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## J.D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Full transcript of  
an interview with:

# Vince Curro

Conducted on: 2 August 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

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**This is Allison Murcia interviewing Vince Curro at the State Library on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2019. This is part of the Don Dunstan Foundation 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary oral history project. Could I please have your full name?**

Vincenzo Felicci Curro.

**And you were born when?**

26<sup>th</sup> May 1947 at Uraidla.

**We've agreed on the terminology that we will use, that you were a 'Don groupie' like a lot of other people.**

I certainly was a big fan, yes.

**Let's tell the story of how that came about.**

Well, my first experience of seeing and listening to Don, I was nine years old and it was the 1956 election campaign. Don was doing the old-fashioned style campaigning – street corner talks. My parents, who were Italian obviously, along with a number of other Italian people in the Payneham district, had gone along to listen to this man who had taken on the Italian people in his electorate as a project, as a helper, a go-to man for when they had problems. That was in 1956.

**You actually can remember going to that?**

Yes, it was on the corner of our street and another street.

**I can definitely tell you that you've had the longest association of anyone that I've spoken to, with Don.**

That was '56 and then in '57 my father died – it could have been about 12 months later when my father died. Mum needed some legal assistance and, of course, everybody in the community said, 'Why don't you go and see Don?' so we did. We made an appointment and visited Don at his office at the Epworth Building in Pirie Street.

**Is that where he worked? That's still there.**

Yes, the building is still there. We walked in and he actually greeted Mum in Italian, which really made her feel comfortable. She'd always been an admirer of his because of the Italian community connection with Don. When he was able to do that she said, 'This is the man to look after us.' Don didn't personally look after our legal affairs. His partner, I think it was Roder – Dunstan and Roder was the legal group he was working at at the time. So that was in '57 and then again in '59 I came across Don again when I was in Year 7 at what is now the

Trinity Gardens Primary School. I was chosen to thank Don on behalf of the class for our visit to Parliament House. I think I stumbled through a few words! He was appreciative of it.

**What a lovely early introduction to Don.**

Yes, this continuing introduction. I'll say to this day my interest in politics and, more likely, the social justice issues that Don was so passionate about rubbed off on me. To this day I consider him as the person who inspired me to have an interest in these things.

**That's a lovely introduction. You were such a young person to actually get that compassionate so early, and it has been critical in your whole life.**

Yes, then when I was at Norwood High School, a couple of times he visited. In the evenings he visited us to adjudicate our debating club activities and, again, that was another contact.

**Were you a debater?**

I was on the debating committee – more an organiser than a debater at that stage. I think I feel a lot more confident about something like that now than I would have then.

**It's very, very hard as a teenager to get up and talk in a debate, isn't it?**

Yes, but I was always interested and so I was on the school debating committee and helped organise things and worked out what we were going to do and what the topics were that we were going to debate and so on. The most amusing connection with Don that I can remember from those days is that we were at a fundraiser for a candidate for – I can't remember what the electorate was called in those days, but I think the event was at the Campbelltown High School and it was a fundraiser for whoever the candidate was, which I don't remember. Don, of course, was invited and we were all waiting to see Don, and Don wasn't there, and Don wasn't there. The problem was that it was a Saturday night and it was the Saturday night after the Norwood Football Club had won the Grand Final. He had been in the club rooms with the footballers.

**That's a pretty good excuse, isn't it?**

Don arrived wearing a Norwood football jumper and a red and blue scarf and the cheers in the room were deafening!

**Again, that was his style, wasn't it?**

Yes.

**Even then, or since, you don't get a politician - - -**

No, that has that connection with his - - -

**And I like to use the phrase he was a man of the people and he related at every level.**

Yes, he truly was. A lot of politicians will say that they are a man of the people but in practice they are not. In fact, the interesting thing about Don was that he could easily have been part of the elite.

**Absolutely.**

He could have still been a left-wing politician, apart from the people he was supposedly helping – but no, he was the sort of roll up your sleeves type of politician who got involved with the people he represented. From thereon I didn't get to do a lot. I was off at work myself as a school teacher and didn't get to do a lot other than what everybody does every three or four years and vote, and always made sure that I voted for the right party!

**Were you always in Don's electorate?**

I grew up there until I was married in 1971, or 1970, something like that, which was early in his premiership. We moved to Stirling in the Hills. Unfortunately we were represented by Alexander Downer in federal politics and I can't even remember who we were represented by in the state.

**Certainly in those areas that would have been quite solid Liberal in those days.**

I always kept thinking what a waste of a vote.

**At least you got to cast your vote.**

I did, I made sure I did. The next thing – a sort of anecdote that I can relate about Don was when I started teaching at Mount Barker High School in 1990 something. All the new teachers who had arrived at the school – we had a pre-teaching day get-together and as new teachers we had to introduce ourselves. One of the things we were asked to put down was who our hero was. Being a physical education teacher everybody expected me to name a sportsman of some kind.

**Of course, that would go with the job, wouldn't it?**

I said, 'The person I admire most is Don Dunstan.' By then he was retired from politics but everybody knew who he was and some of the younger ones said, 'Oh, the guy with the pink shorts!'

**That's unfortunate that that's how they remember him.**

That's the thing that people – I cannot - - -

**They are actually next door in the Museum of Democracy if you've got time - - -**

I really almost get annoyed.

**It trivialises so much of what he was about. The pink shorts were actually an important statement and it's taken out of context now.**

Yes, the pink shorts and the safari suits.

**Yes, and he was just so sensible on style of dress for our climate and that message has got lost over the years, but his partner donated the pink shorts to the Museum of Democracy next door. At least they are on display.**

That's good. Of course the other spectacular things – things like holding back the tide at Glenelg and riding an elephant around the zoo, spouting poetry with Keith Michell – all of those things I followed with great interest.

**They are memories that people of our generation remember fondly. They weren't things that today's politicians would do as a stunt. He did it because he wanted to do it and it was appropriate to what he was doing.**

I compare what Nick Xenophon does to try and be like that, but it doesn't work.

**It didn't work – I don't think he was anywhere near that sort of calibre. Don didn't ever look at it as a stunt or a publicity campaign.**

No, it was just something that he wanted to do and something that he enjoyed doing and he thought, well, I'm going to do it.

**Exactly, and it might help particularly the Arts with the reading of poetry. I think my favourite was probably holding back the tide.**

Yes, everybody remembers that one.

**Also when he opened Rundle Mall – the champagne in the fountain was quite a good one.**

Yes, and there was the one about the Hindmarsh Building Society on the Gawler Place corner. Those were all good ways of doing those things that reassured the people that things weren't as bad as you might think they are. Anyway, with all of that as a sort of preamble there's no guessing as to why I would become involved with the foundation when it started.

**Before we start with the foundation, once he had left politics and got ill and had a very sad death, and an early death - - -**

There are a couple of other things that I remember. One was a long lunch at Don's Table. To this day I can't remember how we managed to get an invite – whether we just happened to be going down The Parade and there was something going on - - -

**You ended up there.**

Yes. Don was host, of course, and he had Tim Knappstein from Knappstein's Wines who provided the wine that day, and Steven, his partner, as the chef. I think Tom [Don's grandson] was there too as a waiter, if I remember rightly, as a young lad. The lunch was scheduled to start at 12 or 12.30 and it was about 5.30 by the time we'd finished.

**That's a good lunch!**

It was an excellent lunch – it was just so much fun. Don, bless his heart, got around to every table and had a chat with everybody at each of the tables and reassured them that he was their host and they were his guests, every one of them. I think Greg Crafter might have been there too.

**He was heavily involved in those early days too.**

I think I remember Greg being there and it might have been the first time I met him.

**Don was a man of style, wasn't he?**

Absolutely.

**To do something like that. Many politicians post-politics just go into business and make a lot of money. He went into what he was passionate about.**

It was food, and that was it.

**Food and people. Do you remember much of the afternoon or was it just a lot of food and conversation?**

I've still got the menu from the day.

**How delightful.**

Somebody at the foundation has taken a photocopy of it to set up – I know that part of this project is going to be a Don's Table dinner or lunch, or something like that.

**They're looking at something like that and also a possible relaunch of the cookbook, slightly updated I think. They're looking for that sort of memorabilia so that would be quite important that you kept that. Have you kept other things over the years?**

I've got a cookbook, the old version.

**Yes, I've got the old early version.**

I've also got a copy of *Felicia*, his autobiography that he wrote about his time in parliament. That's a signed copy. I'm not sure where I got it but I've got it.

**Also – this is not part of the interview – but are you aware that there is a new biography [by Angela Woollacott] being launched?**

Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

**I can give you the details after this.**

I got an email about it from somebody.

**It might have been the one I sent out to a lot of people.**

You did, you forwarded it from somebody. Anyway, I went to sign up and they told me [the launch] was sold out.

**There'll be a waiting list.**

Yes, I put my name on the waiting list.

**There are always cancellations at the last moment.**

Can you let me know?

**Yes, certainly.**

Because I would love to be there.

**I think it was one of those that booked out very quickly.**

I did almost as soon as I got your email.

**And I forwarded it as soon as I'd booked but it was one of those events that I think was always going to be booked out very quickly. Hopefully, they will be recording it which would be useful for the foundation for this year because it's deliberately being launched here and it's the first state it is being launched in, and launched by Penny Wong. It's my understanding that it is part of the celebrations because the foundation was certainly behind the book.**

That's interesting because we're going to something at Unley – women who had an influence, Unley women of influence, or something, it's called.

**I've got the flyer and I have to check the dates.**



Penny Wong is speaking at that I think.

**Yes, there's a lot happening this year: the foundation and the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of suffrage so it's a busy year all round. Let's move on. With that background you had no choice but to get involved with the foundation. What I wanted to ask, when he died, can you remember how you heard about it or what your reaction was at the time?**

Just through the media, and obviously, a sadness but we all knew it was coming. I had seen Don walking along The Parade – it must have been just months before he died. He was walking with a walking stick, stooped, looking much older than his 70 years that he was, but still greeting people along the way. Obviously, there were the traders along The Parade who knew him well and he had a word as he was going along there. He was almost unrecognisable at that stage as the man.

**Yes, it went towards the end.**

Yes, and that was the last time I saw him. Then I was privileged – because Vivian, my wife was working with Bronwen, Don's daughter, at Annesley College - - -

**What was she – Bronwen was a teacher?**

Yes, Vivian and Bronwen were teaching there. We got invites to the memorial service and at the end of the memorial service – there was a table set out on the lawns outside the Festival Theatre saying, join here for the Don Dunstan Foundation. Vivian and I went up straight away and said, 'We'd like to join.' I happened to mention to – actually I think this chap, Richard Smith, was somebody at the table, if I remember rightly. Anyway, I started speaking to somebody and I said, 'Is there anything we can do to help the foundation?' They said, 'You can become a volunteer, like us.'

**So on the day of the funeral you offered that.**

Yes. I said, 'Well, put my name down.' I gave them contact details and they said, 'When we have a meeting we'll get in touch with you.' The foundation from that year, 1999, to about 2004 or 2005 – people like Greg [Crafter], and so on, can give you more details about when it transitioned from basically a volunteer group organising things to coming up with a business plan which some of us volunteers were involved in, sort of helping set it up. Then once it got to that stage it became incorporated and it became a fully fledged foundation, but up until that time for those first four or five years it was just a group of us, about - - -

**Let's talk about those early years.**

Yes, there were about eight or ten of us and we thought, OK, what are we going to do? The first thing we've got to do is have some events so that we can raise a little bit of money.

**So there were no paid people – it was just a group of you who had become volunteers and you weren't given a framework or anything?**

We were guided by Greg Crafter. Under his guidance he would often chair our meetings if he was available, and so on.

**But basically you came up with the ideas.**

We came up with the things that we were going to do. There were some official events that people like Greg and whoever else was on the board at the time would come up with. For instance, there was a book launch where Gough Whitlam was invited to launch the book. That was out of our control – we just helped out with setting up and all those sorts of things but there were other things that occurred where we chased up people who we thought might be interested.

**Can you remember some of those early ones? We're going back 20 years – that's a big ask!**

The one I was particularly involved with was Mia Handshin who was a journalist at the time. I had heard her speak somewhere and I thought, this young lady - - -

**She would have been quite young then.**

Yes, she was just out of her teens, I think. She might have been early twenties at most. I'd heard her speak and I thought she was very good so I thought I'd see if I could find some contact and I spoke to her on the phone and said, 'Would you like to [give a talk]?' She said, 'Yes, fine.' I remember introducing her to the people who came as possibly Australia's first female prime minister! I knew there was going to be one female prime minister soon.

**At some time.**

Well, relatively soon compared to the history of the country.

**Yes, you didn't think we'd have to wait that long. Do you remember what you asked her to talk on? [Vince checks notes] Have you got some notes there? It doesn't matter, I'm just curious, if you can remember.**

I just came across her name when I was looking at this stuff just before coming.

**So you got your speaker organised, then what did you do to publicise and organise your event? How did all that happen?**

What we did was we had a venue – we had people who presented at venues. In the first year or year and a bit was Charlick's Feed Store and Saskia Beer was in charge of that at the time. When Gough came to launch that book it was held there. We had Tim Costello come along there and speak. We had George Negus lined up but he never did turn up – we don't know what happened to him.

**He did do the final interview [with Don Dunstan].**

Yes, I don't know what happened, whether there were constraints of work or whatever. Tony Baker filled in for him. Who else did we have?

**There were some pretty prominent people.**

Yes.

**And you got that venue free or - - -?**

Yes, it was donated.

**Then people could buy something if they wanted when they were there.**

Yes, then our audiences started to grow, which was - - -

**How did you advertise in those early days?**

Just flyers, and people who had joined the foundation were sent flyers and - - -

**We had mailing lists then.**

Yes, mailing lists and there were one-page newsletters and those sorts of things that would be sent out and people would know ahead of time where and when and who. Anyway, our audiences started to grow so we had to have another venue and the people who were at the Governor Hindmarsh – I can't remember their names now. I've known them for a long time. They were at the Bridgewater Hotel when we were living up in the Hills and then they had the Governor [Brian and Vivienne Tonkin]. Anyway, that was a good venue and so we made what we called a lunch event for \$20.

**So your meal and your speakers sort of deal.**

Meal and speaker deal, yes. I remember we had Donald Horne who came. I'm not sure who was able to get in touch with some of these higher profile ones.

**That might have been some of the politicians.**

Yes, if no high profile people were available somebody would ask somebody who they thought might be. Jane Lomax-Smith was one of them and I think one of the last ones we had at the Governor Hindmarsh – and this was probably after it had gone out of our control, as it were – Mike Rann was probably one of the last ones we had there at the Governor Hindmarsh.

**So up to that stage it was all volunteers.**

Yes, usually somebody from the board or the council would find a high profile speaker but the organisation of the event, the setting up and contacting people - - -

**The hard work!**

Yes, all that spade work was done by this group of people. We had people come in and people drop off but over the years we had maybe 20 different people who helped out. Those lunches were very successful.

**How often would you hold it?**

We'd have about five or six a year.

**So, it was quite substantial.**

We'd set up dates and then we'd try and work out who was available or we'd ask somebody like Greg or whoever else was - - -

**Someone with the contacts.**

With the contacts for somebody who was a little bit more important than we knew.

**Certainly those names that you've listed now are still well-known names, they are certainly high profile.**

Yes, and we tried to have a theme centred either around the speaker who might be involved in one of the values – it might be a human rights issue, it might be an Arts issue. Donald Horne spoke about *The Lucky Country* 40 or 50 years on from when he wrote the book, and what he was thinking - - -

**Did he still see it as the lucky country?**

Not as lucky as he thought it was in the '50s.

**It would be horrifying if he wrote it now. You didn't just have that role of organising – you actually were helping on the night as well. The functions that I've been to, you're always doing the meet and greet, checking names off lists. It's**

**a lot of work – I don't think a lot of people, unless you've been a volunteer, actually know how much work is involved, and you're first there and last to leave.**

Generally, yes, unless there's something more pressing we make sure that there is somebody there.

**Your wife has also volunteered all of that time.**

Yes, she's still at it.

**She didn't know the early Don like you did.**

No, she arrived in Australia in 1970 just when Don was – it was really quite interesting because for her politics wasn't a major interest in her life at that stage. She still blames me for the interest that she has got now and she has become quite interested.

**Did you go to most functions together? You were involved for that whole time together.**

Yes. Often if we had committee meetings I'd go because I think she was doing something here at uni in the evening - - -

**So it depended on her availability.**

Yes, generally when it was the committee meetings I'd go to those because I had more time up my sleeve.

**What about the other volunteers – as you said, the numbers changed. You had seven or eight as a core group. Did they stay involved longer? You've obviously broken all the records because you're the only one who was there from start to finish.**

Some of them stayed longer – what did I do with that list? From my list I can't even remember very much about them but there's John Caldecott. He might be an interesting person to contact.

**I might photocopy that list before you go.**

I see John occasionally at the Market on Saturday mornings. Alison [Galbreath] was one of the early secretaries. The very earliest paid, or what do you call it when the university lets them go or the government?

**Interns.**

No – secondments. There was a girl called Michelle – even if I give you first names people like Greg might remember who these people were because he would have had daily contact.

**So Michelle [White] was one of those secondments?**

Yes, and there was a girl called Alison Galbreath. There were two or three secondments who worked out of a tiny makeshift office – I can't even remember where that was now.

**I was told where the first office was – somewhere in Adelaide Uni I think, and then there was a little office in North Terrace for quite a while as well. What were their tasks?**

They were the kind of people who organised – we would draw up things and they'd organise publicity and mail-outs and those kinds of things. There might be some others as well who were in and out.

**Is that a constitution you've got there on the top? I'm just wondering what date it is because - - -**

2003, this one.

**I've got that one. We've been trying to see if we could get the very first version.**

I never did see the very first one.

**There have actually been several amendments. The 2003 one is pretty close to the original.**

There are planning sessions and - - -

**We'll go through that box when we've finished.**

I can leave it with you. It's not particularly organised.

**That's fine – if it's related to the foundation I'll know what I'm looking for.**

Some of the stuff you already probably have.

**Certainly some of the minutes, I wouldn't have any of that. That would be delightful – thank you.**

There's the menu for the lunch if you want to have a look at it.

**It's autographed as well. Just pick out some of the highlights of the meal.**

Seared scallops in sweetcorn sauce - - -

**And Steven did all of the cooking?**

As far as I know, yes. He might have had some helpers out the back. These are the starters: scallops and then there was mushroom timbale topped with sweet potato chips. In those days  
- - -

**That would have been unheard of.**

Yes. For main course we had either stuffed squid with macadamia nuts, mint and sorrel; then we had camphor tea-smoked duck.

**Had you eaten any foods like that before?**

No, I know I like tea-smoked duck now and I've had it a few times when we've been to Asian restaurants.

**Actually you've got an amazing collection there.**

Yes, there are clippings from the time - - -

**If you're happy to leave that with me for a week or so I'll get some copies done with your permission and put them into the collection for the foundation.**

These cuttings were from the newspaper around the week of his death. There are some tributes there from all sorts of people: Mike Rann, John Olsen, Kim Beazley, John Howard.

**The library relies on people like you to keep these things. What does John Howard say?**

'Mr Dunstan was a polished advocate of his views and policies. The skill played no small part in his considerable political success' – faint praise.

**Right, at least he acknowledged his work.**

Michael Kirby – he's another one we had as speaker too. Probably the highest profiled person that we had speaking for the foundation was Robert Reich who was Bill Clinton's Secretary of Labor.

**That's high profile.**

Yes, and to this day he's still got my pen! I gave him my pen to sign an autograph and he must have pocketed it because I got home and thought, where's my pen?

**It went to a good cause!**

I thought, I guess he could have it.

**How long did you continue going to the Gov?**

That's an interesting point.

**That concept of a lunch speaker is very good.**

I think from 2001, 2002 – it might have been a good six or seven years. I've had a number of people at events when we were talking at informal gatherings who have said, 'Why don't you bring back the long lunches?'

**Well, whoever they are, I'm agreeing with them because a lot of the audience who go to these functions traditionally have been older people. We're certainly getting a youth movement coming through thanks to David Pearson's work.**

Yes, the stuff that he does with AdMental is fantastic.

**But lunch meetings are so popular for so many organisations. It doesn't have to be a long day.**

When you think about the kind of people who we got to speak, they were interesting people and usually high profile and they would get people in.

**Most stuff is at night now, isn't it?**

Yes.

**Older people don't really want to go out at night.**

There's a Sunday lunch. Who else did we have? Did I mention Michael Kirby?

**Yes you did, and he is a staggeringly good speaker, and he's a very funny man actually.**

Yes, we had him a couple of times. I can remember there was a small gathering – you know the little building behind the Art Gallery?

**Yes, I know the one you mean.**

There was some small event there and Michael Kirby was the guest speaker. He was coming straight from the airport and it was an afternoon thing, like one o'clock in the afternoon. I was given a box of sandwiches and they said, 'Here, can you watch out for Michael when he comes and give him this because he won't have had anything to eat. We don't want him passing out!' It was nicely presented and I thought it was great because it gave me a chance to have a little chat with him.

**Absolutely, and he's a delightful man. I've spoken to him several times.**

Yes, very nice.



**Very generous, again, with his time and he gives very thoughtful presentations. He doesn't just rock up; he's put a lot of thought into what he's saying.**

Julian Disney was another one.

**Yes, and he's got an association with the foundation as well.**

Yes.

**When did things start to change from being so heavily focused on volunteers doing this work?**

That would have been about 2004 or 2005. One of the things that we were asked to help with if we wished to do so was set up a business plan.

**As volunteers?**

Well, talk about the sorts of things that we thought the foundation – our involvement and our passion for the foundation was appreciated so when it was decided that the foundation was going to be stepped up to a serious – not that it wasn't serious - - -

**No, just moving up a level.**

Yes, and we were asked to contribute to what we thought might go into a business plan, not that we expected much but at least we were listened to.

**You knew what it was about though – you knew the values and you knew what the audiences would want.**

Yes, and we were listened to and so out of that grew the connection, particularly the connection with the two universities which put it on a more firm footing than just a group of people sort of remembering Don.

**Which is how it started and that was a lovely idea but I think it got to the stage where you were ready to move up.**

Don wanted it to be a foundation – that was part of his legacy.

**And he was involved in that.**

Yes, he set that up. I'm not sure who he worked with but I'm sure that Greg - - -

**I've actually interviewed the lawyers involved in setting it up.**

I'm sure that Greg Crafter would have been involved because he was Don's protégé.

**Greg was certainly involved in an advisory role but it was Ted Byrt and Simon Nuttall [and Adrian Graves] who were the lawyers who put it together. The trust**

**deed that you've got there, they were actually involved in that and over a period of time the board would make changes, basically updating the original.**

I guess the thing was that it went from us doing stuff to the board and the council being more active in organising events, and so on. They probably knew our limitations.

**Also, you didn't have any money!**

That's right, and so the business plan, the involvement of the universities put the foundation on a more solid footing financially and legally. It lifted the profile.

**What do you think of where it's at now? Tell me a little bit about – you've been involved for so long – to where we are now.**

One of the things that concerned me was that for a good part of the first decade of this century it was all people who remembered Don. It's getting to be fewer and fewer of those, of course. I think the thing about where it is at the moment, particularly in the last three or four years with David Pearson as the director, it has involved young people much more and I think that is a very, very important issue. I think the other thing is that one of the things that should be thought about, and was thought about back when we were closely involved, was what we could do to add Don's name to the history of South Australia as far as what is taught in schools. The '70s in South Australia were a sort of defining period for this state and try as hard as the conservatives do – they still rely on a lot of those things that - - -

**Very little of his legislation has been overturned.**

That's right, and so these young people coming through school now – I don't know what they're called, Millennials, or whatever – kids who have been born since the turn of the century – deserve to know about this man and his work – more his work than him as a person.

**I hadn't considered it from that point of view. That's an excellent way of expressing it. They need to know why South Australia is special in so many ways.**

Yes, it is.

**Also, the legislation he brought in wasn't easy in those times but it did spread all over the country.**

Certainly – there was the Duncan Affair, which led to the decriminalisation of homosexuality.

**There was a lot of work done in things people don't think about in consumer affairs – so many areas that we just take for granted all over Australia.**

Even something as simple as the recycling deposit on bottles – we're a long way ahead of the other states on that.

**It was all coming out of his head and going to Peter Duncan as his Attorney-General and saying, 'Put this through.' It was Len King initially and then Peter Duncan. Their role was to implement Don's agenda but Don took them all for the ride. He did it all by consensus – he wasn't a single ruler.**

This was the fact – the point is that he had these intelligent people around him and they believed in Don, and so they were prepared to do these things.

**That doesn't happen now, does it? You've either got a one-man-show or an internal fight.**

Exactly, it's the saddest thing.

**I think that was the strength of politics then and subsequently I think in the Bannon decade as well, that they had good, intelligent, hard-working ministers who were there for the right thing, and were well-led. Could you say that about any government since?**

No, I would be accused of being elitist but I still think that people who put their names up should have a level of education commensurate with the responsibility of the job.

**That's well said.**

I think that so many people say, I'll stand for this or that seat as an Independent or whatever. OK, it's very nice to say I'm just an ordinary person like you but then once they get into politics they are too easily manipulated by the power brokers in their party. We need people who think things through as our leaders, not people who just say what the boss says.

**You've just said it – we need leaders.**

Yes, we need leaders who recognise that there are people as clever or cleverer than they are, and come up with ideas that are good for the people and good for the country. We too often finish up with people who sort of don't really know why they are there.

**One of the things, from talking to people who were in Don's Cabinet was that he had an agenda that he wanted introduced but if you had a good argument you could talk him out of something. If you could convince him that what he was suggesting was wrong he would go with it, so he was persuadable I guess. That's a really good sign of strong leadership.**

It's really interesting because I can remember thinking about that and Don's method of doing this when I read the Lincoln biography, *Team of Rivals* [by Doris Kearns Goodwin]. Abe Lincoln did the same kind of thing in his time in office.

**I'll have to track that one down.**

Yes, it's quite a thick book but it's an excellent read. For a political biography it's fairly easy to read. He would bring in people who – and he didn't mind whether they were Democrats or Republicans or whatever party they represented if they were people who had intelligence and people who had vision. Like you just said, if they could convince him of a good idea he was prepared to go with that idea.

**That's a good leader who can do that.**

Yes, and we haven't had one of those for a while.

**It's been said to me a couple of times that if Gough Whitlam and Don Dunstan stood for parliament now they wouldn't even get preselection. That's how ahead of their times they were.**

Why wouldn't they get it?

**Because they don't play the games; they weren't in factions. They were honest, hard-working politicians with progressive agendas and vision. That's a sad and true fact of how politics has changed in not that [long] a time, a couple of generations really.**

Easily, yes, and you can see the difference. You get bickering that occurs, you get ideas that – Tony Abbott put it as the captain's call. He uses that and, of course, any leader who thinks that way really isn't going to bring people with him, and it became his undoing.

**I'm going to ask you something really hard now, to sum up: a couple of sentences that would summarise what you think of Don.**

A person with passion for people who was inclusive. When Don spoke about the rights of people he spoke about the rights of everybody.

**Not just the elite.**

Not just the ones who would benefit from them. To me, the values that he has set up for the foundation, he wrote those values down himself and that is what he stood for. It epitomises his time in politics and his legacy.

**That's a perfect summary – thank you very much.**