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Full transcript of
an interview with:

Kym Mayes

Conducted on: 20 February 2019

Interviewer: **Allison Murchie**

Transcribed by: Deborah Gard

For:

The **Don Dunstan Foundation**
20th Anniversary Oral History Project

1999–2019 celebrating 20 years of action for a fairer world



DON DUNSTAN FOUNDATION 20th Anniversary **ORAL HISTORY** PROJECT

NOTES TO THE TRANSCRIPT

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Abbreviations: The interviewee's alterations may be identified by their initials in insertions in the transcript.

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A series of dots, indicates an untranscribable word or phrase.

A dash, – indicates a pause or a digression as occurs in informal conversation.

Sentences that were left unfinished in the normal manner of conversation are shown ending in three dashes, - - -

Spelling: Wherever possible the spelling of proper names and unusual terms has been verified. A parenthesised question mark (?) indicates a word that has not been possible to verify to date.

Typeface: The interviewer's questions are shown in **bold print**.

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This is an interview for the Don Dunstan Foundation 20th anniversary oral history project. Today it is Allison Murchie interviewing Kym Mayes at the State Library. His lovely wife, Carolyn, is also present with us. It is 20th February 2019. Congratulations, you are the first person to be interviewed. I need a few details for the record. Could I have your full name?

Milton Kym Mayes.

And your date and place of birth?

It was Port Pirie, 23rd April 1947.

What I'd like to talk about for just the first few minutes is a very short history of your working life – what you did first off and then your political career, so maybe just a couple of minutes talking about that.

Sure. When I finished high school at Adelaide Technical High School – it no longer exists - - -

Where was that?

It was in the School of Mines. It was a scholarship you had to have – I think there were over 490 in the QC, I think it was then. I'm not sure how I got through; my sister had been there and one of my cousins and I think that's how I squeaked in. I recall a phone call from the headmaster, Mr Cannell, to my mother – it must have been in about 1959. I'd sat the exam, which was horrifying – we sat in the Brookman Hall and there would have been I thought thousands, but it was probably 200. It was the pinnacle to get into Adelaide Tech. I had wanted to go to Urrbrae but my mum had this ambition that I would go to Adelaide Tech. My sister went there and, as I said, one of my older cousins. I think I did well in Maths or Arithmetic and so on, but my English was always my weakness, which has proved to be the case over - - -

That's continued on, has it?

Well, I had mild dyslexia. I was diagnosed in Leaving Honours with some form of dyslexia.

That happens a lot with children at that time.

Yes. I still have difficulty. I dropped out the conjunctions all the time in a sentence.

It stays with you for life if it's not picked up early enough.

Yes, even with spell-check I stutter to pick it up; I've got to read through and I swear I can look at a paragraph for a day but I still won't see it. The next day I might think I'd better look at that. Carolyn is brilliant – she wrote a Masters paper in three nights, so I had to look after the kids three nights in a row. In fact, I was in hospital when she brought the kids in and left

them with me and let the kids play in the hospital room whilst Carolyn went back and continued writing. It would take me three years to do that and then there would be all these errors. So I recall the phone call – it was really fascinating. I think he asked Mum did she sincerely want me to go to Adelaide Tech because I think I drew level with another lad. I think he was stronger in English and weaker in Maths, and I was weaker in English and stronger in Maths. I think we must have been on the 495 or 490, or whatever it was, the cut-off limit because I figure I must have been the last kid into the catch-ups, which is a bit like my life story I think! So I went to Adelaide Tech, I finished and I didn't know what the hell to do. A lot of my mates were very engineering focused. Adelaide Tech was part of the School of Mines and there were quite a number of famous engineers who went there – Essington Lewis I think was one of them. Anyway, if you watch *The Advertiser* memorial page, sadly, you'll see, attended Adelaide Tech. You know, significant engineer and so on.

Anyway, I went fruit picking for about two and a half months with a couple of my mates: a guy called Robert Atkinson who became an orthopaedic surgeon; Rob McLennan, I think his name was, he became a doctor at the Adelaide, and a couple of others. They shot through and I stayed up fruit picking because I just didn't know what to do. I didn't like - - -

It's very hard when you're young to know which direction you want to go.

Yes. My father wanted me to go back on the farm. He still had a farm which was agisted to one of his good mates. I had no ambitions to go farming at that stage. Anyway, long story short, my brother-in-law talked me into applying for a job in the Reserve Bank, which was in the old Commonwealth Bank building in King William Street. I applied and so I came back from fruit picking to start this job in the Reserve Bank. I started in what they called the clearing house, which was the lowest of the low I think, but I spent a period of time working in the economist branch. That was very complicated! What I had to do was cut out the financial pages of *The Advertiser* – I don't think *The Australian* had started then. There were probably eastern states papers which we got - - -

So you didn't really see your future there, did you?

Well, it was a terrific future because it was a great social life but the bloke I worked for – the economist in Adelaide had numerous – I know this is going on long but - - -

No, no – a couple of minutes.

He had numerous fingers in various pies. He ran an entertainment promotion arm as well. I won't mention his name because it probably never got mentioned to the tax office! He had me under his wing, and I was fascinated. He was very urbane and very articulate and a very

direct sort of a person – a man of the world you would describe him as. I grew up in a very religious Baptist/Lutheran home. My mother was secretary of the Country Women’s Association; Dad was in the masonic lodge at Port Pirie. If you mentioned the word sex – we didn’t have any alcohol in the house, it was totally temperance. My mother was from German background, which fascinated me. Her name was Hūvner (H-Ũ-V-N-E-R), and our first links were Nitschke. They were among the first people in Hahndorf – my great-great-great grandfather’s name is on the arch there in the main street of Hahndorf. So I was always fascinated that Mum was in the Temperance League, given the German background. Just before she died she admitted my grandfather would put the horse in the sulky every Friday at about 3pm and head into Terowie, which is where they had a farm. He would get his two flagons from the Terowie pub and have a beer or two. I’m not sure what happened – there must have been something in the family.

I’m aware of time, and that sets the background. How did you end up being in politics for so long? You came through the Union Movement.

Yes I did. I spent a year and a half in the Reserve Bank, and we did the decimal currency. I began to realise that the world operated through politics and economics. I thought, right, I’m going to do Economics. So I rocked down to the University of Adelaide and enrolled. I saved furiously because my parents didn’t have enough money to support me through uni and I didn’t have a Commonwealth scholarship. The first year was front up with paid fees. I did a Maths/Science, which is basically what you did. You did, I think, seven subjects at Adelaide Tech, including metalwork and fitting and turning and woodwork, and so on. So that’s how I started and my first exposure was Gretel Dunstan as my tutor in Eco 1 and I had her in Eco 2.

Did you know who she was?

No idea. I had no political understanding at all.

But you were learning about politics, and Gretel was a private figure.

Yes, she was a person who sat – we had tutorials of five students. Now you have tutorials of 100. She sat with rubber bands on her fingers because she was a smoker. In order to get through a tutorial for an hour she’d have these red rubber bands wrapped around her fingers that she kept twiddling with in order to - - -

That’s quite fascinating that we’re talking about the Don Dunstan Foundation and you had that contact in - - -

1966 with Gretel. She was very deep and intelligent. She could answer your questions so directly and so quickly and I had all these questions. I had no understanding of how economics worked – I probably still don't.

You didn't make a connection with the Dunstan surname?

No, I can't think that I did.

Well, you were a young man at uni.

I was the first of our family to tackle university. Again, I digress terribly but I didn't realise my father had this real chip on his shoulder about university folk. He played country cricket and the university team would come up in the '30s and play in Port Pirie. Dad played in the Port Pirie 11, or whatever it was, country side. I don't have the details but they had been probably PAC [Prince Alfred College] and St Peters boys and they sort of treated them like country yokels. They were seen as second class citizens.

I'm actually going to stop you there because we're going to do a full interview on your life later. That has set the scene really well and you've just made that link with Gretel. Now let's make the link – when did you first have anything to do with Don? Where did you meet him and what were the circumstances?

I'm not sure of the date and I can check this, I think, but I was involved in the Unley sub-branch and - - -

When did you join the ALP?

I joined the ALP in 1972; I joined the University Labor Club probably in '69 because I became deeply committed to the Campaign for Peace in Vietnam. I met Lynn Arnold through that – Lynn was the key figure. The other person was Geoff Harcourt - - -

He was my Politics lecturer.

I never had Geoff as a lecturer because he went off to Cambridge. I think he lectured Eco 1 after, so I had Hugh Hudson just at the end of Hugh's career. He came back for a term I think before he went into parliament, so I had him for a term; that was it.

When you were in the University Labor Club were you there when Don came down and gave talks?

Yes, he came to the Union Hall. I remember attending probably two of Don's presentations at the Union Hall, so that's probably my first exposure.

What was your initial reaction to Don?

Fascinated. I was really a country boy and language and culture at that level I had not been exposed to. Don seemed to me to be the most knowledgeable, urbane, cosmopolitan internationalist that I had ever seen. I was absolutely gobsmacked by him – in awe would have to be the way I'd describe it.

I think that's the impact he had on a lot of people. He was quite instrumental in the ALP Club at the uni.

Yes, this was probably '67 or '68. I didn't have Gretel as a tutor after that period. I know I had - - -

Did you make the connection with Gretel then?

Yes, then, but like two years later, sort of hello Australia!

So that was your first introduction. You were just one of the hundreds in the hall.

Yes, maybe not hundreds. By the time you got to Eco 2 there were 80 and 40 in Eco 3, so you weren't culled at the beginning, you were culled during the process. Derek – I can't think of his name [Verrall?] – said, 'Look to your left, look to your right in Eco 1. Two on the left and two on the right will not be with you next year.' That was the philosophy.

That's quite sensible because that's the way it did work out. When did you actually get to meet Don?

At a Labor function, probably a conference – no, a fundraiser in maybe '74, probably at Unley, probably at a function we had for Gil Langley. I'm pretty sure it was probably something like that. I remember I met Gavin Keneally at one of those functions. We were always having fundraisers; Unley was a pretty active branch.

Unley was known for it – so you were committed to the ALP quite early.

Yes, what happened was Geoff Stokes – do you remember Geoff?

No, I don't know him.

He was a lecturer in Politics and married to that wonderful ABC FM Classic – Julia Stokes – I can't think of her name, it will come to me [Lester]. Julia carried ABC FM Classic and she was a national broadcaster who hosted all of those – so Geoff and I met at Unley at a branch meeting at the Druids Hall which was on Commercial Road next to the pub on the corner of

King William Road. That's where we met and the main item for business was moved by Gil Langley, seconded by – I can't think of his name but he was a perennial – payment of the hall, which was \$2.50 or something! They were the main items on the agenda for a branch meeting! Stokesy and I rocked up in early or late '72 and he was doing Politics at Flinders and I'd sort of been kicking around doing a variety of things which we can perhaps talk about later - - -

Yes, we'll do it in detail later.

Yes, I do tend to digress. I have a very discursive nature – prolix too is probably my second name. We bumped into each other and we didn't know each other. I'd have to claim that Geoff was the one who initiated the thoughts. He said, 'We ought to ginger up this show,' – get it on the road. It just seemed to be that time that Unley was gentrifying. The young baby boomers were moving in and buying the old rundown bluestones around Goodwood and Unley. I paid \$20,000 for mine on Palmerston Road. It was rundown; it was completely dilapidated, so in the next 20 years it was renovated three or four times. I think that was a lot of the movement – this younger group moved in, the Gay Thompsons, the Nick Alexandrides, the Paul Acfields. The former Speaker, Michael Atkinson, moved into Salisbury Street and drove me crazy!

It was a real surge of that energy and I think a lot did come from the Moratorium Movement.

Well, my parents' politics were conservative. They had never voted anything other than the Liberal Country Party up until '72.

It was the time of a lot of energy, wasn't it? Don was the right person to be in then.

Absolutely. This was the Athens of the South and in my days in the PSA we had very talented young people applying from all over Australia for jobs in the Public Service Association in South Australia. You had to beat them back with a stick: Brisbane, Sydney, New Zealand - - -

It was the new – I can't even find the word but I grew up in that time and I thought I was living in the Athens of the South and Don Dunstan was god.

I can appreciate it – I do now look back and think, my god, what a wonderful period.

Adelaide was so special. It was ahead of all of the other states.

It was a melting pot of intellectual creativity – I don't think I added much to it but - - -!

You were certainly part of that happening.

I saw it all happening around me and I participated. I was still very conservative because I had this conservative background. Again, I won't digress, but my father couldn't comprehend me – a) he wasn't that keen on me going to university and, b) when I told him I'd joined the Labor Club, effectively, he evicted me and I found other lodgings. My mother was very upset about that, but that really created a stress in our family. Dad just couldn't understand why I should join the 'communists', as he saw it.

Yes, any leftie is a communist to them but that's not an untypical story because that generation – and I'm the same – we were the first generation in our family to go to university, to get politicised. You're different – you went on and actually became a politician. What drove you to that?

I was an accidental politician; I have to admit that.

I thought you might say that.

No, I was an accident.

Tell me how that came about.

Peter Duncan, Trevor Smith, Gil Langley, Des Corcoran – did I mention Paul Acfield?

You mentioned him previously.

Yes. I was there because they didn't want [Mick] Noonan to be elected. Gil wanted Noonan but nobody else did!

You'd never considered a political career?

I hadn't considered it, no. That sounds shallow perhaps, but, no I hadn't. I was actually in the PSA enjoying myself. If you ask people like Jimmy Douglas perhaps, I wasn't at the hard end of the really innovative change - - -

Were you there for the sit-ins and all of that?

Yes, but after I left, Jimmy said something interesting to me afterwards – he may deny it now, but he said, 'Mate, if you'd actually stayed on we may not have had the great showdown between Jim Otte and,' Jim Douglas really – that was the showdown, and Jan McMahon. She came through – well, Jim died and that's the reason she got the throne. But Jimmy said that to me once, and I was a moderating impact. I had a good relationship with John Fagan, who was the president, Graham Dicker, Louise Miller. I was accepted as a more moderate, probably leftie. Jimmy was a driving force; Jimmy was a real energy – demanding for change

constantly. So I was an accident; they had to find somebody that Gil would live with, that wasn't Noonan because Duncan and Smith and the others did not want Noonan in there, and they saw it as an opportunity. I was an alderman; I'd beaten the Libs to get the position of alderman in Unley by about six votes, I think, out of 500, or something. I'd been chaining myself to trees and demanding accountability and transparency in the council.

So you were already pretty political weren't you?

By then I had a real understanding of where to go and how to get there. The PSA had turned me into – plus my experience with Harry [Krantz] and the Clerks' Union. I mean, you learned by sitting at Harry's feet and you had to have the blessing every day otherwise it was to Coventry! You did what Harry said but I've always had a bit of a rebel spirit and I guess I'm a bit of an individualist in many ways, a bit of a loner I suppose. I was always prepared to break out if the chance came and I think that story I wrote for the *Labour History* about the airport kerfuffle with the baggage handling. The bloke who – he was the local rep, George Edgerton, he was just a wonderful person. I knew I was on pretty safe ground. George said, 'Well, I think we'd better to do something about this,' and we did, but under Harry's tutelage I learned a lot - - -

Many people have said that.

Yes. It wasn't as though Harry set out to be a kind and gentle leader or set by mentoring. It was do it or I'll take your head off!

OK. When you stood for Unley was Don involved in that process?

No, Don wasn't keen on me, but he never got involved.

It was the group that you've mentioned - - -

Yes, Desy Corcoran rang me one - - -

So it was get you in because we don't want someone else.

Yes, and someone who Gil would live with comfortably. He once said to me, 'I reckon you're all right mate.' That was the tick! He always said to me, 'I wanted bloody Micky [Noonan] here,' but no-one seemed to support that idea – the branch didn't want it.

OK. When did you start to get involved with Don? Was it when you actually got into politics or was it - - -?

I'm more, again, accidental – I was a passenger.

I've got the record of your time in parliament so it was pretty impressive and quite substantial, and there were numerous ministries which we'll actually talk about later.

It was probably because I didn't do any that well!

I beg to differ on that. I've printed out your *Wikipedia* entry¹ and I've got to say it was impressive, so I'm not prepared to accept that self-criticism.

It was a very talented Cabinet. From the Dunstan Cabinet through – if you look at people like Hugh Hudson - - -

Donny Hopgood.

Donny Hopgood – outstanding people. Gavin Keneally: people never give Gavin the credit that he should always claim. He was such a modest bugger but he did some wonderful things. There were some really lovely people in - - -

It was a very impressive Cabinet and a very impressive government – the amount of achievements - - -

Except we stuffed up at the end.

It doesn't matter. There was a ten-year government that achieved a lot, and you were part of it so you certainly have a claim to be proud of it.

It was hard to float to the top in that group. You had to get across Blevins and Sumner and – if you had the brigadier's baton in your backpack, you didn't want to show it because your backpack would get nicked real quick!

But as you said, you were more of a moderating force. You weren't someone who was out there for the fight, were you?

No I wasn't. I would never claim that I'm a leader in the sense of - - -

There were enough other leaders around, weren't there?

Look at Cornwall – you know, how do you beat that act? Cornwall, privately, he was a quiet bully, but I never capitulated to any of it. Frank [Blevins] and I had our strong differences and I think Frank never forgets those – I do.

¹ Member for Unley, 1982-1993; Minister for Agriculture, 1985-1989; Minister for Fisheries, 1985-1989; Minister for Recreation and Sport, 1985-1992; Minister for Employment and Further Education, 1989; Minister for Youth Affairs, 1989; Minister for Housing and Construction, 1989-1992; Minister for Public Works, 1989-1992; Minister for Environment and Land Management, 1992-1993; Minister for Emergency Services, 1992-1993; Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, 1992-1993; Minister for Environment and Natural Resources, 1993.

Let's talk more about Don now. What was your relationship like with him? You said that he didn't like you at first.

It was accidental again. What happened – the reason for that is we had a bloody motion about a particular restaurant in the city that Don was involved in. I'm not going to go into it – it's well-recorded. John Lewin in our branch moved this crazy motion that we investigate why the Premier is involved in this and what involvement the Premier had. It was to go to State Council, I'm sure. Someone said to me it was put on the conference list. I can't believe that but it probably did somewhere along the way, but I was the bloody delegate. I've always had this sort of Methodist/Uniting Church/Baptist sort of work ethic that when you put your name up you've got to stick to it. I looked at this motion after – we met on Monday nights in the Senior Cits – and I looked at this motion after and I remember saying to Gay Thompson or Paul Acfield, 'I don't like the look of this! This is questioning the Premier's –,' how can we say it? I could be very specific, but it's questioning the Premier.

You didn't want to raise it at the conference, did you?

Well, I thought – then I realised that I'm the delegate and there's one other delegate [Geoff Stokes]. I think it was Council – it got on the Council papers and I think they eliminated things by [not] getting any seconders. I don't think there was a seconder for it, but I had to move – and I'm pretty sure it was State Council, but it probably was the conference. I need to check that. I mean, it went next to my name - - -

What did Don Dunstan think - - -?

I think I got blackballed from that moment. Associated with Lewin, that was probably the kiss of death and never - - -

When did that relationship move on? He really wouldn't have known you at that stage.

No – who are these two idiots? I suppose being associated with Lewin would have given me a tag. That would have been in '77 I reckon, somewhere around there that motion came up – '77 or '76. It could be checked, I'm sure; it would be in the archives.² I didn't have a lot to do with Don over that period. I was involved in the council; I was deeply involved in the PSA and there was a coup to remove Phil Lennox – I was part of that. In a way, the power group that had the council members, the executive members and the key staff members like Jimmy Douglas, and so on, they really installed me as the 24-hour watch on the operations of the

² Post-interview note [KM]: The motion regarding Don's involvement with *The Red Garter* and *The Coalyard* Restaurants, with John Ceruto, was in 1974.

organisation because they wanted me to be watching over the General Secretary and watching over what was happening. Fundamentally, I guess because I was a competent hand in doing these things and I was thorough and I was always committed to it – my role in the PSA was very important so I got very deeply involved in that. I was Assistant General Secretary and that was there to ensure that relationship between the Executive and the staff and that we kept progressing the union.

Did Don know much about you from PSA?

No. I mean, I led negotiations on the salaries - - -

He would have known who you were but - - -

Yes, the lock-out of the Hansard reporters in the courts - - -

Through PSA he would have been very aware of you –

They would have known - - -

– but he didn't develop any sort of relationship with you.

No, but I was front page of *The News* and - - -

You didn't talk to each other? He wasn't involved in those sort of negotiations.

No, he wasn't. That was at public service level – the Commissioner of the Public Service and people like that were basically where I worked. I'd see Don at Labor Party functions like fundraisers and say gooday but that would be about it really.

You had a working relationship rather than a personal relationship.

Yes, absolutely.

Certainly when we discuss this later we'll go into the details of the Dunstan Government and your role in considerable detail but when he died and they set up the foundation how did you feel about him? It was such a loss to South Australia and even though you weren't friends you'd worked in his government for several years. How did you handle that loss?

I felt it was tragic. I think he changed the whole culture and nature of this state. In fact, I think Whitlam has acknowledged that as well. I think that Don was a beacon for democracy in this country. I think you've got to give him far greater status than perhaps people interstate – you say to a Queenslander now in the Labor Party – some of the youngsters look

at you and say, 'Who is that?' You think, what a bloody shame, this should be etched into their brain that this guy was so significant in changing the whole nature of politics in this country. I mean, you come from the Playford period with meat and three veg to the whole cultural environment change. OK, Steele Hall I think started the Festival Theatre and Steele was an interesting character. My electorate was initially in Steele's electorate when he was the federal member, so I got to know him. That was an interesting period as well because you could talk to him about things, and arrange immigration if a Greek sailor jumped ship or whatever!

Did you go to Don's service?

No, I was away. I was in Queensland.

When did you go to Queensland?

I went up in the middle of '94.

And he died in '99.

Yes. I was deeply involved in raising the kids. I actually had 12 years to make up for failing to be a parent, which Carolyn would no doubt re-endorse.

That's a typical politician's story I'm afraid.

Yes.

So you were completely out of the state for those last five years of Don's life and he set the foundation up mainly with Greg Crafter. What made you want to open a branch in Queensland, or Brisbane?

Yes, it was Brisbane. I guess it was Don's legacy. I knew George Lewkowicz - - -

Who we will be interviewing.

George and I were one of the few non-private school lads who went through Economics. That's where I first met George, so he was one of the few. I must have been down here for something and I bumped into George and we were talking about the foundation and what was happening. It was perhaps George who suggested it – I'm not sure - - -

It came out of that - - -

Yes, that conversation, and it went from there. It grew from that.

Who was in government in Queensland at that time?

That would have been a Labor government definitely. The first meeting we had – George came up and met with Andrew Fraser and a guy called Malcolm McMillan and myself.

These were local Queenslanders?

These were local Queenslanders. Andrew was Treasurer in the Bligh Government; he was the member for Mount [Coot-tha] - - -

Sorry, who was in the government?

Andrew Fraser who was a very bright young bloke, very smart. Unfortunately, he sold Queensland rail! Anyway, he's not the only one to carry that sin in the Labor Party. There's a lot sold - - -

There is a lot that has been sold by all parties.

Bloody oath, yes!

You said George came up there.

George came up, yes. George will be able to relate to that. That then stimulated us. I knew Malcolm through my links in the Labor Party. Malcolm is a walking archive of Queensland labour history, a marvellous guy with an amazing memory. He could walk down the street and tell any public servant when they were due to retire and how much their superannuation would be. He is amazing. He knew Tommy Burns [Queensland Deputy Premier]. He worked for Tommy Burns actually, as Tommy's chief-of-staff. His best mate was one Kevin Rudd, Kevin 07, so interesting tales to talk to Malcolm about Kevin. Anyway, we digress again. It would have been 2003 – I've got all my handwritten minutes - - -

That was 2003?

Yes, I'm pretty sure that was when we got together; I'm absolutely certain it was that. We met in a coffee shop on Birdwood Terrace – Andrew and Malcolm and I³. We discussed getting a division of the Dunstan Foundation going in Queensland and the three of us were very keen to do that. I saw it as an opportunity to – the Labor Party had a lot of activities but there seemed to be a lack of intellectual discussion available. There are a couple of organisations that do provide that but from the point of view of left progressive politics there seemed to be a need to fill a gap there, so we thought that would be the way to go. Malcolm was a critical

³ Further information supplied by Malcolm McMillan has been included at the end of this transcript.

ingredient to that because he knows everyone. In those days there weren't past politicians that Malcolm didn't know the history of, where they'd been and what they'd been involved in. Janine Walker he alleges had once been a member of the Liberal Party. You'd say, 'Who's this Malcolm?' and he'd give you chapter and verse. It was amazing stuff. So he actually initiated contact with a number of the people who became involved in the Queensland branch of the Don Dunstan Foundation. Without Malcolm it wouldn't have happened because I just didn't have those contacts and Andrew didn't have the time because Andrew was the member for Mount Coot-tha and he was ambitious to become – and rightly so - - -

He was busy.

Busy as a lizard drinking. He was committed and had a political future. He went on to be Treasurer of Queensland under Anna Bligh. His name was there and that was the important thing, to have Andrew involved as the local member and we used his office for meetings, and so on, to get things going. So that's where it all began. We initiated our first meeting; we got a guy called Greg Chamberlain who was a former editor-in-chief of *The Courier Mail* and the first editor to write the editorial column for *The Courier Mail* supporting the election of a Labor government in Queensland: the Goss Government. Greg is a marvellous, marvellous human, absolutely. He fits into the Dunstan Foundation like a glove on a hand. He's just an amazing character.

A very good group to set it up.

Yes, and there were a number of other people who came in as well, including getting Therese Rein.

How did she get involved?

Through Malcolm, and Malcolm convinced her to come and get involved. She was really enthusiastic about it and gave a lot of energy and support. We were meeting in her offices in the city for several years when we were arranging events and functions. We had events at the Commissariat - - -

What's the Commissariat?

That's the old customs house in – it's not on George Street [Queen Street] - - -

That's for public meetings?

We had events. We had guest speakers, so we had Tommy Burns on one occasion come and talk about his life in politics. In fact, we sponsored an oral history of Queensland which included very much Tommy's life in the Labour Movement in Queensland.

Was this an oral history of ALP people?

Yes, it's with the National Library and we did - - -

You mentioned earlier, before we went on tape, that you got the funding for that through the foundation. Is that right?

Yes, the foundation was actually the organisation that it was sponsored through.

So they provided someone to do the interviews.

Malcolm did the interviews; Malcolm was trained. Lindsay Marshall was involved. Lindsay was on the committee.⁴ Lindsay was a prominent journalist, a wonderful human. He worked for Wayne Goss as Goss's press secretary and for the last four years has worked for Anastasia Palaszczuk as her chief press officer. He has since retired and is now working for - - -

How many were interviewed in that oral history?

We'd have to look at the - - -

A substantial number?

Yes. Malcolm went through a host of people.

Basically about their involvement with ALP?

Their involvement with the Labor Party, so there would be Liberals, LNP [Liberal National Party] people, including a former premier who would have been interviewed.

And they've all gone to the National Library.

Yes, it's gone to the National Library. You can access it.

What was it called? If I just looked up the Don Dunstan Foundation, Queensland branch, would it come up?

⁴ Post-interview note: Other committee members were Clem Jones, the former mayor of Brisbane and also leader of the Labor Party in the Queensland Parliament; Lord Jim Soorley, Angela Dahlke (solicitor), Dianne Coffey (PA to Therese Rein), Maureen Hayes (former Deputy Mayor of Brisbane City Council).

Yes, it would probably have that and it would be Labour History in the 1970s. We did it as Labour History not the Labor Party, so it's those figures who were involved around that time. We interviewed a whole raft of people.

You had the Tommy Burns talk. What other sort of events did you hold?

We had Rudd at a major fundraiser. We got very much involved in directly supporting literature for Aboriginal kids.

One of Don's big passions.

Yes, and we had lots of debates about how we should do that. The more commercial members of the committee saw it as very important that we get money out to the organisations that were supporting literacy for Aboriginal kids. We had a major fundraiser which the Prime Minister then attended. One of the major hotels – I can look it up in my minutes. I'm sorry to be so vague but things are coming back to me as I go – we raised \$120,000 at that lunch alone. About \$80,000 went to a Queensland group which had Aboriginal literacy as their major function and we gave that money, which we all agreed would have been one of Don's favourite foundations. Then a portion was used for the oral histories that we supported, then I think in the end when we rolled up the branch the funds were returned to South Australia, if I recall, so that was whatever funds were left out of that. We raised quite a bit of money in earlier functions. I'll have to look through and see all of the events that we funded but we had a major function at the State Library on their new library mezzanine area; there was a music and wine function, we had Katie Noonan and a whole raft of prominent Queensland musicians and we raised money again for the Aboriginal literacy - - -

You obviously had a lot of prominent people through all your contacts.

Well, Therese could pick up the phone – we had what I called - - -

Therese could get anyone.

Yes, the people who wanted to appear on the social pages of *The Courier Mail* or *The Brisbane News*, they were all there with bells on.

Tell me a little bit about Therese. You said she was passionate about the - - -

Yes she was. She's an Adelaide girl, if we can use that term, if that's appropriate. I think it is.

Yes, it is; I think it is. We accept that!

And she is a significant force of energy and an intellectual grunt, and she is smart and she's very smart business-wise. You have to get up very early to catch Therese. She was very enthusiastic about it.

Did she know Don at all?

You'd have to ask Therese that.

That's interesting, to be that committed – coming from Adelaide she may have known him. It was just a passing thought.

Well, she went to ANU, that's where she met Kevin and when you see the photos of this young couple you can see they were going somewhere together. The kids are movers and shakers as well. It must have been her exposure to the Dunstan era. Therese doesn't wear a billboard saying I'm this or that. Therese I think likes to come in and strike you with surprise. Surprise is a big element of how Therese operates in my opinion. She is formidable as a person.

Would you call her a friend?

Yes, absolutely. Carolyn and I went out to Kevin's first book launch, which he did out at one of the primary schools – where was it? – it was in the inner suburbs. It was a great night because Kevin talked about China and where China is in world politics and how we should measure China; look carefully at their history and why they are where they are. You know, the colonial boot that's been on them for 300 years and how they've been exploited by every significant Western country, particularly the Europeans – the English, the French, and the Americans, I suppose, as well. He gave a wonderful exposé of how he sees China in terms of the rest of the world and how the West really has to put themselves in the Chinese position and think about why they do what they do. We all look at what they do in terms of intellectual property and there's a reason – they've had their guts ripped out for the last 200 years.

I think everyone acknowledges that Kevin is the China expert.

Yes, this is a bit of pay-back. They don't see any living on welfare – they've been exploited. I talked to Therese about the current situation and she was very concerned about that, but they are movers and shakers. They were living in New York; they had a place in London and the kids were in China. It was sort of a touchdown in Brisbane.

Both were clearly supportive of the foundation.

Absolutely.

Both of them had contacts and a lunch raises \$120,000, so the branch was doing very well.

It was terrific.

And very high-profile people. Adelaide is quite different to that and we have different focuses. How through that foundation were you making people learn about Don, and remembering Don? Was it more the fundraising angle?

I think that probably the outreach was – the business community knew about it because just with Malcolm alone, most of the people anywhere near politics in Queensland would know that the Don Dunstan Foundation had a Queensland branch.

They were well-known.

Yes, he would talk to people about it and he would talk to everyone about it. So yes, it had a presence, no question about it.

CAROLYN: Didn't we see a picture of Don on the - - -

KM: Yes, we had the roll-outs – Lynn [Arnold] came up and Greg [Crafter] came up - - -

As speakers?

Yes, Greg came up and spoke at the Commissariat at one event and talked about the foundation and what it was doing and what it was committed to do. I would have loved to have done more but, in essence, I guess I was overly ambitious about what we could do. I certainly wanted to siphon off some of that \$120,000 and the other money – we raised \$20,000 or \$30,000 prior to that – and set up a sort of full-time secretariat, almost. There had talked about that but we had committed ourselves to the Aboriginal Literacy Fund. I think all said and done when you look over your shoulder and say, right, we've got the closing the gap, the royal commissions and deaths in custody – I felt a bit guilty that maybe I'm not doing enough as secretary and I should be doing more and this money should be more effectively put on the ground. You're conscious of charities spending 80% on administration and 20% on delivering. We had this serious debate at several meetings about how much do we give. I was very nervous about saying, I'd like to keep \$40,000 for next year and have a part-time secretariat and then we could look at doing things like getting Lowitja or someone to come up, or getting – no, I won't mention the name, that prominent Aboriginal bloke from Queensland – that would set the world on fire! – but getting Lowitja or someone to come up and talk about how the Aboriginal community sees the issues that we are confronting as a

community. What do we need to do more about it as a democratic government in Queensland? Raising questions; confronting the comfortable middle class gentry of the inner Brisbane intellectual community which now lives there, there's no question. It's very similar to Adelaide and Sydney and Melbourne – there's an inner intellectual gentry in the inner suburbs of Brisbane and they pack a considerable punch. So I often thought that we should be doing that but I was very nervous about pushing that because – Therese had said, and a couple had a crack at me, 'You need to do more.' Well, yeah, OK.

But you need money to do more.

Yes, I was a bit stretched. My rubber band was a bit stretched as well, because we had our own little company and I was trying to do things in that as well, so there's always that dilemma – I could have done more; I could have done it better – no question about that.

But when you look back now, you achieved a hell of a lot.

Well, I think we did. I think we put the Dunstan Foundation name up in lights. We certainly did and it got a lot of press coverage when Kevin O7 came up and we had a business lunch. I was staggered – people were saying, 'How many are coming?' We had to fit more tables and chairs in. It was a real squeeze; everybody wanted to get into it. I thought, that's certainly a benchmark of where we should be going in terms of – getting to the intellectual stuff, we had Michael Kirby – sorry, it's all coming back to me.

You had all the high flyers.

Michael was brilliant – remember that night we had?

CAROLYN: Yes.

KM: Michael Kirby gave us an address on his life and the issues confronting modern democracy and where it was going. It was a wonderful speech. So, yes, we did some great things. That's the stuff I wanted to do. I wanted that stuff so my kids could be exposed to all that. I know the Quakers do it and a whole raft of other groups do it but the Dunstan Foundation has a particular - - -

It's special.

Yes, it has a particular spot in that debate because of Don's commitment and because I always have seen what Don did in Adelaide and in South Australia as significant in changing – certainly in changing my life – opening the world, making me think about what is happening in the world.

I think he did that for so many South Australians, and not just political people, because some of the changes that he did just had impact on everyday working people.

I think the doctors' wives – Don impacted on the doctors' wives and changed the political assessment. People thought about issues other than their daily events and the selfish issues about whether we can – I don't mean this in a derogatory sense, but whether you could pay the electricity bill or the rent. It takes you out of that daily churn, the daily hum.

People thought about different things with Don and I think we'll finish on the note that he just did change that course of history for South Australians, and that's why we think we are pretty special here. Just to finish, how long did the foundation run in Queensland?

We wrapped it up in about 2011 [it began in 2003].

So quite a long time. What led to it folding?

I think we sort of lost the enthusiasm, the drive.

It's hard to keep that level up.

Yes. We talked about how we could keep it going. I don't think we had a good succession plan – our HR team let us down badly! I think we should have had a PeopleSoft succession.

Let's just look at those very successful years and what you achieved and particularly for the Aboriginal people in Queensland, and for continuing Don's memory. On that note I'll say thank you very much for today, much appreciated.

Pleasure.

Post-interview email correspondence from Malcolm McMillan to Kym Mayes:

The lynchpin/s for the Queensland DDF kicking off were a gang of three and in this descending order The Hon Andrew P Fraser, The Hon M Kym Mayes, and me.

My role was to encourage others to join – Tom Burns, Therese Rein, Greg Chamberlain, Dr Tim Reddel, Lindsay Marshall – all magnificent individuals.

Tom's strong political relationship with The Hon DAD [Don Dunstan] AC QC over decades made him an automatic choice to be the Chair.

And, under his chairship what fun, joy, and laughter we all enjoyed and cherished.

They were vintage times and the best meetings I have ever been to.

The generosity, hospitality, sterling encouragement, not to mention the inspiration we all received from Therese was extraordinary.

The most significant individual external to the Qld committee/chapter was Kevin Rudd as PM.

Kevin's contribution to our committee on 31 July 2008 with his speech to our fundraising lunch (sponsored by Allen's Law Firm) was priceless.

<http://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-16040>

That fundraising lunch made our committee 'go' with philanthropic support to The Indigenous Literary Foundation, The Valley Youth Support Facility, and was a catalyst for Oral History recordings now housed in the National Library of Australia.

To the day I die, I will never forget the expression on the face of The Hon Greg Crafter AO, then the National Chair of the DDF, on the day of that DDF lunch at the then Crest Hotel in Brisbane.

Greg Crafter, as you know is an incredibly well connected/networked person in Australia. He was absolutely gobsmacked with the financial success on the day!

Was the amount raised in the circa \$120+K range?

The fundraising by Greg's gang in Adelaide at that stage was modest by the standards set by the Kevin lunch.

But the events run by the DDF in Adelaide have been and still are tremendous in support of the memory and legacy of Don.

If you've already put down some recorded words with Ms Murchie, there would in all probability be little that I could add.

Hope you're well and I often think about how Carolyn is going.

Regards,

MM.

[ps] the book event brochure is attached, but regretfully we never had a record of the magnificent address by the now former Justice of the High Court, The Hon Michael Kirby AC QC.