ORAL HISTORY – QUEENSLAND COMMUNIST PARTY

TRANSCRIBED RECORD OF INTERVIEW WITH STAN IRVINE

Date: 24th September 2014 Interviewer: Ross Gwyther

[*This transcript has been slightly modified by the interviewee to add explanatory notes when necessary. These notes or words are in "italics"*]

STAN: I was born in Carina, as it was called – now it's called Carindale, of course, part of it. I was probably born in hospital. I don't know where or not I was born. I presume they would have had me in hospital, because I know all the other children were born there. Early days, my mother was born at the Lady – what's the place down the Valley – and my grandmother walked from this place where they were living at Highgate Hill, they walked down to the Valley for her to be born at this place.

I had two brothers, one older, one younger than me, and we lived at – my mother owned it, I don't know how she owned a house, but she had this shop. It was where the IGA shop is now, just one of those normal old shops. Come into it, the counter was there. I can still see it, almost see myself there. Probably we were one of the first to get a telephone. Nobody else had a telephone. We ended up getting one in the shop, and that was probably – I had nothing to do with it, of course; I was too young.

ROSS: So when were you born?

STAN: In 1921, and my elder brother was born in 1918, I think he was, and the younger brother was about 18 months behind me, but all in that. It was down in that area just before the Great Depression, where we were looked upon by perhaps the average person there as probably middle-class, I suppose, because although we were as poor as church mice, but because we lived in a shop people thought, oh, you've got plenty of money, they can run a shop. But she had a lot of bad customers.

She left the shop in about 1928, the start of the Depression, when things started to get really tough. Probably nobody was buying anything, nobody could afford to buy any goods. She had a lot of debts owing, people that, in those days the average pint of milk a day in a billy, you left it on the step and the milkman came round on a horse and cart with milk drums on the back, and he measured out a pint of milk. Well, those days we had people going round pinching those off your doorstep.

ROSS: And your father drove taxis?

STAN: Yes. I don't know when he started doing that, but I can always remember him being a taxi-driver, and they used to work, he'd start work about 2.00 o'clock in the afternoon and work the night shift down at South Brisbane. So I didn't see too much of him when I was growing up, because he was, when

I went to school, he was still in bed sleeping, getting over the night before. Then when I came home, he was off to work. That was after school.

ROSS: What about the sort of political environment that you grew up in with your family and people who were significant in your life then?

STAN: Not very much. I wasn't a bit interested in politics until during the War years, actually. The Army sort of brought that out.

ROSS: Would you have said it was a Labor-oriented family, or a Conservative?

STAN: They weren't political. My grandfather and grandmother were quite religious, but they were a rebellious religious mob. They didn't believe in the Plymouth Brethren, their people, but had their own beliefs, so they left them and my grandfather belonged to an organisation called the Bible Students o Australia, and so this was the only religion that I was brought up, something along those lines. The older I got, the less religious I became. There was the Sunday School, that was the only religion that I had when I was growing up.

ROSS: And then when your mother left the shop, she took up being a seamstress; is that right?

STAN: No, we moved up to a place in Cambridge Street towards Camp Hill way. My father sort of kept on with the taxi, and he must have made enough, and my mother just became a housewife then. There was nothing definite.

ROSS: And you were always interested in carpentry?

STAN: Yes. My mother said I was born with a hammer in my hand. I wanted to do something. I built a fowl house when I was four or five years old. It probably fell down after I finished, too, but the area around was all country, of course. My mother's shop was one along Old Cleveland Road, and the nearest shop was about three miles up the road, owned by someone else, you know. It was sort of a long way distant, and in those days before much motor traffic, probably our pastime on a Sunday was counting the number of cars going past. That took care of the Sunday, you know.

ROSS: So because you were interested in carpentry, you went to the Central Tech College?

STAN: Yes, that was after I finished Seventh Grade in the State School. I went and did – at the Carina School there were about 120 pupils, and I was up to Seventh Grade, and there were six (three girls and three boys) who actually sat for Scholarship. See, my elder brother, he must have had the brains of the family because he went on to High School at Brisbane Grammar School.

ROSS: Because you had to get a certain percentage to go on to High School?

STAN: Yes, and that particular year, to make it harder, boys had to get 55% to pass, and the girls had to get 50%.

ROSS: If you didn't get that amount, then you couldn't go on to High School?

STAN: No, you had to pass the Scholarship to go to High School – unless you had the money to do it privately, you know. We didn't have that sort of money.

ROSS: So then you went to the Central Tech College?

STAN: Yes, for about six months, that's all, and they did mostly, like, carpentry sort of work, so they had the long benches with a box on the end of the bench with different tools, like a hammer and saw, chisels and things like that. That was it, but I did a bit of Chemistry, very little Chemistry, no Physics or other higher education.

That was that. It was simply for working people, I'd say, well, unless you were born with plenty of brains you didn't think about things like Physics and Chemistry and things like that. I can remember doing Chemistry classes at the Central Tech, and they'd give you a Bunsen burner, a chest filled with copper sulphate, and you had to reduce it, hold it over the flame to turn it into a crystal. The old fart ruined the test, held it over too long and it burst. We didn't get a second go at that. The school may not have afforded enough, but they paid for the test tubes.

ROSS: So after that, you then got a job at a sawmill, Brandon's Sawmill?

STAN: Yes. How it came about, my father worked this cab rank at South Brisbane between, and there were two pubs on the corner, and there was a laneway – I forget the name of the laneway. Anyway, there was him and his brother (he was a taxi-driver as well) and they worked from that location, probably catching all the closing, probably why he worked at that time of day.

Well, one of the people he used to pick up in his taxi was a chap who used to work for Brandons, and he used to do all their work, because Brandons had a system going. They had a lot of rubbish timber in a box and things like that. Some of them used to be 3/8th wide, the axle, the floorboards, because they couldn't – remember the 2 x 1 box timber – we'd put tongue and groove on the sides and make a flooring out of it. Anyway, he picked up some months ago talking about apprenticeships, because I found that this joker, with me in apprenticeship, that he was also tied up with Brandons. Actually, it wasn't him that indentured me; it was Brandons themselves that did the indenture, but he was doing all of Brandons' work, like, all the building. They did quite a lot of houses around Brisbane. There was about four or five brothers in Brandons. One was the Minister of the Church in King George Square, yes. There's a church up on the top. Well he was the organist in that. He was just one of the Brandons. There was Jim, Bill and Ben. They are the ones who actually operated the timber mill.

ROSS: So maybe we should look at the War and when you joined up in the War, because you had brothers, too. Can you tell me a bit about how that came about?

STAN: Yes, well, my youngest brother was called up – was it numbers or if your name started with a certain letter, you were in the ballot? Yes, he was called up. My elder brother, I don't know how he came to join up. He went to Brisbane Grammar School, that sort of upper-class – he was the only one that got the higher education in our family. He got offered a training course very early, Lieutenant in the Army, but he never went any further. That was it.

Probably his association with different people played a big part, too, like, [*one person's*] father was the Minister for the South Brisbane Church of England and he become our Adjutant, more or less 2 I/C in the units. They got on quite well together, probably sort played more or less when they were young. He must have had more brains than us - he passed all the exams and so on.

ROSS: So you joined the 61st Battalion?

STAN: Yes. I didn't have to, but because my brothers were in it and I was still serving my apprenticeship. When I finished serving my apprenticeship they insisted – at one stage in my apprenticeship I was going to give it away, I got sick of the boss, the attitude towards life generally, you know. Because of that I tried to give it away in the second or third year and my Uncle spoke to me very severely. He said, 'Stick with it,' you know, 'It won't last forever.' So I did. And that's when I finally finished my apprenticeship when my two brothers were in the 61st Battalion – it was six or 12 months before I finished my apprenticeship, so they had a part in the attitude there, see.

Probably the wages at that time – I started off on thirteen and fourpence. That was the first year of wages for apprentices. Then by the time I reached the the fifth year it had risen to two pounds ten. I thought, 'Oh, lovely, all this money!' after getting 13 and 15 shillings, so I told the boss what he could do with his job after it was all completed, and I had about three or four months holiday then.

I took myself up – I'd earned enough in that short period to see me the whole year, you know. Two pounds ten in those days – the adult rate was only five pounds, but then I started hearing tales about it – how my two brothers were going, and sort of getting a bit envious and not knowing anything about the Army and what it meant....They were still in the camp at Chermside. So I decided, oh, I had to be in this, too. Probably worried about the Japanese coming down to take Australia, might have been a bit of propaganda getting through to me.

I didn't join till '42, March '42 – while my two brothers were out there exercising in the field, walking through Beenleigh and all place like that, across the fields – sounds all right to me! I got in, I was a carpenter at that time, fully trained. I would have been in a reserved occupation and I could have just as easily have joined the Construction Corps, the CC, at that time, but that didn't turn me on. I was sick of building houses and things like that, getting all the dirty work associated with that.

Then my brother, because he knew this chap who became the Adjutant, they applied to get me inducted into the Pioneers section of the Army, because I'd really helped them a bit. My brother was an Intelligence Officer. He worked with maps – I fitted out a utility, probably one of the lend-lease vehicles from America, I fitted it out with a cupboard with these big trays in it. It had three or four trays in the length, which you could put the maps out flat. They always rolled back again when you took your hand off them.

On that basis I got into what they called the Pioneers. That was sort of the engineers of the unit. We had it broken up into four battalions, and the headquarters. At that time when I joined it was the Signals, all laying phone lines and that sort of thing. It had an anti- tank section, a mortar section, like, but the Pioneers were a basic, he did work particularly after he came home, after Saturday night, he'd clean the sewerage, and the bin, what do you call it, the pan, he'd pull it up after Saturday night, you know.

Bridge building and all that, you know, support group for the ordinary battalion.

ROSS: Then you were deployed up to New Guinea?

STAN: Yes, we got to New Guinea in stages. First of all they had in the camp, the Dispersal Area surrounding Chermside, up Howlett Road and all that. It was all bush then, you know. They put tents in. Couldn't seal them, but they said, 'Don't worry about that.' Anyway, I was well up North at this time, towards the Japs, at this time.

So I went from Chermside to this Dispersal Area, then the orders came out to move further North. We went to Yandina, set up camp there. Of course, we had to dig a big trench for the toilet, you know, put all the hessian around these, and put about half a dozen seats. That was it, you know. Then from Yandina I went another bit later, three or four weeks later, further north to a place called Ant Hill Plains, just outside of Townsville. They put us on just plain trucks with a seat down the middle. They sat back to back – what was it, crocodiles, they roared like a bull, crocodiles – I never even thought about that.

Anyway, we were at Ant Hill Plains for a little while and then we took up a position at Rollingstone just outside on the North of Townsville. Ant Hill Plains was more or less South-West of Townsville. Rollingstone was fairly impressive, up a mountain - We had to watch in case the Japs landed in

Townsville- I hate to think what we could have done to them – and then from Rollingstone they put us on boats and took us to Milne Bay – because I was in the Army about four or five months – to Milne Bay on two ships, the Dutch freighters, one they called the *Pontico,* and the other was called the *Swattenaut*.

Anyway, it took three days from Townsville to Milne Bay. This was in the middle of all this, by this time, 24 August. The Jap landing took place. Again, luckily for us, the Japanese intelligence was faulty again. They assumed that it was undefended, Milne Bay was undefended, and we had one air-strip there for the Air Force. They didn't expect, by that time, the whole of the 7th Brigade, which the 61st was part of – there were three battalions in the Brigade, the 61st, 25th and the 9th. They were all set around different parts of Milne Bay, and we were on – well, Milne Bay is a great, big bay up there in Papua New Guinea, and we practically sat the whole day on the entrance.

At the mouth of Milne, the mouth of the bay, there is an island – I've forgotten the name of the island, but as we came past it was a beautiful day, you know, no rain, and it was just like a tropical paradise in there. When we got to the head of the bay, it never stopped raining. Seemed like it never stopped, anyway.

So from Milne Bay to – we moved up to, we had different sections. One section was on the other side of Milne Bay, on the North side of the island, and we had spotters up in the hills behind, you know, reporting troop movements coming down. After that, they just decided we were up at Port Moresby and because of all this other business they decided to give us a rest and we went up in the hills behind Moresby, a place called Gotadabu. The Army doesn't believe in having rests. They have patrols, exercises on every second day, you know. That's their thing, always doing something, can't have them doing nothing, sitting around doing nothing.

I came home and did a course in map-reading at Somerset Dam. I went back and by that time they'd moved up round the corner, up to Madang, just north of Lae. From Madang we went of course to Bougainville, a meagre force of 1,000 men in – we had to sort of get rid of these Japanese people. There was only 20,000 of them. They thought we were that good we could beat 20,000 Japanese. Anyway, that's where my brother was killed. There were no roads on Bougainville. There might have been some around where the Japanese were, but the area we had to get to them, it was all jungle and just single – only the tracks that the natives had used in one place or another.

ROSS: That's the time when Menzies was complaining about the troops?

STAN: Well, Torokina was the base that the Americans had made a landing on – but that's where they had what they called the perimeter, just a semi-circle and they went around the edges, you know. All night long you'd hear a rifle

going off or a shotgun going off, you know. It wasn't the Japs; it was the trigger-happy Americans. If you were on patrol at night, you were standing out there in the dark and you could see something, you know, in the front there, you could bet your life something was going to move or appears to move. So you become pretty alert. But the Americans shoot first and discuss it after, you know, that attitude. That's the way we thought, anyhow. I suppose they were just as scared as we were, although when we moved into the perimeter and the Americans moved out, they went in a convoy to go further North to Rabaul and places like that. What's the other place, North of Bougainville?

ROSS: So your battalion was in this perimeter and you had 20,000 Japanese troops on the North of--

STAN: Yes, and a lot of jungle between us, and there was only, no roads. To get there you had to walk. So that's when Menzies got up and said these Australian troops were sitting there doing nothing, they should be getting rid of the Japs out of these islands – he didn't say it properly – get back on these plantations, you know. Well, I blame him, that was the only reason why they had to move us. They were fully contained, the Japs. We had them surrounded, and I think the only way they could feed them was by ship or something. By the time we decided to move against them, they were starving. A pointless exercise. We could have stayed there forever and a day. They'd have died of hunger, the Japanese, instead of having to fight them.

Milne Bay was where I first realised that they were trying to kill each other, you know – like, coming from a suburb of Brisbane and never having seen a dead body or anybody getting killed by a motor-car accident or anything like that, when the Japs came over with their Zeros and our Kittyhawks took after them, and you actually could see them in a coconut plantation, see them, actually hear the planes firing, and the bullets coming through the undergrowth, you know, it's quite – there was suddenly the realisation, 'They're trying to kill each other?'

So, sort of, that's the first realisation, my first realisation that that's what war is all about, you know, trying to kill. Everything was just a, you heard about it on the radio, it just didn't' relate to your way of life at any time.

ROSS: So during that time, what about the sort of politics that came out in terms of discussion groups and so on?

STAN: We had a couple of Party members from Sydney – one of them, he's the fellow that gave me the book, The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists,

ROSS: The Party members you said, were they openly, you know, did people know they were in the Communist Party?

STAN: Oh, yes. The discussion was, and this was the other thing I meant about Menzies didn't want them to hang around – we were workers together, so you ended up talking about it, so the worst thing they could do was talk about it, and all these solutions pop up and you can work out yourself which one you're going to believe, because – so, like, it probably started up in Port Moresby with going to that place up in the mountains behind Port Moresby, it was the head of the Kokoda Trail, where this area was, Torokina, although the Kokoda Trail hadn't come into any prominence at that time.

ROSS: But were you saying that's when you started having these sorts of discussions about the war and---

STAN: Yes, at night time.

ROSS: ---the war and what it meant, and politics?

STAN: You know you had at least six people to each tent and I remember we started talking about different things. You know, they'd talk about concerns. At that time the Russians were the underdogs and they were fighting for their life and everybody was for Russia. They used to say, 'Joe for King,' you know – the king was Joe Stalin. That was the attitude that arose in the discussion in the tent.

ROSS: So what's where you sort of got a bit interested in Socialism and Communism?

STAN: Yes, that was when my first political leanings came to light, and reading that book, it explained exactly what Capitalism was all about. I never even thought about it much. It's the same thing – you accept so much in life, you know, there's the status quo, you just follow along in the same old lines all the time. When you start thinking about it, reading about it, you come up with a different view altogether.

ROSS: So this was through reading "The Ragged----"

STAN: Well, that was one of the books I was reading. Of course, that came up for discussion, too. In the book we started talking about Communist – what was it? I forget the characters now.

ROSS: Well, it's all built around some building workers basically, isn't it, house painters and---

STAN: Painters, mainly. Yes, a group of painters, and of course being not mal-treated, but they were given all the dirty work and not being paid well, you know. Then inequality, the foreman, the trouble-maker, he felt he was the real villain of the place. I've forgotten – I suddenly realised, 'Oh, that's what Capitalism is all about.' Where they started off in the book, they had a game where they all sat around in a circle and they had their sandwiches out, and

it was when they had a talk to the boss – said to someone, 'Give me a bit of your sandwich,' and the boss ended up with all the sandwiches and the workers suddenly realised they didn't have anything to eat. Typical, you know, so very basic politics along those lines, that's what they brought out.

Then there's this chap from Sydney, he was in the same section as me, I gave him the books to read, and it became very obvious after a while how the system works, you know. Previously he couldn't have cared less, you know

ROSS: So can we talk a bit then about after the War, because you were then demobbed at the end of the War?

STAN: Yes, about three months before the War ended. By this time, or during the War years my mother and all the other soldiers of the Unit, their mothers got together and formed, they used to send parcels of food over and that sort of thing, and they'd sort of have a little committee of mothers. My mother got friendly with one of the jokers at the barracks at – Victoria Barracks. And he got me transferred on a compassionate grounds, I think because there were three brothers in the War in the same unit, and one gets killed, it's probably they'd say, 'Oh, they shouldn't have had three brothers together in the one unit,' you know. Anyway, whatever transpired, I got transferred to Watercraft Workshops down at Bulimba, and who should be there but Donny Elder and – I can never think of his name, but the family name were Party members---

ROSS: So they were both in the Communist Party at that stage, were they?

STAN: Yes, Donny was, and at that time the Englarts were very prominent, you know, Ted, Of course, when the waterside had a strike or anything, it all became clearer about how Capitalism was working, and it sort of emphasised everything. That's why I teed up with Betty Englart, who was one of the daughters of Ted, and she greeted me to the party, so from there we formed – and, being a carpenter, union meetings was a regular outing, you know. I used to say – I'll meet myself going to a meeting, you know, meeting after meeting - and most of them were mostly ran by the unions, because we had Jerry Dawson and Keith Lachlan, all the Organisers were all good Party Members, and they were real good Organisers, too. I wish we had those sort of people here today, because everything's gone quiet a bit.

ROSS: So which union would you have been in, then?

STAN: When I joined it was the ASC & J, *(*Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners), and throughout the campaign against the Secretary of that, and they changed now to the BWIU - Building Workers Industrial Union. Then they changed to CFMEU when they all combined they had the Construction Authority, Mining, Engineers, all those, they came together as one, give them more strength.

Donny was also in the workshop – that's when he lost his eye, working – they wanted to put a door in the side of the wall, and that wall was sitting on a metal clinch, about 3 or 4 inches of concrete, and we had to jack-hammer it, the jack-hammer was only a little small one, and a chip of that flew up in his eye. So that was – at that time three of us got together, all members of the Party... I can't think of the other chap's name---

ROSS: So you became friends, apart from being in the Union and working there, you became friends? and your families?

STAN: Yes. Well it was after the army - places like the Watercraft Workshop – it was like a holiday. They had people from all over Australia in that unit, Watercraft Workshop, people who were associated with boats, you know. The Army had a lot of small boats and they used to maintain them. It was quite a big place, it was, down at Bulimba – a big building, anyway.

ROSS: So after you'd joined the Communist Party then and there were a few of you who were Party Members in that Watercraft Workshop? Did you see it as part of your political work to work amongst, talk amongst your fellow workmates?

STAN: Yes, well, mostly on Union, although we formed a Branch – I don't know where, I think it was because being in the Union and we established a Branch at the Royal Brisbane Hospital and we brought in – there were two doctors, three or four nurses and then there were the people, people in the Carpenters and Building Workers, formed a Building Branch. There were two sisters that were nurses down there. She married a Secretary of the Party. Some disease, she got.

ROSS: So was this a bit later when you were actually working at the hospital?

STAN: Yes. Well, when I first went, I come out of the Army, I got a job with a chap called Kapitski and just a humpy building, you know, building houses. There was a terrific shortage of houses in Brisbane and there was plenty of work around. I worked with him for 12 months or so, and the Party came up with the idea, got to get down amongst the masses. Where I was working, it was two tradesman and another apprentice, and that I wasn't much influence to anybody in those days, with a small crew. They came up with the idea that we've got to away from this petty, small business and form a Branch in the hospital itself, because I was working with – so I left Kapitski and got a job at the Royal Brisbane. That name will come to me.

ROSS: So when the Party came out with that philosophy of actually getting out amongst the masses, was there a lot of discussion about that within the Party? Was that an issue that you hadn't thought about before, or ---

STAN: No, it was more of an edict, saying that the Committee, the Central Committee at the time at the time was getting more influence amongst the

working people, when it was a group of people, they should have had somebody, a representative to talk

ROSS: And all those Party Members, did you all think, 'Well, this is a good thing. We'll go along with this'?

STAN: Yes, because otherwise, actually if I had stayed there with Kapitski I earned half as much again as what they paid for the work at the hospital, working at the hospital----

ROSS: So you actually dropped money in order to work amongst a broader group of workers?

STAN: Yes. So, you know, quite acceptable to do, but it probably wasn't that much difference. They paid the award rate, whatever the award rate is. Gerry was the Secretary of the Union and he was a pretty good fighter in the Courts, you know, not only just on wages and things, but on all the little benefits, even things like drinking water on the job, you know. He used to argue – when Donny started saying, 'Fill your billy up at the tap,' and they started work, and then they weren't allowed to go back to the tap for the rest of the day, so that was their drinking water supply for the day. Those sorts of things build up your resistance to Capitalism. All the workers, they were out in the sun, they were hot, and I know Gerry went to Court arguing about why don't we stock at least cold water, not the hot water – things like that, and there were quite a lot of other little things, conditions, mainly.

ROSS: So you'd fight for those within the Union?

STAN: Yes.

ROSS: Did you talk about, like, because you had a branch of the Communist Party, would you have been talking about the sort of issues that were important in the workforce, and then you could take a bit of a lead in the Union?

STAN: Yes, it was mostly about we didn't have any policy-making things. That was left to the Central Committee and the Branch Committees, and on the Branch Meeting, Stafford, Ted Whiteoak – we used to meet at Ted Whiteoak's----

ROSS: This is the Branch Committee of the Communist Party?

STAN: Communist Party, yes.

ROSS: Okay. So there was a Central Committee, and then there were Branch Committees – what, like a Branch Committee in Brisbane, say?

STAN: Brisbane, and the State Committee ran from Brisbane. Then the Branch Committee was---

ROSS: So would there have been a Branch Committee which covered a certain area?

STAN: Yes.

ROSS: Like, the whole of Brisbane, or maybe sections of Brisbane?

STAN: No, a section of Brisbane in the main, mainly the State Committee looked after Brisbane, and went as far as Townsville and places like that, like, the State. I don't know how often they met or anything, but – what was his name, very prominent in Townsville, Frank Bishop. Frank was very, he was a good Party Member. If someone was wrong, he'd say it's wrong and explain why it's wrong, a very good speaker, Frank.

ROSS: So where would you hear that disagreement? Would that be at State meetings?

STAN: Yes, the State Committee, and the Branch meeting – we were running the South Brisbane Branch Committee.

ROSS: So were on the South Brisbane Branch Committee?

STAN: Yes, for a little while.

ROSS: And then in terms of the structure of the Party, you had the Branch Committee of South Brisbane. Then you had committees in each workplace, like, you had a hospital committee of the Party, didn't you?

STAN: Yes. Well, they used to call them Branch Committees and that, with their own Labor Committee. Yes, Ted Whitehead was a bootmaker, we used to meet in his shop, where they're building the Children's Hospital now. That's where his shop was, and they lived behind the shop.

ROSS: Can you tell me a bit about building the house down at Mermaid Beach, too?

STAN: That came about not through so much the Party, and when it went to workshops there were a whole heap of people from all over Australia, and one chap was from Western Australia, and he was a member of the Life Saving, probably the State Branch over in Perth, not Perth, Fremantle, those places, yes. He came along and they decided, well, I don't know who decided to form a Surf Committee in Brisbane, because there were weekends you were free. You went home, or I did, every night, had a pushbike and used to ride home. Weekends, those who were, somebody on picket to look after the front gate and that was it - nothing else was done.

ROSS: Even though you were in the Army, you mean?

STAN: Yes. And then they decided that he had a connection with Surf Lifesaving, so I went for the Southport Branch. There were two branches down there, the South and the North, one Coolangatta way, and the other one up round Southport, used to go to meetings up in Southport and they'd be on Mermaid Beach. There was no surf club up there. There was no people, so that they'd get people together and learn the basics of life-saving. We ended up with two Bronze scores that first year. As far as life-saving goes, we had no-one to save because one time I can remember as plain as anything, all there was in the Clubhouse were a man and his – well, probably they were newly-weds – walking along the beach from Burleigh somehow. So the Club turned out to keep an eye on them, so they got sick of that and turned around and went home again. That was about the sum total. Weekends, you'd have a few of the locals swimming, you know.

ROSS: Did you build a clubhouse, or did you have a clubhouse at that stage?

STAN: No, when my brother was killed, my father got his transfer. My mother didn't want to stay in the same house as she was in before. We had a holiday at - she liked Mermaid Beach and it was only 15 pounds an allotment in those days, so being a carpenter, I volunteered to do the building, so I built a house down there for her.

Dudley Street. Senator Brown, Chairman of the Senate, had one house on the end on the beachfront. Across the other side on the opposite was the WEA (Workers Education Association), a building there. They used it as a holiday house. There was only two other houses in the street.

ROSS: So did the WEA have classes there?

STAN: Yes, well, not while we were there. We used their buildings for a clubhouse for quite a period of time, too, while we pinched some materials from the Watercraft Workshop and built a clubhouse right on the beach, and the dunes.

Once I started building my house, practically all my time was taken up in building the house. You couldn't buy materials, almost impossible. It had a fibro roof on this place, and the builder we got it from was allowed three roofs a year. That's how we managed to get it. He was a builder and he got one, saved one for my mother. Surex had the sawmill down there, and when you put the order in, you more or less waited at the door while they put it through the saw. If you were a day later getting to pick it up, somebody else would have moved in and bought it. So things were pretty tight now for building.

Building a house and getting materials, and then having children at the same time, I sort of fell by the wayside where the Party work was concerned.

ROSS: So the kids, when were they born?

STAN: We were only married 12 months when Graham arrived.

ROSS: So when was that?

STAN: 1948.

ROSS: Okay, so you were married to Flo in 1947?

STAN: 1947, yes. So one thing and another, we used to be bombarded with things to do all the time, and then Marie Crisp – remember Marie Crisp? She was a bit, not dominating, but she wanted things done and whether you were prepared to do them or not, they had to get done---

ROSS: Because Marie was an Organiser for the Party at that stage?

STAN: Yes.

ROSS: So she was a pretty organised sort of a person?

STAN: Yes. She did the job at first. She did what job she had to do. I remember one time I arranged to meet her after work across the road from, more or less outside the Exhibition Grounds there. When I went there she didn't turn up. Cold and wet - after about an hour I got sick of waiting for her. I suppose she had some pressing excuses, but I didn't agree with it. If you make an appointment you keep it, you know. They weren't married then. Ted was a State Committee Member.

ROSS: And what about when you got married to Flo? Was Flo involved in politics then?

STAN: No, not at all. She came about through the, you know, she worked with one of the – oh, she had the ideas always in the background at the moment, but she had worked at Taylor & Elliott's for a long while, as a "dogsbody", filling up orders and that.. and she met up with – sorry, her younger brother was sort of one of our life-savers, and one thing led to another, and she came down and was, they stayed in the WEA building while we were on patrol in the Club. That's when she went swimming. She couldn't swim – even when they got a pool, she still didn't learn to swim – but she went swimming with one of the other life-savers and got into difficulties and she was, as the end was coming to her, he towed her ashore.

By that time I was Secretary/Treasurer of the Club at this time, and I had to take down all the particulars from her to put on the records of the Club, and it developed from there, we started going together at that stage. Then we found she was very peace-minded, and all her family is very musical.
Iris, the woman she was friendly with at Taylor & Elliott's, she was married to one of the, our Chief Instructor Life-Saver, and she was coming down doing the cooking for the whole Club, as one of her jobs. She ran into Flo

one time when Flo was working in a newsagent selling casket tickets. I got talking to her and I invited her down to the surf club. One thing led to another, anyway. That's the way we got together.

ROSS: And then after you got married, did she get more involved in politics? Like, she would have joined the party at some stage, did she?

STAN: Yes. She never actually joined the Party. She never actually had any theory or learning any study classes.

ROSS: When you two got married, the Party was pretty active in that period, I guess, because you had all these Branches around Brisbane? Do you have any idea of the size of it?

STAN: Well, the Hospital Branch had only about eight or nine members, as I said. That was about the Branch size, I suppose, but there were a lot of Branches around the place, you know, a lot of members of the Party those days. It was the "in thing" then, I suppose, too. At the end of the War, one thing and other, shortages and all that, and people being dislocated all the time, it created a feeling of opposition to Menzies and people like that.

ROSS: And when you say about Study Groups and so on, were you involved in those through the Party, too? Did you have, like, they used to have cottage lectures, I know.

STAN: Well, our people used to have corner-of-the-street meetings, you know, always had a main speaker and two or three others around, like, chairing the meeting and that sort of thing, delivering *Tribunes* and *Guardians* and all that sort of thing. All that aspect was all part of your duties, mainly. I'd be selling the *Tribune* and *Guardian* in Adelaide Street, you know. I'd have to go along with them – I don't know if I was moral support or physical support, but, yeah, people selling the paper.

ROSS: What about when you were just working with your regular workmates who weren't in the Party? Did you have a sort of philosophy of how you actually interacted with them?

STAN: Yes, mainly round Union matters, you know, based on the job, because actually, we were fairly isolated, even though we had– we had two nurses, and then we had a couple of doctors in the Party those days. I don't know what happened to them. Even though we had the Branch and we met occasionally, didn't meet regularly----

ROSS: How often would you have met as a Hospital Branch?

STAN: Depending upon the availability of the – the two nurses had duties to do, the doctors had duties to do, and---

ROSS: So you might have met once a month or something?

STAN: Yes.

ROSS: What would you have done at those meetings?

STAN: I remember a time when we organised one discussion group amongst outsider people, where Archie Boe down here, he lived in that area there. Remember Archie Boe?

ROSS: No, Was he another Party member, was he?

STAN: Yes, a Party member, too, Archie, always telling jokes, he was – like, he's living in an area that got flooded just the other side of the hospital there, and he said a Scotsman came along and he was looking round, and, 'What are you looking for?' and the Scotsman said, 'Oh, I just dropped some money down there.' He said, 'Send a couple of policemen down to look into it.' Another one he said was throwing a lot of money into the what-do-you-call-it. He was only a small man in the first place, and making it worse for his mates to get it out. But that's all the jokes. Very dry.

ROSS: So he was in your Hospital Branch, was he?

STAN: He must have been. He was a carpenter.

ROSS: Okay. You organised a discussion group amongst non-Party members?

STAN: Yes.

ROSS: What would that have been about, do you remember?

STAN: I don't remember. I was on the periphery. They were probably talking about hospital matters, operations and things like that.

ROSS: Yes. Also I know you talked before about, like, getting involved in the sporting world. To some extent, was that part of that Communist Party philosophy of getting out amongst the masses?

STAN: Yes.

ROSS: Can you tell me a bit more about that, then?

STAN: Donnie had been along to the Mt Gravatt Youth & Recreation Club, and Donnie said to me, 'Come on, we'll have to get into this,' so he was one of the chief organisers. We went along and they're all sitting around the table, and – practically all Liberals, too, as it turned out, so everyone wanted to help. We used to meet at Holland Park, Mt Gravatt. There's a hall up there, a Shire Hall. It's gone now. About near where the pub – it's just near below where the pub is.

ROSS: So what organisation was it?

STAN: A youth club.

ROSS: So when would that have been when Donnie and you went to it the first time ?

STAN: About ’54, it might have been ’55. Anyway, Graham at that stage, well, it fitted all our thinking to get him into a Club, you know. The idea, we didn’t intend to take over the Club, we just wanted to be part of it. In the end we ended up taking it over, because there were all the levels, they just dropped by the wayside, most of them. The sponsor, he was a Member of Parliament and he often came back in to say, ‘I was instrumental in starting,’ but he more or less left them to it, you know, he formed it and then left.

ROSS: So they had started it not all that long before you went along there, and then once it got established and it needed a lot of on-going work, they dropped away?

STAN: Yes, well, it involved getting the kids together, most of them from about five years old up to about, well, the baseball club, that was a separate section that was formed. We used to meet first in the Shire Hall and they had the usual things, like, they had dancing for the young girls and things like that, and the boys just organising games – very elementary stuff. Then we got a better offer, moving out to the Mt Gravatt Showgrounds, and by that time the Shire Hall, a big tall pine tree used to drop the prickles or something and you couldn’t have the kids going round bare-foot, so we were very happy to move out of that, even though we ended up on dirt floors at the Mt Gravatt Showgrounds. You didn’t get the hall. There just weren’t any buildings around. There’s all good buildings now.

ROSS: Yes. So did that organisation keep going, that Youth Club?

STAN: It’s still going. It’s still alive.

ROSS: What’s it called now?

STAN: It’s still Mt Gravatt Youth & Recreation Club.

ROSS: The Mt Gravatt Youth & Recreation Association?

STAN: Yes. It’s the only one I know of. When we first got it going properly out at the Showgrounds, we had sections of different, like, started off with rugby league, soccer, baseball, and the girls had softball and hockey, marching girls and vigoro and all that, practically every sport, and we had people to organise it. People actually did – that was the thing, when they got sick of it the whole thing dropped away. Nobody came to run it.

ROSS: Stan, other activities like the Progress Association, were you involved in that, because that was another thing that Communist Party Members I guess tried to get involved in?

STAN: Yes, we had the Holland Park Progress Association.

ROSS: So what sort of thing would have happened in that?

STAN: It was mainly whatever happened in the streets around the area, just Local Government stuff, you know, making sure the roads were, well, tried to be improved, the footpaths and things like that – very basic stuff there, too

ROSS: So was that something that would have been started up by Party Members?

STAN: Yes, I suppose the Pettigrews, George was involved in it – George Pettigrew. They were both Party Members, so there were Party Members everywhere. They didn't carry a banner around with them, though, to say who they were. The Progress Associations did fairly good work around the place, and were fairly well known. People who had problems would come back to the Progress Association.

ROSS: And you would have also got involved in the Peace Movement, I suppose, too, would you, or was that a bit later?

STAN: No, that came in with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. They were, the bombing of Hiroshima and all that, and I mean, they were all over West End. The CND people, we tried to form a choir there. We got it going, too, but then a couple of the people decided to give it away because there were too many religious people, not as in real-Lefties or – and from that came the .. Again Donny was involved in that. Donny by this time was an Organiser for the Miscellaneous Workers. He worked for the union working for cleaners, and he knew, Donny knew I had an interest in music, and he said, 'Come on, we're forming a choir,' so we went along to the Teachers Building.

ROSS: The Union Choir? Well, the Union Choir started in the late '80s, I think.

STAN: Yes, well, that's when they started. Of course, Flo and I were foundation members of it, the choir.

ROSS: But if we look back quite a lot earlier to the early 1960s, that's when all the campaigning about the atomic bombs was going on?

STAN: Yes.

ROSS: You would have been involved in that probably, too, then, would you?

STAN: Yes. I know I went to meeting after meeting, you know what I mean, and I don't know how folk put up with it.

ROSS: You were talking last time just on that Peace issue, about when the Red Dean came out here?

STAN: Yes. That would be – oh, yes, Ban the Bomb, that was the period. The Dean of Canterbury came out and [*my mate]* Norm Kelk. I had the Oldsmobile utility. We'd go on paint-ups and letterboxing and on painting up on the posts, electric light poles, and that's how we ended up in the South Brisbane Police Station one night. That would have been when the Dean was here. Yes, I forgot about that. We decided we'd go and put signs up. We painted a sign on the overhead bridge, the railway bridge outside Hancock and Gore's.

I mean, we didn't know, we found out later the caretaker had rung the Police and we made the mistake of not going. We were going to do one more, and we decided to do one down at the 'Gabba, up on – but then the law stepped in. But nothing happened. I heard them talking on the telephone and there must have been people asking what sort of people we were – "oh, these were just ordinary people that painted a sign". The Police were relatively civil those days. Yes, that sign stayed there for a long time, *Ban the Bomb*.

That's basically mainly what my activities were, paste-ups, letter-boxing, selling or distributing *Tribunes,* selling *Tribunes* and street corner – we had our own PA system on the back of a truck, you know – very, very amateurish, really, when you look back on them. You could see on the corner of Raffles Street, Donny – the joker on the corner he must have turned his radio up real loud. We took no notice and someone couldn't stand the noise inside, so they'd get him to turn it down. The only job I had was chairing the meeting and introducing the speakers.

ROSS: Would this have been a street corner?

STAN: Yes.

ROSS: Somewhere where there were a lot of people around, near shops or something like that?

STAN: Yes. In those days the Salvation Army would have, on Sunday nights they'd all get out with their musical instruments and play on different street corners. This followed so much a similar thing, although we didn't play any musical instruments, just used the PA system to put our point across.

ROSS: Just, can we go back to the 1950s for just a bit, to that period when the big Anti-Communist Movement was going on? How did that affect you as member of the Party? You know, they brought in the Anti-Communist bill and then there was the referendum.

STAN: Yes that was menzies..

ROSS: You would have been organising against the Groupers in the Union, I suppose, were you?

STAN: Oh, yes, that was – the Groupers decided they'd have to get rid of Gerry Dawson here, those other Communists. The Groupers were mostly Catholic, all owned by Archbishop Mannix and all those. And Gair, of course, was a good Catholic, so he formed up with what they called the Groupers, and we had some of those. We had some violent clashes up in the old Trades Hall, but there were enough reasonable people, enough to get them routed, you know, they gave up trying to get rid of Gerry and all the other organisers.

ROSS: What about on the job? Did it impact in your Union activities actually on the job?

STAN: It must have done, never did much subsequently, but we'd always get a good packed Union here, call for any of the TVs, get a good write-up from the Lefties, you know, they were thinking people, and the Groupers would be on one side, the baddies on one side and the goodies on the other.

ROSS: So if you wanted to sum up the philosophy that you took from being in the Communist Party in terms of how your working life – what would you say as a summary of what you learnt from being in the Communist Party?

STAN: Well, I learnt what Capitalism is all about, and what's the cause. Although we didn't succeed, there were various times in the early '50s that the Communist Party was a leading force in the ridges, you know. The revolution was just around the corner, but it never eventuated. But that was the attitude, as I said, you know, at some stage the Party was very close to taking over the Government, but I think it was a bit optimistic for us to do it. We had – what – 60,000 members in the Party at one stage. Something like that, so there was quite a lot of support there, you know, not enough to take over a Government, as I said earlier.

ROSS: There would have been pretty much equivalent to the membership, say, of the Labor Party, though. It was sort of equivalent force to the Labor Party?

STAN: Yes. Most of the Labor Party supported the Communist Party, too. That was before the Right Wing took over. They moved to the Right Wing, and that's the trouble with them today.

ROSS: Just talking about what you learnt from the Party, apart from learning about Capitalism and how things work, what about, if you were going to summarise it, what did you learn about how you interacted with your fellow workers as a Communist?

STAN: Probably not enough, because Building Trades has always been small, little bits here and there, all over the place, small quantities. It's only when you've got a big, high-rise building or something or other that you've got a chance to organise to any extent. Most of the time it was all humpy building and things like that. Probably it depends on the era we're in at the time.

STAN: If you can associate with your fellow workers on a social basis, you can use more influence that way than getting up on a stump and telling to them – because the message is not something you can ram down people's throats. It's getting them to realise that they've got to realise that what you're talking about is fact, you know. We all know that we need a new Party here in Queensland or around Australia, one that's for the grass roots working class again.

(End of Recording)