

Stories of working with community in Western Australia



Transcript

Interviewed and Recorded by Dave Palmer and Jennie Buchanan

George Davies

Murdoch University, Perth WA

25th August 2003



George Davies pictured at Murdoch University, 25th August 2003

DP Thanks for joining us George Davies and agreeing to tell your story of involvement in community work.

GD Well for me in childhood days a big value was the experience of community but I didn't have the sentences and the words and the concepts around it. I didn't know that that was what was going on. It was something you absorbed through your skin. So with a Dad who shot through when I was three and a mother as a working, single mother who brought up two boys, that's a worse scenario these days, but she was one of nine children, three killed in the war, still left six, five other aunts and uncles who, some had partner and children which meant cousins, aunts and uncles, one family in the bush, Christmas' were a very crowded house, lots of stuff going on. So it was an environment, a context that was a rich childhood with a single parent. When I hear the feds talk about family and single parents and make no reference to what is around that parent, when they blame parents they make no reference to the need for back-up and that parents can't do it all and parents are



overloaded. So, extended family, if you like was like a springboard, a trampoline. So that's a base from which you then bounce into doing OK in making friends in schools and getting into the footy teams and getting on all right and so on.

Had fights and got expelled from primary school but, talk about that later.

DP Yes, this is rather early.

GD And then from age eight I started going to camps in the Christian culture, got hooked into going into Christian Endeavour camps and inter-school Christian Fellowship camps where there were, not a lot of heavy words thrown around, but it was English rather than American evangelism. It was OK stuff, although it was ... Anglicans leading most of it. But when I reflect on it, what I recall, what I love in the tape that plays in the head, was the experience of togetherness. A big bunch of people sing a lot of songs, make a lot of harmonies, piled in a bus together going somewhere, me at the front doing the song leading. The feedback, the rapport with the group, the chance to have a go stuff that can't be done on your own or even with a small group. Some things need a group, although the group gives us a vehicle to explore the world. Some experiences only happen in a bigger context otherwise you don't have them, footy matches are one feeling, but apart from footy, and the occasional gig, and we've got a problem now of where are we corporate? Where do we experience connection corporately? So that early stuff was an experience of community that I just assumed was the norm. I assumed was what goes on for everybody until I got amongst the isolated and the disconnected and the bloody alone and realised it wasn't.

So I had an interest in Ag Science, or Vet Science from being on school holidays in the bush with one of my uncles and ended up doing Ag and going school teaching and experiencing "stressed community". People whose agendas didn't fit into the syllabus that I was teaching. Lots of stuff came in

from outside the school gate into the school yard and the school yard into the classroom but not into the syllabus. You'd be there in front of, in those days, forty four and forty three in two first year classes with no show of getting anywhere near the stuff that you knew. You could see, could pick up what was going on in their lives. It had nothing to do with finding the south celestial pole or understanding the difference between diffusion and osmosis. And I loved my science. I was keen about it but they didn't have the same interest despite my brilliant attempts to motivate and present well and so on. They had other stuff going on. Baggage that got in the way that needed attention and was sharpened by one guy who shot himself and his seat was empty and the boss called us into his room and the all male small staff in an agricultural boarding school, "Gentleman, Harry killed himself last night. I am in contact with the parents and that is in hand. Good day." Nothing was done with the school students, you'd just going back to teaching diffusion and osmosis.

DP So you were very interested in education?

GD So I thought the Education Department in New South Wales was too restrictive. It was not allowing the time and energy over to get close to this stuff. I'm buggered at the end of the teaching term and the teaching days. There isn't the time and there isn't the energy. I want to get closer to that so I thought, "I'm in the Christian scene I'll go into the Methodist ministry. The Church will be more flexible." And I was right, about one millimetre more flexible. And there is significant expectations of what country parsons will and won't do in a country town.

But on the way through doing theological studies, I met a guy, Trevor Waring. Now Trevor was the second detached worker in Australia. It was 1964 and there had been big gigs in Newcastle. All of a sudden the groups from the big smoke said, "We are not coming any more. Got a better offer." The big disco with 3,000 stopped in the three months and what do you do? So the theory was discovered that. "Well go ... instead of



putting on things that people don't come to." Because they'd stopped coming in large numbers to scouts and guides and organised sport and Church groups, aged fourteen, the graph went zoonk.

There is a big cultural shift in that mid-sixties and so the concept of ... to go where they are instead of trying to get them to come where you are and work from there. So Trevor Waring did that. He was a drop out from college because ... he got his girlfriend pregnant and the Methodist Church couldn't handle that and so he became a detached worker. The first one in New South Wales. So I kept in touch and listened to his stories and was pretty, to use Geraldine Doogues word which I hate from the media, "I was fascinated." I was absorbed. So I tried myself out and I'm going through college, doing placement stuff, so I played guitar in the coffee shop and out on Walker's Central Methodist Mission. After the action on a Friday night's they'd collect for coffee and there was me and the mike being the backstop for whatever, feeling music, background music and the muso gets to connect with people. You are a neutral person, you are a safe person, you can have jokes and fun, talk to the bods when you see the finger tapping and the foot tapping. So I made a made a number of contacts there and tried myself out doing street work or detached work around town in Sydney.

DP What's detached work?

GD Well detached work as we developed the terminology then, meant the person doing it not the person's you are doing it amongst, not connected, not tied to premises or to programme. So you are not running a place and you are not running a programme such as the basketball competition. You are free to go to where you find the action. It is about finding the action and then finding new relationships. So you detach from those constraints. I prefer that to outreach which suggests that here we have got a thing putting it's little fingers out including it's value system to ensnare or to deliver. It doesn't matter. It is

all very good. Hospitals understandably talk about outreach work because there is a big show that you've got your fingers going out from. But I like the concept of true detached work which was an Australian philosophy at the time. That you are amongst young persons where they're choosing themselves where to spend their time without selling a message or bringing anything from any particular place.

So Trevor Waring had an advisory committee, and that was a great thing, they met at 7:00 o'clock in the morning as busy people. They had a psychologist, a magistrate, a police officer, a nurse and three or four others. After a while he became a bit of, just equal with the rest, they had animated discussions with each other giving mutual support rather than all a big focus on Trevor. So he could say to young people on the streets, "Look I'm -" or they would say, "Who the hell are you?" and interestingly it took three months for them to say that first off. He was a left wing, non-directional guy so he didn't initiate any conversations and he went out in a suit because he had been in his previous job in a suit and that was what he was comfortable in.

Top town Newcastle standing around in a suit for three months until somebody spoke to him. They were watching him. They hadn't spoken to him and when he got moved on by the cops like they did then that helped a bit. So eventually a guy peeled up from over the road and said, "Look Dude. We've been watching you for a while, who the hell are you? You are not a parent. We've been checking everybody's parents, you are not a spy for the parents. You are not a parent. You are not welfare worker. We've rung up the welfare and said. 'Oh look we've had contact with one of your staff. He looks like this and is shaped like that and speaks like the other.' And they said, 'Sorry we just can't work out who that is on our staff.' So OK. You are not one of them. You haven't tried to sell any drugs or make any sexual advances. Who the hell are you?" So Trevor knew he had two minutes flat and he said, "Well I'm with a show called Newcastle Youth Service. I'm the de-



tached worker. I'm here to be of use to you if that is any good to you. I've got a resource bunch who have got this, this, this and this skills and connections with the wider community scene and if that's any good I can connect with that. So that

is what I am. I am the front person for this show called Newcastle Youth Service." So nobody spoke to him for another couple of weeks. They thought about that and then a guy peels off over the road and says, "Eh listen mate. Got a bit of problem at me work place. Fellow won't give us me overtime. What are you going to do about it?" So Trevor says, "Oh we can go and talk to him eh?" So they go along and they talk the bloke and he got him his overtime sorted out. The stuff and the floodgates opened.

So one time I said, "What's happening?" "Oh a sixteen year old girl came up to me. I'd never seen her before. Didn't know who she was because I know about fifty to seventy of them well. I know them by eye contact, another couple of hundred, but I know none by reputation to six or seven hundred and they tell each other where to go and they go and talk to that bloke." So this girl says, "Well you come home and talk to my Dad." OK so he goes home to talk to the Dad. She tells him what to talk about on the way. When he gets there, there is this big pre-metric, eighteen stone, heavy dude, "Who are you. Want a beer? How are you?" Trevor says, "Pleased to meet you Mr So and So. Your daughter has asked me to say a few words to you on her behalf, like she's got a boyfriend who's twenty one." "Oh bloody hell, twenty-one. She's sixteen" (mimics barking noise). "Oh right. OK. He's just come out jail." "What? He's come out of jail?" So he went off a bit more and then the next bit was, "and she is pregnant to him." Well he went up and down the stairs about eighteen times and Trevor said he realised why the sixteen year old said, "Will you talk to my Dad?"

So I thought, "This is good stuff. You know this is good stuff." So there I am singing these songs and the little Jesus

evangelists would go to the tables and talk to people about Jesus and the Evangelists Institute but the caretaker shut the place up at 11 o'clock so they had to get through their getting people into connection with the Lord before 11 o'clock because that was the end of their conversation.

DP Jesus went home at 11?

GD And there we were at the gate and the caretaker has been patient waiting to roll the bars across and the guy is trying to wind up his conversation about getting it kind of clinched. You know, six steps to salvation, four to spiritual, and only up to three quarters of the way through and you know the caretaker wants to shut the place and it's the eleven o'clock curfew for the evangelists and me and this bloke were standing on the other side of the gate. At that time I was so grateful that I was on the other side of the gate and that made a big mark on me. I thought, "I don't want to be inside your bloody gates when they are locked."

So I go up town with this bloke and we ran into a French fellow who was getting arrested. Cops were giving him a hard time. So this bloke with me goes, "Oh he is my cousin. What are you doing? That's my cousin." "Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Down the station." I forked out the bail interestingly and the French bloke takes us down the wharves because he was a sailor, a merchant seaman. So the bloke with me starts saying, "Oh look, next time you come back, we will arrange a passport and you can leave the ship, stay in Australia, join in our communist community. We have got three thousand people. You can join our community." So they are arranging this exercise of illegal immigration for next time he comes but drinking a fair bit of wine and stuff in the meantime and I was good Methodist theological student I wasn't into the grog, I hadn't met enough Presbyterians at the time. Uniting Church was yet to come along. So I was the sober one, so it was about three o'clock in the morning and we are leaving the ship and a bloke



says, “Will you carry this bottle?” because I had the bag. So I stick it in my satchel with my song books and things and so I stick the whisky bottle in my bag and we walk up but there was these flashing lights, the customs officers who say, “I want to have a look in that bag please sir if you don’t mind? So are you importing illegal whisky here?” “No.” but before I got into too much discussion with me the bloke got right into them and they got totally focussed on coping with this angry bloke. So I says, “It’s OK he has a bit to drink and he has had a bad time with authority in the past,” and I did this negotiation thing and they totally forgot about the bottle of whisky, so long as it calmed down and they got themselves out, said, “OK. OK. Off you go.”

So we are going up the hill and this bloke is mumbling, “Christian helping a Communist. Christian helping a Communist.” And I always regret, because now it was quarter to five, that I didn’t accept his invitation to go back with him and meet some of the others in the Communist community because I had to take a service the next morning. Nine o’clock at Maliba or somewhere and I was being responsible and stuff. I always regret that I didn’t go right through with it. I cut out and I cut out too soon. I regretted that and I knew I regretted it. So I decided when that sort of stuff is on, that takes priority over bloody everything. That getting into some relationships which then are a connection with what is going on in a wider group. You run with that. You do that. You build on that because that is the seed and that is the soil and that is where the trees and the plants come from.

So I got a bit sorted out and then of course a bloke came along to the music where I was playing and said, “Look there is a folk joint at Strathfield opened up and they are looking for musos, why don’t you come down?” Well I had a hundred songs in my little book when I looked for background but there was only three I was game to sing in front of everybody who was actually intentionally listening to me. So I went,

“OK.” and this little converted hamburger shop, with a little stool at the front, “So I’ll sing you three songs.” And I heard the bloke say to his mate in the kitchen, “Eh come and look at this.” He is saying to his mate, “Come and look at this.” I thought, “That’s interesting.” And he said, “That’s good. Come back next week.” Well you can’t do the same three songs, hell a great things for musos to have a venue, a setting, a place that wants you to play and therefore you work out stuff. I got a few more songs together and somebody slung an insult so I included them in the next verse and got to be the opening person and broke up the crowd and we had a wonderful time.

DP Ah, so this is where you learnt your retorts?

GD And after a few months we got word that the Strathfield Council had suspicion that there were drugs in the place. It was 1968 for gods sake, Arlo Guthrie was our hero, “Alices Restaurant”, we loved the twenty two minutes of it but, “There were drugs down there.” they reckoned. It was probably the cleanest place in town because the main bloke running it with a big sunny smile on his blonde features knew the smell of cannibas, which I didn’t and so if someone was smoking dope he’d say, “Oh look. Somewhere else if you don’t mind.” And if a whisky bottle was smuggled out of a jacket, he’d say, “Somewhere else if you don’t mind.” and he was within seven metres of every so and so in the place. No place in Sydney bloody was cleaner and we got shut down.

“Drugs, young people having a good time. Must be an orgy.” I remember two young women from Balkan Hills out in the Western Suburbs of Sydney turned up on the last weekend and they were in tears. They said, “We’ve only just found this place and it is closing down.” and it made me conscious of how important it was. A place where people you had never run into before, you shared something, it was creative, it was unpredictable, it was The Emancipated Rampart Foot Warmers Jug Band who became the Saturday night special, who some-



times called themselves “The Amazing Emancipated Rampart Foot Warmers Jug Band” with the washboard and all the gear. “Tumbarrumblalumba shooting kanga-bloody-roo. Ding-a-long, ding-a-long, ding-a-long.” And you couldn’t stop foot tapping. They really loved them.

DP So if they reformed now, they’d be “The New Amazing –“

GD Oh absolutely, jug band, with a jug, “Hoom, hoom” going on. That was wonderful stuff. So that provoked me to get going with kind of blues harp and stuff so I added that onto my stuff I was doing and teamed up with other people and we had brilliant experiences and became connected to each other and the more so when the trouble came and the council shut us down. The wall got covered with beautiful graffiti. I love graffiti. I mean graffiti is a message. So the stuff was rich. And on the last night we had wall reading and we stood on various tables around the place and we would read our sections of wall in rotation. “Hitler is alive and well and living in the Strathfield Council Chambers.” “I cut out drinking, I cut our swearing, I cut out smoking, I cut out women and now I’m cutting out paper dolls.” A lot of good stuff. “Virginitiy is a myth, how come I missed out?” Stuff that made us laugh. Stuff that was very funny and stuff that was biting serious. Just a wonderful place. None of the old theological students gave a shit. I thought, “Bloody hell mate, this is a wonderful place.”

So I get posted to Albury and I go into my Superintendent minister that you have if you are a first year out probationary Methodist minister who said, “From my reading, the guitar experiment has been tried and has failed and anyway the guitar is of the devil and I’m not having any of that in the Church.” And so on and so forth. I did use it in the service. I asked the conservative choir master, “What did he think about me singing a song with a guitar in service?” and he said, “Oh don’t just sing a song, make up a story. Kind of put a few together.” And I thought, “Interesting.” So I did. I had six songs con-

nected together painting a picture of a few deep profound things and when I came out the first bloke at the door said, “I didn’t come for a concert and I don’t approve.” One of the late popes that we had and he got with the superintendent before I did and so the guitar was banned, which was great.

I thought it was a problem, it was one of my first learnings, like Strathfield. The problems of where the action is, because I thought, “Well this Strathfield thing it is just some local government misunderstanding and a bit of a communication thing.” It was just a repeating pattern. My god that was 1968, how many years later is it since it has never stopped. If there is something good, if there is something connecting. If there is something that is unpredictable and what do you say, “It is fuzzy. It is an amoeba around the edges. It is absorbing stuff and it has got fingers going God knows where. It is creative. It is fun. It is serious.” It will be closed down. Some bastard will try and close it down because it doesn’t fit the neat little boxes that we are controlling and looking after and making sure that they are properly supervised. I think deep down in my guts, in my balls, in my corpuscles, I became a Ned Kelly attitude to authority. “You bastards get out of the way. We are trying to make community around here. An authority does not help community”.

So where am I up to? So I go into the music shop in Albury and there is this repairman and he fixes up my guitar for me and I say, “Look, any music joints around here? I used to be in a good one in Sydney?” and he says, “No. No. I used to be in a good one.” and told me about another one and so we got talking and he had some friends so we had a meeting in his lounge room. Forty five people turned up to talk about maybe getting a music joint together and we rented an old shop that had become vacant near the centre of town for ten bucks a week. A month later we had a meeting in the shop and seventy people turned up and a big red dog, which is a very good sign for a folk joint, and we were on the way. We were going to call it “The Folk Pot” and then we changed it to “The Coffee



Pot” and then we just called it “The Pot” which in 1970 was a very politically smart thing to do in a conservative country town.

But I had learnt. I went to the mayor. The mayor was about building communities, about getting public influentials on side. So I go to the Mayor, I had learnt a little bit of politics. I’d say, “Look we are going to start the music joint and this is what is going to happen. People are going to say, “It is bad news because there are dim lights. Young people having a good time. Must be an orgy. Must close it down. Probably drugs.” They are going to say all of that stuff and what we are going to be doing is indoor busking, making our stuff, blah, blah.” And he said, I forget his name, but he was a bloke who was temporary Senator, big fair haired, strong bloke, somewhere to the right of Genghis Khan but appreciated the personal contact and said, “Don’t you worry. I’ll look after that.” So when we did have a bit of trouble outside and there were police over the road, I went and talked to the police and I said, “Well anything you want to say?” and they said, “You look after the inside. We will look after the outside. No worries.” And we were sweet.

So we didn’t fear the community local government sector this time. This time it was the Church where the Superintendent had forbidden his congregation, the main one in town; I had the little one up North. They were forbidden to go to this place because it was evil and he said to me, “I only allow you to work in it because it is Saturday night and that is your night off. Otherwise you wouldn’t be there.” So I thanked God for the night I wasn’t and I had more conversations about God stuff down there than I did after Church services and with the youth group and all the rest of it once it got going. You share everything under the sun, including world views, values and experiences of childhood and good and bad and all the rest of it. Bernie Bell a local insurance man and a champion golfer and brilliant guitarist who decided half way through, “It is time we had some gospel stuff here.” And after a couple of

months started singing, “I’m on my way to freedom land,” and we got grooving on good African gospel stuff and that was fun. But he also had a motor boat and he took a picnic out there and we all went water skiing with Bernie’s motor boat and we visited Beachworth Jail and did a Johnny Cash, “Boy named Sue.” thing there in the jail. We were having a good time. We went to some other place where the nurses were trying to launch a fund-raising thing and we provided the music and the audience. (laughter) We had good times for five months but then my superintendent made sure I got moved onto another town.

DP Ah yes.

GD But that was part of the community development. Some people in the show said, “Look why don’t we do something more but not the same?” I thought, “That’s interesting.” So we thought, “OK. How about Sunday night? That is a space.” So we had three folk-pot forums we called them and there was a guy who worked in the Aboriginal Community up North. The Parlins Repair Man had done interesting stuff up North and there was another bloke who was a Swiss born, five language speaking, bank officer who got close to Bonegilla Migrant Centre because he could talk multiple languages to highly stressed people who got out of the vehicle and found German staff ordering them to buildings and they thought that they were back in bloody nazi somewhere and freaked out and cried all night. So this guy was having interesting experiences and, “So we don’t need any bloody guest speakers as with any group really, amongst ourselves we have got stories that haven’t been told. We’ve got stuff to hear.” So I said, “OK. We will have this thing and what we will interview these two guys.”

So I got an interview started, after a big night of music and scones and raisin bread and the good sixties coffee stuff got us going. Then we knocked off and we did the interviews and then whizzed through onto discussions. We had three of those



and the lapsed Catholic bloke who was at the Mowagum Centre he actually said, “I think it is impossible to be an atheist.” He actually said that over a BBQ before his interview and of course I’m a Methodist minister and I thought, “Hullo. Interesting and possibly an atheist eh? All right.” So I’m doing scripture teaching for the Presbyterians because the Methodist bloke wouldn’t let me do that because guitars are evil. But the Presbyterian bloke didn’t like school stuff and I’d been a school teacher and so I did his stuff and took the guitar in. So I’d wait around the corner while the Methodist fellow went into his class and didn’t see me and then I’d come out from around the bend with my guitar and smuggle into the room down the hallway and get into Arlo Guthrie and stuff with the school group and this young woman, final year student said, “Look George I think I am becoming an atheist.” and I said, “Ah come down to Pot on Sunday night, a bit of action, a good place to be if you think you are becoming an atheist, yeah come down.” “Oh I’m not going to say anything.” I said, “That’s fine.” I convinced her to come and be up the back row.

Well this bloke went on about Bonegilla, profoundly interesting stuff. Brilliant stuff about what was happening in the immigration scene there and then I said, “Look you also said, if you don’t mind me saying, the other night that you thought it was impossible to be an atheist. Do you want to expand on that?” and he said a few words and she couldn’t resist. She was up the back and she got into him. It was a brilliant discussion that erupted and one of the reasons for that is ... because you can’t talk about religion or worldview stuff effectively in a pub or at a party. Here we had a setting that was non judgemental. I couldn’t get a bloody word in really. It went on for another hour and a half and I’m trying to interrupt, there was all this interesting stuff and I’ve got theological training and I could summarise, “So there was three main strands here.” and I tried, and they just kept talking over me. I couldn’t do any collating or summarising and facilitating, it had ownership of

its own thing. And we had three of those a month apart before I left town. They were good. They were so good. Where we already had a relationship. Where we already felt safe. We already felt mutual respect and we could get into some stuff that was sitting under there not talked about which was doctrine.

And then there was the army guys so the second time we had the army blokes and the nurses. I mean all the nurses thought all the army blokes wanted was sex and the army blokes and the rest of town thought all the nurses did was kind of stick themselves in the nursing quarters and take short cuts. And they were talking about euthanasia and heavy issues with each other but they didn’t have other people to talk to. So the next interview I asked the army blokes what it was like at the army camp and they talked about their frustration doing courses that were six months, but courses but spread over three years so they wouldn’t get their qualification and leave too early. They were frustrated and angry about sitting around bumming around, doing nothing, bludging. That was a surprise to most of the room. And the nurses had these profound issues and never talked about it outside nurses. So it was great. The nurses and the soldiers got mutual understanding and so did the rest of the show. We had this richness amongst us that needed a setting to come out and then you had the bloody condemnation of the place.

So here is another good one. Another brilliant one with wonderful stuff happening on the ground and you’ve got a dude saying, “It is evil, it is bad.” What is going on? So I kind of started to get a bit political and listen to, “Where do these attitudes come from?” and, “They can’t get away with that. I’m going to challenge them on that.”

DP What next?

GD So the next place was a wheat belt country town, Central West New south Wales on the way to Broken Hill.



Well I met a few guys, ah well there is a little bit of precursor to that because detached work, so plant yourself outside the Midnight Café on a Friday and Saturday nights and some of the Church people would say, “Oh no you should be doing more hospital visiting.” You know because I was spending time with young people, I did my hospital visiting ... dude in town, I’d take my guitar in and I’d spend all of Thursday afternoon there. I’d go around and sing songs to the seniors in the geriatric ward and I’d be there all afternoon. They’d pop in, do a prayer, and they are gone. Ten minutes. Come on. I’d do the hospitals. “Oh no you should be doing more pastoral work.” because I’d do everybody’s school stuff. Nobody likes a school. So the Catholics and the Presbyterians and all the Anglicans all one bloody big room and I’m singing Arlo Guthrie songs and I found later this Koori muso bloke who used to come with me and we had wonderful times on the theory that God made everything spiritual therefore we can talk about anything because it is all part of the spiritual. So we would just talk about life, town, everything. Good fun we had. Anyhow so I met these dudes outside the Midnight Café and stuff and got to be a familiar figure.

Some friends came first week and they went up town and they just wanted to know what life was like in a country town. So in the spirit of community they had initiative and Veronica, seventeen, vivacious, outgoing, verbal Veronica, whoo, hah, Veronica goes up to these tractor driving, sheep shearing dudes hanging around and she says, “What is it like in this town?” “What do you do on Friday nights?” and they look at each other and, “Oh who is this? What have we got here?” but they actually said, “Nothing really. Just hang around here.” “Oh” She comes down the house, “Can we have a BBQ. You know we won’t make you have to do any work. You’ve got the BBQ there. Can we use the place for a BBQ?” “Yeah. Well yeah.” So up they go to town, down the streets and say, “BBQ at the Methodist ministers’ place next Friday night. Seven o’clock on.” You know, “Come on.” And they look at each other and

say, “What is this? What is going on?” but they say, if we all go, all the fifty town dwellers down there in the main drag, community lounge room, “If we all go.” Hell they all came. There was six of us and fifty of them. (laughter)

What a night. One of them decided to do a survey on, “Who believes in God and who doesn’t?” and goes up to this woman and says, “Do you believe there is a God?” and she says, “Oh come on. Come on.” and he marks his pad. I never got the score of him. That would have been interesting. Fair dinkum street survey stuff. So, interesting discussions. Adam and Eve, ... Catholics and Protestants. Everything under the sun. ... broke out and one bloke was little bit tipsy and dinged another car as he drove out of the back yard but otherwise there were no problems but we had three garbage bins full of beer cans and my friend said, “What are we going to do? We had better bury them. Hide them.” And I said, “No we have had a party. This is Australia. People drink beer and eat sausages and we’ve had a good one. It’s been a great night. We had a wonderful time. Sure there was a bit of beer but it was OK. It was just part of the culture. We are not ashamed of the beer cans. We had a great party.” So I left them there.

Naive. One week in town. Country (town of) three thousand, of course the garbage men were significant in the pub scene and they picked up three garbage bins full of beer cans from the Methodist minister’s house on the first weekend he was in town and so it was something to talk about. So the primary school principal down the corner of the street, three houses down, and the primary school staff room was where all the values of town were decided. What was ‘cool’. Our term. Not their term. What was cool? What wasn’t? What was right and what was wrong and what was permissible, the primary school staff room executed us in the court of community condemnation in the second week of my presence in that town. (laughter) Condemned to have a bad reputation for the rest of my time with the lashes of letters to the editor. (laughter)

DP Oh really.



GD Oh Yeah that was a bit later but there was this nice ease of getting into conversations up town after that party. Added to by driving-in in a 68HK Kingswood second hand thing that I'd picked up after my Volkswagen died along the long stretches. And, I'm not a real mechanical type but it had four on the floor which for a '68 Kingswood was pretty good. Bucket seats, dual throat carburettor, extractors, lukey muffler, bubble, bubble, bubble into town, pull up at Engel Park, up the bonnet, all the heads go in, three nights later two guys knock on the door (knocking sound) "Hey George, Googy (who is the town drag champ) wants to know will you take him on." And so I said, "Look I've got to drive this thing all over the west here. I can't do to my gear box what Googy can do to his gear box because he is in a mechanical shop." But apart from that I said in a moment of inspiration, madness and why not, I said, "Yeah." And I remember their eye-brows climbing. I said, "I haven't done it before." They said, "No worries. We will coach you."

So they came down Wednesday night and said, "The cars all leave two or three at a time so it is not too obvious." But after half an hour, forty minutes, the main drag is deserted and we are all out there at the measure ... which nearly every country town in Australia has got and we passed a cop on the way out coming back in his little mini minor with a girl and I said, "He won't give us any trouble. We have sprung him." So I line up beside Googy and they taught me about heel toe stuff and hand brakes and things on the way out. So I lined up and he got away from me in first gear and I was level pegging in second and gaining on him in third but he did me by a length and a half and on the way back turned around and did the same to me, length and a half, on the return bit and then I joined the crowd twenty metres back, careful about safety, pretty sensible. It was organised as an adult race meeting I tell you. They had it sorted out and the action was these two sets of headlights in the night and the starlit sky and working out which one was in front. The whole experience was just wonderful

stuff and it was illegal of course and if I get sprung as Methodist minister oh this would be great. But it was a beautiful, it was wonderful stuff. Energy, togetherness, ideas, jokes, the open skies, ah bloody wonderful stuff.

I was experiencing community that I hadn't experienced before. So then I am driving through town one night and there is this bloke lying on the road. It looked like he had been hit so I, being a compassionate lad, ten o'clock at night, you know and I'm a minister after all, I pull over and I get out. I'd better check this fella over and he jumps up and goes, "Ah. Ah. Fooled you." So I angle parked and sit down on the kerb at the side and another car comes along and he is on the road again looking like he is injured and the suited man who had just come from the Rotary meeting, publican gets out and he jumps out, "Hah, hah. Fooled you." And the next ten minutes, "Bloody louts, hooligans, riff raff should be booted out. Rah. Rah." And that was to provoke a meeting a few weeks later on what to do about louts and hooligans in the town. So a bloke sitting beside me on the gutter says, "George, you want to know what is going on?" I said, "Yeah. Explain it to me will you?" and he says, "Well we have got a roster and this week he is the entertainer. This is his idea to entertain us. Next week is my turn. I've got to think of something." (laughter)

This town main drag on a Saturday night outside the café, sitting around in the cars, this community lounge, is a complex fascinating place. Well the stuff going on, sitting in the car and I'd walk along and they'd say, "Hey giddy George. Hop in." So I'd get in the car and we'd be a bit bored and we'd do a few laps around and come back and there is three girls walking down the footpath and there is some blokes outside the café, what will happen? And the girls are wanting to meet the blokes and talk, and the blokes are wanting to talk to the girls but there is all these eyes watching and what if the girls try, the bloke says something and gets a knock back, gets ignored in front of (his mates), he wouldn't dare try that so nothing happens.



They want to communicate, like at Scarborough years later in the pin ball shop, so social work students came down, the blokes wanted to talk to the girls and the girls wanted to talk to the blokes but they were both scared to initiate in case it got complicated with the eyes watching and so I thought, “We’ve got to have some places that are neutral territory where it is OK.” We got another music joint started in the lounge room of an old pub that had become a community centre and we got a few people and we got this action going and it was Good Friday, Easter weekend, a good sort of weekend, long weekend.

Some friends of mine came up from the big smoke, Christian rock group sort of stuff but it was hippy days and we were doing gigs and festivals and things so they, “Oh George has got a place at ... and there is a new, oh lets go there. Big excursion.” I was getting a string of people coming out wanting to do music and so we headed off a truck in the park afternoon and then we said, “OK eight o’clock in the community centre we are starting again.” And the place filled up there was nothing else to do on a Friday, Good Friday night in town. The place was chockas. We had one electrical cord because there wasn’t any power in the pub that night for some reason so we went next door with one cord and plugged into the blokes electricity and off that one with five double adaptors we ran the PA, the lights, urn, the toaster. There must be a God, it didn’t blow. (laughter) However, thick wires I suppose and we were having this great night and then “George. You are wanted at the front door.”

So I go to the big front door of the old pub and here is the Sargeant. Sargeant Ray Chitty, bless his soul and beside him, the Anglican minister, my mate I thought, Don ... Father Don and Sargent Chitty says, “You’ll have to close this down. Can’t do this on Friday night. Can’t be legal. Public holiday. Can’t have this sort of thing on Friday night.” So I says, “Oh hang on Sargent I’ve been doing things in coffee houses ... on

Sundays in Bathurst, in Orange and Blainey and all over the joint and we do stuff and what is the difference if it is a Good Friday, it is a Sunday, it is a public holiday, what is the by-law?” And he couldn’t quote anything so I had him a bit over the barrel and then he said, “Look Father Don doesn’t approve.” “Oh come on.” And I look at him for the first time and, “If you Anglicans want to sit at home and mediate about the death of Jesus that is a beautiful thing to do but not everybody in town has got an Anglican value system Don, so what is the alternative, floating parties by the river. Come on.” So we argued and the Sargeant pulls out his trump card and he says, “Well you’ll get a bad reputation out of this.” Which was when it hit me. Now I had been reading the bible everyday since I was eight years old. I used to put my pin in the Scripture Union card, “Yeah I have done today’s one.” You only showed your Scripture Union badge if you had read your reading so you go to school to the ISCF group and you look at each other, if you have got a not shiny badge there was a lot of peer pressure there. You knew you weren’t up to the mark so you, “Oh I was right into the bible.” But it had never hit me like it was hitting me in this action. It occurred to me, I said, “Sargent it is Good Friday. Jesus Christ died with a bad reputation. I’m trying to be a follower. You are threatening me with a bad reputation. Maybe I am doing something right Sargent.” The irony of it was just so sharp.

And he was right and I was right. He was big in the pubs and the clubs and he said, “This will attract undesirables from other towns.” That was one of his lines too. “Attract undesirables. We have got a quiet town here. We don’t want this kind of thing. Attracting undesirables.” “What happened to Gallipoli. We were mates down there in the trenches.” Community. We talk about Anzac Day. The root of the real Australian identity, Anzac together, mates, bearing one another’s burdens, carrying the wounded, sticking up, rescuing, ah mateship. Yeah.” And now in peacetime, 60km down the road their teenagers are undesirables to us and our teenagers, “Oh come from the wrong town eh?” Happens here in Perth. “Come from the wrong suburb. The other side of the river. Ah those unde-



sirables. Riff raff. They have come. They don't live here." Yeah well, community, it is a nice thought.

So all the arguments were the same. What I didn't know was that inside the door of the music room there was some Koori Aboriginal young bods listening to every word and they said to themselves, I was told three months later, "Look Sargent gives a hard time. Sargent is giving George a hard time, this bloke George, we are with George, we are going to look after this place." We never had any trouble. So we had our own private army of the local whoever who looked after the place. When a fight broke out they stopped it in 45 seconds. "Jeez you were quick with that." They said, "Yeah don't let the cops have any excuse to close this place down." So we were again, like the Strathfield thing, we were the safest place in town and we were the one with the bad reputation and the senior nursing sister said, "George there is a lot of talk around town about this place. I want to tell you something. We had broken heads and split scalps from the river and the back of the golf club, the bowling club, the RSL club and we have never had one from your place. You keep going." That was the reality and the reputation was different.

And I was learning something about making community. What are we so bloody scared of? If it is not British and it is not a box and it has not got a flag we don't want it. It is illegal and we want to ban it. You silly wankers. That has grown from the ground up. Let's use the creativity of people. And this 18 year old bloke, Koori, sees a couple of other people sing a song and people go, "Yeah. Yeah. That is good." Clap, clap. And he says, "Yeah I could do that." And he gets himself a big white, twelve string guitar, and plays his Creedence records, practices, couldn't read music, still can't. Worked out the riffs and came down. And there in the corner in the gloom at the end of one night, is a bunch of Kooris who used to come after the pub, dead drunk, and if they would sing at the mic they would slobber and knock it over After a while they started

to come before the pub shut and on the nights that we were open, which was about once a fortnight, they would come instead of the pub and sing sober and we could see the growth happening. But this little guy had got them going because he would play the guitar while they sang 'Proud Mary' and other Creedence stuff and thanks to Bob Dylan you can have an unusual voice. I heard this squeaky, thin voice coming out and I said, "Hey mate. Come over the microphone and have a go." He told me at his fiftieth the other weekend I went to Canberra for, he says, "Actually what happened was you picked me up, sat me on the seat behind the mic and said 'sing'." Well he started picking. Johnny ... he is a professional muso, played at the Corroboree 2000 on the Opera House stage. Wrote a song called Journey of Healing used by the Sorry Day Committee, a number of CD's, does school stuff at Roeburne. Ah wonderful stuff. He started because there was a place that would welcome him and give him a go without judgement but with lots of encouragement. It didn't matter who you were and how you played it.

Same as the Strathfield thing. If it was live and coming from a human it was interesting and you'd get affirmed. If it was terrible, you'd get nicely told. A bloke in the Strathfield sang a song, "In an English Country Garden" and people sang along with him and they changed the words, I can't remember what they changed the words to but it was sort of a message like, we are changing this song, and that was great but that'll do. There was occasional relationship between what he was singing and the actual music. Occasionally the lyrics and the rest connected but not too often during the song. So the crowd was, it was beautiful the way they affirmed and also didn't have more than they could cope with of him. It was nicely done. That is very interesting stuff where the kind of ground rules are, "Everyone is welcome and we are all part of this and no-one is shit and if someone is someone we can't cope with we will find a nice way." A lot of maturity comes out of this. So the same thing was happening. So Johnny became a brilliant muso and started a band and then the town was proud of the place and I was seen as a good bloke but that took four years



DP Could I get you to move now to Western Australia and continue the theme of work with young people in the community.

GD Yeah, well after four years in that mid-west town I got moved to the North Coast then, to Nambucca Heads. which was the southern tip of the hippy scene. Nimbin, was further north and we were the last place where there was cheap land. The dairy industry had virtually died. People had changed to beef and there wasn't enough money in that and the industry was going down hill. And there was a lot of land available and groups of young bods from the suburbs of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, were pooling their resources. Had a couple driving taxi's while the rest of their group came up, built houses, made clothes, grew food, doing an Anzac thing in the hills. And I met a few of them down town of course and I got into conversations and I said, "Oh drop into my place for a coffee if you like." And they did and we began a place to drop into when you are in town. Friends up and down the coast between Sydney and Brisbane, we were dead half way, we became a stop over because it was a big old former doctors residence, with five bedrooms, two bathrooms. We became a permanent community of about ten people, sometimes bigger. Not often smaller. And it all happened in there and we planned two festivals in the hills and ... festivals on the dairy farm and we had a wonderful time, controversial as hell.

The youth group folded because we used to meet at the house and the parents didn't want their sons and daughters to come to the house and have any contact with these hippies and maybe get introduced to the dreaded weed and so on. But while I was doing that I got some media stuff there too because the police, police, now there is a link, police were starting raids in the Lismore region. A superintendent had raided a number of places and we as stop-over house where it was a bit like old England where you didn't get the news from the newspapers, you got it from the travellers. We had people in

the house a couple of days after the Nimbin raid, talked about going down the hill at three o'clock in the morning on the back of cattle trucks and not being able to give breakfast to their children and the whole big thing and a \$50 fine which traumatised the community.

And we had people three days after the Cedar Bay raids in Queensland who talked about gunship helicopters hovering over their little dwelling with a bloody gun poking out. You know. Freaked out the children something chronic and the adults, we got these stories, they could come and they would lob and they would tell us what was happening. One of them was a famous sports person's sister who talked about being strip searched and fondled on her breasts and in her vagina by the cops because she was hitch-hiking. And sitting around the big table a joint came out. This particular time it came out it was after her story and got passed around and I shared in that. I was at a camp, a very conservative camp in Cherry Tree Pool two years later and they said, "What do you think of Marijuana?" in the question time that we had at the end of the camp and I said, "Well the last time I smoked dope it was the nearest thing I have experienced to Christian community and I didn't get invited to the camp reunion by the leaders and that was when the reputation problem started to burst out of the seams fairly immaculately.

But yeah I was heavily involved and then I got a bloke from my earlier days who was a conservative Christian leader. He knew that WA was looking for a youth consultant for the newly forming Uniting Church. I'd worked part time for the Scripture Union and had been a beach mission leader and all those early associations and he said, "Oh George Davies is an interesting –" and so I get sent a form saying, "We are told you might be interested." And I thought, "Nah it is too far." But a couple of bods wrote to me and said, "We need a good evangelical person here." So they hadn't heard the last few years' stories. They remembered me from uni days. They thought I was the same, and I'd been transformed by the cultures I had



met and my life had changed. Kind of broke out and couldn't push the toothpaste back in the tube. No way. It was out and it was on the other side of the barrier, so I threw my hat in the ring and I thought maybe it is time to specialise so I came over as a youth consultant.

DP When was that?

GD It was 1977. The Uniting Church inaugurated in June that year and I spent a year living on my own to take a break and not rush into anything except rush around the state. I was constantly, I was every weekend I was hiking from the Pilbara to Esperance and finding out who is where, doing what and connecting the place. Made a lot of contacts and a lot of friends which was very helpful because the second year I was here the Synod were all two year appointments, the first five or so state consultants in different positions. The structures were interim and we all had a two year thing and everyone else's was continued but there was a motion that Davies be terminated at the second Synod which was heavily outvoted by the floor of the Synod. But that happened every second year for the next two extensions and at the sixth year they set me up in a specialist thing called Community Youth Services and put someone safe who was known to use four letter words in charge of Youth of the Church and gave me drug stuff, homeless stuff, street stuff but cut me off from the youth of the Church. But more of that in a moment.

So I came and I was a year on my own. But during that year I thought, "I'm still a conservative lad inside I suppose." You know, I thought, "Well I might get young people of the Uniting Church to join in with inter-school Christian fellowship summer camps and family beach missions and encourage them to join that multi-denominational co-operative good fun stuff. But August that year one woman said, "Look my daughter has got a friend who is using heroin and she spends a lot of time down at Scarborough and we are really worried about her."

And someone else said, "Yeah I've got someone who spends a lot of time down Scarborough and there is a lot of crowds down there on summer nights and there is these drags going on."

This talk about Scarborough and I looked around the Scripture Union scene and nobody was doing anything in the metro at all it was all Bremner Bay and all over the place and, "Well, how about metro?" It was interesting, without having to recruit I just said to the people that were around me, "What do you reckon about we plant ourselves down there for months? We could rent a flat maybe and put our bodies on location and do our thinking afterwards." And there were ten people saying, "Yeah." So we went in a flat in January '78 to put our bodies on location and not predetermined, I'd learnt that from detached work. Don't predetermine. Maybe a drop-in centre, maybe a discussion tent on the beach, maybe basketball games, maybe disco, maybe surfing films, God knows what. Is the Y doing the discos again? Is the surfing club doing -? We don't know what the culture is. We are going to learn about it.

So I briefed my team and said, "Look the main thing is honesty. If we find that we are a nuisance, we are an interruption, we have no value, we get in the road, that will be success because that will be reality and we will put our energies somewhere else next Christmas. So we went in with a low expectation. Started cleaning up the flat. Oh my God. Even before anything happens there are ground rules that you don't know about. There are structures that you don't know about. There is territory you are ignorant about and we chose this flat above Rocco's Pizza Bar, which is now dead in the entrance of Observation City. It was in Macedonian territory. Macedonian's controlled that patch. Nobody walked up and down that patch of footpath and our entrance was in the middle of it. The Macedonians were the gatekeepers and we didn't know but on the second day when the painting is going on and we are getting rid of the cockroaches and things one of our team was sitting



on the window sill and the guys down below say, “What is going on?” and she says, “Oh come up and have a look.” She was a nice, warm, earth mother type, wonderful person and she brings them up and shows them around and feeds them soup and coffee and stuff and they never came up again, they weren’t interested but they decided the place was cool and they wouldn’t interfere.

Months later we found out that we had actually chosen a risky location because these guys, if someone was walking down the footpath, if you were walking past and you weren’t a local and all of a sudden ‘whoomph’ on your ear-hole, great sport, great fun, baaaaah, you disappear. That was their patch. That was their sport. You know, it was a bit like the Western New South Wales, they had their action. So anyway we got OK with them and I walked past this bloke about fifteen times in the first few days, surffie bloke renting the flat next door and, “G’day”, “G’day”, “G’day”, and after the fifteenth time he said, “Want a cup of tea?” so I sat down and had a cup of tea with him and he says – now we didn’t have any plan about how we were going to meet people, where we were going to plant ourselves and blah, blah, and he says, “What is going on?”

It was a bit like Trevor Waring in New Castle, I knew I had two minutes to tell him, to sum it up, “Well we are a group. Uniting Church but some of us ain’t got any Church background. We’ve heard about a lot of action down here. We thought we’d plant ourselves for a month and see if we’re any use and we are using that little flat up there. Want to have a look?” So he comes up and has a look around and then a bloke comes to see him and says to his flat mate, “Where’s Phil?” and he said, “Oh Phil’s up there.” Not knowing what there is so this bloke comes up and looks around and by this time, day four or five, or something we had a woman, a young team member in the front room as a CB freak in the bedroom with a big window overlooking the car park and the main room had a window overlooking, a just great little place, so she is on the CB radio and the bloke on the other end of the

line says, “What wheels are you?” she says, “I’m not on wheels, I’m in a home base above Rocco’s Pizza Bar, Scarborough Beach front.” And he says, “Oh shit, I’m only in the car park.” He was 15 metres over yonder in the car park, “Oh, come in and have a coffee.” So around the walls we develop this butchers paper and we had call signs and number plates and all sorts of CB vocabulary and one bloke did a ... sketch of the beachfront. He had the buildings, the cars, the ... sketch in behind all the writing. Just a brilliant piece of artwork. It was very effective. So Phil and his mate and stuff they came up and, “Geez eh.” And this redhead woman who had talked to the Macedonian she would make soup every afternoon at 5 o’clock and she had developed a bunch of fourteen year olds who would always be there for the soup and used to treat her like a mother and say, “Oh can we go down and go to the blah, blah.” Got to ask permission to go places, interesting dynamics were happening.

Really interesting dynamics and there was a social worker whose son was a runaway and he was hiding in the bush somewhere up on the northern beaches and his friends used to come and get soup and stuff for him. They wouldn’t tell us where he was because no-one was safe to tell where he was in their view but they would get the food. So we were sending the food up to this little runaway guy who later we eventually met, and his mother, and talked about it and the little guy turned up and he was thirteen and I said, “What did you come here for?” and he said, “Oh me mates told me to come here. I just had a big blue with me old man and I got out of the house and I haven’t got any money, I’ve got nothing.” So I took him back to my place for the night and then he rang up his Dad the next morning, he’d calmed down and got back home and so on.

But what had happened was that we found ourselves in the middle, we met people like that and the grapevine started to work and we started to fill up and then the police busts. The big attempt to get rid of young people from the beach front.



At twelve o'clock at night, police sirens, and you would have about five minutes flat before all the exits were blocked off. Any car that tried to leave would get a yellow sticker, police would be there until two o'clock. The plain-clothes

dudes they had, spotting people who had either talked too loud or spun their wheels or whatever, they'd finger them. The uniform guys pick them up, get their quota of about 20 take them to the van, photographed in front of a silent crowd. I couldn't understand why they were so silent. Nobody shouted any protest. Nobody said anything. They were totally sullen, silent, watching their friends get photographed and put in the wagon. So I started to go to court on the Monday mornings and be around for all the people who were getting processed every Monday morning but our little joint filled up with people that wanted to outstay the cops because at 12 o'clock the games shut down, at 1 o'clock the food shut down, at 2 o'clock we are the only light left on. The police leave and we became a psychological casualty station to talk about what do you do if your friend got arrested and outstaying the cops to avoid a yellow sticker and play chess and all sorts of stuff was going on.

And then we met the people who were having a heavy time. One guy, two bods were playing with the game of chess and he got up with his boots and just walked across, crunch, crunch, crunch over the game and we understood that this guy had some anger in him. Then about week three we met the young woman that had been using the heroin but we met her because someone said, "Oh George there is a fight downstairs." So I go down the stairs and there is two young women, they were both fifteen, I buried one of them last February, the two of them, one had a knife glinting in the moonlight, they had been sharing a flat, some stuff had disappeared, they blamed each other and they were having this big stoush. The landlord had chucked them out but they had met and they were down there just opposite our entrance and so I broke all the rules, grabbed one of them, grabbed the knife and we took them upstairs and put them at opposite ends of the joint for an hour and a half

and talked them down and calmed them down. So we met Yvonne, not her real name of course, and they were both sleeping out, beach stuff and both had families fallen to bits.

Now what I had learned from the east was the concept of a core house where you've got what had happened at Nam-bucca. We'd developed an intentional handful of people looking after the practicals of the joint with hospitality, space and that worked quite well. So we had put together three houses with our little team that had some core people that were resilient and had a spare bedroom. We were able to say to Yvonne, and a couple of the others that we met, look if you like we've got a spare room you can try out. She did, cautious as you should be, she was cautious about blokes and with me there was three blokes sharing a house, all in the team. I shared it with the other two guys after the team formed but three blokes sharing a house, inviting a fifteen year old into the spare room, "What is going on?" she was cautious about that, to her credit. That is how you survive, being cautious. She carried a knife for taxi drivers that got too amorous, she was no slouch this one, very attractive and very into survival.

By day three she is with us and I knew she was shooting up so I thought, "I'm the great counsellor. I'll be the great counsellor bloke here." So I says to her, "If you have got anything you want to talk about, feel free, I'm happy if you want to talk about anything." having such an empathy as I do. Half an hour later she was packing up the haversack, all her worldly belongs in the one haversack, ready to go, obviously going on the road. I say, "Are you going?" and she says, "Yeah I'm too much trouble around here." So I learnt, always learning, that was too heavy to say that.

But I knew where she would go because we were having little break ins, the window kept getting forced and there were signs of somebody being there but the little radio never got pinched or anything and we would say to the landlord, "Oh yeah we've got to fix that window." and we kind of accidentally kept post-



poning fixing the window because we knew we were acting as a squat. And we were happy though because the one month project became a three year project. I went down there a couple of hours later and there was Yvonne upstairs on a mattress asleep so I wrote a note and stuck it on her haversack saying, "Sorry for the dumb questions. You are welcome back anytime."

And a couple of days later she turned up again so she stayed for a fortnight and disappeared for a fortnight, come back again, stay for a month and disappear for a fortnight, and stay for two months and disappear for a fortnight and gradually she stayed for two years and then she and her friend went over east, The friend that she had been having the fight with, no it was a different one, they went over east and they set themselves up running little a little escort joint of their own in St Kilda. They did that until a disaffected client burnt it down and they decided it was a bit risky and they came back to WA. I remember her knocking on the door and of course I'd had the three o'clock phone call, "This is officer so and so, St Kilda police station, we've got this young woman here who has given us your number. We have arrested her for prostitution, have you got any comment?" I'm shaking my head trying to be coherent and sensible and sound how you are supposed to sound at that time of the morning with a police officer. So I hoped that it was a temporary set back and she was working through a lot of stuff and so I said a few words, kept her out of jail. She comes back and she knocked on the door and I said, "Ah Yvonne come in." and she said, "I didn't know whether I'd be welcome back this time." And of course she was, as long as we could cope, we had a practise of behaviour, we only worried about behaviour at the practical level not a moral level. Moral was to do with what was behind it and we didn't know what was behind it so we weren't going to judge the symptoms, we just had to cope with the symptoms. So we had some coping mechanisms but that was it.

So we became in our little network of houses very trusted to the street scene so Yvonne would say, "Oh could my friend so and so stay here." And runaways would turn up and we couldn't knock them back with a stick and there was a bunch of Noongars who got evicted from a house where king of the streets guy had let everyone stay. There were ten and they got evicted and there were six of them who were going to stay together no matter what but there was nowhere in the system that would accommodate six young Noongar people in a block. So we turned the garage into a bedroom and we set it up with beds and wardrobe and a bit of carpet and made a room out of the garage which was really great in Floreat Park. We had some interesting discussions with the neighbours about whether there should be Noongars in Floreat and I found myself saying, "Well they were here for thirty or forty thousand years before the rest of us dudes but do you feel that it is not proper that they be within two kilometres of the ocean. They should be inland at Balga or somewhere else. Is that what you are saying? Is there something wrong with Noongar people living in this part of the land now? Have you got a reason for that?"

DP **Hmm.**

GD You know we had those interesting discussions, and one father turned up and said, "I want my daughter. She is a slut." And the daughter had appeared a few nights before on the run from God knows where but the parent grapevine got to know about this place too and the parent turned up and, "She's a slut." I remember eye-balling him, now and again I'd get angry, I was angry with the polliies who walked by on the other side of the road, like the bloody Pharisees in the New Testament who don't give a shit really unless it has got votes in it. That is the reality, they are on another planet and they might be nice people but they are too far away and they don't want to listen to the people that are close, not really. OK Geoffrey listen to that. Richard listen to that. Charlie listen to that. All the rest of you. Anyhow. So I get angry with this bloke and I'm ten



centimetres away from his eyeballs and I'm saying, "In this house mate nobody gets called a slut in this house you can go now. Off. Piss off now. Out." I'm saying to this bloody father, good family counselling really, but again I didn't

know that there was a bunch of them from the garage, or a cluster in the kitchen. They're in the kitchen listening to this, so I'm sticking up, putting myself at some risk and that was one of the components of loyalty.

We got this immense loyalty because we stuck up for them in front of some threat because this fellow goes up the front path saying, "I'm going to have this place closed down." And that was when I felt the power again. Power, God, not being part of the system. You've got power. You've got no money. And I said, "Mate you are going to close down a private house. We can all kiss it goodbye can't we. You are going to close down a private home?" I had him over a barrel. So he went to the radio station. He went to 6PR and I hear him, he must have said he was going to so I tune in. "This is Bob Maumill interviewing this bloke rah, rah, rah, Reverend Davies" carrying on. So I ring up. Talk to his producer, say, "Oh it is the Reverend George Davies here, I am a minister who eats small children and cannibalises (laughter) I thought he might like to have a chat to me." "Oh can you come in the studio? So I end up in the studio talking to Bob Maumill and crew and we have an interesting time so I kind of broke into the media.

On the Scarborough Beach front. Well when they started to get arrested on the Monday mornings for simply spinning the wheels. A patch of oil, make the smoke, cover your car with smoke, fish-tail at 40km hour down the track. Far safer than Claremont Speedway where cars would flip through the picket fence and hit people and lose wheels and so on. Scarborough Beach front, big concrete, upper level, if the few people had stood down below were just nicely invited to use the upper level. There was no danger at all but the image was louts and

hooligans and danger and drag and bullshit so we had a meeting with our tea. We had been there three months now, and we had a little meeting for an hour and a half and we worked out ten things that we thought the public were not getting from the Sunday Times, that it is about energy and socialising in the suburbs.

Because young people had said, "Ordinary nights at Scarborough you go with your own group from school or somewhere and you stick with your own little group, on the drag nights everybody talks to everybody. One person cracks a funny, fifty people laugh. You are three deep along the upper car park and it is like watching the ship go out in wartime at night and the band playing. You have got this feeling of togetherness. It was beautiful. It was wonderful. It was neutral territory. It was different from the average nights. The rules were anyone talks to anyone. Funny things happen. A guy jumps down, there is a police car parked in the lower carpark and a fellow goes down with a rope, ties it around the muffler and back up and ties the other end of the rope to the fence to the railing and we are pissing ourselves waiting for the car but unfortunately, sorry officer it slipped off, the knot wasn't quite right. But what a ruse you know.

This is the Australia that dropped the rifle intentionally on the parade ground in front of the British bloody General, "Oh sorry officer. I dropped my rifle." Deliberately "up you" to authority, but when it came to your lieutenant getting killed at Gallipoli and a lance corporal would be in charge of the platoon and do it well because we weren't cow-towed into just obeying rules and retained some individuality and some creativity and some guts and all the rest of it. You know Australian soldiers. That's my nasho and school cadets coming out. We didn't do it the way the Brits and the Yanks did it. We did it our own way and that was Gallipoli and that was Scarborough and that was Strathfield and that was Condo and that was Nambucca. There is something about an Australian spirit that wants to say that to authority.



DP And where did you go from Scarborough Beach? Was it from there that you went on to establish Perth Inner City?

GD Yeah. Around the time Maureen Monroe was the Anglican Youth Officer, a wonderful person. Had been in the Uniting Church, became Anglican Youth Officer. We would have raves and this was going on and at the same time she said, “What if the Churches have a chat about the young people in town?” and I’d agreed with that. So she convened a meeting of the Churches but in the process of convening, people wider than the Churches, YMCA and others, said, “Oh we wouldn’t mind being in that.” So we ended up with 30 people including the then Welfare Department, local government all in a heap talking about young people in town. That was November 1978 so at the end of that year we had that discussion and we decided we didn’t know what was going on in town. And I suggested a process for finding out. “It is called detached work I said.”

We had Nick James in town, who had been doing it informally. After YMCA discos he would hang around the street and do a lot of street contact, and another guy with the Catholic Church who was informally doing some. We knew he had skills and talent and so let’s intentionalise a bit about this. So we used social work students, myself and some Uniting and various volunteers and trickles and dribs and drabs to spend time around town and to jot things down. We quickly heard the need for somewhere to rendezvous and to meet. Young bods who had come from the Armadale line to meet people they knew from the northern line and they’d meet at Hungry’s but if you were at Hungry’s for too long and you weren’t buying something and if you were sitting at a table some staff person would say, “Are you ordering? Oh we need this table for our customers.” And you got that all over the place so where, where can you be without having to pay, without having to spend, without having to be a customer, so the detached thing was working by listening not just to individuals but to group

dynamics. What are the patterns? What is the sub-culture scene? What is going on? What is not going on that could go on? So then we had a couple of people from America and England came, a British bloke who had been involved in detached work development, Michael Eastman and a fellow from America who had been involved with YMCA.

OK. So talks to a couple of big seminars and we were kind of doing the community education thing, we had a lot of interest in the business seminar. Michael Eastman was big on talking to them about the concept and a bloke walked up to me with a cheque book and said, “Who do I write the cheque to?” We weren’t organised. We didn’t have a bank account. We didn’t have one to write a cheque to. I was a great fund raiser I was and not any better since. So two years later we formed the incorporated body in 1982 but at the beginning a group with the contacts had a hairdresser in Murray Street who had a vacant room behind him, landloded by UWA say, “Look I’m prepared to say to the landlord I’d be happy as hairdresser to have a place for young people to meet using the other rooms.” And we started the Cave Drop in Centre and we allowed “The Place”, which we called it, at Scarborough to shut down and pool resources with the Cave because Scarborough was great in the summer and dead as in the winter so we pooled resources for an all year round show. Our lot helped to set up The Cave in the first month and fix the joint up and after eighteen months of mainly whiteys the Noongars turned in a couple of big clumps as Noongars do and are welcome to do or to do for security and family and network. They came in a group and most of the whiteys thought, “Oh shit.” And moved out so it was creatively taken over by Noongars and became a heavily used Aboriginal venue so we Aboriginalised the committee and the volunteers of course. We had access to Department of Aboriginal Affairs, precursor of ATSIC and we were able to get past the rent being paid by Trinity congregation in town to having rent partly paid by DAA. And we could afford a paid co-ordinator and admin assistant in year three so we got bigger and then we got evicted by UWA because they didn’t like graffiti up the staircase up the building.



DP Where was it?

GD 312 Murray Street, just back west from William Street on the Northern side, first floor up. But the graffiti was people's names. They wrote their names.

I mean not very subversive. I mean there was a sense of ownership. I remember saying that we needed to talk to the University Administration Property people and say, "Hey you've got a department called Sociology and Social Work. If you and the university who are organised in order to have departments like social work and sociology, talk to them they will tell you that what we are doing is profound and wonderful. We have got ownership and connection and safety and identity and profound stuff going on with the most alienated group, sub-culture in Australia and you shut it down. Why don't you get your Property Department to talk to your Sociology Department." They were not interested thank you.

Same as the ... Earthwise where the bloody Church Property Committee decided to terminate the lease and now we are having a brawl with the bloody wider scene to understand what is going on there. It is not a property decision, we are talking about the Earthwise thing growing out of the last twenty five years, since Scarborough days of development in WA. It is an outcome. It is a product. It is a big oak tree come out of soil that has been composted with experience and death and hope and pain and laughter and relationships is the soil and the fertiliser and we've got this great bloody beautiful bush and they want to chop it down because they think it is like Tai Chi, we are just renting the place and just a community group etc. So Property Committees give me the whoopies.

Anyhow, so we moved. But we moved to bigger, downstairs to what as numero, uno, corner of King Street, Murray Street and then we got a letter from the Federal Government. Community Development, what we need is Federal Government departments. Any students watching this, bloody hell you might become a bureaucrat one day. God help us and you.

They decided over there in Canberra, under Bob Hawke I think it was then, "What we need now is to focus on employment. Employment. Jobs. Jobs. Jobs. That's what young people want. Jobs. Jobs. Jobs." Because Bob Hawke ran a big survey and he didn't ask youth workers, he said they wanted direct contact. So he employed a lot people to be in radio studios to talk to young people who would ring up. And what were they. They weren't detached workers that's for sure. And our lot rang up to talk about ... legislation and were told, "As the producer and what would you want to talk about?" "Oh, is there anything else you want to talk about?" and they got filtered out and the people who wanted to talk about employment got to talk on the radio and Bob Hawke's wonderful survey found that what young people want is, "Jobs. Jobs. Jobs."

What we were hearing was a bit deeper and more profound than that. However, The Cave got a letter, the Perth Inner City Youth Service, got a letter saying, "The category under which you are funded, called special projects, is being terminated. The focus is now on employment. You are invited to submit for a project such as, we suggest, a silk screening t-shirt (project)" We didn't bother to write the bloody letter did we. So we went to the State government who had the Youth Services Programme funding Drop in Centres and Detached Work at the time. We had been gracious we had let other shows get in on the State queue because we were a bit unique and had this access to Federal money because of the Aboriginality. But in this great co-operation between State and Federal, States don't want to pick up a dead Federal programme. "No way. It wasn't our idea. We don't like the bloody Feds anyway. We bureaucrats compete. Politicians look at each other across the river and the rubicon and the Nullabor and no that is a yuk, yuk."

So no show but the State department, who was very good at funded research, researched into the Cave concept. So we had a university researcher for three months and a committee



chaired by Ted Wilkes himself and made up of a range of people. The researcher talked to Aboriginal young people that used the joint and their family networks and the Aboriginal agencies and got a ringing endorsement of the concept of

The Cave and then stuff all nothing happened did it? Do they really want to know the research? It was bullshit wasn't it? And then there is this good Aboriginal bloke who was the Minister at the time. I forget his name. The bloke up north who likes to get water going everywhere. But anyway you know the bloke, "Have discretionary money." one of his staffers said, "didn't spend the discretionary money?" "No." and now seventeen years later they don't know what to do about Aboriginal young people in town do they? We've had numerous 'get rid of them' haven't we?

We have had the early 90's streets sweeps, Operation Sweep followed by a nicer name, same thing, Operation Family Values followed by Assistant Commissioner John Standing in your face policing and community crime prevention which he said to the city is safe committees, "Find the parents and say to the parents 'fix these kids or we will fix you'." A bully, he'd never heard of Don Edgar, he'd never heard of Richard Eckersley, he'd never heard of Margaret Mead, he'd never heard of a dozen others when I suggested that to the City Safe Committee as a Youth Affairs Council representative. Well no it went over like a lead balloon didn't it. But maybe we've got community policy being led in the public arena by ignorant people.

Where are the academics, sorry no offence, who say something every time parents get attacked?" and talk about the absence of natural supports and extended family and that parents can't do everything and they are overloaded and all the rest. Where are all the bloody voices? I try as often as energy can but I am getting into sleep deprivation as well as funny reputation. Anyhow it is a problem. So it got ignored. I mean young people have kept coming into town ever since in bigger and

bigger numbers with no where to be and if Geoff Gallop is "... moral danger. I'm going to do something about this rah, rah, rah." Doesn't give a shit really does he? Because why should they only have the footpath until their glue sniffing is so significant or the blood is flowing or the stropky behaviour is on and they are picked up by ambulance or police JAG squad, you name it, until then, until the late in the day action of the emergency scene all they have got is a bloody footpath but the sociology research is about three metres high on every campus in the cosmos saying that there are developmental tasks.

I learnt about it in 1961 when I was doing sociology for the first time in my Dip Ed course. I had never heard of it before when I was doing Ag Science things called Developmental Tasks the thing to do things in your personality and your growth and your connections outside the front door of home. Don Edgar calls it a family, friendly environment, not with Assistant Commissioner John Standing, not with Geoff Gallops policies not with Richard's Courts policies not with zero tolerance policies. These are the leaders of the world, the state and nation. God help us it is not community for young people.

They are getting a big message of, "We don't want to know you." "We don't want you around." "You are not part of this." And the research says Richard Eckersley, the key thing young people needed a sense of welcome, inclusion, participation, we want to know you. They are not getting that message but whenever we gave that message, however humbly, like, "Come and share a house with us." or, "Do some fun together." You get a response. You get warmth. You get trust. You get affection. You get connection. You get to be a human family and all the bloody social workers on clients, "Don't let them come near your home, they are your clients. So we have got social workers everywhere who have their nice, together friends. Who have their nice together ability to socialise and do interesting things and go to good parties and so on and have an interesting time discussing community capacity building and action research formats and all the rest of it about the clients, well we have got a different view.



Sorry about it, I know I am breaking all the rules in social work but I happen to think as a lapsed kind of, as a clerical error, that maybe Jesus could be worthy of comparing in values with some of the social theory around the place. Be-

cause he said, in the good book it says, "Open your home to strangers." So why shouldn't we who are doing the social work be participants in the development of social capital, why shouldn't we be part of it? Not the professionals of it looking down upon the clients. Young people down at Scarborough started to put some youth workers in the category of social workers that they already hated and we used to talk about not having youth work becoming categorised like social work to be seen as The Welfare and kept at arms length in relationship.

We tried to retain an image of being humans (laughter) rather than any sort of worker really. And that doesn't mean I am for people just being willy nilly naive and uncontrolled in letting people invade their house and stuff up their children.

We have an intentional model in those houses of a core of persons who are resilient without small children connected to each other so someone wouldn't be isolated in those houses and then connecting those houses to other stuff. So it was intentional but it was also participatory. It was intentional with being aware of important cultural realities but participatory because a lot of young people are alienated enough not to go to anything that is part of the establishment. Anything that has got a paid worker runs a risk as being seen as establishment and the PICY thing now is what the house, the network we had, has become the household network of Perth Inner City Youth Service with open ended accommodation.

So the metres high of research again saying that early childhood disadvantage and trauma and exploitation and abuse has long term consequences.

People develop schemas of looking at things so that Bob Montgomery of psychology over east talks about the new word by what's his name Young, about schemas and you learn to not trust anybody because that is how you survive but you carry that into adult life and that works against you and you learn to think, "I am to blame." So you carry that into adult life and that works against you and you don't need to revisit that stuff and re-open the wounds by re-living it. That was bad psychology. You need to re-visit and re-frame it and say, "The schema was wrong. There are people I can trust and also the schema was wrong. I was four years old for God's sake. I was a child and you were abusing me, I the adult will talk to that four year old who was me saying here's what I could have said if I had the words you have at fault. You are an adult. I am a child. You are abusing me. You are at fault. There is nothing wrong with me etc." The consequences are long term and you are supposed to have a three months limit.

We had a big argument with one of the bureaucrats in SAT programme a few years ago about having a limit of six months for accommodation and supported accommodation assistance programme and we in the Youth Accommodation Coalition had a big session. We say, "This is stupid for this, this, this, this, this, and this reason." And he goes away and he comes back later and says, "Yes our committee has thought that through. We have revised the structures. Now the limit will be three months." They actually reduced it. So Perth Inner City Youth Service said, "Stuff you. We are not going to tell anybody to go after three months if that means prematurely throwing onto the real estate market, they are not going to be coped with by, are going to get back into emergency dramas and re-cycle around and around and around. We are going to keep a person, let a person be, until natural process operates like it does in an ordinary so called home and you move when it is appropriate times to move." We've had to argue the case and Perth Inner City Youth Service Household Network had two staff in 1984 and since then the need has gone through the roof, get referrals from the Department of Justice, Welfare De-



partment, other agencies, peer referral, self referral and we've got less than two staff now in 2003. They are on 9-day fortnights the two staff. Now is that pathetic or is that pathetic? Because we don't act as an extension of the police

force, if someone is smoking dope, doing street prostitution whatever, they still need a base, a space, a place to stay so as far as we can practically ignore and just work on the survivals of that behaviour whilst we put our energy into what is going on in their life circumstances and their history and their sense of community, or lack of, and all the thousands of issues etc. But now it is cutting edge to include, oh one could go on about this, "Governments don't understand." is what I am trying to say.

DP Can I get you to describe the detached youth project and also how the household network operates?

GD Well the concept of detached work, really I am a believer in how it started in the 60's, the purist thing which was about diagnose and develop what you are going out there is as litmus paper, as Geiger counter, as barometer to check out what is going on. What is around? Not be individualistic so there is some star that tended to use the street for one to one counselling. The street is where you do your counselling. Fine. Some of that goes on. Or, the American thing in New York where you went out there to reduce the blood flowing gang warfare and to keep streets more quiet and safer and better for commerce. Or Canada where you tended to go out and take your camping programme and do the advertising out on the street and do the marketing out there. But Australia has been different from those in its roots. It was about doing a sociology if you like, practical, on the ground, not only who is around and talking to people with needs and making connections but what groups are around and how they are getting on with each other and what is a sociological demography dynamic and do something with that. And hence the hearing the need for venues, hence down at Scarborough running with the

tide and getting into issues that were both justice and socialising and fun and camping and trying things and listening to the research.

Like we took a bunch to a Uniting Church Easter Camp, hah, one I wasn't at. I went to the conservative camp, the other bunch went to this camp at York and of course I said things like, "Fuck." And "Shit" and "Wank" because saying fuck to them was like Winnie the Pooh saying, "Bother." Because that was their dialectic and is the dialect in their sub-culture. So why should one sub-culture, we snotty nosed people in charge of Church hierarchy decide that fuck is a terrible word that people shouldn't say. Why should one sub-culture decide that its dialect, where it may use the term dole-bludger is a worse swear word, one sub-culture says that its dialect is purer than some other sub-cultures dialect then anyway saying "Fuck. At the camp was a trauma, young people rang up their parents and wanted to be taken home and the camp fell to bits so we listened to Shane Gould down south who had said with her partner, "Look," and I knew her over east, look she called into my house you know, "if you want to use our property some time." So we did. We set up a camp that didn't assume we had a Church or assume anything, in the bush surrounded by the trees. We had nine years of Easter camping. So camping grew out of the contact at the beach front. A drop in venue grew out of the contact and became a social place. The Household Network grew out of that.

DP And what is the Household Network?

GD Well then it was the three houses offering a spare room. Now it is two land-lorded houses and two units, accommodation for eight young people, external support for young people in their own patch who plug into collective things that go on. So there is a bunch of young people in their own accommodation so at any one time there is realistic contact with fifteen or twenty with serious issues of life survival going on. And then around that there is other things connected. So after the initial bunch



in the early eighties calmed down a bit we had a bunch of young people that were connected and had been to some of the camps and wanted to be together and who had got sorted out a bit of their drug stuff and court fines and chaos but are at the back end of the employment queue and the training queue.

So a few in our group, ... In particular put in twenty grand and some others then took over a small business called Squirrel Nutkin selling dried fruit and nuts in Subiaco and turned that into a show where you did a hawking delivery thing which now is not possible. But Peg went off with vehicles and wheelbarrows and took dried fruit and nuts in all directions and the experienced people would set up a new run and the ones who didn't know how to deal would go with them and learn how to do it and the place was also a drop in spot and just wonderful. And that went for seven years, got beaten by the rents and now has become Earthwise in Subiaco which is a recycling venue, permaculture garden, music joint, connection with the arts, Sambanistas, Junkadelicks and has a sister relationship with City Farm.

Perth Inner City Youth Service Household feed into that as do local psych out patients and senior citizens, local citizens, miscellaneous bods who have been around years ago, sons and daughters of the ones who met when they were fifteen. It is an urban community (laughter) it is an urban village, it is a network, it is a creating place where you can have a go at your ideas. It is where the Church, because on the premises that I was in, that we made a youth base out of in Subiaco, we made space available, people have a go at their own ideas. Rather than seniors in the Church running an op shop and collecting money and making up food parcels to give to the poor we made the space for people to have a go at their own idea.

But now the Uniting Church is saying one of the problems is that it only has a loose relationship to the Church and the only involvement of the Church is that some people in it are Chris-

tians. I think that is the ideal relationship to have, so the Church is persons who are Christians involved in the Church are participants, partners alongside, not bosses owners and in charge of but they can't understand that.

The Property Committee decides that it wants to do something else with the property while the Church goes on about mission as if we are still living in the Seventeenth Century doing charity stuff of some sort in Dickensian England. God help us. So we think we are being a bit more contemporary. Then there is the Catholics in Hawthorn on the radio the other day talking about how they are cutting edge because they have got a project that is owned by the beneficiaries. Yeah right. Welcome. So in real life the only way it would work was for it to naturally grow the way it has naturally grown.

DP George, I'm afraid that our time is just about up. Can I end by thanking you very much for accepting my invitation to talk about your involvement in community work.

End of interview