

**GEORGE WINSTON ORAL HISTORY –
TRANSCRIPT**

SESSION 1 – 29 MAY 2026

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This is an oral history with **George Winston** recorded at Springwood, NSW on the 29th of May 2026 for the Engineering Heritage Australia Oral History programme. The interviewers are **Graham Shirley** and **Bill Phippen**. The interview number is EA-SYD-FH2026-1.

George, could we begin by you telling me when and where you were born?

George Winston

I was born in 1934, in a city called – Now called Lviv, which is now in the Ukraine. But when I was born there, it was Poland – It was called Lvov.

Graham Shirley

Tell me about your parents. What were their names?

George Winston

My original surname was Weinberg, which is very much a Jewish name. My parents, or my father, had a law degree, although he never practised law. But he was a sculptor. A very gifted sculptor. More famous - That's very, very good at this job.

Graham Shirley

Did he work professionally as a sculptor?

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

What sort of clients did he have who? Who were among his clients? I mean, who? Who did he sculpt for?

George Winston

They were typically fairly prominent rich people, and a poor person couldn't afford to pay. They'd have a portrait. He specialised in portraits and he loved the female body as well. He could also paint well.

Graham Shirley

So, when you say he loved the female body, are you talking about that he occasionally did nudes?

George Winston

He did nudes. Or the female bodies with drapes.

Graham Shirley

Which was very much of its - of its era.

George Winston

Oh, very much of its era.

Graham Shirley

I'm thinking of someone like Norman Lindsay in Australia, who also -

George Winston

Yes. Yeah, well, his parents sent him to Paris to study sculpture.

George Winston

But also to get him away from my mother. Because they didn't - They weren't very happy with her. She was of a lower class, but poor family. And they didn't get on very well with her.

Graham Shirley

So, tell me the names of your parents. What were the first names of your parents?

George Winston

Well, my father was called Eugene, or the Polish equivalent of Eugene.

George Winston

And my mother was Anna. But she was - She had a Jewish first name, which was Hannah.

Graham Shirley

And what was - What was Anna's or Hanna's maiden name?

George Winston

Hers - Seideman. Which means 'silk man', in German.

Graham Shirley

Right. And so, do you think your parents were a good match? They clearly loved each other.

George Winston

Well, he was madly in love with her his whole life. I'm not so sure about the other way. I think she was at least partly motivated by status and money.

Graham Shirley

And what are your earliest memories of them?

George Winston

Oh gosh – Well, my, my father vanished on the first day of the Second World War, one day before the invasion. He got into a car with two other men, including his cousin and my mother's brother. And they drove across the border to Romania. To escape, try and escape from the invasion.

Graham Shirley

And why weren't your mother and you in that car as well?

George Winston

That's an excellent question. I think because this was a bad marriage. I think he was escaping from a bad marriage. As well as escaping from invasion. War invasion.

Graham Shirley

And was your mother and were you also intended to be in that same car? Or did he just take it on his own initiative to leave?

George Winston

He took it on his own initiative to leave and leave us behind. So, he virtually abandoned us. Although I love my dad dearly and I thought - Most of my life I didn't think of that as abandonment. But quite late in my life, I realised it was abandoned.

Graham Shirley

So when was the next you heard of your father?

George Winston

Well, my mother and I were trapped in Poland, initially under the Soviets. The Soviets came first to that part, Poland. There was a pact between the Soviet Union and Germany, where the Germans took the western part of Poland and the Soviets took the eastern part. So we experienced the Soviet occupation first.

Graham Shirley

Do you have any specific memories of that? - Of the Soviet occupation?

George Winston

A little, yes. I remember my mother teaching me the Cyrillic alphabet. So that I could start reading the Russian language. She also taught me the Polish Roman alphabet because there was - There was no school. I never went to school in Poland. There was no school for Jewish children, especially under the Germans.

Graham Shirley

So, what sort of education did you have in Poland?

George Winston

My mother teaching me. I didn't get any other education. Because when I was when the war broke out, I was five, so I was below school age. And by the time I got to school age, there were no schools for Jewish children at all.

Under the - When the Pact between Germany and Russia was called the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, and the Germans broke that in, I think it was in '41. And that was the end of normal life.

Graham Shirley

So, what happened then? If that was the end of normal life? What? What changed as far as you and your mother were concerned?

George Winston

Umm ... About a third of the population of Ukrainians - And on the very first day when the Germans took over, the Ukrainians slaughtered three thousand Jews in Lvov.

Graham Shirley

Did you know anything about that at the time?

George Winston

Yes. Yeah.

Graham Shirley

What aspect of that did you know about at that time?

George Winston

Well, I can't go into detail with - We just we were aware of the slaughter and - We were just lucky enough not to be killed at the time.

Graham Shirley

So, of course, you eventually left Poland, but what happened? What - Are there any other specific memories that you have of life before you left Poland? In terms of your living arrangements?

George Winston

Well, yes – I've got some - Eventually all Jews were herded into a ghetto. Each city occupied by Germany had a ghetto. And Jews were not allowed to leave the ghetto. You stayed and you need to live together. They had to wear a yellow star.

Graham Shirley

Do you have any specific memories of the ghetto?

George Winston

Yes, there were seventeen of us in one room. Food was a problem - Was a great shortage of everything. You know, it was - The normal life, it had gone.

In our normal middle-class life, we had privacy. We had a bathroom and we had adequate food. And all that just disappeared.

And I know that my mother took me somewhere out of the ghetto and into town and uh, she omitted the yellow star - Which you could get killed for that.

And I remember there was the German soldier in the street who stopped us, and said to my mother, "You're a Jew, I could tell". And she said to the soldier, "Do you have any children?" And then, he said, "Run". (Emotional sound.)

Graham Shirley

Sorry, would you like to pause for a moment?

George Winson

Yeah.

Graham Shirley

OK.

just to pick up the narrative again, how was it that you managed to get out of Poland?

George Winston

Right. Well after several close shaves, my mother realised that if we didn't get out, the - The next step would be, to be actually killed because the German organised that - A killing spree. A couple of months after that, we actually left - Smuggled out. They machine gunned all the Jews that were left in Lvov. Just killed everybody. That's what was waiting for us. And she was very aware of that.

So, she had some gold jewellery left. And she got in touch with people smugglers, so these were gentiles who did the job of spiriting Jews across the border. And she gave them this gold jewellery and she said, "I want - I want, with my son - I want to get to Romania. You get the rest of the money cash on delivery at the other end."

Because some of these smugglers could just take your money and then dob you in. And there was a reward for that. So, they could have done that, and they could make extra money from the reward from the German authorities. So with them - Because they were honest or not.

And they then organised our escapes. So, they took us to a village near the border, the Romanian border. And - To stay with a guy who was a - I think he was a cobbler and he said, "You wait there and we will come and get you". So, we stayed with this cobbler, who was a nice man and fed us adequately.

And after a while, he, the smuggler said, "Right, get ready. Tonight's it". So, there was a creek. The border was a creek with - and it was right in the middle of winter. Was about - about the first of January 1944. And so, they came at night and we yeah - We were covered with white sheets. Which was actually silly because there was a full moon, and whether you were wearing white or not, you cast a dark shadow. But because it was an extremely cold Polish winter night, the German guards must have been in their huts. Not patrolling in the freezing weather. So, they actually carried us on their backs across this creek. Then we spent the rest of the night in a shed on the Romanian side.

Graham Shirley

Must have been a profound relief to be out of Poland.

George Winston

Well, it was one once we were in - not on that night. I mean, we were still at the border, so it could have been shot at any moment, had the guards been patrolling - it was very, very dangerous. But in the morning, my mother - We were transported separately. My mother in a hay wagon in the middle of the hay. And when they came to the Romanian patrol - There was the Romanian soldiers there with bayonets and they - They stuck in the hay, but then this - Fortunately they were not looking for people. Apparently, they were looking for contraband.

Graham Shirley

What - To make a little living on the side, kind of thing?

George Winston

Well, people who smuggle things to make money on the side, of course - The – And the - A young woman came from Bucharest, who was sent by my father and she took me to the train and we - We travelled in a heated train, I remember, comfortably, to a town called Chernivtsi. And we joined up there with my mother. And we stayed with a Jewish family for a night or a couple of nights. But they were terrified of having Polish Jews there. They could have been still caught and, you know, taken into concentration camps because Romania was part of the Axis and the Germans were in charge.

So, we got away from that quickly because we were endangering the Jewish family that we were staying with.

I remember it was my first experience of a kerosene heater. (Laughs) Romania had oil, and kerosene was cheap. It was Hitler's only source of oil – was Romania.

Graham Shirley

So how long before you were able to move into a safer zone?

George Winston

Oh, once we were in Bucharest, we rejoined my father there. And we were there with false names.

Graham Shirley

Right.

George Winston

Not the original Weinberg name because that would have been deadly. But - So we stayed with the - with the assumed name, Gayeski, which is a very Polish and non-Jewish name. But my father was there with his original identity, still doing sculpture.

It was a very - I tried to look that up in the history of Romania and I – I didn't find an explanation, but for him Bucharest was a good place, was a safe place. He didn't have to change his name or hide anyway. He just retained his true identity.

Graham Shirley

George, because you have recorded a lot of your background before you came to Australia, we've recorded that previously. Can we sort of now have a summary of what happened between Bucharest and your coming to Australia?

George Winston

Certainly, yeah. All right. Well, I stayed in Bucharest with my parents. Until the - well, basically, until the war finished in that part of Europe. In other words, the Red Army came in. And in - The Germans retreated, and a puppet Communist regime was established by the Soviets in Romania at the end of '44.

And my parents managed to obtain an exit visa. You couldn't leave the country unless you had an exit visa, and they also obtained an entry visa to Palestine. They were both miraculous things. (Laughs)

So, we got into a train which left Bucharest, going South to Bulgaria. When we got to a Bulgarian town called Stara Zagora, in the mountain most beautiful mountains, in Bulgaria, the train stopped. And we were stuck there. We didn't know why, but we were not allowed to proceed. The whole area was under Soviet control, of course.

So, we started off by living on the train, which was unliveable in the middle of winter. Six feet of snow. And - That there was no provision for three hundred people (who) were on that train. All headed for Palestine. And we started off by sleeping on the train. But eventually they let us move into a school hall. We were actually very lucky. We were billeted by a Jewish couple in town who gave us their best bedroom and their best bedding and just couldn't be generous enough. And I remember my father, that he painted the portrait of our host. As a thank you.

So, after about six weeks, we were allowed to proceed. The train was allowed to proceed. But just before we left the border, they stopped us again for two weeks. Now it took me 50 years to find out exactly the reason for all that. And that was that there was a previous train load like that where a Red Army deserter was found on the train. The Soviet authorities obviously thought there might be a deserter on this train too. Why it took us - took them six weeks to check the train, I don't know. It was quite weird. But then, after another two-week pause, we were allowed to proceed. Now the entry visa which we had from Palestine actually expired. Towards the end of that period - I think we missed it by one day. But the mandate authorities in Palestine relented and they let us in anyway.

Graham Shirley

So did you - Wasn't there a period in France as well?

George Winston

That was later, yes, yeah.

Graham Shirley

Oh, that was later.

George Winston

Yes. Just like that. Then weeks later, so we arrived in Palestine, which was still a British mandate of - We were initially housed in a reception camp. And I remember having that nice clean bed with proper sheets, good food. They were - This was all provided by the British Army. Because we were legal, we had legal entry visas. The illegals were transported to Cyprus and kept there for the duration, very miserable.

Graham Shirley

So what was? - What was expected you would be – Once you reached Palestine what were your parents' plans for what would happen in Palestine?

George Winston

Couldn't have any plans. We just did - Just did what you had to do to survive. So, my father found a job in in a chocolate factory, and his job was to carry bags of sugar, heavy bags of sugar. And he was a labourer in the factory. And ... I remember he met a municipal - some municipal, high ranking officer and he did his portrait. And we got - We got a flat. (Laughs) It was bribery.

Graham Shirley

You got a flat in return for the portrait?

George Winston

Yeah, a flat on the outskirts of Tel Aviv. And the flat consisted of one bedroom. No bathroom. A kitchenette. Very basic. Terrazzo floors.

Graham Shirley

So what was - There was a common bathroom, was there, in the in the building?

George Winston

There was. There was a bathhouse. A little hut - hut kind of thing with where you could have a bath. And my dad was - At that time he was working twelve hours a day, six days a week, just to keep us in food and rent. The economy was very tough – disastrous. And on Saturdays, we used to go to the little bathhouse and fire up the boiler, get warm water. And the Orthodox Jews would come and hammer on the door and shout at us for making fire on the Sabbath, which was a sin. They gave us really tough time. (Laughs)

Graham Shirley

So, for how long were you in Palestine?

George Winston

Four-and-a-half years. So, we arrived on the first of January 1945. And we left after the Arab-Israeli War, which took place in 1948.

Graham Shirley

So, you experienced that war, did you?

George Winston

Oh yes. That was my second war. Was the fourth war for my parents. And my mother said, "Enough! Enough wars! Let's get out!" So, she went to the French consulate and wheedled and cried and that - They both fluent French speakers - And she wheedled out a transit visa for France. And - We had we still had a Polish passport at that stage, so we were officially Polish citizens. We never became Israeli citizens. And a lot of Polish people were being repatriated to Poland. Both Jews and non-Jews. And we joined that group, pretending we were going to Poland. My mother said, "No! Not on not your Nellie. We're not going to Poland." Before I did - I had the Communists twice - once in the beginning of the Second World War and then at the end, in Romania, when they came in. In there so - But that was our only means of leaving the country. So, we joined the Polish contingents - We got on a ship. It was a very, very low-grade ship which - halfway across the Mediterranean, I remember that part of the propeller fell off. And the captain said we would go back. And then he changed his mind and then we went forward again. But eventually we stopped in Naples.

And in in Naples, I replaced the page in the passport which had the French visa on it and we peeled off the group. And the Polish group, they went up north through Italy, Austria, Czechoslovakia into Poland. And we got on a train to Paris.

Graham Shirley

And happened once you reached Paris?

George Winston

In Paris, my mother had a very valuable contact. She had a schoolmate, a woman who was in charge of arranging immigration for the DP - displaced persons. Europe was awash with DPs from various countries. So, this friend of my mother said, "Look, I can. I can get you on that transport. Your choice is Canada, South Africa, Uruguay, Chile, Australia". My mother said (laughs), "It's going to Australia. At least not likely to have another war there".

Graham Shirley

And so how long before you? How long were you in France before you went to Australia?

George Winston

We went in France for twenty months. And I went to school there. I had no French language at all. And I wrote like an eight-year-old because I've been using Hebrew for four-and-a-half years at school. So, my writing was pathetic in Latin letters. I had to fix that up and the French teachers were not very tolerant. There was no support like that

we have here in Australia. Migrants who get special treatment at school or special help. There's nothing like that.

Graham Shirley

Yeah, tough old world sometimes.

George Winston

It's very tough.

Graham Shirley

And so - Tell me about the journey to Australia.

George Winston

The journey to Australia was by a ship, of course. It was 1950. We were allocated a place on a Greek ship, smallish Greek ship, leaving from Genoa in Italy. And we were very lucky because it wasn't the first stop. They left originally from Greece and we were supposed to go steerage, which was awful. It was for people carrying - all bedded together, noisy, smelly - carrying their sausages and their cheeses. And they eat - (Laughs) It was awful, but it was full, so they put us in an economy class cabin. We got a cabin for four - was roughly. So, it was - It was a very good experience, and I made friends with the Greek boys on board. A rough lot but OK.

Graham Shirley

When you came to Australia, was Sydney your first port of call?

George Winston

Oh. No. We stopped in Fremantle and then the ship terminated in Melbourne. And we were supposed to complete the trip by rail. It so happened that was there was a rail strike. So, they put us on a DC3. And for the first time in our lives, we're in a plane. It was a wonderful experience. The DC3 took four-and-a-half hours, Melbourne to Sydney.

And our whole trip was paid by an organisation called The Joint. They paid for the sea voyage and the plane. And The Joint stood for Joint Distribution Committee and was funded by rich American Jews who provided various kinds of assistance. I remember going in a depot in Paris. And they get clothes, second-hand clothes that were donated by The Joint.

Graham Shirley

It sounds like you were very lucky. But it also sounds like your mother was such a clear and pivotal figure in terms of making things happen.

George Winston

She was very resourceful, very far-sighted. Very, yeah - My father was more passive. Basically, he just went along.

Graham Shirley

So, she clearly had a very strong drive -

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

- and motivation throughout life.

George Winston

Tremendous drive and survival instincts. Yes.

Graham Shirley

When you arrived in Sydney, what happened next in terms of finding accommodation and so forth?

George Winston

Well, we stayed for a week in a Jewish migrant hostel in Greenwich, where a British ex-army person ran it. Very unpleasant, very bossy. And the place was expensive and we had no money, so we only stayed about a week. And we then found - We rented the room in Randwick, which was a big room, probably the size of this one. And it had enough room for three of us and the use of a kitchen. It was very common after the war because the accommodation was very short in Sydney, or in Australia generally, because of the war. And so, I was able to walk ten-minutes to Randwick Boys High School. I could resume normal life. We could go to the shop, buy food. My father's wages were enough to, you know, keep us afloat. It was amazing, it was a miracle. But suddenly we're in a normal world, out of danger, out of misery.

Graham Shirley

Must have been such an immense relief.

George Winston

There were - It was wonderful. Yeah, it was.

Graham Shirley

So how long before your father got a job?

George Winston

Oh, just a few days. Jobs were plentiful. But Australia was desperate for workers.

Graham Shirley

So, he - What was your father's job?

George Winston

Oh ... What was his first job?

Bill Phippen

Was it the railway?

George Winston

No, it was later.

Bill Phippen

Was it the post office?

George Winston

The post office? He never worked in the post office.

I can't remember what his first job was now, but he. He did find a job on the railways. He was - became a painter's mate. He's rubbing down carriages for the painters. He did that for quite a while. But then he was allowed to graduate to being a painter. And he joined the unions.

Graham Shirley

And did your mother seek work?

George Winston

My mother would - did piece work at home on a sewing machine. And she had a singer sewing machine with an electric motor fitted to it by the previous owner. It was a second-hand machine and. I took charge of the maintenance, lubrication or odd repair job. I learned about the sewing machine.

Graham Shirley

Now, what was the suburb you were living in? You mentioned Randwick Boys High.

George Winston

Yes, we started off in Randwick. From there, we moved - moved to Maroubra Beach, to a recently built block of flats. You had to pay key money because of the scarcity of accommodation. The incoming tenant had to pay key money to the outgoing tenant. It was illegal, but everybody did it. You couldn't find a place to live without paying key money.

Graham Shirley

So, what exactly was key money?

George Winston

Key money was – Uh. I don't know with the fine, but also payment made by the incoming tenant to the outgoing tenant. And without paying key money, you wouldn't - you wouldn't get a place to live, to rent a place.

Graham Shirley

Looking now at your schooling at Randwick, how long did it take you to catch up at Randwick Boys High? Because clearly you had a lot of catching up to do.

George Winston

Well, I thought I could speak English because I started learning English, in Palestine, Israel. And I was - For some reason I was always top in English. I had an affinity to the English language, We had a very good teacher primary school in Tel Aviv and in Paris. Well, because of - I had no French - I was not even marked. Except in English, in which I was always top. We had a Turkish English teacher who was educated in the US. He spoke with an American accent, but he was a very, very good teacher. And I knew we were headed for Australia, so I made sure I read English books. I remember reading Edgar Allan Poe among - and The Saint. There were a lot of whole series of books about The Saint who was some kind of adventurous detective. I can't even remember exactly but he was a hero. So, by the time we actually got to Australia and the ship docked in Melbourne, I was listening to people shouting on the wharf. And I couldn't understand a word because. Of course, they were (laughs) - That they were talking Strine (laughs). But it didn't take me very long. It only took me about three or four months to get comfortable with Strine. The Randwick High School was full of refugees, immigrants, 'reffos'.

Graham Shirley

And was there any kind of disconnect between the average Anglo Australian and people who were refugees, former refugees who came to Australia?

George Winston

It was patchy. There was some. ... Um ... Yes. Australians were wary of newcomers, any sort of newcomers. We were strange, strange beings. At school it was not a problem because there were a lot of us and we, we gave them a good run for their money. (Laughs) We were all very keen to achieve. I was never told by my parents, "See, you've got to study hard, you've got to do your homework". That was understood. Was understood that we become a professional. And most of the Jewish ones anyway became doctors and lawyers. But my folks were happy with me heading for engineering. It was alright.

Graham Shirley

What got you interested in engineering?

George Winston

It's a hard question to answer. I was always fiddling with things, trying to build things. But because of the war I didn't have Lego or these games where you could construct things to improvise.

Graham Shirley

So you say it's a hard question, but can you remember, was there a light bulb moment or was there a gradual realisation that engineering was something that interested you?

George Winston

Well, when I was very young, I didn't really understand engineering, but I knew I wanted to create things. ... Ah ... I was given a slide rule. Still, during the war my great uncle worked for a Polish oil company. Believe it or not, there was a small oil field in Poland, and he was employed there. And I've kept that slide rule for many years. It was hard as a child. It was not hard. It was ... Yeah, I'm struggling now to try and crystallise the explanation of what drew me to engineering. But it was with me very early in my life.

Graham Shirley

To actually construct things?

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

To make sure that they were built correctly, etcetera, etcetera.

George Winston

Yes. Just putting things together.

Graham Shirley

Yes.

George Winston

Had it not been for the war, I would have had all the resources that kids normally have. Which was a box of – I forget what these things were called.

Graham Shirley

Meccano Sets?

George Winston

Metal Meccano Sets – Yes, Meccano - That's exactly right. The war - with the war - completely prevented that.

Graham Shirley

What is your favourite subject at school?

George Winston

Mathematics. Physics. Languages. My language is only because I acquired, enroute, the basics of maths and physics. We also had a brilliant chemistry teacher in Randwick High School, and he was a war veteran. That people who've been in the war were allowed to become teachers – were supported. And this guy had a wooden leg. But he was so brilliant that we all became passionate about chemistry, of all things. And so, when I graduated, very soon after I graduated, I worked in the chemical industry. But that was something that was a coincidence, but I enjoyed - Unlike the other engineering students, I enjoyed chemistry.

Graham Shirley

Tell me about Sydney University at that time.

George Winston

Sydney University was a traditional, very old fashioned, traditional place. It didn't – I felt it didn't create practical engineers. It was a bit heavy on theory and light on practice. We had early machines, huge compressors and engines. I remember one in particular, a single cylinder. It was a single cylinder, and I think it was a gas engine with a fly wheel - Would not have fitted into this room. It was - Some amazing things, and the electrical laboratory (laughs) would not be allowed today. There was a bench with ... I'm struggling now. ... What it was - Made of - Made some kind of insulating material. And we would stand on that and attach clamps to wires, 415 volts wires uninsulated. (Laughs) Would not be allowed today. It was very dangerous and I remember getting a shock from that quite a few times.

Graham Shirley

Good grief! Your heart must have been racing anyway, I mean -

George Winston

It was, it was. It was hair-raising. Yeah, it was. It would have been totally illegal today.

Graham Shirley

So, let me say that the teaching was heavy on theory - What was lacking do you think?

George Winston

Well, I'll give you one good example. We had a subject called descriptive geometry, which was - Practically all the boys - we didn't have any girls in class at all - but all the boys had done tech drawing at school except me. So, I was confronted with a drawing

board and a sheet of paper – and – But I just didn't know what to do. We were doing projections. The words fail me now. It was this elevation, plan elevation, side elevation with three points in space. Not an object - Three points in space. I was lost, completely lost and I thought the other boys, they just got stuck into it. A because they of their previous experience with tech drawing, they didn't have any trouble. I thought, “I'm not going to let this beat me”. I got my own drawing board at home and a T-square, and every Sunday I worked on descriptive geometry. And I finish up - finished up with a credit. Not a distinction, but a credit. “Yes, I've beaten this.” And it stood me in good stead because I learned to visualise things in three dimensions.

Graham Shirley

Good on you.

George Winston

Yes, so that was a major achievement.

Graham Shirley

Tell me about how you got the job at ICI and what your first responsibilities were there.

George Winston

Well, I started off with the Electricity Commission because halfway through the course Electricity Commission head-hunters came and they offered a ... Um ... What's it called? Could it could? Thank you, couldn't she?

Graham Shirley

A cadetship?

George Winston

A cadetship, thank you. A cadetship. So, I accepted the cadetship from the Electricity Commission, which was if I was paid £15 a week for studying. So, I gave my parents 10 pounds. I kept 5 pounds for myself, and I gave them 10 pounds a week. And it was great. I think it was roughly equivalent of what my father was earning as a painter's mate.

Graham Shirley

So initially at the Electricity Commission, what was your job?

George Winston

Oh. I had my first job - was in the meters and test laboratory in Chatswood, where we worked on our meters and standard transformer - voltage transformers and current transformers. This was physically heavy equipment, and part of the job was to visit new turbo alternators. We did efficiency checks. So, there's the mechanical team that measures the input - excuse me, the steam energy input. And our job was to measure

the electrical output. And I'm using the word 'our' because I had a mate from whom I learned and he was a technician and he was a Latvian. A very big, strong man and he lugged the very heavy transformers into a Ford panel van - big Ford panel van - and charge off to Tallawarra and Wallerawang and Lake Macquarie, where three big recent power stations were being built. We did the efficiency testing.

Graham Shirley

I think the main power station at that time in Sydney was Bunnerong, wasn't it?

George Winston

Bunnerong was one of the first - one of the early ones. It was still running but it was closed down soon afterwards.

Bill Phippen

Bunnerong was built by the City Council.

George Winston

City Council, yes.

Bill Phippen

Before it was the Electricity Commission.

George Winston

That's correct. This was Ultimo. Ultimo was railways.

Bill Phippen

Ultimo and White Bay the balance -

George Winston

There were such - Ultimo and White Bay the balance.

Bill Phippen

They merged to form the Electricity Commission.

George Winston

But that was part of the of the job - Was there was this efficiency testing of turbo alternators, which having were being commissioned.

Graham Shirley

And were you travelling out of Sydney as well?

George Winston

Well, there's three locations - South was Tallawarra, near Wollongong,, Wallerawang, through the mountain and Lake Macquarie.

Graham Shirley

George, we were - You mentioned a few minutes ago about the scarcity of women on campus will certainly be - You know, an area like engineering. Tell me about the how often women were working in professional jobs. You've just been mentioning to Bill -

George Winston

There were no girls in my year, except that I do remember a girl called Janet and I've forgotten her surname, but she was in civil engineering, and I believe her father was an engineer. But she was on site - rubber boots and all. And I thought (laughs) she was very courageous.

Graham Shirley

How long did you stay with the Electricity Commission?

George Winston

Oh, not very long because I found the place from - from the laboratory at Chatswood, which was reasonably interesting because I was a cadet, they transferred me to the Construction - Power Station Construction - department, which was worked out of long temporary huts in East Sydney. Where was it exactly? I can't remember, but it was, it was not far from where the police headquarters are now. And that was a terrible job because it was a job, but it was like something out Kafka in the sense that the - We were supposed to be writing specifications for new plant. And whenever I wrote something, my boss would take it and rewrite it. Was soul destroying. I thought, "I have to get out of this. It's my - My life is being wasted here". So that's when I took -

Graham Shirley

Yeah. So, you've described this Kafkaesque environment at the Electricity Commission. How did you get the job at ICI?

George Winston

The man ...

Graham Shirley

Well, let's put. It another way, what are your earliest memories of your work at ICI?

George Winston

I can't remember how I got the job. I suppose someone seen it advertised, but I really don't know. But the job I got at ICI was an assistant engineer to the site electrical

engineer. And there was a man called Don Pike. I still remember him. And this man – He was a very capable and unpleasant man, but he was quite unusual. He knew where the underground cables are, and he knew a lot. A lot of the circuitry was in his head. And I tried to emulate him, but I couldn't do that. I didn't have that sort of mind.

Graham Shirley

When you say the underground cables, are you referring to the ICI plant at Matraville?

George Winston

Yes, yes, there were five factories on the one site. And ... Yes.

Graham Shirley

What did these? ... Could you recall what those five factories specialised in?

George Winston

There was inorganic, organic, plastics, polyethylene. There was one more and I can't remember what this one was. Said there were different areas. But the site electrical engineer was responsible for twelve substations. And also, for the - the inorganic section. The inorganic section consisted of chlorine production. So, salt arrived by the shipload from South Australia, and it's deposited on a big concrete pad. And a front-end loader used to push it along down the chute. And from there it went by conveyors into a big tank, where it dissolved in water to give a salt solution. The salt solution was then electrolysed to produce chlorine, caustic soda and hydrogen.

And the - So there was a vast array of cells which created these - It electrolysed the brine. So electric current was passed through graphite anodes into the brine, and then into products of electrolysis. With those three things, the chlorine gas collected in the space above the anodes. A stream of mercury was under that and the - The sodium formed an amalgam with the mercury, and the mercury flowed in another space underneath and then into water. And the - the sodium reacted with water to create hydrogen and caustic soda. And you know, the chemistry was, you know - I was happy with the chemistry because of my experience in high school. And electrical engineers hated chemistry.

Graham Shirley

So you were - You were a rare combination, in other words.

George Winston

I was a bit unusual in that sense, that I was very comfortable with chemistry. But there were a lot of a lot of different plants there. Some are very dangerous.

Graham Shirley

Dangerous in what sense?

George Winston

Uh well, the caustic soda processing plant was very dangerous, and people had to wear protective clothing and goggles and helmets. And it was a substance that you wouldn't want to really be in contact with.

Graham Shirley

What was your day-to-day role? I mean, could you just sort of walk me through what you did on a day-to-day basis at ICI at that stage?

George Winston

I had a team of electricians. The electricians – I was responsible for their work. They were repairing switch gear, repairing, replacing things, motors and so on. That was very early. Conversion keys gear consisting of a huge motor and with a DC generator at each end. So, one motor in the middle driving two generators. And these 1942 vintage, producing 16,000 amps, you know serious power.

Now and again, these things would have to be maintained during the day. It's the turn - It's skim the commutator, using the whole thing as the lathe. So that that turned slowly. And then it would take a layer of the commutator and then clean out the spaces in between the segments. It would virtually create the equivalent to a new machine. And the next generation - generation of - AC to DC converters - was a very weird Swiss machine called the mechanical rectifier. And that consisted of an actual switch which bounced up and down three times a minute. Very complicated controls that were the things that would get me out of bed at two o'clock in the morning if it stopped. Every time that these machines stopped cost a lot of money, thousands of dollars an hour. So, I used to get a phone call in the middle of the night. And they'd say, "Come and fix it".

Graham Shirley

Would you be able to fix it by yourself? Or did you have to have a team working with you?

George Winston

Usually there'd be an electrician, and electricians would always have to – These were union rules - We were not supposed to work with tools. Engineers are not allowed to pick up a screwdriver. Depending on who was on duty, they'd often look the other way.

Graham Shirley

So, you were there really, at two in the morning or whatever - If you have an emergency like this, you were there to analyse what the problem was, diagnose what the problem was, and then come up with a solution?

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

I presume -

George Winston

Well, yes, yes, fix it as fast as possible.

Graham Shirley

But you were directing the other employees who were there. You didn't, as you even, pick up a screwdriver?

George Winston

I wasn't allowed to. But sometimes I did. But it depends. Who did - I remember working with the union rep, and because it was the middle of the night and he didn't care, we worked together and that was alright. But generally speaking – “Now we need to trace animate”. The mate generally did nothing. (Laughs)

Graham Shirley

And did this? - Did this continue on throughout your career? I mean, obviously you picked up various skills along the way. You know, that practical, you know, skills with your hands to work on things and repair and so forth. But what you're describing to me in that situation is very much purely of your mind. I mean, you have to come up with an idea to fix something and then you would direct other people to do it.

George Winston

Yes. It was a many-sided job because as well as this sort of detailed job that I described - full filing and repairs - we had twelve substations. So, there was some high voltage work as well. And this is potentially very, very dangerous. But we had procedures to make sure it was properly isolated and made safe before anybody could touch it.

Graham Shirley

You've described to me what you were doing day by day at that - at that early stage. Did that change? Did that evolve into anything else in that first period that you were working for ICI? Or was it the same routine day after day?

George Winston

It was more or less routine. But it didn't - It didn't last all that long because ICI had the practice of putting people into areas that I had no experience of. You sink or swim. So all of a sudden, I was now put in in charge of a chemical plant. And see how I had - I was not a chemical engineer. But they had some very weird equipment. Our chlorine compressor is an example. You can't - You can't lubricate it. It normally compresses oil to lubricate it. Now, if you put oil near chlorine, it produces a gunk. It immediately breaks the machine this – This, compressors were lubricated with. Carbon rings, because carbon is a low friction material, carbon on steel.

But I had two full men working for me who were very experienced. Without them I would have sunk. I was just - You know, that I had special knowledge, long experience of this very unusual equipment. So - But I was only put in that position for about a year or two. And then, ICI Management decided they're going to extend - that we're going to build a new chlorine plant to supplement the existing one. And this was serious business and I was put in charge of design. I've never done any design in my life. Plant design. So that that was a big challenge.

Graham Shirley

And so, they were giving you these jobs that you weren't initially suited for. Did they give you any training, any support, as you then fulfilled their expectations?

George Winston

No. Sink or swim was the training. You wouldn't believe this, but that's how it was.

Graham Shirley

It is difficult to believe actually, because it seems, well for a start, inefficient.

George Winston

Inefficient, correct. The thing is that you know these things were not traditionally designed in the UK. But that's it. "Now we're going to do it here." And they've never done it before. So, there was really no one there with previous experience of designing a chlorine plant.

Graham Shirley

Did you ever find out why they were moving staff into areas which initially they were -

George Winston

No, no, It was - just seemed to be normal practice in ICI. And I remember thinking, "I don't - What am I going to do? I've never done any design in my life." And. Uh ... They were very demanding. that things got done in time. There was a heavy boss in charge, project manager. And I remember driving to work every day with a knot in my stomach. Then I thought, "This is not - I don't like this. It's unhealthy. I've gotta get it out."

And at that time the company initiated a process of - What was it called? How to get things done? So, they selected the group of engineers, mainly engineers and plant managers, and put us together in a lecture room. And it was an American system. So, it was based on the concept of a goal that you want to achieve. And I remember one of the goals was, "How to get the boss' job". Or, you know. "How to get a new house". Whatever. And there was a fine English engineer who very ostentatiously walked out, just walked out. Couldn't - Didn't like the philosophy of it. I didn't like it either. But I thought, "I'm going to use this, and I'm going to use it to go overseas and work somewhere else".

Graham Shirley

Could you be more specific in what in what way could you use it?

George Winston

Well, the technique is you break down the process into small elements, and you do each element. And eventually you've got the goal. So, I worked out what I'm going to do - obviously find a job. I had two young daughters at that time, young children. And "Get a job over there". "Get the money together" for, you know. Or "Get the house let". All those elements that just affect each one. And I went to London for two years.

Graham Shirley

But before - Before we look at the at the London section of your life, tell me how you met Tamara.

George Winston

Yes. Oh, just before I do that, I applied to the company for leave of absence. I said, "I want to go for two years right now. I'll be back. Will I still have a job?" And they said, "No". I said, "Too bad".

Now yes, Tamara. I met Tamara through another couple, a Jewish couple. Very close friends, Walter and Clara, and they were looking to buy a house in the western suburbs of Sydney. Touring around looking at housing. And so, the woman said, "Oh, there's a there's a guy called George who's coming along too. And she said, "Oh". Said, "Oh, alright". And she said, "Oh, you don't have to marry the guy". Anyway, we clicked and she was studying also, at the University of Sydney. She was doing physiotherapy. And we used to meet at the grounds for lunch. And the chemistry seemed to be alright so. That's how it happened.

Graham Shirley

And when you married, where were you living?

George Winston

Where was that?

Graham Shirley

OK, so - I'm just wondering where you and Tamara lived. You know, when you were -

George Winston

I went straight from my parental home into a marriage which was not a good thing in retrospect.

Graham Shirley

What would have been better?

George Winston

If I'd lived on my own for a while and got my feet as an adult.

Graham Shirley

So, tell me about your daughters. They were both daughters for you and Tamara, at different times.

George Winston

Yes, yes, yes. Well, we for some reason or other we had a fairly traditional Jewish wedding. Based on the Temple Emmanuel, I don't know why because neither of us was religious at all. And our parents were not either.

Graham Shirley

Do you think there was some sort of community expectation that that was what you needed?

George Winston

I guess so, yeah.

Graham Shirley

Alright, so just moving back to your departure for London, did you tee up any work before you went over there?

George Winston

I did tee up work with a company called Humphreys in Glasgow. Unfortunately, they didn't have any major project at the time. So, I picked up bits and pieces, did some fairly - It was frustrating. There was not a good project for me to get stuck into. I thought, "This is not good, I'm just wasting my time". I saw a job advertised with ... No, I've got to think of the company name. No, it's just an American company. Oh dear, I never thought I'd forget that.

(Brief pause)

Graham Shirley

George, you were trying to recall the name of the company. What? What is the name of the company?

George Winston

Bechtel International. They were - They had a branch headquarters in London. And I spotted that job. I went in and they liked me. And one reason they liked me was because of my languages. They were building an oil refinery in Ghent in Belgium. So, an electrical engineer who could speak English, French, reasonable German was just exactly right. My new boss - he was chief electrical engineer, said, "You got a passport?" I said, "Yes, got a passport". "Right", he said, "you're going to Germany. Bring your passport in and organise that."

So I kept on travelling. It was a wonderful job. Because I was put in charge of procurement of major electrical equipment - high voltage switch gear level, the switch gear. Big electric motors. And it was it was great and it was superbly organised, unlike ICI. Here were feeling our way. They had people there with experience and there was a filing cabinet which was 'oil refinery'. They had just built one in Wales. So, the one in Belgium was going to be very similar. Metric of course, but I thought it was very similar.

So, you pull out from file sent out. Ring up, ring up the mechanical guys, in charge of major equipment instead of - You've got a - I would say, "Have you got a list of fence and pumps and et cetera?". "Oh, yes, come and get it". It was a magic garden. "Get that thing", and I'd specify all the electrical in accordance with what was. We knew what was coming. And I made some very interesting trips, trips to the continent. And the English engineers didn't want to go. They didn't speak the language, they didn't like the food.

Graham Shirley

And you embraced it?

George Winston

I embraced it. I still had my old French schoolmate in Paris. And I used to try and organise to have a weekend in Paris. It's wonderful.

Graham Shirley

Did the family travel with you at all?

George Winston

No. No. Strictly on the job. Early morning flight across, late night return.

Graham Shirley

Oh I see. So, they were - They were largely day trips.

George Winston

There were either day trips, but not always. Sometimes I - Well, I could, if I went on Friday, I could make it Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

Graham Shirley

Yes.

George Winston

Have a two-day holiday.

Graham Shirley

Good planning. And sounds like a dream job. I mean, how long were you working for them for?

George Winston

A year. I would have liked to - Well, we both seriously considered staying in England for good. But my mother-in-law, Tammy's mother, got cancer. And we came back, because she was in danger. So, we came back. It was the beginning of 1968. And she died towards the end of that year.

Graham Shirley

And I imagine that that had quite an impact on Tammy.

George Winston

Hmm, it was. Huge.

Graham Shirley

So, when you came back to Australia, did you - Was ICI the first port of call, or did you obtain -

George Winston

No, I felt that I no longer wanted to be a small cog in a big machine. So, I thought of freelance for a while. So, I worked as a freelance engineer. In the beginning I worked on the aluminium smelter in Newcastle. It was the - How can I think? - Alcan - The Alcan smelter. And I took a job as a draughtsman initially. But I was not - I was a lousy draughtsman. I was quite an advocate and good engineer but not good as a draughtsman.

I was, um ... Yeah, I came back to ICI as a freelance. So, they were paying me well, as a contractor. It was the golden trap because I was being well paid. I could take a holiday anytime - unpaid, of course. And I was given jobs that other people didn't want to do. So that's why it was a trap. Minor projects that people didn't want to be bothered with. One good job was replacing a very complicated Swiss mechanical rectifier with a solid-state system. I enjoyed that. It was quite a challenge, but generally speaking it was rubbish work.

Graham Shirley

Was this still based at Matraville?

George Winston

This is based at Matraville.

Graham Shirley

So how long did you stay there for?

George Winston

Two or three years.

Graham Shirley

And what caused you to leave there and move to the next job?

George Winston

Well, I was coming back from London after - Engineering should be helping people somehow. So, I've got the idea of maybe people with disabilities could be helped - while being a freelance - and you know earning their income. I was looking for opportunities of doing that. And I had contact with a number of organisations. Like the Australian Quadriplegic Association and Crippled Children's Society and so on.

How clear was the idea to begin with?

George Winston

It was not clear. It was just that kind of idealistic concept. And I was, uh, just doing a search. To see if there's an opportunity of doing that.

Graham Shirley

When you say you contacted the Crippled Children's Society and so on and so forth, what was the nature of your interaction? Was it a fact-finding mission in every case?

George Winston

Well, it was trying to find opportunities to get my engineering experience put to good use. It took me two years to find my first client. Which - Bill will remember Mary Case.

Bill Phippen

Mary Case.

George Winston

Mary Case was was crucial because she was a post-polio, a person who had polio, and she was severely handicapped. And she had a bed which you could pull into a sitting position, and her mother used to do that. Now, her mother was not very strong person. So, I thought I could probably fix that. I was still in ICI - a contractor. So, I went to - I went to see the Master of Apprentices. They had a very good apprentice centre. And I can't remember where the actual bed came from. Who provided that? It was a bed that you could pull it, pull it into a sitting position. And I went to the Salvation Army Depot at Tempe, and I bought a washing machine motor gearbox. And we've got the apprentices at ICI to do the mechanical work. I designed the electrical work and the push button control so that Mary was in charge of her own positioning.

Graham Shirley

And this was all based on volunteering. I presume it was it was entirely voluntary?

George Winston

Yes, yes. Well, I didn't get paid for that job, obviously. And then - But Mary was very happy to be in control and liberate her mother from that physically difficult job. And she actually managed to get a job in Canberra as the librarian.

Bill Phippen

At the National Library.

George Winston

National Library. And this is where Bill was got involved because he had a truck, a little truck. And we loaded up to bed on the truck. And we took Mary to Canberra, I think in my car, I can't remember. Anyway, we transported -

Bill Phippen

I know I made her a desk at the same time.

George Winston

A desk. Yes, a desk and a -

Bill Phippen

A desk and a bookcase.

Graham Shirley

A desk for her work at the National Library?

Bill Phippen

No, a desk at home. She could get her wheelchair under – That's the one that had legs. And so that's how I met George.

George Winston

Yes, yes.

Graham Shirley

George, before we move too far into the TAD story, there was a period of time in which you worked for the Royal Australian Navy as well.

George Winston

Yes. That's right. Well, ICI got rid of all contractors. I was the second last to go. And I remember coming - And I was suddenly unemployed, which was a new experience for me, and a very disturbing one. Anyway, I remember coming home to Tammy and saying,

“I found a job”. And she looked at me and she said, “The Navy”. (Laughs) It was quite strange. (Laughs) So I worked there for four months. It was very difficult because it was a place where nobody seemed to do anything useful. Was shocking. People did foreign orders. There was a drawing office with three draughtsmen. One was studying the horses, one studying the stock market and the third one was doing this engineering degree, all in working hours. It was horrible. I couldn't stand it and I lasted four months. And then - What happened then? Sorry. Oh yes, that's when we had that meeting? - That became TAD.

Graham Shirley

George, I believe you. You wrote a crucial letter.

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

In 1973.

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

What did that consist of?

George Winston

It was canvassing for help to engineering - engineers to get involved in helping people with disabilities. And I think about five engineers responded in Sydney. And a couple in Melbourne and I think one in Brisbane, I can't remember exactly.

Bill Phippen

The agreed number is usually quoted as eight, which is what you've just said.

George Winston

Yes, eight in total. I used to - I used to have a copy of that, but it went – It - So that was the start.

Graham Shirley

Yeah, the letter. The letter began: "There is scope for socially useful contribution by engineers in the design and construction of equipment for the severely disabled". And I believe that letter was published in June 1973. So, what was the result of the letter?

George Winston

Well, I was originally going to put an advertisement in Engineers Australia newsletter. And I went to see the secretary, and he happened to be an old lecturer of mine from the University of Sydney. And he said, "That's very expensive. I'll tell you what to do. Write a letter to the editor." So that was the result.

Graham Shirley

And the letter to the editor then led to what?

George Winston

Eight engineers.

Graham Shirley

Engineers -

George Winston

- Contacting me, yes.

Graham Shirley

It introduced. - And how did you harness the experience and skills of those eight engineers?

George Winston

Well, I had the list of their experience - skills and experience. And then, as projects came in, I would try and match the problem to the volunteer skills. Now, in the beginning, that was almost trivial, because the numbers were so small. But uh - To backtrack it a little bit, you see. Somebody from one of those organisations who said: "You've got to formalise this. Form a committee, apply for funds. Make it a proper organisation."

But it was Ron King. Ron King was an engineer who was had had polio. He was almost totally paralysed and what he did with a mouth stick - And with a mouth stick, he could turn the pages off a newspaper and do many things. His mouth stick was tipped with a dentist drill. He was a - But more importantly, he was in encyclopedia of solutions. So, in the beginning of TAD, I would visit clients and ring. If I couldn't produce a solution, would ring Ron. And he'd always have some kind of solution in his mind.

NOTE: I ALSO SUGGEST THAT THE ABOVEMENTIONED FIRST INSTANCE OF THE RON KING STORY BE COMBINED WITH THE SECOND INSTANCE, WHICH OCCURS BETWEEN 01:10:01 AND 02:14:55. (SEE P. 45, THIS DOCUMENT.)

SESSION 2 – 5 JUNE 2026

Graham Shirley

This is Session 2 of an oral history with George Winston. It is being recorded at Springwood, NSW on the 5th of June 2026 for the Engineering Heritage Australia Oral History Program. The interviewers are Graham Shirley and Bill Phippen.

OK. Yes, George, we spoke about Mary Case at the end of last session. There was another person who needed a technical aid, and that was Janet Hill. What do you recall of her?

George Winston

Janet Hill's disability was that she was rigid. She couldn't bend her body from the hips, or the knees for that matter. And a big problem was that she was living in a hostel for people with disabilities and she could not get in and out of bed without help from another person. So, that restricted her bedtime. She had to go to bed too early and get up late to fit in with nurses' shifts. So, a TAD volunteer made a bracket hinged to the wall. It was a piece of plumber's pipe bent roughly in a U shape. With two brackets bolted to the wall and stops so that - It had a loop at the top. So, using a stick with a hook on the end, she could pull that down to a nearly horizontal position. And then, with her elbows on the, on the pipe, she would wriggle around and gradually get into bed and then use the stick to push the pipe up and put up again. So, it was counterweighted so it could stay vertical or horizontal. Now once she had it vertical against the wall, she could then wriggle around and she'd be in bed. So, it was in her – under her control. And the big thing was that she could get into bed whenever she wanted. She wasn't dependent on another person. Very simple device.

Graham Shirley

It must have made a lot of difference to her life at that point in time.

George Winston

Yes, yes. I like that example because it was a very good instance of a simple device which made a big difference.

Graham Shirley

Then there was a woman called Wendy Stewart. And she apparently needed iron lung for sleeping. Can you tell me a bit about Wendy Stuart?

George Winston

I don't remember that. I'm sorry.

Graham Shirley

Apparently, she was the director of the Australian Quadriplegic Association and she needed an iron lung for sleeping at night. And there was a man called Robert Byron and another man called Mike Stephenson, who designed a superior iron lung. Do you have any memories of that?

George Winston

I think all I remember is Mike Stevens, who I think he was associate professor of an engineering. But I'm sorry, I just don't have a good enough memory to talk about that project.

Graham Shirley

That's fair enough. You've already got fantastic memories. Bill, you wanted to add something?

Bill Phippen

Well, my knowledge of that project is that it was made of aluminium by someone who worked for Qantas and the great advantage of it was that it was light. And it was also broken into components, so the lung, the pump, the motor and so on could be transported. It could be broken up into carryable pieces and carried in a station wagon, and that meant that Wendy could go away. Because she had to sleep in her own lung because she - I mean, she was breathing consciously. Had to, and so she couldn't breathe in her sleep. Though the aluminium lung she could be taken away. And she could have a day out or a, you know, a week out or go on holidays. - That was the real step forward.

Graham Shirley

Clearly another life-changing device.

Bill Phippen

Yeah.

Graham Shirley

OK. George, regarding the devices that were being invented for what became TAD, you couldn't do everything yourself in terms of it coming up with engineering solutions. What were your strengths and weaknesses when it came to what - the kinds of projects you're able to help with your knowledge?

George Winston

Basically, I was not the man who made the devices. My role was that of a coordinator. My main role was matching the need to volunteer capabilities. And as it collected more members, more technical volunteers, that became easier. Because obviously we had a bigger spread of talents, workshops, specialties.

Graham Shirley

And just moving now to the eight engineers that we mentioned at the end of the previous session -

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

Can you remember the first meeting involving those engineers?

George Winston

The eight didn't meet initially because we were in different states. The New South Wales group, from memory, consisted of five, the initial group.

Graham Shirley

And then the other, the other three were from other states?

George Winston

Well, we had nothing. We had two in Victoria, one in Queensland.

Graham Shirley

So, the first time - Would it have been after the incorporation of TAD that you started to have meetings on a regular basis?

George Winston

Now, the incorporation was in the New South Wales group. The national group was only - Initially, certainly it was an informal grouping. The chronology is difficult for me now.

Graham Shirley

Yeah. Bill has some input here, so I'll just - Yeah.

Bill Phippen

I believe that the first formal meeting was in March of 1976, when a general meeting was called at Engineers Australia. And a meeting with, you know, minutes and elections and so on. So that was an unincorporated association.

George Winston

Well, we had monthly meetings locally of the Sydney group, of the New South Wales group, which was basically a Sydney group. And with Jim Dodds as chairman, who was a high-level quadriplegic himself, we used to meet in his room in a nursing home.

Graham Shirley

And did that continue for as long as Jim was involved in the meetings?

George Winston

Yeah, it continued, and continued afterwards. And where a chairman was not a disabled person, we could meet in the TAD office.

Graham Shirley

And which what was the first of the TAD officers in New South Wales?

George Winston

Yes, our first office was at the Civilian Maimed and Limbless Association – CMLA - in St. Peters in Sydney. Was a one-room office.

Graham Shirley

And what were some of the subsequent offices that that followed?

George Winston

Gosh, where did we go from there?

Bill Phippen

After that, I think we went to Coorabel.

George Winston

We went to Coorabel, yes.

Bill Phippen

Right. In the Nurses' Home.

George Winston

Yes. We got a room in what used to be a nurse's home in the Royal Ryde Rehabilitation Centre. The Royal Ryde Rehabilitation Centre had had a large nurses' home, which became obsolete because then the nurses were already living in the community.

I met the medical director of Royal Ryde who got himself very interested in TAD. And he organised for us to use one room in those premises. And then I asked, "Could we not have another room?". And we kept on getting another room and another room (laughs) as the organisation grew – grew in the office. The office grew and a number of office volunteers grew. And eventually we got quite a large office on that site, and even a storeroom under the house, under the building. Because people kept giving us equipment that was no longer required and we kept on storing it.

Graham Shirley

It sounds like Royal Ryde was very generous over the years.

George Winston

Yes, they were wonderful. Yeah, very supportive.

Graham Shirley

So, the involvement with Royal Ryde was over multiple years?

George Winston

Oh yes. It was.

Bill Phippen

20 or 25 years, I think.

George Winston

Yeah, I can't remember.

Bill Phippen

We didn't leave there till 2007.

George Winston

Right.

Graham Shirley

OK.

George Winston

2007 - When did I retire?

Graham Shirley

Oh, 1994.

George Winston

That's right – '95.

Graham Shirley

And so that involvement continued up until the time you retired from TAD?

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

Right.

Bill Phippen

But we had moved out of the nurses home. We've moved into Coorabel. Yeah, the bottom floor of Coorabel.

George Winston

Oh yes. There there's, there's. There's some modern building called Coorabel. Allowed to move into more modern premises. It was still rent free.

Graham Shirley

I believe that in the very early days of TAD, you were still working for the Royal Australian Navy?

George Winston

No, no,

Graham Shirley

Oh, you weren't? Right, OK.

George Winston

Definitely not. Only worked for the Navy for four months. It was a great relief to switch to TAD. So – Yeah.

Graham Shirley

And the ability for you to switch to TAD on and earn an income I believe was made possible with a grant from the Whitlam government.

George Winston

It was.

Graham Shirley

Tell me a bit about that grant and what it what it made possible.

George Winston

Well, while we were an informal group, we had been doing projects for people who were members of the Australian Quadriplegic Association. The paraplegic -

Bill Phippen

Paraquad.

George Winston

Paraquad, yes. And the Association of Crippled Children, now called Northcott. And the representatives of these organisations were very impressed with what we were doing. And their advice to us was, "Get yourself organised as a committee and incorporate, and apply for a grant". And quite reluctantly, we did that. Because some members were engineers who were interested in doing projects, not very interested in the clerical, administrative type activities. But we could see the potential benefit of that, so we followed their advice. And we set up a committee. And then incorporate – incorporation - and applied for a grant, through the Southwest Sydney - Southwest Sydney, yes.

Bill Phippen

Quite a long name.

George Winston

Yes.

Bill Phippen

Southwest Regionals -

George Winston

Regional? Regional – Re- something committee.

Graham Shirley

But the main thing is you applied for the grant.

George Winston

We applied for the grant, which the source of it was the federal government. But it came through this local committee. And the reason for being Southwest Sydney is that a very important member who was himself a high-level quadriplegic, lived in Peakhurst. And we - At that time we were meeting in his place. He was our technical advisor. A brilliant man.

Graham Shirley

What was his name?

Ron King is a very important and interesting member. Ron had been an engineer with CSR. And his job was very similar to mine at ICI. And he got polio. Very high-level polio. And he was - He was in an iron lung at Prince Henry Hospital. One day he said to the doctor, "When am I going home?" And the doctor said, "Mate, you're not going home. There's no way you can go." This was the - the huge challenge to Ron. So, he got his technical friends to invent and build several systems Ron was dependent on. A respirator his friends constructed from a clean air source of special compressor which was put under the house supplying air for his breathing. He also had systems for doing other things, such as operating a telephone. And he could only turn his head and do things with a mouth stick. He had a long mouth stick with a dentist spur on the end which enabled him to turn the pages of a newspaper. Or even a book. And the pages of the book were held back in with a rubber band, which I think was the sort of band that women used to hold their hair back. He was very inventive. So, he went home. His wife was very, very hard working and caring and resourceful. But he was able to do a little bit of paid work. And he was scanning the newspaper for the changes in roads and reporting them to the street directory people.

Graham Shirley

So if there's been a road that had been changed in some way and it had been reported in the newspaper, he would get onto -

George Winston

Pick that up. The Gregory's directory. He also had a little job from (a) model aeroplane club. It was also a clerical job. So he was earning a little bit of money by these means. He was very, very impressive. The telephone he operated, it was the old rotary dial, and he designed a system where a spring-loaded plastic finger dropped into the holes, the dialling holes. And Ron would count the clicks as the finger dropped into one hole after another. He would count the clicks and release and dial that way. And he controlled all that with a system where he could blow and suck on a pressure switch. And the pressure switch could detect three levels of pressure and three levels of suction. He was very, very skilled at controlling that.

Graham Shirley

What a – What a remarkable man with a remarkable brain.

George Winston

Yes, superb. Very, very unusual. I think of Ron now as having had a brain, which was a combination of a computer and information storing.

Graham Shirley

The sort of person that you wish you would live forever. Or at least their brain could and be tapped.

George Winston

Yes. Well, initially I was coordinator for the projects. And I used to drive all over Sydney visiting clients. And if I couldn't visualise the solution, I would phone Ron and consult him. He would almost invariable - Sorry, almost invariably have a solution. From his data bank.

Graham Shirley

Tell me about the steps that were required for a client between their making a request and the delivering and testing of their equipment. What were the individual steps?

George Winston

In those initial days, when we - I was the only one in the office. There was a woman called Beryl Benson who lived in the Brookvale area, and she herself had some kind of disability, but she was our telephonist. And people were directed to her and they would phone Beryl. She would collect messages, and I then I would follow up. Once a day I collected messages. Visited the clients. Made an assessment of the client's need and see if we had the capability of helping. Then allocate the job to a volunteer or offer the job to a volunteer. And the volunteer would go and visit the client. And negotiate a solution.

Graham Shirley

And was the design and quoting factor included in the -

George Winston

There was no quoting, we didn't charge. The designs were up to volunteer, but if the volunteer didn't have a solution - It depends because our system developed. So, after two years, we employed our first occupational therapist, called Nancy

Bill Phippen

Efraemson?

George Winston

And she took over the job of visiting the clients. And she also became very familiar with the volunteers. She was very popular with the volunteers because she would visit each volunteer, learn about what they could do, ask them questions about their workshops and their methods, and so on. And they just loved it because she was very, very pleasant person. But it was very important. And as we developed further, we eventually employed a coordinating engineer. But I can't remember when that happened. And that was a big step forward because that engineer could then concentrate strictly on technical work and developing solutions. I think Alan Avery was the first, coordinating engineer. He was a brilliant man. He could work in in metal, wood, electronics. Almost anything. Multi skilled. Wonderful.

Graham Shirley

And was he on staff in terms of a wage capacity or was he a volunteer?

George Winston

He was on staff. But I can't remember when that happened. That there was a big transition because I could then concentrate on administration and fundraising. Fundraising was a very big challenge, which nobody wanted to do. And it gradually - not gradually - It suddenly became my responsibility. And halfway through our first year, which was funded by the Federal grant under Whitlam, I realised that we've got a big problem. And what was going to happen in the second year? And we had a committee composed of engineers, occupational therapists, people with disabilities. Nobody was interested in money. And I thought if we didn't make a serious effort and find a source of money, the whole dream would just collapse. And that it was - I was determined not to allow that to happen.

Graham Shirley

How much of your time at that stage was devoted to fundraising?

George Winston

I couldn't put a percentage of it at the moment, but it became very important. The story of it, that fundraising is quite interesting. Yes.

I had a close friend who was a lecturer in surveying at the University of NSW, called Len Berlin. And I spoke to Len about this problem. And Len had an office in the basement of the university, where he had an early computer, predating the personal computer. And this computer was connected to an electric typewriter with keys. Very unusual. And Len wrote the programme, which now you'd call mail merge, which would combine addresses with a letter text. Somebody helped me to compose an appeal letter asking for support, financial support. We got hold of a copy of 'Who's Who in Business', a very big tome listing all the corporations in Australia. We chose big companies, at the national - Sydney - based. We used to go every Sunday and type in the addresses to the managing director or the general manager and generate the same appeal letter with the different addresses that was the mail merge. And over a period of twelve months, we got enough money to go for a second year. Our first year the budget was \$13,000, of which I got nine thousand as a salary, and I was very happy with that. In the second year. We raised \$15,000, which was enough. Through this mail appeal. And in the third year, we got a state government grant. But we continued the mail appeal for many years.

Graham Shirley

How often was it a mixture in any given year of government funding and private funding?

George Winston

Well, it was always a mixture. I couldn't give you percentages now, but it was - both very important. In 1980 a judge who got very interested in rehabilitation led Minister Margaret Guilfoyle, Federal minister, into an exhibition stall which featured TAD projects. I think that was the Year of the Disabled Person. And Margaret Guilfoyle was very impressed,

and she organised an ongoing a Federal grant for us, from the children's section of the disability support. So that was an ongoing federal grant, which went on for many years.

Graham Shirley

I think ultimately it moved from the children's section to another form of government funded federal government funding. Is that correct?

George Winston

I don't recall that happening. I think, as far as I can remember, it remained in the children's section. I do remember going to Canberra regularly to go and report to one of. Margaret Guilfoyle's staff.

Graham Shirley

But it sounds like your fundraising activity was very effective over the years.

George Winston

It was very effective and very important. So, I saw myself as probably about 60% fundraiser and 40% CEO.

Graham Shirley

But through that fundraising, you would also have been, of course, promoting TAD and making -

George Winston

Oh yes.

Graham Shirley

I mean, many more people would -

George Winston

The two things overlapped, certainly. I did quite a bit of public speaking. Initially I was a hopeless public speaker, very nervous and pathetic. But I did a public speaking course, and, with time, I became much more skilled.

Graham Shirley

Were you having much media coverage?

George Winston

No, I wouldn't say that. In small ways, yes. Sometimes featuring a project, but not really.

Graham Shirley

I'm just thinking for, you know, TV news or magazine programmes, for instance - That what you were doing would seem to be a natural - In the public interest.

George Winston

We did get some. I kept the file of clippings. I think it became - We became more known when I was - I was nominated for the BHP Pursuit of Excellence Award, which was a big national shindig supported by BHP. And it took place twice, in 1984 when I was a runner-up and 1985 when I was a winner. In 1985 I got the Order of Australia - AM - for my work.

Graham Shirley

And that in itself would have would have also lifted the profile of TAD.

George Winston

Yes, yes, yes, it was very helpful.

Graham Shirley

All right. Now look, before I mentioned the policy of charging clients. Now, I believe that at one stage there was a change of policy, or maybe it wasn't a change of policy, which meant the clients covering the material costs for the technical aids provided to them.

George Winston

Yes, I can't remember when that happened, but we invited clients to fund materials where possible. But in my tenure there, we never refused a project to a client who couldn't pay. What we did do was to address some local club – organisation - to underwrite the project for a Rotary Club, for example. Would locate the Rotary Club in the in the client's area. And we're saying, "This is what we're doing in the area. Will you help us with material costs?" And that usually worked well. And I established a panel of speakers so that I didn't have to do it all myself. So, I always delegated, or I could. That allowed me to carry on until retirement. Otherwise, I would have been burned out.

Graham Shirley

So, you're talking about delegating to other speakers. Is that correct?

George Winston

Yes, yes.

Graham Shirley

Who were some of those other speakers? What fields were they from?

George Winston

Oh. That's a hard one for me to answer now. But I know that the ideal speaker properly

was the engineer who was doing the project, but of course mostly they didn't want speak in public. I think the -

(To **Bill Phippen**) What was the name of the – He was a very, very good - He was a Jewish man.

Bill Phippen

Henry Baddiley?

George Winston

No, it wasn't Henry. Henry was on the committee. But there was some other man. This is just terrible, but I'm really stuck now.

Graham Shirley

That's right. It doesn't matter if you can't remember names. We're mostly talking about events and historical milestones.

George Winston

Yes. We had two brilliant volunteers who could solve just about anything, and one of these was also a willing speaker. So, if he was doing a project, I could rely on him to address some local club and raise money now.

Bill Phippen

Was that Bill Youll?

George Winston

No, it wasn't Bill Youll.

Bill Phippen

I'm searching.

George Winston

I'm sorry. Yeah.

Graham Shirley

That's alright. That's alright. You mentioned technical aids before, regarding telephones. What about page turning? Do you remember any technical aids which helped people turn pages of books, for instance?

George Winston

There was something on the market which I don't remember the details of. It was not very effective. Page turning was a fairly difficult, complex thing to do, I don't think it was any - I don't remember any solution they put with any book, any size book. And lot of books have stiff spines. So technically it was a huge challenge The other huge challenge I remember was travelling on the beach, on the sand.

Graham Shirley

You're talking about a wheelchair or other forms.

George Winston

Yeah. So, we'll check each.

Graham Shirley

Could I just get you to explain what you mean by travelling on the beach?

George Winston

Yes, yes. For a person who's normally a wheelchair user to cross the beach was a very, very - technically - very difficult challenge.

Graham Shirley

So, what was the solution?

George Winston

Well, there were many attempts. One solution was to have the large tyres. They almost deflated - very low pressure. So, they had some chance of travelling along the beach or across the beach. And I don't think we ever managed to develop one that would work on in any conditions because the sand conditions vary enormously. Some beaches are flat and hard, almost like a road surface. Easy. Then you get the ones that are very soft and the sand moves all the time. They're the really hard ones.

Graham Shirley

I'm just thinking the whole thing of a wheel carrying sand up into equipment would be difficult as well and difficult to overcome.

George Winston

Well, that could be, but that wasn't the main problem. The main problem was to get traction without getting bogged.

Graham Shirley

Right. OK.

George Winston

I don't know how much I remember.

Graham Shirley

Tell me what you remember about the blind skiers.

George Winston

There was a system of beeping to tell the blind person. They would ski in pairs. So, there would be an able-bodied skier carrying a beeper. And there'd be a blind skier who could follow the beep.

Bill Phippen

I thought it was actually stations on the on the ski slope. And the National Parks would put it out on request. So, if a blind skier arrived and wanted to ski, well, you could speak to somebody and they put these beacons down the slope and you could ski yourself from beacon to beacon. And successive beacons had a different sound. And so you know, you get to this one and the next one's a buzzer and the next one's a ring or whatever. And also something changed in the in the sounds to tell you the difficulty of the slope - that it was flatter or steeper or whatever.

George Winston

I think that's correct.

Graham Shirley

What about a blind skier navigating around such things as rocks and trees and so forth on a snow field?

George Winston

Well, not every slope was suitable. Obviously, it'd have to be an easier slope. Yes, I was a cross-country skier myself for 40 years, so it really spoke to me as a project.

Graham Shirley

You said it was a huge project. What made it huge?

George Winston

It was very complex because we'd have to get the - somebody on ski fields to cooperate with. Who was that?

Bill Phippen

I thought it was sort of somebody official. Yeah, the National Parks or somebody like that.

George Winston

It was, but I can't remember who it was.

Graham Shirley

George, tell me about a TAD system to get people into swimming pools - into and out of swimming pools.

George Winston

Yes, we took that project on. Under the sponsorship of the Department of Sport and Recreation. And the solution that our coordinating engineer Alan Every developed, which was done with the help of volunteers, was a floating pontoon made of aluminium sheet - So, if you can imagine a box with an open bottom, and we had a small air compressor at poolside which pumped air into this floating box. And a person in the wheelchair could roll from the poolside onto the box. And I seem to remember it had a handrail on part of it, for safety of it. Then opened a valve. Somebody would open a valve, an attendant, I think, and release the air in the 'poolevator' would sink slowly and pull it - It was a plastic wheelchair. It stood up to corrosion. Not a normal - A normal wheelchair would have been hopeless, would just rust away, disintegrate. And so, we did many trials, a lot of development. And we convinced - the pool, it was in a hospital pool. The hospital was Lidcombe Hospital. It actually worked quite well. The disadvantage of it was that installed in a pool, poolevator in a pool, you lose one lane. And mostly, the pool owners didn't want to sacrifice one lane. But apart from that, it seemed to work quite well. There are other ways and I'm sure there are now many pools. I know this. Some pools are built with a ramp. And of course, that ramp is also sacrificed, or part of it.

Bill Phippen

Yeah, I thought one of the interesting parallel devices made out of that same program was an idea of darts for people who couldn't throw darts. And so, the suggestion was made that we could blow them through a pipe. And it worked quite well, until the police came very politely and pointed out that such devices were weapons and illegal. "So please stop making it."

George Winston

I've forgotten that, I think, yes.

Graham Shirley

There was also another device involving a spring-loaded snooker gun. Do you have any recollections of that?

George Winston

No, I don't remember that one.

Bill Phippen

I mean, it's simple enough. It's just a device you could cock and you release the trigger and the snooker cue would jump out the front and propel the balls across the table.

George Winston

Yeah, I have no memory of that one.

Graham Shirley

George, do you have specific recollections of the evolution of typing devices? In other words, typewriter type devices for the disabled over the years in which you're involved in for TAD?

George Winston

I have some recollection of communication aids that - It was the - Communication, the field was very important. And by the first one that I recall is for a woman with a Russian name, who was a quadriplegic and she had no speech. And ... The only way she could - I'm struggling to get her name. I think I'll remember her name. But that won't come. But the only way she could communicate was the person she's communicating with - with some kind of aid - would point to an alphabet board. And she would blink to indicate that the correct letter was selected. So very painstaking, very slow. And it was a committee member, Doctor Vic Ramsden, who had an outstanding brain, specialising in electronics. And he devised a communication device, that lit up one letter at a time and gave her a switch that she could operate with her mouth. And she would stop the cycling when the right letter was reached. So, it was an advance on needing another person, but still very slow and laborious.

Graham Shirley

How often were such device genuine advances? Or alternatively, were they an alternative device for something that was available on the market that was quite expensive.

George Winston

There was nothing at that time that I described with this woman. There was nothing on the market because it predated personal computers and the specialised use of computers. But it was infrequent but desperately needed for people who are commonly referred to as 'locked up syndrome'. Locked in their body with not able to do anything. To me, it's unimaginably horrible.

Graham Shirley

So -

George Winston

But it - The interesting thing was that I got a Churchill Fellowship in 1979. It's quite a chapter, but which I can't talk about. Shall I talk about that?

Graham Shirley

Yes, do talk about it now. I was going to ask about it.

George Winston

The Churchill Fellowship enabled me to go through several countries to look at technology for people with disabilities. And one of these locations was Madison, Wisconsin. They had an establishment with which combined the skills of a technical university and the rehabilitation hospital. They had developed a system where you point your eyes at a grid on spectacles, and that actually activated an early computer which communicated with us -

The very highly disabled person would wear spectacles with an equivalent to a keyboard on the actual spectacle lens by moving their eyes. They could activate it – it was equivalent to poking your keyboard with one finger. And you could then get the system to activate anything that was connected to it.

Graham Shirley

This is quite revolutionary - I mean -

George Winston

It was revolutionary. I believe it's available now commercially, but at that time it was an amazing development. And -

Graham Shirley

And tell me a bit more about the places that you went with the Churchill Fellowship.

George Winston

Well, I went to the US - three places in the US, which were significant. There was California; Madison, Wisconsin; and New York. The US had fifteen rehabilitation engineering centres which they funded with a huge amount of money. And it was only marginally useful to TAD because they concentrated on very expensive high-level systems which were only affordable by people who had Veterans Administration money. I remember there was a robotic arm which cost \$40,000, which - No disabled person could ever afford that, but by funding from the Veterans Administration – it became possible. The person in the street had no access to that sort of money. So, I took that - Part of my mission was to find out who's doing what. You know what? What is available to people with disabilities? In the US. UK. Sweden, and Canada.

Graham Shirley

What sort of ideas did you bring back to Australia as a result of that Churchill fellowship?

George Winston

Well, I learned what's possible with technology. But I also learned that we were doing something unique. Because we're using volunteers to create solutions. And the only other place where that was happening was the UK. And we had - We were unaware of the UK organisation for a long time. And they had a group called Remap, which stands for Rehabilitation Engineering Movement Advisory Panels – (Laughs) - But very, very similar to TAD. And I remember attending their meeting, one their regional meetings, and I might have been in Bathurst or Newcastle, or one of our branch meetings. It was the same volunteer interest and generosity and inventiveness. I found it very satisfying to be able to attend that and learn (about) that sister organisation in the UK.

Graham Shirley

And did you bring back anything, I mean you talked about the aid for typing and communication. Did you bring back specific invention ideas to TAD in Australia?

George Winston

No, no, I didn't. And I was quite disappointed that there were - There were the different levels of funding. And there were things they were doing there which weren't - They're out of reach of the so-called man in the street, in other words. A person with a disability would typically have no money or hardly any money.

But I organised another trip for myself and I think it was a year later. It might have been two years later - which I attracted funding from - I remember getting a free air ticket from Qantas and free accommodation. And I attended a rehabilitation engineering meeting in Houston, Texas. They have one every year. And there I thought I would really learn what is available, what kind of solutions people are finding who are not Veterans Affairs. recipients - funding recipients - And it was very interesting - Was I found that outside of the states that I mentioned - California, mainly California, and New York, there was nothing. There was one man in Houston who was actually driving a converted London taxi. And his friends had converted it so that he could drive into the taxi in his powerful electric wheelchair, and it could then drive a car. It was an amazing project, but he had no help from any government for that. It was all he and his friends.

Graham Shirley

Just remarkable generosity, really.

George Winston

Pardon?

Graham Shirley

Remarkable generosity.

George Winston

Remarkable, remarkable, amazing inventiveness too.

Graham Shirley

So, the point you were making was that when you came back to Australia, you were frustrated by the fact that some of the inventions that you'd seen overseas were economically out of reach for the bulk of the TAD clients.

George Winston

Yes, yes, very much so. That's why I organised the second trip. But I did see some very interesting examples of what can be done. There was this quadriplegic who had been a policeman who was shot in the back. He became a quadriplegic. And he taught himself. He actually did a university course and became a lawyer, an a lecturer and the students used to go to his place. And he would - That was the lecture room. Very impressive. The motivation behind something like that was huge.

There was also a very, very interesting engineer in California who is himself a disabled person. And he has acquired a small truck, a van with the rollover at the back, which he could operate remotely and wheel himself in into the driving seat of this van, and get around. But these were good examples of what could be done by individuals. Now that engineer had developed a wheelchair for the Third World. One bedroom in his house was a workshop and he had a small lathe and a welding machine. And if he - He said, "If I can build this in my bedroom, then it's suitable." So, he developed a wheelchair which was suitable for Third World countries. And it was all based on electricians' conduit and bicycle wheels. Designed so that if the village in the Third World countries - could - They could make their own wheelchairs suitable for their terrain.

Graham Shirley

That's fantastic.

George Winston

It's all very, very impressive and I stayed in touch with him. And one of one of the things he'd developed was a wheelchair that could travel through snow (laughs), which was not our problem here.

Graham Shirley

Not generally.

George Winston

I think his area of operations were poor countries like Guatemala and Central America, where people are very poor. They can't - Areas where a standard wheelchair was

unsuitable. It just corroded and seized up, so a chair made of electricians' conduit was valuable and could - The locals could make them themselves.

Graham Shirley

So, if we're looking at TAD type organisations elsewhere, what other countries of the world have set up TAD type organisations as a result of knowing about TAD Australia?

George Winston

Oh right. Yes. There was one because, as I said, the UK, one pre-existed TAD. But in Vancouver, a group of quadriplegics decided that they need some engineering assistance. So, they commissioned the consulting engineer to do some work for them and it - and it cost a fortune and they realised that's not the solution. And that somebody had picked up one of our magazines, the 'TAD Journal'. And they said, "Ahah, that's what we need here". So, they set up their own organisation was chaired by a quadriplegic. And I'm struggling to remember the name of it. But they were serious about it, and they set up branches in various parts of Canada. And eventually it spread to the US as well. So, I was very thrilled with that, and I used to get their magazine.

Graham Shirley

Now you've mentioned the 'TAD Journal'. How did that begin?

George Winston

Well, it began with the - a free magazine which was funded by advertising. And it was actually a bit of a - Turned out to be a bit of a scam. We had somebody who sold advertising in that and used the money to publish the magazines. And I seem to remember that it was a small source of funds, for TAD as well. But it certainly enabled us to publish. (To **Bill Phippen**) Do you remember that?

Bill Phippen

Yeah, it was - It's one page of advertising and one page of text.

George Winston

Yes, exactly.

Bill Phippen

And you could see that the salesman had sort of travelled to different parts of the state because there be lots and lots of ads from the north or the west or the south, and all the butchers and bakers.

George Winston

And it was a good way at the time to publicise what they were doing.

Graham Shirley

You used the word scam. Could you explain that a bit?

George Winston (To Bill Phippen)

Why was it a scam?

Bill Phippen

I think the issue was the salesman would portray this payment for the advertising as a donation. So, rather than buying advertising at a commercial rate.

George Winston

Yes, I think that's right. Yes.

Bill Phippen

So there's some doubt that the ethics of the advertising.

George Winston

Yes, I was very uncomfortable about that.

Graham Shirley

So how was that problem overcome? ... You were very uncomfortable. So, what happened? What happened as a result of that discomfort?

George Winston

At some stage we switched to a proper monthly magazine.

Graham Shirley

And how -

George Winston

I think it was without advertising. (To **Bill Phippen**) Wasn't it?

Bill Phippen

I think we tried to sell as much advertising as -

George Winston

We could, yes.

Bill Phippen

And we gave ourselves a time limit and the decision was when the due date comes it's published, whether the advertising is sold or not.

George Winston

Yes.

Bill Phippen

Because it was so important in terms of publicity and fundraising.

George Winston

Yes, yes. We very much improved the looks of it. It became far more professional.

Bill Phippen

And for a long time the editor was Bill Youll, who was actually a civil engineer.

George Winston

Yes, that's right. Yes.

Bill Phippen

But a very competent editor and journalist as well.

Graham Shirley

So, leading on from that at, at what point did you or did TAD employ a public relations person? ... You were apparently - In 1978 you were advocating the need for a public relations person. Do you recall that or what the outcome of -

George Winston

I'm very vague about it. Sorry, we had - We had a brilliant young person. She was a nurse from the kids' hospital.

Bill Phippen

Juliana.

George Winston

Juliana. She was a find - became a fundraiser.

Bill Phippen

Juliana.

George Winston

Yes.

Bill Phippen

And she still is. That's her life now. It was a very brave decision we made because we interviewed people for this position of fundraiser. And Juliana was not a fundraiser. She was a nurse, but we loved her enthusiasm and we made the decision and it was a very good decision.

George Winston

Good. Hey, Juliana. Juliana Trifunovic - Trifunovic. We can write that out for you if you want.

Graham Shirley

So that's - She's still in the role?

Bill Phippen

I get email, I'll get messages from her often.

George Winston

But she left TAD. Yeah, yes.

Bill Phippen

Yes, she left TAD. But she made herself a career as a fundraiser.

George Winston

Yeah, as that sort of person. Juliana had been a nurse in the children's hospital. Which was - at that time - was the Princess Alexandra Children's Hospital.

Bill Phippen

Royal Alexandra – At Camperdown.

George Winston

At Camperdown, that's right and she got sick of working there because her patients are dying all the time and she had at that time to attend many funerals, of these lovely kids who died. So, when she saw the advertisement, she jumped at it.

Graham Shirley

Now Bill has passed a note with the name of somebody that's Juliana, Trifunovic is her surname.

George Winston

Yes, that's Juliana.

Graham Shirley

Yep, OK. Alright. Well, we'll just record what that surname is in a moment. Could you actually - Bill, could you tell me the name of Juliana's surname?

Bill Phippen

Trifunovic.

Graham Shirley

Which is which is actually spelled 'TRIFUNOVIC'.

George Winston

Yes, it's one of the – She's from one of the - Or her parents came from one of the Yugoslav Republics - Serbia, I think Serbia. And she was - just seemed to be an absolute 100% much to what we needed.

Graham Shirley

So it sounds like she was very effective.

George Winston

Very effective. Tall, attractive.

Bill Phippen

Relatively young. Relatively young.

George Winston

Relatively young, yes. We interviewed her three times, I remember.

Graham Shirley

George, tell me about the spread of TAD throughout Australia. Not only in New South Wales but in other states.

George Winston

Well, the Victorian – TAD Vic – started simultaneously with the NSW one, because the article in 'Engineers Australia' appeared. Mark Dohrman, who was visited me yesterday, responded to that, started this off - the Victorian group immediately.

Graham Shirley

So that obviously has quite a history unto itself.

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

OK. And do you know much about that history?

George Winston

Well, I certainly know a lot about Mark. Mark's an agronomist, who originally - He was well on the way to be become a Jesuit priest. But at some point, he realised that he wanted to have a family. So, he abandoned his Jesuit studies, didn't finish. And he's been married for all these years, with four children. (Laughs) A big family. But he's not an engineer. He's an agronomist, which was a perfect fit for TAD.

Graham Shirley

So how many other states of Australia now have TAD organisations?

George Winston

Queensland was established sometime later. So that South Australia, Western Australia

Bill Phippen

ACT.

George Winston

ACT. The Tasmanian group didn't survive. Started off but didn't survive. The Northern Territory started but didn't survive.

Graham Shirley

What were the problems with those two? Why didn't they survive?

George Winston

Oh, in Queensland, there was a problem there. The coordinator - There was a problem of dishonesty. The coordinator was a woman who lived on the TAD premises rent free. So, corruption came into the picture there.

Graham Shirley

But that's Queensland. That's not Northern Territory or Tasmania. So that's Queensland. Yeah.

George Winston

That's Queensland.

Graham Shirley

But why - Why didn't Northern Territory or Tasmania survive?

George Winston

I'm not sure, but those – There was a problem of - It takes a lot of energy to co-opt volunteers, find some funding, and many challenges. It's not an easy thing to do. But there were branches in - We had eight branches in New South Wales, of which I believe only one survives. And that's the Newcastle - Newcastle branch.

Graham Shirley

OK. So, we're talking about branches outside of Sydney.

George Winston

Yes.

Bill Phippen

Yes, the survival of these things very much depends on the existence of a character in the state or in the town. Someone who - Someone who's going to drive it and has the ability to drive it and the lives long enough to drive it. And often when that person moves on for whatever reason – the branch collapses.

Bill Phippen

The branch or the state group collapses. but New South Wales - We were fortunate with George for a long time and then other people succeeded him.

George Winston

Yes. Well, our coordinating engineer and client service person used to visit the branches. I also visit their branches and that was really valuable because it injects some energy and appreciation. It was a good network. And almost invariably I stayed with the one of the committee people in each branch overnight if it was a question of distance. We had a branch in Wollongong and that was an easy drive. You didn't have to stay overnight, but some of the other places – Yeah, it was great to attend a meeting and encourage people.

Graham Shirley

Sounds like succession planning is vital, yes.

George Winston

Yes, yes. Because the people wanted to set up a branch, we would support them in various ways.

Graham Shirley

There was - You also had the idea of a national coordination and information service.

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

Tell me a bit about that.

George Winston

We did set up a TAD Australia, which was a very lightweight organisation, but yes, it mainly was concentrating on information. And associated with that, we ran a seminar. A national seminar. I think it went for eight years. So once a year we would choose the topic. Might have been sport or – Transportation or some other topic. And they invited people to come and then and participate and exhibit equipment, commercial equipment, and sell exhibition space.

Graham Shirley

And does that coordinator role still exist?

George Winston

I don't think so. No, no, not now. That died when I retired.

Graham Shirley

Oh, OK.

George Winston

Is the man – (To **Bill Phippen**) Who ran that? I'm struggling now.

Bill Phippen

Tom Marish?

George Winston

Tom Marish, yes. Yeah.

Graham Shirley

There was also the TAD Foundation.

George Winston

Oh, the TAD Foundation was strictly dollars. Dollars and cents. And it was a way of salting away funds. And by being a separate organisation - or separate entity or company, it meant that we didn't have to feature a big fund in our annual report. I can't

remember how that worked now, but it helped us because if it gradually accumulated a lot of money there. I think we're up to a million dollars. (To **Bill Phippen**) And can you remember?

Bill Phippen

Oh, certainly. The foundation got up to a million. But then later on, after your time when the time came to buy new premises, it raised \$2.7 million to buy a new building.

George Winston

Yes, which we - It was a level above our normal funding.

Graham Shirley

But it sounds essential, actually. So it was a fund which - where funds would be invested. And -

George Winston

Yeah, Yes.

Graham Shirley

The savings built up basically.

George Winston

Yeah, we had the committee that was in charge of the finance of the foundation.

Graham Shirley

I presume it still exists?

We went - (To **Bill Phippen**) You were involved in that.

Bill Phippen

I'm not sure of the present arrangements. But when I was chairman, I was ex officio on the foundation.

George Winston

Yes.

Bill Phippen

And so it was very closely linked to TAD.

George Winston

Yeah.

Bill Phippen

Most of the people on the board were the same or similar people to the people on the TAD board and -

George Winston

Yes.

Bill Phippen

And it could do nothing else than fund TAD, so -

Graham Shirley

Sounds a great strategy.

Bill Phippen

And it had some great people like Jim Shires.

George Winston

Oh yes, treasurer.

Bill Phippen

A banker. A banker, a career banker. Did wonderful work.

George Winston

Wonderful man.

Graham Shirley

Tell me a bit more about Jim Shires.

George Winston

Bank of New South Wales.

Bill Phippen

Bank of New South Wales. He wasn't an engineer. He had no technical skills, I think. But he was into finance and banking. He was the Treasurer, of course. Then he is -

George Winston

He was. For many years, the treasurer and was Bank of New South Wales. Of course, became Westpac.

Bill Phippen

And so, he and others set up the foundation, and he knew all the right people to talk to, to get the right investments. And he was made an Order of Australia for it.

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

So, another very interesting person that that was actually a volunteer was Michael Helsham.

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

Tell me about his involvement.

George Winston

Now Michael Helsham's very special. I remember getting a phone call from my wife in the office. And she said, "Have a look at this morning's 'Herald' because Mr Justice Helsham is retiring and he's looking for community possibilities, of supporting something in the community". So, I found the article, and I found his phone number in the phone book. And I wrote a letter and I delivered it the same day. I think he was very impressed and he said, "Yes, I'll help you". So, he became an office volunteer, a telephonist. But he had many other skills, many other roles. Whenever there was something legal or vaguely legal, we could consult Michael, who was a tower of strength.

Graham Shirley

Incredible background.

Bill Phippen

I mean, his most memorable claim to fame was - The telephonist, Monday to Thursday, was Deborah. But she didn't work on Fridays, so Michael used to be this receptionist, telephonist. So, he would answer the phone and say, "Good morning. Technical Aid for the Disabled. This is Deborah on a Friday."

Graham Shirley

That must have caused a lot of laughter.

George Winston

It did. Our other volunteers in the office just loved Michael. And they had a woman who was took charge of the TAD Journal. She was an American woman ... Yes ... Yeah, I'm in trouble now.

Bill Phippen

I'm in trouble too.

Graham Shirley

There's another volunteer whose name -

George Winston

She was an employee. And she was in charge of the TAD Journal and -

Graham Shirley

And what was her name?

George Winston

Pamela Manning. Now Pamela was a little woman, physically small woman and. She did driving tour buses in Alaska. Very impressive. And something happened on one of the roads that she used to drive. Nothing to do with her, but it was a big accident and people got killed. And a lawyer came from the US and asked Pamela to testify as to the road conditions. And so, I asked Michael Hailsham to support her. This impressive tall American guy came and started cross questioning. And Michael said, "Just a minute, sir, my client -", he said. (Laughs) I can't remember exactly what he said, but he protected her and he made sure that that she felt very safe with his controlling the procedure. (Laughs)

Graham Shirley

George, would you like to reflect further on your achievements with TAD by the time of your retirement from TAD?

George Winston

Um ...

Graham Shirley

That 20 year span ...

George Winston

I think we've covered the BHP Pursuit of Excellence Award. And the order of Australia. My parents were still alive and they were very, very proud. OK.

Graham Shirley

Very proud of your achievements.

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

Through TAD, yeah.

George Winston

I retired in 1995. At the age of 61, I felt I'd done everything, and it was time for me to go.

Bill Phippen

I think the one of the greatest things that George did, was when he did retire, he really retired. He didn't hang around and become chairman or loom over the organisation. Because there's a real issue called Founder Syndrome, where he can hang around and stifle the organisation. And he basically walked away. He's always been welcome. He's always been revered as the founder. But he has sought to have no day-to-day controlling role in the organisation. And I think that was a really wonderful thing to do.

George Winston

Thank you for that.

Graham Shirley

Did TAD occasionally reach out to you over the years to say, "Look, we need – "

George Winston

No.

Graham Shirley

No.

George Winston

I thought they might, but they didn't. I think I found that a little bit disappointing. But also good, because I thought, "Well, they know what they're doing".

Graham Shirley

Yeah, that shows a degree of confidence.

Graham Shirley

George, how did you get become involved in working with refugees?

George Winston

Well, when I retired from TAD - or just before - I started looking around for other voluntary activities. And I sampled various organisations. I did a lot of shopping around. And one of them was a refugee support organisation which was based at the Red Cross. The Red Cross in the City of Sydney had an asylum seeker centre, or section. And I volunteered for that. People would ring up and ask for assistance with various things, one of them being learning English. And they had a big reference book, and I could look up various sources of help there. My job ostensibly was to field the inquiries and then refer them to community workers. I forget the actual title, but there were employees there. And I remember there was one - somebody who rang up, wanted to learn English, and I got the reference book and gave them all the details. Then I was told not to do it because it wasn't my job. (Laughs) Really upset me. I thought, "I don't want to be here".

But I found the Asylum Seekers' Centre in Surry Hills, which was run by the community. Was actually a young Jesuit priest who was the coordinator. And I took a job on in there. I became a computer tutor. It was in a cottage belonging to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. And the Good Shepherd had given the cottage to - Asylum Seekers have found accommodation somewhere else. And we said - I had a bedroom in that cottage. And I set up a class of eight computers. Very tight - elbow to elbow. People came and I'd teach them. The initial process was learn to type in English. So, I'd teach them how to type. And then if they were really clever, they could progress to other things. And I found that very satisfying. The wonderful voluntary - Because I had sampled quite a few different jobs, and none of them did the trick for me. But that one was spot on.

Graham Shirley

What was it that you think particularly appealed to you?

George Winston

Oh, I felt I was making a big difference in their lives. And I remember at that time there were quite a few Algerian refugees. They all spoke very good French. Mostly, they spoke no English because I had fluent French. It was very - a very good fit and they loved to find a French speaking person helping them. But there were many other nationalities there as well. And then one or two were brilliant. It was a little - I remembered there was a little black African man who was brilliant and he basically - he was just very clever, seemed to be a born computer person. And I was hoping that he might find a job in computers, but he didn't. He took on some kind of a manual job. But there were - There were some very interesting people coming from different countries. And there was a Russian family, which included an opera singer and classical orchestra conductor. I made friends with quite a few of these people.

And occasionally I was able to help in other ways - organise accommodation. The Jesuit Refugee Support Centre had accommodation possibilities. People came and they had nothing - no language, nowhere to live, terrible, terrible situations. It was a very well-run

centre, and they had certain days where people turn up and brought their food. They have a big party with people sharing ethnic food. Wonderful.

Graham Shirley

After you moved to the Blue Mountains, did your involvement in refugee activities continue?

George Winston

And because of my experience in Sydney, they grabbed me - a five years, experience of refugee support. And I was, initially I think, secretary-treasurer. Never chairman. But there might – The main contribution was fundraiser.

Graham Shirley

So, the first your first involvement with them in the Blue Mountains was attending that meeting at Lawson.

George Winston

Yes, yes.

Graham Shirley

And how long did that involvement continue?

George Winston

Hmm ...

Graham Shirley

Even approximately.

George Winston

Until - Until about two years ago, two or three years ago.

Graham Shirley

That sounds like quite a significant period of time.

George Winston

It was significant - I became very well known in the Blue Mountains. I was nominated as Citizen of the Year in 2019.

Graham Shirley

OK, look - There's one aspect that we didn't cover earlier. And that was way back your marriage to Tammy ended.

George Winston

Yes.

Graham Shirley

And you subsequently met Jean. Can you tell me how you met Jean?

George Winston

I met Jan on a one-week adult education course in Bathurst, run by WEA - Workers Educational Association. They ran courses every summer - residential courses. So, at least one week. And I remember - It was Tammy's suggestion, actually, that we do that course and she took on Chinese civilization and I went and joined the psychology group. And Jean was part of that. She lived in Bathurst. And we – The course was wonderful. There were nineteen of us. And we were together the whole time. At breakfast, lunch and dinner as well as the lectures, discussions. So, when the week finished, it was that - been so good that we thought we need to continue this - was too good to just let it go. We engaged the lecturer. We had a very good lecturer to lead us in Sydney, four months later at the home of one of the participants. Ah. And it was there that Jean and I met properly and we just fell in love. Like 17-year-olds who – We were both 40. It was very dramatic. And so, Tammy and I divorced. We were separated by then - We divorced.

Graham Shirley

Did you maintain contact with Tammy after you split and divorced?

George Winston

We maintained contact because we had two daughters ...

Graham Shirley

Tell me about the significance of Jean in your life. Once you'd married Jean - You developed a relationship and then married. It seems from what I've heard that she added a lot of value to your life.

George Winston

Oh hugely. Hugely. She supported me in everything I did. All the voluntary work and organisation work. Everything I did, Jean was there. Supporting working. So, for example, when I was organising events to raise funds for refugees, she was always there helping in a big way. Yes. Oh, yes. Wonderful person.

Graham Shirley

Sounds very positive, proactive person.

George Winston

Yes. Oh yes. Wonderful person.

Graham Shirley

And I gather Jean is no longer still around.

George Winston

Jean died in April 2024. So, two years ago. Of heart failure.

Graham Shirley

Well, look, we're we've almost finished the interview. I generally ask people at the end of oral histories, what would you say, throughout your life, has been the source of greatest satisfaction in your life, that has brought you fulfilment or has stood out in a very positive way, probably more than anything else in your life.

George Winston

Probably my life with Jean.

Graham Shirley

I think at a certain point and once again this is this is taking its cue from what I've what I've read about your life, that you did a lot of work on self-development at a certain point.

George Winston

I did. I did. Yes, huge.

Graham Shirley

Could you tell me a little bit about that?

George Winston

Yes. When Jean and I got together, two of her three daughters came to live with us. The youngest one was Stella, and she was only eight at the time.

And I enrolled in a course which was called a self-transformation course in the City of Sydney. And it involved attending weekly attendance. But a very important lesson from that course was, "I change, you change".

Graham Shirley

And the self-transformation course that you did - How? - What impact did that have on you?

George Winston

Well, it had a huge impact in terms of saving my marriage to Jean. And Stella and I became good friends, and we're still good friends. And she's always concerned about me. And I could - She now lives in Murwillumbah. She rings me up now and again. She's quite concerned about me.

Graham Shirley

Well, George, thank you very much for a really superb interview.

George Winston

Yes. Thank you for -

Graham Shirley

Really, really excellent interview.

Bill Phippen

Thank you, George.

George Winston

Yes.

Bill Phippen

This has been an experience for me.

Graham Shirley

OK. All right. Thank you very much once again George and, ah -

George Winston

I appreciate -

Graham Shirley

And we'll - We'll now finish the interview.

George Winston

Yes, good.