



Fitzroy History Society Oral History Project 2015-2017

Transcript of interview with Bruce Pitts

(Interviewed by Hilary McPhee and Anne Polis from Fitzroy History Society in Fitzroy on 03 March 2016)

Bruce Pitts opened the first specialized exhaust workshop in Melbourne in the mid-seventies at 67 Johnson Street, Fitzroy where he still operates, making good use of the laneway system behind the building. His vantage point, repairing neighborhood cars and motor bikes, employing mechanics and apprentices, allows him to acutely observe the local scene and his changing industry. His wife's first job was at Moran & Cato's in the next block. Bruce vividly recalls the days when the pubs and cafés were run by Italian and Greek families, before the arrival of flash food and speeding bicycles, when the coppers had annual wind-ups in the lower Town Hall and the bank manager came to visit.



START OF TRANSCRIPT

Facilitator 1: This is an interview with Bruce Pitts from the Fitzroy Exhaust Centre, at 67 Johnson Street. Both facilitators are long-term residents whose cars are looked after by Bruce.

Bruce did you live in Fitzroy or work in Fitzroy, that's what I realised I wasn't quite clear on.

Bruce Pitts: I've worked in Fitzroy, I - if you looked at the strict boundaries of Fitzroy I guess I've never lived in Fitzroy. I've lived in Collingwood, Northcote, right on the border on the Merri Creek, Budd Street, Collingwood. I've lived in West Parkville and I've lived in Gatehouse Street, but never in Fitzroy proper.

Facilitator 1: So how did you come to work in Fitzroy proper? [0:51]

Bruce Pitts: I took a position in the mid '70s with a tyre company as to develop [a/my] mechanical business in Nicholson Street on the corner of, just opposite the Carlton Gardens. I guess that was, this, the centre of the City and the inner suburban areas were the things I'd been interested, I was interested in. I grew up in the outer suburban areas as they were then, Oakley, Clayton, and as soon as I finished my trade I travelled overseas. I had a good time, a good long time overseas, four to five years and...

Facilitator 1: Before you started working?

Bruce Pitts: Before I came back to work, before I came and re-joined the workforce in Melbourne. I was looking for something more than what outer suburban Melbourne could offer me then. So as a working and a social environment I needed something a little bit different. So that's, so I found it was great working in Nicholson Street and it sort of gave me a bit of a taste for the inner city. I left Nicholson Street and moved into partnership with a fellow at a service station workshop in Victoria Parade, East Melbourne on the corner of Lansdowne Street which, obviously, right opposite George Street in Fitzroy.

Of course, used to go for Friday night drinks over to the old Drill Hall at the top of George Street. When the BP, who was the fuel company, who was the franchise or the property, the property owner in Victoria Parade decided to head along the self serve fuel route and determined that we weren't necessarily the ideal people to run that sort of outlet...



Facilitator 1: Because?

Bruce Pitts: Because of our preference, I guess, for a workshop customer service type environment in that way, and driveway service as opposed to selling Choo Choo Bars and bubble gum and sugar drinks, yeah. So that didn't sort of fit our psyche and they let us know pretty quickly and got rid of us.

[3:24]

So while this was happening we were looking for something alternative to do and we found an overseas, a franchisor who wanted to do some business in Australia. An American/English mob called Midas Corporation.

Facilitator 1: When was, we're talking about what, the late '70s?

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, we're talking about the middle '70s, 1976-'77 and we investigated that and decided to go with Midas and open the first specialised exhaust workshop in Melbourne as such which was in Johnson Street, Fitzroy.

Facilitator 1: Right, where you are now?

Bruce Pitts: Where we are now, mm.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, so you leased the site, how did it work...

Bruce Pitts: We do lease the site...

Facilitator 1: No, how did it work then? Did you, had there been a motor-, had it been a workshop before?

Bruce Pitts: Yes, well traditionally that site had been used for automotive repair and spare parts and things like that. It was a service station for some time, it was a tyre service, it was a wrecking yard, so it had seen the whole industry go past.

Facilitator 1: Did it occupy the same space it does now between...

Bruce Pitts: Exactly the same, exactly the same space. But a fellow Rotson, from Rotson Knitting Mills in Victoria Street obviously got a hold of the property and developed it. He was the one who built the two warehouses, obviously couldn't manage to get a hold of the corner site on Fitzroy Street. So he built the two factories there. With access to the rear lane.



Facilitator 1: Yeah, and with access onto the lane behind which was the secret to.....how you work those one way streets with lots of cars.

[5:05]

Bruce Pitts: Yes, oh yeah well that's the secret, of course, was to be able to get some sort of vehicle flow through the workshop, otherwise you were just stymied. I mean you'd spend your life backing out onto...

Facilitator 1: Onto Johnson Street, mm.

Bruce Pitts: ...Johnson Street which I try to relieve Ann of doing most of the time. In fact she refuses to do it. She just stands on her digs and says let me out the back.

Facilitator 2: That's right, well you've got to take your lead from your customers, Bruce.

Facilitator 1: That network of one way lanes and streets was very much then as it is now?

Bruce Pitts: Yes, yes. It's great to see that not too many of them have been restricted or built over or sold. I don't know what - the City of Melbourne it was in those days I th-, oh well it was City of Fitzroy, of course.

Facilitator 2: Yes, it was.

Bruce Pitts: But how they administrated it compared to other councils, a lot of other councils sold their laneways.

Facilitator 1: Yes, Maribyrnong certainly did a lot of that I gather, and Collingwood too.

Bruce Pitts: Mm, and it's great to see that Fitzroy didn't and you've still got those, you've still got some sneaky little access backwards and forwards. I found it particularly good when I used to go and attend the MCG on a Saturday afternoon after we'd finished work. It was just a pleasure to pick your way through...

[Over speaking]

[6:23]

Bruce Pitts: ...the lanes all the way through to Victoria Parade.....and not have to worry about the punters in the street. You might run across the odd SP bookie in the early days, but apart from that there was nothing.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, were there SP bookies around you when you opened?

Bruce Pitts: Oh yes, yes, yes, yes. Every, well...



- Facilitator 1: Tell us what the neighbourhood was like.
- Bruce Pitts: Just about every pub had one, sort of around this area and right through North Melbourne, West Melbourne, South Melbourne, Port Melbourne.
- Facilitator 2: Were you [a factor] to that when you moved?
- Bruce Pitts: Oh, it was vibrant, yeah it was vibrant. It was exciting, I guess. The 'burbs were as they still are.
- Facilitator 1: Boring, boring.
- Bruce Pitts: They weren't totally boring, I mean there were some great sporting clubs, clubs that I'd been involved with that were, it was terrific to revisit and that sort of thing. But just there was always something going on in town. Although I must say that in those days Saturday afternoons and Sundays, even though Johnson Street during the week would carry vastly more traffic than it now carries because there was no Eastern Freeway, on Saturdays and Sundays you could fire a cannon up any of the streets ...and you wouldn't hit anybody.
- I mean it was just, I can remember when I was in Nicholson Street in Carlton and finishing work on a Sunday and there was a hotel that regularly sold cheap beer down in Wellington Street, called the [7:55]
- Curry Family Hotel. Still exists, and...
- Facilitator 2: It's the [Gem now], is it the Gem? [Unclear].
- Bruce Pitts: Yes, it may well be called the Gem now. But you'd sort of, you'd sort of look at, you'd have a bit of a look at yourself and say oh, yeah I feel reasonably fit and pretty confident today I'll go down to the Curry and buy some beer. So you'd grab the ute and off you'd go down the Curry after work, so one o'clock or one thirty on a Saturday you'd front up at the Curry Family Hotel. Well, fair dinkum, talk walking into a den of thieves. It was daunting, it was daunting, and you were only there to buy beer. I mean it wasn't as if you were there to bust them or, for whatever shenanigans were going on.
- [Over speaking]
- Facilitator 1: Because they were all betting? They were all - what were they doing?



Bruce Pitts: Oh, they were just betting and they were locals and they were very protective of their own little environment. That was theirs, that was their pub.

[Over speaking]

Facilitator 2: Gertrude Street pubs were a bit like that too, weren't they?

Bruce Pitts: Oh, very much so. All the...

Facilitator 2: All the locals pulsating.

Bruce Pitts: Oh, what are these people doing in our pub? Even though the owners or the publicans or whatever, where they got their beer from, God knows, but it was a damn sight cheaper than anywhere else. So you'd go down there and you'd load up with cheap beer and...

[Over speaking]

[9:09]

Oh yes, oh yes. You could, yeah there was cheap beer about. Of course those days we used to buy large bottles, 750ml bottles, yeah.

Yeah, so all the pubs were very much the same, all the Fitzroy pubs too.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, and cafés? Were there many cafés in that [bit of] Johnson Street? No.

Bruce Pitts: No, there were a couple of Italian cafés. ...I remember one, the taxi drivers always used to go to a café over in Rathdowne Street just down from the Lemon Tree Hotel. There was a - I can't remember the name - [Cisero's] or... [Chichio's] or - and all it was Laminex, blue and white Laminex and hard tables and Laminex chairs. But they would make the best crispy bread roll, pastrami, sandwiches that you could get in a month of Sundays. There was also a terrific little fellow - I'm just trying to think - on the corner of Bell Street, right opposite where I was with Ensign Tyres and Phil still walks backwards and forwards up Johnson Street here. But [Phillip] was his name and now, if I said he was Greek I'd probably be right, but Phil used to do the same thing. He used to knock up these scrumptious bloody lunches out of nothing.

Facilitator 2: What about Chinese?

Bruce Pitts: No, I can't remember one, Ann, really.

[Over speaking]



Facilitator 1: I don't think there were Chinese in Fitzroy.

Bruce Pitts: No, no, not...

[10:35]

Facilitator 1: No, there were a Chinese family living over here in this house opposite me... but they were working in the City, Little Bourke, that stuff. I don't think there were Chinese...?

[Over speaking]

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, I can't really recall, I can't really recall Chinese.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, no Italian and Greek...

Bruce Pitts: I can certainly recall Spanish, there was a bit of Spanish happening. There was always Casa Iberica and there was little Belinda who had the Costa Brava... in Johnson Street.

Facilitator 2: ...they'd cook garlic. Out of all the rest of the food there was still garlic... they'd serve up, a lot of garlic.

Bruce Pitts: Oh, yeah.... Oh, fantastic.

Facilitator 1: So Casa Iberica... was there then, in the '70s, wasn't it?

Bruce Pitts: I reckon it was. It was great.... Then they got - Alice, Alice and her husband, and Alice used to run the shop and her husband did initially and I think when they got a little bit bigger and became providores rather than just shopkeepers...

[11:28]

...I think he got a, he got a factory or a warehouse over West Melbourne someway and that's where he cured his...

Facilitator 1: That's right, his hams and, yeah.

Bruce Pitts: ...hams and did all that sort of thing. But Alice, they ran a very, very successful business there for many years and it's still, it's still running. A Portuguese South African guy.... Yeah, Paul. He's been there, time flies, but maybe eight years, five or eight years now.



- Facilitator 1: Mm. So, when you moved in there were a whole lot of people who had been there for a long time? Or were you at the beginning of a whole lot of stuff that was happening in that end of...
- Bruce Pitts: I think it was probably the start of a bit of a renaissance of the area.
- Facilitator 1: Because there weren't gyms and things, were there, in those days.
- Bruce Pitts: Oh yeah, like I'm damn sure Hunt's Gym was there.
- Facilitator 2: But it was squash, it was squash though.
- Bruce Pitts: Oh yes, Hunt's Squash Centre, named after the push up champion of World of Sport in those days. We used to - oh yes, Hunt's Gym.
- Facilitator 1: Did you go there?
- Bruce Pitts: Of course, we used to go - oh, yeah. We went up to play squash. We didn't go up to muck around with weights and all that sort of thing, we worked hard enough not to have to worry about that. But oh no, we used to go up to have a game of squash just as an excuse for a beer as much as anything else.
- Facilitator 1: What do you mean for a - you couldn't get beer in the gym.
- Bruce Pitts: Oh no, but it was an...
[12:50]
Well it was a, you felt you deserved a beer, you felt you deserved a beer. So...
- Facilitator 1: Of course, and who's we, when you say we went up to the gym?
- Bruce Pitts: Oh look, I had staff, staff and sometimes friends. Friends used to come in, I used to meet the friends in town. We used to, our local really, unfortunately, wasn't Fitzroy, our local was the International Hotel at the corner of La Trobe and Exhibition Streets which is since, I think it's Australia Post now, big Australia Post building.... We used to meet there, but young, all young blokes, mid-20s, late-20s, that sort of thing. When Hunts decided to build a spa and sauna up there and decided to have it mixed... as opposed to ladies Tuesdays and Thursdays. When they decided to have it mixed Saturdays and Sundays well of course, God, they were lined up down the street.... Oh, goodness me. Very popular.



Facilitator 1: So sleepy old Fitzroy on Saturdays and Sundays there was this amazing stuff... happening in the - tell us about it

Bruce Pitts: Yes, but apart from that, weekends around the place were very, very quiet in those days. Pubs, if you wanted a bit of action you could always go up to - well, [Alan Rutherman] had the pub on the corner which is the Provincial now. The [Telly] Theatre was still across the road. I was talking to [Lyn] this morning saying oh gees, I've got to go and do that bloody interview, and I was [14:26] talking to Lyn and she worked at Moran & Cato's in the '60s. So she was well aware of it and we were talking about milk bars, how there's no milk bars in Fitzroy anymore.

Well she said where the, she said in the block between Brunswick Street and Victoria Street on Brunswick, between Johnson Street and Victoria Street on Brunswick Street there were two milk bars that she can remember. She could even remember who the owners were but, yeah, she was at Moran & Cato's.... In the '60s, yeah, and then oh, I think Permewan Wright took Moran & Cato's over and then she, they used to downstairs on the ground floor, they used to do all their cheeses. They used to repack all their cheeses and their meats and things like that for sale right through their supermarket chains and so on. Eventually they moved them out to Glen Waverley or somewhere out there, somewhere out there where they all went.... She went too, she went too for a little while.

Facilitator 1: Did you meet her then, is that where you met?

Bruce Pitts: No, no her father was a horse trainer [unclear]...

[Over speaking]

...that's how I met her, yeah. Mm, so the horse has got a lot to answer for. But yeah, so we were talking about it this morning and she can, she's got, yeah she's obviously, came, used to come up by tram, she was only 15 year old or something in those days, it was her first job.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, it was her first job at Moran & Cato's. [15:55]

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, first job.

Facilitator 2: Yeah, she lived in Fitzroy, or didn't live in Fitzroy?

Bruce Pitts: No, they were living, yeah Ivanhoe I think they were living in those days. Yeah, that was while dad, yeah her father was still training at Flemington, then he, they



later moved further out and they got a chicken farm up at Panton Hill when he got 10 years for some misdemeanour or something.

Facilitator 1: He got 10 years for some misdemeanour.

[Over speaking]

Facilitator 2: So ... talking about misdemeanours, did you have any association with the sort of roughhouse that was Gertrude Street and [unclear] and so forth?

Bruce Pitts: Oh yeah, yeah, even when we were in the service station in Victoria Parade and we'd go up and have a few beers at the Drill Hall. I think it was [2nd to 15th] Field Artillery ... Oh yeah, we used to go up there for a beer on a...Friday night there, used to open the bar and we'd have a few beers there. If we didn't go there sometimes we'd wander over to the Rob Roy or the Champ, mainly the Rob Roy, sorry mainly the Champion which was on the north, sorry on the south... [17:02]

...east corner, the Champ. I remember just, I think it would've been the late '70s there were three rough nut builder concreter types who thought they could take the Champion over and tame it and get things under control. They could handle themselves alright, but...

Facilitator 1: Tame it meaning what? Make it fashionable?

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, well but yeah... make it a little bit more palatable for the general punter as oppo-...

Facilitator 1: Who didn't want it tame at all.

Bruce Pitts: Because you could go in and you just, you really had to have your wits about you. You'd cop one from the two bob, from the two bob...

[Over speaking]

Bruce Pitts: Oh, they'd get full and they'd fight for a beer. They'd fight you at the drop of a hat, half of them.

Facilitator 1: This is after six o'clock closing we're talking about, isn't it? Where...

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, that was after six o'clock, yeah....Yeah, early-mid '60s, yeah.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, but were they starting to titivate the pubs in Fitzroy by the mid '70s? ... Not the Rob Roy and the Champion.



[18:10]

Bruce Pitts: A few, but, no not the Rob Roy and the Champ, no. No that was probably they...

[Over speaking]

Bruce Pitts: ...I don't reckon they gentrified them until oh, quite some time after that. I think probably early '80s was the start of it. Pubs like the...

Facilitator 2: There was the Royal, you remember the Royal on corner of George and Gertrude.

Bruce Pitts: Yes, yeah I do remember the Royal, didn't go in there much. I had a mate who ran a pub for a while right at the back of St V's, can't remember the name of it, it had a name like the Excelsior or something like that... Yeah, right behind St V's. In fact, I believe St V's owned the freehold at the end of the day and that had a sneaky backdoor through to St V's. So you can, God help you in those days I suppose if late in the afternoon you had an accident at work and they carted you into St V's and the surgeon would just come out the backdoor of the pub to look after you.

Facilitator 1: They could do... amazing things, surgeons, full of booze, they didn't care.

Bruce Pitts: Well, exactly and I'm sure they still do. But yeah, that was an interesting little pub with its backdoors and so on.

Facilitator 2: So it was sort of a rich, a rich life.

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, the Pumphouse Hotel, that was done up... I reckon middle '80s.

[19:22]

Maybe earlier, earlier. The classic example was the...

Facilitator 1: The Pumphouse set, yes and the Lemon Tree, which became very trendy in the late '70s, do you remember that?

Facilitator 2: The Commonwealth, the Common-...

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, oh, do I ever. I used to regularly get to the Lemon Tree. Oh...

Facilitator 1: Yes, well that would be near where you were working.

Bruce Pitts: ...all the air hostesses used to go straight to the Lemon Tree after they landed on Friday nights.



Facilitator 2: But then the, I can't [remember] what it was, St [Andrews] Hotel, that was where all the... That was where all the Commonwealth drivers went. So you'd see their... cars in Nicholson Street, many of them in the pub waiting for their boss to be finished at Parliament House.

Bruce Pitts: Yes, exactly. Exactly, gee I do remember that, St Andrews Hotel, yeah. Yeah, might just have a little, just a little one, yeah. There was, yeah so the Pumphouse, they did that up. I reckon the classic example of a hotel they did up was the Town Hall Hotel which became McCoppin's. Now the Town Hall Hotel, the bloke who did it up was, I got to know him a little bit, [Stuart], [Simon Seaward] I think his name was....

[20:35]

[Over speaking]

Bruce Pitts ... and his wife's family were the original publicans in that hotel. So he, as, I think as much as anything else, as much as a business venture I think he got a hold of the pub and decided to bring it back to its former glory for her, as a gift to her. They ran that quite successfully for some time, in fact I think it's still running quite well. But it did have a little bit of a slump, but gee it was a great hotel when they did it up and opened it.

They had the drive in bottle depot. It was refreshing, too, because it's lovely to go into a hotel that's got some, there was a bit more etiquette I suppose, or a little bit more stylish or you were happy taking your mum there or... your woman friend or...

Facilitator 1: Yeah, and a lot of women, you were always very welcome there. Whereas most of the pubs you weren't.

Bruce Pitts: Oh, no. [You had... to go into] the ... Ladies lounge.

[21:49]

Facilitator 1: Well, not really, I'm not talking about that long ago. But it was, they were rougher and McCoppin's was a bit nicer, I suppose. Do you remember The Evelyn?

Bruce Pitts: Oh, can't remember the Evelyn. The corner of Kerr and Brunswick? The beautiful thing about...But a lot of the pubs, I've got to say a lot of the pubs, particularly around Fitzroy, were owned and run by Italian and Greek families and they ran



their hotels, they were much more women friendly and children friendly... than the old Aussie hotelier was.

Facilitator 1: Yes, you'd see kids having counter teas and all that stuff that you, yes.

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, they were part of, they just accepted it as natural and they were much more welcoming. So yeah, there were some good pubs.

[22:48]

Facilitator 1: Back to your business. In the '80s it was going, growing, growing, growing? Did you take over more space or was...

Bruce Pitts: No, no we kept the same space. Now, that building sold for \$278,000 in 1976 or '77. The house immediately behind on the lane facing Little Fitzroy Street I think sold for \$15,000 or \$19,000 the same year. Now, goodness me, that just gives you an indication of what's it's worth. The guy who actually bought it was a Western District grazier.... I tried to buy it several times over the journey and he said he was always in the business of buying them, not selling them. He was looking... and he always justified it by saying well, it's not his immediate children that he's looking after, he's looking after their children's children. So he's looking down the track and he had quite a few of these...

Facilitator 1: Has he still got it?

Bruce Pitts: Oh, he's still got it, [Tom].... He'd be nudging 80 I reckon, Tom, now.... Tom [Robertson]. His property is at Murchison in Western Victoria.

[24:06]

Facilitator 1: So you've had a good relationship, yeah.

Bruce Pitts: I know him....Yeah, we've had a good relationship, he was quite a good landlord, in fact a terrific landlord. In fact, I don't think we had a rent rise for the first, certainly the first 15 years, anyway.... No, he was very good. But...

Facilitator 2: So where's this house? Where's the house you were talking about that he [unclear]?

Bruce Pitts: Oh, immediately behind the factory in Johnson Street, yeah. But no, Tom's been good but by the same token I don't think he has ever had to put his hand in his pocket for anything. So we've always done hot water services and small repairs



and all that sort of thing, and kept it, we're one of the cleaner mechanical operators I think. That's a pretty good workshop for 40 years. So we've looked after it but yeah, the bugger would never sell it.... He's going to develop.... Yeah, he's had some drill rigs in there recently.

Facilitator 1: I saw them, that's what triggered this whole conversation. I saw the drilling going on and you told me that was what's happening.

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, he had the drills all happening and he's just doing some

[25:12]

...soil contamination samples. I wouldn't imagine there'd be a problem. He was just, I think it's just to decide whether he puts an underground car park in or not.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, like they all have.

Bruce Pitts: Mind you, why [should/shouldn't] he? Because nobody else seems to have any car parking restrictions in the area. You can put up anything you like.

Facilitator 1: The block of flats immediately opposite, that orange block, they've got an underground car park and I blame them for every crack in this house but no one will take it in...

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, so no, but it's been, it is, look, it's disappointing, I suppose at the end of the day when you turn around and you think God almighty, \$278,000 back then and it's God, what would you put a price on it now? I don't know, \$5 million, \$6 million? Who would know? All I know is, poor old Tom is not getting what is a viable return, I guess, from the rent. Because I'm certainly not paying commercial rates on the basis of the value.

Facilitator 1: No, but you would've been fantastic tenants for him all this time.

Bruce Pitts: Oh, we would've paid the bloody thing for, yes, of course. But that's all, God help us, if Tom disappears, whether that largess will continue or not.... is anybody's say.

[26:28]

Facilitator 1: Tell me about people you employed. I mean that was another interesting conversation we had about how the kids are different now that you used to employ, that they've got different attitudes to work, all that stuff, do you remember that conversation?



- Bruce Pitts: Different attitudes to work, different expectations. Yes, I always had an apprentice, we always had apprentices from the time we were in the service station in Victoria Parade and ran apprentices through. I guess a few of those have stuck to their trade until they got to their 30s and 40s, but I can't think of any of them who are still involved actively. But that's right through the trade, I mean tradesmen who are still involved actively probably after the age of 40 are generally running their own businesses. That's the only way that they can see.
- Because trade rates, and particularly the automotive industry, is so poorly paid in comparison to a lot of other trades that's the only way they can see a way ahead is to stay in that industry. Very, I don't know. We've never been unionised and apart from the basic stuff like set apprenticeship wages and certain wages and conditions that they're virtually industry run, Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce and the Federal Award, there are Federal Awards. But generally overall it's, if people were paid by the awards that are in place there wouldn't be anybody to repair your car anywhere.... It's just daft.
- Facilitator 2: What about the changes in Fitzroy Bruce? I mean it's interesting, isn't it, how you've got sort of Fitzroy people in a way who come and different waves of people come with them but there's a few people like you who are [constant] [unclear] with that? The changing face of Fitzroy?
[28:24]
- Bruce Pitts: Oh, yeah I guess so, it's always interesting. But it's lovely to see the same faces and it just, yeah, it's lovely to walk down the street and nod to three or four people, and you may not even know their name, but you've known them for 35 years.... It's always comforting because it's constant. It gives you... constancy. It's like listening to that boofhead John Elliott on the radio, he's on the radio with his son on a Friday night and oh, goodness me I've never been a fan of, but to hear his voice is so comforting. You think well gees, here he is, he's...
- Facilitator 1: You recognise it immediately, you know it, don't you, immediately.
- Bruce Pitts: Yeah, and it takes me back 30 years and it's great, I love it. I love it because it makes me feel young again, you know.
- Facilitator 1: Did people like that come into you to have their cars done?
- Bruce Pitts: Oh look, We've had a string of, we had strings of I guess celebrity types... over the years. But interesting people, people from the medical profession, the legal



profession, particularly when we were over the road in East Melbourne in Victoria Parade. Because we had all those... legal eagles all the way up. The Redlich's and all those guys, Holding Redlich, Clyde Holding's firm was just on the corner.

[29:44]

Just past the Greek church. We had, Halfpenny, he was across the road... and we had all the odd bod, the people from the Liquor Commission, and they went through their, they went through their trials and tribulations in those days. They were immediately next door. So if you wanted to get the afternoon off and shoot off to the Warrnambool Races and watch the Grand Annual or something there was always somebody from the Liquor Commission who'd jump in the backseat or in the passenger seat and go with you. Oh they'd call it an industry awareness tour.... But yeah, so there were, yeah there were all those people and now, of course, because I don't know whether the thespian, the cultural people have always been here. It's probably, a lot of them you don't know because they don't achieve that notoriety until later on, but I mean I've...

Facilitator 1: Yeah, they keep their heads down, yeah.

Bruce Pitts: I've counted plenty of entertainers and...

Facilitator 1: Yeah, and the University and all that stuff, I mean... it's like a little university town in lots of ways, too.

Bruce Pitts: Well, of course. Yeah, very much. [31:00]

Facilitator 1: So actors are living in Fitzroy and they always have and ...entertainers, working class people who have always lived here and...

Bruce Pitts: Yes. Well they find here. You've got to have a concentration of those people so that people, so that they find some intellectual stimulation. I mean, and you've got to, they do tend to congregate because whether it be a pub or a suburb or whatever, because those things are available to them.

Facilitator 1: Yes, and you being where you were located in that first, second block in Johnson Street, second block, see Fitzroy happening outside your window. I mean everything is going on.

Bruce Pitts: Well you can, and you've got - I suppose it's their, their - what was that, they used to do a show in the States? They called it The Passing Parade, remember? It used



to be on when you went to the movies back in the old days and it's The Passing Parade in Fitzroy. I've got, I reckon half the reason I've got so many trade customers are because they love to come and drop their car off and say well, if you can do it reasonably quickly I think I'll hang around and wait. They're either up the road for a coffee, up the road for a beer or a meal or whatever.

They just stand there and they're - particularly the young ones, or the new ones who come in who've never experienced inner city before. They might, well invariably they're in the automotive trade so they live in areas further away generally, they've got a...

[32:38]

Oh, they come and they're just agha-, you know. I mean they, have you got a job, can I work here? They find it very exciting and...

Facilitator 1: Yeah, and you've done a lot of work with motorbikes too, haven't you?

Bruce Pitts: Well we have, but we, but not... not early days. you'd struggle to see a motorcycle in Fitzroy in the early days. There were a few old Nortons and a few BSAs and that sort of thing. But I guess probably 15 to 20 years' ago - I'd have to look around, I'd have to look and see when I actually went and made sure I had my motorcycle tester's licence. Because I remember 40-odd years' ago you didn't, it wasn't a special category. So then the rules changed, it became, you had heavy vehicles, you had taxis, you had light vehicles and you had motorcycles. When I could see an emerging market with motorcycles and scooters I thought oh we should really morph into this a little bit.

Facilitator 1: When was that? Sort of?

Bruce Pitts: I reckon probably 15, probably 15 or 20 years' ago and they became a lot more common. So we made sure that we got all our accreditations and re-sat our licences and all that sort of thing so we could accommodate that market. Now it's a big part of our business, it's 50 per cent of our business now. We started off as a specialist exhaust shop and...

Facilitator 1: What's a specialist exhaust shop?

Bruce Pitts: Oh, well we had, back in... Yeah, well back in the day, back in the mid '70s we got revolutionary hoists which had a post on each corner and you could actually



[34:27] lift the vehicle up on platforms so it was terrifically safe, terrifically stable, but the whole underside of the vehicle was accessible. So no crossbars, nothing to reach around or cut around or anything like that.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, so no one was lying under something, yeah.

Bruce Pitts: It was, the bane of the average motor mechanic was the fact that they had to do these things either on the floor or in a pit or in a centre lift hoist which meant they had to sit them up on teetering blocks and it was a very dangerous - they used to hate exhaust systems. So we thought it was an ideal thing to move into.

Facilitator 1: So you invested in that, or the landlord?

Bruce Pitts: No, no, no we just [took out] the bare building from the landlord and we invested in that. So we put these lifts in, we plumbed oxyacetylene - shouldn't say that - but we plumbed oxyacetylene, it was all pretty legal I assume. We plumbed oxyacetylene right through the building and compressed air and all that sort of thing. We had pneumatic tooling.... We had much more efficient ways to tackle that type of repair than previously was available. We used to do Volkswagens in an hour that'd take the average mechanic three hours and that sort of thing.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, so that would, your business would grow and grow.

Bruce Pitts: So yes, so - but of course, as with everything that's innovative and profitable by jingo, it doesn't take long and then everybody else just... jumps on your back and they tag you.... o we had to then move into, give ourselves different areas...

[36:11]

Facilitator 1: So keeping ahead of the game was a huge, yeah.

Bruce Pitts: Yeah. We, fortunately we were able to take general repairs and roadworthy inspections and that sort of thing from our workshop in East Melbourne and so we always had that as a backstop.... We always had that separated from the franchisor's claws. So that was just a little security blanket for us. But as time went on it became more a part of our business again because the exhaust business slowly, slowly has died off to the extent now where it's probably less than 20 per cent of our business, certainly.

Facilitator 1: Why has it died off?



Bruce Pitts: Just different fuels, you've got... the advent of unleaded fuel... you've got catalytic converters which increases the temperature in the exhaust system so you haven't got condensation...

Yeah, you've got stainless steel content used in the product itself which, so the instances of exhaust replacement and repair seems to be generally through accident damage now or damage through road material and things like that, road metal and things like that. So it's, yeah - or of course, performance enhancement. But Fitzroy has never been, Fitzroy and the inner city have never been areas where performance enhancement's important.

Facilitator 1: What's performance... [37:38]

Bruce Pitts: Well, they're the, they're, these are the...: What do they call them? The drag, the Northern...

Facilitator 2: The hoons, the hoons.

Bruce Pitts: ...the Northern Skids or whatever they call themselves and the Southern Skids.... You don't see too many happening in... [Fitzroy]

There might be the odd one now and then in Miller Street, North Fitzroy, or there was one this morning in Clarke Street, Northcote. ... But apart from that they're very - so that part of our business was relatively small, the performance market. But we moved into suspension and shock absorbers seriously because that was another area we were able to purchase very well and sell at a good margin. So that was, it was - because we were in a franchise system and the franchise order demands are the big grab for advertising and for administration. So you've got to, the profitability has got to be well up to cover it.

Facilitator 1: Who's doing the advertising and stuff? [They do].

Bruce Pitts: Oh, well we had a committee, yeah. With the franchisor we had a committee and I've got to, I must say that for the time that we were involved with Midas that they were, they, you couldn't question their integrity.

[38:51]...

Facilitator 2: They had good PR, Midas, didn't they?

Bruce Pitts: Yes, they were very good people, they had good people in the country running it and I think they were honest. I think they were basically honest and trustworthy



and had some integrity. Now of course the company changed hands a couple of times now, owned by completely different parties, and it's probably less than that. So we decided to part company after some 23 years' involvement with them. But we had multiple stores too, in other areas. In Prahran, in Thomastown, in Hawthorne, in Queensland... too, we moved up into the Sunshine Coast.

Yeah. Yeah, so yeah it was interesting. But yeah, the automotive landscape has changed a lot. Now these days a lot of roadworthy and compliance work and general service work.

Facilitator 1: Have you changed? I mean, are you still enthusiastic about it?

Bruce Pitts: Oh, well as enthusiastic... as you can be, really. I mean some guy showed me some stuff on Google today, a couple of reviews on Google and I hope it doesn't prompt you to look, but oh gee, I don't read that sort of stuff, I don't take any notice of it as a rule...but oh there's some terrible, they say some terrible things... [40:13]

...about me.... Rude and, yeah.

Facilitator 1: I was going to say that one of the reasons it seems to me and Ann... and all of the people that we know that go to you that the reason they go to you is because of you, because it's a really...

Facilitator 2: Because you're so cheery.

Bruce Pitts: Mm.

Facilitator 1: But, so they're getting you on social media?

Bruce Pitts: Not social media, no. Just where they make comments on Google and that sort of thing. ... Well and they rate you and not, almost anonymously which is - look, if they said something...

Facilitator 1: Yeah, never look. [40:50]

Bruce Pitts: If they said to you look, I don't quite understand this and I'm not happy with the way things are going and why are you treating me like this, or why are we - I'd probably fob them off anyway, but to go away... To say everything's fine and think everything's fine, the transaction's complete and every-, because everybody's got to be happy in a deal.



- Facilitator 1: Yes, of course.
- Bruce Pitts: You've got to be happy, I've got to be happy, otherwise - I'm not going to lay awake at night gnashing my teeth, I'd rather not. I'd rather work another 10 years so that I can sleep well. So yeah, the people, they do it anonymously and they, you see it [unclear] you're doing it yourself. You send these texts, and I know you probably do it because...
- Facilitator 1: Texts, you mean my little SMSs to you saying come over here at 5:30.
- Bruce Pitts: Yeah, but see I advertise, occasionally I'll advertise a car or a motorcycle or something like that and people will text. I mean, I don't do texts, but that's my fault. I guess that's my fault.
- Bruce Pitts: But it gives them an anonymity.
- Bruce Pitts: An anonymity that... I don't like, I don't like....
- [42:05]
- Bruce Pitts: I like to deal with people straight up, up front. These people talking to each other on phones on the tram and all that sort of thing, there's something... There's something missing. We went to the... ...where did I go? I went to MoVida on Saturday night. There were four young people, and they weren't of any particular ethnic persuasion, there were four young - when I say young people, 30, 35 year olds - that were sitting on a table right opposite us at the bar. They were all on their phones. We had a Chinese couple next to us at the bar, she was circa 55, he was circa 60, they never spoke to each other for the whole two hours they were there, they were on their phones the whole time. Terrible.
- Facilitator 2: You see it all the time, you walk down Brunswick Street and the same thing.
- Bruce Pitts: Yeah, so we're losing the art of communication. So somewhere like Fitzroy's great, really, because people still talk and they chat and they meet in a coffee bar or they...
- Facilitator 1: That's right, and that's what Mario's celebration was all about too. ... It was amazing, just no one on their phones, a huge gathering at the Town Hall.
- Bruce Pitts: Yes.... Fantastic. Yeah I didn't know, I didn't realise it was on...
- Facilitator 1: You're like that, yeah.



- Bruce Pitts: ...but I've never been a, I haven't been a Mario's person... [43:26]
- Facilitator 1: No, I have because I worked just down the road so it was part of my milieu but that's one of the things we value about your joint because there's a conversation. You actually have an exchange, don't you?
- Bruce Pitts: Yes, yes.
- Facilitator 2: ...we were amazed that [Alan Nance] was a customer, I [unclear] do you realise Alan Nance [comes to the group]?
- Bruce Pitts: Oh Alan yeah, yeah. ...: For years, and his daughter...
- Bruce Pitts: ...and son in law and da-da da-da, it goes on and on. I saw - who did I see the other day? His wife died, [Bronwyn], Bronwyn died. I saw him in ... Moor Street and he was hobbling along, but he was well. He was well. He had a sort of like, not a helper with him, a mate who was giving him a bit of a hand. Maybe an Indian guy.... It was good to see him and catch up with him.
- [44:27]
- Facilitator 1: Fitzroy's still a very lively place, despite the kids on their phones and...
- Bruce Pitts: Yes, yeah exactly, exactly.
- Facilitator 1: There's just good stuff happening and you're getting them all the time, too, aren't you?
- Bruce Pitts: Yeah, oh yeah.
- Facilitator 1: Some of them you're employing, because I had one of them, but we had a conversation about him being a bit of a private school nerd...
- Bruce Pitts: Oh yeah, what a shame. Yeah, I - look, back in the day it was expected that you worked, it was expected. I mean nobody sat back and got...
- Facilitator 1: Yeah, that you worked when you had a job.
- Bruce Pitts: Well yeah, but you try, you had a go and people still respect you if you have a go. Alright, if you don't cut the mustard that's fine, but you have a go and to have a go, nobody - as an apprentice I probably did nothing else bar wash parts and sort out nuts and bolts and tools for the first six months of my apprenticeship. Then for the next six months I probably fixed punctures. God help me.



Facilitator 1: Yeah, and you had someone to talk to? You were listening to them or you were just doing it on your own?

Bruce Pitts: Oh no, it was, no not really. If you ran into a problem there was always somebody to advise you, you were advised or shown, generally shown rather than explained. But...

Facilitator 1: It was another way of training people, wasn't it?

Bruce Pitts: Oh definitely, yeah, definitely. It was a show and... Sit by Nellie.

[46:00]

Facilitator 1: Sit by Nellie and watch how Nellie does it, yeah.

Bruce Pitts: Sit by Nellie, yeah. Yeah, well that's right, that's right and that's why probably, because I came through that system I find IT a little difficult. Because people who know it, who find their way around it very easily like my younger son who does everything for me loading up photographs and all that sort of stuff and swapping this and swapping that.

Facilitator 1: Loading up photographs on what? Social media? He does...

Bruce Pitts: Oh no, this is all work related, VR, VicRoads sort of stuff, backups, and they require 100 different backups for all these things. But yeah, I find it difficult because James wants to do it so quickly and move on...he just hasn't got the patience with me.

Facilitator 1: VicRoads are making you do all kinds of stuff you didn't have to do.

Bruce Pitts: Oh yeah, we've got the compliance. There's a lot of compliance issues now that didn't exist then and it's like everything else. It's like OH&S and traffic management, didn't exist. Now, they want to open... ..a fire hydrant in Fitzroy, they put up 85 bloody orange cones up and down and closed the street off, it's ridiculous.

[47:22]

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, just crazy.

Facilitator 1: We're going to get a 30k zone, the Council's opting for, how about that? Bikes go faster.



Bruce Pitts: God help us. Well, the bikes go terribly, bikes go much faster... ..and the bikes are on the footpaths in Fitzroy and I think it's... disgraceful.... Yeah, no it's no good. ... Yeah, and they don't care... they just hammer.

[48:10]

Bruce Pitts: But yeah, so the kids have changed. They used to, they expected to work and they did work and they put good, long good hours in. But the kids you get now...

Facilitator 1: You'd take on apprentices? That was, you took on apprentices a lot.

Bruce Pitts: Oh, we always took on apprentices, yeah. But we still do the odd work experience kid from one of the, Princes Hill or wherever, but there's no - look, there are no young kids apart from kids who have only arrived - not kids - apart from young men who've only arrived in the country two minutes ago. Nobody else applies for a job, nobody else walks in off the street like we used to do with a book under your arm and walk around looking for an apprenticeship. No, it just doesn't happen, you don't get kids doing it.

Facilitator 1: Yes, so blokes that have arrived as refugees...

Bruce Pitts: A lot of, yeah... people from the subcontinent with some sort of skills, some, the odd backpacker who might want to get a working visa or something like that, occasionally you'll get one or two of them. But not often, very rarely, two a year. So it really, it's - I hate to say it but I think it's a dying trade to an extent. ... Yes I do, I do.

Facilitator 1: So what will happen?

Bruce Pitts: Oh, well what'll happen is that... the dealerships will take over...

[49:30]

Yeah, dealerships will take over and what you and Ann will do is lease your cars straight from the dealership and you'll change them over every five years.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, my son's doing that already, yeah.

Bruce Pitts: It'll be like Foxtel, you pay a certain amount each month...

Facilitator 1: Yeah, and they cover everything and that's the end of it.



- Bruce Pitts: That's the way it'll be done, yeah.... It is, yeah, it is a shame. But I guess out in suburbia I guess there's a bigger pool of talent, but parents expect so much of their children now and we're not perceived as being a way to wealth and.....fortune, so...
- Facilitator 1: If they only knew the number of race horses you have tucked away in Queensland.
- Bruce Pitts: Shh. Yes, well. Yeah it's a...
- Facilitator 1: Oh, now just before we finish - we don't need to finish, but I'm sure you need to - you, when I first talked to you about this you were also talking about people you spotted in the street like [Tim Burstall's] girlfriend and all that sort of stuff.
- Bruce Pitts: Oh yeah, back in the...
- Facilitator 1: Do you remember those bits of scandal.
- Bruce Pitts: Back in the day.... Susannah York. ...was around.
- [50:37]
- Bruce Pitts: Yeah goodness me, still gave me a flutter, the heart...
- Facilitator 2: That was a long time ago, isn't it?
- Facilitator 1: Yes, so other kind of people who were floating around Fitzroy then.
- Bruce Pitts: Oh look there's... always somebody, even famous...
- Facilitator 1: Muhammad Ali - we heard about the other day on one of the interviews someone did - was here... visiting the black community in Gertrude Street...
- Bruce Pitts: Really? Okay.
- Facilitator 1: ...because he'd heard there was a black community in Gertrude Street. So in the '80s he arrived here and went to see them.
- Bruce Pitts: Well well.
- Bruce Pitts: Sometimes they can be spirited away, and I saw a woman the other day walking up Johnson Street and I, if it wasn't Serena Williams I thought I'd [unclear], but I'm sure of it, I'm probably sure it was. But I mean we've had all, we've had the rock stars, we've had all the footballers, we've got the John Clarkes, we've got Mick



Gatto, we've got all these people are backwards and forwards all the time. It's great to...

[51:37]

Yeah, they're part of the community and it's great to be able to have a chat with them and...

Facilitator 2: The [crims] have moved out, haven't they? ... Yeah, well Mick Gatto.

Bruce Pitts: Well, yeah. Well no... Look, the petty crims. ... There's, oh I had a guy in the office, that guy in the office not long ago, that was an aggravated burglary.... there in Johnson Street and that was an aggravated burg, I don't know what's happened to him.

Facilitator 1: What's an aggravated...

Bruce Pitts: It's when they use a weapon....Oh, with menace?

[52:23]

Bruce Pitts: Oh right, well I was there so it was aggravated. So what's aggravated burglary with menaces then?

Yeah, well he had a pair of... pliers or a weapon or something. So I don't know what's happened to him, he's probably, they probably took him around the corner and let him out, took a while to get there. But those sort of things, yeah that goes part and parcel. Say, petty theft and all that sort of thing, that's always going to happen.

Facilitator 2: So what about the police, is there anything the police have changed?

Bruce Pitts: Yes, absolutely. The police have changed a heck of a lot. Police, police parking, parking inspectors and officers have changed dramatically, I would think.

Facilitator 1: Because it's now a revenue raising element of everything, that's generally part of...

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, well that didn't exist before, although it certainly did in the parking area. I mean I would, I might be a little bit out but I'd take a guess and say that I reckon 60 to 75 per cent of the parking revenue in Fitzroy in the inner city never got to see the coffers of the appropriate councils back in the day.

[53:34]



Facilitator 1: So how did the money change hands?

Bruce Pitts Well they were in charge of, the guys were in charge of collecting it.... I'm talking about parking meters and things like that.

Facilitator 1: You're talking about meters.

Bruce Pitts: Yes, absolutely. Oh yes, that was, I'm sure a lot of that... was spirited away and well, I'm sure the record says that too. I mean if it's researched enough it says that. Oh yeah, but in saying that, back in the day you could, you knew who was in charge of enforcement, local civic enforcement in Fitzroy was.....and if you had an issue you could give them a call. Now you wouldn't have a hope in Hades. The coppers, yeah, we used to have an annual wind up at the Fitzroy Town, the lower Fitzroy Town Hall every year with the local police.

Facilitator 1: So who was there, what sort of wind up was it?

Bruce Pitts: Oh, all the local businesses were there, all the, oh yes, all the local businesses, the police. The guys would come around, they'd be in the Divvy wagon and they'd come around and give you an invite and they'd be around at all the pubs and the pubs would donate a barrel or two and we might give them a few bucks for...

Facilitator 1: When was this, '70s? '80s?

[54:49]

Bruce Pitts: Oh, right - I reckon it didn't stop until at least, at least the mid '90s.

Facilitator 1: Wow, well they sure didn't...

[Over speaking]

Bruce Pitts: You knew all the, you knew half the police. Even though Fitzroy, a big station like Fitzroy, and I think they had 65 or 75... guys and women, but... not many women in those days. ... Even a big station like that. You knew half of them by sight and you knew probably at least 20 per cent by name. Because they'd go and have a beer in the local pub.... They'd have a day off on a Saturday and they'd come into the pub and say oh, oh you're having a day off, what are you doing here? They're oh, I brought my wife in, they'd bring their wife in. So we came in the other night and we enjoyed ourselves so much we thought we'd come back. Oh, so where are you guys going for dinner tonight? Because we used to meet at the pub.....and then on a Saturday night we'd meet at the pub, there'd probably be eight, 10 of us



and we'd decide where to go for a feed. It might be over here at Belinda's in Johnson Street, it might be at the Indian doctor's in Smith Street. Remember him?

Facilitator 1: Yes, I do, yeah.

[56:00]

Bruce Pitts: His daughter, his daughter ended up with Everest in Station Street in Fairfield. But the doctor, I used to, he was a great host. We had some...

Facilitator 1: Yeah, he was fantastic.

Bruce Pitts: ...terrific nights.... He was on this, this western side of Smith Street. Probably about halfway up, you reckon?

Facilitator 1: Yes, yeah. He was fantastic, it was a fantastic place.

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, can't remember what the name of the place was, but oh gee, there were some good places. What about Café Lisboa? Down on the corner of Westgarth Street and Brunswick Street.

Facilitator 2: I went there and he was [like] the Portuguese Consul.

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, Carlos [Salem]os. He had the dicky arm, but he was a lovely fellow.

Facilitator 1: If you looked like you might be going away he would talk about going to Portugal, going to Portugal.

Bruce Pitts: Oh, wonderful host, wonderful host, great guy and stood the test of time. He stood the test of time, he doesn't look any, doesn't look a day older. I saw him only recently, looks fantast-, always had an, oh always had a rotten Peugeot that he used to drive. [57:09]

Facilitator 2: So it's been a very rich... place, hasn't it? That continues, don't you think? The richness of Fitzroy... continues even though you say it's not the same as the old days. But it's pretty interesting.

Bruce Pitts: Yeah, yeah. No, oh, it was marvellous. Big plates of peri-peri prawns, you can't, you haven't been able to get them anywhere else since... you can't buy, you can't get a decent peri-peri prawn in Melbourne anymore, since he shut down there. I used to love going there.



- Facilitator 2: Yes and that's sad, isn't it? The... way that vanished and what come, nothing came, it crumbled, the whole thing, there was nothing of any memorable nature that comes after him. He stopped, and what's there now?
- Bruce Pitts: Yeah. Oh, some sort of retro bloody joint.
- Facilitator 1: Tricked up food, mm.
- Bruce Pitts: It's, but the rents have killed a lot of that entrepreneurial stuff. Everybody's going to have a big bank roll now to really kick something off. There used to be banks around the corner, for God sake, you'd have a choice. The Commonwealth Bank was here on the, right opposite on the [block]...
- Facilitator 1: Absolutely, we used to invite the bank, local bank manager to our parties...
- Bruce Pitts: Of course.
- Facilitator 1: ...and he'd come in his long socks and he'd have a wonderful time and we would get our overdraft. I mean it was really, it was a - he, because he knew us and our friends he would come to the publishing company down in Cecil Street and like us and on we went. So, but that's all stopped, and...
- Bruce Pitts: Well it was very much like that. ... What about Neil, I can't...
- Facilitator 1: ... his name was, Wilbur.
- Bruce Pitts: Wilbur Clough.
- Facilitator 1: They don't make [bank managers called]...
- Bruce Pitts: What bank was he?
- Facilitator 1: He was with the ANZ in... Carlton but he'd trek over to Fitzroy and come to the parties.

[59:00]

- Bruce Pitts: Well we used to bank with the CBC who were where the Red Onion is now on the corner of Victoria and Brunswick Streets, the CBC who were taken over by the NAB. But I can remember Neil, and I can't, sorry Neil I can't remember your surname. I don't know whether he's still with us, because he was a... he was a smoker.



- Facilitator 1: But they trusted you, because...
- Bruce Pitts: You'd go into his office and of course he'd have a fag, so you'd all have a smoke, everybody used to smoke...
- Facilitator 2: But it was extraordinary, I mean ... our bank. They'd just let you run up debts, it was extraordinary, they were very trusting.
- Facilitator 1: Because they knew you, they trusted you, they went to your parties.
- Bruce Pitts: Yeah. Well they did. Well [John] [Unclear] said that too about early days and grinders.... [Well] they need money because they wanted to keep us going, or something. I don't know what it was, but it was...
- [Over speaking] [59:54]
- Bruce Pitts: Oh, to justify their own existence too, if they had a few loans out and all that sort of stuff. I mean that's what they were suppose-, that's what they did.
- Facilitator 1: That's what they were supposed to do, that's exactly it, yeah.
- Bruce Pitts: That's what they did. Kids had bloody, kids had little passbooks and that sort of thing and - I don't know whether a lot of, do you think there's more kids around Fitzroy now than there was then?
- Facilitator 1: There are kids in prams that run people like me...
- Bruce Pitts: Children? Lots of babies, yeah.
- Facilitator 2: But there's been a gap though, I think with kids.
- Bruce Pitts: Yes, there has been.
- Facilitator 2: There was a fall off and then there was a boom.
- Bruce Pitts: I can remember we used to go to the Rochester Castle on the corner of...
- Facilitator 2: Johnson Street, yeah.
- Bruce Pitts: ...George Street and we'd go there for lunch. That was in the day when you had lunch. By God, I don't think I've had lunch for 25 years. But old Pat [Ficary] used to run that, big Pat, and he'd be running it and his son in law would be behind the bar, who's - anyway, you'd go down there and you'd have a spaghetti Bolognese



entrée for \$1.50 and a veal parmigiana for about \$3 and you'd have enough change out of \$5 for a couple of pots.

Facilitator 1: A couple of pots on top...

[61:13]

Bruce Pitts: That was lunchtime and there'd always be a couple of the local coppers, there'd always be a couple of the local detectives, they'd be in the, they'd be sort of slinking about, the ones that weren't at Stewarts in Carlton, because they used to always drink at Stewarts in Carlton. ...That was behind the Carlton Police Station.

Facilitator 1: That's where we used to drink, too.

Bruce Pitts: Carlos [Alessandro] I've seen over there once, he was...Oh yes, are his people still there? Is, who's the lady who's got it, who runs it now?

Facilitator 2: I don't know, I haven't been there for years but Maria was his wife.

Bruce Pitts: I reckon she's still there. I reckon the family's still there.

Facilitator 2: You could, he had a brother who ran ... a pub on the corner of Palmerston and Rathdowne, the Italian pub, Clare Castle. Clare Castle, his brother had the Clare Castle.

Bruce Pitts: Right, and the other bloke had it. Jose-, not Joseph, Argentinian, not an Argentinian bloke. He ended up he had pubs all around. He had one in North Melbourne on the corner of Peel and Victoria Streets, he had one, he ended up with one over in Richmond, Jose.... Jose, Jose had the Clare Castle too, for a while. Remember the pub, remember opposite the Clare Castle in Nicholson Street called, not the Pioneer, it was called the - bugger it, I can't think. [62:34]

I know the blokes who used to run it, it was the [Reardons], I'm sure the Reardons ran it for some time.

Facilitator 1: I'm going to stop this because we're now in Carlton, we should do another Carlton project.

Bruce Pitts: Yes, that's right.

END OF TRANSCRIPT