

VICTOR HARBOR ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, '*Beside the Seaside*'.
Interview with Mr Ken Collins on 24th July 2014
Interviewer: Keith Percival.

Welcome Ken!

KC: Thank you.

Let's start at the very beginning. When were you born and where?

KC: I was born at the Uraidla District Hospital in 1932, on 19th July.

Tell me about your parents.

KC: My parents were Alice and Hector Collins and we lived at Forest Range in the Adelaide Hills and my father was an orchardist and a gardener, market gardener. We lived there until 1949.

1949, so you moved somewhere then did you?

KC: Here to Victor Harbor.

In '49.

KC: Yes.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

KC: I had two brothers younger than me and I had three sisters, one of which was older than me.

They're all still alive?

KC: Yes, they're all still alive at the moment.

What do they do?

KC: I guess you'd say, "Home duties." They all married and the eldest one is in a nursing home at the moment and the other two are still doing home duties. My brother Graham, he had a menswear shop in Gouger Street, Adelaide. My youngest brother was a school teacher and he lives in Tasmania.

What about your schooling and your childhood? Where was that?

KC: My schooling was at the Forest school, Lenswood in the Adelaide Hills. It was called the Forest School because Forest Range and Lenswood were all Forest Range once. After the First World War they split them in halves so one part was Forest Range and the other part was Lenswood.

Were both your parents working then or did Mum just bring you up while Dad worked?

KC: My Father was the gardener and my Mother was his best helper. She was very, very involved in the garden.

How old were you when you moved to Victor?

KC: I was seventeen when I came to Victor Harbor.

So you were just finishing school?

KC: I finished Grade 7 at Forestville/Lenswood and I went to Oakbank Area School but I was only there for six months because by that time I'd turned fourteen and I had to go home and help the family with the garden and bring up the rest of the family.

Your five siblings, yes. Did you ever take any holidays while you were growing up?

KC: Yes, we had holidays, mainly at Victor Harbor because that was the destination my father always loved and we always really enjoyed ourselves when we came here.

So that's why they eventually moved here.

KC: Yes, there were too many children to bring them up on the property that we had and so my father decided we'll shift and they can go their own way then rather than him having to look after them on the property.

So they just sold up?

KC: Yes. My father sold up and in a few days the place was sold and I was on my way to Victor Harbor.

Did your Dad carry on with his gardening business down here?

KC: Yes, Dad did gardening for many of the people who had houses in Victor and he worked for the Barr Smith's, that's one, and he was kept busy doing gardening because he was very well thought of because he was very thorough in everything that he did.

Before you moved to Victor where did you stay? In guest houses or boarding houses?

KC: Yes we stayed in The Central Guest House which is in Ocean Street where the Wales Bank is now. It took two years to build The Central Guest House which was three storeys high and they knocked it down in a fortnight.

Do you remember when it was knocked down?

KC: No, I can't remember that but I remember it being knocked down but I can't remember when.

That was after you moved here wasn't it?

KC: Oh yes. Probably in the seventies I would imagine.

Victor Harbor still is a big holiday resort and there were lots of guest houses and boarding houses in those days weren't there.

KC: There were forty-two guest homes in Victor Harbor and most people came down by the train and went home by the train and they stayed at these guest houses and most people stayed at the same one each year. They booked in when they left to go away and we used to enjoy it because we sort of knew the people that we were then with when we came.

That's wonderful, you developed a nice relationship and become sort of friends in a way don't you?

KC: Yes, we became good friends actually.

When you came on holidays all the time, did you use the train?

KC: We used the train most of the time but Dad on one occasion brought me here in his International truck and he used to come for a fortnight and I used to come for the first week, then my mother came down for the second week and so I went home and looked after the property while he was away.

So they didn't have a car but they had the truck for the business?

KC: Yes, my father had a Packard car first. Took out the back seats and carted the gear to the market. Then he had a La Salle ute; La Salle were made by the Cadillac Co of America. It was a V8 and boy it used to move! (chuckle).

So when they moved down, they brought that with them of course didn't they?

KC: No, Dad sold all his vehicles.

As well?

KC: When he came here he bought a Mitsubishi Magna which he had for quite a number of years.

They were a wonderful car, I remember those.

KC: Yes.

You told me once that you remembered the Centenary of Victor as a four year old. Do you remember much about it?

KC: Yes. When I was four years old we came down on the Centenary train to Victor Harbor. There were actually two of them that day, two trains. One came early in the morning and one came nearer to dinner-time. The procession in the main street went from the sea end of Ocean Street right down the full length of the street and there were samples on many of the cars and I remember my father catching a box of Granose in front of where Lalor's had their Chemist Shop.

My recollection of Victor Harbor as a four year old, I can remember the faces on the old Wonderview Theatre up top and I remember the gaps in the planks on the Causeway because I could see the water underneath and I wasn't too sure in those days about that.

It's tremendous what you can remember at four years old because most people can't remember that far back.

KC: No.

Tell me about your first memories of Ocean Street and the Railway Terrace and the main precinct area.

KC: My first impression was of Railway Terrace because there was a bakery shop just opposite the train, where the train came in. We always had our meal there and it was Irvine's I believe it was at that time. That was a really good bakery shop and we loved that.

Then we went around into Ocean Street it had lots of shops in those days, a bit different now. In those days the telephone and the power lines were all up in the air on posts and of course, that didn't make it very attractive. I think it made it rather poor but they were taken down later on, about the time I got on Council for the first time.

Do you remember what sort of shops were there? Was the whole street shops, all working?

KC: Yes. The whole street was shops and unfortunately since that time most of them, there have been a lot of land agents there. Unless you wanted to buy a house, not very attractive and that's one of the pities, I think, of Victor Harbor.

In those days that was the main shopping street wasn't it?

KC: In those days that was the life of the town and it was those people who kept the town going and in those days, unless you could pull up in front of a shop, you didn't go there. It was a strange thing, but people go to Adelaide and they'd walk a mile and wouldn't think anything of it but down here it was different.

They still think that, that's why they've never banned parking in Ocean Street.

KC: That's right.

The community wants to park outside. Ken, let's go back to when you kept coming down on the train. In those days it was still all steam trains wasn't it?

KC: Yes, when we came down it was all steam trains and we used to love going through the tunnels on the way down because they'd put the lights on and you shut the windows because there was all the smoke. But the train journey to Adelaide was very picturesque and we saw some beautiful country. It certainly wasn't a boring trip.

How many stops were there on Adelaide to Victor train?

KC: Possibly a dozen.

That many?

KC: Yes. They stopped when they had to pick up passengers, even in those days.

If nobody told them to stop at a station they'd go straight through would they?

KC: Yes. We always stopped at Mt Barker because you could have a cup of tea there.

They stopped for a while, did they?

KC: Oh yes at Mt Barker.

So you could all get off?

KC: At Mt Barker Junction I think it was, two different places.

That's very interesting. How long did it take? Was it three hours, roughly?

KC: Yes I believe it was a good three hours.

Especially with stopping at Mt Barker.

KC: Yes but it was always enjoyable because there was something different to driving in a car.

Yes but it probably took twice as long though didn't it?

KC: Oh yes, I think more than twice as long, about 81 miles I believe it was to Adelaide by train, but it's only 50 by car, but of course you didn't stop in the car.

No. When you moved here, no, sorry, going back to Ocean Street with your first memories, was that a two-way street then?

KC: Yes, it was a two-way street then, from the bottom end to the top end.

Was Bell's open then?

KC: Bell's was open then and it was a rather big store. I believe it was a grocery shop at one time and it was clothing when we came to Victor Harbor. The grocery shop in Victor Harbor was in Bell's own building at that time. There were lots of little shops in those days but they have virtually all closed down with the coming of Coles and Woolworths. Unfortunately there wasn't the competition after that.

That's when Ocean Street lost its main attraction didn't it?

KC: Yes, by the 1980s when I was on Council, that was one of the first things we did was take out the telephone poles, take out the electricity poles and make it a one-way street. That gave us more room and people could move quite freely that way because the poles were nearly out on the street. Removing them we could widen the street.

Do you remember when you went one way? Was that your Council time?

KC: That was about 1985.

That was when you'd started on Council, no you hadn't started then, sorry, you started in '82.

KC: Yes.

So your council did that?

KC: Yes and we put different lights in the street, we were quite proud because we planted trees. There wasn't room for them before.

You put the first trees in, did you?

KC: Yes.

We'll come to that again, we're about to have an upgrade of Ocean Street. We'll talk about that later on.

KC: Yes.

Ken, when you first arrived, when you moved here you were ready to start work, weren't you?

KC: Yes, I was ready to start work and my father bought a milk round; it was the only way we could find a house to live in. So he bought a milk round and they rented the house out to us. My father built a house two or three blocks up afterwards and I was on the milk round for about nine or twelve months. I was up at twenty-five to three every morning. One thing was good, I was on £5.10.0 a week.

How long was your delivery? How long did it take to deliver all the milk?

KC: We started probably delivering at about three o'clock and we'd still be going until about eleven o'clock in the day.

You must have covered all of Victor Harbor!

KC: We did pretty well. After that I went to work at the AMSCOL cheese factory in the afternoon to earn a few extra shillings.

So you were thrown into the deep end with hard work weren't you?

KC: Yes.

So Dad was building his own house then?

KC: No he built it about three years after he came here. He was living in I think it was 49 Hill Street at that time. We lived there about three years before Dad built a house.

He built it himself?

KC: No, no, no.

You were the builder, not him, yes.

KC: Yes, I helped build it; Bartel's built it and they were my employers for sixteen years. I was with them and I learnt my trade thoroughly from them.

We'll talk about that more later on. That's very interesting. You must have noticed, before we get on to you Council time, you worked for Don Bartel for sixteen years and then you started off in your own business?

KC: Yes.

What were you building? Just houses?

KC: We mainly built houses and additions to houses. Houses at that time were all solid brick. They were double brick, outside and in the first place we had to plaster the bricks because the bricks weren't very good quality. By plastering we saved the brick from washing away but as the bricks became better we did far more clean brick houses, outside and plastered them inside.

Can you tell me about the time you were a builder, did you notice many new building methods and materials coming in to the market?

KC: Well, the first probably ten or twelve years everybody built solid brick and nearly every building that was built in Victor was built by local people. I can't remember hardly any Adelaide builders coming here in those days. Then in the latter part of the time I worked with Don brick veneer houses came in to vogue and they've continued that way pretty well ever since. You don't see many solid brick houses built these days.

No, you don't and now they're getting into steel frames.

KC: Yes, things have changed a lot in the building trade since the days when I started. They have steel frames today, they have wooden frames for a brick veneer house and not very many timber-framed houses, mainly. I love the old brick, best of all. It was solid and many of the houses would last for well over a hundred years which we built. But there seems to be change in everything.

We started off, we used to slake our own lime, we used to buy lime in bags and put it in a tub and stir it up and then sieve it out. Then we used to have to make our mortar. We made a great big slab of mortar, which we left for about a week then we used to dig in to that and put cement with it, then more sand and make our mortar that way. These days they just use slaked lime, the hydrated lime, and that was much cleaner and a lot easier. (chuckles).

Ken, tell us that cement came in during your time.

KC: Cement came in before my time, I worked with Mr Fred Bartel and he was the first man in Victor Harbor to use cement and that was about the beginning of the First World War. There are houses that he built when he first came down here that are still standing and very well. He was a very good builder and I was very fortunate to learn my trade under him.

And Don.

KC: And Don.

There must have been a lot of new developments in the area while you were working with Don Bartel, and buildings.

KC: Victor Harbor, after the Second World War started to go ahead quite dramatically. At the time I started there were about eighty men in the district who were tradesmen and builders and practically all the building was done by local people. The travellers from various companies said that the standard of building in Victor Harbor was second to none. There were about eight or nine different firms of builders in those days. We all got on well

together too, that was the other thing, there wasn't the bitterness of rivalry you have because we all seemed to have plenty of work.

My boss was Don Bartel and he was one of the finest men I've ever met; he was a brilliant builder and he built everything for other people like he would for himself. He was one of the fairest men I've ever met and he was also our football coach and I played football with him and played cricket with him and we really did enjoy each other's company. He said to me the other day."The reason we got on so well was because you did as you were told!" That was nice, but I still take Don out for dinner every now and then, every two or three weeks we go out to Middleton Café [Tavern], that's where he likes to go and we talk about all the old times and the things we used to do. It was very good.

How long were you in the footy team, Ken?

KC: I was there, probably about eight or nine years, it might even have been ten years and our football team wasn't doing very well. We had several of our players that came drunk every time to a football match and when Don Bartel became our Captain-Coach he said, "Things are going to change! I'm sick of being a bridesmaid." We often got in to the Grand Finals but we never won one. "In future," he said, "there'll be no drinking in this Club during the week. After the game we'll all go down the pub, have a drink and that'll be all the drinking."

Within two months the Encounter Bay Football Club changed dramatically and it was a pleasure to be there, a pleasure to be with Don our Captain-Coach. He was fair and respected by everybody. I never heard a player or a supporter, opposition player or opposition supporter ever say a word against him, except that they would like him playing for them. Don won two Mail Medals and he was very good.

Did you start winning more matches?

KC: Yes we won several premierships after that.

Great – thanks for Don!

KC: Yes, thanks for Don. We had some very good footballers at that time playing for the Encounter Bay team and I'd say that Frank Joy was probably one of the most natural footballers you ever saw but Don Bartel and Alan Field both won Mail Medals and they were brilliant. For the Harbor team there were the two Tugwell brothers who had played for Norwood, and Ron Reid who was a Norwood ruckman at one stage and they would be the stand-outs of the locals that I saw.

Wonderful! A lot of them would still be alive as well. Do you still keep in touch with them?

KC: The Tugwells and Frank Joy have both gone. Alan Field and Don Bartel are still alive and Ron Reid's died too; there's only two of the six that I mentioned still alive.

And you're still going strong Ken.

KC: We enjoy each other's company when we go out as we remember a lot of the funny things that happened in football. At one stage we had two aborigines that came over from Point McLeay to play for Encounter Bay and Don said to one called Norm Tripp, "Norm, won't you have a shower?" This was Tuesday night, on the Thursday night he said, "Don, I'll have a shower on Thursday and then I'll be fresh for Saturday!" (laughs)

In those days you didn't shower every day did you?

KC: No, no. In the early time in Victor Harbor I remember two aborigines that lived here, one was called Mansell Tripp and we used to see him in the main street of a Saturday morning and he used to stand there and talk to the people who went past. The Victor Harbor Club had one called Ephraim Tripp who was a little rover and he played for them so I did see local aborigines in Victor Harbor at that time.

At least you remember them because there were still some around Goolwa and the Island.

KC: Yes, but those two were here.

Ken, what were your other hobbies?

KC: In those days I had a hobby called "work". Our wages were relatively small compared with today. A tradesman in those days was on about £7.0.0 a week and the one thing I'm always grateful for my father was that he taught me to work. That is a tremendous asset really; so on a Saturday I used to go out working for other people on my own, doing fences.

Building work?

KC: Building work, yes. I'd pick up an extra \$5.00 on a Saturday, £5.0.0 actually, and that helped things along a bit.

You weren't married yet were you at this time?

KC: No, no.

We'll come to that in a minute. So were you a good saver, were you saving money to build your own house?

KC: I was a very good saver. I remember one week when I went working with Bartels after leaving the milk round I was on £2.15.0 a week of which I paid £2.0.0 in board, I had a shilling out in tax and I had fourteen shillings. The first year I bought my top set of false teeth and that was all. By the next year I had bought a block of land, £192.12.2 it cost me.

Whereabouts was that?

KC: Just up there here, three doors up.

On Bartel Boulevard?

KC: Yes and I was also involved very deeply in the Church of Christ Youth Group. We didn't have a Sunday School when I came and we went around and visited all the homes in the town and we got our Sunday School up to 117 and I became the Sunday School Superintendent when I was twenty-one. I was a Sunday School teacher for about forty-one years and I was a Youth Leader for thirty-eight. We had marvellous times in those days, not the competition those days there is now.

You're still a big church-goer aren't you?

KC: Yes, yes I've been going to the same church for almost sixty, one week short of sixty-five years. I was on the door there for about fifty of those years with another fellow. I like meeting people and the Church was eighteen people at one stage. It's now up about two hundred and twenty.

That's marvellous isn't it.

KC: Yes and a lot of the kids that I brought to Sunday School are still there and that makes me feel quite happy.

You feel very proud.

KC: Yes.

Did you get involved with any building work with the church?

KC: Yes, we built a Hall on the back of the Church; it took us exactly a year to build. They built out of Besser brick and it was, the main hall, was fifty feet by thirty feet. We built a new kitchen at the same time which was about twenty-five feet square. This was a good-sized kitchen which is used regularly now. We built a new toilet; we had

to knock the old toilet down to build the hall. Since then we have, nine years ago we re-modelled the Church and we added a lot to the front and I laid quite a lot of the bricks in that.

Nine years ago?

KC: Yes. The two boys, I had eight men at one stage but I only had two that joined me and they took over my business when I dropped out. A lot of the work around there we've done.

But when you built the hall, Ken, was that all volunteer work or were you paid for it?

KC: The Church that we have was opened in 1940 free of debt, £2,300.0.0 land, building and all the furniture. When we built the Hall in the early 1960s, that was opened free of debt as well. That cost £3,000.0.0. Since then we've added to the Church and that was about \$125,000.00; that was opened free of debt too. The Church has never been in debt as far as money's concerned.

But when you did the building work, was the Church paying for labour or just materials?

KC: Just materials.

So it was all volunteer work.

KC: All volunteer work, all done by church people.

Dedication is marvellous isn't it?

KC: I decided one thing when I got a lot of these young people involved in the Church, that if ever we were to keep them, we had to give them work so I employed about five of them in my building business and we found jobs for others in different places in the town and they're still here today. They've been here forty, fifty, sixty years some of them. I knew that unless they had work they couldn't stay here so I went out and found work for them.

Marvellous Ken, it's the best way to keep them as you say.

KC: Yes.

So when did you sell the business?

KC: I started my business in 1965 and I retired in 1985 so I was twenty years out on my own and sixteen years with Bartels. I was very sorry to leave them because handing on was, you know. There's some things in life you just don't like but one of the best things that ever happened to me was that I went to work for them, because they were good builders and they were very thorough.

I asked you that because I wanted to see when you became a councillor?

KC: I became a councillor in 1982 just after the previous council had been sacked by the Government.

I wanted to ask you about that.

KC: I was very disappointed in the fact that Council got sacked and it was sacked mainly because of rather dubious decisions with building and planning. I said to Brian Spilsbury at that time, "I'm thinking of standing, how about you?"

He said, "If you stand I will." He became our Mayor and was a very, very good businessman. At that time, the Council, when we first got on, had very little equipment to make roads or do jobs and the first year we were in Council we spent more money on new equipment so they could do the work, than we did on roads but that has paid off handsomely since.

You have to have the equipment to do it otherwise you can't do it. You went to Council three years before you retired.

KC: Yes.

Ken, I read in one of the books that State government suspended or fired them because they disobeyed five building regulations. They didn't get permission from State government for development.

KC: I don't really the real reason why they were fired but I met the man who fired them and he seemed to be a straight guy.

Was he the one who became the Administrator?

KC: No, no this was a McPhail I think was his name.

From State government? Was he the Minister?

KC: No, no he worked obviously in the local government industry but the Administrator was Mr McFarland.

That rings a bell. I know they appointed him as the Administrator. For seven months he was Administrator.

KC: Yes.

Then the new Council was elected.

KC: Formed.

Yes and that was your first Council.

KC: That was my first Council. I thought, come on Victor Harbor, we have to stand up to this. (chuckles).

To me it was all to do with planning approval apparently.

KC: It was mainly to do with planning and there were two or three fellows got together and they caused a bit of a ruckus, you know.

In those days Council had to get State Government permission for any development proposals.

KC: Any large ones. When you get on Council one of the first things you realise is that your decision-making is very small and it is a very narrow path. For instance, the Building Act states that if a house complies with the Building Act it shall be passed. So what can you do? It just has to be passed. There are a lot of things in the Local Government Act that you find that limit your decision-making and anything that is major has to be approved in Adelaide as well as Victor Harbor.

My time on Council I regard as very interesting. One of the problems I believe is that you don't know who is friends of who and there are things done that I didn't approve of but that was only just my perspective. At the same time, Council did some very good things too. The upgrading of Ocean Street was one of the things that I really applauded because the shopkeepers in Ocean Street kept the town alive and when the big fellers came in it stopped us having to go to Adelaide to buy a lot of things you had to. It also closed down so many of our little shops.

And that problem is still there in Ocean Street.

KC: Yes.

Which we'll come to in a minute. Going back to what decisions local government can make and when State Government needs to get involved. When Council passed the big shopping centre for Woolworths, did that also need State Government approval?

KC: I'm doubtful. I think Council could probably providing there was the area and providing that it complied with the Act by having enough building spaces for cars, that was one of the huge problems we faced in Victor in the early days was that Victor Harbor was designed for the horse and cart and when you bring in cars you've got to park them for people to go in. Parking became very restricted and by allowing Woolworths to come in we created some seven or eight hundred car parks by taking the school out of the area and putting it in a safe place where it is now down by the Hindmarsh River. I was on the Council when that decision was made and some people weren't going to like it.

You mean to move the school?

KC: Yes, you see the school was bad really because there were four road frontages to it and to keep children in a playground or in the yard with four different street frontages was pretty difficult and was very difficult to manage.

And dangerous.

KC: Dangerous. So when we shifted the school down to land which the Council owned and we gave it to the Education Department and we took over the land the school had. That's how we brought in so many car parks which are greatly used today. If you have a new project you have to have space for the cars to go. That's how we achieved that.

In your Council time, what are your proudest achievements as a Councillor in terms of Council?

KC: I think one of the first ones was the upgrading of the main street; that took a little bit of while and it upset quite a few of the people who had shops in the main street but eventually I think they came to and enjoyed what we had done. I believe that the shifting of the school was another major project and that has had very, very good benefits to the town, especially as where the school was is now a car-park and that means we can park cars there pretty freely at the moment.

The first question I asked when I got in Council was when are we going to build a Ring Road and they all stared at me. I said to them that if we have a crash on either one of our bridges, the ambulance won't be able to get to the hospital, have you ever thought of that? That made them seriously think. I wasn't on the Council when the Ring Road was built but when it was built it was all done in one hit and that was to the great credit to the Council.

Sometimes when I go to Adelaide from one end to the other, I'll pass up to sixty cars. Each one of those hasn't had to go through the main part of the town and that is of great benefit to the traffic in the central business district.

That's what the by-passes are for because it keeps them out of the CBDs.

KC: Yes, and of course it's used by so many of the locals down in Encounter Bay. When we're going to town we practically all go that way. We don't go through the town at all.

When did Ocean Street become one way? Was that during your time?

KC: Yes. In the 1980s, about the middle of the 1980s.

It was one of your Council decisions.

KC: Yes.

Did you have any break, you did over twelve years. You didn't do consecutive terms did you?

KC: No. I did on one occasion I think but I was still in business you see at that time.

Exactly, you can't do everything.

KC: That's right, you can't do everything.

It's a big work-load as Councillor.

KC: If you do it properly it is. Not every councillor does it properly. I'll tell you a story about that later but not on this! (chuckles)

At the same time you were on the Hospital Board weren't you?

KC: I was on the Hospital Board, probably started, I was on there for ten years.

At the same time as your Council time?

KC: Yes. I ended up on the Hospital Board as its Chairman, the last year I was on the Hospital Board. I thoroughly enjoyed the Hospital Board because every person was out to get the very best they could for the district. Council really isn't like that. In many ways, Council is like a lot of children playing in a sandpit. One Council decides to do certain things and the next Council comes along and says, "I don't like that!" So they just wipe it all out and start all over again.

So all the good work's gone?

KC: It's the weakest form of Cabinet I believe.

I entirely agree.

KC: Whilst I believe that local knowledge is the best knowledge there are limits.

Ken, what was the year you started on the Hospital Board?

KC: I think it was in the early 1990s, I think it would have been because I finished in the year 2000.

Was the hospital much, much smaller then and with fewer facilities?

KC: We had a public hospital, and it was a very well run hospital, the Board was a very good Board and the Board decided that they wanted to have a Private Hospital on the grounds. They had plans drawn up, they had it priced and everything and they went to Dean Brown who was our local member then and Dean looked at it, read it all and he said, "You'll get this."

So he went to the group in Adelaide who build buildings. They said, "It's not on our programme."

He said, "Well it is now!"

We got our hospital and Dean Brown was a magnificent Member of Parliament. He stood head and shoulders above previous ones.

I agree.

KC: They all did their best but in those days we were a safe Liberal seat and we got nothing, but Dean Brown, I believe, spent about \$45,000,000.00 in his electorate in two terms. Now that is why Victor Harbor has gone ahead quite dramatically in the last ten years or more. He put the infrastructure in place and a man who can do that, beside that, Dean Brown had a brilliant brain. He could think up things very well.

Yes, I'm full of respect for him; he was a very good Premier.

KC: He was just a very good man. I'm afraid that unfortunately ----- (indistinct) he gets in to a lot of these positions and some decisions are made that are not in the best interests of the country.

So it's thanks to him that the hospital was developed even further?

KC: Oh, sure. He was the mainstay and even people on the Board who voted Labour, voted for Dean Brown.

Ken, in your lifetime you've obviously seen a lot of growth in Victor Harbor, a huge amount of growth. You showed me that lovely photograph on the wall at the turn of the century when it was a very tiny little town.

KC: Victor Harbor has, as I first remember it and that wasn't when we came down on the Centenary train, because I didn't see very much but when we came down on holidays there'd be huge crowds around all the holiday places, after meal times. They could go there. There were forty-two, I think, guest homes in the town at one time but in the town of Victor Harbor when I came here in '49 there were only seventeen hundred people living in Victor Harbor. Now I believe there is something like fifteen thousand.

Yes, just over.

KC: So you can imagine the tremendous difference, the streets have gone out longer and wider to different areas. When I first came to Victor blocks along the seafront past the Yilki Post Office and shop, you could buy for fifty pounds! But nobody had any money. That was the trouble and things have changed dramatically.

Some of those blocks that could be bought for £50.0.0 then would probably be \$150,000.00 today. That of course, pushes the Council rates up a fair bit which they realised afterwards.

When you were in the trade as a builder, what would it cost to build, say, a three-bedroom house?

KC: When I first got in the building trade Bartels were building three-bedroom houses for £1,400.0.0. My house, which I built in 1970, myself, and with the fellows who worked for me cost me \$12,000.00 in cash, land and everything, but I did about an extra \$6,000.00 worth of work on it myself, so I got my house for about \$18,000.00; which is not very much in today's language.

Everything has tripled in cost now. Do you remember changes on The Esplanade, Flinders Parade?

KC: Flinders Parade, there's been a lot of change on the seafront. In Flinders Parade, where the Soldiers' Gardens are, some of the trees have had to be removed because they've died, they were planted about 1922 I understand, the original. Down the other side there's been some quite big buildings down there on the seafront, that's on The Esplanade. There's been a lot of building going on, and of course out at Encounter Bay, which was one time no electricity or anything down there. They had their own wind-lights and generators themselves. When the Adelaide Electricity Supply Co. came and took over, all of that area developed dramatically and I believe today there's about 60% of all of our residents live this side of the Inman River.

Really! 60%?

KC: Yes, so I'm told.

There's still enormous scope for development.

KC: Oh yes, there's still a lot of vacant blocks we won't see them built on.

So Ken, the Council commissioned a very good book on Victor Harbor by Michael Page and Ainsley Roberts, published in 1987. You compiled a list of street names and who they were named after in the back of the book, over three hundred of them. That's a massive task, how long did it take you to do it?

KC: It took me approximately three years to do it. I was challenged in a Council meeting to do it and nobody thought I would but behind the scenes I was doing it. I had to chase around interstate; one whole lot of names I got behind "Adare". The man who named them went to Western Australia, I caught up with him and spent about two hours on the phone and he told me the names of who they were named after; people who worked in the Waterworks apparently.

I went to cemeteries, I found out a lot from them. I went to the Council and looked up the death records and that sort of thing. I also had some people at that time who had pretty good knowledge of the district and I spent hours with them. They told me this, that and everything. I also tried to be as short as I could in the summary that I put afterwards, only a line or two. I think you don't get into so much trouble.

As far as I know there's only two mistakes I made in that – had ...Parsons **had** land at Waitpinga... the actual word should have been **have**. One date I put on was a son's date instead of his father's date; they were the only things that I got wrong in the whole lot as far as I'm concerned. I got them all out bar seven, seven names I just couldn't get.

That's a wonderful achievement Ken.

KC: Well it was very interesting; it cost me over two thousand dollars in actual costs to me.

Personal cost?

KC: Yes and because I never got it back and we had a bit of a difference over whether it would go in the book. Ainsley Roberts said to me, "If it goes in the book, it'll be the best chapter in the book because it tells more about Victor Harbor over the years than anything else." So he said that if the Council will put it in the book I will spend my time free of charge, which he did. And that's how we got it in the book.

Did any Council make the decision to name all our streets after local identities and well-known people and people who've done most for the community? Was there any decision made or did it just happen naturally?

KC: We had a nomenclature committee, a street naming committee, and I compiled a lot of other names that have been used since and the history of them that they use and they've used many of them. We try as much as we can to keep the names after local identities, sometimes a developer will come in and he wants his name put on a street and all this sort of thing. That's OK; he developed part of Victor Harbor for people to live in. By and large we tried to keep the names as local as we can and tell the story of somebody.

And it works. I suppose a lot of cities and towns do this anyway. It's quite a common occurrence I would think.

KC: Yes. Ainsley Roberts was a tremendously likeable man and he was very helpful to me. He used this page and he actually wrote the story of the book; he used it in another one of his books and that's why we got Michael Page to write the book. It's interesting.

And the book is very good; I've read it again recently. You can tell us about your incredible charity raising activities.

KC: When I left the Council I decided that I had to do something because I was only fifty-three when I gave up building I was only fifty-three and I knew that you've got to do something, you just can't sit around and die, you've got to get up and do something.

In the middle 1980s my daughter went as a missionary over to Nepal and that was costing her \$40,000.00 a year which she had sponsors for. She invited me to be a sponsor so when I was on the Council I refused to take my pay for quite a number of years until the government heard about it in Adelaide and they wrote down and said, "He has to take his pay."

The reason I wouldn't take my pay was simply because I believe there are a lot of people in the community who worked untiringly in various areas and I thought that if they can do it for nothing so should I. And I still believe that because there are many people who do wonderful things in any community.

Anyhow I made the Council spend my money on trees and I planted trees around the Encounter Bay Oval and here in Truslove Reserve, just across the street here. One day I was out watering these trees because I planted them and I watered them too, I found a heap of cans. I thought to myself that I could pick these up every time, so I went out on my pushbike and I picked up cans. At that time, cans were only five cents each. In nine years I think it was, I collected \$23,000.00 worth for my daughter and her work over in Nepal.

In the year 2000 we had the World Convention of our church in Queensland and the Victor Harbor Church of Christ and the Goolwa Church of Christ sponsored a lady from a Third World country to come out. We paid all of her fares, like her airfare and she was one of the most generous people I have ever met. She came out here from Zimbabwe with no money. At the time I had \$70.00 in a tin in my shed which I went and got and gave to her. She didn't spend a cent on herself; she spent it on little things like potato peelers to take home to people who couldn't come because she was so privileged in coming.

She told me about this Khaylelihle Children's Village which was starting up and they had bought a farm and they started building houses. They had over a hundred children in the village now when they built. They educate them, give them all their medical attention, they have football teams and everything there. Everything you could wish a child to have they have. Most of these children come from homes where their parents have died of AIDS and AIDS was pretty rife in Zimbabwe at that time so I started collecting for them and over a period of about twelve years I collected a million cans and bottles which was worth \$100,000.00. I got a lot of thrill out of that, I simply believe that I made a little bit of a difference to somebody's lives and I also helped to keep Victor Harbor clean and tidy.

What a wonderful thing to do Ken. You must be very proud of that. You raised \$100,000.00.

KC: Yes.

Did you keep your bike or did you get a scooter?

KC: I had about four scooters over that time which I paid for myself, never out of the money that I raised. I used about four scooters and I used three vans as well. The last one, I didn't quite reach the million cans, but by selling the bus that I used to collect the cans in, I reached it. At that time I was diagnosed with diabetes and I was falling over a lot of the time so I had to give it up in any case. I enjoyed doing it.

You must have been so popular, everyone knew you of course from picking up the cans and bottles.

KC: A lot of people knew me but probably a lot of people thought I was doing it for myself. I made no money at all picking up cans for myself.

You must have had publicity in the papers and things like that.

KC: Yes, I had several of that but mainly I collected them when people were in their beds. I got up between three and four o'clock every morning and twelve years with a torch. (chuckles)

Wonderful Ken, wonderful, you must be proud of that. Now, just a couple of things before we finish our little chat. How do you think Victor Harbor will develop over the next fifty years?

KC: That's a very debatable question. I'm sure that Victor Harbor will expand, and any of the hills that we see around here now will have houses on by that time. I believe that the centre of the town will change in appearance but if they decide to make a mall at one end of the main street, they've got to make provision for the cars that it takes out. I believe there will have to be probably a two or three-storey car-park built in that time to house the cars because it's no good having a property that you can't get to.

Remembering that Victor Harbor was designed for the horse and cart we have to come to the conclusion that there has to be some radical change. That will possibly be some streets closed right off. There may be other thoroughfares that might have to be put through, widen streets and one thing and another.

Victor Harbor has the most wonderful climate perhaps in all the world and very often in the winter time we're four degrees warmer than Adelaide and ten degrees cooler in the summer. You can't get much better than that. I think Victor Harbor will always be a popular destination for holiday-makers. I hope so anyhow.

Victor Harbor in the early days lived on the holiday people coming and for about six months of the year Victor Harbor was just about dead and it was when the holiday season came again that the people started coming and the shops all did well. The guest houses flourished and it wasn't for twelve months of the year and I think that now we are seeing more visitors come in the middle of the year. Even now, which is winter-time we used to back in those '40s and '50s because the facilities that we've got and the hotels and that are pretty good.

Like the caravan parks and things like that?

KC: Yes, and the caravan parks. People still come here in the winter in their caravans.

The other attraction in winter now is of course the whaling season as well which helps. And school holidays.

KC: I think the fact they've gone to an extra term and an extra break in the school holidays has been a wonderful thing for Victor; because more people come down in those holidays and when the prices are much cheaper to rent houses and one thing and the other. I think Victor Harbor's got a very wonderful future and I just trust that the people on Council have Victor Harbor really at heart so that we do improve. With the work that Dean Brown put in when he was our Member of Parliament, which was incredible really which you'd probably have to live another fifty years before somebody to do that sort of thing but he believed, went in, superstructure went in and the town grew and that's what happened.

Yes, he was a wonderful, wonderful person especially for Victor Harbor.

People say, Ken, the shopping centres is what killed Ocean Street. I can't see any quick fix to get people back into the street, using the shops again even if it's a mall; I don't know what the answer is.

KC: That's a very hard one. Progress is determined by many things and one is to have a community support like, I still buy anything other than food, in a small shop simply because I believe in the little business. I believe they are the backbone of the country and a lot of the money from these big concerns goes out of the country. You just have to realise that. For instance when Council built buildings over on Granite Island; built a new toilet there. We had a shocking toilet there for many years. Many of the locals got upset about that but the fact was that even though they borrowed money from overseas, you can't tow things off of Granite Island away and we got our new buildings over on Granite Island, we got our toilets all fixed up and the Council wasn't left with the burden of it, the State Government took the Granite Island over which was very good of them and we've now got the facilities on the Island that make the Island more attractive than what it did previously.

There's been a lot of good things that have happened in Victor Harbor and one of them is the fact that today, other than seeing a specialist or two, you don't have to go to Adelaide for anything. That has to be a plus because it keeps cars off the road, which is very good.

I just hope we never become another Surfers Paradise.

KC: Oh sure. No we don't need any of that. There are many people who used to come down here many years ago and would still like to see Victor as it was years ago but that is a rather fatal mistake because you have to progress and not everything that we call progress, really is progress as far as lifestyle is concerned. In Victor Harbor we've enjoyed a wonderful lifestyle and that is very precious. You can't really buy that, it's just there.

That's what makes it so special as you said. If you start building high rises it would be disaster.

KC: Yes. I hope, I think when I was on Council, I think it was at the time when I was on Council we said that no building should be higher than any of the pine trees in the Soldiers' Gardens and I think that is not a bad rule.

The new apartment block is about the same height as the top. Yes, it is. The Crown was going to be a similar height wasn't it?

KC: Yes, it was going to be a similar height. When I was on Council there were a lot of arguments to and fro, big additions to hotels and that sort of thing. The Hotel Crown got it passed eventually, instead of that, they can't get the money.

They keep losing the developer.

KC: There are a lot of other factors other than Council approval that are needed to be looked into.

Well, Ken, you've been marvellous. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

KC: Not really, I'd just like to say that I've been conscious all my life of an unseen hand that has guided, strengthened and helped me and I think that is the greatest joy that I've ever had. Even when I was picking up cans I was lead to places that I never dreamt of but they were there. So that was good.

Thanks Ken, you've really been marvellous for the new Oral History Project. Thanks for all your help.

KC: Thank you very much.