

Australians at War Film Archive

Robin Stein (Robin Russell) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

- 00:51 **So, Robin, it would great if you could tell us a little bit about where you were born, your family that sort of thing.**
- 00:57 I was born in St Kilda in Melbourne and
- 01:00 came from an Orthodox Jewish family. My father was an academic and he taught himself to play saxophone and clarinet so he became a jazz musician during the Second World War years in St. Kilda. I grew up with music constantly. Latin American music was on the scene at that time, so my family got very much into that and I really fell in love with that music.
- 01:30 I started singing from the time I was a little kid.
- 01:35 **So what sort of music were you hearing in the house?**
- 01:36 Well because of the Orthodox Judaism of which I was brought up, there was a big mixture of music. I was taken to the synagogue and heard the incredible ancient tunes that were all written in minor keys and I remember those to this day, they sent chills up my spine even from the time I was a tiny little kid.
- 02:00 Then I'd come home and there'd be jam sessions and all the musicians would pack into our tiny little lounge room in St. Kilda and lift the roof off with their music. So I used to, that was from the time I was born, so I would sleep through that my Mum told me, and I'd only wake up when the music stopped. I really had a lot of influences. I've got all my father's collection of 78s now, with Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan
- 02:30 and Carmen McRae and Peggy Lee and Lena Horne and all those kind of singers, Billie Holiday. I grew up with all of those people, they were my friends basically. My father came to Australia when he was eight years old and he came from Buenos Aires, that's not where he was, he was actually born in Buenos Aires but his family came from Russia and Lithuania. I actually went back to Lithuania
- 03:00 a couple of years ago and went and had a look and saw where my grandfather was born and where he was brought up. It was quite amazing, I understood perfectly why he left, it was a terrible place. They came out on a ship and they put on, they were theatre people, and they put on Yiddish plays and variety shows and the whole family sang and they were all musicians and singers and artists
- 03:30 basically. So they arrived, I think, when my father was eight, he was born in 1905, so just before the war broke out they arrived. My mother's family came from Bremen in Germany, well that's where her father came from and her mother came from Scotland, so I'm one of Heinz's 57 [canned soup] varieties. They met, my mother was a Tivoli ballet dancer and my Dad was working in the pits
- 04:00 at the time, in the orchestra and playing the saxophone for the Tivoli show and I guess he was looking right up at my Mum, they fell in love and they got married. I'm the second child, I have a sister six years older. My father, I guess, was a mixture because he was an academic and he studied all of his life and it didn't occur to him that his children wouldn't because that is what Jewish people did.
- 04:30 So I also did that. I wasn't very interested in Sunday school as a child but I did go to Israel and I studied Jewish law and I studied in-depth to the point where I guess I could teach. But my greatest love was singing and that was something I'd done since I remember because we had a piano, we used to sing around the piano. My Dad and Mum, music was their
- 05:00 life really. My Mum taught piano as well, she taught ballet as well and she tried to teach me but I had two left feet so I guess singing was the next option. We used to sing around the piano and I remember being taught harmonies to songs like Moonlight Bay and those sorts of songs when I was a kid growing up. There were always musicians around and always jam sessions in our house and I grew up with that sort of music.

- 05:30 My parents loved all kinds of music and so I grew up with a lot of Latin American music as well and I think that is one of my favourite kinds of music, but also grew up with influences like Carmen McRae, Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald and I guess I became a jazz singer because of that influence. And my Dad loved jazz, that's what he played in the night clubs in St. Kilda during the war and he also drove an ambulance.
- 06:00 I don't, for some reason, he didn't go and fight, I don't understand why but he did his First Aid, his St John's Ambulance and he worked in an ambulance and played music at night. He was a tailor by trade. He had come dux of University High and he wanted to be a doctor and there wasn't enough money by then because there were so many children, he was the last of the children. I think there were seven or eight children and five survived.
- 06:30 He was a really gentle man my Dad. He was my idol I guess as I was growing up. My Mum was the one that dealt out the discipline and my Dad didn't want us to dislike him so he used to leave that to my Mum. I guess I started singing from the time I was 13 or 14 with his
- 07:00 band on a weekend, just around the local clubs up Fitzroy Street and around St. Kilda in Acland Street. Then as I, I guess I should go back a couple of years, because when I was eight or nine years old I used to climb out the bedroom window in the middle of the night and I used to go down Acland Street, because we lived in Havelock Street which was around the corner, and I used to go in to the night clubs and sing. And my mother used to come and check my bed during the night and if I was gone she'd walk down
- 07:30 Acland Street and listen at all the doors and until she found my voice and then she'd come up and drag me home. That didn't stop me. I was irrepressible like that as a child, much to my parents horror I think. I went to Sydney to get work, started to go to Sydney to get work when I was 16, because there wasn't a lot of work in Melbourne at that time, no leagues clubs, no RSL [Returned and Services League] clubs, no poker machines to make money
- 08:00 and I was restricted basically to the clubs around St. Kilda and Fitzroy Street which I worked in. A lot of those were Latin clubs in those days and so I first started singing in Greek, Italian and Spanish and French and Yiddish, sometimes Latin. I've been known to sing 'Ave Maria' in church for a wedding, or a funeral. Then I went to Sydney when I was about 16 and started singing there and
- 08:30 at the time I was still studying. I was studying art - ceramics, painting and drawing and all of that with the idea of maybe being an art teacher, but that didn't eventuate.
- 08:44 **I want to ask you a bit more about Melbourne at that time before you went to Sydney. You said that your father was an academic as well, so how did he manage to combine the music career with academia?**
- 08:54 I think academia, his studies, he loved studying and
- 09:00 he was a teacher. He taught Jewish history, he taught Bar Mitzvahs and he blew the shofar at the synagogue, which is the ram's horn that's blown in the New Year and various festivals. That was something that he did, that was part of his life, I guess, that he didn't question, he did that and he'd done it all his life. Jewish children start studying from the age of three. And so he had not known any
- 09:30 other life, but music was his hobby I guess, and it really consumed him and he became very close friends with a man in Melbourne, who's still alive and still working, by the name of Denis Farrington, and Denis organised bands and put them into clubs and so there was really no difficulty to balance the studies with the music. I don't think I had any difficulty balancing
- 10:00 the studies with the music too because they both become a part of your life. An important part. I still study, not necessarily Judaism anymore, but I still have my head in books because I'm a homeopath and I just love the science and the medical aspect of that. So yeah, I don't think it was a problem at all for him and it certainly isn't a problem for me. Melbourne in those days was an amazing place. I think it was a much safer place
- 10:30 during those years when I was growing up. It wasn't a big thing for a child to be walking along a street at night, you weren't frightened of kids being snatched or anything like that. Everyone in the street knew each other and I guess, really lived for his jazz music that he played on the weekend, that was his freedom I guess.
- 10:56 **Can you describe that St Kilda scene to us, what it was like compared to now?**
- 11:00 Compared to now, it's really fantastic because now I see St Kilda as being a bit grotty and a bit sleazy now, and in those days it was an exciting place. There were night clubs above a lot of continental style delicatessens which have changed a bit now. They've been made in to coffee shops and continental cake shops and things like that. In Acland Street in those days we used to go down early in the morning, I used to go down with my Dad and we'd buy fresh
- 11:30 bread which was still hot, you could smell it and you'd have that beautiful bread smell in all the place, and there were vats in the delicatessens which would contain herrings and all manner of olives and wonderful tasting things. And everybody knew me, the butcher knew me, the deli people knew me, the

fruit shop people knew me. St Kilda was a very different place. We used to get fruit and vegies delivered by a van, we used

- 12:00 to get ice delivered, the ice man used to come and he'd throw the ice blocks on a hessian sack on his shoulder with his big ice pick to hold it in place, and he'd chip bits of ice off for us as kids and give it to us and we'd have ice blocks. We didn't have a fridge. Melbourne was a very interesting place. Very multi-cultural in those days, and people like us who spoke other languages were not as welcome,
- 12:30 we were given names. My, Stein, my name is shortened from Finkelstein and I discovered that I got 'Stinkle Feet', and Einstein, and Frankenstein, and all kinds of things at school, which was nothing compared to what my Dad had experienced. His nose had been broken a few times by kids because he would wear the skull cap to school and he'd be, as soon as his school had finished he'd go and study. That was his life until about 7 or 8 o'clock at night and then there'd
- 13:00 be prayers and his whole life was mapped out like that. So his life, I think, was a lot more difficult than my life.
- 13:09 **Other than the name calling, did you feel any other sort of prejudice?**
- 13:12 Yes I had that all the way through my primary years. I went to a, because my health was not so good, I was an asthmatic child from the time I remember and so my parents thought that if I went to a private school perhaps I'd be better off. But in actual fact I was a lot worse off
- 13:30 because I was the only Jewish girl in a Church of England School with an anti-Semitic headmistress. So I spent my whole primary school time outside the headmistress's office being blamed for all the stuff the other kids did and I wasn't even sure what I was being blamed for, but that was my life. My parents thought that I was a bit retarded because I hadn't passed an exam and it was because I'd sat outside, or was always stood outside the headmistress's office for the whole primary school time that I spent there.
- 14:00 So that was not fun. Made me very rebellious.
- 14:06 **How about making friends?**
- 14:07 I don't recall having any friends in that time of my life. I was in and out of hospital. I spent all of 4th grade in hospital when I was eight years old, most of my, I repeated 4th grade for that reason and I spent most of the next year in hospital too. I understood why my parents thought I was a bit retarded. I didn't read until I was 10.
- 14:30 My beginnings were, I don't know how deeply you want me to go into things here, but I spent the first four years of my life spread eagled in my cot tied up because my mother was so frantic trying to deal with my sister throwing the tantrums that she threw, that she still throws in her life, and dealing with my Dad who'd hurt his back badly in an accident and had had
- 15:00 his first heart attack at that point. And she didn't want another baby so, and nobody would help her in those days. They just told her to get on with your life, so that's how I spent my first four years, tied up. The first, probably until I was a teenager, I really didn't start living my life. I know I was living it all the way up until then, I know that your beginnings shape you and make you who you are. I think I was angry
- 15:30 with my Mum for the first 35 years of my life until I finally confronted her. And when she told me how difficult it was, I then felt really sorry for her and all that anger just fell away from me. But it made me a very determined person. Also, because I was so sick my Mum was told by a specialist to put me in the water and make me swim, because if I didn't swim I'd probably die. So she took that literally and she dropped me in the deep side of the pool and she wouldn't let me out until
- 16:00 I could swim. So that wasn't a lot of fun. I remember being blue and teeth chattering and not being able to feel my hands and being terrified that I was literally going to drown. I have a lot of memories like that from my early childhood. But I guess I got to laugh at adversity and I still do and it's shaped the warped sense of humour that I carried with me for the rest of my life.
- 16:30 It enables me I guess to empathise with other people who have been through shit too because that's the human experience, we all go through it at some point.
- 16:42 **Were you close to your sister who was six years older?**
- 16:45 No, not close to her. Hated her. Still hate her, can't stand her, she's not a nice person and I'm quite happy for this to go on national television. She's not a nice person at all. So I never got on with my sister. She tried to kill me when I was little
- 17:00 she used to try to beat my head on the corner of the concrete of the pavement and she used to drag me to school by my hair and she wouldn't take me to the toilet, a little girl of four or five you know, when I needed to go and so I'd be wetting my pants in public and, yeah, my sister was very humiliating person.
- 17:26 **So even at that early age was music the solace?**

- 17:30 Yes. Yes. And I think I fell in love with Billie Holiday for that reason. Do you know what Billie Holiday, Billie Holiday sang the blues and she sang from her soul and I think that that began to resonate with me, even as a small child.
- 17:51 **You said you'd sneak out and go to the clubs and sing, how old were you again at that stage?**
- 17:55 Nine or ten I was doing that.
- 18:00 **What was the process, they'd just welcome you in and get you up?**
- 18:01 They all knew me, they'd know me because they'd know my Dad. So they'd known me since I was born so as long as I could hold a tune they were willing to give me a go and it was a terrific experience for me. Just fantastic experience. That was a form of expression that I think was vital for my sanity. Very, very important part of my life.
- 18:28 **Can you describe to us the bands, combos they were and the music you'd sing?**
- 18:30 Well again I used to sing in other languages because they were the bands that were happening when I was that age. There were people like Eddy Burnett, whom I think is still playing guitar somewhere around, Leo Rosiner, and Leo Rosiner was featured in Schindler's List as being one of
- 19:00 the people that Schindler had allowed to escape and he came to Australia. He and his brothers played violin and piano accordion. So it was a lot of gypsy music also that was, gypsy sort of folk music, Latin American music. I sang songs like Besa mema [?UNCLEAR] in Spanish and different songs in other languages. My father spoke eight languages fluently
- 19:30 so language was not a problem I guess. I'm not as good with language as he was.
- 19:39 **What would you have spoken at home?**
- 19:40 English. English and Yiddish were the two languages spoken at home and even amongst the English were scattered lots of Yiddish words. In the same way that America does today. In American movies you hear today talking about people being shikker which
- 20:00 is drunk or you know a shmendrik which is an idiot. Also in my early life because I was so sick I spent a lot of time at home in bed and there were always people talking to me. But there were people I couldn't see and my parents couldn't see and they thought I just had a very vivid imagination. But my mother discovered
- 20:30 early in the piece that if she asked me who I was playing with that day I could name all those children and I could describe to her what they were wearing, and she realised at some point that I actually was seeing people that she couldn't see. And so I don't recall a time in my life when my friends, my spirit friends I guess, you can call them whatever you like, but I don't remember a time in my life when that didn't
- 21:00 occur. So I grew up feeling that it was just a normal part of my life. I didn't see it as something different, I didn't realised that other people didn't have that ability until I started going to school and mentioning to people that 'so and so told me this' and they'd say, "Who was that person?" And I'd say, "That's not a person you can know, that's just a person that speaks to me in my head." And they'd look at me as though I was mad and then
- 21:30 give me a very wide berth from then onwards. I have had, I've been clairvoyant, which means that I see things and I'm clairaudient which means that I hear things as long as I remember. I'm told that children who are sick and spend a lot of time sick, and I had something like six cardiac arrests in the first few years of my life, and have clear visions of floating around
- 22:00 on the top of the hospital ceiling while my body was on a trolley being, my chest being thumped and my heart being started again, and then how painful it was when I came back in to my body. They're some of my earliest memories. When I got to school and realised that I was not like peers I constantly told those people that talked to me to go away, I didn't want to be separate
- 22:30 from everybody I just wanted to be like everybody else. And it was bad enough that I went to school with you know, my chunks of black bread and continental cheese or herring or something else in my lunch and everyone else had white bread sandwiches and vegemite and peanut butter and jam. I never had lunches like that. So that was bad enough I already felt different, but that made me feel much more different. But as I got older I understood that those people were not there to hurt me or make my
- 23:00 life difficult, they were actually there to help me.
- 23:03 **You made a conscious effort to shut them out?**
- 23:06 I told them to go away in no uncertain terms. I used to yell at them, "Go away! I just want to be like everybody else." "I don't know why you're here. I don't care why you're here. Just go away and leave me alone." Because it was constant and if I didn't do what I was told to do by these people they didn't

leave me alone, so I really got to hate them as a child. I didn't understand it

23:30 at all.

23:34 **Looking back what were they telling you?**

23:37 They kept me company for a start because I was a very isolated child. I didn't have a lot of friends in my early childhood, I spent a lot of time at home, sick, not being able to breathe, not even knowing where my next breath was going to come from, often thinking that I was going to die. Sometimes welcoming that feeling too, hoping I would die then the struggle to breathe

24:00 wouldn't be so constant. I think when I was 10 years old I weighed two stone eight, that gives you an idea of how sick I actually was as a child, and I'm sure that without their healing and constant support of those people, possibly I would have died, but they knew that I had a purpose so they kept me here. In Vietnam they actually saved my life.

24:30 I didn't know about Vietnam at all until I went to Sydney, and I was in my early 20s and I was approached by an agent one night on my way home from working in the Cross. I was just walking through the Cross, which in those days was like St Kilda was when I was growing up, it was a terrific place, a very exciting place, a lot of different musicians of all different nationalities there, all sharing their musical

25:00 you know, ideas with each other. For me it was a fantastic time because I would work early in the evening at one job and then I'd go to another job until 3am and then we used to jam until 7 or 8 in the morning. Then I'd go home and go to bed. That was a fantastic time. I was asked to go to Vietnam and all I knew was that it was a war torn zone and I thought that was something

25:30 I needed like a whole in my head and kept refusing. The offer was continually made to me, "Why don't you go?" "It would be really good for Australian troops." "It would be a real morale booster," "You would do something very important," and hang on here I've got a life of my own that's important. But eventually I agreed and I went and I went when, I made arrangements to go when I was about 24.

26:00 **So who organised that?**

26:03 I have been wracking my brains to tell you who organised my first trip and I can't remember the name of the man who organised it. He's since passed away of cancer. He became a naturopath, but in those days he was a theatrical agent, and theatrical agents were people that I gave a very wide berth to. I didn't work for any of the agents,

26:30 I really, later on I did but at first I didn't.

26:36 **Before we get you to Vietnam can we talk about that move from Melbourne to Sydney and why that came about?**

26:41 After I finished school and I was going to MacRob High [MacRobertson Girls' High School] I decided that I wanted to do art, didn't necessarily want to teach art, which is what my parents were pushing me to do, or be a doctor of course, which was what every Jewish child is supposed to do with their lives.

27:00 I wasn't interested in that. All I really wanted to do was paint and make pottery. I went to Melbourne Tech [Technical College] and I did English as a university subject and then I did all my art subjects as well. I started singing, being paid to sing, from about 16 onwards and so I was at Melbourne Tech and at the same time, on a

27:30 Friday night or a Saturday night, I was also singing. I did 'Delo and Daley' shows, that was one of the shows, television shows in Melbourne at that time with Jonathon Daley and I forget the other guys Delo's name, comedians that came from America. And also Jimmy Hannon shows were big at that time. So I did several of those with big bands and

28:00 big arrangements, it was all quite exciting. I also sang in a place called Geoff Brook's Steak Cave which was in the middle of the city at that time and Geoff Brooks was a jazz, a lover of jazz, a connoisseur of jazz, he knew a lot of musicians in Melbourne at the time and he introduced me to a lot of people and he loved my singing so I was very lucky, really, because I went straight into that job and it

28:30 was a fantastic job. Work was limited for singers and so unless I did television permanently, and it wasn't a medium that I enjoyed, I really think I'm an entertainer and so I love to sing to people and if I couldn't sing to people, if I was only singing to a camera, it wasn't quite the same. It doesn't give you the same energy, the same bounce and so I sought,

29:00 I sought people. I didn't want to work in television in that medium. So I started going to Sydney in school holidays when I was off from Tech and that was from the time I was perhaps 16, 17. Started going up to Sydney for work and did a lot of work in that time. When I was finished my tech, I decided that's it, there's nothing for me here I've got to go to Sydney. So I did. Went to Sydney.

29:30 **So Sydney really was the big scene at that time?**

- 29:30 Sydney was the only place where you could get work. Really if an artist wanted to work you went to Sydney, other than New York or Los Angeles or you know, somewhere in the south of America, Sydney was the only place.
- 29:46 **And your trips up there, were your contacts arranged through Geoff Brooks?**
- 29:53 Geoff Brooks didn't do anything to further my career in that respect. I did all of that myself.
- 30:00 **So how did you go about that?**
- 30:00 It was really hard. I used to go up on bus or a train myself and I was only a kid, and I stayed in places like Rembrandt Apartments which was like a boarding house type place in Kings Cross. There's now a big hotel there, it was right on the corner of William Street and Darlinghurst Road. Rembrandt Apartments, a lot of artists stayed there and you had a little room and a little, and a kettle or you know, a birko thing you could boil an egg in and little hot plate and
- 30:30 a tiny room, that was basically what it was. I think I paid something like eight pounds a week for it when I went up there and stayed. I worked in a chemist shop in Bay Street in Double Bay for a while and, you know, to get enough money to pay my rent until the work started coming in. But eventually it did, it was only a matter of a year or so that it was hard. And the work started flowing in. I didn't have a problem after that. I was really never out of work, I was very lucky.
- 31:00 **And you could make a living purely by the singing?**
- 31:03 Oh yes, definitely. One of my first jobs was at South Sydney Junior Leagues Club in Kingsford in Sydney and I worked with a band called the Australian Sextet, Jazz Sextet, they were good. I got a name change from that band because in every musicians joke there's always a 'Finkelstein' and that being
- 31:30 my name I was too scared to give my name to anybody, to any of the musicians, because I knew that they'd laugh at me. So I didn't. I'd been teased all the way through my childhood, school, so the musos [musicians] used to hassle me to tell me what my name was and I'd say, "No, no you'd laugh." And they'd all say, "No we promise we won't laugh, we really promise we won't laugh." And in the middle of a song I finally said, "If you promise not to laugh, it's Finkelstein." And the drummer
- 32:00 kicked his bass drum off the stage, which was about six foot high, all the musicians dropped their instruments on the floor and just rolled around on the stage in the middle of my song roaring with laughter at me. So I was extremely miffed and I went home and I got a telephone book and I looked through all the 'R's because anything rhymed with Robin would've been fine, and I found 'Russell' and I became Robin Russell from that moment and I went to work the next night and I said to them, "My name is Robin Russell
- 32:30 from now onwards and if anybody calls me anything else there'll be hell to pay." And I must have had enough determination because that name still sticks with a lot of people in Sydney, even today, and that's a long time ago, we're talking 40 years ago. As far as I know the musician that organised that Australian Jazz Sextet in South Sydney Junior Leagues Club is still working there. One of the few musicians whose had a job that's lasted forever,
- 33:00 his whole life.
- 33:01 **I think you mentioned, off camera, about your parents and their, and your Dad especially expecting you to be the good Jewish girl and study and get your degree as a doctor. So what happened when you moved to Sydney, how did your folks respond?**
- 33:17 My father cried. He cried even more when I went to Vietnam. It was very hard for them because, I guess it was something that
- 33:30 they didn't even, they didn't expect me to do, it was another world for them. They were very worried that I'd be influenced by, you know, the Bohemian element I guess. But I was Bohemian long before I went to Sydney, you know, I started when I went to Melbourne Tech, that was when the Beatnik era hit and I was one of the first to dress in black and become a Beatnik with my pointy toe boots.
- 34:00 And my hair down to my waist. I think they had already, they already had an inkling that I wasn't really going to go along with the scheme of things. It was very hard for them, but then they discovered that early in the piece when I used to wag Sunday school and go around the corner with my mates. I didn't do what was expected of me. It's just how, the nature of the beast I guess.
- 34:30 When I went to Vietnam that was even harder because they'd come from Europe and they'd come from war torn countries, they understood what war was about. I didn't know anything about war, I knew that in the Second World War when I was very, very small and my parents were trying to trace, write to relatives, I remember distinctly letters coming back from Russia and Poland and Lithuania, and all the places where we had
- 35:00 relatives, at the close of the Second World War. And the letters would come out and they'd all be, the lines of writing that my parents had written would all be blacked out and the address would be blacked

out and all that would be left on the envelope would be a name and so my parents didn't know what had happened to their families, and it was a very, it was a very traumatic time for them. We lost a lot of our family in the holocaust and the Second World War, a lot.

- 35:30 I think my mother lost most of her family and my father lost half of his family. They were people that they'd never see again. My grandfather, when he left home he never saw his family again, he was only 16. They sewed diamonds into the seams of his clothing so that he could escape through Europe. He finally made his way to England. And so they knew more than I did what I was getting into. I didn't know what I was getting into when I went to Vietnam. I really didn't know anything about the war. It was an eye opener for me.
- 36:00 **Did they ever speak of the family's experiences and what they may have gone through?**
- 36:06 No. They spoke very little of it because it was too painful. When I got on the plane to go to Vietnam, after my parents pleading with me for many months please don't go, my father said to me, "I'm not going to be with you for much longer, so don't stay away too long." So I got on the plane howling my eyes out because that was a really big guilt trip to put on a person.
- 36:30 I was 25 when I left. So yes, it was very hard for my parents.
- 36:40 **You mentioned how you were one of the first of the Beatniks. Can you tell us about that phenomenon? Where the hang outs were?**
- 36:50 I guess the hang outs then were the, as they're known now, coffee shops and pubs with the kids that I'd grown up with.
- 37:00 A lot of them Jewish, in that crowd of kids, still friendly with some of those kids today and what they've done with their lives, you know, just amazing what people do with their lives. We used to just hang out, you know, drink coffee talk about stuff. I really don't think the generations change I don't think that it makes a difference whether you're a Beatnik or a rap dancer
- 37:30 or a singer or what a person is, the generations are the same. You imagine that there are not going to be a generation gap between you and your children and yet when you have your children and they reach puberty there is. Because it's the kids job to rebel against their parents and the status quo of politics and whatever is going on in life. And so I don't think that it's any different to what it is today, I don't think so. My kids went through
- 38:00 that stage too and rebelled against everything I said and did. It really upset me at the time, but I understand now that that's what kids do, that's their job. If they didn't do it you'd look at them strangely and think there was something wrong and that they weren't normal. But you don't understand that as a kid, you just do it, you just go along with the flow. I think also, I grew up as a very damaged child because of what I'd been through and damaged children
- 38:30 numb certain areas of their life so that they don't have to deal with the pain and so I was numb in a lot of areas. And I think going to Vietnam for me was a bit of a wake-up call.
- 38:47 **So just want to hear a bit more about Sydney, if you can, pre-Vietnam.**
- 38:54 Sydney was a very exciting place for me. I loved Sydney and I still love
- 39:00 Sydney as a city. I love it probably more than any other city in Australia and I've experienced and worked in all of them, as well as overseas cities. Sydney for me is still probably the top city, one of the top cities in the world. In those days it was fantastic, the harbour was fantastic. I lived in the eastern suburbs, in Bondi, and I had the harbour on one side and the ocean on the other. I surfed because my mother dropping me into the water at the age she did
- 39:30 actually did me a big favour and I became a champion swimmer for my state. I was an under 16 backstroke champion and surfing was one of my loves. So I surfed in Sydney and I loved it there. I had a wonderful time, I was free. I think freedom is something I really embraced. I'd had a thumb pressed very firmly down on me in my upbringing and I'd, going to Sydney
- 40:00 for me was just fantastic. Loved the Cross, loved the flavour of it, loved seeing the people from Les Girls walking up and down the street, parading, you know, all the transvestites and I was in awe of all of that when I was young. I used to go and see those shows and be in awe of these men looking so sensational, the way women would love to look if they could. I was in awe of all that, I thought it was fantastic being able.
- 40:30 to rub shoulders with musicians that, to me, were I really looked up to those people. I think I was extremely fortunate.
- 40:38 **So did Melbourne seem pretty staid by then?**
- 40:41 Completely. I didn't want to come home. Hated the cold. Hated the cold all my life, still hate the cold. It was very hard for me to come back to Melbourne, especially as my father died while I was in Vietnam and he died in the house where, my Mum has only just moved out of that house. She was in that house

for nearly 70 years.

Tape 2

- 00:31 I had been travelling backwards and forwards to Sydney probably for about three years while I was doing my studies and then I'd lived in Sydney for another couple of years at least when I was approached to go to Vietnam. At the time when I was approached I was working in a place called the Bourbon and Beefsteak Bar, which is still in Darlinghurst Road, and quite famous and with a piano player by the name of Alan Harborn. I don't know
- 01:00 if he's still there but he went with the place and he was one of my first experiences probably, with an alcoholic, because he was a huge drinker and he could play basically any song in any key, he was just brilliant. It made no difference how much he'd been drinking or even, people used to fall asleep, drummers used to fall asleep at drum kits and piano players and things, because they drank, you know.
- 01:30 It was the first musicians that I worked with, were drinking schooners of brandy in those days, so that side of it was pretty much of an eye opener, but Sydney
- 01:43 **Was that just the culture?**
- 01:46 That was the culture, yes. Fortunately being asthmatic I wasn't able to drink because it just gave me a headache and gave me asthma so I didn't. I was never a drinker. I remember, in fact,
- 02:00 the piano player from South Sydney Junior Leagues Club having to go in to a detox [detoxification from an addiction], to detox after taking Drinamyl - purple hearts - and he'd say, "What do you want to play? What do you want to sing?" And I'd tell him and he'd start the introduction to the song and I'd start the song which I thought it was going to be, but something would flip in his head and he'd be playing another song in another key, and so I had to deal with all that stuff, and all these musicians that were drinking
- 02:30 heavily. It really was the culture there.
- 02:33 **What about harder stuff?**
- 02:34 Yes. While I was at South Juniors, Keith Barr, our trumpet player OD'd [overdosed] on smack [heroin] and jumped out a fourth storey window of a flat and killed himself. There were a few things like that and very talented people too. Very talented people. But musicians being, I guess, more sensitive than a lot
- 03:00 and a lot would come from really terrible upbringings as well, and, I think perhaps there was a generation of kids that were born after the war of people who had experienced the war and it changed their lives and so the way they brought up their children was different. Just as Vietnam veteran's children are probably finding it tough in their generation. So they, musicians were traditionally big
- 03:30 drinkers, big drug takers, heavier drugs rather than marijuana, it was speed and sleeping tablets, mandrax at the time, mandies, I don't know how all that worked because fortunately I didn't get in to it. I think I was very lucky in that respect. Being asthmatic I was given a lot of ephedrine as a child because they didn't have a lot for asthma in those days. I remember
- 04:00 aspaxadrine spray being the forerunner of Ventolin, which is a puffer now, it's simple. In those days there was a whole thing made out of glass tubes and a big brass thing that fitted over my face and I used to have to fight, I didn't have to, but I used to fight because if you can't breathe and someone is trying to force something over your face when you're a kid, and telling you this is gong to help you breathe, you don't believe them because you are having to be held down and
- 04:30 something forced over your face. All of that used to make my heart pump and the thought of taking speed or something else that made me speed even more would have been awful. I think I was naturally hyperactive anyway. I didn't do any of that.
- 04:48 **Did the asthma present any problems to your singing?**
- 04:52 Constantly. I often had to do a show and give myself an injection of Bronchiferon in the dressing room
- 05:00 before I did a show often. It was constant. But that was something that I'd dealt with all my life so I'd dealt with it, you do what you have to do you don't, especially when you grow up with something, and you don't know anything different, you just do it. It also posed a problem when I was swimming, but it also helped me to swim and it probably did save my life. It was just the method used to teach
- 05:30 me that I objected to.
- 05:35 **So how gruelling was that time in Sydney, how often were you gigging and so on?**

- 05:40 Most nights I worked. It was only difficult really when I had a day job, that was the only time it was difficult because I'd come home from work at 5 and 6 in the morning and have to be at work at 8.30 or something, that was when it was difficult.
- 06:00 I kept the job at the chemist shop in Bay Street for a couple of years and was taught all sorts of wonderful things by the old chemist, He taught me how to make moisturisers and face creams and all kinds of stuff. I still do that today and sell them, all my natural creams. I also worked in a TAB [Totalisator Agency Board] and managed TABs, was assistant manager of Kings Cross TAB for a while. Did all kinds of little jobs to help me through.
- 06:30 It was really only difficult if I had to get up early in the morning, then it was gruelling. I think I worked in David Jones for something like a week and finally told them where to go and walked out of there. Couldn't stand that. Did a few jobs.
- 06:50 **I'm curious to hear a bit more about the music, how you describe your style and kind of music that was popular then.**
- 07:00 I think the songs that really attracted me were the standards, the songs, the sort of songs that Ella Fitzgerald sang and Carmen McRae, those people, the blues that Billie Holiday sang. I really love those songs as forms of expression so they were the songs that I sang. I had a repertoire of thousands of songs. You did in those days because if you had somebody that came along and said, "It's our wedding anniversary will you please do this song that was popular when we were kids," it was probably before I was born, but because I grew up with my parents knowing all of those songs I knew most of them, knew the lyrics and I sang a lot of jazz. I sang a lot of jazz in Sydney. I didn't so much sing Latin in Sydney. Melbourne was where I sang Latin American music, but in Sydney I sang in English.
- 07:30
- 08:00 **And other than the paid gigs there were jam sessions.**
- 08:03 Constantly. Yes. I did a lot of different gigs too. We used to do, I used to work at the Chevron which was in the Cross. That was closed down after a while, there were jobs in Sydney in the city. I remember we did a job at the Ski Club from 9 o'clock at night until 3 o'clock in the morning and the Ski Club was at the top
- 08:30 of a really old building in Liverpool Street in Sydney in a very sleazy area and I remember getting in a cab and saying to the guy, who didn't know where the Ski Club was, it used to be the Old Musicians Club and the cab driver said to me, "Oh they have a club for old musicians, that's really nice." I remember everyone laughing when I told them when I got to work. Oh good we're going to have some sort of club we can go to when we're all old
- 09:00 and dodgery. Still in contact with a lot of those musicians. Met a lot of musicians, just some fabulous musicians I worked with, I was very lucky.
- 09:13 **Can you tell us about some of those people, the characters be they friends or even the show biz figures of the time?**
- 09:18 I worked with the Warren Ford Trio when I first came back from Vietnam, this is not pre-Vietnam but after Vietnam so we're jumping around a
- 09:30 little bit here. And his drummer was a man called John Pache and John Pache was one of the real characters of that era. At that time he had a girlfriend, the girlfriend wouldn't let him in the door, he could only break into her house through an upstairs bedroom window if he was dressed in some kind of suit that he had to rent on that day. And John Pache, he worked as
- 10:00 a percussionist for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and he also worked as a jazz drummer. He used to frequently fall asleep at the drums, frequently, and he would never ever lose a beat. So he was one of the characters, John Pache. And I worked with him in my own band too, later on in, before I left Sydney and moved up north, he was in my band, he was a fabulous drummer. Dave Levy still plays around and piano player, fabulous piano
- 10:30 player, good jazz piano player. There were a lot of people with incredible pasts and very colourful people, very colourful people. We had to deal with a lot in those days because in those days the poker machines were not separated from the musicians, so we had to deal with all the noise and if we asked anybody to quieten down the drunks would be yelling out, "No,
- 11:00 we'll be doing our thing, you can't stop us." And cigarette smoke as well, being asthmatic the air conditioning wasn't always what it could be, the sound wasn't always what it could be, managers turning up and down the sound, and changing your tone levels and if they didn't like a song, simply turn you off. We had to deal with all kinds of stuff like that. Musicians themselves, yeah, they were characters.
- 11:27 **If you're playing and sort of competing with the pokies and so on, do you actually have an audience of such in those leagues clubs?**

- 11:30 Yes you have an audience but you also have the hard core poker machine people, and they were the one-armed bandits in those days, not buttons. And even if I did a lady's day or morning session or something like that there'd still be the housewives there losing all their week's wages, which used to just blow me away. They'd be doing that day after day,
- 12:00 night after night, the same people, complete addiction.
- 12:04 **There was a film out recently I can't remember the name of it, with Bryan Brown, set in the 60s about the crooks of the day, poker and the leagues clubs. You didn't see that?**
- 12:20 No, I don't recall the crooks of the day being anything to do with the poker machines, but I do recall all the gossip around
- 12:30 Les Girls, and I can't even remember names now, but there were underground figures throughout and I guess I rubbed shoulders with all those people. But it was pretty safe to live there. I never had a problem. I wouldn't live there now. I've been to the Cross since and even walking around St Kilda since, it's not the place I grew up in, St Kilda, and the Cross is
- 13:00 not the place where I lived for years and years, and felt safe. I wouldn't do that now. The heavier drugs, a lot of musicians later on would go in to the band room and light up joints and things, but I think I was lucky that I didn't get into all of that. In Vietnam I did. I got into it more in Vietnam
- 13:30 because there was so much going on that was inimical to what I saw as life. Was a terrible thing. I learnt a lot about war, about how people act in situations of stress and war's not a good thing. It taught me that.
- 13:53 **Did you have time for a love life in Sydney?**
- 14:00 No, not at the time I didn't. When I was eight years old and I spent that entire year in hospital, I was abused for that entire year, sexually, in the hospital by a wards man. So I suppressed all of that and I just don't have anything to do with men. Nothing to do with them, kept them at arms distance, was probably
- 14:30 quite frightened, but didn't allow that to come into my conscious mind, to acknowledge that at that time. So no, I didn't have time for a love life at that stage and up until the time I was living in Sydney I was still swimming like 10 miles a day and doing my gymnastics, and teaching gymnastics and coaching swimming. I used to coach trampoline in South Pacific when it was a baths,
- 15:00 we used to go to the beach there in Melbourne. I had the crowd that I grew up with and people that I went out with but there wasn't anything serious, not at that stage not until I went to Vietnam.
- 15:17 **So you mentioned before how you'd been approached a number of times about Vietnam, at that time what did you know about what was going on over there?**
- 15:24 I knew that there was a war, but basically I knew nothing else. I didn't
- 15:30 know anything about the Vietnamese people. I'd hated geography at school and I'd got 4 out 100 for that and it was for neatness, or something ridiculous, because obviously I wasn't there a lot and I didn't take it in and I didn't want to know about it when I went to high school, and I didn't find it interesting at all. So I knew nothing. I knew nothing. I went completely innocent, completely oblivious,
- 16:00 stupid, didn't even do any research.
- 16:04 **What did you think you were getting into?**
- 16:06 I thought I was going there to entertain troops. I'd be carried into my performance and I'd be carried out, I'd be safe and I was stupid. I have to say that now, I was stupid, because I honestly didn't know. If I was asked to do such a thing now and I didn't know about the country I'd immediately go to the internet or somewhere
- 16:30 and find out what I was getting into, but I didn't have that experience then. I was a very inexperienced 25 year old even though I'd been singing for 10 years at least, up until that point. I just didn't know and didn't think that I needed to find out, I'd find out when I got there. Everything's very relaxed when you're that age, you're invincible, so you don't think about it.
- 17:00 I arrived in Tan Son Nhut Airport and, it was just before the Tet Offensive and so, the offensive was really the worst time there and we couldn't get out of Tan Son Nhut because it was too dangerous in Saigon, that's the main airport there, and I remember arriving and looking out the portholes of the plane and seeing planes on the tarmac that had been bombed.
- 17:30 And being in shock. "How do they bomb an airport?" was the question that I was asking, I didn't understand that. We were put into a bunker and we were told, I was told because I went alone, I was told that I had to spend the night in this bunker all by myself without anyone coming and telling me this is happening now and that's happening now, they were all doing their jobs, fighting, protecting the

airport, protecting the American planes and stuff.

- 18:00 And the rockets came in and I was blown out of bed. My bed consisted of a stretcher, you know, six inches off the ground with no mattress and I spent the whole night with the stretcher over my head, underneath it thinking for sure I was going to die. And cursing myself for coming to such a place and not being able to believe that the war was going to touch me. That was a big surprise.
- 18:30 **What an introduction.**
- 18:31 It was a terrible introduction, I thought I was crazy and I thought if it's all going to be like this I'll have to go home, I can't deal with this, this fighting going on. What a surprise! There's a war going on here, what am I doing here? Yeah it was a real shock.
- 18:51 **So you'd come on civilian aircraft had you?**
- 18:55 I came on a civilian aircraft to Singapore, I spent a night in Singapore.
- 19:00 This was my first time abroad and it was a bit shock to the system. Big shock to the system. The following day I was picked up by a Sea Bee,
- 19:30 a marine, who took me then in to Saigon to a villa, to where I was going to be staying. And I met the Italian stripper that I was going to be working with, Daniella, and a French woman who was running the show, a real tough lady she was. I also was introduced, over the course of the next few days, to my band
- 20:00 and that band was a five piece Korean band, none of the musicians spoke a word of English. There were two dancers with them and they also didn't speak a word of English. Fortunately I had all my musical charts and everything with me so I didn't have a problem with the band. When I heard them start up in the first rehearsal they sounded like an orchestra, like a full orchestra, they were just fantastic. At that point we put a show together in the space of 24 hours.
- 20:30 I was the only English speaking person in the show and so therefore I was the MD [music director] and I also did all songs, introduced the acts and whatever else was going on. We did our first show in Saigon. I looked around at the GIs [American infantry] that were at this particular show and they were all really blasé and I found out later
- 21:00 that all the bands do their first show in Saigon and so these people see a band every day basically, and it was nothing to them, it was something that they just did. The people that really needed for me to be there, which was the whole reason I was sold to go in the first place, as a morale booster for our own men, they were out on the front lines. And in order to take my show into the front lines, that
- 21:30 was quite something. Most people who took their shows, for instance Col Joye went in, he was flown in for two or three shows and flown straight out again. Little Pattie did the same. Whereas the shows that we were booked to do were from the Mekong Delta all the way up to the demilitarised zone, and I was going to be all over Vietnam if I chose, or I could have chosen to have stayed around Saigon,
- 22:00 but I chose not to do that. I chose to go into the front lines because that was why I was there and I just felt at that time I would be protected. So that was what I did.
- 22:11 **Is it possible for you to explain your organization, who were you working for?**
- 22:17 I was working for an agent and the agent basically was in Vietnam to make money. I guess agents of any description, doesn't matter whether they're real estate agents or theatrical agents
- 22:30 they're all there to make money, so that was really what they were there to do. They were there to sell shows and they sold shows three at a time. There'd be one for the enlisted men, one for the sergeants and another one for the officers. They'd sell three shows at a time and we might do a show, it was organised through the military.
- 23:00 We were taken everywhere in jeeps over unmade road often, or if it was too dangerous we'd be in a convoy, or if it was too far we'd have to hang around in different airports or airstrips in the middle of nowhere to be put on military flights, only if they had enough room for us and our instruments, which was a huge amount, lighting and all of that stuff for staging that the band took care of.
- 23:30 We'd be waiting around airports, sometimes for all day in huge heat, 100% humidity. I slept in cots the same way everyone else did in the army, and started off eating the food from the American kitchens and thought this is no good either, I hated it. I seriously hated it. I moved in with a Vietnamese family in Saigon and I used
- 24:00 their house as a base and I ate Vietnamese food from then on. I couldn't deal with the American food at all. Everything was dehydrated and I wrote home to my Mum and Dad and said, "Listen, don't worry, I'm not going to be killed out there. I'll only die if I eat this American food, so I'm quite safe, so you don't have to worry about me. I'm not going to eat it."
- 24:24 **You were moving around a lot. Who manages your movement, is it the agent or is there**

someone attached to the group?

- 24:30 The agent would tell us that we had to be at a certain airport at a certain time. There'd be usually jeeps to pick us up. The agent had all these military people that used to do her favours and I guess she used to give them free shows or whatever, and I don't really know how it worked but I do know it was all connected with the military. And
- 25:00 I flew in every kind of aircraft I think ever invented, a lot of the time held together with bobby pins and safety pins and fashioned pieces because old C1-30s and things that they couldn't get parts for anymore. It was quite something.
- 25:19 **What had you brought with you? You said you had your musical charts, what about wardrobe?**
- 25:25 I had a few clothes, mainly just dresses because it was so hot over there. Seriously, so hot I'd never experienced anything like that. There was no way that I could have done proper make-up or a hair in the way that it was in 60s you know, when I was there. I arrived in 1968, and the humidity was such that your hair was constantly wet and I did shows with my hair in pigtails or in a pony tail
- 25:30 because you just couldn't do it any other way. You were drenched through no matter what you did. We were picked up by military people who would deliver to airports, we'd have to wait, we'd have paperwork made out saying we were doing a show at this time in this place and then it was up to the military who were running the flights to get us on one. If there were no flights available we would be stuck there, sitting on our instruments because it's not like a waiting room
- 26:00 in an airport where there's a restaurant or something, there was nothing like that. Nothing. It was really bare, very basic.
- 26:43 **What were your first impressions of Saigon?**
- 26:45 Busy, crazed, I couldn't believe the traffic. All the drivers just drive wherever they wanted, at whatever speed in whichever direction, nobody obeyed any rules.
- 27:00 People would be driving along at one hundred miles an hour and all of a sudden they'd screech to a halt in the middle of the road and they'd jump out of their car and go and wee up against the side of it. I was shocked by this sort of behaviour. I'd never seen anything like that. You took your life in your hands driving around Saigon, it was crazy. The people we called the 'White Mice' [due to white gloves], they were everywhere, they were the Vietnamese police, and you didn't mess
- 27:30 with them. I learned that very quickly.
- 27:35 **How did you learn that lesson?**
- 27:37 Because they push you around. See I didn't speak the language and they didn't speak English most of the time. They speak French. My schoolgirl French came in very handy actually in Vietnam, it was the only time I'd ever used it and they spoke slowly so that I was able to understand them. And when I went to France thinking I could speak French because I'd spoken it in Vietnam it
- 28:00 was nothing like the French spoken in France! I couldn't understand a word that they said because they spoke so fast. The Vietnamese people, I really fell in love with, they're beautiful. They are a gentle, very hospitable, warm people and I really loved them. But my first impressions, it was very busy, very crowded, a lot of beggars, a lot of children, naked children playing in the terrible water that
- 28:30 you knew was infested with typhoid and cholera and sewage. The plight of the children really got to me. Got to me from the moment I arrived. The plight of the children I think was one of the biggest things because there were so many sick children and so many and so little that anyone could do to help them. So yes, the plight of the children was a big thing. There were
- 29:00 cabs driving around, little cabs that would squash millions of people in to them. There were little buses running on a little Vesper motor scooter engine that would be carting 50 or 60 people around. The dress, because the girls were always in long black pants with long white, the things that they wore were like their dress.
- 29:30 They are beautiful people and beautiful looking people too. And so I was struck by their beauty and I was struck by their gentleness and struck by their hospitality and sense of warmth. In spite of the fact that their country had been overrun by people for their whole lives. Basically different people had been running their country and telling them what to do. Basically no different from my grandfather when he left Europe, people had been running his country and he told me, he told my parents that my
- 30:00 father, he never knew whether he was Lithuania, Russian or Polish depending on who owned the country at that time. Vietnam was no different. The French had run it for a very long time and different other countries had come in and been at war with the Vietnamese. They're very simple, beautiful people.
- 30:22 **Can you tell us about the villa where you first stayed?**

30:28 The villa

30:30 was wonderful because in Australia we have a lot of English style homes built on concrete slabs, especially in Victoria where it is very cold, and to build on a concrete slab is just madness because it makes the house cold, and a cold house in the winter and it's just insanity. Because it's so hot there the houses, the villas are sort of French style, everything's open with big verandahs so when the rainy season happens and it's

31:00 torrential outside, there's a huge big verandah right around the house and you can sit outside and the rain is running down and it's just wonderful and cool. A lot of stone and a lot of stone floors, and every single villa that I stayed in, and I stayed in quite a few, were run by a mama-san, and the mamas and the girls came with the villa and they would wait on you hand and foot. The first shower that I had I pulled the

31:30 screen across to come out of the shower and there was a girl there waiting with a towel and she was ready to dry me, and for her that was normal. For me it was a very scary thing, I didn't know what she wanted with my body. It was quite a shock and she was hurt when I said to her, "No, I don't want you to dry me. I will be drying myself from now on. It's not something I wish for you to do."

32:00 I actually insulted her, because it was her honour to be able to do that for me and I wasn't able to receive it. Their customs are different. The mama-san found out that I loved to experience all of Vietnamese vegetables and fruit and new flavours. So every morning when I woke up she'd already been to the markets and she'd bought this wonderful array of

32:30 tropical fruits and things that I'd never seen before. Things you'd peel, like a banana and inside it is passionfruit, wonderful things, wonderful, wonderful food they'd have. I fell in love with it and so she did her best to accommodate me, as all the girls did, everything was washed for me, I didn't have to do anything. It was quite wonderful, that side of it was very wonderful.

32:54 **Who else would have been living there?**

32:56 I was there, the agent was

33:00 there, Daniella the Italian stripper, very passionate Italian girl, she was there and the mama-san and her girls were there. That was who lived in the house. The house perhaps had a dozen bedrooms. Big house.

33:17 **And the girls were there solely to provide for?**

33:21 They came with the house. They were the servants, that was their job and they were probably paid a pittance. And they were probably supporting a whole family with

33:30 that money. The Vietnamese girl that worked in one of my, in the first band, no second band, sorry, that I was with, the Filipino band, there was Vietnamese girl that was dancing and she was only about 16, and she was beautiful and she was supporting her entire family of maybe 50 people on the money she earned travelling around with us. She didn't keep a penny for herself, it all went home. Same as the Korean band that I worked with, same as the Filipino I worked with.

34:00 All the money was going home, that was the reason they were there.

34:07 **Do you remember that first show?**

34:10 Yes. The first show was a, first shows are always funny because that's when you make mistakes and so yeah, I made a few mistakes. It was hard to remember all of the Korean musicians names because they don't call each other by their first name, it's always by the surname, and it's always

34:30 Mr or Miss, so Miss Kim and Kim was not her first name, that was the family name or Mr Lim or Mr Cheong. It was amazing to be actually working with a band, a group of seven people and not one of them spoke a word of English. That was amazing. They were fabulous.

34:51 **So how long did you end up staying with that group?**

34:53 I was with that band for three months and then their visas ran out and they had

35:00 to go back to Korea to their families, so they probably renewed their visas and came back to Vietnam, I don't know. But I was introduced to a Filipino band and they were four young Filipino guys, none of them more than 16 and none of them could read music at all, but they were all natural musicians, and again, they were able to play any song in any key, they were just fantastic. So I spent another

35:30 two months with them and then my father passed away. And because, anything to do with family amongst the troops was a connection with home, because everyone was homesick. Because it was my birthday, when my birthday cards arrived I waited until I was with the group of army

36:00 personnel. Wherever I was working at that time, I would have to look at my notes then to work out where I was then because it was a bit of a blur, but I read out all my birthday cards which were, well a

lot of them filthy cards from my friends and everyone had a good laugh. And the last one I got was a telegram which I'd been saving til last, thinking it was from my parents, and it was actually from the Red Cross to tell me that my father had passed away. So that was the

36:30 last word that I got on my birthday, 25th birthday I think it was. So that was hard because I think the French girl was working independently but by the time I had the Filipino band. There was a Korean running the show then and he completely stopped all my cheques then, that had gone in to the bank because I went home for a month to

37:00 be with my mother. I went against the contract, there was no clause in the contract for such a thing, so I spent the first five months there without pay. It was enough for me to know that I didn't want to stay in Saigon and do the shows. I wanted to really get into what I was

37:30 there for which was to entertain the troops.

37:34 **So how did you instigate that?**

37:39 I was asked at some point and I said yes I want to go to the front lines, that's where I want to go. Again I don't think I had any idea of what that meant in terms of danger or anything like that. I don't think that I even thought that I would be in danger at any time. But of

38:00 course you learn. You learn the hard way. I experienced a show that I did on a big verandah, on the first floor of a very large building, and incoming rockets destroyed the half of the verandah where we were not, fortunately, because I wouldn't be here to tell the story. But we were all on one side of the verandah and the other side of the verandah disappeared and I burst both my ear drums from the rocket because it was so close.

38:30 Yeah I realised then, hey hang on a minute this isn't meant to happen. I'm not meant to be in danger here. But yes, I was many times.

38:40 **In that situation what happens? How do you defend yourself?**

38:44 You don't. You can't. It all happens so fast, you hear the whistling and it was the first experience I'd had of rockets and so the whistling didn't mean anything to me. I mean whistling, what's going on,

39:00 over the top of the instruments and then all of a sudden there is a crash landing of a rocket destroying buildings around you, and half the verandah that you're standing on is demolished, that's very scary. How do you defend yourself? You don't. You just sit there open mouthed and in shock, seriously, and the noise and it wasn't just one rocket they were continuing all around the place. So it becomes quite frantic

39:30 and people become hysterical and I think I was just in shock. You know it was like my first night at Tan Son Nhut thinking what am I doing here, I'm mad, I should be home. But it was part of it and it became part of it and strangely enough even in your sleep you begin to be able to count the distance between when you first hear the whistling sound and the rocket taking off

40:00 and you start to count and you know oh that's too far away for me to be worried and you keep sleeping. The human body is quite extraordinary in what it can deal with and what it can assess.

40:19 **In those situations was there someone from the military tasked to protect or was there a drill?**

40:22 No. There was never a drill, isn't that strange. There really should have been a drill, but then how do you anticipate

40:30 and how do you know what to anticipate, perhaps they couldn't anticipate these things. There was an entertainer killed while I was there, an Australian girl, but I didn't know her. It brought home to me I am in a war zone, this could happen to me. I could die. But I didn't really think I would. I just didn't think I would. It's part of the invincibility of youth perhaps. But I always felt that

41:00 I was going to be ok. So much so that when we went from one place to another sometimes we were told you won't be able to do a show tonight. We'll have to lock you in your bunkers because we're going to be hit tonight. And I'd say, "Nah, you won't be hit tonight, tomorrow when I leave." And sure enough that would happen. I honestly felt that there were angels sitting on my shoulders somewhere along the line and that I was safe. And I felt it for most of the time I was there. There were some sticky situations where

41:30 I didn't feel it for one instant, but most of the time I did feel safe.

41:36 **You talked earlier about the spirit friends and your clairvoyancy, where was that at this point?**

41:45 Just outside of Saigon there was a place in the Chinese section of Saigon called Long Binh and we had to go travel to Long Binh in a convoy because it was a very, very dangerous road and we did our shows -

Tape 3

- 00:31 We were at the very end of the convoy, at the end of the night after our last show and I think we had to wait around until 2am until the convoy finally went back to Saigon. We were in a Kombi van and it was the last car in the convoy. The convoy was perhaps a mile long. There were a lot of tanks and different military vehicles in the convoy.
- 01:00 We were travelling along and it's pitch black, there are no lights anywhere because you attract snipers if you have lights, and it's not a main road so we had no concept of where we were. We were just following the car in front of us. And suddenly we were hit by a sniper and we could see the trace of bullets. The tracer is like one every sixth bullet or fifth bullet or whatever, and we could see the tracers. And the Americans, for whom we'd done that show, were shooting back at the
- 01:30 direction from where the sniper had come. Couldn't see a thing of course, there was a lot of activity, a lot of commotion, a lot of screaming and yelling, getting military together in order to shoot back. The tracers were right across our Kombi van, from one, being shot from both directions. And so we were there in the middle and my band were in absolute terror,
- 02:00 Filipino band, they were all saying their rosaries, they seriously thought we're going to die. And the voice came into my head and said, because we had thought of getting out of the car, out of the Kombi van and getting underneath it, and the voice said to me very clearly, "If you get underneath the Kombi van you will all die." It was like, "But where do we go?" It's all happening you don't have time to think to do anything different, and I was
- 02:30 told very clearly by the voice in my head, "Get out of the van now. Now drag the band if you have to, drag them by the scruff of their neck if you have to. Get on your bellies. Do not put your heads up at all and go from the driver's side of the van just straight across from the driver's side, just out, and you'll find a dried up creek bed and you lie in the dried up creek bed until the shooting stops."
- 03:00 It was a very, very clear voice. It was completely unmistakable and it was the voice I'd had all my life that I'd been telling 'piss off' basically.
- 03:09 **Was that a female voice?**
- 03:10 A male voice. So I did that. I told the band, "We're going, we're getting out of here." They were saying, "No." And I literally had to drag them because they were in terror, in terror, and I'm talking about abject terror which is - there is no logic in terror like that. And so I had
- 03:30 to drag them and I had to keep their heads down, and I don't speak a word of Filipino, and they spoke very little English, and it was a huge thing to be doing at 3 o'clock in the morning, and it's pitch black and they don't know that I know that there is a creek bed there, and that we're going to be safe. So I'm driving them away from a van that they saw as their protection. It was absolutely terrifying for them. It was terrifying for me too. The shooting stopped after what seemed like an eternity and the whole
- 04:00 sky was lit up by coloured smoke, and the trace of bullets and the noise and the commotion was massive and it seemed to last for half an hour, but it probably lasted for five minutes, maybe 10 at the very most. At the end of it there was silence and we were still too frightened to put our heads up, we were in what turned out to be a dried creek bed. We actually tumbled down into it, screaming the whole way.
- 04:30 We waited for, again what seemed like an eternity, and finally two Americans came walking up the convoy from the front to the back to see that all the cars were alright and when they got to the end we heard them saying, "My God they got to be all dead." We didn't know at that point, but the entire Kombi van was just riddled with bullet holes and there were shells from the bullets under the Kombi van, we would have
- 05:00 all been dead had we'd stayed anywhere near it. And they finally came and found us with spotlights and when the spotlights hit us we thought we're going to die, we're going to be shot and we realised that it was the Americans, and they said it's safe to come out. We still didn't want to come out. I had to drag my band out. We got back to the Kombi van and our instruments were all safe, there were
- 05:30 holes in some of the cases, it was just extraordinary that our lives were saved by that. And I understood at that point, that all those voices that I'd been telling to piss off all my life up until that, a whole quarter of a century, up until that point, they were actually there to help me and protect me and they saved my life. So I'd didn't ever argue with them again. The band, you know, thought I was, I don't
- 06:00 even know what they thought really, they just thought I was an angel or something, that I'd saved them. They were hugging me and crying and it was really very, very emotional. It was a very frightening experience. That was only one of them. There were a few like that. We all got back in the van and off we went and finished our trip to Saigon, which took another couple of hours.
- 06:30 And all fell into bed and the next day we got up at six and went somewhere else. It was non-stop travel. We did three shows a day sometimes, mostly it was two shows a day but mostly we would do 16 shows a week. So there would be two days where we'd do three shows. And I did 30 songs in each show so if you're looking at three shows you're looking at 90 songs plus I'm introducing all the acts. I lost

- 07:00 my voice very quickly, no speaking voice after about six months. I don't know how I had a singing voice, but I did and evidently that's the way it works. Your speaking voice can go but for some reason you can still sing. I was singing songs like Respect and soul songs. I was screaming. It's a wonder I can still talk. I'm sure that my vocal chords are damaged, I haven't had them checked but I can't sing for very long now whereas I used to sing all
- 07:30 day, all night and it didn't bother me. So yeah, I think it was all affected.
- 07:37 **There are so many questions, but I want to go back to before you went to Vietnam, just briefly, to find out what you needed to do to prepare for the trip? To get a bit more detail about that. And also about you performing three times a day, you weren't performing like that in Sydney?**
- 07:54 No, not even close. I was doing, well I wasn't doing
- 08:00 shows for a start. I was a band vocalist in Sydney and so I was singing all night, but it wouldn't be every song. The band would do a number, I'd do something then the band would do something and I might do two in a row, but I never ever did 90 songs in a night, not ever in my whole history had I ever done that much work. It was very different. Whereas it was a show there, we were putting on a show and we were
- 08:30 putting on shows for people that hadn't seen a show for six months, they'd been in the jungle. They couldn't believe it when a round-eyed girl walked out on stage, they just couldn't believe it. When I worked for the Australians and said, "G'day mates," that just brought the house down, and sang Waltzing Matilda and everyone would sob. I don't know why Waltzing Matilda wasn't made our national anthem
- 09:00 because it's the song that everyone relates to, and was a very emotional song for the Australians while I was there. So yes, it was very difficult doing that much work especially because we were constantly exhausted. Travelling around a country in the way we travelled in jeeps and armed personnel carriers and aircraft, it
- 09:30 wasn't easy to do that and wait for long times, for long periods of time in the heat with nothing to eat or drink often, and if they offered you anything it was what the Americans had which was their dehydrated bread and their dehydrated mash potatoes and their dehydrated eggs, and I'm not kidding, it was all dehydrated stuff. So yeah, it was interesting.
- 09:56 **So before you left did you need to have vaccinations and a medical?**
- 09:59 Yes. Every vaccination
- 10:00 under the sun I had. I had, I think, three typhoid, two cholera, black plague, yellow fever, you name it and I got on board the plane and they said to me, "You haven't had enough, you haven't had your booster for this and you haven't had your booster for that." And they gave them to me before I actually got on the plane. So I was as sick as a dog on the plane. And I also had a small pox vaccination and I was working every night at that point, before I went
- 10:30 to Vietnam, and I was working in one particular restaurant for the dinner show and my small pox vaccination had started to swell up. And I remember doing a show for a group of poor innocent people who were trying to have their dinner and I was holding the microphone with my right hand and I turned around and noticed that my left arm, and there was green pus from the top
- 11:00 of my shoulder down to my elbow. I can't imagine what the poor people that were eating, what on earth they were thinking or what they were eating. I was pretty sick from those vaccinations and I was still sick when I arrived. When you have them all at once, I mean just to have a typhoid shot for instance it makes you sick, your arm swells to double its size, and it's incredibly painful and you can't move and you're aching from head to toe, and you've got a temperature and you really don't
- 11:30 feel well. That was only one. I had them in groups of several at once, it was quite vicious.
- 11:37 **Who was advising you?**
- 11:39 That was what I had to have. That was what people had when they travelled to those countries. It was all, it was huge. I had to have a smallpox booster to go to England and nowadays people would laugh, but that was what I had to have then. All of the military personnel had those shots and I also had
- 12:00 to start on the quinine when I got there as well, and that gave me headaches. I didn't deal too well with that and I still got malaria, but I got a strain that fortunately was not recurrent so I was lucky in that respect. But it was, I think I'd come from a very sheltered sort of life. Australians don't realise how sheltered we are and how lucky we
- 12:30 are, incredibly lucky we are. Until you go to a country like that which is really war torn, second world country as well, huge amount of poverty, a lot of beggars and the heat. They chew betel nut, that was a big thing with the Vietnamese, you'd look at them and all their teeth would be rotten and red and their gums would be crimson from the betel nut, but that was their only way out.

- 13:00 It was cheap.
- 13:04 **It's certainly a far cry from the clubs of Sydney isn't it?**
- 13:08 Yeah with their air conditioning and sound systems and things, yeah. It was a big shock but I didn't mind that part of it, that part of the experience for me. And the whole experience for me was huge, it was really life changing and because I got
- 13:30 to go back to certain places where I had been before, like Pleiku in the mountains for instance. There were a lot of airforce bases in Pleiku and it was a difficult thing to fly into, Pleiku, because as we came down in to the valley we'd be shot at, the plane would be shot at by Vietnamese, Viet Cong, in the mountains and so it wasn't an easy place to land. So we'd come in there, sort of holding our breath as we came in, being jolted around in an
- 14:00 aircraft and I'm terrified of flying these days, I have to tell you, because of my experiences there, lost my train of thought again.
- 14:17 **You were saying how confronting it was. Perhaps we can get a picture of what you were saying off camera, how far ranging you had to travel with these two groups?**
- 14:27 Often we would be up and ready to be picked up at
- 14:30 5 am or 6 am and that would be to do, sometimes a show at 7 o'clock that night, depending on where we were and how far we had to travel and how we had to travel. We may, for instance have to travel a couple of hours in a jeep or a series of jeeps in order to get to an airport somewhere which would be in the middle of nowhere, no shade anywhere and we are really talking 40 degree temperatures 100% humidity, a cold shower, which is what I had all the time, never had hot water the whole time
- 15:00 I was there. As you were drying yourself the palms of your hands and the backs of your hands, your fingers would be breaking out in beads of sweat just like the rest of your body. It was impossible to get dry. We'd be travelling around like that and do perhaps arrive somewhere, to do a 10 o'clock show in the morning and then we'd go, and maybe that would be down south somewhere near the Mekong Delta or one of those places. Then we'd
- 15:30 have to quickly pack up our instruments and all our lighting and everything and packed into a truck ready to go to the next airport, and we'd have to wait around in the heat, sitting on our instruments because there'd be nowhere else to sit. With whatever water we were lucky enough to bring with us if we could, often we didn't, we weren't able to, and we'd sit around and we'd wait for the next flight which would take us to the next show. We'd maybe get there at 3 o'clock in the afternoon,
- 16:00 set up, perhaps we'd been offered some lunch or something like that which, you know, was not always the most appetising in American places. I was offered meat pies and vegemite when I got to the Australian base. Then at night we'd do another show. Often we were in three different areas of Vietnam in a day. That was nothing to do that. Or from one end to the other in a day. Even though it's a small country it took a
- 16:30 long time to travel around like that. If we were in a jeep, it's not as though you're in a car that has springs and shock absorbers and things, you're literally bounced around on a hard seat in the heat, in those conditions, on unmade roads, it was exhausting. I was constantly exhausted the whole time I was there. Constantly. Then you give a show or you arrive to give a show, and because you're in the front
- 17:00 line areas we were often shut into bunkers or shut into an area where they deemed it was safe for us. But we weren't safe from the GIs. You'd be half way through getting your gear off, for your change to be on stage and you'd open up a wardrobe and there'd be a bloke in there with a spy glass checking you out while you were getting undressed. Or they'd come in, in the middle of the night and you'd wake up with
- 17:30 hands down your covers of your bed, because he's wanting to have a feel. That went on all the time. I carried a 45 around for most of the time because of it. And I had a real interest in guns that I developed from that point, it wasn't against the Vietnamese, it was against the American soldiers.
- 17:52 **Where did you get the gun from?**
- 17:53 One of the officers who was being a real smart arse at the time, sat
- 18:00 down at the table where I was sitting having a drink, waiting to go on, and took out his gun and put it on the table and said, "This is my .45." It was just to impress and I probably said something just as smart arse and he says, "I can break this .45 down in so many seconds, do you want to see?" And you didn't say no to an officer so he got out his time piece and timed how he broke it down and I watched and he
- 18:30 said to me, "I bet you can't do that." So I took it and because I'd just watched I did what he had done, and he was so flawed because he said to me in the original bet, "If you can do it, because you won't, I'll give you the gun." So he gave me the gun. So I carried a, I had a holster underneath my dress and I carried a 45 around with me for the rest of the trip. But I had to surrender it before I left.

18:58 **Did you ever shoot it?**

18:59 No. Probably

19:00 would have knocked me from here to across the other side of history had I done that. No, I never shot and I never carried the bullets in the magazine, but it was enough of a threat if they were persistent to get them away from me.

19:15 **Sounds like you had to harden up a bit, be a little less innocent?**

19:20 I had to harden up enormously. I had to harden up enormously in order to survive, but it wasn't all bad. I mean it was

19:30 rough and it was hot and it was sticky and it was dirty, and you never ever got the dirt off you. I remember sitting in a hotel in Singapore when I was on my way home, after my father died, and I filled the bath right up to the top with hot water because I hadn't had any hot water for five months and I sat in the bath. And I emptied the bath out three times because the bath water was so dirty each time. It was just all of this stuff coming out of my pores that had been there for months.

20:00 Just driving and travelling and amongst all that grime and heat. I had to toughen up and I had to toughen up very fast, but the plight of the people and the plight of the Americans, not the plight of the Australians whose morale was high. They didn't have many problems apart from the fact that they were in a war zone which of course creates the biggest problem of all, but the morale amongst the Americans was very, very low.

20:30 It was more of a problem amongst the Americans and the drugs were also rife amongst the Americans, whereas the Australians didn't have as much of a problem with drugs because their morale was not as low, and there were reasons for that of course.

20:46 **What do you think the reasons for the low morale was?**

20:49 Well the Americans went into training, it was compulsory to go to Vietnam, they were sent to their training places.

21:00 They were given very little training, they didn't have a lot of jungle training like our boys had. And then they didn't stay together as a group they were sent individually to different places all over Vietnam. So they didn't, the camaraderie that they'd built up with their peers that they'd done their training with, was shattered because then they were split up and put in to a new group and they didn't know those

21:30 people. And they had to get to know them and get to trust them and that doesn't happen instantly. The other thing is that amongst the Australians, if someone was wounded we always went in and brought our wounded and our dead out, in America that didn't happen. I mean amongst the American troops. Wounded were often left, that's why there were so many missing in action. The dead were often left, if they couldn't get to them, they didn't.

22:00 Whereas our boys would have risked their own lives and did, I know they did because I've spoken to them. The Americans didn't have that trust and they didn't know for certain that if something happened to them that they wouldn't be still there in 10 years time. That is demoralising for them, that was demoralising. So they smoked a lot of grass, they smoked a lot of cigarettes, they drank a lot of alcohol.

22:30 Our boys knew that when they walked through the jungle, walk through the jungle silently and not draw attention to the themselves. The Americans weren't taught that, so they used to walk and they used to talk to each other at the tops of their voices and they'd get hit. It was a big difference between the Americans and the Australians. I felt constantly, I did over 500 shows for the Americans, and I constantly felt I was boosting morale the whole time

23:00 I was there. The boys were desperate just to talk. They used to offer me sums of money just to talk, because it was their only contact with home.

23:11 **So confiding in you?**

23:12 Yes. Confiding in how terrified they were and how homesick they were and the 'Dear John' [letter informing that a relationship is over] letters that they would get. They often, they felt that they were being used by their own country, and of course they were. They were brainwashed. The only

23:30 food they got was what the army allowed them to have, the only movies they got to watch were war films. They didn't get to watch anything that would lift them out of the war and take them somewhere else. They didn't get to do anything that would take them somewhere else. Whereas the Australians did all their training together, they were sent as a unit, they knew each other, maybe six months of training together to trust each other and to know each

24:00 and form friendships that were like brothers. And they knew that if they got wounded that their friends would do everything possible to save their lives and to bring them out. They knew that. They didn't have those thoughts, those fears that the Americans had. So it was very different. Very different audiences to

work to, too.

24:22 **So tell me about the American audience?**

24:23 The American audience, I thought, were probably the easiest audience to work to in the entire world,

24:30 and I've worked all over the world. I find them to be very gullible people. I found that they believed everything they were told even though it was completely illogical at the time to me, who was a novice of the worst description. I knew nothing about war but what I learned from the Americans was considerable. For instance, I

25:00 learned about the drugs being sent back in bodies because the whole war ran on drugs, and precious stones and arms. That was what the war ran on. I learned from boys that were working in intelligence that the war could have been over years before, but the American economy needed the funds and so the war was kept going for a lot of years beyond what it should have kept going.

25:30 The times when we were hit in Vietnam was not by the Vietnamese it was by the Americans hitting their own troops, and when I was gassed it was the Americans that had done that, when rockets came in and we were close to be being hit, it was the Americans hitting the wrong places and the wrong targets. That didn't happen in amongst the Australians. So I learned a great deal. I learned that the Viet Cong collected their boys from villages

26:00 and they were armed only, sometimes, with forks or spoons, cutlery, they didn't have weapons. They didn't have boots a lot of them. A lot of them had had no education, no training. I was hearing this all the time. I was speaking to the boys about it all the time, they were confiding in me about these things. These things bothered them.

26:30 **I'm trying to get a picture of how these conversations would take place. You would do a concert - ?**

26:35 I'd do a concert, at the end of the concert there'd be a sea of boys to get autographs, to get photos taken with me, offering me money to talk to me, telling me things about their lives, where they'd come from. When I went to every new base I used to find out what the local gossip was for that week, in that base, which people were targeted and why.

27:00 So that I could introduce those kind of jokes in to my show and make it a bit more personal. Everyone would have a laugh. There was no segregation in the Australian shows, whereas in the American shows when I first started to do the shows, the African Americans would be down the back and the whites would all be down the front. I wouldn't do a show like that. I would come out on stage and say, "Something is really wrong here. I'm sorry. I can't

27:30 sing." They'd look at me and go, "Why?" And I'd say, "Because you're not all sitting together. I'm not doing a segregated show. I simply won't." They'd look at me as though I was mad. I'd say, "Ok, you guys from the back, I want you down here in the front." And so they'd look and they weren't sure whether to do it and they'd look at their officers and I'd say, "I don't care what the officer's say, I want you down the front." I would make them all mingle

28:00 in together and link arms and sing. I wouldn't tolerate it being segregated. That to me was an abomination. I'd never ever discovered anything like that. I'd never experienced anything like that. It was huge. The African Americans felt as though they were fodder, they were the troops that would get hit first and were always put into the position where they were murdered

28:30 first or killed first. They knew that. That wasn't something that people made up or people were telling me that was not a truth. That was something that was confided in me all the time. So I learned a lot about the war and yes, of course, I had to toughen up because you don't listen to all this and treat it lightly. There were times when I couldn't sleep because of it,

29:00 because of that sort of persecution that was going on. The will of these boys had been broken. I went to a hospital, every time I arrived at a base I went to the hospital and I sat with the guys, they'd take the emergencies in first, and I'd sit with the guys that were waiting to go into surgery because they had shrapnel in their legs or arms, it wasn't life threatening but they were still in pain. So they were given morphine and they'd open their eyes and suddenly this

29:30 blonde suntanned person with green eyes had been looking at them. They'd think that they'd died and they were in heaven and I was an angel, there couldn't possibly be any other explanation. I saw myself as an ambassador the whole time I was there. I saw the sort of job that I was doing and how I changed the morale and how if they hadn't had a show or hadn't

30:00 got out of the jungle for six to twelve months that I made it my job to take my show to those places. They would lie at my feet for that. They couldn't thank me enough. They didn't know what to do for me. The majority of them were incredibly grateful. There were always the ones who would hide under your bed or in your wardrobe and spring out at you when you least expected it, or try to force you to kiss them or whatever. I sort of got to take that

30:30 in my stride.

30:34 **So that growing compassion and knowledge about where you were and what was going on there and the connection with the people, how did that feed or influence your performance?**

30:46 I guess I don't know how to answer that. The people listening are the only ones who would be able to answer that. I was more concerned with the fact that

31:00 the show would go on. Sometimes it was really hard and we didn't even know - sometimes the instruments would arrive and we hadn't. Or half the band would be taken on one flight and they'd arrive but the instruments wouldn't be and we'd still be somewhere else. It was really hard to keep everybody together and actually get the show on time because if we didn't we wouldn't get the next connection. So that was huge. I didn't have a lot

31:30 to think about while I was actually performing but yes, the growing compassion did continue to the point where when I went to the hospitals I also spent time with the Vietnamese people as my Vietnamese became a bit better. I discovered their plight was even worse than the Americans. I tried to adopt children. I would have brought a dozen home had I been able to, but the

32:00 government wouldn't allow these children to go out of Vietnam. They were half castes, you know, half white, half Vietnamese and their lives would have been miserable. They would have been beggars from the moment they were born and mistreated, and kicked and abused because they were half castes. I would've done anything to have prevented that and bring children home. I had a lot of nightmares and I reproached myself for a long time after that, that I wasn't able to do that to help them. But you can't help everyone in life.

32:30 Reproached myself for a long time after that, that I wasn't able to do that to help them. But you can't help everyone in life.

32:38 **So you looked in to possible ways of adopting?**

32:40 Desperately. Desperately. Finally took, fostered three Filipino children when I came back after many years. I guess because of that, that I did that. Because the plight of the children was horrendous.

33:00 They had nothing. Their life expectancy was very, very low. Sometimes a family would have 12 and 14 children and maybe two would survive because a third world country, they didn't have the food available, they didn't have the medical supplies available, it was a war torn country.

33:30 **So how much contact were you having with the villagers?**

33:35 A lot.

33:37 **How did you manage to do that?**

33:39 Well because I lived with a Vietnamese family when I first arrived. I moved out of the villa because I didn't like it. It wasn't that I didn't like the villa or the mama-san or the food that she cooked for me or the care the girls gave me. I loved her and I loved all of that.

34:00 But the Italian stripper was making a lot of money on the side. A lot of money on the side. I didn't feel that I was there to be listening to all of that going through the next bedroom, coming through the walls at me. I didn't need that. There was a lot of that going on. I found a Vietnamese family that would, I could rent a room and I moved in with them.

34:30 I started learning a bit more of the language and they sort of took me in hand and took me to the shops and showed me how to deal with the money, and how to ask how much things were and they helped me. The more Vietnamese I got to know the more I travelled around by myself on public transport and in taxis rather than in military vehicles all the time. So if I had some time by myself I

35:00 wandered which is what I do and done for the rest of my life. I like getting in there with people because you don't learn about a country until you do that. The more language I had the more I was able to communicate and whenever I went to the hospitals, base hospitals, just to see the men there would be lines and lines perhaps hundreds of women with babies and toddlers that were sick, and napalm

35:30 burns and infected eyes and respiratory system, with flies glued to their faces. Babies when they're sick cry, but these babies didn't cry and that used to haunt me and their eyes would be like saucers, huge, and they'd look at you and look right into the depths of your being, these babies, arms that were so sick and so thin, so impoverished and so malnourished and I couldn't

36:00 bear it. They were sick and there was nothing anyone could do for them really. When I was in hospital, in Fairfield Hospital in Saigon they brought a woman in because I was in a room by myself because all the rest of the ward was men, so they put me in a room by myself and asked me if I would mind if a Vietnamese woman was brought into this room. This woman had had 17 children. Only a couple had survived and they'd just given her a hysterectomy

- 36:30 because she was something like 49 years old and she was pregnant again with number 16. It's tragic. I don't believe that I'll ever come to terms with that part of it. Yes I tried desperately through the government and the orphanages, anyway I could, anyone I could talk to. I would have brought home a dozen children had I been able to. How I would have looked after them, I didn't anticipate,
- 37:00 I just wanted to get them out. I couldn't bear their plight. I couldn't stand it. It haunted me for years and years and years and maybe it still does.
- 37:10 **So you were seeing evidence of injuries, war injuries, of the Vietnamese people?**
- 37:19 If a Vietnamese child had had a leg blown off by a mine it would be bound
- 37:30 up with a filthy bit of cloth and tied with string and the child would be walking around on home made crutches. with one leg. There was no care. There was no prosthetic limb fitted. There was no, if they survived they were damn lucky. The survival rate of children was something like 15%. At birth it was lower,
- 38:00 because of the unsanitary conditions and the bad water. Their country had been destroyed. Their rice paddies had been destroyed by the war. Their villas had been taken over by the Americans. It was a terrible plight in which they found themselves and the Americans, at the end of the war, promised them large sums of money to rebuild their country, it was never ever given to
- 38:30 them. The Americans just destroyed their country and walked away and it isn't destroyed for just a generation or a few years, it's destroyed forever. The dioxins and the things that went in to the soil all over Vietnam will never ever break down. A friend of mine who I grew up with, became an obstetrician, went to Vietnam to lecture, came home sobbing and told me, and that was 20 years after the
- 39:00 war. He said the hundreds of thousands of babies that were being brought by mothers, with cleft palettes and club feet and terrible things that they knew the dioxin would do, in 1924, when they were doing the research in to the dioxin in America, they knew that these were the deformities it would cause. Those things will never be out of the ground and this doctor said to me, "These were only the people that were able to get to me.
- 39:30 There were probably another 75% that were not able to get to me." He was not able to justify it at all. He couldn't deal with it either. He was a grown man used to that sort of thing by then. He was in his forties, he'd travelled and seen poverty struck countries, but he'd never seen anything like that. I'd never seen anything like that, that's why my life was never the same after that.
- 40:00 You don't recover from that sort of abuse, because that's what I saw it as. To their own men as well as to the Vietnamese.

Tape 4

- 00:33 Trying to get the government to acknowledge that I was there has been an impossibility. I've worked with the Vietnam veterans in Sydney very, very closely and I help to organise the Vietnam veterans reunion with a big march, I helped organise that. I computerised all of the civilian data of all the civilians that had been in Vietnam,
- 01:00 and why they were there and when they were there, and everything like that, because there was no such database for that, so I did all that as well. Worked closely with the Vietnam veterans. Forgot the question again, there's so much spinning around in my mind at the moment.
- 01:20 **You were talking about reviving the memories.**
- 01:21 Yes the Vietnam veterans, several groups have tried to get some acknowledgement for me through the
- 01:30 different governments and they've made a submission to every single government that's been in power since I came back and they're just ignored. People like Little Pattie and Col Joye were, a big thing was made of giving them a service medal for doing three shows, and I did hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of shows and nobody will even acknowledge that I've been there. In fact recently, I mentioned to you before we started the tape that my son has been missing now for 19 months, and I wrote to John Howard
- 02:00 and said to him, "This is what has happened in my life. This is what I did. I did this for an entire year of my life. I did it on a voluntary basis. For the first five months I didn't get paid a penny. I paid for my own trip and everything." For the first five months I didn't receive a penny, because I went home when my father died and I broke my contract. I went back to Vietnam after a month with my mother, and took another band back and continued my work for that year because I'd
- 02:30 committed myself for that year. I wrote and I said that I didn't want anything for myself, I wanted it for my daughter so that she could have it. I received a letter back from an aid and advisor to the Prime

Minister that said, "I'm sending you some forms to fill out for the Order of Australia, but it's probably best that you don't fill them out." Being in Vietnam had nothing to do with an Order of Australia medal.

03:00 It was such wrong advice and such a slap in the face that I just threw it in the rubbish bin.

03:10 **So what did you, what was your actual request?**

03:14 For an acknowledgement. For the government to acknowledge that I spent a year in Vietnam doing a damn good job and I did it, I wasn't forced to go there, I wasn't in a ballot, I wasn't in the military, I did that of my own volition. I did that. I made the decision to go,

03:30 I made the commitment and I did my utmost and I saw myself all the way through as an ambassador. I know what good I did there, going to the hospitals and going in amongst the people, doing whatever I could do for the orphanages. Any shows that could raise money for the, you know, the kids in the orphanages to get some penicillin, or something, we did. I did that. Constantly we did that to help in any way we could because

04:00 that was why we were there. To constantly just get it thrown back in my face and for the government to say we don't even have proof that you were there. What? I've got my passport stamped with all the Vietnamese visas that I had to have and all the vaccinations and all the photographs. How can they say I wasn't there? They may never acknowledge me.

04:30 **Has this happened to other entertainers?**

04:34 I don't know. I know that it's happened to most of the civilians, the missionaries that were there, the people that were there of their own volition, working in orphanages. They weren't with anything, necessarily with any group, they just paid their own way to see what they could do to help. They're the people that I'd put on the database, the people that the Vietnam veterans

05:00 wanted to have a record of because it didn't occur to them that the government wouldn't acknowledge these people. These people all did a job and they all did an extraordinary job. Some people were there for years. My health was destroyed by Vietnam. I know that other people's health was destroyed because I went to give some of those submissions that we offered, and the submissions weren't just a page, it was all the people

05:30 that these people had been in contact with. The orphanages, the military that they'd been in contact with, the help that they'd received from the military. The sort of jobs that they did were extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary, they went with nothing and they built things from the ground up. When you watch the M*A*S*H [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, set during the Korean War] series on TV it's all the same. It's no different. There were still black market going on and all kinds of things. The

06:00 weapons that were being captured by the Americans were French, East German, West German, Chinese, Japanese, they were from all over the world. Everyone was in on it. Everyone was making arms, everyone was making money out of arms. Everyone, every country was making money out of precious gems that were being transported. Every country was making money out of drugs being transported back in bodies.

06:27 **What do you mean by that? Back in bodies?**

06:29 They would cut open the

06:30 stomach of a dead man and they would fill it with heroin, then they'd sew it back up again, put it in a body bag and the body bag would be flown back to Australia or to America. At the other end it would only be the army personnel or the government officials who collected those bodies. They would be then taken to the local morgue, their belly split open the drugs taken out and on the streets, probably, by the next day. At huge prices.

07:00 That was a common thing. It is horrific but it was a common thing. When I was first diagnosed with malaria I collapsed on stage, a short time before I was sent home, because I couldn't continue after that, I was just too sick. I was broken down basically. I had been, and I didn't find this out until 16 years later, until I gave evidence for

07:30 the Agent Orange Commission, but I discovered that everywhere I was had been sprayed with dioxins. Dioxins were the Agent Orange. There was Agent Blue, Agent Purple, Agent White, Agent Green, there were all kinds of substances and heavy metals and all kinds of things that they were defoliating with. The Americans were told this is perfectly safe you can have water fights with this and drink it, you can do anything you like with it. There is no harm in it whatsoever.

08:00 Use it to get rid of the weeds around your tents. So that's what they did. They had water fights with it, they drank it, they ran it through their hair when they were hot, they washed their faces in it. I was in every single place where they'd sprayed. And because they'd also sprayed the rice paddies, I was living with a Vietnamese family, I ate fish and rice that was grown in that water. I swam in that water. I drank in that water. My health was destroyed just like

08:30 everyone else's that came back. I spent the next two years almost unable to do anything when I came

home. When I was first diagnosed with malaria I was right up in the north near the demilitarised zone. I was flown back, after I was hospitalised and stabilised up there in an inflatable hospital, I was flown back to Saigon, to the Fairfield Hospital there. And I was flown back in a plane which had body

09:00 bags in bunks, stacked. So I was the one living person in this plane full of dead people, all in body bags. Probably a lot of them had drugs sewn in to their bellies, to their cavities. It happened, it was a reality of the war, it was part of it.

09:23 **Was this information that you were told by - ?**

09:26 Constantly. Pleiku was the airforce base where

09:30 I went many, many times and gave a show. And we used to love working for the air force because we got treated like, well, people. We were given a mattress on top of the cot to sleep on. We slept in real tents and not in bunkers and under the ground and, you know, not in barracks, in bunks and things. We were given real food to eat, fresh food often, which was not

10:00 heard of while I was there. The personnel, the guys that I became friendly with there who slept all around me in their tents, they worked for the Intelligence and they told me these stories, on a nightly basis, they used to tell me these stories. One of them, a man by the name of Lieutenant Dan Stramiello, he returned to

10:30 Colorado, Denver where he was born, and he'd worked for Intelligence the whole time he was in Vietnam and he was so demoralised and so ill from what he had done, which was against his own nature and his own integrity, that he wanted to kill himself. He actually tried unsuccessfully to commit suicide. In his recovery he decided the only way he was going to be able to

11:00 live with himself for doing what he had done in Intelligence, the whole time he was in Vietnam, was to do something for an underprivileged group. And so with his university and business and law degrees that he had, he began to work for the American Indians. He was the one responsible for getting them their water rights and their land rights and a lot of the things that they now have, are due to him and the work he did. He says now that if he hadn't been able to do

11:30 that work to balance what he felt, in Vietnam, had gone so against his integrity, he wouldn't have survived. There were many like that.

11:45 **Do you know the nature of his work? Did he talk very much about that?**

11:51 In Vietnam? Yes I know that men were captured and taken up in planes

12:00 and then they were interrogated, and they were abused while they were interrogated and frequently thrown out of those planes. They were killed eventually. Women as well as men. If anyone was suspected of being Viet Cong they were interrogated and they were interrogated very, very fiercely. There was just as much torture going on amongst, from the Americans

12:30 towards the Vietnamese. What is publicised is what the Vietnamese did to the Americans, but the Americans did just as much to the Vietnamese. Maybe more. I only hear little bits. It doesn't allow you to have a lot of respect for the government of a country that allows such things. Or any country that joins forces and takes

13:00 people to war. I was very against the war in the East, the recent one the Australians joined into. I was totally against that. Australia was ripped off. We were lied to, everyone knows that now. It's a terrible thing to say because I loved the American people. I found them to be really, a very innocent people, very

13:30 ready to believe whatever they were told, to do a good job and to make the most of what they were there for, they were good people. The Americans were good people, but those in power, it doesn't make any difference from what country they come, it's governments that make war, not people. I learned that very quickly in Vietnam. I also learned from this man Dan because we

14:00 remained friends after the war 'til now. I've visited him. I took my children and stayed there in Colorado and we spent time together as I have done with a number of men I made friends with. He was the one who told me that some of these were just children, 13 or 14 years old, that became what they called the Viet Cong. They didn't know what they were fighting for, they didn't know who they were fighting, they didn't know where they were fighting, they didn't have arms.

14:30 They were the ones that were given cutlery or take what you've got and if all you've got is cutlery that's what you take. Your knife and your fork. They used to take planes over these areas and drop pamphlets saying come and volunteer, come and give yourselves up and we'll give you food and we'll help you and we'll take you to America, and it was just crap.

15:00 They only wanted to interrogate them. They didn't want to do anything else. They wanted to eradicate them and in any way they could, and interrogate them and get whatever information. Because for the Americans to go into a war and not understand the mentality or the way another country thinks that was a really terrible thing for them. Because in war, all the way through history,

- 15:30 the people that go to war, they anticipate that if 'I do this to you, you're going to do this back to me'. But that didn't happen with the Vietnamese, there was nothing that the Americans could anticipate that would create a reaction that they expected. They never, ever expected the reaction that they got. So it made it very difficult for them to have a war because they
- 16:00 weren't on top of it the whole time. Then no matter what they did their men would still fall into pits, pits of bamboo stakes, and they would still have their genitals cut off and shoved in to their mouths, and then they'd be hung from the next tree for the next regiment to come through and find. They didn't know where these people came from. When the Cu Chi tunnels were discovered, that ran for kilometres under the ground, they were amazed. That's a feature of Vietnam now when you go to Vietnam as a tourist
- 16:30 you go and see the Cu Chi tunnels and you think people lived under here for years at a time. Never saw the light, it's just phenomenal. They couldn't wage war against a country like that. They could never have won. How much did it cost? You know 56,000 men were killed in action amongst the American troops between the time the war started and when it finished around 1975.
- 17:00 By 1985, ten years later, in America remember that figure, 56,000 were killed in action, 186,000 had committed suicide in that 10 years following. What does that tell you? That tells you that those people never ever found that inner peace ever again. A lot of Australians are still in that same
- 17:30 [UNCLEAR]. It took me 16 years to talk about it. Now I can talk about it, I feel, because I've written, I wrote it down. When I gave that evidence for the Agent Orange Commission I had to work out again where the hell was I on those days, and when I looked at my schedule I was in all of those places. I understood it better, I think, 16 years later.
- 18:00 I had nothing to relate it to. When you find something out that's horrible, you try to relate it, you try to put it in to perspective in your own mind so that not only can you understand it, first of all you have to accept it. Most of the stuff that I learned in Vietnam and I experienced in Vietnam I couldn't put it anywhere. I had nothing to relate it to.
- 18:30 I was a child basically of the holocaust because I was born after that time, during that time. A lot of my relatives, I'll never know what happened to them, they're people I don't know, they were faces. I didn't know first hand as a little child what had happened, because my parents didn't tell me. I didn't know until years later until I was at school and read The Diary of Anne Frank in my teenage years at school, and couldn't
- 19:00 finish it. I couldn't, my heart just fell apart. Vietnam did the same to me. There's nowhere you can put certain things in your life to be able to accept them and relate to them and finally understand them. Now 36 years later, or whatever it is, I think to myself it wasn't the fault of the boys that were
- 19:30 there, they didn't know why they were there any more than anyone else did there. They weren't fighting a war. There's a few hardened lifers in the army that don't care where the war is and who they're fighting they just want to kill and maim. There's always that element in the armed forces, but that's not the majority. The majority are just ordinary people like you and me. So you can't put it anywhere. I understood
- 20:00 what the Vietnamese veterans went through, that's why I reached out to them when I came home. That's why they reached out to me, because we'd experience the same thing and none of us could put it together. We experienced the same thing health wise too and we were constantly told 'it's in your head', 'you're neurotic'. I was told those things too. I was also a child with problems of the war,
- 20:30 I can't put them down to anything else. Speech difficulties, very high IQ [intelligence quotient] but attention deficit disorder, hyperactive, big problems caused. My health was destroyed, to this day. My liver was destroyed. I was given when I was, in 1981, I was given only 6 weeks to live because of my liver.
- 21:00 That was from the dioxins.
- 21:17 **Would you take us through what would happen at a performance, what the line up was?**
- 21:22 First of all we would arrive some time before the performance and we'd be taken in and shown where the performance was going
- 21:30 to be. Now if we were lucky it was in a room, or a tent, if we weren't so lucky it was on the back of a truck, a semi or boards that had been placed across piles and piles of empty howitzer cannon shells. I did lots of shows like that, or in a bunker which would be all sand bagged, does terrible things to your sound system,
- 22:00 all those sand bags just absorb it, so that's a bit hard. There was never air conditioning and so the heat was the heat, that's what you worked with. So we would go in ahead of time and we would set up all our instruments and then we'd, if we were lucky, we'd have a sit down and have a drink. Then the men would start coming in and we'd change, and my makeup consisted of a pair of false eyelashes and lipstick,

- 22:30 because makeup would just, you'd sweat so much that you'd be lucky if you even had your false eyelashes on at the end of the show. That was what my makeup consisted of. I really didn't have to coif my hair or anything because it was plastered down, and usually very grimy and sweaty and salty. And I'd have to get dressed like that, undress and dress in those kind of conditions. Often in make-shift type of dressing rooms
- 23:00 that were draped sheets, no lighting, no toilets between here and 50 metres away. That 50 metres often would be because of the torrential rain and six inches of mud. You couldn't get dressed and if you wanted to go the toilet once you were dressed to go on stage, you'd have to get undressed and put something else on, because there was no way in the world you'd come back able to go on stage, you'd be covered in, splattered
- 23:30 in muck and mud. So that was before the performance started. If the dressing room was make-shift and there was nobody on guard, which they usually had to put one of the army personnel on guard for us so there wouldn't be men with binoculars and glasses at the walls and stealing our knickers. I think I came home with only the knickers I was wearing because every single pair of knickers
- 24:00 I had there were pinched. They'd take souvenirs as often as they possibly could. While you were on stage, they'd be going through your stuff to pick out whatever. Then all the guys would come in and there were thousands
- 24:30 of them often, thousands and thousands. If we did an open air show often they were hanging from trees and on trucks way up the back or on ladders, whatever they could do to see the show they would do that. And they'd come from all over the place. A lot of them would come in from the jungle, they were really looking like they'd just come from the jungle. Completely greased up and dirty and hadn't had a shower for months, some of them,
- 25:00 and hadn't seen a round-eyed girl for the whole time that they'd been in Vietnam. That was huge for them to come to a show, it was huge.
- 25:12 **How would they welcome you?**
- 25:13 They often didn't know that there was going to be what they called a 'round-eyed' girl in the show because the band would come out first. And my band, the first two bands that I had were Korean and Filipino, the third band that
- 25:30 I took back with me after my father passed away and I came back to Australia, that band was Australian. That was the only Australian band that I worked with there, called The Surf Riders. The Filipino band's name was The Jargons, and I think the Korean band, you'll love this, were called The Seven Wonders. I made Wonder Number Eight, no doubt. One of the wonders of the world, perhaps?
- 26:00 The band would come on first and do a warm up number, something to get everyone moving or clapping or whatever. With the Korean band they were a really terrific band and it sounded like an orchestra, I mentioned at the beginning, so whatever they played they had trumpets and saxophone and stuff and a rhythm section so it was a big number. Seven piece, no five piece band and two girls.
- 26:30 So that was the seven, okay, I was number eight. So the five piece band would be piano, bass, drums, trumpet, saxophone okay so you had the front, what they call the front line section, makes for a big band. So in the small places, if it was indoors that's a lot of noise and that'd get everyone, you know, if they weren't dancing at least clapping and knowing they were going to be entertained for the next however long.
- 27:00 That number would finish and maybe a dancer would come on and perform or something else, and then perhaps the third song along I'd walk on stage. So that was always a big shock because a round-eyed girl they didn't expect and hadn't seen for a long time, a lot of months. And so immediately they'd all stand up and scream and yell and clap before I even said a word.
- 27:30 If it was an Australian group and I said a word at that point I'd say, "G'day, cobber." Or you know, some Aussie expression that brought the house down, because an Australian coming in to entertain Australians was huge. That was really huge. They honestly didn't know what to do for me at that point. They would've given me anything they had, seriously. We think Americans, once we got past the segregation part and they realised
- 28:00 that if they wanted my show they couldn't do that. That was cool. They got used to that and the word went around very quickly that I wouldn't do a show for them if they were segregated.
- 28:12 **So you'd turn up and they'd already dealt with the segregation?**
- 28:15 Yes. That took a couple of months, but I managed to do that. I simply would not have gone on and I meant it. I was completely serious. If they wanted a show, they couldn't be segregated. I don't care who they are, I didn't care
- 28:30 if they were officers, who they are. Didn't matter to me, they were just men to me. And the few women that were there too. So then I would welcome them to the area, whatever the base was, and say, "I'm really happy to be here with the 137th Airborne." Or whatever the group was. I would try to memorise

whatever the local jokes were and the names of the people so that I could actually say,

- 29:00 "And I heard that so and so was playing up last night. I bet you've all got a few hangovers." And you know, whatever the patter was I'd talk to them for a few minutes. And then I would sing and most of the songs I sang were Aretha Franklin stuff, it was all stuff that was popular at that time.
- 29:21 **What songs did you like to open with?**
- 29:23 Respect. That was the big opener usually.
- 29:30 There were also, there were a lot of Americans that hadn't come from cities who really loved the 'cry in your beer' type country and western and I had a bit of trouble singing, "It's crying time again, I'm going to leave you." But that was what they related to and so I had to if I got requests for those songs, I had to do those songs too because that was what I was there for. So I tried to accommodate them and tried to
- 30:00 make the show as light and as funny, not funny because I was a comedian or because there was a comedian, we didn't have a comedian, just whatever they were laughing at at the time, or whatever awful situation was occurring I would try to make light of and talk about, talk to each of them personally in the audience, you know, "Who wants to tell me where they're from?" and
- 30:30 "How often do you write to your Mum and Dad?" "Do your sisters and brothers send you stuff?" "What did they send you?" Someone would pull out a pair of socks miles too big and we'd all have a laugh. If it was somebody's birthday, that was always a big occasion. Anything to do with home was welcomed. They were kids. They were so desperately homesick and so frightened all of the time.
- 31:00 So I would try to include as much of all of that in the show and, as I said, I did 10 songs in every show, so it was a pretty well loaded show. I think everyone got to hear whatever music they enjoyed, and the band would do songs and then the dancers would come out. When I was working with the Filipino band the Italian stripper was working with us and she was
- 31:30 definitely a, I'm not even sure what adjective to use, she was a very voluptuous, very hot-headed, passionate, Italian girl who was basically there to make as much money as she could. I'm sure she did it real well.
- 31:49 **What a different flavour?**
- 31:53 And she used to really drive the men crazy because she used to tease them like crazy, and it wasn't a really good idea
- 32:00 to be teasing them at that stage of their lives, when they were desperate. You don't go teasing someone that's desperate and then walk away from them because then they get a bit riotous. She was an element that was not so easy to deal with. I had a lot of trouble dealing with her. I can't imagine what the men, they must have had more trouble. I actually got the idea that she hated men by the end of it, and maybe she did but that was
- 32:30 part of the show, you know, she did that. The Korean girls that danced, they were terrific. They were always covered and modest, whereas the Italian girl just let it all hang out for everybody, and of course they loved it. My dresses weren't quite as revealing but you get into the spirit of it I guess.
- 32:57 **Can you describe your wardrobe?**
- 32:58 The sort of clothes that I had. Well
- 33:00 maybe I'll get you to take shots of some of my photos, but I guess anything that was a bit see-through, anything where I could shove my boobs up and shake those was good. Anything form fitting or short - mini dresses were the thing there and boots, because you used to sing These Boots Were Made For Walking. That was popular, and that was something new and could sing along with and songs
- 33:30 that would get the men involved were really important because singing and dancing, I encouraged that at the show. Because how else are they going to let off steam? Singing is one of the best ways to let off steam. So I'd encourage that. I tried to include as many songs as I could that everyone knew. Everyone had radios and so everyone knew what the songs were being played for the moment,
- 34:00 there were some songs that were really popular.
- 34:03 **So different repertoire for the Australian audience?**
- 34:06 No, same repertoire. Same repertoire. I had rehearsed maybe 40 songs with each band and sometime we would put in a different song just to stop us from getting bored. But mainly it was the same songs and we'd always get the same requests for the same songs because they were the songs of the era that everyone related to. Anything about
- 34:30 peace, about going home. Anything about home, it didn't matter as long as the word 'home' was in it, they were happy and we would talk about when everyone would go home, and what they would do when

they got home and what the first thing your looking forward to eating, and what's the first thing your looking forward to doing, and hot showers and, you know, lobster, the things they didn't get. The luxuries, they

35:00 were the things they look forward to mostly. Human contact was probably the greatest thing that they looked forward to.

35:07 **So you would have these conversations from the stage?**

35:11 Constantly. Oh yes, from the stage absolutely, and I would bring people up on to the stage and tell me about themselves. Otherwise how do you touch people, you know, you could go into a place that you've never been before and you can sing them

35:30 a few songs and then you can leave and what have you done? How have you made a mark on that person? What do they have to remember you by? How did you cheer that person up? How did you take them from where they are, which is where they hate to be. They don't want to be there, none of them wanted to be there. How do you take them from that and take them somewhere else for a short time? You can't do that unless you get close and personal. So that was the way I did

36:00 personal. I didn't see any other bands. And I didn't see anyone else perform because when I was travelling in one place another band was travelling somewhere else, so I couldn't even tell you how many bands were there. I have no idea. Still to this day I have no idea how many bands were travelling around. Probably lots. I don't know how many took their bands into the front line areas though, I don't know that.

36:30 **So your Korean band, you spent three months -**

36:36 I spent three months with them and neither of us were able to communicate verbally. But you communicate very well non-verbally when you have to. We became quite close. It's a different civilisation in Korea. They have,

37:00 really manners, manners are really important amongst the Koreans. For they are, amongst a lot of the oriental people, and so they always respected me. But I became very close to the drummer in the band and I know that man was married in Korea with children and he was sending all his money back, as all the musicians were, to their families in Korea. It must have been harder for the girls who had children and were missing their children, that must have been much harder for them.

37:30 But they didn't complain or if they did they were doing it in Korean and I couldn't understand it. We didn't have any trouble communicating. I spent all my time with the drummer and we used to be arm in arm walking through the villages because he knew that I loved to explore everywhere I went and he didn't want me to go alone. So he took it upon himself to be my protector. There was one particular show that we did where we were hit by incoming and that was the time when we were gassed with

38:00 CS gas [tear gas]. It was in the middle of the show and we heard the aircraft go over and the next thing none of us could breathe. It's not only that you can't breathe, it really effects every mucus membrane that you possess - eyes, nose, ears, mouth, throat, chest everything, as well as your skin. Everything is on fire at once and your eyes are burning so much that they're watering and you simply can't see anything and it's your instinct to run. Just get away from it, just run.

38:30 You can't breathe and you can't see and you're falling over and you're crashing into people, but everyone is doing the same thing. Panic. Run. It must have been hours before the commotion and the chaos settled down and I was grabbed by somebody, who knows who, and pulled into one of the inflatable areas that they had organised for their wounded and someone was flushing my eyes out. And I was on a respirator

39:00 because being asthmatic it was really, I couldn't breathe. Suddenly the door burst open and Mr Cheong, my Korean drummer, burst into the room, speaking in Korean at a million miles an hour, came over, embraced me, sobbing his heart out, rattling in Korean in this terribly excitable state and he'd been deeply affected by it too. He was just glad to see that I was alive

39:30 and when he walked out, I actually escorted him out because he was making so much commotion, they said to me, "It's amazing that you speak Korean." And I said, "No, I don't speak a word of Korean." And they said, "But you knew exactly what he said." And I said, "Well, of course, how could you not know what he said?" He was just happy that I was alive and that I wasn't badly injured, you know, he's my soul mate, he's my buddy. He took it upon himself to look after me and he'd done that.

40:00 Communication, verbal communication wasn't important and it wasn't important with the Filipino band either, although they did speak a little bit of English, the Korean's spoke none. Years, years later when I had my own children, I took students into my home for several years while my children were still at school. We took a lot of Korean students and Japanese students and students from all over

40:30 and I think I related to the Korean students far better because of that time that I'd had with the Korean band. They were marvellous. I got a virus, you got lots of viruses like 24 hour flus in Vietnam that were really quite vicious and would knock you for a loop, very high temperatures. I've had temperatures in Vietnam of 106, that's a high, high temperature. And in 24 hours it would be over,

- 41:00 but for that 24 hours you think that you're going to die and the problem is that you don't die, you have to live through it. Those Koreans sat up all night at my bedside and sponged my head and went to Vietnamese herbalists and got me herbs and brought them back and cooked them, and did whatever you do with those sorts of herbs and fed them to me during the night and made sure I had enough fluids. They were amazing. I've tried so hard to contact them after the war
- 41:30 had finished and I couldn't, sadly I couldn't. I sent word to newspapers in Korea and to all kinds of places. I wasn't able to find them, which I thought was sad because I really loved them. Yes the communication, it didn't mean anything the fact that we didn't speak each other's language meant absolutely nothing. We communicated very, very well. We didn't talk philosophy obviously.

Tape 5

- 00:48 **We're talking about the shows and you opened with Respect, that kind of thing, you also talked a fair bit about the crowds, especially the American GI s, and how were the Aussie audiences different?**
- 01:06 Well the camaraderie amongst the Australians was very strong and their morale was much higher and so it was a different group of people. The Americans even in America are very, I don't know if the word's 'gullible' it's probably not the right word to use, but they are very accepting of anybody that comes on stage and tells them something
- 01:30 or entertains them. They're very accepting people like that and they're basically very good hearted people and they're there to listen and be entertained etcetera. The Aussies are too but in Australia the Aussie audiences are different because they are a tougher audience. They're sharper people, they're more on the ball as a group of people, they're sense of humour is perhaps a lot more warped than the Americans.
- 02:00 The Americans don't understand the Australian humour. It's too fast for them and it's too out there on an obtuse. So the American audiences are very easy to work to, the Australian audiences in Vietnam were also very easy to work to simply because they were there to do a job, they were doing it, they were doing it hard and tough. They were living no differently to how I was living, so I related to the fact that they were doing it tough. They were also homesick,
- 02:30 they were also really, really young, just kids, simply kids. But their morale was higher. So that made a big difference, it meant that they were more in command altogether or every aspect of their life was more together. Perhaps they had greater support from home, I don't know about that, but they were definitely different audiences to work to. It was a fact that I was an Aussie doing a show for Aussies that made it so special.
- 03:00 It not only made it special for them but it made it special for me because for days ahead, knowing that I was doing a show for Aussies, I was excited about it, and you know, I did my Big Kev [Australian entrepreneur famous for protectionist ideals], 'I'm excited' about this, and I really was. The minute that they knew that I was an Aussie, they would all just jump up and scream and yell and throw stuff for me. They couldn't do
- 03:30 enough for me. It was really beautiful, it was like they were my brothers and I really felt that, and I'm sure that they felt it of me too and they appreciated the fact that I'd come there to entertain them so much that it made it a real pleasure to do those shows. And especially Waltzing Matilda, that was, seriously was the ice breaker for every Aussie show that I did. Waltzing Matilda was something that everybody knew, whereas even now,
- 04:00 not everybody knows the words to Advance Australia Fair. Everyone knows the words to Waltzing Matilda, everybody knows the tune, whether they could sing it or not they did, rousingly, you know. It helped them somehow. It kept them in touch with home.
- 04:21 **Whereabouts in the set would you sing Waltzing Matilda?**
- 04:23 Oh, usually very close to the beginning because, I guess, until
- 04:30 I spoke nobody knew that I was an Aussie. They knew I was a round eye obviously because I wasn't dark and didn't look oriental in any way, shape or form. So they knew I was a round-eye, that was enough, that was terrific for them. Then when I spoke and the accent, which doesn't matter where in the world you live, you hang on to your accent and so that was my first time overseas, probably my accent may have been stronger than it is now that I lived
- 05:00 overseas for a number of years in different countries. The minute I started speaking they knew I was an Aussie then I'd go into Waltzing Matilda. What else are you going to do at that point, it's such an opening. It's an opening specifically for something like that, and they loved it. They just loved it because not only did they relate to it and related to me for singing it, but they related to the song and it was home. Waltzing

- 05:30 Matilda and Australia are synonymous. How they could even think of another national anthem for me was unheard of, but you know.
- 05:40 **You said that you'd get guys up on stage as well for banter, how would you select them?**
- 05:48 It's like a class of kids. You'll always find two kids, two guys putting their hands across their mouth and you know, that they're saying something about you
- 06:00 or your legs or whatever, it is their thing that they are attracted to. And so I'd say, "Hey you! Get up here!" And they wouldn't know why. So they'd come up and I'd say, "Let us all into the secret, let us all enjoy the joke, what was it? What part of my body? What part of somebody else's body?" They'd all crack up of course, because they were all doing it, they hadn't seen another woman, a woman for how many months, sometimes a year.
- 06:30 So it was easy. It was easy because they were so willing to be part of the joke and to do anything that lifted them above where they were basically, and that was my job.
- 06:45 **What numbers would you generally close on? Did you do encores?**
- 06:50 There were encores but we used to try to keep the encores to a minimum otherwise they'd keep us there forever. We often had somewhere else go,
- 07:00 in fact most of the time, unless we were spending the night. By the end of the day we were absolutely bugged, completely bugged. It didn't matter how much I ate I don't think I put on an ounce the whole time I was there because it was so constant and so hot. Usually we would finish with I Want To Get Out Of This Place, and of course everyone sang along because everyone wanted to get out of this place. So
- 07:30 that's how we would end the show, on that. Sometimes we'd do four and five choruses of it and everyone would keep singing and yeah it was a good way to finish a show, to finish on a song like that. A lot of those songs were freedom type songs that were written in that era and we would grab any one of them that we could and they were the one's that were popular. Anything to do with home and freedom and getting out, and peace
- 08:00 not war.
- 08:01 **Waltzing Matilda obviously got to be a favourite for that kind of bonding with the fellows. What was some of the other favourites for you?**
- 08:10 That's, I guess, a hard question to answer because I really didn't get a chance to sing my music specifically there and my music being jazz standards, I didn't get a lot of chance to sing that sort of music. I really love singing ballads
- 08:30 and Funny Valentine and Misty and those sort of things. The closest I could get to that were songs like Summer Time. Songs that they would relate to I couldn't really sing anything at all that they didn't know because there was no point, they weren't in the mood and I wasn't in the mood to deliver either. There was plenty of time to do that when I got home. When I did.
- 09:00 **You said you were doing three shows.**
- 09:01 Sixteen shows a week was average, sometimes we would do more than three shows in a day. That means that in two days you do three shows. Sometimes we'd do a few more than that, but basically sixteen shows would be the average that we would do every single week. Week in week out, we didn't have holidays or anything.
- 09:21 **You were saying how you were doing shows for the officers, sergeants and other ranks, were they the three shows that you're talking about?**
- 09:28 That's right.
- 09:30 Enlisted men, petty officers, officers.
- 09:35 **So at each venue you'd -**
- 09:37 Each venue there'd be three shows. Because everybody then gets a chance to see the show.
- 09:44 **So how did you set about, was it 10 numbers?**
- 09:48 I did 10 numbers in each show, so if we did three shows in a day that's 30 songs for me, that's a lot of songs.
- 09:56 **What sort of a break did you get between sets?**

- 09:57 Sometimes none,
- 10:00 sometimes 15 minutes, 20 minutes, sometimes an hour sometimes it would be in a different mess so we'd have to break down our equipment and set it up somewhere else. Funny things happen too. I fell off the stage once. We went to Pleiku, we were in the mountains and we were working for the air force and there was a guy, an officer, it was a show for the officers and this guy had come to every single one
- 10:30 of my shows in Pleiku. I didn't know who he was, but he was extremely handsome. An African American guy who was just drop dead good looking, and he sat in the front row and he came to every one of my shows for months on end. And I went too close to the spotlights on a six foot stage and I lost the edge of the stage in my line of vision and down I went and I landed on this man's lap, head
- 11:00 first with my legs over his shoulders. This guy just sat there with this person that had just arrived, very closely, head first I won't tell you where my head was.
- 11:30 **Do you want to tell it a bit later?**
- 11:45 No, I'm quite happy to tell it. I landed in this extremely uncompromising position on this poor man, who evidently had been sitting there watching the show because he had this attraction to the only
- 12:00 white girl he'd seen in a long time, and as I said, he's drop dead gorgeous and he's the person whose lap I arrived on. And he asked me would I got out with him for a cup of coffee. So I had been very well prepared before I left for Vietnam on how many venereal diseases were rife in Vietnam, and I should be extremely careful and not under any circumstances was I to put myself in a silly situation. With that in mind I said, "Yes all right. I'll
- 12:30 have coffee with you in a public place where everything is cool. OK?" He was a psychiatrist and a really beautiful man and very well educated and a beautiful man. So off we went for coffee and we were sitting chatting and we were having a wonderful chat, he really was a beautiful man and he was telling me about his work and where he came from in the States, and I told him a little bit about myself. And in the course of the conversation, we're sitting side-by-side in this little coffee bar,
- 13:00 he took my hand and he put it on his knee. My hand flew off his knee, instantly because I realised that it wasn't only his knee that he'd put my hand around. Not only was I shocked at the incredible length of this 'not just his knee' but everything else that I was holding onto that I decided perhaps it wasn't a good idea
- 13:30 for me to have coffee with him and I politely left.
- 13:41 **You were talking about the dire warning that you received before you left Sydney from the doctor, would you mind telling us about that on camera?**
- 13:49 The doctor that vaccinated me told me that he had heard that the venereal diseases in Vietnam were so terrible that there were many that we
- 14:00 hadn't experienced, Western civilisation had not experienced. And that there was an island somewhere where these men were sent to die once they'd contracted these venereal diseases, because there was no cure for them. Their families were told that they were missing in action. I don't know how true that was, or whether he was trying to scare the shit out of me, but he succeeded,
- 14:30 he succeeded. He succeeded very successfully. I was far too frightened that I was going to end up on that island with everybody else. I had this vision in my mind of leprosy and members falling off and all kind of strange things happening. So yeah, I was very careful. I fell for a GI there, for a marine in the Sea Bees and even wrote home and told my parents that I was going to go over to America and get married. That went down like a
- 15:00 lead balloon. Of course it didn't eventuate, I came to my senses and it was really just a crush.
- 15:09 **So how long was that relationship?**
- 15:12 Well it's hard to have a relationship in Vietnam when you're doing 16 shows a week, and he was in one place and I was all over the place. I only got to see him once every few weeks and it was a distant relationship to begin with and it was doomed.
- 15:30 I really didn't have any intention of going back to America and getting married. I've never had any intention of getting married in my entire life, to be honest. It's not something that I've wanted to do. I'm a bit of a rebel like that because I think that religion was created by men to control people and marriage is part of that control, I'm not into control so I don't go there.
- 16:00 **I'd like to talk more about your going from organist to drummer, Mr Cheong, your Korean drummer, what about the other guys in the band, what kind of characters were they?**
- 16:15 I didn't get to know them very well. They cared for me when I was sick and the girls were always friendly, but they kept to themselves quite a bit. So Mr Cheong was like my brother, he was the one who

- escorted me wherever I wanted to go
- 16:30 and I always believed his choice, because I was like his little sister. He respected me like that and they all respected me. We didn't have a problem at all, there was never a dispute about anything. Not ever. The whole time I was there with any of the bands in fact
- 16:57 **I realised my questions are jumping all over the place now, we were talking about the shows and the audiences and the fact that you did three sets, sometimes with hardly a break. How would you unwind after all the shows were done?**
- 17:12 Different ways in different places. It was very hard to unwind in areas that had Howitzers going off every few minutes, 24 hours a day. That was hard because there is no escape from that kind of noise. Believe it or not, you can
- 17:30 actually get to sleep for short times, exhaustion does wonderful things, you get to sleep with those kinds of noises going off and that was hard, but we used to often just sit round and eat rations in the middle of nowhere and just rave, talk with the men. And sometimes officers, sometimes enlisted men, sometimes people would just wander in and would
- 18:00 join the conversation and add to it, whatever. When we worked Pleiku for the air force, where I said they were working in intelligence, there was one man that used to bring out a book of Haiku poetry and read it and that was my first introduction to Haiku poetry, the Japanese verse, and I loved that. In the same place, because there were no city lights, the stars
- 18:30 were really amazing, you felt as though you could put your hand out and gather up the stars. There were a lot of men that knew the constellations and were able to point out the Big Dipper and star formations, which was really fascinating for me, because I don't have that knowledge. There was always people to talk to and ways to unwind. Basically through talking, I guess. There
- 19:00 was nowhere to go and there was no other entertainment. I didn't watch the American movies because they were war movies and I was in the middle of it so why would I want to watch it in my spare time. I wrote a lot of letters home. I'm a big letter writer so I wrote a lot of letters. Fortunately for me I did because all my friends and family saved my letters and I eventually wrote a book, so it was good. Not a lot of spare time and
- 19:30 by the time you finished your unwind time was a lot shorter than it was if I was in Sydney working. Basically you just want to be horizontal and close your eyes and just shut out everything because the driving was just so constant and the flights so constant and the, yeah, it was very exhausting.
- 19:53 **Did you ever manage to get leave?**
- 19:56 I only got leave when I came home, when my father died, that was the only leave I ever got.
- 20:00 I wasn't there for holidays I was there for working and I seriously did that. I mean that was what I took seriously and that was what I had dedicated and that's what I believed I was there to do. It didn't occur to me that I wasn't going to have a break or a holiday. However, having said that, I also didn't think I was going to be working so hard. It really was very hard work.
- 20:24 **It sounds like there is potential for a bit of burn out.**
- 20:26 I was completely burnt out. I guess that's why I
- 20:30 contracted malaria and when I came home I was much sicker than just malaria. Malaria knocks out certain things, you can't see, your muscles ache terribly, like terribly, and you've got this awful fever and sweats and shakes, the whole bit. You're nauseous with it and vomiting and it's very specific. But I had other problems too when I came back. I realised that my nervous system had been shattered and the chemicals had taken their
- 21:00 toll, and I wasn't detoxifying as well. And there were times when I used to go yellow, and times when I'd break out in skin rashes and react to things that I hadn't reacted to previously. I was, I guess I was chronically fatigued for several years after I came back. I'm sure all of them were, because your diet is so dreadful. I was lucky because I lived with a Vietnamese family for some of the time
- 21:30 when I wasn't, when I was in Saigon. And I was able to have fresh fruit and vegetables and fresh food then. But otherwise, the Americans got none. You were lucky if you got an orange or something like that or an apple if you were lucky. We used to buy tins of mandarins in the stores, in the PX [duty free American canteen] stores, tins of mandarins because we were craving the citrus so much, the vitamin C.
- 22:00 The only tablets that were handed out weren't vitamins, they were all malaria tablets. They were in dispensers in all the mess halls. You walked in for your dinner and you took your quinine and then you got your dinner. I guess I was lucky in some ways, but it did take me a very long time to recover. Then in 1980 I had complete liver failure so the chemicals definitely have effected me. That took 10 years to recover from.

- 22:30 But you know something good always comes from something negative and the doctor who healed me taught me homeopathy, and that is what I do today, I'm a homeopath. You see how life works, we don't always understand the reason for things but it becomes apparent.
- 22:49 **We've talked about the Korean band, the Seven Wonders, that was the first three months and then you had the band from the Philippines, The Jargons, you said that they spoke a bit of English, but what was the vibe like with that group?**
- 23:17 Very different from the Koreans. The Koreans were all, probably in their 40s and all adults with a family, whereas the Filipinos were
- 23:30 16 and 17 years old, none of them had even girlfriends at home. They just had families, brother and sisters and parents and all their money was going home to them. So they were a different generation of kids, they'd grown up on the street. I learned when I went to the Philippines that most of them can play musical instruments, they play by ear and they have such an extraordinary facility to do so, like the Maori people do, musical instruments and voice
- 24:00 and music, for them, is a natural thing and Filipinos are the same. I guess Spanish influence with the Filipinos makes that possible perhaps. But they're all guitarists and they've all got fabulous rhythm and so they were natural musicians that I worked with, all by ear. Nothing like the Koreans who had my charts and the charts were done the same way every night.
- 24:26 **So how would they learn the arrangements?**
- 24:27 They would just ask me, "How do you want to do this?" and I'd sing
- 24:30 it and they'd play it. That fast, they were fantastic.
- 24:36 **These are even songs they'd not heard before?**
- 24:38 Yes, but most of them they'd heard. These are kids that grew up on the street in Manila. They don't miss much. If you have a natural aptitude for such things it's easy. If people are not musical they don't have that aptitude, the ear, they have to develop it and sometimes
- 25:00 even then it's not so good. I've worked with a lot of musicians that can't play a song in another key if I've got laryngitis or whatever. I've worked with lots like that. But fortunately the majority I've worked with did have that ability and I'm very grateful for that.
- 25:18 **Do you play an instrument?**
- 25:20 No. Voice is my instrument. I was forced to sit at the piano and do scales for years and years, but
- 25:30 sorry, I just couldn't sit there for that long. I'm too restless.
- 25:35 **I'm just wondering with the Jargons whether you needed to help with arrangements, if they were songs they hadn't heard for example, melodies one thing but the chords are another.**
- 25:49 That's true, but that was never a problem for them because they had such a good ear that, see a song doesn't just go nowhere,
- 26:00 a song has a certain pattern, a certain sequence and then it resolves. It's called a resolve, it resolves it comes back to the tonic that you began with basically, and so it's really not such a bad thing, not such a hard thing for a person that is already a musician naturally and has that incredible ear. Even with me I can hear a note and I can sing you the rest of the notes in that chord, or I can sing around the chord that the musician
- 26:30 is playing because I know what those other notes are. I hear them naturally. That's only because I've got a good ear. I don't see that as something extraordinary. I felt that I was fortunate to have a band that was so good but I didn't see it as extraordinary. I'd grown up with that.
- 26:49 **Now are they the guys that you were in the Kombi van with?**
- 26:54 Yes. Yes.
- 26:55 **So how long were you playing with The Jargons?**
- 26:57 For about eight weeks before my father died and I had to go back to
- 27:00 Australia. And then a month later I went back for another group, this time it was an Australian agent called Show Group Management and the man who ran Show Group Management was Les Mazlier [?], passed away, and Show Group Management is no more. Les Mazlier organised for an Australian band, a five piece band called The Surf Riders, I don't know where they got that name, probably specifically just for Vietnam.

- 27:30 They were Aussie guys from Sydney that are still playing around Wollongong and that area. Off I went again with them and a go-go dancer by the name of Lisa. She was the eye candy I guess you'd call it. She wasn't really a dancer but she looked great, she was okay to travel with. That band were interesting to work with, that band.
- 27:59 **So that seven of you flew back to Vietnam together?**
- 28:04 Yes. Yes and we all stayed in Singapore for one night and we were all taken to the wonderful restaurants and things, Singapore's a fantastic place, I loved Singapore. Then off we went to Vietnam and we were put up in different villas at that time, all around the place. Because we were all Australians it made a difference even though that upset me, it shouldn't have made a difference as far as I
- 28:30 was concerned, but it did. That's the reality. There was one night, have you heard of the Montagnard people? Montagnard people are the indigenous people of Vietnam and they live in the mountains. They aren't actually called Montagnard people, it's a French word I think. Actually I don't know the derivative of the word but it's a separate
- 29:00 language and as fighters they were very highly respected by the Vietnamese, because they were fearless. I had a real attraction to going and meeting them. So made my way up the mountain by myself and I introduced myself to them and I became familiar with these people who accepted me, which was quite extraordinary. So when I was telling my Australian band
- 29:30 about them they asked if they could come with me one night after the show and if they could meet them as well. So I primed them about respect and all of these things and they couldn't do this and they couldn't do that. They said yes they'd go along with all of this. So I took the five boys up the mountain and I introduced them to the elders of the community and all the community came out to meet them. And as a mark of respect they brought out
- 30:00 some alcohol that they'd made. I don't know what they added into it, spit maybe, a bit of urine. I don't know. They did add stuff like that to their alcohol to make it alcohol. It was in a gourd and we all sat around in a circle and they knew that I didn't drink. I didn't touch it I was too frightened of what might be in it, but the five boys of my band did. They all, they had to drink to a level and the levels were marked,
- 30:30 and it was all the same straw, and it was all passed around so if one person had some sort of disease I guess everyone was going to get it, that was the way it was. But these were very strong healthy people. Two days later my band woke up, two days later. We missed two days of shows and there were people out looking for us. We were in such shit you have no idea how angry these people were with us because they
- 31:00 lost money, they lost hundreds of dollars because we lost two shows. My band slept for 48 hours on one little bit of that gourd of alcohol. That was their introduction to the alcoholic substances of the Montagnard people.
- 31:16 **How would did you get in touch with the Montagnard men?**
- 31:20 Just through being able to speak a little bit of Vietnamese and being able to communicate with people in the street and getting invited. I guess I'm a friendly person,
- 31:30 I speak to everybody. Because I was, in the Jewish religion you are brought up to, there's a couple of sayings that are really powerful and one of them, the strong saying, is 'we never know what angels look like'. That's number one, and number two is 'that the lowliest beggar can actually be the highest, the most elevated being', and no, you should never look down on anybody because that person may be so way above
- 32:00 you that you know they have a lot to teach you. So that's how I see people and I really loved people and I love to know about them and find out about them and taste the flavour of the way they live. Because otherwise there is no point in being a tourist. I'm not a tourist. I don't like to go to tourist resorts and mix with my own kind and know nothing about the country that I've visited. I like to get in amongst it and
- 32:30 so just by talking to people I was invited, and it's an honour to be invited like that.
- 32:40 **Did you learn much about Buddhism while you were there?**
- 32:41 No, I didn't learn a lot about it, but there were a lot of Buddhists there and most of the Vietnamese have their little altars and their flowers and their fruit and their offering to the Buddha. And the way of life of the Buddha is probably the closest thing to
- 33:00 Judaism in the respect for other human beings, although you wouldn't know it in the world today. Yes it's a religion I greatly respect.
- 33:12 **How good was your Vietnamese?**

- 33:16 It was terrific while I was there. I forgot it very soon afterwards because I wasn't able to speak it to anyone. Language is, you lose languages unless you speak them. My father's mother tongue was Spanish but he didn't know a lot of
- 33:30 Spanish towards the end. He'd lost it because he'd spoken English for so long.
- 33:35 **Did many 'round eyes' make that sort of effort?**
- 33:42 No. No. Very few Western girls like me at that age and time, very few. A few went from Australia, but in a population of whatever it was, maybe 13 or 15 million at that stage, probably
- 34:00 half a dozen did what I did, maybe less. I don't know how many girls really stayed for that full year and really travelled the way I did. And lived the way the military lived. I didn't have any creature comforts than they had. I didn't have any different food except when I was with Vietnamese family. I lived the same way they did, I put up with the same conditions
- 34:30 which meant, by the way, when you come in of a night, into your tent, the first thing you do is you pull back your covers to make sure there are no snakes and no insects. And you sweep all the insects out of your bed and then you quickly get in and cover yourself up and you wake up in the morning and the bed is still full of insects. Because that's what is there, you're in the middle of these places and where the mozzies are like
- 35:00 jumbo jets and there are insects there that I'd never seen before. We lived with that all the time, with bites and stuff. And the stuff that they used to give us to stop, as an insect repellent used to take my nail polish off so who knows what it used to do to my skin. I probably could've taken my make up off with it and it probably would've taken the first three layers of skin with it. So I tried not to use a lot of that stuff, but I was chemically poisoned, severely anyway.
- 35:30 **It's quite obvious that you embraced Vietnam for the place that it was, but what about the guys that you were working with? Were there others that got involved as you did?**
- 35:42 No, I don't think any of them in the bands I worked with got as involved. But that's not saying anything negative about them, they were there for different reasons. I don't know if I could have been there for the same reason they were there.
- 36:00 They came from poverty stricken families and it was their way to make money whether or not they put their lives in danger to do so. It meant that their siblings could be educated and that was everything for them and so their purpose was very different to my purpose. I had been educated, I was extremely lucky in that respect. So therefore perhaps I had something more to give. I found myself in a situation where
- 36:30 I was presented with that opportunity and it felt right at the time for me to do that. My experiences were perhaps unique because of that, because I put myself in to those situations. I put myself in to the front line areas. I put myself in to the villages. I met the people, I knew what they were experiencing. I knew what they were going through. I knew what the military were going through, their suffering was really no different to anybody
- 37:00 else's, it was just called something different. But everybody in Vietnam was suffering, no one was exempt.
- 37:08 **Outside of your base when you were doing a show did you get to meet a lot of villagers, local people?**
- 37:15 I went in to the villages, and so yes I did.
- 37:19 **So tell us about those experiences.**
- 37:20 Saigon in Christmas was amazing. I took a lot of photos of Saigon at Christmas because the markets
- 37:30 which normally had produce brought in by the locals suddenly had all these Christmas decorations. I didn't celebrate Christmas, being Jewish, and so it was really quite amazing for me. The other thing that I did, when I found people, guys in the army, navy, air force whatever, who were Jewish, I used to, on a Friday night, light the
- 38:00 Sabbath candles and the word would go round and whoever was Jewish used to come. But the incredible thing was because it was a time when anybody else could be in touch with the creator in a way, people who were not Jewish used to come along too and join in. It didn't make any difference to them what we were doing was something that was alien to them, it just brought everybody closer together.
- 38:30 So that was another thing that I used to do there, that was a really nice thing to do. And it wasn't necessarily because I was so religious, because I really moved away at that point from my religion. I've moved back, now I've moved away again.
- 38:50 **So when you did come back when your father had passed away, how long were you back in**

Australia?

- 38:54 A month. I came back to Melbourne for three and a half weeks and I spent that three and a half weeks
- 39:00 with my mother in the house where my Dad had passed away and where I'd been brought up. That was a really hard thing to do because I was close to my Dad. My father was very gentle, beautiful man. My Mum was only 52 years old. I'm older than she was when she lost my Dad. She was left with a lot of debt and it was very hard for her. After Vietnam I came home after
- 39:30 and I recovered, then I went to England and worked for several years there as a singer. I sent my mother her ticket and she'd never been out of Australia so she came to England with me and we spent six weeks there touring around, and we went to Spain and France. It was good.
- 39:50 **You mentioned earlier where you had to break the contract to come back?**
- 40:00 It meant that I didn't get paid for that five months.
- 40:02 **Up until that point?**
- 40:02 Up until that point. In fact the GIs, the guys took up a collection for me to get home because I got the news, as you know, on my birthday I received that news, and my instant response, it had taken some time for the Red Cross to find me. My father had died and the funeral had already happened by the time I got home. When they found me I knew I had to go home
- 40:30 and so I went to my Korean manager who just shut the door in my face and said, "No way, we've got your return ticket, we've got your passport. We don't have to give any of it to you." He was forced to give me my passport and I took my passport and the little bit of money that I had, that I knew I could purchase a ticket with, and I went on foot to get my ticket. On my way into Saigon
- 41:00 a Vietnamese man on a motorbike appeared out of nowhere, came up on to the footpath with his fist straight out ahead of him which collected the centre of my skull, right between my eyes and he gave me two black eyes and a bloody nose, took my bag, took my money, took my passport and I was left with nothing. I mean that was a really awful thing to happen at that point. And
- 41:30 I went straight back to the base where I had been staying and the medics came and sat me down and helped me and, you know, there wasn't a lot I could do with my eyes out like this by that time. They all took up a collection for me to get home, to pay my ticket home, a new passport was rushed through for me, which I still have today, and I got home because of the Americans, just the American boys.

Tape 6

- 00:33 **You did tell us earlier when you'd arrive at various camps one of the first places you'd go to were these hospitals, can you tell us a bit more about that?**
- 00:41 Yes. I mentioned before that I would wait with the boys that were wounded, that weren't emergencies and they would be in line according to, the most injured would go in first. I'd sit with them, I used to also speak to the
- 01:00 lines and lines of women with babies that were always there at the hospitals, lines and lines I'm talking hundreds of them with babies. I think I mentioned before, didn't I, that the babies didn't cry, that was the thing that really struck me. A lot of these hospitals were actually inflatable, they had inflatable walls and they'd just blow up hospital. Hello, would you like a hospital here? Let's put one here, and they'd blow it up and there it would be
- 01:30 with all its rooms and operating theatre and the whole bit. Some of the wards were psych wards and this is where they put the kids that were shell shocked and had gone through and had witnessed such traumatic experiences that the mind had shut down. I went into some of these psych wards. I didn't do it often because it was really a very difficult thing for me to do, personally, but when I did it, it deeply effected
- 02:00 me because these kids, we're talking kids 18 years old. I've had kids of 18, they're still kids at 18, they're really not there to be witnessing horrors and people being blown up. And they'd watch their friends being blown up or whatever it was that had caused the brain to shut down. It has to be something really, really terrible to shut a brain down. It's a protective mechanism that happens and there were hundreds of
- 02:30 them, hundreds of them. And they were walking around with vacant expressions, they had no knowledge of where they were, who they were, what country they were from, what their names were, how old they were, who their parents were, they had no knowledge of that whatsoever. That'd just gone and maybe it was fortunate for them that it had gone, but I don't know if some of those boys ever came back.

- 03:00 That's the horrible part. I also saw things like that, there was a time when the area where we were designated, the girls, to change there was a boy that was guarding that through our whole show and we were hit and he was really badly injured. I felt guilty about that, I felt terrible, because if we hadn't been there doing the show on that particular day he wouldn't have been
- 03:30 hurt. You can't look at it that way and take personal responsibility because it wasn't mine. I experienced it that part of it was mine, but it wasn't my fault. But you can't help feeling guilty at such times.
- 03:52 **When you came back did the 'Surf Riders' have any inkling of what was ahead of them? Had you given them a bit of a pep talk?**
- 04:00 No I didn't as a matter of fact. I really didn't know whether it was going to be different, I didn't know. I didn't want to scare them so much that they didn't want to go. I knew it would be an experience for them too, what sort of an experience, everybody has a different experience. You can put two people in the same experience and they'll still have different experiences. I told them a little bit, but they also knew that I'd
- 04:30 come through unscathed, relatively. The insanity permanent side, that came from Vietnam. I think they just trusted like me and when you're young you feel invincible, it doesn't occur to you that you're going to get hurt. And they weren't.
- 04:50 **What do you think they were doing it for?**
- 04:52 Challenge. Money. I don't know. We weren't,
- 05:00 it's not as though we were paid a lot, but it might have been an extra 10 or 15 bucks a week to what we would've got at home. It was really pointless to put ourselves into that dangerous situation, where we could have lost our lives for that small amount of money. In those days it was a fair amount of money. I can't even remember how much it was, but I think it was less than one hundred dollars a week, from memory. I'd have to go back in to my letters and check
- 05:30 that part out, but for me I worked for the first five months for free anyway. I was really fulfilling my commitment and it was very important for me to repay the boys that had taken up the collection to get me home.
- 05:47 **I know you can't speak on behalf of The Surf Riders, but you obviously shared a lot of time with them. At the end of it how do you think the experience had been for them?**
- 05:55 I know they were exhausted. The drummer disappeared evidently, I don't know
- 06:00 where he went or what happened to him, he just disappeared. The others are still working and I know the experience affected them deeply. I know the guitarist was in a terrible car accident a few years later and his son was killed in that car accident so he was out of it for a long time, many years. But they're all working and I don't really know how it
- 06:30 changed their lives because I didn't have a lot to do with them after that. I came home a few weeks ahead of them because of my being sick. I tried to come back into the group and work after I got out of Saigon Hospital, but I was extremely weakened by then. I'd had a number of viruses while I was there, stomach bugs and other types of strange fevers and things.
- 07:00 It all adds up - bad diet, a lot of travelling, huge heat, constant bites from insects and sunburn, and all the things that you had to contend with in that situation. The discomfort of constant travelling and little sleep, it all added up and it added up for me, for my health, to be shattered for a couple years afterwards. I picked up
- 07:30 gradually. I went back to work, I started singing again and had a couple of kids even, until it really hit me and then in 1980 I had liver failure. That was put down to the dioxin levels because the dioxin levels in my blood were so high at that time. Tests of blood had to be sent to America to be tested, couldn't be tested here. We didn't have such tests for dioxin in those days in Sydney, in Australia. There
- 08:00 wasn't such a test.
- 08:03 **Can you tell us about that show where you collapsed?**
- 08:07 We were in Danang from memory, right up in the north. I had been feeling pretty exhausted and it was becoming an effort for me to actually get up on stage and sing. I had no speaking voice at that time, that was towards the end of my tour.
- 08:30 I could sing but I had a lot of difficulty speaking. I'd had a couple bouts of bronchitis, the winters there were very cold, very cold, snowing in some areas in Vietnam. You don't expect that because it's tropical area and the humidity is basically very high and even in winter it's high and you get these big rains out, but it snowed in some areas and it was very, very cold, very damp, very cold. Lot of water, lot of rain, very cold.

- 09:00 I'd had a couple of bouts of really severe bronchitis, pleurisy as well while I was there and I think it just demolished my health. I'm sure that they came back in a similar state of exhaustion. You can't keep up sixteen shows a week indefinitely with that sort of work and travel, constantly, because you don't ever have a rest. There were
- 09:30 a few times where, you know, we'd have a break and we would run down to the beach and I remember running along a beach to get to the water and there must have been a hundred metres between me and the ocean, but jumping into the ocean was just fantastic. I swam in the South China Sea and we had a few times like that. They were few, basically it was work. And I burnt out, of course I did.
- 10:00 **What happened after you collapsed?**
- 10:06 Some medics took blood samples from me. I was taken to the dispensary, medics took blood, asked my symptoms, they were pretty certain what I had because they dealt with it all the time. They called me in and I checked out what they were looking at in the microscope and they pointed out the cells and said, "This is malaria, this is what
- 10:30 you've got. We have to airlift you down to Saigon we can't deal with you up here." I was in hospital in Vung Tau until I was stabilised as far as temperature etcetera was concerned and then I was put in a plane, taken to a plane in an ambulance. Wonderfully looked after, seriously, by the Americans, I was seriously well looked after. They all came out of the woodwork to help me basically.
- 11:00 I was airlifted down to Fairfield Hospital in Saigon along with all the body bags and that was a pretty disconcerting experience. I was in hospital there for about three weeks, a considerable amount of time, and I couldn't see for most of it. I was very, very sick. I came out of hospital in a very
- 11:30 weakened state and I tried to go back to work and I did maybe a few weeks of shows and I just couldn't keep going. So it was determined at that point that I was of no further use so they sent me home. Unceremoniously.
- 11:50 **They broke the contract this time?**
- 11:52 They did but I basically couldn't work so you could say that I broke the contract. I was just too finished, I was finished by that time. I'd
- 12:00 experienced too much, seen too much, listened to too much. I knew exactly what was going on and why the war was happening and why people were dying and how they were dying and often it was the Americans that were killing their own men. It's demoralising. I lost faith in governments altogether at that point. I knew without any doubt whatsoever that
- 12:30 war was an absolutely horrendous thing and it didn't affect the people in government at all, it only affected the young. The best, the cream of our youth who it affects because it's the strong ones that go to war and it's the strong ones that are killed off. Everyone else is left to fend for themselves. The economy goes crazy accordingly. War is a shocking thing.
- 13:00 How did it affect me afterwards? I think I'll never ever be the same. I remember some of these situations like they happened to me last week. I will probably remember them until the day I die. I'll remember the looks of horror on people's faces. I'll remember the babies that didn't cry.
- 13:30 I'll remember the mothers that could do nothing for their children, and watch them die in horrible ways, napalm burns. I looked at men whose lives had been irretrievably lost. I know my band would never be the same. None of the bands that I worked with there could have been the same. I wasn't the same. I looked at the world in a different
- 14:00 way altogether and still do. I'm still very against, and I don't care if they call me an anarchist or a rebel I don't care what they call me, it doesn't matter to me, but governments are the ones who create wars and governments are the ones who should be held responsible and accountable. I'll do anything still for the Vietnam veterans associations of Australia and America. Whether I'm acknowledged by the government or not.
- 14:30 I will still work tirelessly for them because I know what they've been through.
- 14:38 **You know how you said earlier that you felt that you were in some ways an ambassador, was that something that happened, how long did it take for you to develop that notion for yourself while you were in Vietnam?**
- 14:50 I don't know. I'm sure it was fast because it was an accelerated learning process for me. So I'm sure it
- 15:00 was fast. Sure it was within the first month that I felt that. Because I felt that I carried quite a responsibility on my shoulders. I mean I went by myself in the beginning and I really didn't know what I was going to experience. But once I began experiencing it I understood then what my role was. My role wasn't only as
- 15:30 an entertainer, I didn't think it was anyway. That's how I saw myself. I don't know about names like

ambassador. I say that word loosely because I don't know what else to call myself in that situation. I didn't see myself as doing something special or extraordinary. I know I didn't see myself in that way, not at any time because too much was happening for me to think of me.

- 16:00 It was basically what else was going on and how the other people were affected and how much worse off they were than I was. I had an easy ride by comparison to a lot of them. So yes, I saw myself that way, but that was really because I could see that I could be of service there. I've always felt, from the time I was tiny I've been told by the people that guide me that was what my life was
- 16:30 going to be, a life of service. That's what it's been. They were right.
- 16:41 **I notice that you mentioned charity shows? You were involved in some of those?**
- 16:46 Yes. Lots.
- 16:50 **What would they be in aid of and how did they differ from a normal show?**
- 16:53 Mostly for orphanages and the kids and especially for a lot of the half caste kids. Kids that had lost parents,
- 17:00 kids that had lost limbs. Try to get money together to send some of the children that would never have a life, to Australia so that surgeons could operate on them. Which they did, and then they'd have to come back to their families sadly. A lot of those people ended up in Australia anyway, as boat people and fortunately at that time we accepted boat people. My family were migrants.
- 17:30 To me the way things are now it's set Australia back in history a very long time because of the government's view. Lack of humanitarianism. You can see that from Vietnam I've formed some very strong opinions and feelings, mostly against the government.
- 18:00 That's unfortunate, because I don't like to talk of my own country like that, because I love my own country, my country, Australia, is one of the luckiest countries in the world. And people only have to go overseas and live overseas and see how other people have to live and the kind of poverty they live in, and even the people that are in poverty here are better off than overseas. We're very lucky.
- 18:28 **Can I ask how those charity shows work?**
- 18:30 Same show basically,
- 18:35 But the hat was going around?
- 18:37 That's right, yep. The officers were expected to donate more than the enlisted men because they got more. And they usually did too. Everybody that was there understood the plight of the Vietnamese, everybody understood that. They all understood that it was a part of war that civilians were going to get hurt. And they
- 19:00 didn't want it but if they didn't do their job, they weren't rebels, they were going against the government and lined up and shot. What do they call it on board ship, mutiny? That's right and you're charged. That was the same in the army, if you refused to do what they were told to do, even though they knew that they would be probably putting everyone's life in danger and that whoever was making,
- 19:30 giving them that order was a fruitcake [mad - 'nutty as a fruitcake'], and there were plenty of fruitcakes there, they had to do it or they'd be charged with insubordination and thrown in the stockade. It's not a nice thing. When you know that a law, a decision that is just being made and orders that are carried out are going to kill your friends and maybe you, how would you feel? And yet there were some amazing things. There
- 20:00 were groups that went in and were hit and you hear of ordinary men carrying their brothers out. My friend Mick Grace, who worked in the orphanages there and he worked in signals, he carried a man over his shoulder for kilometres to get him out of the area where they were. He rounded a bend and came face-to-face with the Viet Cong with a gun in his hand.
- 20:30 And he could've shot him, and he didn't speak any Vietnamese and I'm sure the Vietnamese man didn't speak any English, but he said to the man, "My friend's wounded, this is my brother. I'm going that way." And he did and the man pulled his gun back and let him go past. And yet they were enemies. There was another story of the same man who saved a man's life because he was hit in the neck and he
- 21:00 was losing blood through the jugular vein, and he would have died in seconds. And the only thing he had was the top of a biro and he shoved it down the jugular vein of the man and stopped the bleeding. And at the welcome home parade in Pitt Street in Sydney a man came running up to him and said, "Are you so and so?" And he took a top of a biro out of his pocket and gave it back to him. He said, "I want you to have this. You saved my life."
- 21:30 So there were incredible acts of bravery also. I have a lot of respect for the Australians and the Australians who were in Vietnam.

- 21:39 **You were there '68, '69 when I guess public opinion was shifting.**
- 21:46 I was there and the public opinion was here. I can't tell you much about the public opinion. I knew that they were demonstrating against the Vietnam War but I wasn't a part of that.
- 22:00 Because I was over there and I was amongst it by then and once you're amongst it you haven't got a lot of time to think about anything else. So as far as the public opinion went I knew there were a lot of people were against the war but I really didn't know the details.
- 22:17 **I'm just wondering if that managed to filter into the ranks and whether it may have had some affect on morale amongst the troops that you saw?**
- 22:27 I actually don't think that
- 22:30 too much of that filtered through. And I think that if the officers in charge had allowed it to filter through it would have been an invitation for a lot of strife and a lot of rebellion. So nobody wanted to be there, that was understood, well most. I say most because I'm sure that there people who enjoyed being there and enjoyed killing people, there's always going to be that in a war, they're the
- 23:00 mercenaries and they're in every war. But the majority of people didn't want to be there. And so it wouldn't have taken much to incite them. In some of the places that I worked at, Bong Son and some of the places that were right on the front lines, because I was one of the few, with the Jargons, I was the only girl that travelled with them,
- 23:30 and being a round-eye I was often the only girl in the camp. And so the camps were made for men, they weren't made for women. If I wanted to have a shower I'd either have to do that late at night or at some other time. There'd always have to be a guard there and after growing up in a religious family which was very conservative and quite modest,
- 24:00 was suddenly surrounded by men that thought nothing of walking to the showers with an erection, you know, and no clothes on, didn't make any difference to them if I was there. And so they were the other things I had to deal with. That was a big thing for me to deal with coming from such a protected environment. It was like, "What!?" I didn't know where to look. Now if it happened, I'd probably laugh. But
- 24:30 all of these things affected me at that age and as naïve as I was.
- 24:37 **Did the men ever attempt to sort of temper their behaviour?**
- 24:42 No. Nope. Rarely. Rarely. I think in any community, it doesn't matter what the denomination or what nationality, testosterone's
- 25:00 testosterone and it speaks loudly and clearly. It's a biological fact.
- 25:06 **You mentioned in passing the boyfriend of sorts that you had for a while that you saw irregularly, but when you did catch up what would you do, where did you go?**
- 25:18 There was really nowhere to go. Nowhere to have any privacy or anything, which was probably a good thing at that time. Possibly I could've
- 25:30 booked into a hotel or something but that was not my nature. It was a real new game for me. I didn't do that. Perhaps there were opportunities, but I didn't take them. It was all an ideal. It was a Hollywood ideal of romance and probably the first romance that I'd ever had in my life and it's in an unreal
- 26:00 situation so therefore it can't be real. It's an ideal. You blow it out of proportion in your mind as you do when you're with your first romance and you think that it's all fantastic and perfect, but it's only because you've closed your eyes to the facts. My mind is made up, don't confuse me with the facts. So yeah, it petered out. He was shipped back to America when I went back to Australia because my Dad
- 26:30 had died. That was basically the end of it. I think we wrote a few letters to each other and then he got married and life goes on.
- 26:41 **The girl that you moved in with, the Vietnamese family, can you tell us about that situation? And what you gained from that?**
- 26:48 In a way it was similar to where I had just left except that they were all Vietnamese and nobody was doing
- 27:00 anything that I felt uncomfortable with, basically. They were just an ordinary Vietnamese family that were good enough to take me in. They really went out of their way to accommodate my likes and dislikes in food etcetera. I love fish and I love fruit and vegetables, you know, they made sure that they went to the markets and everything was so fresh and beautiful. They also knew that I was travelling and that

- 27:30 they were still going to get their weekly amount of money. They were really kind to me, they treated me, they accepted me and I think that's a big thing for an oriental who doesn't know a person that's come from a Western civilisation and completely, sort of civilisation, very different to what they've been through. My experiences were so different to theirs and yet
- 28:00 that was what endeared them to me. They were so hospitable and they went out of their way to make me comfortable and beyond what I was paying them for. I was paying them for a bed basically. They went way beyond that. So I loved those people. I loved them. I felt a very strong bond with them and as my language, my Vietnamese got a little bit better I was able to show them
- 28:30 that I was grateful for their help. Because really they were, they made my life more comfortable while I was there. I'd love to visit the country again. I would love to visit the country again, it's a really beautiful country.
- 28:47 **Do you know what happened to that family?**
- 28:49 No, I don't know. I tried to locate them. I may be able to go back in to Saigon and find them and locate them because I know where the place was,
- 29:00 but it may have changed so much in 36 years that I may never find them again. The elderly mama san possibly isn't with us anymore anyway. And her family may not remember me. 36 years is long time so maybe nobody's there anymore.
- 29:22 **Very silly question, did you learn to sing any Vietnamese songs?**
- 29:27 No. It's a shame isn't
- 29:30 it? When I sang in so many other languages that I wasn't able to do that. The Vietnamese people are really beautiful people, they really are beautiful people. I think a lot of people who are persecuted for as long as the Vietnamese people were, they have something extra, an added quality to their being perhaps, that makes them beautiful that opens the heart a little bit more. That's how I found those
- 30:00 people. I could go and live there any time. I actually thought because I spent a whole year there and I travelled the country so extensively I could have easily gone back there and lived. Even though I wouldn't and my life was here, it ended up being elsewhere also for many years, but I know my life's here. Now especially because my next step, so I've been told by my guides, my next step is to start doing
- 30:30 healing work with the indigenous people. I have no concept of that at this stage, how that will eventuate, but I'm sure it will because of the experiences I've already had with them. A part of that is through my own psychic experience while I was in Mount Warning and I went to climb the mountain for the first time, and two big brown arms came out of the air and pushed my shoulders and I was sent reeling backwards and
- 31:00 landed on my backside. I didn't really know why that had happened until I consulted one of the indigenous elders and was told that there were borer rings in that place where I was and I must be extremely intuitive because the elders were there to protect me. Otherwise I might've have died. So that was my first experience and then in November last year I went to Kalgoorlie to see my daughter, and I drove and I camped in the desert, and I knew wherever I went, it was a female
- 31:30 area or a male area or an initiation area, I knew, I felt it. There were times when I got out of the car and vomited and other times when I wept uncontrollably and I knew it wasn't my stuff. I've been told now for a number of years that I would do this. So I guess that's what I'll be doing, but I just don't know how at this point.
- 31:53 **You told us about the experience with the van where your guides told you...**
- 32:00 Absolutely, the guides saved our lives. My word, yes.
- 32:04 **Then you went back to Australia, came back to Vietnam on your second tour of duty, because you'd realised that you can't argue with the guides, were they asking you to take off the shirt before?**
- 32:27 No. I was hot.
- 32:30 Not everything has to do with my guides.
- 32:33 **When you were coming back to Vietnam, did that change things the fact that you'd sort of accepted that?**
- 32:40 Yes, but I think the thing, I think what changed things most was the fact that I was travelling with an Australian band, and I hated the fact that that changed things, but did. We were treated differently everywhere we went, in every base.

- 33:00 Not necessarily at the Australian bases I have to say. But definitely at the Australian bases we were treated differently.
- 33:09 **Differently, how?**
- 33:11 Whereas before I'd been the round-eyed person and the white person and the so-called 'civilised' person and I really hate saying that because it's
- 33:30 not from me, it's from them and the way I was made to feel because of that. In the previous tours with the Korean band and the Filipino band I was treated differently from them and had to constantly fight for rights I had for them. Whereas that was all taken for granted with the Australian band and there was no discrimination whatsoever. We were all treated
- 34:00 like kings. It should not have been that way.
- 34:07 **It made you see how tough it had been for the other bands.**
- 34:11 Yes. I already knew that, and that's why I had fought for. I was outraged if I was offered something and they weren't. For me to come into where it's air conditioned, whereas my friends can stay outside where it's hot and have their drink out there. I'm sorry,
- 34:30 I won't deal with that. Not ever in my life do I believe that I will deal with that. I'm a very strong person so that experience made me a lot stronger. Yes unfortunately, we were treated differently, sadly. That is a real slight against a nation.
- 34:57 When you used to desegregate the audience, did you get any feedback from those guys after, seeing the result?
- 35:08 I got a lot of flack in the beginning, but I don't believe I got any flack afterwards. In fact I think some rather strong friendships were forged. Because when I went back to those places where I had been, and I went to some places three and four times in the course of a year,
- 35:30 they were actually very proud to show me that they were all sitting together and that I didn't need to do that, stop the show to do that. So we all learn as we go along. We can't learn any other way but by us showing others.
- 35:51 **You've told us about some of the shows where you fell off the stage and that sort of thing, are there any other shows that stand out for you in particular?**
- 35:56 The one that I did at the Bob Hope
- 36:00 Theatre, that was incredible because there were so many men there. It was more than 10,000 and I'd never worked to such a big audience before. So basically when I came on stage it was a sea of faces as far as the eye could see, and it was mind boggling. I understand when the footballers go into a final, you know it's the Aussie Rules, it's very different to
- 36:30 when they're playing a weekly game because you go in for the final and there's something like 80,000 or however many people the stands hold, and the energy carries you because it has its own momentum. That's what happened at the Bob Hope Theatre because there were so many men there and the energy was massive, it was a real swell of energy. So when people applauded it brought the house down, it was a fantastic
- 37:00 experience. I've never ever worked to that many people before or ever since. That was extraordinary. There were some shows where, because it was a smaller room, maybe a smaller group of people they were more intimate and perhaps I was able to get a little closer to them. But I know that the shows moved people. I know that. That was the feedback, the main feedback that I got.
- 37:30 That it had lifted them above where they were, whether they were homesick or whether they'd just got letters from their girlfriends saying that they gone and married somebody else, whatever was going on in their lives. And the human condition dictates that pretty well that something is going to be going on in our lives most of the time, whether it's tragedy or change or whatever it is, everybody goes through it. The feedback that I did get was that I'd made a huge difference.
- 38:00 And that was the most gratifying thing of all, of my whole trip, that I'd made a difference.
- 38:12 **Just going back to the Bob Hope Theatre, who was on the bill?**
- 38:16 Just me.
- 38:19 **Just your band?**
- 38:20 Yes, just me and my band.

38:22 **How many people?**

38:22 Well over 10,000. I've got a photo in amongst the photos there and it's a sea of faces. That's all it is, a sea of faces.

38:30 People hanging out of trees, hanging off jeeps, personnel carriers and on the backs of trucks dancing, and just thousands upon thousands of people. I don't even know where they all came from. It was phenomenal that so many people can come to one venue for one show. Just me,

39:00 I was nobody. I wasn't Bob Hope or whoever does all those shows. Ben Grable and all those ones that did those shows. I was nobody. 10,000 people just coming to see a show and it gives you an idea of how far they were prepared to go and to what ends they were prepared to go to have a bit of entertainment and a bit of a laugh, and a bit of pleasure and joy in their lives.

39:30 **They must have thought pretty highly of you and the band to have you there?**

39:35 We were very highly respected for the fact that we even went. Yes. That was the main thing, that we actually left a secure environment, made the trip, which was not a small trip, it's like 10 hours in a plane, and live the way they were living, didn't ask for any further comforts than that,

40:00 just accepted whatever we got at whatever base and they were all different. Some had facilities, some didn't and that was appreciated. More than anyone could even express. That was shown by the fact that they didn't know what to give me first, they would've given me anything that I'd asked for basically. But I wasn't there to ask, I was there to offer.

40:28 **You were saying how difficult it has been to receive acknowledgement from the government here, impossible, it seems that most of the involvement you had with the military was with the Americans?**

40:47 I did over 500 shows for the Americans, whereas I did probably less than one hundred for the Australians. The Americans were the ones that moved me around.

40:58 **Do you think that if you'd come from America and gone back to America you would have that acknowledgement?**

41:02 I don't know. Some of the Americans tried to get me that acknowledgement from America, and nothing eventuated from that either. Possibly if I'd have been an American I would have got that. If I'd gone back to there to live. I wasn't a person from another country. Possibly, but I can't really answer that question.

41:30 All I know is that I'm not the one that has attempted to get that acknowledgement, it has been the Vietnam veterans all along and they have really worked very, very hard and put in a lot of hours and a lot of effort to make submissions to every single government, this person was here, this person did an amazing job for us, not for herself, she didn't get anything from it, except sick, she did it for us, she should be acknowledged and we've been ignored every single time.

Tape 7

01:00 **In the notes that we got there was a mention of your mother and your grandfather having been psychic healers.**

01:11 Yeah, that's right. My mother and my mother's whole family basically, all through the generations have been healers. It was passed to me. I became a healer but I didn't know that I was a healer, of course. For a very long time I didn't know.

01:30 Then it went through to my children also and my daughter, when my daughter was eight I had collapsed with an asthma attack. I walked in to my son's room and he'd been cleaning everything with methylated spirits and spreading it around and I breathed it in and that was the end of my being able to breathe in. I asked my son to call an ambulance and my daughter said to me, "I'll fix you, Mummy." And she put her hand on my chest, and she was eight, and within seconds my lungs opened up and I was able to breathe.

02:00 That was much earlier than I discovered anything like that. I asked her, "What did you do?" And she said, "I fixed you." And I said, "Yes, I know you fixed me, but how did you know what to do?" And she said, "It was easy. I just put my hands on you the way the people put their hands on me in my room when I'm sick." And I went, "Oh, ok." How do you deal with a kid like that? And then she just went off to play. It was completely normal for her.

02:30 It took me much longer, I think it took me until I was in my 20s before I realised that I had healing and then because I'm a touching person somebody came to me, feeling bad and so I touched them, put my arms around them, gave them a hug and they said to me, "I don't know what you just did but my headache went and I feel so much better." I went 'oh, ok'. I think it comes through me, it doesn't come

- from me. And now I give healing
- 03:00 a lot to people. People come and request it. It's part of what I do.
- 03:09 **So your mother, what did she practice?**
- 03:12 Well I guess coming from, her part of the family are Scottish, and so therefore it was an accepted thing in her family and so if ever I was sick
- 03:30 she would put her hands on me and the heat that came out of her hands was phenomenal. I didn't experience that from my grandfather because my grandfather died when I was about nine and so I didn't remember that about him. I remembered that he painted like Albert Namatjira and he was very funny and clever artistically. He made all the props for the Tivoli Theatre and the back drops he painted. So he was very creative and when he laughed his top false teeth used to fall down.
- 04:00 That was basically what I remember about my grandfather because I was too young. Certainly too young to know about the healing side of it. Now healing comes through me whether I like it or not, whether I'm tired or not, whether I'm sick or not it just pours out sometimes. I offer it to whoever's around. Usually I will pick up the pain the person is feeling and be able to pin point where they're feeling it.
- 04:30 So that's just a part of the gifts that I'm here with. The part of the contract that I came into this life with. Because I believe we all have a contract and we all fulfil that contract at some point in our life, according to what we have learned along the way.
- 04:48 **I guess that's the other aspect perhaps for you, in being in Vietnam and seeing children who were sick and mother's with babies, you said earlier, there was nothing you could do.**
- 05:05 There was nothing I could do, but the desire to heal was very powerful even though I didn't know that I could heal. I didn't know that I had that gift at that time. But the desire was there and the desire being there was a rather overwhelming thing because there were hundreds of women with hundreds of babies and I couldn't have healed all of them.
- 05:30 I just couldn't, there were too many people hurting, everyone was hurting in some way. They were either hurting because they were injured, or because they were homesick, or they were hurting because they were being persecuted or tortured, or their men had been taken off and they didn't have any idea where they were. Everybody was hurting for some reason. I couldn't heal everybody.
- 06:00 That's a big awakening that part of it. Even, you know, with my daughter it was, I really saw that as a huge responsibility for her, and I took her to a very famous healer in the area at that time and asked him if he would talk to her because I didn't want her to feel burdened by it. She won't heal anybody now, she's 26 and going through whatever it is she's going through at the moment. And she'll come back to it
- 06:30 because that's her gift and her guides won't allow her not to. So whatever she's going through now I understand is she's collecting that experience in order to empathise with the people she heals later. Even though she doesn't know that yet.
- 06:48 **So you didn't have that awareness in Vietnam?**
- 06:50 No. I didn't. I knew that I was clairvoyant and hear voices even if I didn't know
- 07:00 how to name it. I knew that much, but I hadn't started to actually do readings for people or nowadays that's what I do. I can take a birth date from a person that has come to me as a homeopathic patient and know automatically that they're problems go back to when their father was beating them up as a child. They don't know how I know that and I can't explain how I know that, but I do know
- 07:30 that it's part of the healing process to name the problem and that it wasn't their fault and there are ways to heal that. So a lot of my work is in that area, healing emotional problems from childhood and bringing them to the surface when a person can't function any other way. It's a big part of my life now,
- 08:00 but I don't think I was aware of it then. I knew I heard voices and it was Vietnam that made me realise that the voices were there to help me, not hinder me.
- 08:14 **So with the clairvoyancy which includes having the gift of hearing the voices when you were in Vietnam, you were travelling through rural areas a lot that were relatively untouched places, still very traditional in the way people used that land, did that have an affect on you? In amongst all this craziness?**
- 08:47 The profound beauty had an affect on me. So much so that I've never forgotten some of those areas that I visited and went back to visit again and again with my
- 09:00 shows. The mountainous areas were the ones I found the most beautiful because they were the ones that were the least touched and the least damaged. Whereas the cities and populated areas were areas that had been bombed. So I guess the mountain areas were the most pristine and some of the most

beautiful country I've ever seen in the world. It was my affinity with the people I think that was a shock to me,

09:30 I didn't expect to become friends with the people. I was there to entertain the troops. I hadn't really thought about the people to be honest, I didn't know anything about the Vietnamese people. So it was a real eye opener. I felt such an affinity for them, I don't know why, I just did. I don't know Vietnamese people here in Australia, which is really strange that I don't know any.

10:00 I've met one or two, in passing. One man used to fix the radiator of my car and he was Vietnamese and he knew I'd been in Vietnam and, you know, we related on that level but otherwise I don't know very many. That hasn't been where my work has taken me. My healing work basically is my life. I've written four books and it's all to do with my healing and

10:30 my psychic ability basically.

10:34 **So were those clairvoyant powers, apart from the voice, that guided you when you were under attack, did they surface in any other ways when you were in Vietnam?**

10:44 When I was diagnosed with malaria I was told by them it's time to go home. I don't always obey the voices because I don't always do as I'm told. I'm a rebel. I guess they know

11:00 that and so they go along with me and a little bit later they'll tell me again, "I think it's time to go home." If I still don't obey I become ill and I have to go home, so I didn't have a choice towards the end. I was forced home. That was the voices telling me that I should have done it months ago, but I had, I was there for a year and I expected to be there for a year, I didn't expect to go home in 10 months. I'd committed myself

11:30 for a year and that's what I expected to do, sick or not. Because you're in show business that's what you do in show business, you know, the show goes on and I'd been in show business at that time easy 10 years. You sing whether or not you're sick, or whether or not you've got the flu, whether or not you feel like it, whether or not the kids have woken you up for the whole night. You still sing, because if you don't somebody else is going to take your

12:00 job, that's the way of show business. So you work. So it didn't even occur to me to go home. I would have just pushed on and made myself a whole lot sicker probably, but I wasn't allowed.

12:15 **You had been singing when you had bronchitis and pleurisy?**

12:20 I had all that while I was there. I had all kinds of stuff. I had constant thrush from driving around in the heat in the cars. I had to have an operation when

12:30 I got home because it was so bad. They didn't have gynaecologists and people there to treat me. They were doctors, that's it. They were dealing with men and men's problems and then I come along and say, "Listen I've got this," and they'd say "Well I don't know what we're going to do for you." So that was a real problem, I put up with a lot of stuff. Just being in that heat all the

13:00 time and if you scratch yourself it breaks out into a topical ulcer so that's also a problem because you can't avoid walking around and not scratching yourself. Especially me, I'm the clumsiest person in history, put a hole in the middle of the ground and there'll be miles around it but I'll be the one that will fall into the hole. That happens and I've scars on my legs from things that didn't heal.

13:30 **You had a lot of pressure didn't you? You had to look good, perform, but you were up against it?**

13:38 Yes I was really up against it. Especially towards the end, and my health was failing and my energy levels were failing and I have very high energy levels as a rule. And some of the things you put up with too, you'd go to a place and the only loo that there would be would be out in the middle of nowhere, full of bugs and god knows

14:00 what, bullfrogs down the bowl. There'd be two holes there, and the GI s would sit next to each other and they'd be having a yak. I couldn't do that! I like my privacy for such things. I'd have to choose times also when the rush was off basically. There were other times in Vietnamese toilets

14:30 where I'd go and they would give you one little square of paper from the roll and that was your lot and that was all you got. You had to make do with it, no matter what, whether you tore it up into little strips they didn't care, you know, that was all you got. No water to wash with afterwards and it was literally a hole in the ground buzzing with flies. That was what they were used to. They were used to having animals in their houses with them

15:00 and stuff. It's quite a different life and it's a good eye opener and education. I think every child should have that sort of education. Where they are shown a different way of life and that people live differently and that not everybody is successful and not everybody lives in middle class. I think every child should be shown that so that they understand that the education that they're getting is something precious and not to throw away. There are other kids that never

- 15:30 get that education or that opportunity. This is the land of opportunity and we take it for granted. So yes, I was up against it for all of the time really, because it was so hot and so oppressive and no showers and nowhere to escape, and nowhere to lie down if I felt tired.
- 15:52 **Did you come back to Saigon very much?**
- 15:54 Yes a fair bit because that was the base. So if we were going north
- 16:00 from south and we were driving we arrived in Saigon and we'd spend a night or whatever there at the villa. Sometimes we were playing around Saigon so we came back to Saigon every night. So it just depended where we were, how often we came back. Sometimes it would be weeks and my letters, my mail came there and sometimes I wouldn't get mail for three weeks even though I wrote home every day, every single day, because my parents were just distraught that
- 16:30 I was there, and my father was ill. So yeah, I wrote every single day.
- 16:38 **It must have been sad for you, not just learning about your father's death, but it coming late?**
- 16:44 That was terrible. It was really terrible. Because I had no warning apart from the fact that I knew he'd had a heart attack, he had another one while I was away
- 17:00 and he'd said to me, "Don't stay away for too long because I'm not going to be with you much longer." And I'd gone on the plane howling my eyes out because of that. I really loved my Dad and so it was a very, very hard time. Very, very hard. And very hard for my mother. I look back now and you know, here she is, she's 52 and that's not old, at that age I thought that was old you know, she's more than twice my age, wow that's old. 52 to lose your husband is
- 17:30 very young and so I see that she also had a hard time. And I didn't stay in Australia when I came back, I pissed off. I went to England to work and I went to America and worked and then I went everywhere else and worked.
- 17:48 **With your returning to Vietnam did it cross your mind, after when you came back after your father's death did it cross your mind to not go back to Vietnam?**
- 18:00 No. No, I'd committed myself and besides I'd been loaned a considerable amount of money to get home and so it didn't occur to me for even one nanosecond that I wouldn't go back and repay that money. It just didn't cross my mind not to go back. That's part of personal integrity I think, that was just me.
- 18:30 Maybe somebody else in the situation would have been able to justify extremely well by not going back, but I couldn't. And I couldn't have lived with myself. I had committed myself and I took that very seriously. I don't commit myself to a lot of things in life, but if I do commit myself to something I do it 120 per cent. I think I mentioned
- 19:00 before we started filming that people who have been brought up the way I was brought up either become over-achievers or drug addicts. I couldn't become a drug addict because I was asthmatic and the drugs didn't work well with me so I became an over-achiever instead. That's my job. I have done that, I know I've done that.
- 19:24 **Did you go back with a renewed enthusiasm?**
- 19:27 Yes I did because I had a different band.
- 19:30 Different songs, and Freddy Marsh the saxophone player had a fabulous voice and so he did a lot of those incredible songs from the era of Fifth Dimension songs. Yeah, I did go back with renewed interest and because we were received in such a different way I think, apart from the fact that that devastated me from what I'd experienced
- 20:00 before with the other bands, that part was also nice because we were given a few luxuries that I hadn't experience before.
- 20:09 **How did you get these boys together?**
- 20:10 I didn't do that. Les Mazlier did that from Show Group Management. He was the one who introduced us and said, "This is the band that you are going to be travelling with, what are you going to sing?" So I told him what I'd been singing and he said, "Well I think we can update a few of those songs now.
- 20:30 So you'll be doing this, this and this." "Oh all right." A bit more soul music just to test the voice out a bit. That was fine, I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed going beyond my boundaries and I think voice-wise it pushed me a bit beyond my boundaries. That was a good thing it didn't hurt me at all.
- 20:52 **So Freddy Marsh was the sax player, who else was in the band?**
- 20:54 Ricky was the guitarist,

- 21:00 isn't that terrible, the names have gone, I've got them written down. But I guess they were the two I was most friendly with. I didn't get so close to the bass player or the drummer. The drummer's name was Darryl I remember, and he was the one that disappeared after Vietnam, so that must have affected him. I guess we travelled in a different way too because we travelled as mates that could communicate
- 21:30 with each other on any level, so that part was also different. I didn't spend as much time on my own as I had done previously and probably that was a good thing too. It was different when I went back. The film was the same but the names had change, you know what I mean. It was similar in a lot of ways but in the way we were received it was different. It was one thing to have
- 22:00 one round-eye but to have a whole band of them was quite different. So it was good.
- 22:09 **Are you saying that you got better treatment overall?**
- 22:13 Yes. That was the thing that upsets me most.
- 22:15 **Like accommodation?**
- 22:17 Not so much accommodation because there's only a certain amount of military accommodation, you know, it's a tent or a tent basically, a cot or a cot. That part doesn't change, but
- 22:30 suddenly we were offered steaks in the officers' mess where we'd never been offered anything like that before. The boys were given alcohol, whereas my other bands were never offered alcohol. There were differences and those differences, because I'm an observant person who hates such differences, they were very stark to me.
- 23:00 We went to restaurants a couple of times too and I was served the buffalo steak, have you ever seen a buffalo steak? You imagine the biggest dinner plate you can find and the buffalo steak will overlap it in every direction. It's just huge, there's no way you can eat it. It doesn't taste any different but I don't eat meat any more, but I did during that time because my strength came
- 23:30 from there I think. I don't think I could have managed to get through it if I didn't eat meat there.
- 23:36 **Where was that, in Saigon?**
- 23:38 Yes, Saigon. A buffalo steak, you don't expect it, there wasn't anything on the menu that said - you're now going to be served buffalo steak that's going to be bigger than anything you can possibly imagine, that's not what the menu said it just said 'steak'. Oh haven't had a steak for a long while, that'll give me some strength, I'll have a steak,
- 24:00 and when it arrives you go, "Oh, is that what I asked for? Must be if that's what I got." And then you ask and they said, "Yeah, buffalo." "Oh okay, buffalo is a big animal." It probably would have fed several families for a week that meal that I was offered in one sitting. I was always aware of that too, that the resources of
- 24:30 the ordinary people wouldn't have permitted them to eat like that. So yes, those things stuck out in my mind. The girls that were forced to prostitute themselves, there was no other income, that stuck out in my mind. They were only girls, they were young girls. That's stuck in my mind as something really awful and I already knew intuitively what their end would be and what
- 25:00 would happen to them because of what they were doing. There were a lot of things that have never left me.
- 25:09 **So where were the prostitutes? Just Saigon?**
- 25:10 All of the towns had prostitutes. Most of the bases had prostitutes. There were always Vietnamese people working on the bases doing laundry and the menial type of tasks that the American's didn't want to do or the Australian's didn't want to do. There were always Vietnamese on the bases and that was a problem because they didn't
- 25:30 ever know who was Viet Cong and who wasn't and sometimes they were Viet Cong. They found out the hard way, but you know, they still employed people to do these menial tasks and so there were Vietnamese people working on the bases. And taking medicines and selling it and taking food and selling it and that's human nature. Everyone becomes an opportunist when
- 26:00 you have nothing.
- 26:03 **So these women who were cleaning or doing menial tasks were moonlighting as prostitutes?**
- 26:08 Oh probably. Why wouldn't you? The men were offering huge sums of money. They offered huge sums of money to me, five hundred dollars, a thousand dollars, my entire savings but I wasn't there to take their money, or to get involved, in that respect. But if that much money is offered
- 26:30 of course they'd take it. They'd be mad not to. That could feed them for a whole year. That could

educate every brother and sister that they have. So of course they are going to do that. That's the sad part of war.

26:47 **You said that you learned a little bit of Vietnamese, did you ever have conversations with Vietnamese people with an interpreter?**

27:03 No. Never. It possibly would have been a very good thing to do, but I think I'd have surrounded myself with a lot of mistrust from the Americans had I done something like that. Because they would then have wanted to know what I knew that they didn't. I probably knew a lot that they didn't, because whether they were American or Australian military personnel,

27:30 they were there to do a job and they did that job in the one area. Some of them were rovers and travelled and whatever, and scouts, but most of them stayed as a group in the same area experiencing the same things. Whereas I was all over the country experiencing different things and observing constantly. So I saw a lot. I probably saw more than most of the military personnel that were there.

28:00 **Did you find that you had to be careful about what you said?**

28:05 To certain people, yes. I wouldn't talk to the lifers for instance, the ones whose career was army. I wouldn't have spoken to them because they would have betrayed me instantly. They would have gone to a higher source and possibly I would have been tossed out of Vietnam or not allowed to do shows for the Americans. They're a very suspicious race about such things,

28:30 the heads of state, not the people. The people are the opposite to that and the people talk, they just didn't think twice about telling me these things, they needed to get it off their chest, I think, it was very important for them to tell me a lot of these things. But I didn't go asking. I'm just a safe terminal for people to unburden themselves with me. I hope I've put the burden

29:00 down at some point, but I carried it for some time. Didn't see it as a burden at the time, but it was heavy and it stayed with me. I think it was 16 years later when I wrote about 400 pages in book form in chronological order from all my letters and I spent, however many months it took to write it all, maybe six

29:30 months or a year, and I spent most of it howling my eyes out and that was the best catharsis I could have had because that enabled me to put it down.

29:37 **So what was sad about what you were reading?**

29:39 The fact that the children would have no future. Many of the children would die as a direct result of the war. Many of the people would get cancer and die as a direct result of what their ground had been sprayed with.

30:00 They were innocent people, they didn't deserve that, they'd been oppressed for years. They'd had nothing for years. There wasn't anything more to take from these people except their lives. They were scratching out a living on paddies that had been rocketed and bombed and didn't grow anymore rice, their cattle had been killed. I suffer for other people.

30:28 **What about you, as the woman who had written the letters you had read quite some time after you'd come back from Vietnam?**

30:47 Oh, as that writer, me?

30:51 **Yes, did that affect you?**

30:52 Deeply. Deeply. I haven't touched them since, those letters, I haven't opened them up, it's like a Pandora's box because

31:00 I wrote in details and I wrote from my heart, as I always write what I feel. And my observations obviously were very keen and my feelings were very powerful. The affect that it had on me was very powerful to instigate those deep feelings. I'll never forget those things. How the government can say that there was no proof that I was there, all they have to do is examine my heart. They'll find out.

31:30 I was touched very deeply by the country, by the people, by the plight of the men that were there that didn't want to be there, who knew they were being used, who were getting out of it in anyway they could in order to try to numb the feelings that they didn't want to feel. It was all painful. Every bit of it was painful, there isn't anything about a war that's good.

31:58 **Yeah, but I'm just thinking about the letters and what you would have had a need to express about what you were observing, but what else were you telling your parents and your relatives about the war?**

32:29 There were so many

32:30 boys that came to those shows who needed to unburden themselves at some stage about the fact that

they'd lost a brother, they'd lost a friend, they'd watched that friend die in front of them in agony and they couldn't do anything to help them. They'd lost the brother that they'd promised their parents they would look after and felt responsible for that.

33:00 These were the things that I heard every day and these were the things that I wrote home about. These were the things that affected me and will always affect me. I know from the tragedy of my own life that parts of you numb out so that you can continue in your life. But there is no such thing as closure, there's no such thing as forgetting those things and it becoming easier, it doesn't become easier. All that happens is

33:30 that the human life form is so resourceful that they will find ways to survive in spite of it. It doesn't mean that it's easier for them and it doesn't mean they've forgotten and it certainly doesn't mean that it is less powerful with time. It's not. Closure doesn't exist in the world. They say you have to do this for closure

34:00 but that's just bullshit, closure doesn't exist. You spoke to men whose experiences had happened sixty years ago and they remember them like they were last week, how much closure have those men had? There's your answer. You can't go through an experience like that and not be burned and for it not to change your life. You can't

34:30 put those experiences anywhere because you have nowhere to put them, you have don't have a filing box that says this is for all the tragedy in my life and I'll put it all in there and I won't have to deal with it. You deal with it daily. Whatever decision you make and however you treat people is because of those experiences. You would never want to be treated that way, you wouldn't want people to dismiss your pain, you wouldn't want people to

35:00 tell you it's all in your head, when you know that it's not. This is what every Vietnam veteran and every veteran of every war has had to deal with. Stiff upper lip. Get on with it. And you do, you try to get on with it the best way you can or you don't as the case may be. I've lost a lot of friends that couldn't get on with it. Couldn't just go back to their lives.

35:30 Couldn't live with it. Overdose, shot themselves, hung themselves. They'll find a way.

35:39 **This is through your work with the Vietnam veterans?**

35:42 Yes.

35:46 **So how closely are you connected to them?**

35:49 I have a couple of very close friends, they're like brothers. One who's tried to commit suicide a number of times, has had nervous breakdowns

36:00 because he can't come to terms with what he's experienced.

36:08 **How useful do you think counselling is?**

36:11 I think that it has its place depending on the counsellor, depending on whether the counsellor has had those experiences. Somebody told me that as a sexually abused child I should never allow a counsellor to counsel

36:30 me unless they themselves have been sexually abused because that person can't relate to my pain. How can they, if they haven't had that experience? So a lot of the veterans have that experience. They would tell a counsellor things and the counsellor doesn't relate to those things, so how can the counsellor assist them to put it into perspective. What is the perspective for tragedy? We're not taught anything in our lives to

37:00 deal with tragedy. We're left to our devices basically in the Western world. In the Eastern world they have a greater acceptance of everything and that is the Buddhist way. What you don't accept you won't endure. Acceptance is always a part of it. A lot of the veterans witnessed things that they can never accept.

37:30 I understand that through the tragedy that I've gone through in my life. There are things I'll never accept until the day I die, because I can't come to terms with those things. I can't find a place in my mind to place those things, there's no comprehension that equals it. So therefore there's nowhere to put it. It just stays there around you as an energy that's there.

38:00 It affects you physically whether you like it or not. All the agents, not just Agent Orange, that everyone that was there was sprayed with, the civilians included, that has caused problems, a further set of problems for the veterans. And for me too. I was fortunate that I met a man who taught me homeopathy because he was the only one that gave me hope

38:30 that I would live. I'd been dismissed by the orthodox community and given a time limit. This man being a homeopath as well as physician actually gave me hope and said, "Yes, you'll live but it's going to be a long hard climb back. I can only take you half way. You have to come the rest of the way."

38:55 **So how did you come to be submitting to the Agent Orange Commission?**

39:00 I think that there was some sort of newspaper or radio, or television maybe, thing that went out and said that anyone who had spent more than a week in Vietnam during the war would they please come forward and maybe they would be chosen for the Agent Orange Commission. I replied and when they asked me where I was I had to submit my schedule

39:30 and they wanted me to give evidence then. But the thing is I'd been in so many places where Agent Orange had been sprayed and the other agents that I was so deeply affected by it, I then became a liability. I could, if the government acknowledged that I was there then it's like telling the indigenous people that 'yes there was a stolen generation'. They'll ask for compensation.

40:00 The government don't want to do that so it's better not to say you're sorry then they are not going to be asked for anything. It sucks. But that's the way it is, that's the reality of the situation. Part of the reason I believe that I'm not acknowledged is because they don't want any future time to occur when I might ask for compensation. Whether that is a reality or not, I don't know,

40:30 but it sounds pretty feasible to me, knowing what I know.

40:36 **You've obviously followed the Agent Orange issue, you've researched.**

40:45 Very closely actually. There's a letter in there from a man called George Claxton in America who's the leading mind on it and he really is a mind and he was a Viet veteran who has been affected very deeply and

41:00 he really is a genius in the area. I have a lot of friends in Australia who are very, very up on it and send me all the latest stuff on it constantly.

41:18 **There hasn't been a class action, has there?**

41:19 There's been several, but the pharmaceutical companies in America have squashed every one of them. There was a class action and a

41:30 certain amount of a million dollars was granted but because so many people in Australia were affected that they ended up getting \$150 each. It was just madness. It was an insult. These people, a lot of their children are living in bubbles, they are not able to live in the environment because they are so chemically sensitive because of what their father's have been through, that if they don't have congenital problems, they have

Tape 8

00:46 And I was working with a man who was playing trumpet in his band occasionally, by the name of Billy Tragassa [?], and I was working with him and he was a piano player as well and he had his own band. In New York I was working with him because he worked

01:00 with Chick, he introduced me to Chick Corea. Then that all happened with Flora and she was gaoled and he was without a singer. He went to the government on my behalf and he really went to bat for me, but the Americans wouldn't have a bar of it and they wouldn't let me stay and they kicked me out. That was the end of that. I came back here and I sang with the Warren Ford Trio for a very long time,

01:30 and in fact, Warren Ford is the father of my son. Then I moved on to different bands, worked with Col Nolan band for a long while in Sydney and different bands. I continued to work until I had my own band at a place called the American National Club in Macquarie Street in Sydney. I had this wonderful band and I had my choice of musicians and I had a 360 degree view of the

02:00 Harbour, and it was really a cushy job. Then I was told by a spirit, "You know you're going to have to stop doing this, you're going to be writing books." And I said, "Don't be silly I'm not a writer." I didn't have anything to write a book about. "I'm not doing that I'm having a good time." So I continued my singing for another 12 months and in that time I got extremely sick and I had to stop. I moved with my kids to

02:30 the Central Coast in New South Wales and I woke up a couple of mornings later with 30 pages written out during the night. It turned out to be the first chapter of my first book and that's how it worked. I thought at the time this is really easy, if I'm going to get a book dictated to me like this, go for it. I'll do it during the night and I'll still be able to carry on my normal life. But it didn't

03:00 work like that. I think the first thing that struck me when I first looked at those 30 pages was how on earth I did that. It's in my hand writing, it's between the lines. Were my eyes open at the time? Was there a light on? How does anyone write 30 pages in the middle of the night while they're asleep? And then I realised the content and it was all about numerology and I knew that I knew nothing about numerology.

- 03:30 So I had to start learning about what was coming through because it all came through very fast, but not while I was asleep. I was actually forced to work for it and do it that way. It took me the next four years to write 200 pages. That was my first book and it sold in America and England and I went all over the place and promoted it. I thought at that time it was so hard
- 04:00 to do with the kids, and the publisher had to finally get a nanny for me to help me with the kids because it would never have been finished, it was just too hard, couldn't do it. It was really hard for me. I had never written anything before, more than a letter or a short article, and so therefore I had all this information that had been given to me but I had to put it on a gradient so that Joe Blow, whether he was 16 or 60 could understand it. That was the hard part for
- 04:30 me. I wrote it and rewrote it and I'm not computer literate, and so I fought with the computer, swore at it and lost whole chapters at times, and I guess did everything else that people that are frightened of computers do. I decided that's it. You are never ever going to get me like that again. I'll never ever write another book. I'm sorry how much you hit me over the head I won't do it. I remember the manuscript had gone off to the
- 05:00 publisher and they were really happy that it had arrived, finally, and they actually had a book to sell and I took my kids down to Terrigal Beach and I remember while they were playing on the beach, I just lay on the sand and closed my eyes and I couldn't, I was so brain dead and out of my body from the experience, it was a really painful time. And as I closed my eyes what was scrolling in front of my eyes was the first chapter of the next book.
- 05:30 So I wrote another book, some years later. I think the first one was published in 1983 and the second one was published in 1990 and I wrote the second one in six months, it flowed through so fast that I worked 20 hours a day. My kids kept my hours basically and didn't go to sleep until 11 or 12 at night. Went to school late, it was just the way it was. That book was also sold in America and England and all over the
- 06:00 place. It's been published in Chinese, Hungarian, Czech, Slovakian. I think they're working on Germany now. So that was translated into a lot of languages and then I published the third one in the year 2000. I'd written the book on Vietnam which was basically my first book which I don't know if I'll ever publish. I may. It was basically for a catharsis. All the books on numerology have been quite comprehensive and I've lectured all
- 06:30 over the world with interpreters on the subject because what came through seems to be very, very accurate. Now at the same time as that, in 1980, was when I got so sick and I was travelling backwards and forwards to Sydney to see this man, Dr Godfrey, who had agreed to treat me. I was doing that on a weekly basis and going
- 07:00 back to the Central Coast at that time and finally begged Dr Godfrey to teach me homeopathy. I finally became a homeopath. So now I practice as a homeopath and a healer, that's my full time practice and on the side I do healing and any other work that I can basically can do.
- 07:26 **Did you continue singing at all?**
- 07:28 Yes. I sang for something like
- 07:30 35 years of my life so that was more than half my life, two thirds of my life I sang. I still sing in rehearsals occasionally. My partner plays very different music from what I do. He's an old rocker and does blues and reggae and that's not what I sing so we don't often get together. But occasionally it happens and he'll do a couple of standards that I know and I'll sing or I'll do back-up vocals for him.
- 08:00 Or we'll have visitors and I'll sing something, usually if the fridge door opens and the light goes on I sing! It doesn't take much and it's something I love to do. And I paint. Post Vietnam War, I guess I have a pretty full life. I've had an amazing life really. I worked in England for a long time and I worked at the very famous jazz club,
- 08:30 I've now gone blank, on, Bobby, who was it? Ronnie Scott! Thank you. I worked there, thank you Colin [interviewer], and I worked with not so much memorable musicians in England but I did work with some terrific musicians and then I went to the States. I worked for the Evening Standard writing copy to earn some money.
- 09:00 When I got off the boat I had no money. I didn't have a penny in my pocket when I got off the ship. I worked my passage and I arrived in South Hampton and had to get to London and managed to do that somehow, I don't remember how to be honest. Had to get a job otherwise I couldn't have stayed the night. I walked into the Evening Standard thinking oh well, I can write. I've got English to back me up, good English. I can edit. I can do stuff like that.
- 09:30 So they put me into telephone sales which I really detested and I lasted about five days and I went in and threw my headset at the manager and said, "I'm more valuable than this. If you can't find something else for me to do then I've got to be out of here." He said, "All right. What else can you do?" So I told him all these things that I'd never done before in my entire life and he put me to work with one of them. I worked with the Evening Standard for the next two and a half years and I lived on a house boat on

- 10:00 the Thames in the north of London. That was amazing. So I went through all the seasons on the Thames, the daffodils and the crocuses, the tulips coming up on the river bank and that was amazing.
- 10:18 **Whereabouts on the Thames?**
- 10:19 In a place called Twickenham, Middlesex. A place called Strawberry Vale and so I got the overland train to Twickenham and then it was not a long walk to get to
- 10:30 Strawberry Vale and then down to the marina where I was renting this house boat. The house boat came about because when I was in the telephone sales in the Evening Standard for that first week, which was my first job there, a man rang up and he was advertising a 55 foot boat for sale, a house boat, for sale. I asked him why he wanted to sell it and he told me he was in trouble with taxation and he had to come up with so much money.
- 11:00 Because I'd been working for that week and I was getting a lot of overtime and stuff I said to him, "How about I rent the boat and I give you a lump sum of a year's rent in advance. That helps you out, you can pay your tax, you're exempt from all your debts. I get a really terrific place to live for that year." And it worked out fantastically. I lived there for two and a half years, it was just amazing. So that was terrific.
- 11:30 And then I went to America and that was how I got to know Billy Traggassa and then started working for him and started to sing with Chick Corea and I met Stanley Clarke, Thelonious Monk, quite a few other musicians that were working with him. They were just his mates. Again I was really unfortunate and I couldn't get my green card and I got tossed out, in fact I was treated so badly by
- 12:00 the Americans considering what I'd done and how many shows I'd given them. I was basically treated like a criminal. I was taken into a room and given the third degree and then kicked out extremely unceremoniously. Forced to pack up, you know, within an hour and escorted to the airport and put on a plane. I had no chance.
- 12:22 **How long had you been in America for?**
- 12:24 Eighteen months.
- 12:26 **So you'd been effectively working?**
- 12:28 Of course. I'd been
- 12:30 selling jewellery on Broadway for the first six months. Escaping the police as the walked along the street, ducking into doorways and stuff. I was making the jewellery I was selling. You become resourceful in such situations and you turn your hand to all kinds of things. I also did a course to teach illiterate adults and that was one of the things I did there that was really rewarding. I taught grown people that couldn't
- 13:00 read or write. I taught them how to form letters and how to write and how to sound out the letters and we followed a format we had to use. And one of my students wrote an anniversary card to his wife. For the first time in his entire life he'd written anything or been able to choose a card in a shop because he couldn't understand before if it said 'Happy Birthday' or 'Happy Easter' and he didn't want to make a fool of himself.
- 13:30 He was able to choose a card with the words he understood and give it to his wife, and I was really emotional about it, I think I cried for a long time. That was a very rewarding thing to do in America. Then I came back here and I worked solidly singing for a very long time, to well after I had the kids.
- 13:49 **What period were you in America?**
- 13:51 1972 I was there, 1971, 1972.
- 13:58 **So when the troops were coming home?**
- 14:00 Yes they were starting to come home, and I'd already been home for a year or so by then.
- 14:09 **What sort of venues were you playing in?**
- 14:12 Nightclubs. Really classy restaurants. We had some fabulous gigs where we were fed and treated like royalty and Billy's' band was just fabulous. He's made dozens of CDs [compact discs] since and his son has become a drummer.
- 14:30 I've stayed in close contact with him. He still gets a lot of work and he worked as an MD in Las Vegas for years with all the big acts back in Vietnam.
- 14:46 **So that must have been pretty amazing?**
- 14:48 It was fabulous. It was a fantastic experience.

14:52 **Did it challenge you as a singer?**

14:53 Absolutely. Gosh yes. Have you listened to that album Forever?

15:00 It was an amazing album, some of the arrangements on it are just fabulous. Yeah, of course it challenged me. Big time. Damn good thing too, I think.

15:12 **Under what name were you singing?**

15:14 Robin Russell.

15:16 **So you kept that?**

15:17 Yes, that stayed all the way through. There's people in Sydney who still know me as Robin Russell. I've written a lot of songs, wrote a lot of songs with Billy.

15:30 Nothing has ever become a hit, but I have written a lot. I've written with various artists and a piano player by the name of Serge Ermoll. I've written songs with him in Sydney. I've written quite a bit. Marc Isaacs, have you heard of Marc Isaacs? I sang with him and he played piano with my band, and wrote lyrics to one of his songs that [UNCLEAR] brought out called Once in a Dream.

16:00 So I've done a little bit like that but never hit the big time. I've been given a 'Jazz Lady of the Year' award. That was the biggest time I've hit.

16:09 **When was that ?**

16:11 I think 1972 or 73.

16:15 **Who presents the awards?**

16:17 That was given through Triple J, or one of those type of radio stations, it would be FM stations that gave me that.

16:30 So that was pretty big time.

16:33 **How much have you recorded?**

16:36 Very little. I've got very little on recording. In fact next time I go to Sydney I'm going to, I've already organised to get together with my ex, Warren Ford, he was musical director, for a long time, for the Platters and then for Marcia Hines for a long time, after I left the band. And then he was the musical director for the Show Boat for years and years.

17:00 He's just now ended all of that and so I've decided that I should do a CD with him and put out some of the songs that we did together, we used to do together, that people used to come and listen to all the time. I'd like to do that. So that's sort of in the future that I'll do that. It's something that I will do because I've got so little recorded.

17:25 **What have you got though?**

17:26 I've got ABC [Australian Broadcasting Commission] programmes and radio

17:30 programmes and things that I did with different bands and I've got a couple of my own songs that I've written that I've recorded with piano players. But basically I've got nothing. You know, nothing to pass down to my kids or show them what I've done. It's one of the things, one of the reasons I wanted to do this because this record's for posterity, my experiences, what I saw through my eyes, what I felt through my

18:00 heart and what I thought. It records that for my kids and my kids' kids. I'm really glad that you've given me the opportunity to do that.

18:13 **Do you feel like singing a song?**

18:16 [Laughs.] With my snotty nose? [Laughs] Are you going to open the fridge door for me? Oh golly that's come from left field hasn't it?

18:27 **Well think about it.**

18:30 I'll have to think about what I want to sing first.

18:33 **I'm curious as to why recordings passed you by or why you didn't have them, given they are an essential part, it seems to be very important to -**

- 18:42 It is now and CDs are really important and easy now, but going back 20 and 30 years ago it wasn't a thing unless you had a hit song you didn't really go into a recording studio and record, you just didn't. We used to record for ourselves and I remember being at,
- 19:00 I'm terrible with names, I remember being at a place in Sydney that was quite famous, where all the artists used to go and sing in the city. And I remember in a break the sound man had recorded me in the previous set and then played it in the break. I was saying, "Who is that
- 19:30 singer?" I didn't even recognise it as myself. Didn't think to ask for the tape. It's crazy but when you're in the middle of stuff like that and it's not what you do in that time it just didn't happen, sadly. I'm happy to sing you a song but I've got to have a puff of my Ventolin.
- 20:00 I'm going to sing an old standard, which I'm sure you'll know, and I'll start in a minute.
\n[Verse follows]\n
- 20:30 "Look at me, I'm as helpless as a kitten up a tree. And I feel like
- 21:00 I'm clinging to a cloud. I can't understand, I get misty just holding your hand. Walk my way and a thousand violins begin to play. Or it might be the sound of your hello,
- 21:30 that music I hear, I get misty whenever you're near. You can say that you're leading me on, but it's just what I want you to do. Don't you notice how hopelessly I'm lost.
- 22:00 That's why I'm following you. On my own, would I wander through this wonderland alone? Never knowing my right foot from my left, my hat from my glove. I get misty and too much in love.
- 22:30 I get misty and too much, too much in love."
I've got no voice at all.
- 22:55 That was beautiful.
- 22:55 I don't even want to hear it played back, to be honest.
- 23:04 I was actually reaching for notes that are no longer there without practice. Thank you. I'm not sure about that. Is that the end?
- 23:46 **I just have to ask you one thing. Did you sing that song in Vietnam, for the troops?**
- 23:48 No. I don't know that I could spontaneously sing any of those songs. Soul songs take your whole range and your whole velocity of sound and there's no way I was going to do that without a rehearsal.

INTERVIEW ENDS