



## Transcript of a discussion with Ian McDonnell, from October 2017

### Part 1 of II Interviews

Interviewed by Rodney McKenzie

Transcript by Barry Neylon

**Rod:** This is a chat between Rodney McKenzie and Ian McDonnell who was born 6/3/1948. Welcome Ian. First off I'd like you to talk about what were some of your memories before you went to school? Where were you born?

**Ian:** I was born in a little place on the outskirts of Liverpool called Speke. I was born, and contrary to what some people would say ... "I was born" .. and for the first two years of my life I lived in Western Ave, which a lot of people would remember if you are from Liverpool, then they built this area called Speke, which was just Housing Commission houses. And we moved to a road called Little Heath Road, which was quite a long road ... that virtually started .... at one end was what they called Speke airport, which is now Liverpool Airport, and, before that, at the top end they've since built the Ford Factory. So it's a very long road. I can still remember them bituminizing the road. I use to stand there and watch the big steam rollers rolling the tar out. I must have been three or four. We lived there until 1960. In the mid 50's ... 58, 59 ... I guess you'd call it a cul de sac ...off Little Heath Road was called Upton Green. It was a good hundred metres up from us. Now in that cul de sac ... number 25 ... there was a lad called George Harrison, and my friend Alan lived next to him. He was learning to play the violin. And there was a big archway between both houses. When we went to High School we walked through that archway. So just about every day I would walk past this George Harrison's house. And about three or four streets away was a fellow called

Paul McCartney, but in the mid 50's Paul moved to Western Ave where we'd come from, .... and I can remember one instance .. I must have been 10 or 11 .. I was out the front of the house and this chap walks past with a guitar on his back and I said; .. "you can't play that" ... and he was going to have a go at me. But Mum must have been watching out the front window and she called me in. Well that guy's name was George Harrison. But then, carrying on with that story, my cousin lived in Hunts Cross, which was the next suburb up ... near the Ford factory, and ..... I can't remember the name of the road now ... but when the Beatles got a bit of money George bought his parents a house ... which was right opposite where my cousin lived. So, my cousin got to know him quite well. And she got their autographs which I have a copy of. I know that they are the original autographs .... because a lot of the autographs, if you hand a book in, George would just sign them for all the Beatles. He was known for that. But anyway I can remember starting school .. and .. it was when they had a pantomime. Somehow I got into that and I don't know how .... standing on stage as a shepherd. I was about 5.

I did reasonably well in Primary School. I've always had a penchant for history, and I was always top of the class in history .....and I guess that has carried on quite a bit ... because now .. where I am part of the Gawler History Team. I can't remember a real lot about Primary School. One of the teachers was Miss Jones .. I remember that, but I use to sit next to a girl called Janet Stewart ... I can still remember that. I was a bit slow at reading and she use to help me to read. And her dad was the local ice cream man. He use to drive the Walls Ice cream van up our street .... that was Mr Stewart. Anyway we came out to Australia .... moved to Elizabeth .... the ice cream van came up the street! ... guess who it was? Mr Stewart. (laughter). I looked at him. He looked at me. (laughter)

**Rod:** I'll have to ask my wife then. Whether she remembers him.

**Ian:** She would remember the Walls Ice Cream Man anyway. And quite possibly if she lived in Elizabeth he was probably the ice cream man. I can't remember what brand it was. It certainly wasn't Walls. Walls being English.

And then High School. I use to walk with two friends. Derrick from Upton Close which was another cul de sac on the other side to us ... and we'd walk up and pick up Alan .. who lived next to George ... and then we'd walk through that big archway. If you look on Google Maps you can see it but it's pretty dim. And so we went to High School up there ... Stapleton Ave it was. We had a bit of fun there, but then again I can't remember too much about it.

**Rod:** So it was either innocent or naughty fun?

**Ian:** Pass (laughter)

**Rod:** So you came to Australia ..

**Ian:** 1960. October 25th .. we left Tilbury Docks. And .. well .. it was certainly the best holiday I'd had for many years .... even for many years after. It was the SS Orontes. It was it's second to last trip to Australia. Then it was scrapped. It was built in 1929 and it was used as a troop ship during the war. I can remember that every morning the steward would walk around the decks with a box of ice cream ... little dandies. And he would give one to everyone and then he would leave the box on the side of the swimming pool ... but I use to follow him and pinch it.

**Rod:** I would believe that too.

**Ian:** I wanted to get the autograph of the captain. But of course nobody could ever get his autograph. So I went to places I wasn't supposed to go and I saw this guy that looked pretty snazzy with his uniform on and I said that I wanted to have the captain's autograph. And he said that they don't normally do that. And then he said; "I tell you what, if you go to the crèche tomorrow I'll leave something for you." So, I went there and I told the lady that the captain was going to leave something for me. And I went there the next morning and there was a postcard of the ship signed by the captain and the staff commander. And I still have it today. And she was floored. She said: "I don't know how you did that."

**Rod:** So you were roughly 12 when you came ...

**Ian:** 12 I was. And on the boat I can remember that there were the seven dwarfs. These were coming out from England to do a national tour of Australia. And I've got the clipping out of the paper where it talks about their tour. And I still have their autographs as well. Not that they are of any use ... but I still have them. So that was a good holiday. We arrived here November 26th ... early in the morning and got onto a bus.

**Rod:** So you arrived here as in Adelaide?

**Ian:** Port Adelaide. We were supposed to go to Melbourne but with a bit of talking with the staff we managed to get off at Adelaide, because that's where our family lived.

**Rod:** So you had family out here before you came.

**Ian:** yes. And we got on a bus to Finsbury Hostel. We got there about 10.30 in the morning and grandmother was waiting for us. She had been here 5 years but I still remembered her quite well. I knew who she was as soon as I saw her.

**Rod:** She came out about the same time as my wife. My wife came out in 55.

**Ian:** 55 she came out as well .... on the Oronsay. The sister ship. I think there were two or three different one's, but the Oronsay was much newer. She must have been posher! (laughter) I come from the "scum of Liverpool" ... the rough area (laughter).

**Rod:** Tell that to the Beatles.

**Ian:** It's funny. I saw a concert on TV which was a Beatles get together thing. And Paul was saying "I came from Hardwick Road"; and I said "No you didn't ... you came from Ardwick Rd". I remember the road because there use to be two buses that were virtually stationary ... they were mobile shops ... but they always stayed in the same place. And there was one in Upton green where we use to go all the time .... it was the local shop ... in the same cul de sac that George lived in. And there is actually a photograph in George's book ... where his Mum I think it was took a photo of him with a guitar outside their house .. and i'm 99% sure that the guy in the background is me.

**Rod:** We got up to where you came to Australia but we failed to mention what other family members there were.

**Ian:** I was the oldest. My sister was 18 months younger than me. She's living in Andrews Farm. My next brother, Larry, I can still remember when he was born. I was about 4, 3 yrs old. But he passed away earlier this year. And then I had another younger brother Gordon who is in the airforce in Queensland, and ... my youngest brother Mark is in Tasmania. I always blame him for not being able to go out when the ship docked, because I had to stay on the ship and look after him while the rest of the family went off. The only place I got off was Naples I think. I had to stay on board and look after him while my family went everywhere else ..... India and all that .... Oh!!! never mind. I still love him (chuckle).

**Rod:** Ok, so there was a sister and three brothers.

**Ian:** All the boys use to sleep in the one bedroom in England. My sister had a room to herself. And of course in 1955 My Grandmother and Grandfather and Auntie came out to Australia. My Auntie use to man the kiosk at the end of Western Ave .... It use to be where the buses came down out of the city ... down the end of Western Ave and turn around and go back again ... there use to be a kiosk down there where they served tea for the busmen. She use to run that. I've got a photograph of her in the caravan there. It was owned by a fellow called Butler. He had several of those.

**Rod:** You mentioned in the break some of the places you stopped at on the way out here. I'm wondering if you can remember some of those.

**Ian:** The first one .... well after we left Tilbury you go through what is called the Bay of Biscay which is one of the roughest bits of water you could ever travel through and I got terribly seasick. But when you are seasick you soon learn how to overcome that. You tend to lie down and stay there.

**Rod:** the worst thing to do.

**Ian:** So you get up on deck and you watch the horizon, because you get seasick because of your ears ..... you are moving but your eyes say .."no, you're not". So, I have been on some very rough boats since then and I can stand on deck without hanging on to anything ... the rougher the better. Once you are seasick you sort of learn. And so, get up on deck and have a good look around. And then after the Bay of Biscay you go around the coast between England and France. The first stop was Gibraltar. That was at night time and so Mum and Dad got off and went for a look around ... but not me. I had to stay there. But I looked out the port hole and saw Gibraltar at night with the lights.

**Rod:** So you were 12 when this is happening. You have memories but you also hit baby sitting duties. So you didn't get off but you were old enough to be left.

**Ian:** And from there we went through the Mediterranean. I remember going past Sardinia and then Sicily and up into Naples. I did get off I think in Naples for a little while. I remember looking in the shoe shops and it was something like 200,000 lira. Seemed like a lot of money. But that was only Lira. And from the boat I can remember looking out from the landing on the ship and you could see Vesuvius in the distance, which caused a few problems some years ago. From there we went down to the Suez Canal. I don't know when it was built but in October November we went down the Suez Canal. It was rather a strange experience because virtually both sides ... you could go both sides of the boat and virtually look down at sand. And you've got the Arabs on the dunes with their camels. So it's very narrow. I don't know how they managed to get the ship down there but they did. We went from there, if I've got the order correct, to India .... no sorry ... Port Said. But you didn't get off the boat.

**Rod:** That was the end of the Suez.

**Ian.** Yes. And you didn't get off the boat. The little boats came to the side of the ship. Goods use to come up in baskets. And you'd have a look and send the money down if you wanted it. Or .. as some people did .. thankyou very much and just walked away with it. There were a few empty baskets that went back. And there would be people yelling and screaming. Aah! Not guilty.

**Rod:** They were not able to get on and you were not able to get off.

**Ian:** That's right. So some people had a look in the basket and thought that looks nice and sent the empty basket back. It probably happened quite a bit. I did see it once or twice. And from there to India.

**Ian:** No, sorry, Colombo ... which is now Sri Lanka. I think Ceylon is still the capital. And I didn't get off there either .. and from there to Fremantle ... and I didn't get off there either. I had a chat with a guy on the pier. This Perth boy comes up and starts talking to me and I was saying that I wanted to get the Captains autograph. So he says: " There he is. I'll get it

for you, give me your book." So he chased after somebody, disappeared, came back with some signatures on there. I looked and thought; "you little shit". They weren't even the right name. (laughter) So! he said he'd got them for me and he'd just signed whatever. So, anyway I got the originals after that. From there to Adelaide and then we're here.

**Rod:** And life on board?

**Ian:** Excellent. Even though it was a one class ship, and it was an old ship but it was the best holiday I've had for years .... well! the best holiday I'd had till that time and for years after. We've been on a few cruises since and to me it's the best holiday you can get. It's certainly the cheapest holiday you can have. I mean, you can get it for as little as \$100 a day on a ship and you wouldn't get a hotel for that ... and you get all your meals .. you get your entertainment. You do have to pay for your booze and things like that. And the so - called duty free shop is a bit of a ripoff I think. I've seen stuff in the Duty Free Shop that I could get a lot cheaper on land. But apart from that sort of stuff .. yeh .. it's a good holiday .. if you don't get seasick. If you do get seasick then ..Get Up On Deck (chuckle). We then spent two years in Finsbury Hostel. When we first arrived in Australia the temperature was over 100 degrees and it was like that for 12 days straight .... 12 days. And of course in Finsbury Hostel they are virtually tin sheds ... Nissan Huts.

**Rod:** No air conditioning. No nothing. No luxury. And you go and stand outside because it was cooler than inside.

**Ian:** It was terrible. But after the Vietnam war ended they ripped the tin sheds down and built nice new cosy brick buildings for the Vietnamese refugees. We spent two years at the hostel. I went to school at Pennington Primary. I was at High School in England and ended up in Primary School here. I stayed there until .... you could leave school at 14 then ... and on my 14th birthday I never went back to school. (chuckles) So at Pennington when it was time to go back into School after the beginning of school or recess I use to play the base drum. I can still remember the tune.

**Rod:** I can still remember that .. unfortunately.

**Ian:** That's probably my best memory of Pennington. There's a few bad ones ... but that's probably the best one. So I left school and got a job at McQueen's Sport store in Port Adelaide. So I'd get the bus from Finsbury down to Port Adelaide. I stayed there a little while just as a bit of a gopher. Then I got a job closer to home at a service station on Phillip Highway. The Mobil station opposite Holden's. My pay was something like 3 pounds and sixpence a week. You could do a lot with that.

**Rod:** So that was when you were what ... sixteen?

**Ian:** 14,15.

**Rod:** 14 when you left school and at the sport store, but that was less than 12 months?

**Ian:** Yes.

**Rod:** So when your parents moved to Elizabeth you got the job at the service station.

**Ian:** Yes. Worked 12 hours a day ... opposite Holden's there. And those were the days when you cleaned the windscreen, checked their oil, checked the water .... mind you it would be pretty hard to check the water these days with pressurised systems. (chuckles).

Then I got into the clothing trade. At Kentish clothing I started on the steam presses. I shouldn't blow my own trumpet but I was that good I could run two presses at the same time. Normally there was only one person on a press. And then I got asked if I would be interested in going into the Maintenance dept. I went in there, learnt my trade, and became an industrial sewing machine mechanic and moved around the various clothing factories in the area. But they got killed off eventually when the Vietnamese started manufacturing clothing at home and it got to the point where people would take all the clothing to their place ... all the cuts to their place .... and next morning you would go back and pick up the whole jeans. It was so much cheaper and it killed off the clothing trade. I don't know of a clothing factory in South Australia now. There is a couple of shoe factories ... and that's about all. I worked in Levis, Corfu, Yorks clothing company ... I even worked in the city for a repair company ... going out to factories to repair. I can't think of one of those factories that now still exists. Which is unfortunate. Rod: What was life at Elizabeth like?

**Ian:** I thought it was good. Elizabeth Vale we lived at which was one of the newer areas. I had a push bike and a few friends and one Sunday ....

**Rod:** Elizabeth Vale ..ok .. so where ..

**Ian:** Where GMH is. Lyell McEwen Hospital. One Sunday a couple of friends we were actually on our push bikes and went into Adelaide, down to Port Adelaide, and back home again just for something to do. I use to come up to Gawler on my push bike as well ... even then. I know there was a place ... I use to take photos with a "you beaut" little Box Brownie .

**Rod:** That's all there was in those days.

**Ian:** And there was a camera shop in the main street. I can't remember where it was but it use to be open on a Sunday and he use to have cheap film. So I always rode my push bike from Elizabeth to Gawler to get some film. But of course it was a lot different then. You don't need film now and you can do a lot more with photo's.

**Rod:** It's also only a 20 minute drive but it would take a lot longer to ride.

**Ian:** I can't remember how long it took ... maybe 40 minutes. I can't remember exactly. But being Elizabeth Vale it was right at the furthest end from Gawler. Elizabeth Downs was at the other end ... not too far. But ... yes .... we had some good times. I can still remember some of the friends I had then. I won't name them but we had some fun.

In 79 I got married and had ... my wife already had a baby ... and we had four more so we ended up with five. And they're all doing quite well. One manages a tyre company, another one is a national sales manager, my daughter is in child care ... there are four boys and a girl all together ... and another one is currently in Perth doing a masters degree in something.

**Rod:** So what ages are they now?

**Ian:** Guess. So you were married in 79.

**Ian:** 78 we got married .. sorry. First one was born in 79, then 81, 84, and 92. The first boy was born in 74. They have all done well. The youngest boy, currently in Perth, has more degrees than a heatwave. And he is engaged to a neuropsychologist. They will all do ok for themselves.

**Rod:** So in some ways they are quite young ... considering you are older than I am.

**Ian:** I didn't get married till I was about 30. Our youngest is our daughter .. she is in child care and is married to a Central District's footballer. I'm not going to ask who you barrack for. (chuckles).

**Rod:** I was brought up .... my grandfather was a head trainer at North Adelaide ... so I was always brought up ...

**Ian:** Second best team. If you go by distance.

**Rod:** I think a lot of Elizabeth was North Adelaide territory before central Districts was started up ... so I think ...

**Ian:** 64 was the first league match. In 1959 they became a bona fide team. I can still remember their first match

**Rod:** All I can remember is that when Centrals started up they took a lot of North Adelaide catchment area. It was lovely for Centrals ...

**Ian:** Their coach ...

**Rod:** ... but effected North for a number of years. I don't think they have ever recovered .. have they? (laughter)

**Ian:** I can remember North Adelaide in a grand final kicking something like one goal eight.

**Rod:** Luckily I was at a wedding that day. I hated the fact that there was a wedding on the day of the grand final. And when I saw the score I was really pleased that I wasn't there.

**Ian:** I think it was Sturt who played them. I remember Central's first win. Their coach was Ken Eustace and I'm pretty sure their first win was when Ken Eustace was selected to play in Tasmania. So he wasn't even there.

**Rod:** My wife Maureen is related to Ken Eustace.

**Ian:** Oh! is she. I know Ken.

**Rod:** I think we might stop there ... if you are happy to have another session at some stage. Because we have a heap more to do. So thank you very much Ian and I look forward to the rest.

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