

ORAL HISTORY – QUEENSLAND COMMUNIST PARTY

TRANSCRIBED RECORD OF INTERVIEW WITH Stan Heilbronn

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Interviewer: Ross Gwyther

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

ROSS Can you tell me a little bit about the sort of political influences on you when you were growing up, that might have got you involved in left wing politics?

STAN I can't remember anything in my very early days... we were in a random commission house out at Garbutt. Impressions - Dad was a bit of an authoritarian but he didn't sort of hold it against you. And I don't think there were any of us, six boys and one girl, who actually would've said a word against him. But by the way, he's my stepfather. My mother married another bloke called Stan Martin and he didn't want anything to do with me until I reached an interesting stage.

And when I come down from Mount Isa and I was about 21, he then taught me to play the guitar so they could... play with him. Once again he wasn't an authoritarian way, he was more or less a gadabout really. But very, like you couldn't dislike him either sort of thing. It reached the stage where I had to make a decision. One, to stay with this society bloke, and the life he led or Eddie Heilbronn. And I maintain in my thinking of it, it was a value judgement I made to either go along with this bloke and all his gaiety and be part of the family including the bloke that reared me.

So if anyone asked me I would say that's a reasonable thing, cos I couldn't see myself working and doing the things that he did and so on. Including of course his relationship to women, what have you. I was against that, or this other bloke who was more serious and has won our hearts. That was a big thing.

And after that, some time, about 12 months we positioned ourselves in a room on Mum and Dad's unit. And we used that, that pressure of living to get ourselves a house but before we were able to get to there, they put us in a fibro huts in Garbutt, and they were used by the Army. And they had a division, fibro up there and you could hear what was going on. It sort of wasn't very suitable. It also had community washrooms, bath and so on, and they were of the same fibro sort of thing. So you can imagine it was pretty primitive. And a lot of our neighbours, that's where I sort of got more into dealing with the Aboriginals. Yeah because we lived among them sort of thing, and we got to know some of the families and so on.

ROSS But that was when you were first married then? Is that what you mean?

STAN Yeah.

ROSS Yes so how old were you then?

STAN Be about 25 I think, yeah might be about then.

ROSS So that would've been like the mid 1950's.

STAN Yeah. They moved into... I'm trying to work out when they did and how they did. They moved into a place on another street, was a real house. The previous one I was talking about was actually a one building divided, it was really two. They moved into a street, I can't remember much about that particular street. I was trying to fill in to when I got mixed up with the Party, which I did through respect for Dad. And also because they had a Eureka Youth League. And I got mixed up in that, because we used to – I think I mentioned at the meeting, we used to go on trips sort of to do letterbox leaflets in another town, another city and so and so. So yeah, and then also we had a little band. Guitar... bush base, and lagerphone and harmonica. And I sung a bit sort of thing. So we used to, took part not necessarily as communists but a lot of people knew us through the youth league. So it was a good stepping-stone because you could hardly be of use with blokes who play and what have you sort of thing. We reckon that was our way in. And we spent a lot over there, over the island, they built huts over there.

ROSS This is on Magnetic Island?

STAN In Nelly Bay actually. Frank Bishop was the main instigator of it. Hardest worker, done a lot more than anyone. But then we did go, we had youth camps over there, at that place. So that was one of the plusses sort of thing. I believe someone said today those units are still standing. He's done a real good job. One of the objectives we did have to it was between where they are and down to the water's edge, there's an old graveyard. Some of the early keepers. I believe also there was a palm tree and under it is supposed to be buried an Aboriginal, a certain thing about.

Yeah so we spent a fair bit of... Lyall Smith, I was nearly going to get him to tell you the story. He had a boat, and that boat gets loaded up to take goods over to the bloody island. And some of the bloody water, almost lapping the bloody gunnel, but anyway we obviously made it... Yeah, and it's through them, the brother and I, through the Eureka league, brother and I sort of joined the Party, come in. Ron was a boilermaker thing, that was his trade that he learnt.

ROSS Ron's your brother?

STAN Yeah, one of my brothers in Brisbane sort of thing. And the other brother – I don't think he ever joined the party, but he was sympathetic. If you like maybe a bit casual but I don't know, anyway he never joined the party sort of thing. And I got in deeper and deeper, now where did we go? Oh I think Dad got, was doing work for the government, CCC, Commonwealth Construction Corp. And we was responsible for sections of rows. He wasn't the only one, there was others. He was responsible, and eventually through his job ended up getting transferred up Mt Spec. And we lived up Mt Spec. One stage up there we...

ROSS Where's Mt Spec?

STAN About 50 miles north of here, in off the highway here. I used to cart timber there, when we were up there. None now. But anyway, he moved us along and a couple of things about that that I remember particularly. We were camped, cos all they supplied was camping sort of stuff. We were camped about a mile from the highest point on the road in Mt Spec, you know, the sign up. 3200 feet I think it was. About a mile from there, and then a mile further down was a woodcutter's camp.

So here we are, I think at that stage it was only the three boys and my sister. Yeah we'd done our schooling by correspondence, and yeah and Sunday, Sunday was go for a walk to one of the settlements and so on. And my sister used to pick up anything along the road, we used to call it rubbish cart lift. But anyway yeah, so that... and we worked our way through my dad's transfers over to settlers along the road. One's called Waterfall and another was Bin Lane Creek, which was the furthest over. And then he got a transfer from there to Mount Isa. I don't know how that came about, possibly just applied for jobs at Mount Isa. We arrived down in Mount Isa about '41.

ROSS 1941.

STAN Thereabouts, and we were there for 10 years. And it would've done a lot to mould me, but also I think we were obviously like Dad was capable as a trade union leader. He was very educational, along the way. I played a bit of sport, ruby league, cricket, tennis. I played all those. I don't know whether Ron got involved then, cos Ron ended up, he became our... blackouts, probably old age is starting to give me the shits. But anyway, I played a bit of sport myself and as that interview with bloody Hilton says, he recognised my sporting prowess.

Dad was also a keen musician, played the banjo. And he was keen for me to take up something, so he made two attempts. One was to play the trombone, and we got to the stage where I was putting notes together, and it got in the way of my schooling and I said to Dad I'm sorry, I prefer to go to school. And then another time he taught me piano, and I got to the stage where I was playing tunes but once again, got in the way of sport, what have you.

So I didn't do that. During my school holidays, I got work at Mount Isa mines in what they call the Assay Office. You get the bloody stones, break them open and check. Which I enjoyed. And the last time I got a job at Mount Isa was as a boilermaker's assistant. And I had to see the superintendent or foreman or whoever it was, something. I don't know what it was I had to see him about, but anyway, I'm up one end of this bloody hall which would be longer than that thing there and pick up the river. I said hey hang on there's so and so, I've gotta see him. So I took off after him, and he was walking pretty... little lesson I got.

Anyway, I whistled him and the reason was because of the noise. I thought well that'd be the most effective way. So either he slowed down or I sped up, I caught him. Soon as I caught him he said did you whistle me? I said woah. I don't know whether I ever, I must've given him the message but yeah. They had had a pretty dirty job, early part there. He was in charge, or played a role in what they called the Bag House. And the Bag House was just a whole mass of hessian sort of thing, big sheets for hanging down sort of thing, and the stuff coming through from the crushing got caught up in the bags. So Dad had to sort of every, during shift, might be every hour or something, had to go up and press a button and the machine shook the shit out of the bags and down went the dust, got carted away. Some of it went out the chimney too. But it was considered a pretty dicey sort of job. Anyway, then of course he did certainly get mixed up in the struggle, and the first one was the lead bonus. I'm not too sure, summer in the mid 40's or something. I can't really remember. I'd have it somewhere, and yeah, he took over the leadership of the AWU as their rep on the job.

So they were watching him, but also as the bloody AWU watching him. And Dad tells me of a case [*of a senior AWU official*], he said that bastard poked a gun at me Stan, from in the car. I don't think he you know... so there was that. There's no doubts where they saw him. But anyway he kept with it right up until – oh that's right, in the process he had to travel to South

Australia and Broken Hill, to apparently get some idea how these things worked or how the bonus worked and so on. That was part of why he went over there sort of thing. Yeah and they struggled, and eventually they won it. They won the bonus and that was a terrific thing. But as I said in my marks there, it's got a downside and the downside was 600 stood down as a result of it, only 400 taken back. And I guess that was the beginning of the end of us there, we come down the coast from there sort of thing.

ROSS So when they put 400 back, they didn't give any jobs to any of the militants?

STAN No. I couldn't give you all that detail, except I know Dad said typical bastards, he said, stood 600 of us down, they've taken 400 back.

ROSS Yeah, can you tell me the story again of you being asked about the interview for your apprenticeship?

STAN Yeah... well what I was hoping to do, was in Grade 6, so that was Grade 6, Grade 7, junior sort of thing. That far back, and I must've been influenced by Dad telling me the stories of Bradford, the Bradford Scheme. Built at Sydney Harbour Bridge or his plans or something. And it must've had an impression on him because from way back there I wanted to be a civil engineer. And I kept saying to Dad if we get a chance Dad I'm going down.

What bloody well happened, got in my way was not too sure whether a coal strike or something, state wide... and then also the lead bonus struggle was on in the same time. Whether it was what little money they had aside for me, had to be used up. So that fell through, and that's how Dad said well Stan he said, why don't you apply for apprentice electrician. He said because electrical's going to be much more in the future he said, and there's going to be all sorts of demands for highly skilled. He said you can study to be an electrical engineer if you like. Said okay, that was a good compromise to take.

And then of course, as the story I told this morning, I apply for the apprenticeship. I got the letter of acceptance from a chap named Hilton would like to see you Mr Heilbronn, blah blah. So I go up to see him and I go into this office, plush bloody carpets and fancy bloody chairs to sit in and so forth. And then Hilton started to read from his letter – oh I see you did well at school Stan. Yeah. Oh your sporting prowess is not too bad either, eh. Yeah. Oh and scouts, you were in scouts. I said yeah. He said very impressive, very impressive. And he might've said some other creamy words but then eventually he said well unfortunately we can't afford to employ you. You might grow up like your dad. That was my first exciting bloody bit of victimisation I had to put up with.

And so coming down then, yeah that would've been all the stuff I told you. That's right, because I come down from there and my real father grabbed me and taught me to play the guitar and what have you. I enjoyed it, but we had one daughter I think at the time and Bett had come along to the... a lot of it though was pub work, or skiffle grip, played in the pub sort of thing. But yeah, and I learnt to strum the guitar pretty well. Not as an expert like plucking strings, all that stuff but learnt the chords pretty well and had a good strum. And whether it was the result of parties, friends, invariably they'd get me to get the guitar out. And I loved nothing better than to community sing. I wasn't particularly worried about community singing. So I had a sort of a pretty good name among neighbours and friends, what have you, with the guitar. Then that other business must've come to it, cos I strummed the guitar, I was a guitar player in that little group I was talking about. Lagerphone, bush base.

ROSS Through the Eureka Youth League.

STAN Eureka Youth League, yeah. I was also trying to get work at the time. And one of the jobs that come up was the Caltex service station. And the bloke in charge of it was a right wing bastard, I didn't know at the time. So when I applied for the job, oh hang on, he did employ me and it was only a matter of a couple of weeks later he come down and sacked me. I don't think he accused of anything sort of thing, but I heard on the grapevine about this bastard see, and obviously, he was keen to get at me and he sacked me. That was another case of victimisation, you know. Worked at BSP as a clerk.

Going back to Mount Isa, when I couldn't get this electrical apprenticeship I saw a job at the railway as a fireman. So I got mixed up in that. Wasn't quite 12 months I think, and it started to get at me. I didn't particularly like the sort of job in the coal and all that shit and so on. Particularly that I was also keen on figures, figures and writing and stuff like that. So I applied through the railway and I got a transfer, goods office or something sort of thing. And they also used me in the main office, used my clerical ability between the goods office and the main office. The main office was where this bloody boss, stationmaster was there, and he never missed a chance... the only thing he couldn't do anything, I was a good worker. Dad had always pressed to me, he said don't be provoked and blah blah blah.

So I was a good worker and I can still remember a bloke in the yard. Fellow about my age he was, Brown or something, he was coming out and he was supposed to do the same job as I. But he was a bludger, and I had to end up having a go at him but see as cleaners, you'd come on to do a shift for eight hours, then there'd be a bit of a break and the other bloke would come on, sort of thing. Well Brownie never lifted a bloody finger. So just another little experience with him, we used to go out to a swimming hole, a dam, Rifle Creek Dam.

Anyway, three of us went out there, one bloke on his motorbike and Brownie had a sidecar on his, and I sat in the sidecar see. Okay, that was alright. So we had a day and on the way home, I'm sitting there and all of a sudden I look down at the forks to his bloody bike and the forks in the frame were going like that. Shit, Brownie look at that! That was a shithouse ride, I was half expecting to go bush anytime, but that was typical of the bloke. He was alright, like I never, I didn't hate him or nothing like that. It was just I couldn't accept his principles.

Anyway eventually I got jack of that and I applied to Mount Isa – sorry, played to the railway, I said I'd like to transfer to the coast. Can you arrange it? And to which I said I'm afraid I've had Mount Isa, I've been here blah blah and I'd like a transfer to the coast, so and so. And I get a curt letter back, your application has been rejected, you are now dismissed. So that got me nowhere, and then I came down the coast and there once again, a decision you make... when I resigned, when I got sacked on the railway, you've got 12 months or something you get so many weeks free transport. And I think I qualified at the time of six, six weeks. Dad said okay Stan now go as far as you can. Go to bloody Perth if you can. He said you can always work your way back mate.

Silly bugger here, got caught up with a girl in Townsville. It wasn't Betty, but let my heart... yeah, it's a decision, you know I just can't help thinking what a stupid bastard I was then. When you're young you don't think those things do you. But anyway, come the day I had to give away, stick with Eddie and I started to get a bit of work around town. Dad worked on the

harbour board, and he got me a job as a cleaner sort of thing or a rouseabout at the harbour board. And that was interesting, I had a couple of years at that I think it was.

Then I must've got the bullet, maybe I don't think it was anything I'd done wrong with Dad, I don't think so. Or else I might've been chasing something a bit different, because I ended up where I lived out at Gulliver where we raised our daughters and had a house there for 28 years. I'd got two years work with the building section of the government, building things there. That gave me a bit of insight to unions and how they work and you know, it was an enjoyable experience, helping like that. Then I started to get into the hardware game. I applied for a job as a clerk, can't recall, Robco, no Hoey Fry. No longer exists now.

But yeah, I had a job with them and that lasted about 20 years, something like that. As a clerk. As I said I liked figures. So I went in as a price clerk, and by then I'm starting to get on a bit and it must've been others in it somewhere but I just can't sort of miss them without... but I ended up actually working behind the counter of Bunning's, which is a big bloody thing-o store. And also one or two others, I worked behind those sort of thing. And then I guess must've retired or something. So that more or less and by then of course we had three girls, three daughters. I had bought my first car, second hand heap, but I ended up getting two or three. I never was keen on driving, and so my love of cars was not really high.

But anyway, done a bit of driving. Yeah and of course, I achieved a little bit in the sporting game. I played cricket for the A-reserve, this is in Townsville and I played for a team called Estates. And I've got a poem in there written by a bloke who was a reported for the Bulletin. We were tipped to play the brothers for a final, for the finals of the competition. And we just got beaten, something like 18 to 16, something like that. And this bloke wrote, and the heading is, Even the Dogs Didn't Go Home. Then it goes on, it's a beauty actually. If you like you can have a copy of it. But yeah, that was only just sort of part of it sort of thing.

ROSS While you were working as a clerk in the Hoey Fry, were you involved in union activities in that job?

STAN Not really. I think the blokes knew I'd joined the union. But that's another story itself, bloody clerk's union, I joined them and I was elected to the state body and then the bloody right wing got in and give me the arse. But yeah but my only direct union activity was when I got elected to the clerk's union. And I went along to a couple of monthly meetings and stuff. And then there must've been some sort of state, be the north Queensland elections, and I got elected surprise surprise. I didn't think of it, but within about six months or so they'd asked me out of there sort of thing.

ROSS So by that time you were in the Communist Party?

STAN Yeah, yeah.

ROSS So did you take from the Communist Party, did you take a sort of philosophy of how you actually would try and work at work amongst your fellow workers?

STAN Dad gave me a lot of that. Because it was nothing for us to, after tea to sit for half an hour and Dad would you know, give some experiences he'd had. And also I think I was trying to read marks I think. And Dad, often we'd talk, he was there and he'd give me a better interpretation.

So it was never far from us, the Communist Party and Dad's thingo sort of thing. Yeah, so it had a big influence. Eddie had a big influence on me, for sure.

Yeah when Eddie passed away, I can still remember seeing the poor bugger there and I walked down in front of the hospital, crying my eyes out. Then we had his funeral and I was sitting over at Frankie Bishop's, went over there for a wake. And again I'm sitting on the front stairs, crying my bloody eyes out. So there was no thought that in the wrong thing where I selected which Dad. There was just, my real Dad and something... his wild life caught up to him, and they found him one morning in his car. He'd flaked. Before then I had been told he was living very rough, very rough, drinking too much piss and so on. And I was kicking myself for not at least following that through, and even went to his funeral. For some reason or other, I didn't. But yeah.

ROSS Could you sum up the sort of philosophy that Eddie had to working as a Communist?

STAN He had terrific person-to-person contact, very good man. Very patient, and also the only ones he'd ever sort of run down if you were, some of the top brass and particularly within capitalism sort of thing. So I think to sum up, he got himself a very good understanding of Marxism or social sort of side of things. And it is an indication, he was actually rewarded with this union delegation, UWSR. Cos he didn't expect it, but there it was, bloke, it worked out. As a bloody labourer, although when he was in the harbour board, he'd done a bit of... what's the word... it's a person who actually – scaffolding, scaffolding. He'd done a bit of scaffolding, and one day coming home and spark off everywhere. He was up doing this job, swinging on his bloody spanner and it gave way, down on the bloody... and they were bloody oysters, yeah. Yeah I think that would've been, I don't remember him studying. I don't remember him coming to Party schools. I went to quite a few of them, cos I was keen to learn. So I went along, went to Party schools.

ROSS Can you tell me a little bit about the Party schools, how did they operate?

STAN Well mainly they'd be one of our top blokes would do the lecturing, pretty sure, most times it was just that sort of thing. But they had different schools I think with different emphasis. So like, for instance one school we went to was down at Newcastle, outside of Newcastle. We went to a school down there. It was obviously, I think the Party owned some of these places and that was one of them. Yeah I went to one or two in Brisbane, and then of course there was the local ones. Frank Bishop was possibly be the tutor sort of thing. But they usually, well I can never remember Dad doing it because I think it had to be well read to get... yeah.

ROSS How many people would go to those?

STAN Well we'd possibly get half a dozen here with the locals. Most of them were young ones, like at the youth league. Could've been more, and the Newcastle one, there must've been about 50 then. So well attended, the Brisbane ones too. I ended up getting elected to the state committee, so I had a fair few trips to Brisbane, got to know Brisbane comrades and what have you. I think what's his name, I think he'd be thinking of Dad. What's his name, talked about?

ROSS Oh, Wally Stubbings.

STAN Wally, yeah I knew him, I knew him quite well. But I don't think that well, and if you mentioned overseas it's Dad he's thinking of, yeah.

ROSS Yeah. Can you tell me a bit about some of the other sort of community activities you were involved in? Like with the Parents and Citizens and so on.

STAN Parents and Citizens, I went to the Cutheringa state school on their P&C because my daughters were going to that school. So that's how I first got mixed up. And just an indication of Eddie too, because he always asks how are things going. And early in the piece he said okay, he said you've been accepted. I was accepted as a secretary, worked my way through and became secretary. He said... learn as much as you can from teachers, from the organisation, what have you, cos it'll stand you in good stead if you ever go up further. So I did that. I went to State...

ROSS The State - Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens?

STAN Yeah.

ROSS QCPCA?

STAN I think I went down as a result of Cutheringa school, and yeah and I think I was there most of the time. Yeah I think then that's right, the elections came up for the state organisation or something, and I applied for that and got or I put myself forward and I got...

ROSS You were elected, yeah.

STAN And let me see I must've been about 10, 15 years... and I think just after that I was actually made a life member. Just because of my own consistency and so on. And at Townsville here I'd done a fair bit of organising. I'd go along to P&C meetings, but also I went along to some – they had what you call a teacher and parents, I can't think what they're called now sort of thing.

But I went along to those and I was made the first life member there, working with teachers and yeah. I was surprised at that one because it was a teacher, it was more or less a teacher/parent experiment I think. And cos even though I was made life member, there weren't many parents come along to the meeting. I'd just roll up every time. Then I'd report back to the teachers, parents, and tell them what we're doing. I got into a bit of a holt with the bloody headmaster of Cutheringa School. He wanted us to build something and I was urging the P&C, I said we can't afford this. He said yes we'll have a few raffles or something. So when we reach the stage where we feel okay – he was shitty at me after that. But we got on.

Yeah that was the other thing that Dad said, he said don't do your block. Whatever you like, don't do your block. He said take a deep breath, he said you can always come back again. So that was also part of it.

ROSS Now you helped create a public transport organisation.

STAN Yeah that came into being about 12 year ago. I'm just trying to think how it got... must've been some, being also in public housing, I actually joined a public housing group that was responsible for putting forward tenants point of views and problems and so and so.

ROSS So was it community organisation?

STAN More or less, yeah. Tenants organisation, yep. So and then in the process of a lot of that, public transport kept coming up. It was a problem for transport. I don't know what made me decide to, there must've been some struggles going on. I floated the idea of a public transport organisation, and I had done some publishing work and so on and we come together at a place out at Garbutt there. And about 30 people there, they were all very keen and so on.

So they said yeah let's go ahead. Well we were doing alright but over a period of time, I found these in peace organisations too – when you sort of achieve your main objectives, interest drops off sort of thing. And so I kept at it, I kept at it. I'd go along to meetings and so on. Did the minutes and new seats for every month sort of thing. Got a bit of a name for myself through the bloody Townsville "Bully" [*Bulletin*], got back through many you can see where I voted there, arguing about public transport. And... I can't think of it now.

Anyway, we kept it up for 10 years and it reached the stage where something to do, might've been Bet – not that she was anti but she might be getting sick of something. I don't know something. Anyway this year come up and I said look I'm not standing this time. Okay, the two or three or four of us who were there suggested that I write out a special manual, setting out my case, and urging others to come along and replace. No one wanted, 12 years, no one wanted it. And I don't think, well I really couldn't say, the Council actually I got a bit of a name in the Council. So whether or not they'd done some damage there, I don't know but it was just after 10 years of this. Although when you look back, we'd never get big meetings.

Once the meeting numbers dropped off I was only getting two or three cronies and so on. We made a couple of attempts with specialist thingo's. We'd have demonstrations, -no - rallies. Rallies and petitions. We actually, now what was the issue, the issue was public transport alright but I'm just trying to think of where I fitted in. Yeah there was big move to change the CBD and at that stage it was just a... you walk right through it. A couple of blocks.

ROSS A mall?

STAN Yeah it was a mall, yeah. So we got mixed up in that and we took up a petition, very well presented too. And so then somewhere after that, the Council decided to go ahead with it, so they called a special meeting. To this day I'm not sure I did the right thing but as soon as they announced the road, what they also said, we're not here to discuss so and so. We're here to discuss road and road through the mall. And he said we'll sit anyone down. I stood up and I said sorry mate, not this bloke. I'm opposed to traffic in that bloody mall, and I'll remain... and I walked out. So this bloke's a member for Thuringowa I think. He was a member of the Council at the time, so yeah. And towards the end, we invited – well, as the program started to develop we actually invited all the tenants, all the candidates to come along to the meeting. This bloke saw me, about a week before, and I told him – oh good I'll be there. Never turned up, the bastard. We got about three or four turned up.

We had a mailing list of about 60, including students. We had occasion to write to them. I think it was in support of one of them. We wrote to them as a fellow organisation. They had transport problems out there. And about 60 yeah, we went along to a number of rallies, one by the migrant's centre here. We got to know it quite well, and we turned up at a couple of rallies and we had our banners up promoting public transport and so on. And we got round so well that he sent me a certificate, just to say thanks very much Stan blah blah. Little things like that...

ROSS Yeah. What about the public housing organisation that you got into?

STAN Well, I was in the Queensland housing accommodation, and when I was living over at Gulliver with all the kids and so on. When I went there they had a progress association. They had a Progress Association there. So I bowled along and the next elections they talked me into standing for election. So I became the Secretary of that. I was Secretary of that for about 15 years, maybe more sort of thing. And yeah, so we dealt with yard filling, drainage, tree lopping, lights, what have you. I used to say when I was there there's hardly a bloody street in Townsville I don't know. As I said the Progress Association, forever writing the groups and what have you sort of thing, yeah.

ROSS So the Progress Association would help out people who might have issues where they're living?

STAN Yeah, yeah. Including taking issue up to the housing people.

ROSS And when you say you were elected to the committee, how were you working that people saw you as someone that they should elect? What were you doing in that progress association do you think that made people see you as a bit of a leader?

STAN I always was able to take part in discussion and respond. Some of them just didn't know how to sort of thing. And also I think we took up a couple of petitions or a petition. I think it mainly just through my diligence of work. Nothing brilliant. I mean obviously I soon got to know what it's all about and no doubt the Party training that I'd had would've helped. So yeah that was no problem.

While we lived at 44 Kent St, directly behind me a Hungarian immigrant had come to live. And word soon got around that he was anti-Communist and so on. And we never had anyone that actually said anything against us, you know. Like you know in view of what he said, all the people in that area, right around they assured me that we're nothing to do with that bloke Stan. So that was a bit of a... yeah. Yeah so I've actually that really. I enjoyed if you like my life in my city where I was born, sort of thing you know. You get so worked up at it, we come here, now Bett has got a weakness of vitamin D in her system. They've given her as much as they can by tablets, and so the doctors say better to go out in the sun, vitamin D, that's what you want.

So what we do here, is morning I'll put her in the wheelchair and go for a walk, about a kilometre. And we go where you done that u-turn. That corner there is a park, shocking park. It's full of bloody gidgee ["*stinking wattle*"], all shit. And I was talking to some of them when we had our meal, there's six of us around the table and I happened to say it's bloody disgraceful. That's supposed to be a park. I said I'm going to write to the bloody Council. One of the girls, she said yes, and I'd like to have a go at the rubbish that gets thrown at that bus stop. I said good, support. So I wrote to them, and said – oh and there's a sign up there too which promises... there was palms at the back. They thought they were creating a sanctuary about certain palms, and they'd have walkways for people to go through. Of course must've gone, but see but I didn't know. So I got all the details and I wrote to them. I said what's this all about, when did you get this...

Anyway, they didn't do anything straight away and then I realised the weakness in my first letter. I just sent it to the Council, and I didn't send a copy to the bloody Councillor for our area. I found now, and so I wrote to him. I sent him a copy of the first letter. I said come on

now, this is bloody terrible. I said blah blah. Anyway, a girl rang me and said Stan we got your letter, we've sent it over to the environmental group. She also directed me to some places, she said unfortunately those palms aren't part of ours now, that belongs privately and so on. So she done that but she agreed that that was... couple of months. But that's alright, not going to let it upset me because I want to do it. For no other reason, I want to do it.

ROSS So even though you're over 80, you're still struggling on.

STAN This was one of the Communist thingo's, you know...

ROSS Keeping active wherever you are.

STAN Keeping active and also living. Living life if you like and sort of trying to involve as many people as you can, sort of you know. This is the social part of it if you like. Social part of it.

ROSS Can we go back a bit to that time when you first got involved in the Communist Party, which would've been the mid 1950's probably.

STAN Yes, I must've come down '41 to '51 was our Mt Isa trip. So after '51 there... early 50's yeah.

ROSS So what was it like to be just living in the community as a sort of known Communist amongst people who might not be Communists? You know neighbours and so on. Like what was your experience, particularly in that time when there was a lot of anti-Communist sort of feeling around.

STAN The best example is the one I told you. When we left, when we were housed up in the fibro houses, very poorly, I don't... I get caught up then, not as a Party member. I got caught up in the housing problems that far back. I even wrote to the Council about the housing and said this is bloody shocking. I said I can hear everything going on next door, obviously blah blah blah. Sorry Mr Heilbronn – that might've helped my getting an early transfer to a house. We were in the first house over in Gulliver Estate. We were the first ones in there and I lived there for 28 years, raised my three girls, daughters, and enjoyed myself.

ROSS When you were living in the community, how did you – the fact that you were a Communist, how did you deal with other people's attitude to Communists?

STAN Well I delivered the Tribune. There was the bloke that lived directly behind me. He was a member of the pipe band I think it was, and he and another mate of his, a piper down the road who got the Tribune off me. They would be marching in May Day. Up to now I haven't missed a May Day, I'm trying to work out how I can go to this. But anyway, I'll just tell you this little bit of the story.

I'll get back to what you were saying...

But going home on my pushy from May Day March, and I pull into Cooper Park Hotel. I ordered my beer and standing at the bar. Next minute there's two soldier boys come up beside me, and I can't think exactly what they said but it wasn't very nice. I think they might've said you Communist bastard, something like that. And I had to be careful here. Next minute, up comes Bobby Hunter, a big six foot something Scotty. And his short mate who's still big. They come up and they Stan, are you being annoyed there? The soldiers... I'll never forget that.

There was a case of two, one would've said, I think they both might've but Bobby Hunter at the back wasn't necessarily...

ROSS A Party member?

STAN No, nor... I supposed he'd be a good unionist. I don't know. Didn't know enough about him, other than he was in the band. Well I used to deliver the Tribune, one, two... about half a dozen Tribunes in those suburbs.

ROSS So you'd collect that each week to deliver it to them?

STAN Yeah, yeah. They'd have a dropping off point somewhere, so I'd go and pick mine up. I used to deliver them somewhere else too, some other places. Just that there was no delivery. I just can't think where they are, but there were a few others, I know that. Must've been a dozen I ended up delivering, sort of thing, yeah.

Well I'd be wrong if I said I didn't feel some... resentment amongst some. One was that headmaster at that Cutheringa School. He got to know politics, see. He never openly sort of tried to rubbish me but you know you can always feel it sort of thing. And the immigree who came to live there, he was one. No I can't think of anyone else because part of the Progress Association, the role it played was to check that the Council were doing the right job by trainees and stuff like that. So you know, I mightn't have gone in as a Communist but...

ROSS People knew you?

STAN Yeah, word gets around, for sure yeah. And you know, sometimes someone would just make a comment oh you think that's worth my day mate. Yeah.

ROSS So like would it be right to say a big part of your involvement in the community, apart from your work, was through that Progress Association?

STAN Through the Progress Association, public transport, housing. See they're all sort of... and the other thing about it, particularly with the P&C, there was no one else in the Party branches involved in it. So I'd go along and Dad had always said make a report Stan, he said, you know I'd go along and give them a report of what was going in all these areas. It would be accepted, no one thought the need to say even pat you on the back you know. But it wasn't really getting me down, because it wasn't necessary for my work. I guess you just look for a little kudos but anyway. I was a bit disappointed that no one in the branch, the Party branch, would respond to Stan Heilbronn's public transport, public housing report you know.

ROSS How the Party branches organised? Was there one branch for the whole of Townsville or?

STAN No no, the last one I remember attending was around at down near the beach, Rosa Bay. They had a branch in one of the streets there, and there was possibly about 10 members that would come along, into a Party member's house sort of thing, what have you.

ROSS Would there have been other branches in Townsville as well as them?

STAN Yeah, I'm just trying to think where. I think there might've been one over Railway Station, South Townsville somewhere, over there. But I'm not too sure whether it was a headquarter

branch sort of thing. But yeah, branches like that. Particularly if there was one of the trade union blokes was in town, something to report, he'd be a special speaker sort of thing. And most of the functions we had down at Frank Bishop's, down at Garbutt, and we had many there including welcoming back Dad and Frank from their trade union delegation, yeah. Yeah we had quite a few of those.

ROSS Can you just sort of maybe sum up what your philosophy to being a Communist was at that time, over those years?

STAN Well I think I'd have to say, guided by my Dad, I think I was left – actually both dads. Because the musician bloke, he was a very good mixer. And so from the point of view of setting an example, you know it was a pleasure to watch him sort of thing. But I only saw him, I went around to his place to learn to strum the guitar properly and what have you. Eddie by the way played a good banjo, and he played many party group, particularly dances and so on. They used to have dances up the top of a building where the party branch was. They had a hall there and they had dances there. They were very successful, good dances, people. And yeah so that I'd say, either through my genes or Dad's influence. Whatever, the two of them had I think a good influence on me. And I think they helped me to sort of deal with people, talking to people, you know. I can't ever remember the only time I sort of raised my voice I suppose was when you were mixed up with something, you were trying to get a motion through and some bastard – you know one of those sort of thing.

But I think that would be part of it. The fact that I liked to learn, in Mount Isa where Grade 6. So I think that must've been something in there that made me search for knowledge. Something like that I think. And that would be backed up by Eddie, that sort of search for knowledge and so on. And so I think there's two things there. One is actually a love of people, and the other is a search for knowledge. And I think that would be important too, because if you become a Communist, it was accepted that you would study blah blah blah. And I took a a strike, you know, so I would guess that would've played a part. That sort of thing. And I think actually watching Eddie work and you know, tremendous respect I had for him. I think they would also be part of that sort of thing, yeah.

[end of recording]