

**VICTOR HARBOR ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, 'Beside the Seaside'.  
Interview with Peter Leane on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2013 at Victor Harbor.  
Interviewer: Rob Linn.**

**Well, Peter, thank you for agreeing to being involved in this project. Where and when were you born?**

**PL:** At Victor Harbor on September 15<sup>th</sup> 1927. Just down here in Cornhill Road. (*sounds like, Sister Ledhan*) the head of the hospital before the hospital was built.

**Was it a maternity hospital or a full hospital? Do you know, Peter?**

**PL:** I think it was described as a hospital. There was no other hospital, but maternity, yes, for sure. But further than that I can't go. (*Couldn't decipher word/s*) learn much more from anybody.

**Peter, who were your parents? Tell me a bit about them.**

**PL:** Grace Leane came to Mount Compass in 1916. Her father was a master carpenter with three sons and they came out to Mount Compass. My father came in 1920, he and his twin brothers(?), took up some land in behind the strawberry farm. Not a very good property. No money, no nothing. Just built a tin shed and they lived there and worked around. They both went on in the district until my uncle was killed in a plane crash in 1929, then Dad took over in the vegetable growing there.

**Where did they meet? Do you know any background? Just locally?**

**PL:** Yes, Mount Compass. There was quite a large group that Mum was in. When Dad came in he joined the group. Quite a group then. The population was much higher at that stage, but it fell away. Now it's come up again with all the blocks built on.

**So was Mount Compass at that stage largely vegetable growing and a few dairies thrown around?**

**PL:** Largely vegetable growing. Cows were not very common at all. There wasn't enough grass. That only came in really when we got the trace elements for super phosphate and could really grow a bit of grass. They started clearing the high land and that made the greatest difference.

I worked for Mr Verco and he had one of the first milking machines in 1945 or 1946. That was fairly rare. It was a very primitive milking machine by today's standards. You wonder

how it pulled it out. But there weren't many cows. A few cows as they sort of built up. Everybody had a few.

Cream was never picked up. It was whole milk once the dairy cooperative at Meadows—Kondoparinga—got going.

**But that would've been much later down there, wouldn't it? After the Second World War? Having the whole milk picked up.**

**PL:** Oh, yes. Yes, after the war for sure.

**Peter, did you attend school locally?**

**PL:** Mount Compass. Grade seven, Mount Compass.

**Did you get your QC?**

**PL:** Yes. With a cut knee. Missed the last three weeks of school but I still did alright.

**Tell me a bit about that school, Peter.**

**PL:** We first went to school in the Mount Compass hall. It was the school building during the week, and then any other thing that went on. I clearly remember carrying stuff over from the old hall to the new school. That would've been in 1933, I think. The brick building was built there. There was a head teacher and one assistant teacher at the time. I remember the school with about sixty students.

**60? That's quite a few I guess for a small rural school.**

**PL:** Well, there were a lot of smaller families. Depression. One came out into the country in various ways, and there were kids all up and down the gullies there then. Yes, quite a few.

**Peter, two years after you were born the great depression starts. Did it hit Mount Compass pretty hard? The community there?**

**PL:** Yes. My dad went broke then. I know he had taken over debts of his brother's and then he bought a truck on hire purchase—I would think—and that was repossessed. I suspect that he gave it back. And we just lost. Had nothing really from then on. There was not much work. He was getting a little bit of work but there was just no money about really.

Some of the established ones ran their vegetable farms and they had rounds where they carted vegetables out around the country. My uncle had Aldinga. Hugh Jacobs had Victor

Harbor. The other Jacobs had Port Elliot. Andersons had Strathalbyn and down that way. This is how they made their living and sort of managed alright—some of those.

**But for your family it was a struggle.**

**PL:** Oh, definitely. Yes, Dad just worked for what he could get, and we were just on a rented house. And then we inherited Mum's brother's farm, or(?) the equity in it. There was nothing much there, but we were there three years before he enlisted.

**Where was that farm situated, Peter?**

**PL:** Just Mount Compass side of the strawberry farm. If you go through past the strawberry farm, there's a property on the left with a lot of trees growing on the swamp. That was our swamp. One corner that we very laboriously grubbed all the trees on—two of us lads—and that's the one there's no trees on. He's planted everything else to trees. There's one big tree behind his house there that was too big for us to grub. It's a big old rotten tree now.

**So Peter, as a young lad, what would your earliest memories have been around the place?**

**PL:** Largely to do with church. All family connected with the church, and a lot of our entertainment was that way. Yes, it would have to be church. Well, there wasn't much else. I tried to work out how many holidays we'd had away. I've just written about that, and they just didn't exist much really.

We went out with Hugh Jacobs. Well, I'd say that was out of sympathy to us. They had the truck and we could go along. I suspect Dad paid for it pretty well by working for them, digging the orchard or something difficult. It was very hard to give him something. He was independent. But it was greatly appreciated by us. I now can see, you know, just what was behind it(?). No, we were just very poor, but Mum had to keep us in shoes. If we didn't have shoes that meant that we were real poor. So she somehow managed to keep us in a school uniform and shoes.

**And did you eat off the place, Peter?**

**PL:** Oh, yes, very much so. Well, fruit from other places. Fruit from ourselves, vegetables and the milk. Vegetables, apples and milk. Cheaper available stuff really was the mainstay. Meat wasn't very much. That had to be brought in, with us. I never had a great appetite for meat. Didn't get used to it there. Rabbits I still like, but there weren't

many of those right in Mount Compass. Later on I trapped those. When I batched I ate rabbits a lot.

**There would've been a few about further out from Mount Compass?**

**PL:** Not at that stage. They came in in the 50s. That's when the real plagues were. Just early in the 50s I suppose. Rabbits everywhere. I trapped as a lad but there just wasn't the great number there. There were burrows about. Same with kangaroos. It was rare to see kangaroos. I saw seven up the back of Jacobs' once. It was the biggest mob I'd ever seen. Well, now I see mobs of forty at Currency Creek.

**Yes, I concur with that. All around the place there, aren't they?**

**PL:** They're everywhere.

**Peter, one of the really interesting things that you wrote about in your memoirs was the building of these carts and carting vegetables around the place behind your pushbike. Now how did all that come about?**

**PL:** Well, our uncle down the Nangkita Road was carting our vegetables to Adelaide to market. He wouldn't come up to get them because, you know, that was cost and things delivering to us. Whether he was just making it difficult for us, I don't know. But we had a pair of wheels and we had some boards so we knocked out a fairly large sort of a cart on little wheels, which later got pinched. They had curved spokes. If I ever find the bloke that's got them, I'll know them.

We had weatherboards that were left over from the house and we just knocked up this big box with two handles on, hook that over the seat of my bike, which towed it, and going downhill Bruce had a rope on the back of the cart and he'd use his brakes to slow the cart down. I did some of the braking and he did some of the braking. It was a two-bike job but we got a surprising load on it.

The carrots that year was a patch I'd planted and they were pretty thin but they grew up into great big fat carrots. You'd pull them out the ground and you'd hear a crack and they'd split when you pulled them out of the ground. I don't know what caused it, but they were juicy carrots. I'd never seen the like of them. But as you pulled them out of the ground, with the air or something, you'd see this crack come down the side of the best of them, the biggest of them. But we made a bit of dough for Mum but I never got any of it. I didn't ever get any money from working on the farm. I put it into the farm until I was twenty-two—yes, twenty-three—to get the dairy so I could leave and go and get some work for myself. Dad asked Mr Verco if I could work there so I could learn something.

Well, I was pretty happy about that but I never saw any money. I don't know whether Mum did. But I went there and did a lot, but I'm darned if I ever saw any dough for it.

**So what age were you when you started with the Vercos?**

**PL:** That would be 1944 I expect.

**So prior to that you'd been working on your own place?**

**PL:** Oh, yes. My brother and I were running that. We were growing vegetables and milking our six or eight cows at that stage. We might've got to ten then. Just building up. Pretty useless sort of cows. Some of them Dad had bought, and he had no idea of a cow.

**This is by hand, Peter, that you were milking?**

**PL:** Oh, my word! It was 10<sup>th</sup> October 1950 when we got the milking machine going. That was the first machine we had. We built the new shed and bought a second-hand machine from Inman Valley.

**Would you have had power on by 1950 down there?**

**PL:** No.

**So this was run off a stationary motor?**

**PL:** We were one of the last to get the power on. No, this was a little Ronaldson Tippett engine, 2 hp, bought second-hand from somewhere else. Had a straight up exhaust and the water would come down the exhaust and wet the spark plug, and it would be a devil to start sometimes. No, that was just a two-unit machine.

My intention was that once I could get out of the milking I would leave home immediately. My brother had talked about leaving but never got around to it. There wasn't room for two of us. There just wasn't the money in it. But he said that it made him (*couldn't decipher word*) something. He only lasted a while and the doctor said he had to get out of the district for his asthma. That left my sister milking cows with Dad. She was growing older and wanted to go nursing in the mission field and was getting fairly worried about that. Dad finally said to Mum, 'You'd better get on to Pete. See if he wants to come home and take over the farm'. I never expected to go back there. But there I was back there, owning it with no dough. I didn't know about one of the taxes, and after I'd paid at the bank they(?) wanted some more money for some tax or other and I didn't have it.

**So what age were you then, Peter, when you came back?**

**PL:** 1952. Twenty-five.

**Were you married by then?**

**PL:** No. I was supposed to have been but the lady got cold feet and it was put off for a year. So we were married in 1953. I batched for a year at McLaren Flat, milking cows for a chap there. Then I batched for a year on the farm home. Lived on rabbits, and very simply.

**At McLaren Flat, whose place was that where you worked?**

**PL:** Jack Thorpe on Penny's Hill Road. Just on the left going up Penny's Hill Road.

**I can picture that.**

**PL:** A herd of perhaps fifty cows. On the third milking I only got one wrong and I couldn't understand that. Later it turned out the cow had two names(?). I can't remember much but the things you want you can remember. They say that teachers can pick kids. Well, I'd never seen that herd but he told me as they came in. In two milkings I got it right. That third one I was cranky about that. I couldn't understand it.

**When you say you were batching, was he actually paying you?**

**PL:** Oh, yes. Batching was looking after yourself. Yes, he upped my wages a bit. He wouldn't put me on to start with because I wasn't married. I said, 'It's me that's doing the work, not the wife I haven't got'. 'Yes, but single blokes get sick of it and leave'. I said, 'Well, that's not likely to happen with me'. He gave me the job. And then when I wanted to leave he upped my wages. I had a win there.

**Did you enjoy that type of work, Peter? The milking side.**

**PL:** Yes, I liked animals. I would dearly have loved an education to go into something more mathematical. It wasn't there, and it wasn't possible. So I just took the chances I had really. I thought of surveying and things but I just had no knowledge of anything like that. There was nobody to give me any guidance. There was nobody within the education much better at that stage. One or two of my group got a bit of high school, but there was just never any chance of it.

My brother went to the School of Mines in Adelaide for carpentry because of his asthma. He had to have something. Mum was a bit apologetic. You know, give Bruce a chance. I sort of envied him more than a little—these days out in Adelaide. Go down by train, ride their bikes to Willunga—Don Jacobs and School of Mines—and ride their bikes home.

**That would've been a stiff one up the Willunga Hill, wouldn't it?**

**PL:** Mighty long day.

**Yes, I reckon.**

**PL:** For a couple of lads.

**Every day?**

**PL:** No. Once a week.

**That was the value of the old Willunga line, wasn't it?**

**PL:** Yes.

**So Peter, bikes were the main mode of getting around then?**

**PL:** Oh, yes. Our pushbikes. Yes, that one bike I bought that cost me twelve quid, I'm astounded now to think just what that money was.

**Now could you tell me a bit about your wider family, too, particularly your Mum's brothers?**

**PL:** Frank was the soldier. He was the oldest one. Got some of the details of his service in the Middle East. He was a farrier. He came home a very sick man.

(*Sounds like, Alb*) was the next one. He married a local girl. He worked at many jobs. I wouldn't describe him as a ball of fire but a very good man, divining and dug wells. He married a Jacobs girl, and it was probably a house they had alongside us that he lived in. Harry was the youngest. No, Mum was the youngest in the family. He was the next. He was on the farm and somewhat of a larrikin. More than somewhat I think. He was quite a bit wilder than the others.

One interesting story is that he eloped with one of the Verco girls, the youngest one who was a bit of a fizzy one. They eloped. I think they had one night before she got dragged out by the ear. It caused quite a bit of hilarity in the town.

He was in the vegetable growing but I think he got over committed, and I just don't know. He went broke. He had a decent truck in 1936, and a bit later on I think perhaps he just did too much and he lost everything.

Mum's sister, the oldest one, she was a lady. She worked in Adelaide and she was a cut above all the rest. She got an education and she was a typist.

Mum just worked around for the local people and picked blackberries, and just hadn't gone very far really. A lot of the women had a local girl to assist them. It was nearly always

some relative or somebody working there for a bit of money. It was surprising what happened in those days. Two of the old great aunts, it's reckoned now that they had a pretty easy life. They had somebody doing their work, and they were the matriarchs.

**So were the women in the family pretty important to how things were run, do you think? Talking about matriarchs.**

**PL:** Yes, but in an unacknowledged way. They weren't seen to make the decisions but they had a darn lot to do with them. Mum was battling in the last of the depression with our truck. Later she told me that it was costing more to go down with a truck than Dad was making out of the vegetables. So they were growing them and losing money really. So there was no way of keeping up payments then.

But no, they weren't overtly like they are today, but it was still there. Times were tough and they had the say really on what happened a bit. There was some that were really ruled by the father but they were a bit more rare I think. I think when Dad hasn't got money, well, he's cramped a bit. The feeling there that they are not earning enough to keep it. I think that made a difference.

**So there you are, working around the countryside, Peter, and you've got a pretty large family around you, too, by the sounds. Would that be fair? Extended family anyway.**

**PL:** Extended family, yes. Cousins, and cousins a bit more removed, but closer physically than closer cousins. Yes, a very caring involved group really, which is a tremendous thing to have. I think our grandchildren are going to miss out on that. Or our great grandchildren now are coming along. Our grandchildren had the property at Currency Creek and some of their cherished memories are of the block. They were there at different times. Our family has only been altogether three times.

**So the Currency Creek property, was that the last one you had, Peter?**

**PL:** Yes. Well, my son owns it. Doesn't make any difference whether he owns it or we own it, we are still out there doing work. I was out there yesterday cleaning up tin and picking up a ride-on lawn mower and the difficult way to cart it away. I'm feeling a bit better so I'm trying to do some things. I might never be able to do them again. Yes, a very large group. With the church and the relatives, yes. Very much so. And then you get into—I was going to say intermarriage. That only happened on one occasion but marriage in the circle, which (*sounds like, enlarged it*) still more, you've got to be careful who you talk about. The same as our church here in Victor Harbor now.

**They all know each other, do they?**

**PL:** And the newcomers don't know that he's married to that one's daughter.

**Well, Peter, you mentioned that you were actually born in Victor Harbor. Did you used to come pretty regularly as a lad to Victor?**

**PL:** No. New Year's Day was the standout one. We just didn't travel. Mum had to take Bruce and I down to the Adelaide hospital once a year for the TB screenings. I had a scar on the lung that might've been something they had to look for. But no, we just did not travel. Just that odd holiday too(?).

**Peter, tell me about New Year's Day. What are your best memories of the New Year's Days at Victor Harbor?**

**PL:** One of the strongest memories is the swimming baths. I reckon the greasy pole was something I really loved. Sliding out there trying to grab the feather on the pole. That really appealed to me. If only I could have had a go at that.

Then the horse race to(?) the island. I'll never forget that. It was the love of horses. And the feather on the greasy pole. Well, I'd try anything. Climb anything. The sideshows didn't interest me. We never had any money anyway. So we didn't do that. No, it was meeting people and perhaps a bit of different tucker on the day. Buy something from the shop. A pasty or something. No, it was the outing and, well, fellowship. Call it what you like. It was a very big thing, that and our picnic days, which I've just written about. They really were the major things in our entertainment world.

**So when you said the horse races, you meant from where you lived to Victor, was it?**

**PL:** Yes. The one with the best horses. They must've set off at more or less the standard time when the work was done and headed down. I didn't know anything about it, but I was told of it later on. There were some good horses and others were just the ordinary carthorses getting long in the tooth. They weren't in the event. But it was a real thing, with some of the good ones.

**So when you get to Victor, did you head out to Granite Island pretty much straight away?**

**PL:** No. There would've been fellowship and lunch first I think. I think we were sort of kept around the beach for a start. There might've been a swim before lunch if it was warm enough. I think the island was after lunch. Perhaps when the sports would be mostly on.

That's when everybody's walking across there. Just how busy, I don't know what it would be, but it seemed to be an awful lot of people about, to me. What the number would look like today I have no idea. But it looked to be people everywhere, on the causeway, and the horse going down through, and leaning against the wall as the horse tram goes past. I don't know, but it seemed a busy day to us.

**You mentioned in your memoirs, too, the swimming baths out by the screw-pile. Were they netted off?**

**PL:** Yes. Not netting in the shark-netting sort of idea. It was more an enclosure for a pool. Yes, it was I think some sort of thing but there was no steel mesh or anything in those days that you could use for it. So, no, not in that way. The sharks weren't thought of very much then. There wasn't enough TV to publicise it and so on.

**So what were the enjoyable things you did on Granite Island once you went across?**

**PL:** Climbing around really, looking at the different spots and climbing down. Yes, just generally something different to explore. Everybody's there, and just running free in a different area. I think that meant more than anything, to me anyway. Some might remember going to the shops, but if you haven't got any money you don't go to the shop. That didn't mean anything. It was just a cheap outing really. If we went with somebody else, well, it was just quite good (*couldn't decipher word*).

**Peter, can you remember Victor Harbor in those days. How big did it seem to you? Where did the houses start, for instance, when you came in from Mount Compass?**

**PL:** Well, there was a boat shed on the Hindmarsh River, as I clearly remember. It wasn't until I had grown up a bit that we boated from there up to what is Greenhills Park. It wasn't overhanging with tea-tree then. There are old pictures and there's no tea-tree on the river. You looked straight across. Now I maintain that if we get a great flood that will rip off and probably block up at the bridge and we'll have a major flooding episode. No, there were just no houses much until you got into the Masonic Hall. Oh, there were one or two big ones a bit further out. But that's where it was, just based around there, the bottom of the hill. There were just odd houses out further, but the dairy farms came quite in close really. Just up the back here was a dairy farm, and out the other side. No, it was a small place then. Hill Street, Crozier Road, Seaview Road—just across there. That's where it all was. Just nothing out the bay much at all.

**Did you go into the main street much at all? What's that—Ocean Street?**

**PL:** No. I don't reckon we hardly walked up it really. There was just no interest for boys there. There was no entertainment there. No, I've got no memory at all of walking up Ocean Street and the shops.

**Did you ever go to the picture theatre there at all, Peter?**

**PL:** Not until much later. The Wonderview Theatre. Yes, I had gone there, around on the sea front. The Electricity Trust was alongside, and a very narrow space up between the two. You could walk up there and feel the reverberation from the Electricity Trust engines. No, I would only have been to the pictures there two or three times perhaps.

**So in your childhood and youth, Victor seemed a pretty small place basically.**

**PL:** Yes. It still didn't seem a big place to us.

**So Peter, you were about twelve years of age at the time the Second World War broke out. Do you remember that time quite well?**

**PL:** Yes, pretty well. Yes, the declaration of war. We knew Mount Breckan was becoming a big centre for training airmen. Wirraway planes flew low, following the main road through Mount Compass, and it was the first plane I ever saw. A low fat bodied Wirraway flying through.

We didn't get a paper. We didn't have a wireless. I didn't have a wireless until I was well over twenty. My father reckoned that was the devil. He was the prince of the air and the wireless came through the air, so we didn't have a wireless. So we didn't listen to Blue Hills or anything like that. I never got that habit.

**Or the cricket.**

**PL:** No. I remember Don Bradman. I really recall the excitement over that—Bradman. And not much news like that. No, we just didn't get it. We didn't see any local paper. We just did not see papers. Most of our news came from other people I guess at that rate.

**So Peter, in one sense, because you didn't have a lot to spend you were pretty much there and that's where your life was held as a community.**

**PL:** Yes. Quite definitely. Those a bit better off, they got out a bit more. But, yes, definitely for us.

**And you were a pretty close community too, Peter, at Mount Compass?**

**PL:** Yes. Some of the depression people that came out, mostly they were a bit further out. We were on the settled properties and the families of those moved out into different places and some were set up in the depression. I can recall some of those families quite well. They didn't belong the same as us. They were school friends but they weren't in that circle of half a dozen families, perhaps I'll say with out counting, but somewhere around that.

**So Peter, you mentioned New Year's Day. Now what about the picnics?**

**PL:** The picnics were a major thing. I think the adults appreciated them as much as the kids. We were collected at the church. In my day it was in these small trucks. They were only 30cwt trucks with a covered top over them. We'd load up into those and head out for the picnic, which were held for a lot of years out towards the Pages Flat Road on Eric Webster's property. Big trees and a good place for picnics. Later there were a couple of different places. We went out to Bishops once. There was one other one somewhere else. They were run by the church.

Some of the other school kids came. They were occasional Sunday School ones and they were keen to get in the picnic. But still again, it was very much this extended family. While it was open—that was most of the town anyway.

There would be perhaps three or four or five trucks I suppose, all down to Sellicks Beach. I remember the trucks parked. We had one or two there. One truck would go off early to grab the cave so we could have that. Then the others would come down but they had claimed it, so then we could move in and the ladies would be under the cave. Somebody else would be a bit late and they'd have to stay outside—another group that was going to get it. There were no hard feelings but we just got in first. And somebody got sent down there. I remember getting terribly sunburnt. That was quite a good move really. It was just something different for us and we greatly appreciated that.

One year there there was a fish spotting tower 60 or 100 feet high built by Dolph Way. The boys climbed that—some of us. One particular one got two-thirds of the way up and he got frightened and he just couldn't move. I was below him and darned if I was going to go down again. So I climbed inside the ladder around him, and then got above him and then helped him up the last bit and I pulled him in over the top (*sounds like, and sit*) in the box. Took us a long while to get his nerve up till he got back down. 'I enjoyed it', he said. He was just stuck on those rails.

**Oh, dear!**

**PL:** There were four or five of us who climbed it I suppose. I just loved climbing and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Anybody watching, it wouldn't look too good when the ladder is on a bit of a slope up the tower and I just went around him (*couldn't decipher word/s*) my feet and hands. I've just written about it in that last lot so some of those picnics are fairly fresh in my mind.

**They were a real treat, Peter?**

**PL:** Oh, yes, yes. I've written about sports days also. The ladies knitting circle ran picnics raising money, and they were fairly memorable ones in the war. Just a great shortage of men. There were just the older blokes and us younger lads. And the women. There was still no money and just how much the women did, and what they did, I don't know.

**So you had a lot of food at the picnics?**

**PL:** Yes. Simple food, but it was prepared and a fair bit of it. Some of it got a bit special with cakes and special attempt made. Yes, but all home produced. Not perhaps as good as you got in some of the other farming land where they had much more available in their milk and cream and meat—some of the Germans. Well, that was real tucker. We didn't see any of that. Ours was just the strong English background, and in most cases very strongly Cornish. Most of our relatives, the local ones—Jacobs and those—came out for the slate mines in Willunga. Cornish miners. And my parents' grandparents were Cornish carpenter families.

**I would've thought their skills were pretty much needed though around the district.**

**PL:** The skills were but the money wasn't there to do anything with it. The houses were just incredibly cheap, some of them. Like, the one we moved up to of my uncle's was four square rooms with walls and ceiling lined with hessian. And then the hessian was plastered over. My Uncle Alb's house had wire netting on the outside walls, and that was plastered and concreted. That made the wall wire netting and cement. I saw it later when it was knocked down and you couldn't believe it, but that was cement and wire netting outside and hessian inside. Very cheap house.

**Would that have been built in the 1920s after the First World War?**

**PL:** That one was. Yes, I reckon.

**That seemed to be a form of building a lot of returned soldiers used after the First World War.**

**Well, had the hessian a lime wash on it, Peter?**

**PL:** Oh, yes. Mum was redoing the lime wash when we went up there to clean the house up. It was just black with (*couldn't decipher word*) and cigarette smoke. And she's up on a table or something—table and a chair—and the lime wash fell upside down all over her. We laughed hilariously. That didn't go down too well. She had a job to clean up.

**Oh, dear!**

**PL:** Made an awful mess on the floor.

**Was it a wooden floor or an earth floor?**

**PL:** Earth floor. Black conboleum, I think it was called.

**Yes, that's the name.**

**PL:** A black lino sort of stuff.

**Yes, conboleum. That's right.**

**PL:** Yes, only a dirt floor for sure.

**And was that pretty typical of a lot of the houses around?**

**PL:** Oh, yes. We thought Jacobs' house was very flash. It was a big one. It was the flashest house in the town. That, to this day, has still got dirt floors.

**So was that Linton's family's house?**

**PL:** Yes.

**I can picture that.**

**PL:** Yes, it's up on the strawberry farm now. It's just a wreck.

**I didn't know that that had earthen floors in it. That would've been quite flash then, wouldn't it?**

**PL:** Oh, the flashest by a mile when Hugh built it. They had a bit more money and it was a big flash house for Aunty Blanche to come and live in. She was a schoolteacher.

**Peter, just thinking about you growing up there. I know 1939 was a very dry year and there were bad fires in '39 as well. Have you got memories of either of those things?**

**PL:** Yes, but hazy because we had no wireless and no papers. So we didn't get so much of that.

**Did you have drought down at Mount Compass in that time, or wasn't it so much known there?**

**PL:** Well, we were on the swamp and it didn't make so much difference to us. Our water came out of the drain. There was still enough water in the drain. We weren't running cows. We had one horse. There was enough feed for him on the paddock below the roadside, and spare cabbage leaves. So no, the affect wasn't as great really. We had five acres of swamp, was growing vegetables and that kept going. The biggest problem was the sale price of those went down because there was no money to buy them. So we felt the drought in that way.

**It must've been very difficult times.**

**PL:** Oh, yes.

**But as a community, I'm always amazed Mount Compass just seemed to have a very different way of approaching things than other areas. You all got on pretty well.**

**PL:** Yes, as a rule. There were some pretty bad feuds that carried on.

**I've heard about those. (*Laughter*)**

**PL:** One man left the church and started the Methodist Church. Things like that.

**So had it mainly always been Church of Christ, had it?**

**PL:** Yes. The Church of Christ started at Willunga. Mount Compass was a branch, and Goolwa was a branch of Mount Compass. Now Goolwa's gone and Mount Compass has gone, and Goolwa's not very bright. Strange.

**Yes. So the Methodists were sort of the heretics, were they? (*Laughs*)**

**PL:** Yes, almost. The Catholic hatred, I just shudder a bit to think of that today, the way that was felt really and the way it was taught to us. They weren't far removed from the devil and their teachings were really bad.

**So that was from within the church you were taught that?**

**PL:** Oh, yes. That is what we were taught, yes. And Bart Manning had his sermons about the end of the world and anything else that could hold the population spellbound for an hour.

**So how long were your services? Were they lengthy?**

**PL:** Not as a rule. No, because it had to fit in really. Church was eleven o'clock till twelve or quarter past, then you had to get home, have lunch if you were close enough, back again for Sunday School from I reckon one until two, maybe two-thirty, and then afternoon church was from three onwards, during the war years. So there were three services in a row. The boys jacked up on the third one at one stage and we went and swam in Eric's dam, straight across from the church. They thought that wasn't quite right. We were quietly told 'it might be better if you went up to Uncle Hugh's dam'. So we could swim up at Uncle Hugh's dam. If they couldn't see us they felt better apparently.

**Oh, dear!**

**PL:** I could see the funny side of that one, even then.

**Peter, as you were growing up, was your father going off to war a big thing for the family?**

**PL:** It was just the accepted thing really. I think the patriotism still annoys me. For a lot of them it was a job and they were getting out and doing something. They just had nothing to do and no future in anything and this was a big adventure. My dad was keen to get in it. He was too young for the First World War. He just missed out with his age. And he just sat around until my youngest brother was born. He was a real latecomer, ten years after my sister. And he stayed around until he was safely delivered, and then he was off for his life. He'd just been champing at the bit to go before that. But no, I think it was more the adventure that got them there than patriotism, if you really boil it down. Not a popular thing to say in places.

**So your father had something to do for a change basically because he'd been without work.**

**PL:** Yes. He was doing his bit for the country and he was going to have some money himself and to send home.

**So did some of the money come home?**

**PL:** Oh, yes. There was allowance sent home, available somehow at the Post Office I suppose. I couldn't say about that for sure. Yes, they kept some money as I remember it, and Mum certainly got an allowance from his wages.

**Did your dad first go to the Middle East, Peter?**

**PL:** No. He was an airman. He trained in Queensland. He got as far as New Guinea and then got chased out of there because he was too old. But he was as tough as boots. He was a little man, but he was tough, and he was tougher than the younger blokes. That was the rules so he was sent back from overseas service, back to Australia. But then he was in the Air Force a long time because he was a guard. They needed guards to guard their camps. Everything, before it was sold. I couldn't understand for years why he didn't get a home until 1946—late '46 I think—but that's what it was.

**So did he get a War Service loan when he got home?**

**PL:** Yes. That's how we got into our property at Mount Jagged.

**Is that right?**

**PL:** Oh, yes.

**Oh, that's right because you were given the choice of help into a place or Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme, I think. Some went to university or the School of Mines.**

**So was that a bit of a new life for you, Peter?**

**PL:** Oh, heavens, yes. It was a big thing to get out of Mount Compass and on to a bigger property with more cows. I bought a pony at that stage before we left Mount Compass. That was really an event in my life when I had a pony. I had the pony and no saddle. I rode our carhorse a bit, but when I had the pony—a very nice one. A local bloke had him. I think I got the buggy and harness from him later on, but to start with I just got the pony to ride.

**Did your dad come back in '46?**

**PL:** I think it would've been '46.

**So you were nineteen then?**

**PL:** Sounds right.

**So Peter, that would've been your first pony—at nineteen.**

**PL:** Oh, yes.

**Gee!**

**PL:** Oh, yes. I still had my Healing bike up to then. We had no transport.

**So what about on the new farm at Mount Jagged? Did you only have horsepower originally?**

**PL:** Oh, for sure. I didn't get a tractor until 1953.

**Is that the first year of the Fergies?**

**PL:** No, they were about 1947/48. Jacobs might've had one in '48.

**Little grey ones.**

**PL:** No, I owned the horses, and my dad had the carthorse. My brother and I sort of went into business, growing potatoes, but it was poor land and we didn't do very well. Did a hell of a lot of work for not too much. The two horses I bought from the pig farm over on Pambula Road—he bought teams of horses and killed them for pig feed. You could go there and pick out horses. So I took two smaller horses and paid him the difference and took them home. Got two beautiful workhorses. They were (*sounds like, the basis*). I had another three of them, then a carthorse, and then a pony. I bought a real riding horse some time a bit later.

**And did you retain the Mount Compass property as well as Mount Jagged?**

**PL:** Oh, no. Linton Jacobs bought that. No, no. Heavens, no. We needed every penny of that to get in out there.

**So was it better country out there?**

**PL:** Better than the sand but there was more of it. There was quite a lot of land roughly cleared. The shoots were growing on it. It was 230 acres. We only had 30 in Mount Compass. There was only 12 on the bottom side and 18 with the very poor sandy hill up the top. No, without the right fertiliser and enough money to put into it, that sand country was about useless. Good for growing bracken and(?) carting away.

**So when did you begin to build up some funds to put the trace elements and super on?**

**PL:** When I got more established really. I still wasn't able to do much for a lot of years. Super was a big worry. How much could I put out this year, sort of doing the budget. In later years I got a bit more scientific and started putting lime out. That's when it really

showed up and I could bring production up. At that stage it was fairly minimal. I tried to clear up what I had. Grew potatoes. That land was a bit better then. Some of that made hay paddocks and then we could cut some hay. Some of Bishop's land was alright to cut, (*sounds like, some even got terribly washed*). We had to learn to handle it. If you worked it too late and the winter rains started, you got dreadful erosion. I had it happen a couple of times. But the property I bought was shockingly messed up.

**So was it a property that had been run down? Is that what you mean?**

**PL:** Which?

**The one you bought.**

**PL:** Yes. Oh, yes. Very much. Just no work done on it for years. He ran sheep on it and walked around. He'd lost his dairy licence because he couldn't keep it clean enough and then just kept sheep, but that was in the good times for sheep. He really made some money. He bought a Fordson tractor at that stage, way before we had one, but he didn't do much with it.

Yes, the fences were bad, the erosion was bad, the rabbits were bad, the (*couldn't decipher word*) were bad. I was the only one that went to the auction. The government had taken it at one stage. They were going to plant trees on it. It turned out to be too wet for that.

**Pine trees?**

**PL:** Yes. I found a bloke walking about on it. That was after I got it. Before I bought it I was leasing it. Then at one stage after I (*sounds like, lost it*) they're levelling—there was a bulldozer working there and being curious I went to see. Oh, he's levelling the land for a pig farm. 'Did you know there's going to be reservoir possibly down the river, down there?' 'No'. He reported to his superiors and work was stopped right then. So that was when the government bought it, and after that I leased it. And then they built the big pig farm towards Myponga, which has now folded I think. But they were starting there. I'm glad they didn't get there.

**So this was before Myponga reservoir was built? Is that it?**

**PL:** No. This is just up from Mount Compass. Just out on the Munetta Road.

**Oh, yes, I know the Munetta Road.**

**PL:** Just past (*sounds like, Lanac*).

**So was there to be a reservoir built there as well?**

**PL:** No. That was one place that wasn't. They asked me if there was anywhere they could go. I said that I didn't know where they could find it, but somebody found that property for them. It was sandy and there was no run off. There were no creeks. Everything went in the sand so it was just ideal for it.

**So Peter, at that stage what shopping you had, was that all out of Mount Compass?**

**PL:** I think Mum would've bought some from the travellers that came around. Rawleigh comes to mind but there was another crowd that carted clothes.

**Vincent's?**

**PL:** Yes.

**Vincent's Drapers from Semaphore. Or Largs somewhere.**

**PL:** They later moved into the district. Vincents lived there. Yundi, Hope Forest or somewhere. Vincents, that's the one. Yes, well, that was a fairly big thing. I think there were purchases made then. They came more than once a year. I wouldn't know how often but they did come around. And I think what clothes we had—farm clothes—would've come from there. There was no shopping for that sort of thing in Compass. We certainly didn't go to Victor, and there wouldn't have been many trips to Adelaide. So they had to come from some place like that.

**When you began to get on your feet, particularly after you were married, Peter, did Victor become more of a centre for you at that stage?**

**PL:** Yes, because my parents were there, and the church was there. Bennett & Fisher were still my stock agent in Willunga. There was a strong connection there for a lot of years. Your connection with a stock agent was a pretty big thing, and I was buying and selling, going to clearing sales and buying cattle. Later on it was lambs—skinny lambs, and grow them up.

But yes, Victor became our centre for my wife and I then, and that's where she did most of her shopping. Mum got the shopping delivered to her place and we picked it up when we went on Sunday. We didn't shop on Sunday, we picked it up on Sunday.

**So that would've been 1960s, Peter, by this time?**

**PL:** The children were quite small so it would've been before the 60s. By '60 we had several.

**So how many children did you have?**

**PL:** Five.

**So you married in '53. When was your first born?**

**PL:** '53. Same year.

**Pretty quick!**

**PL:** Then they came quick all the way after that. There was a bit of a gap on the last one but it was five (*sounds like, or seven or eight years*). My wife reckons she was busy and worn out.

**She could've been right, too. (Laughs)**

**So Peter, you had the joy of your family coming along and growing up. Is your farm beginning to change and you are finding ways of improving things along the way?**

**PL:** Oh, yes. The tractor made a huge difference to me. I reckon when I got a tractor I didn't have to give the tractor a spell. I could get on the tractor after I'd milked and drive it as hard as I liked until I had to go to milk. And I didn't have to chase it or unbuckle it or anything.

Now horses weren't fed properly. They were just grass fed. The paddocks weren't much good so they really didn't get much tucker to make them work. To look at big nice working horses was a bit of a blow to me. I'd seen what good horses looked like and I couldn't do it.

No, that was good. I could clear a bit more land. And I bought machinery, which I wanted, that I could use for contract. So then I went out and worked that machine for other people. I did this with several machines. I wasn't home, but I didn't have any money if I was home. At one stage I was working in Snead's(?) shearing shed and I was looking across at home and I would've just loved to be there instead of in this shed. But if I was home I had no money to do anything. If I stayed home I didn't have enough money to buy a grubber handle if I broke it. At the time it was frowned on by some. One very respected grazing bloke had the theory that if the farm won't keep you, don't you keep it. Now farm advisors tell them to go out and bring money in.

**They do indeed.**

**PL:** I'd thought of that by myself.

Yes, I worked around a lot and learnt a lot from the people that I worked for. Mr Verco to start with, and then there was a stock dealer next door to us. I learnt a great deal from a stock buyer. And I worked for Snead's who were at the forefront of sheep development with the Ag department and things there. Then I worked for Jack Thorpe, who was a really top cattle man on dairying cattle and things like that. As well as others. So all my education came that way really. I never did much with carpentry but once we got engines I'd get a mechanic in and learn from what he did. And most of what he did I could then tackle. That's where it all came from really.

**Peter, was Jack Thorpe related to the Kangarilla Thorpe family?**

**PL:** Yes.

**So they were very, very successful breeders of livestock, from memory.**

**PL:** Yes. A big family.

**And saw millers, too?**

**PL:** That was another one.

**Another branch.**

**PL:** Yes. They also had boring plants.

**Yes, I do recall that. I'm not sure if they've still got the boring business.**

**PL:** One of Jack Snead's manager's daughters married one of those Thorpes in the mill and the boring.

**So Peter, just coming back to Victor Harbor, how did you see that change over the years as your family began to grow up? What began to happen around Victor?**

**PL:** Amscol, Electricity Trust and Telecom were the major employers. And I think as they grew they probably pushed things along. The stock agent died. That fell away. Bennett & Fisher gave up their sale yards. Port Elliot was still going for a long time after. We saw the growth there, but then I think it was just growth from the town that got it out going a bit more then. There was a bit of expansion all around that way. There was nothing much that really brought it in in a rush. It's just grown as people have moved in largely, I think. Later years we've had commuting. That's added to it greatly, as schools have just grown out of sight. There's not too much of that work from Victor Harbor.

**So you've seen it grow from quite a small town into what is now a very big place.**

**PL:** Oh, yes. When we used to go to Adelaide I'd look across the lights from Tapleys Hill—going down Tapleys Hill in the truck—and I sort of feel now as I come over Victor Harbor, and look over Victor Harbor, there's as many lights in Victor Harbor as there was in Adelaide when I was a kid. My first trips down there. It mightn't be so, of course, (*couldn't decipher word/s*) spread out further. But that's how it appears to me. This goes so far around now, and Adelaide didn't go far around in those days.

**So what led you to eventually settle here in Victor Harbor, Peter?**

**PL:** Oh, nothing led me. It was the chance I had. Dad took over the farm. He did it for us and I finally finished up on it. It was the only chance I had really so I took it. I had one neighbour once who was offering to get me into sheep farming. He hated this cow milking. And that was a very low occupation. I could've only run perhaps 700 ewes if it was fully developed and really stocked, and I said that I couldn't grow my family on that. I've got to stay with cows. And he was very upset. But that was the only chance I had. There was no other way of doing anything else. I did look at going to Murray Bridge at one stage but my property sale fell through so I just stayed and developed where I was. Bought my land and I was probably as well off perhaps staying there. I looked at land in the south east, too, but just didn't do any good looking there.

**Some of that land down there took a lot of work, too. I know that from talking to the chaps who were on it.**

**PL:** Yes. (*Couldn't decipher name*) Scrub I went to for a week or two before I worked with Thorpes. Our neighbour bought land down there—a couple of them. There was some crossover there. But you needed money, for sure. But where I was, well, I could just grow quietly, do something every year.

**When did you get the Currency Creek side of things, Peter?**

**PL:** 1980, when we sold the dairy. I looked all around the district and I couldn't find anything I wanted. It was either billygoat country and you'd need spiky boots to walk up and down the hills, or it was bracken fern on Goolwa Road. Oh, another one that I could develop but it wasn't going to be worth any more when I developed it. Then the Bennett & Fisher bloke from Victor had advertised this one and it looked pretty interesting. It was Neville, I can believe the advert, so I rang him. He said, 'If I can get somebody to look at it, I can sell it'. I said, 'I'll look at it with you'. I went out and I said, 'Hold it for us'. Got my wife out. Yes, right. 70 acres, just what we wanted. We later sold 30 of it and got 40 left. I should've kept it all but at the time the sheep were getting

flyblown right when I was busy with the lawn business, and it was good money for the place and it was paying off the loan that I had. The loan was no problem. That didn't matter but it just seemed the right thing to do.

### **Did you sell the Mount Jagged place pretty well?**

**PL:** Yes. The first one fell through and I was going to take it off the market. He said, 'No, I've got another one. I've got another one'. So right, put the price up a bit. He sold it then. I couldn't get a good share farmer. That was my problem really. I was very happy farming. The development side was more in my interest then but it was too big for one—500 acres then. I'd advised my sons to get an education, which Mike(?) publicly thanked me. It was the right advice. The youngest son could milk cows and drive tractors but he hated cows. He couldn't stick it home. So I was left with it. So we were happy to get out. We'd had enough of it really. And I didn't know what I was going to do so it was just a bit of time in between. Then bought the lawn business.

### **So tell me about the lawn business.**

**PL:** My son worked in it. That worked up where Brokenshire's dairy is. That's where it started. It was a badly rundown business with some very bad angles but we bought the name only, on legal advice and all those things, so we didn't get the debt. We bought the truck. Our son had got into a semitrailer. He was mechanically minded so I backed him on that, and it wasn't wrong. He really worked for a good number of years but he didn't like the trucking. Too busy paying off your truck and it's worn out. It's too competitive. So he got out of it.

But the lawn business was six years of jolly hard work. But we did very well out of it finally. Not much in the sale of the business. We made money along the way. When we got to Tooperang we were on good dirt there. We ran a really good business. I had a manager that was going to do that—the lawn business—but then he wanted more money, which I said I didn't have. He said that he was going to leave. He thought he was going to catch me out. And I said, 'Well, you can leave. I've grown vegetables, I've grown pasture, I can grow lawn', which I did. But that left my wife as the office lady, which she hated. She was excellent at it but she just didn't like it. Chasing people for money wasn't her idea of a good job. She was keen to get out of it and I had health problems very badly. So we got out of that. We bought Currency Creek while we had that. We had the two together there. But then it was in to Rosetta Village. I had a few years involvement there.

**Now Rosetta Village. That was the first development off the Bay Road? Is that that one?**

**PL:** Yes, just past the hospital.

**Yes, that's the one. Is that the Bay Road there?**

**PL:** Yes.

**So that would've been the first of its type?**

**PL:** No.

**No?**

**PL:** Bay Village was the first one.

**That's it, yes.**

**PL:** That's opposite the hospital.

**Yes, that's right. So this is the next one along, more or less.**

**PL:** Yes. Rosetta. It was government paddocks at the time. It was supposed to be going to be the school but it was still government land, and we finally bought it from the government. It seems a heck of a good buy now. We got forty acres for something like 400 and something thousand. More or less level land. What it would be worth today –

**A bit.**

**PL:** A bit. If you could find such a thing.

Yes, that was a lot of hard work. It was a challenge. They put it to me that they were looking for money to get it off the ground. They had the idea but they didn't have the capital. The land agent lady that knew I had money to invest came to me, 'What about this?' I said, 'I'll have a look at it'. And I said, 'Yes. Reasonable houses at a reasonable price. That will go. I'll be in it'. Well, it certainly did. One engineer we had there, or a professional of some sort, told me quietly afterwards, 'They wanted me to go in this. I could've borrowed money to go in to it but I wouldn't do it. I wish I had now'. But he was just worried to stick his neck out. But I said, 'No, reasonable houses'. It's proved dead right.

**So did you get very interested in that, Peter, apart from just investing?**

**PL:** Oh, yes. I was fencing and gardening there for a number of years. We got in another director. He and I did a lot of fencing, but I did all the gardens and lawns and the development of the entrance, and all that work. The mounds around the (*couldn't decipher word*) on the Bay Road there—the big mound there—I did all the work on that. Planted all the trees on that. Yes, I did a huge amount of work there -

### **Was it enjoyable?**

**PL:** - six or eight years. Yes, I did but the manager was too tough. His business principles were right on the edge. He was a hard man and screwed everybody, including me. That was the problem. He wanted us out so he could get more money. But I jacked up. I finally told him what I wanted and he said, 'Why didn't you tell me before?' Well, he made an offer, and I said, 'That's no good'. I wouldn't take that. But when I put it up to what I thought—a bit more—he jumped at it. He's an awfully wealthy man now.

### **Did it prove good for you at the time too, Peter?**

**PL:** Oh, yes. Yes, I doubled my money over the period. Oh, yes, there was no doubt about that. I didn't get wages. I did a heck of a lot of work there. I got some director's fees and our profits, and a bit of machinery hire but I wasn't on a wage really. I was a heck of a good thing for the village. Jim got his wages and Richard got commission on selling houses. I was on the tail end. But yes, I enjoyed it. But I was more or less one of the workers there rather than an owner. One of the builders at one stage was asked who the old bloke was with the blue car and the little dog that did the gardening. 'That's one of the owners'. 'Oh, yeah!' (*Laughter*) They really enjoyed it.

### **So Peter, did you build this here?**

**PL:** No. We were up on Renown Avenue. We bought a house there, the first house that was built on the Mount Breckan site when the ABI College had it. It was built for Dr Brian Hardman. They'd had it for sale for a fair while. We finally made an offer of 49,000. There were seven offers at the same stage, around the same price, but because I was known to all of them and I wasn't too far out of the party, I got it. But for a while it had been for sale and then there was this dose of offers on the table. That was very good. It had a big yard, front and back with all kids' cars, and I could bring tractor and trailers there. That was good. And we've been here now about three years. Level, so I can walk around on the level. That's why it was really done. And the windows.

Aleth(?) can reach the windows. That was built up at the back. She doesn't believe in getting a window cleaner. You clean your own windows. She'll weaken one day. No, this is very good. We're very pleased with this. But the church bell, they don't know how to ring it now. You know, a bell tolls.

**Yes.**

**PL:** They bounce the bell on this one. There's an energetic lady. It tolls, and then clunks. Tolls, clunks. It's a double header.

**This is just across the road from where Peter and Aleth live.**

**PL:** I said to one Catholic person that it was the crow bell. She was musical. She said, 'Oh, I know what you mean'. (*Laughs*) I've heard the bells in Bruges, and oh –

**Well, Peter, you've described your growing up at Mount Compass and your boyhood and youth and your occasional visits to Victor, and your picnics, and here you are now in your 80s and you are living in Victor itself. It's been a fairly good journey, hasn't it?**

**PL:** Yes. One of my mates says that I'm the only bloke he knows that changed his job twice after fifty and did alright at both of them.

I've done interesting things. One chap I loved very much in Victor here has died recently, 'How do you get these interesting things?' One of them was work in Libya for three months, was just an advertisement and I answered it. They had the idea that some of these latecomers are better than the ones that rush in—and I had good references—so I got that one. And the solar race from Darwin to Adelaide, 'How did you get that?' I said, 'There was an ad in the paper. They wanted helpers and I got in it'. Various things like that that I've done. The race on the salt lake on Eyre Peninsula. Just another different one.

**Well, Peter, thank you so much for telling us just a little bit about your life today. It's been a real help to hear about how you saw Victor growing over time as well. So thank you very, very much.**

**PL:** Been a pleasure. I don't know how it will sound.