



Fitzroy History Society Oral History Project 2015-2017

Transcript of interview

with Brian and Renata Howe

(interviewed by Mary Lewis and Meg Lee of the Fitzroy History Society on 27 February 2017)

Brian and Renata Howe arrived in Fitzroy following their University years and study for the Ministry in Chicago. Interested in Saul David Alinsky and community organisation, Brian began to apply these teachings when appointed to the Ministry in the Methodist Church. The interview describes a wide range of consequential influences and changes within the community, including negotiation between the Presbyterian and Methodist churches forming the Uniting Church.

The interview describes the congregations and the Hungarian refugee presence in the 1950s, their needs and the services provided by the church. The conditions of schools, especially North Fitzroy Primary School and resourcing are discussed.

While at the Napier Street church Brian and Renata set up CURA (Centre for Urban Action and Research) and with assistance of grants and donations they provided analysis to support community organising for the creation of services to be run by the local community.

This included assistance with saving Brookes Crescent, establishing the Housing Commission Tenants Association, ethnic groups and the Italian community in Coburg, the Eastern Freeway and a Migrant Women's Unit within the Trade Union Movement. In addition, they produced an ABC Four Corners Program on women's working conditions.



START OF TRANSCRIPT

Facilitator 1: Mary Lewis and I are here with Brian and Renata Howe. Thank you very much Brian and Renata for spending time with us for this project. What drew you to Fitzroy? When did you come?

Renata: Well, we had quite an association with the inner city when we were students at Melbourne University. Brian was training to be in the Methodist Ministry and we had quite a lot to do with the Methodist Minister in Carlton and Fitzroy over that time.

Brian: We were having a good time, through the '60s really.

Renata: Brian ran the Carlton Methodist Church...

[0:59]

Brian: Well, the Church of All Nations in Carlton, that's about to celebrate it's 40th anniversary

Renata: 100th anniversary? Isn't it?

Brian: No, not 100th, no, Church of All Nations, Its or something like that. That's really in the '70s, when it gets its name as the Church of All Nations and has quite a complex program, multilingual translation but also it runs programs - it really pioneers English as a second language and development of educational programs for newly arrived migrants. Norman Lowe was the Minister of the Carlton church and he and Audrey Lowe are very important in developing that program which we're going to celebrate the anniversary of on Sunday or Sunday week.

Renata: Brian boarded with our friends Andrew and Vivienne McCutcheon and Andrew McCutcheon was the Methodist Minister in Fitzroy in 1961 and the manse was in McKean Street, North Fitzroy.

The Fitzroy Methodist Church was a huge church in Brunswick Street, and the congregation were mostly homeless men [laughs]. There were also elderly people.

Brian: Also, people from the Housing Commission in that area. But yeah, it had a small congregation but it had this program for homeless men and then associated with that there was Coolabah Club no, the Coolabah's a brotherhood.

[3:02]



No, it held the club in the Sunday school hall for homeless people and that program really resulted ultimately in the formation of the Hanover centre. The Church was really on the corner of Brunswick Street and Hanover Street.

Brian: Now demolished - I was appointed in Fitzroy in 1969, we'd been in Chicago '65 to '67 and then we'd been in Moreland in '68 and then we came to Fitzroy in '69 and the Church was demolished in 1969, just after we arrived. We had a kind of monumental battle to try to save it, not so much the main church which seemed to be a lost cause, but to save the bluestone building immediately behind the church which originally had been built - I don't know the history of that.

Renata: Yes, it was Laurie O'Brien's house, it was a very similar built style to that by the Wills, bluestone sort of jointing - The Wills went to the Methodist Church and they'd built what had been the church and Sunday school in a modest two storey building, very similar to the Laurie O'Brien house.

Facilitator 1: Bluestone, so we're talking about bluestone.

Brian: So important historically.

Renata: We tried to save that because it was one of the earliest buildings, right behind the new gothic church in the front. So, we thought oh, that's a lost cause. But we did try to save the [4:48] building at the back and I think that's when we first arrived in North Fitzroy, wasn't it?

Brian: 1969.

Renata: I remember we got the call in the middle of the night from the Catholic Priest to say the Housing Commission were coming in to demolish it [laughs]. We raced out but, oh, we couldn't do anything.

Brian: Yeah, it was Father... Lost cause, yeah.

Facilitator 2: Was there any support for your campaign then?

Brian: There was support, but those days there wasn't a lot of organisation. It was the very beginnings of the Fitzroy Residents' Association in 1969, we were involved in setting that up I guess.

People in the Residents' Association were quite supportive and I think people around the community. But yeah, there wasn't the organisation.



Facilitator 2: And the National Trust?

[5:45]

Brian: Colonel Birch. was quite supportive, quite supportive.

Renata: In fact, somewhere or other we've got a copy of *The Age* article, a picture of me standing near the building, haven't we? I have, anyway, somewhere.

Facilitator 1: What was his name again?

Facilitator 2: Birch, B-i-r-c-h, Colonel Birch, he was the administrator and it was very much a blue rinse organisation, the better suburbs but they did [laughs] take a forced interest in the inner suburbs as well.

Renata: Yes [laughs], yes he quickly gave the building a C grade rating to try and save it.

Facilitator 2: It might be a bit early in the piece because [Miles and George] both got involved with the Trust and gingered them up a bit.

Renata: It was very 'blue rinse', but he was quite helpful.

Brian: Oh, he was helpful, yeah! Yeah, there was some support but, yeah, we lost it.

Facilitator 1: So, in that work to save the Sunday school hall and the school hall did you get involved with the Fitzroy Residents' Association

[6:58]

Renata: Louise Elliot was the first one who formed the Fitzroy Residents' Association and I think she was, that's where we met her first over the Church, was it?

Brian: That's right, she asked me to be the president. But she was, Louise was fantastic on these matters as you know.

Renata: [Laughs] Too fantastic really.

Facilitator 1: She still is.

Brian: But she was terrific and she really got it going. We had a public meeting and I'm not sure when that was but it would've been quite early probably in 1969. So, we were very keen on the residents' group. There was a ratepayers' association and that was run by Jim Harper, Marion Harper who was famous later for, she was a



main mover in the, I think it was called the Reservoir Ratepayers Association, she would've used that title.

But she was active in Fitzroy earlier in the '60s and Jim Harper was an official, I think, with the Tramways Union and they regard themselves as very left wing, very left wing, yeah. So the Fitzroy Residents' Association got going in that year and it became very active and there was quite a lot of support for it quite quickly.

[8:47]

Facilitator 1: So, with the Church demolished and the Sunday school hall gone, at what stage did you move across to Napier Street?

Brian: Same year really, '69, yeah. ...I suppose we probably commenced operations in 1970 but effectively, oh probably, even before that, 1969 yeah. Once the Church was demolished we had to work somewhere and the ecumenical movement was at its peak at that time. The Methodist Church was negotiating with the Presbyterians and the Congregational Church to form the Uniting Church. So, this was anticipated by churches like Fitzroy where you had a, it was effectively a Uniting Church. We had a sort of Presbyterian and Methodist cooperation agreement.

But the Church then was occupied by Hungarian people who'd really come to Fitzroy in the mid '50s, the time of the Hungarian uprising, '56, was it?

They had come earlier and quite a large group of them had come to Melbourne and the Presbyterian Church had become the centre, it just was cooperation between the Methodists and the Presbyterians. But effectively it was a cooperation between the Hungarians. Doctor Antal was the Minister of the Church and he was quite a strong minister and ultimately arranged the shift to St Luke's in Brunswick Street, North Fitzroy. Was it Brunswick Street or St Georges Road there? [10:34]

St Luke's had become a house church in Scotchmer Street and that was a bit later, probably about '75 or that sort of the middle '70s that the Hungarians moved out. But for those years it was roughly Hungarian and English and shared between Dr Antell and I. The settlement house which had been built beside the church was occupied largely by aged Hungarians and part of the beauty of the St Luke's Church was I had a combination that they could make available for all the Hungarians there in North Fitzroy. So, there's quite a story about all that really.



The Hungarians mainly concentrated in St Kilda, I think, but a number of them lived on the site and Mr Santosi was the kind of like the caretaker of the Church, but he ran the Hungarian side of the Church, really. He was the main person on that side of things. If you wanted to do business you talked to Mr Santosi before you talked to Dr Antell and he could make a recommendation - I think that was the way it worked.

But they had, in '56 they had a whole stack of children came out without parents and they lived in the Sunday school hall. The Sunday school hall was a two-storey building, probably still a two-storey building, and upstairs in that large area the Hungarian children were living there, so it was quite a community. Dr Santosi, Dr Santosi? I think he was quite an important figure in the tax department in Hungary. So, he was certainly very educated and he lived above the kindergarten.

[12:43]

The kindergarten was still operating in the old Presbyterian kindergarten, I guess, run by the, we used to say, the 'nice ladies from Kew or somewhere'. So, it was hardly locally.

It was for local children. I mean there were a number of those kind of centres and part of the Residents' Association activity was to gradually take them over and run them locally. We very shocked at having the blue rinse ladies running our kindergartens. There's a whole story there around the Presbyterian Church, which had been very important during the Depression.

Fitzroy was hit very hard by the Depression and they both had Alf Dickey, who'd been the Minister in the 1930s in the Presbyterian Church, that church, and the Minister at the Methodist Church name has gone out of my mind. What was his name? He was Palmer Philips, he was also a very left wing, very progressive, both got themselves into all sorts of hot water because of their left wing views.

Facilitator 1: So, Brian, were the refugees, were the Hungarians refugees or immigrants, do you know?

Brian: Oh, I think they were pretty much refugees at that time. I'm not sure technically what they were. But I mean they were - they really came with nothing but the clothes on their back, it was a very tough, very tough period I think and yeah, what do you think about that?



They weren't very well off, I mean a lot of people who were part of the hierarchy, as it were, in Hungary who certainly had to get out.

Renata: Yes, I'm uncertain because the refugees were down with Margaret Holmes, the Hungarian refugees, at the refugee centre down in Central Fitzroy there.

Brian: Yeah, well that's an important bit of history as well. What Renata's talking about there is the Resettlement, it was called the

[15:01]

Resettlement Division of the World Council of Churches and Margaret Holmes had been a major figure before the war and after the war working with refugees to Australia, and that centre became the Ecumenical Migration Centre.

Renata: I don't think, this group weren't really involved with the Ecumenical Migration Centre, were they? They were really, very much built around Dr Antell.

Brian: Dr Antell and Mr Santosi .

Renata: I hadn't thought of that before.

Brian: Well they were very right wing.

Renata: Very right wing.

[Laughter]

Brian: So the Resettlement Division's a bit different. It's to do with a different migration too, ...'56 was very specific.

Facilitator 1: Yes, well I can remember Hungarian athletes absconding from the team.

[16:07]

Brian: They would've yeah, I can tell you that's right. ...That's right. There was a famous Hungarian athlete a discus thrower Anyway, so that's a whole story in itself

[17:07]

Anyway, so '69, that's when the Fitzroy Residents' Association formed to go back to where that started.



I mean we knew Barry - well, Don Saltmarsh had been my predecessor and Barry was a friend of, became a friend of Don Saltmarsh's and they were also friendly with Alan Jordan, Alan and Connie Jordan.

Renata: ...There were the old Aussies and families and then there were the migrant families.

Brian: New professionals, yeah.

Renata: So, the new professionals were very few and they had quite a strong network informal network. ...So it was sort of the Pullens and the Jordans and so on.

Brian: Staples.

Renata: Oh, the Staples, yes.

[18:16]

Brian: There was a bit of a network there in North Fitzroy. North Fitzroy then it was still very Greek and Italian and Macedonian, I guess, and Yugoslav and the school, the primary school was absolutely overloaded. I mean the children just came off the boat. Migration then was to the inner city and later it became to Thomastown and the outer suburbs. But then it was all inner city. So, the North Fitzroy Primary School in Alfred Crescent had over 1000 children, when our kids went..

Renata: Mm, on half an acre or something [laughs].

Brian: Well the whole playground was full of portables, so there was no playground. It was opposite the park, Edinburgh Gardens, and the children were supposed to use the park. Of course, that was dangerous, crossing roads, so it tended to be for specific sporting activities. So, in terms of the morning tea break or lunchbreak there was a bit more movement over the road, but basically the children were in the school ground. I remember there was a park built a bit later by Whitlam.

The Whitlam Government had a school's buildings program and that enabled the School to extend a bit. But these 1000 children were all in that front building plus all the portables occupying all the playground behind it. We organised that famous demo and that was the Pullens and the Howes and someone else and...

Facilitator 1: Can you tell us about the demonstration?



Brian: Oh, it was a great demo, it was one of our first. It was a great story, it was a terrific demo. Because we organised it and Barry and - well I suppose because our kids were there...

Renata: Some of the students from Melbourne University organised it, didn't they?

Brian: Yeah, the students from Melbourne University came so there were students and then there were two or three families with children in prams. Our kids were and the Pullen's kids were in prams.

[20:30]

So it would've been pretty much preschool, really. We had a placard and saying - I can't remember what the writing on the placard said - basically it was something about save the Fitzroy Primary School or something like that. It appeared in the middle part of *The Herald Sun*, lovely, lovely photograph of this demonstration with the five people and the preschool kids and the three or four students from Melbourne University.

Renata: Oh, well it was terribly overcrowded the needs of the 1000 children.

Brian: Terribly overcrowded.

Renata: It was just all Portable classrooms, and as Brian says mainly by having some play times over in the park, really, that was the only...

Brian: The toilets were extremely dangerous.

Renata: The toilets. Alan Jordan photographed it all including the toilets, didn't he? [Laughs].

Brian: Yeah, well I suppose - was Connie and Alan there then? I don't remember them being...

Renata: Mm, because their kids were there at the school, yeah.

Brian: Oh, they were there, yeah, but were they at that demo? I don't remember that, anyway.

Renata: I think Alan was there photographing it, yeah.

Brian: Anyway, it was a very successful demo.



Renata: We got a new school, yeah.

Brian: Ultimately got a new school, but it took a while..

[22:03]

Renata: Yeah, they bought the land behind the School, there was a factory and they bought some houses as well and built a new school at the back.

Brian: The Whitlam Government loaned the money for the School. So it was quite a battle.

Renata: All the schools, were overcrowded at that time and they were pretty much the inner-city schools on very small sites. As Brian said kids coming off the boat, being enrolled with no English and expected to just cope with it all.

Facilitator 1: Brian, can we go back to your church work because you began at Napier Street in 1969?

Brian: 1969 on Brunswick Street and Napier Street.

Facilitator 1: So, the Hungarians had gone by then?

Brian: No, no the Hungarians were there. So, we've got this joint operation which includes the Hungarians, includes the kindergarten which is still operating and then the services on Sunday are kind of joint services. So, we were interested in what we can do and I had a background in community organisation, I was interested in reorganisation when we'd been in the States. So, I thought we'd set up some kind of a centre, we had a long debate about what that would be called, it had a very long title. It was called Fitzroy Ecumenical Centre for Urban Research and Action.

Later it just became [CURA] and Centre for Urban - it had Training in it originally. But - Urban Training and - anyway. So that became CURA the aims and objects of CURA were to do research but also action. But the principle behind it was that we were not in the business of services, so we wouldn't, like the Brotherhood over the road, create the services. We might support the creation of services, but they had to be run by people from the community or from the various ethnic communities in the inner city.

[24:25]



So CURA supports some community action like Brookes Crescent but were not the main actors, it's more the Fitzroy Residents' Association but we provide some funding and photocopying and a lot of the kind of backup for that. We were interested in the formation of some sort of community action, community and responsibility in the Housing Commission flats which were being built at that time. So, we helped to form the Housing Commission Tenants' Association and, again, we supported but we were not, not running it, we weren't on the committee or anything like that.

Then we worked with various ethnic groups in the northern suburbs. We also got involved in issues like the famous Eastern Freeway battle and so on. So, part of the story of CURA is written up in Renata's book, 'Trendyville'

Facilitator 2: So was the inspiration for this was found in Chicago?

Brian: Yes, I'm interested in Alinsky philosophy of community organisation. Community organisation was kind of a bit stronger than community development because it represented, I suppose, more of a conflictual approach, more recognising that to get change sometimes you needed to have the demonstration like the School demonstration. We took on various causes, I suppose, at the time and supported them.

But usually, I don't think we were ever in charge of any of these things. We provided support for various groups and we published a journal called *Ekstasis* for about 15 years I suppose the journal was there. CURA lasted about 15 years before it became difficult to fund.

Facilitator 1: Who supported the work of CURA? Yourself and how many others?

[26:43]

Renata: Oh, well the churches, didn't they?

Brian: We had to get a kind of ecumenical group together so that meant the Brotherhood were...

Renata: Yes, the Brotherhood was very important.

Brian: Michael Chalon, the Holy Shepherd ...

Don Shepherd, and he was AIM, Anglican Inner- City Ministry, and we got his support, I think he was before Chalon. Chalon replaced him and we got some



support and we had a rather symbiotic relationship with the Brotherhood. Yeah, we got a bit of support from Wesley Central Mission

we got enough support and the Home Mission Department of the Methodist Church gave us a bit of money, I think it was \$5000 a year for five years. But \$5000 then was quite a lot of money.

Facilitator 2: So, no government money?

Brian: Oh, ultimately we got very substantial grants for research, particularly. I suppose the most important was from the Federal Government, Whitlam Government.

We had quite a good relationship with the status of women, who was that? There was an Office of the Status of Women and the head of that was quite sympathetic to our analysis. We thought the conditions

[28:14]

for workers and migrant women in industry were very important issues at that time. We published many reports really on that. But the one that got the most coverage was called *I Wouldn't Want my Wife to Work Here* and that became a *Four Corners* program and we got a lot of coverage there.

The grant was so large that we could use some of the grant to set up a migrant women's unit within the trade union movement and I'm not sure where that was located.

Renata: it was in Victoria Parade at the the Metal Workers' Union

Brian: Yeah, that's right, Metal Workers', AMWU. They sort of housed that women's centre and then ultimately it shifted across to the Trades Hall, I think. But it was important because people at that time had no idea of what was really going on with - it's rather like now. We think that population growth is a good thing and we're not too much interested in the details and the details of course were pretty ordinary because there was a great deal of expectation and horrible conditions and poor wages and all sorts of issues. Although the issue that was important in the migrant women's study, was dignity really more than wages.

Renata: Mm, yeah. The way they were treated [laughs].

Brian: The way they were treated. We had a photograph of the women sitting on the gutter outside the Perfect Cheese Company. We just had contact from people



interested in the Perfect Cheese Company about how we'd done that research, yeah, just at the last conference.

Facilitator 1: Was the research fairly local because Fitzroy, of course, has domestic buildings next to factories and industrial sites?

Renata: Well, yes it was initially very localised, wasn't it? Because Fitzroy had big industrial employment.

Brian: Well the Housing Commission was really set up there on assumption there'd be this labour market, a local labour market. Some deindustrialisation was starting to occur but hadn't occurred, so Fitzroy and Collingwood were still very much industrial suburbs.

Renata: Yeah. So the Housing Commission was supposed to be for workers in the big - but the trouble was that [laughs] the factories then all closed down and moved and all of that.

Brian: Yes, it was.

Renata: So it was a model that didn't work really, wasn't it?

Brian: So we were a local resource and people came to us to kind of get help in relation to particular disputes or issues they were having. So yes, there was a lot of local activity. It wasn't just local though. We were interested in, like once you get into the Italian community but it's also more to do with Coburg I guess in a way with the Italians. They had the [Federation Association of Workers and their Families I think it was called, and we did a lot for them, Italian community, so that sort of spread that way and that...

Facilitator 1: I recall the *Four Corners* program, but for the sake of the record could you give us an example of some of the findings of the research? The conditions of work for some women?

Brian: Well I don't need to dramatise that, the conditions of what...

Facilitator 1: ...there was a feathers factory.

Brian: Yeah, it was Paul Lyneham.

Facilitator 1: The women were working with feather dust all around them.



Facilitator 2: It wasn't a chicken factory, was it?

Facilitator 1: They were stuffing pillows, pillows, yes.

Brian: No, I don't think they were doing chickens. I did an enquiry recently on insecure work and we were doing chicken factories as part of that, there was a lot of exploitation of migrants.

But like Renata mentioned, Alan's collection of photographs are in the State Library and they're a marvellous collection.

Facilitator 2: I work at the State Library in the picture section...

[33:56]

Brian: So, you know about Alan's collection.

Facilitator 2: ...and I'm always saying to people don't throw anything out. There's a lot of interest now in looking at this period.

Brian: Renata keeps most things you'll find.

Facilitator 2: It doesn't matter where it goes, if you go to University of Melbourne archives quite a lot of stuff's gone there if you felt that's where it should be, but otherwise the State Library

Brian: Hard to place it, sometimes, it doesn't seem very important.

Facilitator 2: Well it's wonderful that the Alan Jordan collection is now scanned online, so it's immediately available to researchers to look at. ...It is a revolution the way we handle that photographic material... It's worth doing.

Brian: We don't have a copy. We've got a pile of CURA reports on Renata's wall in her study because we're thinking of doing something on that and may do a history of CURA Then we've got a complete set of the *Ekstasis* papers. Yeah. They were heady days, really, the...

Facilitator 1: Brian, I was interested to know where the research - you said it lasted for 12 years, did it move over to the Brotherhood or did the Brotherhood take an interest in picking up the research element? Or, we haven't talked either about the interaction of the research with the development of a social planning office.

[35:54]



Brian: No, that's a bit later and I'm not involved too much at that point. Yeah, these things are, sort of, related but not directly if you know what I mean. I mean for example the Fitzroy Council in 1969 is in a pretty bad shape, really. So, a number of people who had been involved in the Residents' Association obviously joined the Fitzroy Council, ultimately became councillors in Fitzroy – people on the Council, I mean, that's where the social planning office originated.

So in a sense when you put people in who were interested in a different approach to social planning I think the Council were quite - I mean, they regarded the - ah, here it comes. Did you find the main one?

Renata: No, not really, but we did that one. The ethnic rights.

Brian: Yeah, that's lectures and talks.

Renata: Mm. Of course, there's Jenny Wills' study.

Brian: We were just talking about that social planning yeah.

Renata: Yeah. That one.

Brian: Child migrant education.

Renata: Yeah, that one. Then that's Giovanni Scro's book. He was a permanent resident for a long while.

Brian: CURA, yeah. Used to turn up in his white boiler suit, he was a painter, [don't know whether] he did any painting.

Facilitator 1: Yes, yes.

Brian: No, it's been kind of like a hands-on the - well, *I wouldn't my wife to work here* because I'm pretty vague on what the recommendations were now. I mean essentially the one I was interested in, I suppose, was setting up a kind of a centre that studied the conditions and kept a, basically started to build a literature around what was happening.

[38:26]

So, I think that was an important part of it, was to kind of - see one of the problems was the unions - and I'm not anti-union - but the unions were very Brian



nominated at that time. So, the notion that you do a study of women in their turf, I mean they really, they really hated that. Oh, that's another one, yeah.

Renata: There's that one that...

Brian: The labour resource centre, I was involved in setting that up as well.

Facilitator 1: But ultimately, ultimately Brian you must've got cooperation from the unions or at least allayed their fears.

Brian: Yeah, but we had some cooperation but they weren't enthusiastic about it ultimately, I think.

Renata: No, no.

Brian: Some people were, like we've just organised for Joe Caputo to speak. Now, Joe's with the - what's it called? The Ethnic Community Council, I think. Might even be with a national body. But Joe's worked in the clothing union and a long time ago in the 1960's, '70s, early '70s, and he was a very progressive Italian guy. Not just women, I mean they weren't too keen on ethnic people becoming leaders of unions and so Joe put his hand up for a senior position with the Union and he was just, I mean, finished in the trade union movement.

He never got another job in the trade union movement because he'd deigned to oppose. So, the atmosphere in the union movement wasn't exactly sympathetic, a very different time.

Facilitator 2: But the Government introduced better regulations for after the *Four Corners*' report, was there some kind of Government reaction to health and safety or something like that?

Brian: Occupational health and safety, yeah, so I suppose so. I...

[40:54]

Facilitator 1: This report of Jenny Wills, came after your work in the Church, is that right?

Brian: Yeah.

Facilitator 1: What's the date on that?



Brian: That's 1985. So... Mm, no that's probably sometime before we - yeah, the 1980s is, that's towards the end of CURA's involvement, CURA's main involvement the 1970s. By the 1980s...

Facilitator 2: So CURA, the philosophy...

Brian: No, here it is.

Renata: Found it, amazing.

Brian: Let's have a look at that. The question...

Renata: You probably need to...

Brian: So that's when childcare was - the childcare. That was a big issue at that time. There's no childcare really, so - and we have this big debate with Winsome McCaughey in the '70s around work based childcare because Winsome's got the new neighbourhood basically, [unclear]. We are much more concerned about work based English language requirements, childcare. The way...

Facilitator 1: So Winston worked with you?

Brian: No, no Winston established the organisation but it was about neighbourhood based childcare.

Renata: Community childcare.

Brian: Community based childcare.

Facilitator 1: I remember that, yeah.

[42:52]

Brian: So, we were much more interested in industry based childcare and that's, that's all there. But in a way, I mean I always - you kind of approach things in a fairly broad - my interest was always in kind of trying to set the framework for the policy discussion rather than necessarily civic policy. At this time there was no policy, much. So, I suppose childcare would be the - what do you reckon about that?

Renata: Oh yes, it was certainly in - there was a big division between - when that study came out the women's movement, the more middle class women's movement, didn't like it at all. So it got - they really ran quite a campaign against it. Because it was recommending church as work based childcare which was what the survey



showed the women wanted. Because they liked to think that they had the kids near them and so on and they were used to that in the European countries where they'd worked.

But the middle-class women's movement was going for the community based childcare model and so there was quite a bit of conflict about that. But they've actually changed their lines a bit now [laughs]. Who was the, one of the New South Wales women who wrote? She was quite strong in the changing union...

Brian: In the clothing trade, yeah.

Renata: Yes, she now... agrees that they should've included work based childcare in there.

Brian: Can't think of her name, yeah.

Renata: Because there was no childcare at all, so [laughs] it was very hard. We did try to do a follow up study recently, we had a bit of money. Anne Scro was very helpful on that. I don't know if - Anne Scro's really terrific on this issue, because she was very involved with the Commonwealth clothing factory...

Brian: Mm, she was, yeah. [45:16]

Renata: ...in Coburg, getting childcare available there. So that's a huge factory and the Commonwealth hadn't got around to really providing any childcare at all. So she was very involved, Anne Scro was very involved in that. So, she's been a very good person on the stuck with the childcare thing.

We tried to do some follow up studies about what happened to some of the children who were in the industry based childcare, but it was so hard to do. We only ever got about three interviews I think. But what it did suggest was - and you can't generalise from it. But - because we tried to find the children. But they'd found it a very hard period, that their - often they were - mum would sleep during the night and dad would sleep during the day, right? So, they got very little care at all really and they felt very resentful of that. Yeah, they hadn't liked either being at home or being in childcare, they just felt it was a very stressful time.

Facilitator 2: So I was interested in the social planning office, but would you have any comments about it? Was it unique and innovative?

Renata: Jenny Wills? ... Yeah. Yes, this book's very hard to get but I think there's a copy in the Fitzroy Library, but that's the one you should look at.



- Facilitator 2: Okay.
- Brian: Yeah, social planning.
- Facilitator 2: It must have originated out of a lot of your philosophy and a lot of what you were promoting through CURA?
- Brian: Yeah, slightly different philosophy, isn't it?
- Facilitator 2: Yeah. [48:00]
- Brian: I guess this is more sort of designed to sort of analyse problems and do research and then - but do it in a way where it's driven within the democratic council kind of structure.
- Facilitator 2: Then you want to see the result coming out. So, the fact that new people got on the Council and trying to improve the situation, that's obviously...
- Brian: Oh, I think that's true. ... The Council changes quite dramatically. I mean in a way the old council in 1969 really saw a lot of the activity, for example the Brotherhood of St Laurence, they were highly critical of the Brotherhood because they felt they brought a lot of rubbish to Fitzroy really, people, problems to Fitzroy. Problem people to Fitzroy. Essentially it is a decent community that held this, all these people of rather poor status and so on. Like Gertrude Street's not Gertrude Street today, it's a very nice place, but in those days Gertrude Street was a very tough place.
- Renata: Mm, it was Melbourne's red- light area, really, wasn't it?
- Brian: Red light area, that's right. Very tough neighbourhood. Of course, there were a lot of homeless people around Fitzroy and there was agencies like [ADUP] and the - what's the Catholic one just over the road there?
- Renata: Sisters of Mercy.
- Brian: Sisters, yeah, Sisters of Mercy, was it?
- Renata: Yeah, I think so.
- Brian: Yeah, but those agencies were [unclear] really, created problems. So - and I think - so they found it very difficult to think about what a normal community would have and I think the thing that - the early stage, it sort of anticipates the later



planning office, but there was a debate about the library. The library was run by - I've forgotten his name now - but a very elderly...

Renata: [Ernie], wasn't it? Ernie, Bernie, or something like that.

Brian: Ernie? Yeah, could be. Anyway, [unclear] and he worked in a union, like the Carriage Builders Union or something like that. Some union that you'd think today you wouldn't have. Ernie was there looking after the library, and the library was a completely intact 19th century library. Except there were a few deadwood decks and kind of more popular books, there were like, around the place, and I think properly organised.

Then there was a tiny corner with a sort of children's library which was 20 books or something. It was absolutely tiny. So, we couldn't get the Council to even consider doing anything more, so Paul Coghlan who was on the Council at the time with Barry Pullen set up this Library Promotion Council. The Library Promotion Council might've had two or three meetings or whatever it was. But once that got going it created - I mean the pressures just needed to be something to create pressure.

Because everyone thought this a great idea to promote and have a decent library, so that really led to, when it took time and it led to the upgrading of the Fitzroy Library and the North Fitzroy Library and so on. But it started from absolute zilch. So, at the time we're talking about the primary work hadn't been done to even - whereas later, I think, in Danny North's period, mid-1980s, the Council has changed, it's progressive. It's more a matter of how do you go about the whole process in a rational kind of way.

So, you identified what the key priority areas are and so on. It's a much more normal phase of government and I think things by then are not as desperate as they had been in the early '70s, which is

[52:25]

a period of enormous change and still changed in the '80s. But in a way change is bringing in a lot of very different people who themselves are considerable resource people, people that can run a childcare or run a library or whatever.

So, you start to see much better quality services that you've got today. A huge library and [laughs] [unclear] that's right, yeah. Mm, so I think it's a logical



development but it's not - I think a lot of the political stuff there's not quite the need for it in the way that there might've been earlier.

Facilitator 1: When you were with the Church, just to follow the years, you went there in 1969 and left 12 years later? Was it a 12 year period you were there?

Brian: In the Church?

Facilitator 1: Yes.

Brian: Well, yes we were there until I went into politics really, which is 1977. So...

Facilitator 1: Right, and had you noticed a changing of community or your congregation over that time?

Renata: Oh, yes [laughs].

Brian: There was change, yeah.

Facilitator 1: Can you describe that?

Renata: Oh, well of course the Housing Commission high rise, they introduced what, 3000 new residents or something.

Brian: 3000 yeah, mm, in the four towers, yeah, the Atherton Gardens and such, yeah, it was a massive change yeah, wasn't it?

Renata: Which was a massive change and then you started to get the young couples moving in as the changeover as the migrant families got more established, moved out. The decline of the industry in Fitzroy, the old little factories and everything, they were no longer competitive so they shut down. So that employment base went, didn't it?

[54:39]

Brian: Yeah, that's right.

Renata: Yes. So, you started to get then the, well the new employment base which was more middle class. The important turning point, I think, was the redevelopment by the Public Service of the Public Service flats around Laurie's house (35 Hanover Street) there. We managed to save Laurie's house [laughs] and a few others. But the Public Service bought up that big area of land to build flats for public servants basically, wasn't it?



- Brian: Mm, yep.
- Renata: Who were working in the city...
- Facilitator 2: Is that [true]?
- Renata: ...because there were - employment was changing in the city and they had nowhere to live, their employees, they - so that was really the first big clearance, wasn't it?
- Brian: Mm.
- Facilitator 1: You're talking about the blocks of flats in a row on Hanover Street. ... Not the one floor up type brick veneer that are around south of Hanover Street...
- Renata: Yeah.
- Facilitator 1: ...which I think [Father Tucker] said we're not going to have high rise flats for the poor, we're only going to have one floor up.
- Renata: Oh right, yes, the Housing Commission ones that they built. ...Yes. But then these were the first private developments, yes.
- Facilitator 2: Were they for sale or as rental properties?
- Renata: No, I think they were for sale, weren't they? Or...
- Brian: Don't know, don't know, no. [56:28]
- Renata: Keith Ross was one of the new residents there and I'm pretty sure they were buying them, I think.
- Facilitator 1: Yes, yes that makes sense.
- Renata: But, and who was the other mayor of Fitzroy?
- Facilitator 2: Ralph McLean?
- Renata: Yes, I think Ralph McLean was also one of the residents that came in in what we called the Public Service flats, yes. So they were in many ways the sort of the new little aspect of the changing population.
- Facilitator 1: Where did you live, Renata?



- Renata: Well we lived in North Fitzroy in the...
- Brian: Church house on McKean Street.
- Renata: ...Church's house on McKean Street, yeah.
- Brian: 119 McKean Street.
- Facilitator 1: So where did you shop and where did you buy things?
- Renata: Well the big breakthrough was when we got, was it Safeways in Smith Street? That would've been about 1972, do you remember that?
- Facilitator 2: Was that over the current Safeways which was a sort of façade-ism, now criticised...
- Renata: Yeah, I think yes that's it, yes.
- Facilitator 2: Yeah, and what about the awful Coles over the road in...
- [57:58]
- Renata: Yes, Coles was the first one, wasn't it? Yes, and then Safeways, yep.
- Brian: There was one supermarket down the other end of Fitzroy there in Alexandra Parade we used to go to quite a bit, it was a smaller supermarket. I suppose that's what you're talking about, before Safeways or Coles, yeah.
- Renata: Yeah. No, yes there weren't, there weren't the...
- Facilitator 1: So the Italian name supermarket in North Fitzroy wasn't there when you...
- [Over speaking]
- Brian: [Bragatello's], yeah. Yeah, they're still there but not really a supermarket.
- Renata: Yes, they were there probably, Bragatello's. I just don't remember ever shopping there until a while later.
- Brian: Oh yeah, we shopped there, yeah.
- Renata: Yeah, I suppose we did.
- Brian: It was a small supermarket, yes.



- Renata: They were...
- Brian: If you did a big shop you went to Smith Street and so on, yeah. ... But yeah, Bragatello's, they were...
- Renata: Then we went up to Northcote.
- Brian: No later we went to Northcote, yeah. It was the electorate, had to be around the electorate.
- [58:56]
- Facilitator 1: What do you think your greatest achievement has been in terms of research and change?
- Brian: Oh, I think, undoubtedly we did a lot of work on Brookes Crescent and that was really the end of the high rise.
- Facilitator 1: Because Keith was very involved in that, wasn't he?
- Brian: Who was that?
- Facilitator 1: Keith Ross.
- Brian: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, but there was a Brookes Crescent Residents' Association and we produced an evaluation, the Brookes Crescent Campaign, that was written by Kaye Hargreaves, quite a solid little volume, 50 pages or something, but it was a good little summary of it. That was published by CURA but there was a North Fitzroy Residents' Association and it kind of carried the day to day battle with the Commission. I think that was very important.
- Renata: We had control of the Council then, too, so they supported the residents, didn't they, in fighting the Housing Commission in Brookes.
- Brian: Yeah, Council, yeah that's true. They came behind that. Yeah, no, good things. We, CURA did the first impact study on the impact of roads, with Commonwealth Bureau of Roads at that time and later on...
- Facilitator 2: Was it commissioned by the...
- Brian: Yeah, commissioned by Tom Hoggins, that ran the Commonwealth Bureau of Roads then. John Stanley worked with him and John Stanley was later very important because he's kind of the Australian expert on buses, I think, John



Stanley. But he worked at the Bureau of Roads and he had been in the Sunday school North Fitzroy running the Sunday school. He came as a volunteer from North Balwyn or something, came to run it. But John

[61:11]

Stanley was important. Anyway, they commissioned this piece of work and oh, probably not the most brilliant piece of work but it was very important.

Because the notion of the Country Roads Board idea of - was crashed through. Not crash, you know...

Facilitator 1: Would this coincide with the time of the freeway planning?

Brian: Yeah, it was before that. CURA worked on the, I worked on the Eastern Freeway study, the Ringwood Road study, and I was commissioned. CURA actually had an offshoot which was called [Unclear] Issues Consultants and how did we finance CURA? We partly financed it with church grants and so on, philanthropic grants and then government grants. But then the other mechanism was we had professional people that we knew, especially [your] planners who would donate their services.

So, they worked for Open Issues Consultants on a voluntary basis and charged a fee out and the fee would go to CURA ultimately. That was how we financed it. So CURA with Open Issues Consultants, did that study on the Ringwood Roads thing and we'd also done the [unclear] study on the impact of roads. I suppose that's how we got the contractor to evaluate and that was interesting. Everyone was in favour of a freeway but no one wanted the freeway through their neighbourhood, so we were able to show that sure, they could put the road through but they'd have an enormous battle.

Renata: There was a change of government, wasn't there? So...

Brian: There was a change of government later, but, yeah. But it was good because basically it forced them to go for the tunnel which we always enjoy going through the [Wilkinson (Melba) Tunnel] as we call it because he'd worked on that study.

Renata: That's up at Ringwood, yeah.

[63:24]

Brian: Yeah, Ringwood runs through there. I know there was...



- Facilitator 1: Yes, anything else Mary?
- Facilitator 2: Do you like the suburb Fitzroy? I mean you've left ...Did you decide to leave because you thought you didn't want to live there anymore, or - I mean this is pretty close by I suppose, a similar sort of area.
- Brian: Yeah.
- Renata: We moved a kilometre. [Laughter]
- Brian: [Unclear] Park Street, yeah. Oh, no I think we needed a smaller house and something a bit more manageable for our old age really. So...
- Facilitator 2: Mm, but do you have any views about the way Gertrude Street and Brunswick Street and now Smith Street are developing?
- Renata: We're not that familiar with them really, are we? These days. But, mm.
- Brian: No. ...A bit critical I think. Might be, mm.
- Facilitator 1: I see you have a photograph here on the wall, the centre there Renata, is that particularly pertinent? Is that Fitzroy?
- Renata: Well that's - one of my students did it actually. That's - is that Gertrude Street, is it?
- Brian: Doesn't look like it. [64:58]
- Facilitator 1: So, it's a recent photograph.
- Renata: Mm. It's a, yeah.
- Facilitator 1: Okay. Is there anything else in particular you want to put on record? Is there anything?
- Brian: Yeah, it's - the Fitzroy, modern Fitzroy, is - I mean, I think residents' associations were very important in the way of managing the change in the city. I mean if you look at the larger picture rather than just Fitzroy, residents' associations are helping to manage a kind of period of quite massive change. I mean we had the fundamentals of changing, as Renata said where Fitzroy's kind of going through a process of de-industrialisation. We're there at the beginning of that so it's not recognised as being that, but later on it becomes.



But the economy is shifting from being an industrial economy to a more of a knowledge based information economy with the universities and the hospitals and research facilities in the CBD. It's becoming a very different city than it had been in the post-War period. So, what the residents do, I think, is they soften those impacts by opposing inappropriate developments. At the time that's quite strategic because it's at the early stages and so quite a lot of things are saved that we now look at them and we say, isn't that terrific that we did notice that.

Because today it's much harder because the - I heard Ron Eddington talking - the roads person, you know - talking down at the Melbourne Town Hall and he said well the CBD's no longer, the old CBD's no longer the city, the core of the central business activity district now extends out to Fitzroy, Collingwood, Carlton and so on, your North Melbourne, you become part of it. So, in a sense the pressures are now much greater than they were at that time.

But of course because things have, areas, have been saved [unclear] I suppose will have been protected against massive intervention then in a way the city still has quite a lot of the

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values that we saw important back in the '60s. Now that's not totally true, of course, because if you think of Collins Street, like we had quite a lot to do with a save Collins Street. Well Collins Street today is nothing like what Collins Street was.

There are important losses like that Parliamentary Triangle. The loss of the building over the Windsor Hotel, terrible decision. So, we're getting now enormous pressures to become a global city and I think that that is very unfortunate, I think, myself. I think we're losing a lot of...

Renata: Yes, a lot of the fabric of the city's being destroyed, isn't it? Yeah. Along Lygon Street, down Brunswick end which is I suppose in a way going through what Fitzroy went through earlier on. You have the 10-12 storey high rise being built all along. But it's - there's no feeling for what sort of city that's, suburb or city that's creating, is it?

Brian: No, I think there's a lot of lack of intention and I think it's terrible.

Renata: It's sort of, it's much harder now because the developers seem to be much, much more powerful. I suppose the Housing Commission was pretty powerful [laughs],



but the private developers are a bit - like, just to give an example, I rang up about the development just over the road, which is all being built right on the park on the corner and so it's got...

Brian: Sensitive, yeah.

Renata: It's a sort of sensitive area anyhow. I rang up to enquire about it on behalf of our local residents here and I was told well the Council are actually not overseeing it, it's being private - apparently their city engineers' department's now been privatised. So, I was given the phone number for a planning firm in Southbank, right, I didn't bother ringing them. I thought I'm not going to go anywhere. That was just really an enquiry, it wasn't anything we felt... [70:17]

we could do anything about anymore. You do feel quite helpless, yeah.

Facilitator 1: We're talking about Melbourne City Council now.

Renata: No, this is Yarra, yeah, across the road is Yarra [laughs]. Is that right, Brian?

Brian: Mm.

Renata: We're in Yarra, sorry, yes we're in Yarra. That's Brunswick across the road, it's Moreland City Council, yeah. So there are three councils around here.

Facilitator 1: We've been going more than an hour, I'll just... Yes, but I'll just - Renata, any reflections on this that you'd like to put on tape about Fitzroy on the record?

Renata: Oh, right. Well it was really, really an effort to just get down some of this history, because I had a feeling that it was all, people didn't realise what had happened in the past. So - and I did get an ARC grant from Deakin and we did over 100 interviews for it. So quite a lot of material's now in the State Library, so if someone else wants to come along and do some work it's there. So, it was really a matter of sort of fairly quickly trying to record some of the past, yeah.

Facilitator 1: Thank you, thank you both very much.

Facilitator 2: Well I felt it was terribly interesting and it's good that we're getting it all down on tape and it will go into the Fitzroy Library. ...It's so easy to lose.

[71:59]

END OF TRANSCRIPT