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This interview is being conducted on Monday the 27th of March 2006. The interviewee is **Peter** and the interviewer is Lucie Baragwanath.

Peter, as you know, the Whitehorse Historical Society is very interested to collect the oral history of the area. Of course migrants played a big part in that. So therefore I would like to ask you first of all: Which country do you come from?

Now, typically this is one of the questions that are not easy to answer because when I was born it was the easternmost part of Germany and when I left eleven years later it had become the westernmost part of Poland. For those people who know a bit of geography, it is known as Silesia.

So you were a child then?

I was a child. When we left of course we were "resettled" officially. We settled in the southeasternmost corner of what was the Russian zone of Germany then. And once we had gone through quarantine, we managed to cross the border, which at that stage was not as tight and controlled as it was later, into the British zone and then made our way down to Munich which was in the American zone. And in order to travel between the British and the American zone you needed to have an interzone pass, which we did not have. But they let us through.

So you were virtually refugees?

Expellees was the official term.

I see.

We did not go of our own volition.

Yes, you.... You were pushed

It was not a voluntary thing.

Right. So, when you came to Australia, you left from Munich?

No, when we came here we had lived in Western Germany. Let me see, we arrived in autumn '47 in Munich and in 1951 I started in Freiburg in the Black Forest. We had been in southern West Germany until late '55.

Yes, I have a younger brother

So, there were four of you?

Yes.

Father, mother and two children?

Yes.

And you came here by ship?

Yes, we came by ship from Bremerhaven

I see.

A ship called "Arosa Kulm" and because of the billowing smoke we referred to it as "Arosa Qualm". (Ha,ha,ha). It is the German word for billowing black smoke. We were supposed to be going to Bonegilla.

Yes?

But as we were on the trip advice came that we wouldn't be going to Bonegilla and we ended up in Greta near Cessnock in NSW.

So you landed in Sydney?

We landed in Sydney. We got off the ship on to a train that took us to into the night and then the camp was at Greta which was the reception camp. And by this time it was December and we were told there were hardly any jobs during the Christmas and New Year period and so in the end we were a group of people that were sent to Port Kembla, in the Wollongong area, to start at the 'Australian Iron & Steel'.

How difficult was it? How was the accommodation? Did you have to find it yourself?

No, that was provided. It was a migrant hostel called Balgownie Hostel. Although Balgownie was in the hills, where we were, that was Fairy Meadows. If you went back you wouldn't recognise it. At the time it was just meadows and Nissen Huts.

I was just going to ask: Were they comfortable or...?

something that suits everybody. The end was that it did not suit anybody. We went out to find ryebread and the British people they had some other ...

I can imagine. Your father was employed I gather?

Yes. He ... well, the three of us, sorry, just the two of us, my brother apparently was not in that, he was too young at that stage. He then was sometimes working for a baker while we were there. Women had practically no chance of getting a job and some people suggested that the reason for that was that so that people would not go away but stay in the camp. The plain fact is, of course that within four weeks my brother and my father headed off, went to Melbourne, didn't like it, ended up in Fitzroy or somewhere there. My father had some very caustic remarks about what he saw there and headed across to Adelaide and found their feet there. My father is a carpenter. He got a job immediately and I can't remember, oh yes my brother ended up in a nursery. But anyway, so then they wrote and said: "Come to Adelaide and then we went...."

The whole family moved to Adelaide?

The whole family moved.
To private accommodation?

Yes.

*And how long did you stay in Adelaide? You must have been fairly young
How old were you when you came to Australia?*

About nineteen, and because I came from school I was classified as a labourer whereas my father had a trade.

So, how long did you stay in Adelaide?

Thirteen years.

So what happened as regards your career? Did you go back to school?

First of all, let me go back one step. In postwar Germany things were very difficult and at some stage, although I was at high school, my parents said: "Look, we can't afford to keep you there and because you wanted to be an architect..." somehow they got the advice that if you wanted to become an architect you had to learn one of the building trades which is not entirely correct because that was more the career path for a building

No, I am talking about Germany. But as a result of that I had an interruption of my schooling, there were quite a few along the line. So I started a bricklaying apprenticeship and so I had done about one and a half years of that...

In Germany?

In Germany. I then... things had improved. I went back to school, caught up, one year behind, I lost one year then in the process, caught up, was there for half a year. This time it was at Donaueschingen when the advice came that we were accepted to Australia. So, because I did not have any trade I was classified as a labourer. But when we went to Adelaide my father said: "Look here, work as a bricklayer." So I started as a bricklayer on a building site. Well, I was given full wages. Within about a week the foreman came back very apologetically: "You realise you are not working as fast as the others, we'll have to reduce your wages. It was still quite a good wage, which I can't remember now... he took back about two pounds. I was there until ... well, I had started in early February, I think, and worked there until about Easter. Then the weather changed, also in the meantime I had enrolled at the Technical Correspondence School to complete my Leaving, that's the South Australian Leaving Certificate, by correspondence and then I was looking for a change of job and I answered an advertisement for a cleaner/handyman at one of the big motor businesses in the city of Adelaide which was very lucky because people there they all had what in sociolinguistics we would call ... it escapes me... well, anyway, this type of accent is closer to the British accent. I think that was very important also, because many others .. that is very skilled people ended up with the wrong sociolect and suffered as a result of it.

Can I go back just a little bit. How difficult was the language? Could you speak English?

Okay, that's a good question, too. At some stage my mother had subscribed to a course "English by Correspondence". She found that she was too busy to do it and she said: "Why don't you do it?" And I did it and then of course when I went back to school, to Donaueschingen for a half year, I dropped ancient Greek in favour of English. On the ship we had English lessons which I did attend, while some of the others didn't, couldn't care less. Of course I also learned modern Greek because I was playing backgammon with the Greeks that had joined in Port Said. (Ha,ha,ha). So, I mean being handy with languages comes in handy. No, I didn't have any major problems as far as language is concerned. Obviously I had to enlarge my vocabulary and studying for the Leaving I had to learn... I knew the Latin but I had to learn the English equivalent. Now for words like

Well, no, it's an English/English dictionary. I think the mistake that many people make is that they get the bilingual one, their mother tongue and the other one, and between two languages there are very few words that are exactly the same. Just a simple example like "ein", the German word "ein": now in English that can be "a" or it can be "one", and that has implications!

Now, coming back to... regarding your education: You got your Leaving, what came after that?

Once I got the Leaving, and I had enrolled at the university for German and French, initially, which I was doing part time, I was allowed to go to the German lectures during the day because there were no night lectures. For French you had the option of doing it during the day or at night, so the question did not arise. But very early in the peace my employer, the motor importer, suggested that perhaps it was time to move. So I looked for another job, and in the discussion with one of the prospective employers he suggested perhaps it might be a good idea to see his neighbour who was at the time the head of the Teachers College in Adelaide. Because, on the boat, I had decided, with the imperial system of measures, I didn't really want to get into that ... of course I should have known that a slide rule could do all those tricks,.. but so I decided that, well, since I had some languages I was going to be a teacher, specially as language teachers were obviously in short supply here. So I was looking in that direction. And so as a result of that I went to see Dr. Penny, if I remember correctly, at the Adelaide Teachers College. He told me the different ways of going about it. So that had some implications ...

That was a happy coincidence!

Yes, it was a happy coincidence. Anyway, I then ended up working at a wholesale druggists' as a store clerk, sorry, storeman. Because with my other employer, when there was nothing else to do with shifting things around, I occasionally popped into the spare parts department and I got some idea of how that side went. And then I applied that when I went to my next job and so at that stage I couldn't go to the daytime lectures but, I mean, it was basically about German language and German history which I knew and so I got dispensation from the head of the department and so I just went to the French lectures and did some reading for the German. And then I met a young man who had come ... a French speaker, Jewish, who had come out of Egypt, and talking to him, his uncle worked in the public service and I found out that it mightn't be a bad idea to apply to the public service.

Another happy coincidence!

So it was time to look for something else. It was already late in the season and I saw an advertisement, one of the private schools had started and I applied and I got the position teaching French, Latin and Ancient History. I had time now. The time table was arranged so that I could go down to the university to my lectures, come back, do the rest of the day and then at night go down and study at the university library before heading home by train. At that stage I was reduced to using the train. Previously, when I was with the motor importers, I rode a push bike. a round trip of twenty five miles.

Very interesting! When did you come to Melbourne then?

Oh, much much further down the track. Okay, let me continue. So, then I did twin honours because the interesting parts for me were the honours courses, French and German. Because that's where the linguistic things were.... I was not interested in the literature part, in particular I did not see eye to eye with the teacher that was doing it. I had finished my B.A.(hon), in fact I completed French honours in my fourth year, and then the fifth year I completed the German honours. That's when it really got serious. I did have some tutoring in the German department at the later stage. It's a question of how long it took me to get a scholarship because if you are studying part time you don't get the necessary points for the scholarship and on the other hand you can't ... you are caught in a cleft stick there. It was only the last year that I managed to get a scholarship and by the time I was past twenty-five. The rules were different then and I managed to get one. finished my B.A.(Hon) and now was looking at doing an M.A.; because for my honours thesis I had looked at Barossa German and most of the people in the Barossa Valley came from the same part that I came from, so I could relate to it even though, I mean, there were other things that were different but I could sort of even fall more or less into their dialect,

That was a good area for you to be in, wasn't it? Ideal.

So, anyway, I needed to have a job. And through a fellow student I found out about the library, the State Library. At the time it wasn't called State Library, it was called Public Library of South Australia. I applied there, was given an aptitude test. One of the questions for instance was: "Who wrote 'Animal Farm'?" I had never heard of "Animal Farm" not having done English literature. (Ha-ha-ha) If he had asked me for instance something about Moliere, Rabelais, or Goethe or Schiller I could have answered. Anyway, that's how you get caught. But anyway, I had fixed that and more or less agreed, yes I would start, when the people from the department let me know that they were going to offer me a tutorship. Anyway, it was too late. I went into the library and also because I liked books...I subsequently found out that, of course, if you like books the worst place to work is in a library, because you see what people do to books.

So, anyway, I spent about two and a half years there but the pressure was on for me to do librarianship certification and I felt ...

So, then I applied to the Education Department for a secondary teaching position and I started teaching first at Marion High which was probably at the time the best next to Adelaide High, the best high school in terms of reputation in Adelaide. The headmaster for instance was on the Council of Flinders University that had recently started. He decided that you have to be able to take study leave to develop yourself. I spent two years there. After that I was transferred to Findon High. That was a slightly different situation. Still, it was still teaching

But then I started looking for ...you know, to further my studies. I had in the meantime finished my Masters, so I got my M.A. and I felt I really should go into tertiary teaching. I applied for all kinds of positions but usually I got caught in the situation: if you applied to the German department, most of it is German literature and I was not qualified in literature, I was qualified in German language, in linguistics. Same for French. And so nothing was happening.

But then through the work on Barossa German I met Prof. Michael Clyne who had done similar rescue work with the German speakers in the Hamilton area. So when he came across to Adelaide I met him and so he organised a workshop at the ANU on the topic of "German in Contact with other Languages", he invited me to come there and I said: "Look, I don't have an affiliation that would pay for the expenses". ANU came to the rescue (I don't know how much armtwisting Michael did). So I was given the fare to go across to Canberra and I took the opportunity of catching up with one of my lecturers from the French department who in the meantime had become Consulier Culturel at the French Embassy. And he said: "I never let any of my students down." (Ha-ha-ha) – And I got the scholarship to go to France!

Another happy coincidence!

Mind you, I got the advice in February of '68. May 1968 the students' unrest started in France, and I was supposed to go there in the northern autumn of 68, October. I did go, but of course at the time the provinces were quiet but as I got there things started moving in the provinces, as a result of which, the study plan was somewhat interrupted, to say the least. I learned a lot about group dynamism, how to dominate political assemblies, which I didn't bargain for, but I got it anyway, and so as a result of which, I was supposed to do the newer, there were several types of doctorate in France, the old one is the Doctorat de l' Universite, the newer one was the Doctorat du Troisieme Cycle, in other words the third degree, the undergraduate and the maitrise are considered the second degree, third degree is the more advanced. Now that type of doctorate consists of two parts, a first year series of lectures and seminars, to bring people together to give them a common grounding, and then you embark on the thesis. So it was thesis and course work. I

ground there. I spent two years up at the University of Queensland, in the meantime, I taught an adult education course in German, in addition to my university work, and then there was an advertisement I had seen for a position in linguistics at Monash, and I thought what chances will I have? I would have let it slip by, except that the Director of the Institute of Modern Languages, which is the adult education outfit, dropped a copy of it in my pigeonhole. Maybe I should do something about it, and instead of my great long extensive CV, I just sent a one-page resume, listing what I had, and then the reply came back, we're going to keep your application; that's a polite way of saying, you know, and I thought no more about it. I was in the process of helping a couple of Swiss friends of mine, to help the wife to get into an English course, I was on the phone and the switchboard interrupted me, "Melbourne calling, will you take the call", so I said to the education officer, I'll get back to you, I'd better take that call, "we've decided to offer you the position, are you ready to come"! So I said, I'm committed to teach the German course over the summer holidays, as soon as it's finished, I'll be down.

So that was...

That was 72, so that's when I came to Melbourne.

I see, and where did you live?

The first year I had a flat in Armadale, the next year, my head of department went on study leave and we came to some arrangement, I was house-sitting, that was in Glen Waverley, and then of course, as it was getting close to him coming back, I had to look for something else, then I bought a small place in Clayton South.

You were still unattached at that stage?

Yes, that was to come later, in fact during one of my study leave excursions, the first time I went to America, something called a Linguistics Institute, a course of lectures and

more time together, and then we commuted for the next two years, every six months, one of us would go one way or another, and then after two years, we then got married in Hong Kong, spent the honeymoon in Malaysia, back to Hong Kong where she was teaching at the Polytechnic, teaching communication, English is her dominant language, and I went back to Melbourne and the question was how soon would we come and live together, and then in 79-80, I went on study leave to Paris, and that's when she joined me.

Started married life...

Still in Clayton South. It was only about four years later that we sold the other place and we moved to Mitcham.

That's really what I'm driving at, it took a long way to get to Mitcham...So Mitcham, which area, what was it like? An established area?

It was a house that had been built less than 10 years earlier, in an area close to Simpson Park.

So how did we get involved locally? Of course I was still teaching at Monash then. There must have been an ad in the local paper where they had something, to do with an advisory committee for the local park. And that's how we first got involved, or I in particular got involved with that advisory committee, which basically tried to feed back to Council, of course at that stage it was still Nunawading. There was a certain amount of paperwork, responding to requests, feeding information, we had monthly committee meetings at Heatherdale Reserve and then we had working bees

So what did you want to achieve there or what was the object?

We wanted to get involved with looking after the local park, making sure that there was some feedback and to preserve the environment. Nunawading, I don't know about Box Hill, had a very strong emphasis on the treed environment, in fact, after I came to live here, I had occasion to go down to Clayton South, and I was really taken aback, no trees, no foliage, nothing, it struck me like I was moving through the desert.

So your dream for Simpson Park was to plant more trees and to have facilities. like a kiosk, or seats ..

Make sure that the remnant bushland in Somers Trail, Simpson's Park is rather open, it's a

And who's going to look after it...and how is it going to be financed...

Yes, as far as planting was concerned, it was Council, but the question of growth for instance when it came, say, to mowing, do you mow right up to the tree trunk, or do you preserve some of the original vegetation that's still there? Do you spray right there? What do you do? That sort of thing. So we marked out an area in the more treed part of Simpson's Park which was no longer to be mowed, and lo and behold, all kinds of indigenous flora came up that would have been previously suppressed because of the mowing or because of the exotic grasses that were growing there.

How about animal life?

Well again, there's that question. Now things develop from there. While I was there, I then became aware of the fact that there was the Nunawading Indigenous Plants Project which had started in 88, in the Centenary Year, and that was a group of volunteers, many of them arising out of the Blackburn Tree Preservation Society, they started propagating indigenous plants. That means local plants, not just Australian plants, because, let's face it, conditions, soil climate and so on in Western Australia are quite different from here. So whether you grow things from Italy or things from Western Australia, there's not much difference, really the issue is what grows best here, and that would be the local plants. The Indigenous Plants Project came to my attention, and I started volunteering there. And of course, I'm still volunteering there, they've since moved away, they used to be in Jolimont Road, but then the Council Nursery needed the space, and other developments, and they moved out and are now in Fulton Road which is Blackburn South, they now are called the Bungalook Nursery, also known as Whitehorse City Indigenous Plants Project.

This nursery, does it serve the public as well?

Yes, you can go and get plants

Is it self-sustaining?

Yes, either through sales or through grants. They do get some concessions from Council, but I'm very bad with details, so I can't say to what extent. There's certainly a lot of cooperation and also many of the plants that are being propagated are propagated for bigger projects so they do go into parks and initially, how I became aware of it, the advisory committee sent a list, please send us those plants if they are still available and if I'm not mistaken, the parks were given those plants free of charge. That was a voluntary thing if you like.

So it's a labour of love...!

Basically it is that. What I get out of it, I learn about plants, I learn about propagation, if I'm lucky, I get tea and a biscuit for the break. It's really for the love of it, there's companionship too of course. That's the two things I'm involved in as far as the City of Whitehorse is concerned. I'm also involved in another way, with another organisation, and I can't remember how I got into that, but somehow I became aware of the fact that Birds Australia, which used to be known as the Royal Ornithological Union of Australia, they were doing bird surveys towards an updating of the Bird Atlas of Australia. And because I am regularly walking Yarran Dheran and Bellbird Dell, you become familiar with the place, if you keep your eyes open, you become familiar with the plants, you become familiar with the wildlife. So I said look, why don't I submit reports. and I have been doing that for it might be the fourth year on a monthly basis. One for Somers Trail because it's on my door step and I'm still officially on the now basically defunct advisory committee, well if it's not defunct, it's certainly dormant. I had to more or less let it go, because they wouldn't budge from having the committee meetings on a Tuesday, but Tuesday night is the night I go to my choir rehearsal, and I'm sorry, the choir is more important. So I'm doing three bird surveys: Bellbird Dell, Somers Trail and Yarran Dheran on a monthly basis.

So you report on sightings?

Yes, towards the Bird Atlas of Australia. In the meantime, the revised edition has come out, and now they're collecting data for an ongoing study. At the time, the revised edition was presented to the Federal Minister for the Environment, because those observations are computed, they're put onto maps, differentiated according to seasons, and that allows research into for instance, the distribution of different bird species, any change, where for instance, some birds might have been very common at one stage, but because of the change of habitat they are no longer as common, or vice versa. When we first came here, for instance, I doubt that you would have seen too many Rainbow lorikeets. People used to go up to Queensland to see them up there, but now they're here, everywhere.

Well, I can tell you one thing, my area here I had about 30 sparrows lined up on the fence, and I haven't seen a sparrow for years, I don't know what happened to them.

Well, yes, that's what I'm saying, there's a change of habitat obviously, that's one of the things, when you go through the bush, I do my regular walks, but I keep my eyes and ears open, and you notice after some time that this particular type of bird that you expect to see in one place, you don't expect to see in another place and then you start asking

down a big tree, now that big tree might have had a nesting hollow in, which gave shelter for a particular type of bird. You cut down some bushes, now those bushes might have had a certain type of fruit which gave sustenance to a particular species of bird. So it's all interlinked.

Does your organisation breed birds, feed them, or...

No, basically just doing research, they provide the data for somebody who wants to follow that up, they might provide advice if asked, that type of thing.

So you obviously enjoy that sort of thing?

Oh yes, I certainly do, I suppose I've never been a one-string fiddle, I've always had so many different, for instance when I was younger I used to collect stamps, first perhaps because people collect stamps, but before very long I realised that stamps tell stories, and then out went any of those stamps that only have numbers on them, or had the same head of someone, because they're not interesting.

Do you feel at home in Mitcham? do you feel that you like the people?

Yes, but you see that it's up to you to make the contact. There are several levels at which I can answer it. Do I feel at home in Australia? yes. I'm familiar with lots of other cultures as well, and for me, Australia is precisely, it's the multicultural Australia I'm interested in. But also through my involvement with the Indigenous Plant Project, with the bird observing, and so on: This is my country.

You feel like a Whitehorseian...?

Definitely, well, at the lower level, not lower, at the more detailed level, yes, I feel Whitehorseian, witness my reaction when I went back to other parts of Melbourne and I found them bare and not interesting.

We're very lucky in this area that we have so many trees, I mention this to my friends sometimes when we travel along, look at all the trees, it's wonderful.

How about the cultural life in Whitehorse? Are you involved in any way, that you go to the theatre or film nights or...

I'm a member of a local parish and for many many years they show films there, and we regularly attend. There's also a film club that looks at films from way back, of historical interest, so we're a member of that film group. We have been to some of the cultural

Well personally, I'm not a theatre goer. So if I go, I go because my wife wants to go. There have been a number of occasions over the years when she felt she'd like it and was quite disappointed. So as far as that is concerned, no. But concerts, yes, MSO concerts in town. We have come though back from going out at night, we're still subscribing, well we're subscribing to a couple of concert series that are held during the day at the Iwaki Centre at Southbank. One of those no longer runs. And there's one series that still runs, the MSO Chamber Players, these are people that are drawn from within the MSO, but it's chamber music, small ensemble, because we're really no longer interested in the big guns type of thing. Then more recently we've discovered the Flinders Quartet, which has got, at the moment, three concerts in their season. They have either an option at the Iwaki or at Monsalvat, Monsalvat is much more convenient, so we go to Monsalvat. If there was something equivalent at Whitehorse, we would probably look at it, but basically it's only one within other offerings, if you take up the subscription. So we've been picking, we've been to a couple of concerts that were given here at Nunawading...

Did you join say the German Club or the Austrian club?

No, when my retirement gave me the option of following my interests in music, I had seen an advertisement for a mixed choir at the Tivoli, which is a German club, and I went there and at the same time I also, off my own bat, I followed up the Austrian choir, because we had run into them at one of their concerts, which at the time, was a Christmas concert which they had given at the Melbourne Town Hall, and I said, I like that choir. But I was a bit uncertain whether they would have me. Anyway for about six months, I went to both, but I found that the type of repertoire that the German one used wasn't really to my liking, whereas the Austrian, well I liked it, and I've found the atmosphere marvellous, and so I've been with them all these years now, I suppose the first time would have been '98, so it's almost seven years now. Part of it of course, is I spent some of my teenage years in Munich, from the dialect. I can relate to that.

Have you become an Australian citizen?

Oh yes, way way back. Initially, I said "No, you don't just change like that". I must admit, when I took out citizenship and it was, well, whenever Hubert Opperman was Immigration Minister at that time, so you can see that it was a very long time ago, but it was for rather selfish reasons, I must confess. Because it was a question of whether I would get the scholarships and that sort of thing. But I've really grown into this, the other thing is, of course, the Germans were only too glad to get rid of us. As soon as you take out another citizenship, it's gone, unlike the Swiss, where if your grandparents are Swiss, you're still entitled to as long as you pay for the military tax.

Yes. Politically and also in terms of political attitudes; so that I regret very much. In fact some of the things I hear when they trot out certain things and they say it's for the common good, I remember at primary school, in you-know-who's years, there was a big writing "Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigenhutz" [Common weal has it over individual well-being]

I can't help, it rings with me, I said look, there it is again. The only other thing, in fact one of the things which stopped me initially thinking of getting naturalised, was that it didn't make much sense to me to have the head of the country in the Antipodes. Maybe it gives some stability to the whole system, but I think it needs some explaining.

Well I think on this note, we can finish now. I think you've done a marvellous job, talking as a migrant in Whitehorse, and I think the Society should be very happy in receiving your contribution.