DAVID HAIGH

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Introduction

This interview with Neil Smith, carried out in 2002, is the second in a series of interviews with practitioners who have made significant contributions to the field of community development in Aotearoa New Zealand. Neil was very ill but, in spite of the pain, he insisted on completing the interview; it is the story of a man who lived by his values. For example, during World War Two he was a conscientious objector and forced to work as a scrub cutter in various isolated camps. At one camp, he met various lecturers from Victoria University, Wellington, who were also incarcerated for the duration of the war. During this period, he participated in adult education classes, which inspired him. He later studied social work at Victoria University under the same lecturers. Through his involvement in the social workers' association in the 1970s, he helped persuade Auckland City Council to establish the community development office. Sadly, Neil died shortly after this interview.

David Haigh: Neil, could you please give me your full name, for the record?
Neil Smith: Neil Gibson Smith, and I was born in Manaia in Taranaki, just a little town near Hawera, and had the first five years of my life there. My father was

the Presbyterian Minister and he had the parish there. When I was five he was called to a parish in Dunedin so we moved to Kaikorai, in Dunedin, the suburb of the Roslyn Woollen Mills and the Burnside Freezing Works. That was 1927 that we moved there – I was born in 1921, so I was part of the baby boom after World War One.

My father had also been a chaplain with the New Zealand forces in Egypt and France, and the occupation army in Germany at the end of WWI.

What about your mother?

My mother was a remarkable woman. She was born in Napier in 1888 and her mother was widowed while she was pregnant with my mother. She already had two little boys from a previous marriage and a daughter from the current marriage. She was married to Frederick Windsor, so I carried the British royal family's name well before they took it up themselves. My mother was born just after my grandfather had died, so my grandmother had two sons and two daughters to bring up in Napier – it was a pretty hard life for her. My grandfather had been a paid clerk for New Zealand Railways in Napier after having emigrated to New Zealand much earlier, in 1855, to New Plymouth, where he became the licencee of the Windsor Castle Hotel. My mother, a staunch temperance woman, said the records say he held the licence, but I don't think he would have actually looked after the hotel. But from the history I have picked up from the New Plymouth Museum, there is no doubt he was the pub keeper there. That went through the period of the Land Wars in Taranaki and he was part of the militia for two or three years there, and then he shifted to Auckland by 1870. His first wife died in Auckland Hospital in 1870 and then there is a sort of a blank until he appears on the electoral roll in Napier in about 1880.

My mother was one of the first wave of girls who were able to get a high-school education through scholarships. She was a brilliant scholar so she got a scholarship to Napier Girls' High School and went through there and qualified for the public service examination, which was the criterion of graduation from high school in those days. She got top marks for New Zealand out of all the girl pupils that year, about 96 I think it was.

How did she meet your father?

My paternal grandfather emigrated from Scotland as a Presbyterian minister, must have been the late 1870s or early 1880s, and first took a parish in North Dunedin and then Invercargill, and then came to Wellington to St Andrew's on The Terrace. My mother was going to the Bible class and church there and so that is where they met.

What was it like at primary school?

I remember primary school as being hell, really. They were very strict. I remember my childhood as unhappy, but I am sure there was a lot of happiness in it as well. My father, for instance, was very keen on camping and practically every summer we went on camping holidays, exploring from Stewart Island up to Pūrākaunui and Waikouaiti, north of Dunedin. So, really, we probably had great times.

Do those memories still stick with you? The landscape of Otago?

Oh yes, they do. One of the influences on me for my future career was the fact that when my father came back from WWI he was dedicated against war and for peace, and he helped to set up the League of Nations Union in

New Zealand, which supported the work of the League of Nations in Geneva. Also, when the depression came in the 1930s he was a very strong Labour supporter and he worked hard for the unemployed; a lot of workers in Kaikorai, in the Roslyn Woollen Mills and in the Burnside Freezing Works, were put out of work for periods. I did not realise it at the time but, from my mother's memoirs, apparently my father had a nervous breakdown, really, through the stress of the work he was doing for the unemployed.

That would have been mainly charitable work and trying to find jobs?

Yes, trying to find jobs. He would have unemployed members of the congregation gardening for us and things like that as well, and setting up soup kitchens in the city and joining in various bodies, too, both church and associated people who were doing something to relieve suffering during the depression.

The League of Nations Association, I take it that still continues with the United Nations Association?

Yes, that's right, and after WW2 he was enthusiastically promoting the work of the United Nations Association in New Zealand.

And he saw that as a means to world peace?

Yes.

And I guess that had a big influence on you, because that is a position that you have taken.

Yes, that's right. Another influence I became conscious of was my grandfather, the Presbyterian minister, who was the Lloyd Geering of 1908. He wrote a terrible book called *The Christ of the Cross*, in which he said it was time that the Church began to see God as a person, as a being of compassion and love and understanding rather than a punishing Jehovah of hellfire for each petty little sin. This was too much for the fathers of the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand in 1908 so he was tried for heresy in the First Church, Dunedin, but fortunately there were enough of his brethren with common sense, so, like Lloyd Geering 60 years later, he was acquitted of this charge.

He must have been a brave man, because he knew the consequences.

I remember him as a very kindly figure and he sometimes came to visit us in his old age.

What happened then, after high school in Mt Eden?

I graduated from high school in 1938 and began university in 1939, taking a general arts degree. War broke out in September 1939, and as it progressed and conscription came in I knew I was going to be called up for military service, but I had been influenced by my father's attitudes and so on. I was a pacifist and there was a very active Christian Pacifist Society developing then, mostly Methodist with some Anglican and some Presbyterian as well, and I was a member of that. I suppose I had become of age at 18 to be called up, and was called up in 1941 and refused. I appealed against military service but the Appeal Board in Auckland was a very conservative group of three men, and unless you belonged to a Christian sect that was specifically anti-war and you could prove you had a long association with them you were very unlikely to have your appeal allowed. Since the Presbyterian Church did not take any stand against participation in war, my appeal was turned down.

Did you have to appear before them or did you just write in?

You had the right to appear before them and I did that. I made a statement.

Reading it over 40 years later, it was very self-righteous and, in many ways, I can't blame them for turning me down. I was only 18, full of ideals. The consequences of that were that when I was called up I reiterated my refusal to take the uniform. I went for the medical examination – I could not see anything wrong with being medically examined. I was passed as fit and told to take the oath of allegiance and pick up a uniform, and I refused at that point. As a result of that I was summoned to the Magistrates Court and charged with refusing military service and sentenced to detention for the duration of the war.

What was that like? What happened?

It was quite a brief proceeding, really. I think my father spoke for me and I did have a lawyer as well, who defended me, but seeing that the Appeal Board had pronounced me insincere the magistrate had little option but to sentence me to detention.

Were there any other options? Like doing community work?

Yes, you could opt for joining the Medical Corps, but the attitude that most of us took in the Christian Pacifist Society was that by doing that you were only freeing another person to take part in the war. Many pacifists did agree to join the Medical Corps and served in that way.

Where were you sent for this detention?

The government had set up a camp at Strathmore, which was on the Napier–Taupo Road on the Galatea Plains. That was the first camp set up but, in the end, there were over 800 of us who were sentenced to detention, and a chain of camps was set up, mostly in the North Island and one or two in the South Island as well. I spent four years, from April 1942 until 1946, in these camps. I started in the Strathmore camp, clearing land that was going to be broken up into farms that would be available for returned servicemen when the war was over. It was a time when they had discovered the secret of farming that volcanic plateau there by putting cobalt or some trace elements on. We would cut mānuka scrub one season and then nothing much would be done with it, and you would go out and cut it the next year as well, but gradually they developed the farms. But that camp became full and after a while they set up another camp down at Shannon, in the middle of the flax swamps on the Manawatū River, where flax plantations were growing to make wool bales and so on. I was transferred to that camp and we were weeding flax plantations that had been privately set up, but we were providing the labour force to weed these flax plants so they would flourish.

I seem to recall those flax plantations – at Foxton? – were low lying and quite swampy, so it must have been quite difficult work.

It was, it was wet and muddy. I went from there to a second camp in the district that was set up a few miles away at Whitanui, and while I was there I got appendicitis and was rushed to Palmerston North Hospital, where I had my appendix taken out. It was decided that when I was ready to be discharged and convalesced I should go back to another camp, which they had set up at Hautu, just near Tūrangi at the southern end of Lake Taupō, and this is where I first got into serious trouble with the camps. When it was known I was going to be shifted from the Whitanui camp, go to Strathmore and then on to Hautu, a lot of my mates gave me letters to take to our mates in other camps and this was quite forbidden. I wrapped these letters in my towel, thinking that was probably as good a place as any. When I was taken to Strathmore to spend the

night there it was decided I should have a shower and the warder who was escorting me went to my kit bag and pulled out my towel, and these letters came out; from then on I was labelled as a troublemaker and an infringer of regulations and so on.

And all you were was a post office worker.

So, I went to Hautu, and this camp became known as the bad boys' camp because, gradually, those who infringed discipline in one way or another were sent there. In many ways, for that very reason, they were the elites of us, and the two years or so that I spent there at Hautu were really one of the most educational periods of my life. After the sheltered Presbyterian manse upbringing that I had had and the range of people I met there …

[End of tape 1, side 1]

This is side two of the tape and, Neil, you were saying about the university students at Hautu.

Yes, whereas, for instance, at Auckland University the most modern novel we had had in English courses was an Edwardian novel by an author who is long forgotten now – that was a far as they dared to come up into modern times – it was a revelation to me to have the whole world of contemporary American literature, for instance, opened up to me: Steinbeck, Hemingway … people I had barely heard of before, but these students from Victoria had these. We were allowed to bring in a few books and also, after a while, the Country Library Service was allowed to set up a small library in each of these detention camps with a supply of books that was changed every six months or so, and we even had a request service, so that was very good. With the variety of talent that there was in that camp in particular, different people started classes in literature, writing, music, drawing – there were quite talented artists there and I joined a class for some time. Most of the camps had one or two little wind-up portable gramophones, too, so we were able to get records in and there I started to listen to classical music for the first time in my life. There was no symphony orchestra in New Zealand until after the war and so I was introduced to Bach, Beethoven and Mozart with just having no great distractions. Being able to spend the evenings just in somebody's hut with a group, listening to these records, was an opportunity that might never have occurred to me out in life outside – that was one of the great openings of my mind, really.

What did you have to do during the day? What was your work?

Well, our work in most of the camps was some sort of farming or outdoor work and at Hautu there was a special camp that had been built just for us, but nearby there was the Justice Department prison camp, which was already well established, and we would be out on the hillsides cutting scrub or doing different work. Bringing in farm land, planting pine trees sometimes, and often we were working with gangs from the Justice Department prison. I got more and more interested in why people were sent to prison, and gradually the picture began to develop of the number of chaps in prison that we met on these gangs whose history was of being brought up in church orphanages, very often Roman Catholic and Salvation Army. The ones with the very strict, brutal discipline – quite a revelation to me – then being turned out into life

unprepared, really, to tackle life and going to perhaps a strange city, having no family background or network of support and so on, getting into petty crime and trouble and then finishing up in prison. So I became very interested in the whole idea of prison and prison reform, and the social change that was required.

The facilities in the camp, what were they like? Where did you eat and sleep?

In Hautu we had individual huts that we slept in and the food was just basic prison diet, reasonably satisfactory. The routine was breakfast and then out to work Monday to Friday, and lunch would be out on the farm. Each gang would have two that were responsible for carrying the lunch and boiling the billy, and things like that. The camp was surrounded by barbed wire so you were confined there when you came back into camp, but we were pretty free, once work for the day was over, to take part in the different activities that developed at the camp, the educational classes and sometimes physical exercises and things like that. So that was how life was spent, really. We were able to have visitors from time to time, we were able to write and receive letters; I don't know if there was any limit on letters you could receive, but I think you could send two letters out per week. So you were able to keep in touch with family, and my parents visited me once or twice. During the time that I was in camp I became engaged to Jean, my wife; she was teaching part of the time at Whangārei and part of the time at the Anglican Church School, Nga Tawa, near Marton, and she visited me two or three times.

How did you first meet her?

We met because her father had been a Presbyterian missionary too, so we were both Presbyterian families and her father had retired to Mt Eden when I went to Mt Eden, and we were the same year at university.

So it was a long engagement! Gosh, it must have been difficult when you left, when you were released after four years.

Yes, it took a bit of reorientation, coming out. Before I was released, towards the end of the war, quite a few of us were in contact with the Society of Friends with a view to volunteering to go to China with the Friends Service Ambulance unit that was working from New Zealand, behind the lines in China, trying to do what they could for people there.

These were the Quakers?

The Quakers, yes, and I was one of those who were in negotiation about this. When the war ended in August/September 1945 there was no word as to when we were going to be released, and after a little while I and a friend both wrote to the Minister of Justice – this was one privilege we had, we could write to the Minister of Justice about any complaints we had – saying that the war was over now and there was all sorts of work of reconstruction needing to be done, and unless he could tell me when I was going to be released I would refuse to work any longer in the camp. It was a deliberate ploy to be sentenced to prison, and I knew that if I took this action and stopped working in the camp I would be sentenced to prison in Mt Eden. Through the interest I had gained in what life was like in prison I wanted to get the experience of what it was like to be in a Justice Department prison before I was released. The Minister wrote back and said that Cabinet had not made a decision, so he could not give me any assurance as to when we would be released, so I …

two weeks I and my friend refused to work and we were taken before JPs in Rotorua and we were sentenced to three months in Mt Eden Prison. So that really completed my education, in a way, my wartime education.

What did you learn about Mt Eden Prison?

Well, one of the things I learnt is what solitary confinement is like. While I was there one or two of our people – there were about 30 of us in Mt Eden Prison at that time for various reasons, quite a few of our mates had refused to co-operate any longer in the camps and had been sent to Mt Eden – saw two warders beating up a prisoner, so we downed tools and asked to see the superintendent. We demanded that the JP be brought in to investigate this incident and for our trouble we were sentenced to a week's solitary confinement, with three days of bread and water included in that. That was the ultimate for me, it meant that you were taken to an underground dungeon and just left alone with an enamel plate with a loaf of very good wholemeal bread (the bread they baked in Mt Eden Prison was the best in New Zealand at the time), a jug of water and the Bible. That is the last time I have ever read the Bible in my life except for looking up any quotes I wanted for anything. At night they took your clothes from you, and you were just left with a singlet and underpants. We had hammocks to sleep in, so your hammock was taken down with you but instead of being hung it was just laid out on the stone floor, so you had that and I guess a couple of blankets. Then in the morning the cell door would open and the warder would just throw your clothes on the floor in front of you, and leave you with your loaf of bread and jug of water. It was the nearest I have ever felt to being treated like an animal. Now I had done this voluntarily and I could take it, but what got me was the fact that this was routine punishment for quite a number, for any infringements in the prison. It was during my time in Mt Eden that I became aware of what was happening with Māori migration to the city. With the shortage of workers, with the troops being overseas, a lot of young Māori were coming from rural areas to jobs in Auckland and here they were without any family network of support, and a lot of them went off the rails and got into petty crime and went to prison. One of the horrific sensations in Mt Eden was after you were locked in your cell at night after work, and after lights out in particular, you would start hearing screaming. It was a lot of these young Māori, and I realised that it was the first time that they had ever slept in a room by themselves in the dark and for some of them it was just too much. Once one or two started screaming it would just go right round the wing. The warders would come up and start bashing on the doors. Meeting these prisoners first hand reinforced the impressions I had been getting of the social causes that resulted in people ending up in prison, so it was a great education for me. At the end of those three months in Mt Eden I may have gone back to camp for a short time and then been released – yes, I must have, because it was October 1945 to January 1946 that I did my three months in Mt Eden and it was not until April I was released, so I was sent back to detention. By that time, we knew that we were being released. It was a conditional release, which meant that you had to report to the Manpower Authority and take a job that was assigned to you that was considered useful work, and you were under that obligation until the last troops came home from overseas.

By this time, I had ideas of being a school teacher as a career, but I

knew I would not be accepted into school teaching with the atmosphere there was after the war, and a lot of us had built up idealistic ideas of joining communities, farming communities and islands of sanity – co-operatives. A lot of us got the impression after the war that, though the Allies had won and beaten the Nazis, there was a great risk of the whole world becoming very fascist, so that was one way of having some islands of sanity in this. There was a job going on a poultry farm out in Mt Roskill so I grabbed it, and that would start me on my education and going farming. I worked there for 12 months, and after that I was free to choose what I wanted to do. Jean and I were married by then, and Jean's brother had a mixed sheep and dairy farm in the backblocks of Ōtorohanga, down in the King Country. He and his wife had just built their first farm house, after living in a raupō whare for the first few years they had been on this farm. They knew we were interested in farming, so they offered us this old cottage that they had lived in if we would like to come and run a poultry unit on the farm there. We established a flock of about 400–500 birds there and I helped George with the farm work. Jean helped their two children with correspondence lessons, too, and we spent three very educational years there learning and getting our basic knowledge in farming. At the end of the three years our son had been born and he was about 18 months old by then. I was very keen to travel overseas and persuaded Jean that we should go to Britain and discover what this country really was that we had been brought up to believe our ancestors had come from, while Alistair was still an infant and virtually half fare. I worked my passage on a British coal-burning merchant ship that was on its last trip from Auckland to Glasgow before going to Hong Kong to be broken up – the *Waimana* it was. It took two and a half months to get to Britain, via Australia and round the Cape of Good Hope, Durban, Cape Town and up to Glasgow. Jean and Alistair went on the *Rangitikei* passenger ship in a six-berth cabin, their companions in the cabin being disgruntled British immigrants who had come out straight after the war and found out by 1950 that they could not get jellied eels every Sunday on the nearest corner, and wanted to go back to Britain.

Because a lot of them returned and then wanted to come straight back.

I left about six weeks before Jean did and we arrived within the same 24 hours. Jean had a sister who had been living in Wales since the beginning of the war and had married the manager of a big steel works in Port Talbot in South Wales. When I got off the ship in Glasgow I rang Meg and Jean answered the phone. I went down and we stayed in Port Talbot for a little while, and then moved to London and a bedsit in Earl's Court, like most New Zealanders who were doing their big OE. Then we found that Jean, as a qualified teacher, could earn twice as much as I could as a builder's labourer cleaning up bomb damage in Kensington, so I became one of London's first house husbands, looking after Alistair while Jean went relieving teaching in South London, Lambeth and around. We had been in touch with relatives – my mother had been a great one for keeping in touch with family, her husband's relatives in Scotland and England – and one of our cousins invited us to come and have tea with them, and the outcome of that was that they said we must come and live with them. They had a spare room and they would set it up as a bedsit and we could board with them, so we spent something over 12 months living with them in London.

Did you travel around?

Yes, we were biking and the train services were good. We explored around Britain in our spare time and then a most wonderful coincidence occurred. We had the chance of going up to the Lake District, and I was going to go along to the Edinburgh Festival and Jean was going to explore the family roots in Cumberland while our London cousin looked after Alistair. Jean and I parted company in the Lake District and she went to Cumberland and I went on to Edinburgh. I was hitchhiking and I got picked up by a middle-aged couple who turned out to be the Mayor and Mayoress of Invercargill – Mr and Mrs Adamson. Mrs Adamson was one of three sisters who had been a Presbyterian family that my family knew, and they dropped me at a youth hostel that night. I got a phone call a bit later and I wondered who could be ringing me – it was Mr Adamson asking if my wife and I would be kind enough to come with them for a month on the Continent. They had no foreign language and they were very unsure of themselves, but if we would come with them they thought they would be brave enough to do this. I said, "Oh well, I will have to see what Jean says." We had thought we might have a weekend in Paris or something like that, but that was the limit, so we left Alistair with Jean's sister in Wales and off we went for a month. We found a hotel for the Adamsons each night, and we found the nearest youth hostel or cheap hotel for ourselves and met up the next morning. We went through France, Belgium, Holland, up to Denmark and then down through West Germany to Austria and Venice, Milan, across and back up to Geneva, then we parted company with the Adamsons. They were now confident enough to get back to Britain on their own, and we hitchhiked from Geneva to Paris and had a little time there and then back to Britain. After a year or so we came back to New Zealand.

[Tape 2, side 1]

Neil, you came back to Auckland from your trip to the United Kingdom, and what did you do then?

Well, at that stage my father was due to retire and he made us a very generous offer, that if we could find a property somewhere suitable for a poultry farm, which is what we wanted to do, he would help us to buy it and they would retire onto that property with us. So we found three acres out in Swanson in the Waitākere Ranges. My youngest brother had just graduated as an architect, and he and my father built a new house on the property out there while Jean and Alistair and I lived in the old farmhouse that was already there. It was set up as a small poultry farm already, so we could start earning a living right away; we gradually built up a flock of about 4000 birds and we were there from 1953 until the mid-1960s. We did quite well out if it, but during this time we had our second child, Roslyn, and Alistair was going to the local primary school at Swanson, and I was interested in the school. I joined the School Committee and the Parent Teacher Association, became Secretary of the School Committee and Chairman of the PTA, and I started to get very interested in why children fail or succeed at school. Through visiting different houses in the district, I came to realise just how many families there were who had no books in the house – a 'book' was *The Women's Weekly* or

The Truth. The next development from that was that we managed to build up the farm so that we were employing somebody to help us, and it was 1964 and the Continuing Education University had started a two-year certificate course in social studies. This was a part-time course, two evenings a week, I think, for two years, so I enrolled in this thinking it would give me some understanding of this problem, why children succeed and fail. It was during this course that I discovered, one, sociology, and, two, that there was a thing called social work that you could actually get paid for doing.

I got my certificate for this course and looked around for a job to do. I had already started doing voluntary work in marriage guidance counselling work and by then it was becoming obvious that neither of our children were wanting to have careers as farmers, so I looked around for a social work job and the first opportunity was in the psychiatric unit at Auckland Hospital, Ward 10. I applied for that job and was invited to come and spend a day in the ward; I got a phone call from Dr Lindsay that night to say that the staff thought they could put up with me and if I wanted the job it was mine. So that was my change in career from farming to social work. The two years I spent in Ward 10 were in the most challenging work environment. I don't know if you are familiar with how it was run there in the late 1960s, but John Lindsay was a disciple of Maxwell Jones, a Scottish psychiatrist who had developed a method based on a therapeutic community; the psychiatric unit became a community, of which all members of staff were considered members, and that was how Lindsay was running this ward. The day started with a ward meeting at 9am, and for an hour every patient and every staff member had to sit in a circle like a Quaker meeting. We had 25 in-patients and about another 25 coming as day patients, and a staff of about 20-25 as well. The routine of this meeting was that anybody could say what they wanted but they had to realise that having said that they had to listen to what anybody else cared to say. You can imagine the demanding environment that it was, and really elite staff got filtered out because some of the traditional nurses and doctors just could not stand this idea of free discussion with the patients, which meant that every action of yours as a staff member was open for discussion the next day at the ward meeting. It was certainly challenging.

It would have an effect on your behaviour during the day, wouldn't it? Yes, you knew that you were answerable to everybody for what you did and the way you acted. That was the first hour, then at morning tea you broke up into small groups and there would be two or three staff members with about ten patients, and I suppose there were about four of these groups. That went on until 11.30am and then I think we had a staff get-together and monitoring of the day till lunchtime. Then in the afternoon there was a programme of various activities, sort of occupational therapy in the ward. People coming in to take classes in various activities – for instance, Peggy Dunstan, the poet, came in and started a poetry circle. She had a wonderful gift of communicating with the patients and encouraging them to write. It was amazing, some of the work that came out of those groups, and also the rapport she had and how she could pick up the most hopeful thing that someone had said. They would come out with a dog of a rhyme and I would think, "Gosh, what can she say about this?" But she would pick some key words that obviously meant something to the patient. A lot of these patients became good amateur poets

and I saw their work appearing in newspapers and things like that afterwards. So that was typical, and other activities included going in groups to some activity in the city, some workplace or something like that. The whole idea was rehabilitation and getting people out.

Were there drugs available in the 60s?

Yes, some of the teenagers and patients in their early 20s were on drugs as part of their symptoms. There was a little bit of shock treatment still being used in the ward but Lindsay was not very keen on it and there was very little of it used. It was all positive discussion, and the thesis was that if somebody in a family presents as psychiatrically disturbed there are probably disturbed relationships in the family, so it was family psychiatry. A condition of a person being treated there was that the family would be prepared to come in for a family conference with staff. There were four of us as social workers and our job was to visit the family, take a family history and present that to the staff gathering when treatment was being discussed. Then we took an active part in these therapy groups as well and in the ward meetings. Shortly after I started there, Lindsay got the idea of having somebody taking minutes of this daily ward meeting. A patient was chosen each week to write notes for the day and a house surgeon, one staff member, was with this patient if he or she needed any help in writing and so on. Once that practice was set up, the meeting opened each day with the person who had written the notes for the previous day's meeting reading out what they had written, then the meeting went on from there. It was amazing what a lot of them showed, the things they picked up on. Although the method did not work for everybody it was very proactive and a lot of people benefited from this line of treatment.

After I had been there two years, the Hospital Board decided it would award bursaries to two social workers to do the Diploma of Social Science at Victoria University in Wellington. I put my name forward with one or two others, and two of us were picked. Ten days before we were due to go down to Victoria the government sliced 5% off the health budget, and the Hospital Board decided that the last thing they needed was educated social workers, so they cancelled our bursaries after we had been accepted. Both of us decided we would go under our own steam anyway. Dorothy Nathan was the other person, and both of us did quite well the first year. I think she stayed on as a psychiatric social worker afterwards. At the end of our first year our supervising social worker at Auckland Hospital went to the Board and said, "Here are these two who went under their own steam. They have paid their way and both done very well. I think you should restore their bursary for the second year." Which the Board agreed to do, so after living on nothing, for the second year down in Wellington I was on full salary.

Did Jean follow you down to Wellington?

No, I was able to do it because she had got her first full-time job, at the university library, so she supported the family during that first year with what little savings we had. The second year, with all this money, that is where our art collection started.

You also met an artist in Wellington?

Yes, that was Robin White. That was in the second year, when we had to go out two days a week and do some practical social work. My assignment was to work with the school counsellor at Mana College in Porirua, and Robin

White was doing a shared-time art teaching position with a friend at Mana College and that is where I first met her. I had become interested in her work beforehand. She had had an exhibition in the university library a year before and I had bought one or two of her prints, exorbitant prices like $6 and $12, to decorate the flat that I was sharing with a couple of other blokes in Wellington. On my days at Mana College, her art department – her and her friend Susan somebody – was the one oasis of sanity in that school. The principal was a Miss McKenzie, who was the first woman principal of a co-ed school in New Zealand, and she was out to prove that she could be as strict a martinet as any school headmaster. For the sort of kids that were coming to the school counsellor, life in that school was just hell, really. But this art room with Robin and her friends was just a revelation to me, and in one corner of the art room they had a partitioned off cubbyhole, which every morning was lined with fresh sheets of blank newsprint, and anybody in the school who felt life was too much for them could take time out in this cubbyhole and do what they wanted. It was the Japanese principal of having a punch ball – they can go and punch a ball instead of murdering the boss. So that was a great experience.

What about the Social Science Diploma, was that as big a revelation as the previous course?

Well, it was great building on that, a full-time course. We studied sociology in detail, social psychology, social work practice, and Jim Robb was there, and John McCreary – he had been a fellow prisoner of mine during the war in detention in Hautu, so I had already known him and he had been quite an influence on me, he had been one of the Victoria University students who introduced me to Steinbeck, etc. Harry Scott, I knew him. He became a sociologist and he was a good writer, a great fan of New Zealand culture, and he had been quite an influence on me in detention. He was tragically killed on Mt Cook, he and a friend were out to rescue somebody who had got lost, and Harry fell and was tragically killed in the early 1960s. I think he had gone to Auckland University by then.

I came back to the hospital at the end of 1971, and we had to do 18 months' or two years' bonding to the hospital because of the finance we had been given. More and more, I was coming to think that here in Ward 10 we were taking people out of the maelstrom that had caused their disturbance of one sort or another, and after two or three months, partly as an in-patient and then coming as an out-patient, they were being thrown back into the maelstrom again. In 1970 the City Council had set up their Community Development Section with Peter Harwood and already by then I was active in the Social Workers' Association, and I had had quite a lot to do with the proposal to have this set up so I was quite familiar with it. Peter had decided on the idea of making the pivot of the community development work the setting up of CABs as windows into the community. He set up the Ponsonby Bureau in 1970 and then the Queen Street Bureau shortly after, and Glen Innes was the third one. Then in 1973 they decided they wanted to open one in Avondale, so I was quite interested and thought that this was taking the step – instead of throwing people back into the community without any great support, we were building up resources in the community that would help people with psychiatric and other trouble. I applied for this job at Avondale and

Peter was good enough to agree to appoint me, so I left the hospital and that is when I got into community work.

Who was there in Auckland City at the time, besides Peter Harwood?

Ian Shirley had come in to set up the Glen Innes Bureau. There was Eddie McLeod, who was running the Ponsonby Bureau.

Was there anybody else? Wasn't there a housing social worker?

I don't know if one had been set up by then … very likely there was, because I think that was something Peter was pretty keen to get up.

I seem to recall a young woman and I can't remember her name.

Now, the architect that helped to design Te Papa … Helena Mercep – yes, her husband was the architect – but I think she was already there when I came.

Between Peter, you, Ian, Eddie and Helena – those people have got quite strong personalities, haven't they? Really interesting characters. Were they able to form a team? Was it a good bond between them?

Yes, well Peter was a great administrator and he knew how to exploit the talents of people and champion them and defend them, as long as they were working soundly.

Did he have to defend them within the Council?

Well, on the whole, the people who were on the Community Development Committee – we had people like Selwyn Dawson, for instance, I am not sure whether Robbie was the Mayor, I think he probably was, then Colin Kay was later. So Robbie was the Mayor and he was very supportive of what we were doing. Selwyn Dawson, the Methodist minister, and two or three others … sorry the names escape me.

That is ok, it is easy for me to get those names, but it was a supportive committee?

Lindo Ferguson, he was Deputy Mayor, I think, for quite a lot of the period and he was a real tower of strength. I think he probably chaired that Community Development Committee quite a bit of the time. Setting up that CAB in Ponsonby, especially with Eddie McLeod as the Community Worker there, Eddie had been the Secretary of the Māori Council of New Zealand. I think he left that role to take up the position in Ponsonby and he was, of course, right into the network of Māori community in Ponsonby. Among the initial workers that Eddie helped to recruit when they advertised for 20 volunteers to run the Bureau were Betty Wark and Anne Tia and Coral Lavulavu.

[Tape 2, side 2]

Neil, you were talking about some of these interesting characters in the Ponsonby CAB.

Yes, another one was Fred Ellis, a key figure, now Peter got in behind their work and listened to what they had to say about what they felt were the needs of the local community there, and very soon the housing situation became one of the key issues – housing, unemployment and the lack of acceptable organised activity for a lot of the young Māori and Pacific people in Ponsonby. Betty Wark and Anne Tia would give Peter all sorts of ideas of what could be done and, in return, with their status as workers of the CAB recognised officially by the City Council, their mana grew in the community.

It was a symbiotic relationship.

Yes, and it gave other Māori members of the community more confidence to come out and take part in community life than they had had before. So various activities were set up in conjunction with the Bureau. The Bureau was set up in the Community Centre in Ponsonby Terrace and various activities started to blossom there, including one that had quite a big effect, though it was not an immediate one, but I might as well mention it while I think of it. A Tongan Methodist minister's wife – Luseane Koloi – was working in the centre of the city there and she set up the first language nest for Pacific Island preschool children. She had been trained by the Methodist Church in Fiji as a kindergarten teacher and her husband as a pastor. When they settled in Auckland they were not very popular with the established Sāmoan and Tongan church congregations there because with their social orientation they saw the chief need of their community was to become accustomed to the necessities of life in Auckland – instead of tithing their people to build huge churches back in Tonga and Sāmoa, they were insisting on the need for their people to consider their wages as their seed crop of taro which they were going to need to buy school books for their children, and pay school fees and so on. They held classes in how to use your washing machine, how to use your electric stove, how to not throw fat down the kitchen sink and block up the drains – in other words, to orientate to what was going to be healthy living in this new community and maybe you could prosper in this.

Is that an example then of how the CAB and the Community Centre provided an opportunity for this to happen?

Yes, especially with Luseane and her little preschool. Luseane's husband unfortunately died of a heart attack while he was back visiting Tonga, leaving her with five dependent children, and also at least one or two other Tongans who were boarding with her as students at university or tech or something like that. Because she had not had long-term residency in New Zealand she was not entitled to a widow's benefit and the best that Social Welfare could do was give her an unemployment benefit, so she existed on that with help from here and there. But when she set up the language nest, unfortunately a reporter at the *Inner City News* reported the opening of it – she had a princess out from Tonga to help launch it and there was a great festival, feasts and so on, to launch this enterprise and so the *Inner City News* wrote this up enthusiastically – and when this report appeared in the *Inner City News* the Social Welfare Department in Grey Lynn stopped Luseane's unemployment benefit, because she obviously wasn't going to be able to report for possible jobs. She was not getting a penny out of the voluntary work she was doing there. Fortunately, Helena Mercep, Betty Wark and myself heard about this and went to the Social Welfare Department and pointed out the lunacy of this. If anybody was contributing to the social wellbeing of the Pacific Island community it was this woman, so they quickly restored her benefit.

You also had an advocacy role where you could see injustice, you felt free to step in and do that sort of thing?

Yes, and that was something that Peter supported and upheld.

Could you run through what your responsibilities were as a Community Advisor?

As a Community Advisor I was primarily responsible for establishing a new Citizen's Advice Bureau at Avondale and managing that, selecting the first 20

volunteers and helping Peter run the six-week training course that they would be given before they got to work in the Bureau. Then, through the statistics that came through the CAB of the important issues that people were bringing in their enquiries to the CAB, to build up a picture of how we could best help in providing resources that would make life, social life, more profitable in Avondale.

You saw the things that were happening in the CAB as a sort of assessment of what the needs were?

Yes, a window into the community. In the three years that Peter had been going he had already found certain things that were useful and that a community centre was essential, so in Ponsonby and Glen Innes and Avondale we had those set up. Also, the emergency housing appeared to be important, particularly in the inner city. And school holiday programmes and after-school activities became something that could be sponsored. So those things were already there, and some experience had been gained in how to do these things by the time I took up my appointment at Avondale.

Did you have a management committee or were you just on your own?

Yes, there was a management committee for the Community Centre. I don't know if there were already community committees.

There probably were, in different areas, it was a bit uneven.

I think it was already established there.

Any particular names of people who were helpful on that management committee, that you recall?

I think Ken Dobson was the Chair of committee when I was first appointed out there and he was very active and helpful.

What sort of issues came out, then, looking at this window into the community?

One of the first things that came out was the need for facilities for recreation of an informal nature for young teenagers, particularly Māori and Pacific Island young people in the district. There was a building next to the Community Centre, an old ramshackle building called The Barn, and we set up an informal youth club there which did good work, but it was certainly one of the things that first raised the level of tension about our work. The Community Centre was next door to the Hollywood Cinema, which was run by Jan Grefstad, who had taken a great dislike to the local street kids, Māori and Pacific Island in particular – with some reason, because they were an obstreperous group – and he did his best to undermine the work that was being done at The Barn. So quite a lot of work had to be done in smoothing out relationships with Jan and trying to make him see that at least some activity that would interest the youth would perhaps side-track them from annoying him in some ways. But it was very much a touch-and-go thing.

I seem to recall that you actually set up, I don't know that it was through you or not, but you seemed to be involved, I think, in relation to the childcare system? Am I right? Children being looked after in the homes rather than in childcare centres?

With the co-operation of the public health nurse in covering the area we set up a family clinic, a children's clinic to be held one day a week. Just let the word go around that on this one day a week from 10am to 12pm, or whatever the hour would be, that Dr Beecroft and her public health nurses would be

available there to talk to anybody who wanted them and there would be a programme of supervised play for the children, and the community minibus would be available to bring young mothers with their children to attend if it was difficult for them to come. It flourished for quite a while – the spark of it was Dr Beecroft coming to us and saying that there were quite a lot of families who obviously needed their help but it was very hard to get a response from them. She thought if we started this project it might bring in those who were not being very co-operative, and it certainly had this effect. It proved a great educational thing because the public health nurses would have informal talks with the mothers and their children, and help them with management problems, and then they would bring in some people who would give a talk for half an hour on nutrition and family budgeting, desirable food and things like this. Also, some of the classes at the local intermediate school became interested in what was going on there, and boys and girls came along and observed these morning meetings and volunteered to make toys and play equipment for the group, so it was being a bit of an education to them as well. A little later we found that students were being sent from teacher's college to observe what was going on and give them some idea of ways in which families could be helped to be more part of the community.

Were the mothers and babies from mixed ethnic groups?

They would tend to be mostly low income, in the state-housing area, but some would be Pākehā, some Pacific Island and some Māori, some would be solo parents, but not all. It was very constructive.

Can you tell me about the school holiday programmes you ran?

The school holiday programmes which we got going pretty quickly – we already had the model from Ponsonby and Glen Innes – one of the schools that was very helpful was the local Roman Catholic convent school and the early programmes were held there. The parish priest was keen to be involved in that and gradually they came to be centred around the intermediate school, where there were more resources and so on. Part of those school holiday programmes, an idea that Peter developed, was to go to visit a marae somewhere in the rural area, a well-established marae, and using links there would be with the local Māori community, find out what their traditional marae would have been and they would help negotiate such a visit. They were very good, and we found in particular the marae at Tokomaru Bay …

That is a long way to go!

There were local links with the Māori community in Avondale, and also it was the family marae for Venus Tamepo, who was our secretary at the department there. So those trips gave me a great entrée into the Māori world that I had never had before. Though my first entrée into the Māori world had really been in the second year of my diploma course in Wellington, when the Māori Welfare Officers were having their national conference at Ruatāhuna Marae in Rotorua and they invited any of the students who were doing the diploma course to attend for the weekend there, and that was the first time I had ever been onto a marae. That was before I had been appointed to Avondale and that was a real revelation to me, being welcomed onto the marae and then sitting in the meeting house during the evening and listening to Māori all evening, with each of us having the courtesy of one of the Māori Welfare Officers sitting next to us and whispering to us from time to time what was

being said in translation. That was really a great revelation to me, spending that weekend there, and I wrote it up for the *Social Work Journal*. To see the confidence with which Māori could act when they were on their home ground there as compared with their diffidence in the outer world, and what a strength being able to go back to that was to them. That was reflected also in the school parties that I went with to Tokomaru Bay and other places afterwards.

Another brilliant idea of Peter's was that part of the finishing requirements of the Bureau workers was that they had to come and spend a weekend on a rural marae at the end of their course, and I have never forgotten the first one for the Avondale Bureau workers. I guess probably it was not just for each individual Bureau, I suppose the new recruits came to the Bureau from each of the four Bureaus but, again, there would be liaison with this. Eddie McLeod and Fred Ellis had close family ties with the marae at Ahipara, at the foot of Ninety Mile Beach. That was the first Bureau workers' weekend at the marae that I went to, and the bus broke down on the way there so it was not until about midnight that we arrived, tired and hungry, at Ahipara, and we were breaking tapu in that to come to a marae you must be there before dusk. However, they were flexible and welcomed us on, and after the formal welcome people were told just to take their gear into the meeting house and find a mattress and settle down. The first people there were taking up a lot of room, and towards the end there were people making themselves comfortable using far too much space and about 20 or 30 hapless Bureau workers standing and wondering where they were going to sleep. Eddie McLeod walked into the meeting house and just burst out laughing, and he said, "Now you know how the homeless feel! Come on, squash up," so there was room for everybody. Things like that gave you insights.

Did you have any interesting people as Bureau workers?

Oh yes, people like Betty Tongalia, who was a Nuie Islander who became a great community worker, she died not so long ago. Ada Loese, who was sort of a rogue worker in a way, she had her own special ways of working, and she was married to a Sāmoan and she has done great work. Since the setting up of the Waipareira Trust she has been given further scope to work there, too. I have not been in touch with her recently but I gather that she is still doing good work out there in the west.

[END]

David Haigh has a long career in community development. He is the former head of CD for the Auckland Regional Authority and has recently retired from Unitec New Zealand, where he taught in social practice, sociology and not-for-profit management. David is active in Auckland Action Against Poverty.