Clem Jones Oral History Project

Interviewee: Dr Maurice Heiner

Interviewer: Lindsay Marshall

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LM: This is an interview for the Clem Jones Oral History Project being conducted on Friday the 24th February 2023 with Dr Maurice Heiner, being conducted by myself, Lindsay Marshall, at the Clem Jones Group offices at 63 Wellington Road at East Brisbane. Maurice, thanks very much for doing this and being a part of the Oral History Project.

MH: Thank you for inviting me.

LM: Now, you're a Brisbane boy, you've told me previously you were born in 1947 and coincidentally, you grew up around the Camp Hill area where Clem and Sylvia Jones resided, but if you can cast your mind back to your very early years, what do you remember of Brisbane of the 1950s and the 1960s? What sort of place was it?

MH: It's often been referred to as a large country town, but of course, we didn't have anything else when we were young to compare it with. We thought that we were living fairly well in what would now be called a bedroom suburb with a lot of wildlife and bush around us. So, for young people, it was an excellent place to grow up.

LM: People don't realise when they look at Brisbane today how big it is, but even just 50 years ago or 60/70 years ago, it wasn't that big, was it?

MH: No, not at all. One would make one's way to the city in old buses that seemed to have a big problem getting up hills and going through Woolloongabba, which was quite an old suburb at the time before reaching the city, where there seemed to be renewal.

LM: And where you lived at Camp Hill, you went to the local school?

MH: I did.

LM: Camp Hill State School.

MH: I did.

LM: And onto to high school. Where did you go to high school?

MH: Well I went to a high school, Cavendish Road High School.

LM: You've told me previously your father served in the war overseas and your mother was a WREN [Women's Royal Naval Service] in the British Navy and they met and married, and your father returned home and did medicine. You've also told me they separated when you were 8 years old, but your father doing medicine and you doing medicine, do you think there was an influence there that shepherded you down that path?

MH: My father's mother was a nurse and she worked at the Royal Brisbane [Hospital] and she worked for the local doctor, at Clayfield, a fellow called Dr Lansdowne. So, there always seemed to be medical talk around the house.

LM: And your mother at Camp Hill ran a corner store, a local corner store. What was that like?

MH: Yeah, she did. She ran a store on the corner of Lunga Street and Stanley Road and that was across the road from a horse farm and on the other side of the road there was a lettuce farm and a small crops farm. It was more than a 7-Eleven store today, a 7-Eleven store insofar as all the homely utensils were there and the home foods, but it also sold bulk wheat and bulk maize and seeds and garden materials and garden implements etc.

LM: Quite a normal outlet for those days, but we'd think it was quite strange these days, wouldn't we?

MH: We would, yes.

LM: And unlike other people I've spoken to for this project, you had a very early connection, or your paths crossed with Clem and Sylvia Jones very early in your life. Can you explain how that happened?

MH: Yes, Clem's closest friend was a gentleman called Jim Bain and Jim and Joan Bain lived in Koolatah Street and Clem also lived across the road in Koolatah Street. Christopher Bain was one of my great friends and still a great friend, and we had another friend down the street called, Ray Watson. We were in the same class at school and I've been thinking since our last meeting, I must have been younger than 8 because in 1961, Clem became Lord Mayor for the first time and we were playing tennis on his court and Clem's wife was giving us cakes and things to eat before that. We were more like street urchins, but the Bains lives across the road from Clem.

Clem didn't have a phone and we would often play Monopoly on the patio of the Bain's house and when the phone rang there was a system of picking up a school bell

and ringing a bell and Clem would come running across the road to answer it. Mostly the calls were for him.

LM: That's a very rudimentary but effective system, I guess.

MH: Yes, absolutely.

LM: So, you then went off to university and study medicine and after that you worked overseas for a period.

MH: I did, yes.

LM: But then you renewed your friendship with Clem when you came back.

MH: Yes, when I came back, Clem, was doing marriages when I came back and one day, one of my patients who had been married by Clem, said that Clem said to remind me of his old mate. That prompted me coming back and seeing Clem and our relationship started once again.

LM: Renewing the friendship and that was when he was a civil marriage celebrant.

MH: Yes, that's right.

LM: And what sort of, you've mentioned before him and Jimmy Bain, they were good friends, what sort of things did they get up to?

MH: Well, Clem and I spoke a great deal about his early years when he was a cadet [surveyor] and when he worked in the city and we talked about everything from their lunch hours to what they did at the end of the week. At the end of the week, Jim Bain and Clem, would take the tram and they would go out to, well, what is now South Brisbane and there would be a dance there or a function of some type, and Clem said, I think they could buy a schooner [of beer] for a schilling and a penny and they would have a schooner each, very rarely two, and talk about everything from politics to sport, then go their separate ways.

LM: That was a big night out for a relatively small amount of money if you could afford it. And speaking of affording things, you've told me also that when Clem went to the university to study at the University of Queensland, he couldn't afford the fees, which is why he had an indebtedness to the university.

MH: Yes, correct. One year he said he really didn't know where the fees were coming from and he spoke to someone in authority there and they just said, "Jones, keep passing exams and you can pay the fees at a later date."

LM: And do you think that was behind his interest in later life in supporting scholarships at various universities?

MH: I think he was always aware of giving the downtrodden and the not-so-fortune help, but I think that he had a special loyalty to UQ [University of Queensland].

LM: And he began his own surveying business and became very successful with branch offices around the State and made a lot of money, sold it off at a relatively early age, still before he was 40 or so, to devote himself to running for the mayoralty. He ran first in 1958 unsuccessfully and then, as you've mentioned in 1961, when he won the Lord Mayoralty. Do you recall much of those campaigns in those days from your point of view as a younger person around Camp Hill?

MH: Well, yeah, I can remember neighbours and people in the streets, particularly the people around Koolatah Street and where I lived on Stanley Road, talking about Clem and talking about the candidate and at times, there was some comment by some, and I can remember this about, how can a Labor [Party] man retire so early and no go into politics? It was "tall poppy" syndrome, the earliest example of it, but I didn't think too seriously about it. But I can remember, Clem used to, in the neighbourhood, he would preach at night … lecture at night, I should say, from the back of a truck and I can remember that happening.

LH: Under the street lamps.

MH: Under the street lamps, absolutely.

LH: The old campaign styling. Yeah, that's gone by the board, hasn't it?

MH: It sure has.

LH: And do you recall him ever mentioning his parents much to you, their influence on him?

MH: I do. He talked about his parents, one, as being socialists and their loyalty to the socialist cause and to the downtrodden and the poor and he used to talk separately about his father, who was a mathematician.

LH: This is Ted Jones?

MH: Ted Jones, that's right. And in addition to being a mathematician, he was a great thinker. For example, Clem told me on numerous occasions about his idea of preventing flooding on the Gold Coast and that would not happen, Ted said, until the Nerang River and the Tweed River were joined by a canal because the Tweed River, in particular, just didn't have an outlet that was big enough. So, he was a great thinker and certainly, a mathematician of renown. Clem told me that Ted could multiply six figures by six figures in his head and of course, Clem could do the same.

LH: Yes, and in those days, well, surveying has always relied on maths, as does most scientific occupations, but in those days before technology that was the way to calculate, wasn't it?

MH: To do things, absolutely. That's how it was when we went to primary school.

LH: Yes. And his mother, Elsie, do you recall much of what he told you about her?

MH: He told me at one stage that he had had a twin and the twin died, and they lived at Salisbury. My recollection is they lived at Salisbury and he never spoke of them being impecunious, but he spoke more about their making sure that fairness should be part of our society.

LH: This was his brother, Royce.

MH: Yes.

LH: Was he a twin or was he younger than him, do you think?

MH: He could have been younger than him, yes.

LH: And Sylvia Jones, from your recollection as a child when Sylvia and Clem were living in Koolatah Street, what was she like? You mentioned giving you jam and cakes and things for the tennis days.

MH: She was a lady just totally suffused with kindness and she did everything to help and, I understood later as I grew older, that she idolised Clem and wanted to see that Clem was, that his wishes were fulfilled. In fact, there are two women that I have known who were never, their menfolk were upset, they weren't immediately angry with their husbands, but they said, "There must be something wrong with Clem, he's not usually like this." And the other person was a friend of Sylvia's and that was Marjorie Johnstone.

LH: Yeah, coming on to the Marjorie Johnstone and her husband, Brian, and they were very famous in the Brisbane art scene. You had a separate connection to them as well. Sylvia had a connection when she was Lady Mayoress, but you had an independent connection as well coincidentally. Just explain how that happened.

MH: Well, I first met Marjorie soon after coming back to Australia when she was a patient in St Andrew's Hospital and somehow or other, we started talking about the Joneses and we started talking about art. I was interested and knew nothing about it, except what I liked, and at the time the Brisbane City Council had a large collection of art and they had a gallery, which was rudimentary. But Clem, was keen that see developed. So, he put that in Sylvia's hands and Sylvia and Marjorie Johnstone, and Brian Johnston, really, they found the right person to run that [City Hall] Gallery and they built it into quite an excellent gallery.

LH: And this was located at Bowen Hill next to the, what's now the Twelfth Night Theatre.

MH: That was the Johnstone Gallery. The Johnstone Gallery initially was on upper Queen Street and then it moved to the Brisbane Arcade, downstairs, and when they left downstairs it became the Old Vienna Restaurant, which you probably remember. Then after that they moved to, Mrs Johnstone's, family home at Bowen Hills.

LH: And the City Hall Gallery or the Council Gallery you've mentioned there and the acquisition of a curator, do you think Clem, as Lord Mayor, left Sylvia to do the, not the soft stuff, but the arts and the human-interest aspects of council activity and he did the hard-edged stuff, like infrastructure and that?

MH: Certainly, Sylvia, was interested in the [City Hall] Gallery and certainly threw herself into the gallery, but she was also interested in people and doing things to make life easier for people. Of course, her father had been a cartoonist and a friend of Steele Rudd.

LH: This is Ashton Murphy.

MH: This is Ashton Murphy, yes, and so, she had quite a good educational background when it came to arts for the living people rather than formal art knowledge.

LH: Also, from what I've been told and read, she had definite skills herself in graphic art.

MH: She did, yes.

LH: And in fact, worked as a draftsperson in Clem's surveying firm originally, which in those days was quite an achievement. There wasn't many women in those companies.

MH: Absolutely not, no.

LH: And going back to the Camp Hill days, Clem and Sylvia, were originally in Koolatah Street where you mentioned, but then they moved to a new place, Old Cleveland Road, 758, down the easement of 758 on Cleveland Road, and there's a story attached to the house they moved onto the site to live in. What happened there?

MH: Well Clem, I think that house, the house that was moved to that site, was at Coorparoo or somewhere, certainly far enough away from Camp Hill to be an ordeal to move it. But Clem decided that he would take charge of that, as he did, and I think going up the hill at Old Cleveland Road, opposite the old milk factory …

LH: The actual Camp Hill.

MH: The actual Camp Hill, the house fell from the truck and there was traffic jams even in those days.

LH: *[laughs]* Yes, he was always, by the sounds of it, he always had a project on the go, didn't he?

MH: Always. Always had a project.

LH: When it got to the new site he also reinstated a tennis court, which was another passion of his.

MH: He did and a year or so before he died, Clem and I were sitting one afternoon and an inch of rain fell while we were having a beer and I said to him, "Clem, in half an hour that court will be ready again for play and how is it such a great court?" and he said, "Ashes, the answer is ashes." You put down a foundation two feet or so of old coal ash and then on top of that, soil and grass, and it was a wonderful court.

LH: Well drained, yes, and the tennis court there at 758 Old Cleveland Road was the venue for weekly tennis matches. Did you go to those?

MH: I didn't go to the tennis, but Clem and his political and other friends had a tennis day every Wednesday afternoon. Clem would provide lunch and sandwiches and beer and whatever anyone wanted to drink and they played there from midday right up to dusk, as long as they could. I used to have dinner with Clem on Wednesday nights, as did Dell [Townsend]. For some years we did that and frequently, when I was coming back from work from Cleveland, which I used to go to on a Wednesday, I would be there and Clem would have his friends there and I met a lot of the Labor [Party] officials and joined in the conversation.

LH: That's Dell Townsend you mention there. the tennis court was also taken over at the end of the year for the famous Clem Jones Christmas parties. You went along to those?

MH: Yes, I did.

LH: Was it a celebration or was it more of a thank you or a networking opportunity or all three?

MH: I think it was all three. Certainly, it was a great celebration. It started early in the afternoon and went on until about 8.00pm at night, but a statement was made by Mr [Terry] Mackenroth, the [state] treasurer, who used to be the MC, that if you were new to the party today, be sure that Clem had use for you at some time in the future and be ready to call. Ready to answer the call.

LH: So, it might have been an invitation to a fee function, but there was maybe a price to pay further down the track.

MH: Correct.

LH: Is that how Clem operated? Not in a negative way, I don't mean he used people in a negative way, but he applied people's skills to projects or ideas he had. He knew who to talk to, to get things done. Who to ask to do things.

MH: It was my first introduction to networking. Clem had a great networking. From the earliest days, any task he said could be dealt with given the right set of circumstances and if he wanted to build a road somewhere or a dam or whatever, if it was turned down by the council immediately, Clem said we'll still go ahead, but we first have to find another way of overcoming the bureaucracy or convincing the bureaucracy that this was the thing to do. It really taught me a great lesson.

LH: Now, there's a famous anecdote about networking and asking for assistance from various quarters when Foodbank was being established in Brisbane. Can you explain that story?

MH: There are two parts to the story. One, the Coca-Cola site which I won't talk about, but secondly, the site that Clem found a street or so away from the Coca-Cola site …

LH: Down the [Fortitude] Valley.

MH: … down in the Valley, and it was an old building and Clem thought this building was ideal. The only problem was it was fairly derelict and filthy dirty inside. So, he called Jim Soorley who was then at the town hall, sorry, he was the mayor and said, look, he would like to borrow some men and some equipment to clean this down. Jim said, "Look, Clem, things have changed now, we can't do that." So, Clem, was not to be dissuaded. Later on in the day, and Jim Soorley told me this part of the story, that he heard that there was a whole lot of commotion down in the Valley, down at this building, at the site.

So, he said he went down to see what was happening and he said there were two fire trucks there and the fireman were inside the building with fire hoses, hosing down the building from the inside, ceiling, walls, etc., drying it, until eventually it became the ideal site for the early Foodbank.

LM: So, Clem knew who to ask to get that done.

MH: He sure did, yes.

LM: And the Christmas parties had a fairly eclectic invitation list, didn't they? People who was head of the Mater at the time, Sister Angela Mary Doyle, was invited regularly after they first crossed paths during the [1974] Brisbane floods, when Clem solved a water supply problem at the Mater. How do you think they got on? Sister Angela Mary is obviously deeply religious in the Catholic faith and Clem was noted for being an atheist.

MH: Clem was an atheist. But he was not an angry atheist like some of our well-known atheists are today. He just could not conceive of a super being somewhere who put life and the universe together and he did respect other people and their religions. Sister Angela Mary would always say to Clem, "God bless you Clem", and Clem would

say, “But I don’t believe in God”, and Sister Angela Mary would always say “But he believes in you, Clem”, which I thought was a great way of summarising the two.

LH: Yes, and the other big event each year for many decades was the Crackerjack Carnival at the Camp Hill Community Welfare Centre, now known as the Clem Jones Centre. Did you go along to those events?

MH: I did and we would go along and we would be half-dressed in dinner clothes. We would wear a bow tie and an appropriate shirt and have the jacket from a dinner suit, but we’d wear jeans and boots and that was often very helpful because year after year it would rain and at times, we would be digging a trench around the edges of the circus tent to prevent flooding. *[laughs]* And I think even Dell at times was digging as well.

LH: Amazing. Now, Clem was obviously a determined and strong-minded individual, but then he obviously has to deal with other determined and strong-minded individuals and you’ve mentioned to me some of the story he told to you about his dealings in the cricket world on the [Australian] Cricket Control Board with Sir Don Bradman. Did they butt heads a little bit in the early days?

MH: They did. Clem’s first example when he met Don Bradman was when he went to the first Cricket Board of Control in Sydney, that Clem was a member, and he went to the very first meeting that he was to go to. He arrived five minutes late at five past two. He knocked on the door and the door was open and Bradman said, “Mr Jones, we will forgive you today because you’re 5 minutes late, but in the future, under no circumstances will you be late. If you are, you won’t be let in.” Anyway, at the end of that meeting, he asked Clem to wait and Clem did so and he went to Bradman and Bradman said, “Mr Jones, you must have some use for cricket otherwise you wouldn’t be here”, he said, “But never try, ever try to befriend me, I’m not interested, nor do I like any of your ilk or your beliefs. I don’t wish to be your friend.”

I said to Clem, “Was he a good chairman?” He said, “He was an absolutely superb chairman. We would go to the meeting, it was punctual. There was no useless chatter and at 8.00am the next morning there’d be a knock on the door at the hotel and we would be handed the minutes from the meeting. So, yes, he was a very good chairman. Not such a friendly man to me though.”

LM: No, but Bradman’s express of dislike there was more about Clem’s side of, was it the side of the political fence?

MH: Yes, the political fence. Unionism and the Labor Party in general.

LH: Yes, and Bradman was noted to be a conservative, but they still had a good working relationship.

MH: Yes, they did.

LH: So, in terms of, if you had to sum up Clem to describe Clem to someone who didn't know anything about him, how would you do that?

MH: An incredibly intelligent man, an incredibly fair man, who will always sit and listen to the opposite point of view and respect people for the things that they disagreed with Clem in and not just dismissing them. We would talk about politics. We could be here all day talking about the thing that we've talked about, but he would often mention his ideal team, political team, and that included Liberals and DLP [Democratic Labor Party] members and Labor members. The other example I saw of Clem, the other generous, was back in the old guard/new guard days when there was the argument over …

LH: The Labor Party.

MH: That's right and at the time it was all centred, well, it seemed to me to be centred on [radio station] 4KQ and Peter Beattie was in the "new guard" and I think at one stage, Clem, was paying the wages for his foes in the "new guard" because he thought that it was very important that this went to the end of the story, so that once the disagreement was solved, there would be no hard feelings. That just, to me, added my respect, increased my respect for him.

LH: And for someone who had acquired and worked to gain a lot of considerable wealth and assets in his life through his surveying firm, but also, through what must have been very canny investment decisions. From what I've read and heard from other people, he never spent that on himself or Sylvia. They had a very modest lifestyle?

MH: They had a very modest lifestyle. Clem enjoyed a beer and he enjoyed an occasional glass of wine, but no, he wasn't interested in luxury cars, luxury holidays. In fact, it was only in the last 10 years of his life that he actually took his, he was in North Queensland with Dell, and I think he took his shoes off and walked and put his feet in the ocean. The rest of his time was spent working and working and thinking and working.

LH: The assets and wealth that he acquired are still working today through the Clem Jones Foundation, the philanthropic foundation, and that's left a remarkable legacy, particularly in the areas of the big three medical research projects, the dementia, the Alzheimer's research at the Clem Jones Centre at the Queensland Brain Institute at the University of Queensland, the spinal cord repair work at Griffith University, at the Clem Jones Centre there, and the Clem Jones laboratories down at the Bond University on the Gold Coast where they're trying to find ways to cure macular degeneration.

As a medical person yourself and now, as a trustee of the estate, that must be very satisfying to see that that work continues.

MH: Look, it's wonderful to see how these institutions are really punching above their weight. The results that they're achieving are very optimistic for the future and the

way they've been able to use Clem's money and then have other people donate to add to the money, is wonderful. I can only see ongoing success. The estate is really run very well by my colleagues. [Clem Jones Foundation CEO] Peter Johnstone is a superb director and he knows his way around politics and just what we should do next and has been a great help to us.

LH: And Clem's clear direction, or one of his clear directions in his will was to support the enactment of voluntary assisted dying legislation in the various jurisdictions around the country. Now, as we speak, all the states have got their own VAD laws and the ACT now has the right to consider it, which they're doing. The Northern Territory now has the right to consider it following the overturn or the federal law that blocked it. That also must be a satisfying thing for you because you were involved in that campaign as well.

MH: Very satisfying. Dell and Clem and me, we talked about that literally for years, talking about why it would be of assistance. Why we should have it. Clem was absolutely certain though that the only way that we would achieve it was to achieve it politically. So, at no time did we help anyone who had dying machines and various ways for people to die. We did it all in a very supportive way and it's very good to see that it's now come to fruition.

LH: The VAD regime had to be legislated and regulated and with protections and safeguards.

MH: Yes, that's correct.

LH: That other, the other way you mentioned about the people marketing do-it-yourself death machines, that wasn't the way to go.

MH: No.

LH: So, in your own personal life and professional life, do you think you've learned lessons from Clem that you apply?

MH: Innumerable.

LH: In your day-to-day work in dealing with people?

MH: Yes, I would never compare myself to Clem or even be one-tenth of the man that Clem was, but certainly, a lot of my ideas about treating people, certainly were similar to what Clem's ideas were.

LH: Great, okay, thanks very much for taking part again, Maurice.

MH: Thank you sir.

LH: Thank you.