



City of Port Phillip Living Heritage Project
Edited transcript – Leonard “Dugga” Beazley
Interviewees: Leonard “Dugga” Beazley [DB] and Frances Beazley [FB]
Interviewer: Cathy Dodson [CD]
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An independent childhood

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CD: Let’s go back a bit more to what was happening on shore. You said you made billy carts and hung out with other kids from the houses around the streets here.

DB: Yes. You want to know what we done?

CD: Yes, what sort of other things did you do, just for fun? Where did you go?

DB: Well, we used to go down the street here at Harpers for a start. And if you go down there now the doorway is still there but it’s got a modern door in it, but it used to have two big wooden doors on it. They used to always be open and but what they used to do was store the wheat in there in bags. It used to be stacked in piles about half as high again as this roof, you know, but in squares like that, but it had a hole in the middle. So we used to sneak in there and we used to play hidey didn’t we? In amongst them. Get down in there. All it had to do, if the bags fall in on you, and you’re dead. You know? We used to do things like that. Around the pumping station ‘round there, next to it was the Council yard. No one there of a weekend, so we used to go ‘round again, we used to play war. There used to be big piles of metal, stones, you know the stones they do the street with? They call that metal. And anyway, but it used to be in rows, like trenches you know? Like that. The tip trucks had dropped it in a line. [*Dugga indicates imagined trenches on the table.*] So we’d get down and they’d get there, and someone would bob their head up and you’d go [*Dugga makes a throwing motion*] with a bloody big brick. Lucky we were bad shots. [*Laughs.*]

CD: I was going to say, what happened when someone got hit with one?

DB: Well I can never ever recall anyone getting hit. [*Laughs.*]

CD: Thankfully, by the sound of it.

DB: Yes, and we used to get, alongside the pumping station we used to get a ball. We used to have a line that far above the ground and you used to throw the ball and call someone’s name and they’d have to catch the ball. Then you’d call that name again. But if you get it below the line and it would bounce low and they couldn’t get it, they’re out. There’d be maybe ten of us playing, but in the finish there’d be two of you, you know? That was a good game. Yes. And then we used to, what did we used to - Sometimes, two or three of my mates there, we used to go the City Baths of a Saturday. And on the way home we’d go to the pictures somewhere, you know? We used to, when they got Downyflake doughnuts in the city, we used to go there and buy a bag full of doughnuts. And this bloke up the road, Bumper, Gordon Esther his name was, we used to call him Bumper, you know? We went to Downyflake doughnuts one day, and all the people are there, and he’s waiting. We went to get the doughnuts, and he walked out the front, and he used to do things like this, and he walked out on the street, you know and he’s going

[*Dugga mimes looking around up high*] looking up at the buildings you know and people are walking past and saying “What’s he looking at?” [*Laughs.*] And anyway, we went out with the doughnuts, and he walked away and there’s about ten people there, doing this. [*Dugga again mimes looking around up high.*]

CD: Also looking?

DB: Yes, and we used to go to the pictures. And three of us would be sitting there together. And you’d be sitting there, you know? There’d be people, not a lot of people, Saturday afternoon. And he’d sit there and he’d go [*Dugga blows a loud ‘raspberry’.*] He wasn’t farting, you know, but he was going [*blows another raspberry*] and in the finish there would be three of us sitting there and there wouldn’t be a soul anywhere near us, you know? Yes. [*Laughs.*]

CD: So he was a bit of a joker? A bit of a prankster?

DB: Yes, yes. Yes, and he, I don’t know how he finished up, but the last time I saw him, I bumped in to him down the beach, oh, must be twenty years ago you know and he’d been working as a bouncer. And he said “have a look at this” and he had two knife wounds in his belly, in his side here, you know?

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DB: We used to also, I’ll tell you what we used to do.

CD: Yes, sure.

DB: With the billy carts we used to go ‘round the beach, everywhere, collecting beer bottles. Beer bottles and plonk bottles. Because in them days they used to chuck all the rubbish overboard off the ships. There was no - They didn’t worry about pollution and that in them days. They used to just chuck it overboard. Sewerage, everything went in the water, you know? But all the crews used to chuck their bottles overboard, you know, a great big heap of bottles. And they used to, a lot of them used to wash up on the beach. So, you know, if we wasn’t fishing and that, we’d go around with the billy cart looking for beer bottles. There used to be a bottle shop down in Nott St there we used to take them to, and we used to get ten pence a dozen for beer bottles. And there was a plonk shop down the beach we used to get a shilling a dozen for plonk bottles.

CD: Just tell me what you mean by plonk, because that is not a term that’s used as much anymore.

DB: Wine.

CD: So plonk, you mean wine. Ok.

DB: Do you know why they call it plonk?

CD: Tell me.

DB: Have you ever pulled a cork out of a plonk bottle?

CD: I have.

DB: What’s it go like? Plonk.

CD: Sounds like plonk, yes. [*Laughs.*] That sounds like a good description. So you were able to go quite far and wide, as kids. Are you – how old are you talking about? How old were you when you were talking about this?

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DB: Oh, we were still going to school. Still going to school. But after I left school, we used to, by that time most of us had bikes, and we used to, of a weekend you know, what we used to do, one of the best things to do, we used to go up the river. Get on the bike and go up the river. All the docks were open, you could get in the docks anywhere, there was no security. But we used to go up the dry dock, up Duke & Orr's dry dock. You ever seen the Polly Woodside? Well that was a dry dock there, and you'd go up there and have a look at the ships in dry dock, you know? And next door to it was Johnsons & Tyne shipyard, they were building a dredge there. We could see them building the dredge. We'd get on the bike and we'd ride all along, down to Lorimer St, down to opposite Holden's. And it was a rotten row there, there was where all the old ships, old sailing ships used to be dumped in there. Just derelicts you know? And we used to get in there and we were up to our necks in there.

And when I was going to school, there was a kid there, his name was Doug Goss and he lived on one of them barges, his father was the caretaker down there. And he used to be a shipwright. This old boat he lived on, was full of tools and he used to do repairs on these - They were old sailing ships but they were still being used as coal barges and wool barges. They used to tow them down to Geelong and bring them back up from Geelong full of wool, and put them alongside the ships and put it on the ships. But anyway, yes, he used to look after them. In the winter months, when the wool season wasn't on, the tug that used to tow them, the *Swiftness*, used to be laid-up, up there, you know? And anyway I used to go down there a lot of a weekend. And there was this time the *Swiftness* was up for survey and this bloke was painting it. I used to go down every - We painted the bloody thing from waterline to the top of its funnel. Looked good too. It had a red funnel with a black top, and the bridge, all the bridge and deck house was white. All the sides were black with a yellow band around it. And anyway, when the surveyor come he said "It looks too - I can't condemn that, it looks too good." [Laughs.] Yes.

CD: Were you doing that as a job? Or were you doing that because you enjoyed it?

DB: No, he just stuck a paintbrush, I went down there to play with his son, and his son was painting, so I got the job too. Yes.

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CD: And, when you were doing all of these kinds of things, that was just kids? You weren't with adults? Most of the time, I mean you were when you were painting, but when you were going to the baths or getting doughnuts for example?

DB: No went on our own, yes. Just catch the bus over the corner. I think it was a penny or tuppence to go to the city, you know?

CD: So you really had a lot of opportunities to be independent as kids?

DB: Oh yes. Yes, you were. Different to way the kids are brought up now.

CD: So what do you see about the way the kids are brought up now that strikes you as different to your own childhood?

DB: Yes, they're soft. They're not hard you know? Well, I don't know how their parents are, that bring them up, but from what I see. You know, I went down the beach the other day with my granddaughter, you know? She's just not quite two yet, but she loves the beach you know?

And I'm down there and she's just got a little pair of bonds underpants on, you know? And she's playing away there in the sun and the water and that, you know, and there's another little girl there, with a woman, obviously her mother. And of course, when kids are there, they get together. Kid's got a hat on, had a shirt on. It had pants on. You know and about that much of its legs showing, and they're that round [*Dugga gestures with thumb and forefingers*] and they're lily white. They're getting no sun on them. Don't want them to get - There's our kid running around down there and she's as brown as a berry. But it's her natural colour too.

CD: Yes.

DB: Yes. Most likely she'll pay for it later on. [*Laughs.*] But, no, they're too, you know, they've got to get down and get dirty. You know, get amongst the dirt and know what it's like. Dig a hole. You know?

CD: Sure.

DB: Like, my grandson you know, I had him once out there when I was pulling the house down. I said "Come on, give me a hand to move some bricks." And he says "Where's my gloves?" I had to give him a pair of gloves. I got him up the sideway there, he was there for about ten minutes, I look round and he's gone. Too hard.

CD: So kids when you were a kid, would they have scarpered off somewhere when given a job like that?

DB: No, no. We were tough as nails. We used to fight like cats and dogs. [*Laughs.*] Yes. Learn how to look after yourself, you know? I used to always tell Sam when he was little, [*to Frances:*] didn't I? I says, when he started school I said "If the kids stand over you," I said, "just hit him on the nose. Punch them." And he flattened a kid there one day. [*To Frances:*] Didn't he? Hit him on the nose. He got into trouble for that. [*Laughs.*] Yes.

CD: Would you say, just going back to your parents and the way they, and other parents in the neighbourhood raised you, what did they teach you? What were the values that they tried to instil in you?

DB: Oh, yes, well you know, they taught you, "don't steal" or you know, "be nice to people." You know, just the way everyone was. But people were like that. There was the odd bad one. I had a bit of trouble at school with a kid. His name was Monk Riley. He used to stand over, he was one of them big burly bastards, you know, who thought he'd stand over everyone. And anyway, he used to stand all over all the little kids, you know? People like that stand over the little kids. Anyway, over the road from the school there was a little shop, a little milk bar that used to sell pies. We used to go over there dinnertime and buy a pie for your dinner you know? And anyway, one day there I went to buy a pie and I'm walking across the road with it in the bag, you know, and he approached me and said "I want your pie." I said, "You want my pie?" He says "yes. If you don't give it me, I'll take it off you." I said, "Do you want it?" He said yes. I said "All right," and I got it and I went whack, and whacked him in the face with it. [*Laughs.*] And what did he do? He started crying, didn't he? He run home and told his mum. Yes, but anyway, my mother went up the school the next day, I told her about it, and she went up, she pulled him aside and told him to you know, don't do it again, you know. But after that we were best of mates. Yes, let them know that you won't let them stand over you. It's not just with them, it's when you get older. If you let them get on top of you they'll stop on top of you. You've got to show them you're not afraid of them, you know?

CD: So that was something you've carried through your whole life really, haven't you?

DB: Yes.

CD: To be firm about your own – ah, looking after yourself, and being independent.

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DB: Yes, yes. As I got older, you know, and we had the bikes we used to go over Williamstown, get on the ferry and go over Willy and have a look at the tugs and the shipyard over there, building the war ships, we'd go and have a look at them. I remember one day, you know, I had this girl in tow. She was 15, I was 17. Anyway we were going over there and her bike was punctured. So I done a stupid thing. I dinked her. [*Laughs.*] All the way to Williamstown and back, it nearly killed me. [*To Frances:*] Mavis.

FB: Yes. I bet it nearly killed her too. Nothing worse than being dunked on a boy's bike. [*All laugh.*] It probably nearly killed her too.

DB: Yes, like it was bad enough for me. Imagine what her arse felt like. [*All laugh.*]