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Full transcript of an interview with

JOY BALUCH

on 27 May 2008

By June Edwards

Recording available on CD

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LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA: INTERVIEW NO. OH 862

Interview with Nancy Joy Baluch AM recorded by June Edwards on 27th May 2008 at Port Augusta, South Australia, for the State Library of South Australia Oral History Project.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

This is June Edwards interviewing Joy Baluch at Port Augusta on 27th May 2008. So we'll just start with what's your full name.

Nancy Joy Baluch.

Why did you decide to be a 'Joy' instead of a 'Nancy'?

I didn't; my mother did. My mother was into Russian history and I was to be called Natasha, and back in 1932 it was the responsibility of the father to go register the children, and when he got down to the courthouse he couldn't remember 'Natasha', but he did remember that his first girlfriend was called Nancy and he had a pet goat called Nancy. As a consequence, when he returned and my mother said, 'This child will never be called "Nancy"', I think that that's probably where I was first [called Joy].

I started school at Cook in 1937 and I think that's probably where the fighting spirit emerged, because it was one teacher that spanned the seven grades and they called the roll each morning, and he would say, 'Nancy Copley', and I'd sit there. And I had a cousin who lived next door to us, his father was an engine driver, mine was an engineman, and he would turn behind and he'd say, 'That's Nancy Joy, that's Nancy Joy', and I would defiantly say to the teacher, 'My name is Joy Copley'. And officially I'm known as 'Nancy', but my family never, ever called me 'Nancy'.

That's interesting. So what were your parents' names and what did they do?

My mother, her name was Parker, but her grandparents came from the Isle of Bute and the Highlands of Scotland, and they came out in the 1850s into Ned Kelly country. Yes, one of my great-grandfather's nephews was John McDouall Stuart, who pioneered the Gulf to Gulf, and so the family moved from Victoria and came here into the northern part of South Australia. On my paternal side they came from Liverpool, from Sussex. The ones that came from Scotland, of course, were millers,

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they worked in the woollen mills – matter of fact, one dates back to the invention of the woollen loom; but on my father's side they came from Liverpool, they were miners; and from Sussex they were businesspeople, and they all arrived, too, in about the 1860s, here. My great-great-grandparents arrived, sailed from Liverpool direct to Adelaide and then journeyed north. They had three children, the youngest of which was ten months of age when they left Liverpool and he learned to walk on the boat. So I go back that far. But my maiden name was Copley.

And did you have any siblings?

Yes. I'm the eldest. I have a sister, Marlene, who's two and a half years younger than I, and then a brother ten years younger than I. And we had a very – born into a blessed family. Working-class family, hard-working, with Christian principles, but an extended family where there was aunties, uncles, cousins, *et cetera*, for generations. And so I was born into a loving family, and today people say to me, 'Well, what inspires you to go on?' And I say, 'Loyalty to my great-great-grandparents'.

I wonder what sort of life they had back there that would entice them to come to a new beginning in a hostile land, a land unknown, for a new beginning and to suffer the elements? And they became, from their previous professions, they became miners, Cobb & Co. drivers, butchers, businesspeople; they completely diversified, and whilst living just south of the Goyder Line. Yes, it's loyalty to their memory, really. And that's why I'm intolerant today of this soft generation and the 'me' society, who don't ask 'What can I do for my country?' but 'What's in it for me?' I get intolerant of that, as I get older. And I think that until one gets older – because in your earlier life you're busy, either carving out a career, your involvement with your family and you haven't got time to think and dwell on these, but it's only as you get older in the twilight years of your life that you start to question: 'What's the purpose of my life?' And some people go through life and never, ever find that purpose, they never recognise what [it is]. And I'm a firm believer in the Creator's master plan: that we all fit in, and each of us there is a purpose.

My daughter, who'll be fifty-four in October, she says, 'I haven't found my purpose in life'. And I said to her, 'Well, you know, your prime purpose was to be

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the mother of two beautiful children, to guide them, to set them on the path that they are now on, and beautiful human beings'. And she said, 'But now what about me?' I said, 'Now there's time for you'. And I said, 'You will find it'. And I believe – I've come to realise my purpose in life. I didn't recognise it, but I realise that I was born for this time. And, having looked back on the struggles, although I had a blessed life, it wasn't an easy life, and that was caused by the choices that I made. God gave us choices, and sometimes I've questioned that, that we were given choices. But I returned twice to Port Augusta or I was forced back, dragged back, whatever you like; and I believe it was for this time. We've each got a season in our life.

So why do you think you were drawn or brought back to Port Augusta?

For this time. For this time in history.

Port Augusta needed you to be here?

Yes. But I had to be here and go through the struggles of personal ill health, I had battling: I became the breadwinner, not my husband. My husband was Ukrainian and he came out as a displaced person in 1948. He was released from Dachau concentration camp in '45 by the Americans in April. He was due for the gas ovens, but he was there; and he would extract the gold from the teeth of the Jews before they were thrown into the ovens; and he was emancipated when released in April of '45, and he really had everything knocked out of him. He was studying to be a Russian Orthodox priest when the Germans came through the Ukraine and took him into forced labour, and he eventually ended up in München, in Munich, where the V1 and V2 rockets were manufactured underground, and being a young man he and other Ukrainians, why they thought they could succeed in sabotaging this great German stronghold I'll never know, but that's how he ended up in Dachau. So he had everything beaten out of him.

And I wanted to be like my grandmothers before me and my mother, whose husbands worked, and I wanted to be just like them, a replica of them. But I ended up the breadwinner and I had to do battle for two. And it wasn't in an easy time, in the '50s, '60s, '70s, they weren't easy times really for women. And so I had to go from being a very – I was very quiet. I was a Sunday school teacher and head stenographer in the railways and because of the attitude of people of the day in Port

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Augusta towards migrants I got my husband out of here and I went into private enterprise, and that's where I see I made a mistake. I should have stood ground and fought them; but I went away twice. I went into private enterprise and then, when I became pregnant with my first child, Michelle, I thought, 'How can I have this child away from my family?' And as quick as I bought the business we sold it and returned here. It was in a credit squeeze. My husband found difficulty, because he wasn't a tradesman, to get a job. He eventually did, but we weren't happy, and I returned again to Adelaide and lived privately until once more the ties of the family, *et cetera*, drove me back. And we shouldn't – as I said, we all had choices. My husband should have been strong enough to say, 'No, we're staying here'. But he liked Port Augusta, too, and he often says, 'We never made a mistake, darling, coming back'.

So when did you marry your husband?

Nineteen fifty-four.

And what was his name?

Teo Stefan Baluch. He was the love of my life.

Was he? I was going to say what drew you to him.

Ah, well, he was different to Australian men. He didn't drink or smoke. Extremely well-dressed, right up until the day of his death. Very quiet. Good musician – – –. (coughs) I'm developing this bloody cough again. (break in recording)

Okay, this is June Edwards interviewing Joy Baluch at Port Augusta, and we were just talking about Joy's husband.

Yes, he was a great musician, great dancer. A wonderful father, husband. He passed over twelve years ago.

So do you want to talk about the business that you ran together in Port Augusta?

Ran a very busy delicatessen on Henley Beach Road, big staff. Unbeknownst to me, my father had arranged to take long service leave in order to see me through the last three months of my pregnancy down there. I didn't know that; in the meantime, I sold the business and came back here. Then we went back and lived privately. Then I came back and opened a shoe store. There was only one in town that never sold

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fashion shoes, never sold continental shoes for men or anything like that, it was just the stable stock, and I went through the process, one, of acquiring a property that was owned by a businessman who had been associated with my grandparents over a long period of time, Otto Rischmueller, and he built shops at the top of the mall and he lied and he buggered me around, and I went down an arcade and a week after I opened up the shoe store his son-in-law opened up right on the top of the mall. Bloody near broke us. It was a credit squeeze.

So I went out of there and the Council had built a beach kiosk on the beach and I tendered for it and I was successful. Summers were okay. First winter I didn't know what the hell had struck us, and the Council hadn't honoured their obligations by putting in a big patio-type thing out the front to enable people to walk in. It was all mud. It was a shocking winter. And so I introduced the first jukebox and billiard machine, soccer machine, and I found that I was making more money out of the teenagers of the town and selling them fish-and-chips and toasted sandwiches, *et cetera*, than struggling to keep – because it was the focal point of the little township there. People slept on the beach, on the lawns. We'd be up at two o'clock in the morning still watering lawns with three hundred people asleep on the foreshore. And I'd had a two-by-two-by-two lease with Council. I never had a toilet. Michelle was then about three years of age. You'd have to cross the railway line, which was the main highway across the old western bridge, trains would shunt of course into the roundhouse and from the wharf, where boats would come in with coal and supplies, and I said to the Council I wanted a storeroom and a toilet. They put it on. Up goes the rent. They never put on a roof, did they? So first night when our stock was moved in all the bodgies and widgies got over the top and took our stock. They eventually put on the roof and that was more money.

Then Council decided they would put in a swimming pool that came in and out with the tide, and, of course, he was the father, Mayor of the City, he was Mayor for about thirty-four years, he was Member for Stuart for thirty-two, he wore two hats, and he came down with the Works Committee and said, 'Well, we're going to put this in. Your business is going to increase. We're going to put up your rent'. All right, that's all right. And they come down to inspect, and I don't know what made me say this. Don Jessop, who later went on to represent the Liberals in Grey

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and later became a senator, he was Deputy Mayor, and I looked at, I said, 'One day I'll wear your robes and I'll bring justice to this city'. And I've no idea what made me say that.

Well, anyway, the lease was up. By that time they had extended it. I had a larger top dining room – it was probably that wide, and then they extended it to maybe the middle of the dining room there. (indicates)

So about twenty feet or so.

This came on the market. I thought, 'I'm out of here, out of here. Wasting my time'. So the Town Clerk of the day, who went to school with me but he was seven years older, we went that way through the school, come down and said, 'Your lease will be up. You putting in a re-tender?' 'No, nup, not re-tendering, you can have it.' I said, 'But I'll tell you something: whoever comes in will have no business'. 'Oh,' he said, 'nice little business'. 'It won't be here when I walk out that door.' So they called tenders and they got quite a number and they selected the successful tenderer and they came to me and they said, 'Oh, well, we can afford to buy the refrigeration and the stock and the furniture but we can't afford the machines'. I said, 'The machines aren't for sale'. I took the machines, put the jukebox down in the Black Bear Café, which was run by a German friend of my husband and I – he come out in '52 with dieselisation of the railway, come from Berlin as a young Hun – 'young lion', as we called him – put it in his café, and the soccer machine, billiard table I put at a place in Quorn, and by this time I'd acquired another jukebox. I put that at Quorn. And I gave them a percentage of what they took. And I came in here, it was run as a guest house.

And was it called the Pampas Hotel then?

No. Suburban. It was the last hotel built in 1883 and it was run as a guest house. He was an ex-schoolteacher, ran a taxi service in Port Augusta, but he also had other dubious business activities like bringing in the girls from Adelaide to service the men from the line. I didn't find that out for years, couple of years. That's why I changed the name, I wanted to get away from the stigma.

And so I bought this on a thousand pounds deposit, and the price of it was six and a half thousand pounds. That was back forty-seven years ago.

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So that was quite expensive then, wasn't it?

Oh, yes. Yes. But over those years, of course, we've ploughed a lot of money back into it and it's been our provider and it has provided me with what assets I have today. But it's a twenty-four-seven job and I'm getting tired, and the last twelve years have been extremely difficult without my husband. And then all that time, of course, I was the Mayor and went through another credit squeeze, the banks with high interest rates in '89, '90 – very difficult time for businesspeople. They asset-stripped. I hate Westpac. Bankers are bastards, there's no truer word than the book that was written: *Bankers and bastards*. And you can't separate one from the other. I mean at that particular time the growers along the River Murray, they were stripped of their assets; other businesspeople, and these whingeing, whining people today who complain about six per cent interest, I say, 'Try bloody eighteen, offshore loans that the banks get you into and you don't know anything about. You don't know what interest rates are'. Yes.

So that hurt your business at the time, during that time?

Oh, yes, like it hurt many. I damn near lost this and all my other assets. And many other people did. I sat the bank manager down here, regional manager, some other manager, they come up, they wanted to sell my land on the west side, they wanted to sell the house that I bought, my mother and father lived in. They wanted a fire sale. I said, 'There'll be no fire sale'. I said to each and every one, 'Have you got insurance?' They said, 'What's that got to do with it?' 'Well,' I said, 'I'm going to make your wives wealthy widows, that's what I'm going to do'. One said to me, 'I haven't come here to be threatened'. I said, 'You don't know me. I'm a woman of my word. It won't be tomorrow, won't be next week'. I said, 'I've sometimes waited twenty years'. I said, 'Dogs have a day and mongrels have a week, and I'll see you have a week'. They shifted the bank manager away. Within a week, sent him to Mount Gambier. And all of a sudden a bank loan, it started off I was doing a development on the west side of my land over there, a bank loan of eighty thousand dollars had blown into four hundred and ten thousand and whatever, through interest. Offshore loans.

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So all of a sudden after this they come up with a compromise. I'd had another business, a very lucrative one, the railway station which I'd opened. When I'd lost the mayoralty in '80 and I'd lost Grey because I was endorsed by the Liberal Party for the seat of Grey – I went down with Fraser, '83, '82 – and after I lost the mayoralty because the unions got involved – they didn't want the Mayor of Port Augusta having that media exposure as the Liberal candidate so they got rid of me, because in those days the mayoral position was only for one year, one year, the term – and so they threw me out, I said to Teo, 'This is no good. Have to have something to do', so I opened up a health food shop and I introduced these people into a different style of eating. I did all the pastries myself. Introduced them into tabouli, all this. Had a certain amount of health food products, *et cetera*.

But then unions black-banned me here. They black-banned Thin Lizzy's – I called it Thin Lizzy's. Bannon and crew always call me 'That skinny bitch'. I was in the Labor Party for two years. Greatest education of my life, you couldn't have got it at a university. I saw how they worked and I didn't like it. And I tried to name my business 'That skinny bitch' – of course, they wouldn't; so we ended up as a compromise with 'Thin Lizzy's'. And one day one of the railway employees, who of course disregarded the union ban on my shop and on him, came to me and said, 'What are you going to do about the railway station?' I said, 'What do you want me to do about the bloody railway station?' I was then out of office, of course. They said, 'Have you had a look? Do you know what the railway station looks like?' 'No.' 'Get the key, I'll show you.' Took me down there, it was a refreshment room and it had been run by the railways with a manager and then I think it was privatised and eventually closed. I took one look at this railway station, I thought, 'It's mine. I'm going to develop this'.

I used to do the cooking for the health food here, which disrupted the breakfasts at the motel. I'd do a lot of it at night but then preparation in the mornings, you know, had to be here. You'd have breakfast at the motel. And I looked down there, this beautiful, great big long bar, the kitchen, and I thought, 'What can I do with this?' There were seven trains a day, passenger trains. Passenger trains stopped for two hours, *et cetera*. Made, absolutely made. So I said to Teo, 'What do you think?' Very passive, he said, 'Whatever you think's okay by me'. And so the Property

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Officer said, 'Well, you'll have to put in a proposition, a tender, to Don Williams'. So I wrote to Don and I offered him a rental and I got a reply back in a fortnight, 'We accept your tender'. Teo always used to just open all the letters. He said to me, he said, 'There's the reply back from the railways'. I said, 'Oh, yeah? What's it say?' 'Oh,' he said, 'they made a mistake here'. I said, 'Yeah? How come?' He said, 'Look at it'. I picked up the letter, I said, 'What's wrong with it?' He said, 'They said it's only a hundred dollars a month'. I said, 'No, I said it was a hundred dollars a month'. I said, 'The bastard of a thing's been *closed* for nine years,' I said, 'I've got to build a business'. Then he took to me, 'Oh, Joy,' he said, 'that's terrible, that's outrageous. We're paying a hundred and eighty down the street'. I said, 'Street's a street. This is the railway station. I've got to build a business'. And so that's what I got it for.

And we ran it seven days a week with staff and my father. My daughter would come in. The staff that were here – and I still had the health food shop, and so all of my staff had to be able to move in here and make beds, go down to Lizzy's and serve, make salads, *et cetera*. If they couldn't do what I did, I didn't want them.

And so I continued there until my lease was up in the main street, and they were mongrel landlords, mongrel, and they put the pressure on all of the tenants there. And there was a coffee lounge upstairs so I wasn't allowed to sell tea or coffee, only decaffeinated; I couldn't sell anything with meat in – I mean, I had vegetarian pasties and all that type of thing. That didn't worry me. But then the crunch come, see, and they put pressure on for rates. I said, 'It's not in my contract'. 'Well, your contract's up, it's going to be written in'. And anyway, came about that they gave me a bill for one thousand, four hundred and something dollars. I said to these property owners from Adelaide, 'You are outrageous'. Some of the others scraped together their money for it. I said, 'I'll pay it, but it'll be the last payment you get'. So I went to every bank in town and I got the one thousand, two hundred or whatever dollars in ten cents, twenty cents, fifty cents and one dollars. Brought them back to Lizzy's and I got five buckets, and I took them out the wrappers and I mixed them all up. Each to a bucket. And then, in the afternoon, I said to a young fellow that was passing by, 'Do you want twenty bucks?' He said, 'What I got to do with twenty bucks?' I said, 'Carry five buckets for me up the stairs'. So he did. I knocked on the door of the

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accountant. I said, 'You want one thousand, two hundred or whatever it is? Here it is'. I emptied it over his desk. I said, 'It's the last money you're going to get from me'.

And I put in big – my colour scheme was green and cream, big tiles like this. When I went in there it was just one of those terrible woollen shag carpets, so I'd gone to great expense to put in all these tiles. So I then systematically set about and I put a hole in every one of those tiles – I thought, 'You won't get these tiles' – so they couldn't use them, and then I put the shag pile carpet over the top. 'That will teach you to mess with me'. So I vacated that and brought everything back to the railway station. I sold health food from there. And I remained there until I think it was '92, we were in a very bad time.

There was centralisation then of government departments, everything that had been brought into the city in the '80s – I mean, 1981, when I became Mayor, seventy-five per cent of the male workforce worked for government agencies, higher than Canberra. And I mean today the whole thing's reversed: we're a service centre, maybe twenty-six per cent work for the governments, *et cetera*. So I went to one of the local land agents, I said, 'I want to sell the railway station, my husband's sick'. He said, 'Oh, things are bad in town'. 'Yeah, I know they're bad'. He said to me – looked at the turnover, it was a good turnover, still twenty-five dollars a week rent, I had a licence I didn't have to pay for, liquor licence – I didn't have to pay a licence fee on Commonwealth property – one of the other publicans on a Ghan day – – –. We were so busy on a Ghan day, you know, it was just from start to go when the Ghan would go out, I mean baking and people would come and load their cars and stay for the day and stay for lunch and be at the bar and then they'd all fall off the Ghan and we'd have hundreds of people to serve, *et cetera* – and I said to the land agent. He said, 'Oh, I don't reckon you'd get twenty-five thousand'. I said, 'Go chase yourself'. 'Oh,' he said, 'plus stock'. I said, 'Stock, machinery, I'd have fifteen thousand'. I said, 'I can do better than that and you won't get a cut of it'. I ended up selling it for sixty-five thousand, cash in hand.

And you just did that privately?

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Yes. Person who'd come out the railways with a big package, he had this ready-made; plus also he'd got a contract for the loading and off-loading of cars, that was worth another twenty-five a year. But the grog got to him and he ended up losing the business; and the lass that's there now was one of my employees, she now has it, and I'm glad because she was such a great employee and friend of mine, you know. Yes, but that was at the time, of course, of, as I said, interest rates eighteen, nineteen per cent. So that's when Westpac made this deal with me. All of a sudden, the four hundred and ten disappeared: if I paid them fifty thousand in cash, which they knew I had, plus a hundred and twenty thousand, they'd forget about it; but on a proviso that I signed a statement that I wouldn't go public on the banks. I did, to get rid of them. And then I found out, of course, that it was illegal what they made me sign.

And in the meantime, in between all this, I ran as an independent. I got thrown out in '93, the unions threw me out in '93, again, because I'd offended the Government. Only by telling the truth. 'Look what you're doing to my city. You're not doing any impact studies on what the effects are going to be when you close that, when *you* transfer those people, and that compounds upon the schools and everywhere else.' No consultation whatsoever. I mean, I just took this up and said, you know, 'You're just a mob of ---. You can't be trusted'. And although the workshops were in the downturn, *et cetera*, unions were still effective enough to get rid of me, so I was out for two years – two years I was able to spend back here, home, with my husband. And I was returned again in '95 to the mayoralty and my husband died in '96.

We might just stop there because I'll have to change the card. Have a bit of a break.

END OF DISK 1: DISK 2

I'll just start by saying this is June Edwards interviewing Joy Baluch at Port Augusta on 27th May. So, Joy, when did you actually become Mayor the first time?

'Eighty-one.

And why did you decide to do that?

Because the others were just not suitable candidates. I'd been in local government since 1970. Everybody gets into local government pushing a barrow, whether it's to

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get their road sealed, whether it's to get rid of the Works Manager, get rid of the CEO, advance the football club or the trotting club. I had a barrow to push, and it was the health of this city, and my beloved son was born asthmatic all as a result of the fallout of the fly-ash, six hundred tonnes a year over this city and this region. Respiratory problems in all age groups increased, went like that. (clicks fingers) I've still got the letter to the editor that I responded to that was the forerunner to me getting into Council, and there was indication that the Government were going to put in another boiler and *The Transcontinental* wrote an editorial and said how good it would be, economic benefits, ra-di-ra-di-ra-di, and I took umbrage. My son was then seven and he'd spent all those years down in Escort House, Red Cross House, Children's Hospital. He was really a guinea pig for Munro Ford, he was in Red Cross House, Red Cross closed Red Cross House at Glenelg and they developed their big headquarters in Charles Street in the city, closed Red Cross House. What happened to those kids? What happened to all those little children that were there? I don't know. Some of them went to Escort House, the severe cases, the autistics, *et cetera*. So because my son was so severe he was put down in Escort House and to the age of fourteen he was in and out of hospital, *et cetera*, *et cetera*. So when he was seven I wrote this reply to the editorial inviting the city fathers to come and sit with Teo and I up in the pass to get a meal when he was out of Escort House or the Children's Hospital, get above the smog level. And I challenged the city fathers and the Government, the Health Department. Joanna Ward was *filled* with kids from Port Augusta.

May, the elections were, and after that letter I had people knocking on my door. Couldn't go shopping. 'Why don't you stand for Council?' Do you know what I said? 'Oh, that's a man's job.' After everything that I had been through, all the trials and tribulations, *et cetera*, I still didn't think I was equal. And my father, who was my mentor along with Teo, said, 'Sweetheart, go for it. You've got as much common sense as those. You used to correct their English when you were head typist', you know. So anyway it was the first shake-up mayoral election, first mayoral election in thirty-four years, or thirty-two. Lyn Richie was retiring as Speaker of the House, he was leaving Port Augusta: big mayoral election. Town was divided, the Deputy Mayor – female, only female on Council – I mean, I'm the second female councillor,

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was the second female councillor – and she went to the election, and one of my ex-bosses from the railways, Council Audit Officer, won the mayoral election by twenty-nine votes. If I had ever won anything by that margin I would crawl into a hole and die. And he remained Mayor for eleven years. Then sickness overcame him and my uncle, who'd been on Council I don't know how many years – thirty, I suppose, I don't know – and the Deputy Mayor of the day, decided they were going to be the Mayor. I thought, 'Over this one's dead body'.

My Uncle, because I sort of looked after my Nanna in the summertime when things got too bad for her – she died at the age of ninety-four – and he'd come here to the kitchen to see Nan, *et cetera*, it was during the mayoral election, he said, 'You know you're not going to win'. He said, 'You have offended too many people. You've offended – you had the horse stables moved out of town, out of the residential areas. You've upset all those people with horses'. Who else had I offended? Senior citizens – yeah, I offended them, because they wouldn't let the elderly *men* into the centre, and that was financed by the Apex Club and the Combined Unions Council. How dare those women shut out these old men and they were only allowed to sit at the bus stop and not allowed to come in! Yes, I've offended them. Oh, he gave me a long list of all those I'd offended, and he said, 'I've got the Aboriginal vote, I've got ---.' He was well into sport and I hate sport, I've never had time for it, been too busy looking after a family, you know, surviving. It's a waste of time. I *hate* football and tennis and golf and that today, and if ever the Asians are going to come in it's going to be on Grand Final day. I know that, but I don't know what year. And they'll just take over peacefully.

And so went to the election and I dusted the ground with them both. But it wasn't easy, because then that's when I the next year was endorsed by the Liberal Party and I was into social justice and, you know, 'Oh, you don't do that to the football club'. I mean I can vividly remember the night that I presented a *papier mâché* model of our child care centre up here. Harry Richards was City Manager and I had been to Canberra, this was in preparation for Redcliffs back in the '70s. Also then I'd taken leave of absence from here and I got a job as Admin Officer for the Regional Council for Social Development, which took in the three cities on the Gulf and eighteen rural councils down to Redhill. I had a social planner and four community development

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officers. I applied for a community development officer's job – the salary was then eight and a half thousand – and I thought, 'I can do this job. So many things under this'. Applied for the job, I went to it, fronted up to all these people. The chairman was a female from Whyalla and she looked at me – she was a very hard lady – and she said to me, 'No, you haven't got the temperament of a community development officer. You've achieved a lot in local government in the eight years that you've been there, you've initiated a lot of change, but that's not what we're looking for. But if you go outside and fill in an application form for the Admin's job it's yours and you can start Monday, because I need somebody to control this lot'. And that's how I got the job. And so I was wearing two hats: I was then Chairman of Finance, Port Augusta City Council [and] Admin Officer. Well, that was just too much for the Council, all this social justice, you know: introducing women's shelters and homeless persons' hostels and *child care* – 'Oh, oh, don't mention child care.'

On the night that I presented this *papier mâché*, I think it was half a million dollars that cost, then, in the late '70s. Cost the ratepayer in Port Augusta nothing. We had to go back for a second bite of the cherry, Harry and I. Hassel and Partners, who were the architects of the Festival Theatre, had designed this beautiful building and they forgot the bloody airconditioning, so we had to go back knocking on Canberra's door to get this. So that night – it was just yesterday in my mind, and we were so proud, Harry and I and the health inspector, that we'd achieved this – anyway, this was their customary way, the footballers, the trotters and everyone, they're going through their agenda. They hadn't read it before. My auntie used to read my uncle's agenda and tell him how to vote. So anyway, they're going through their agenda while I'm spruiking about the child care centre and one said – who used to be a superintendent in the railway – 'My wife stayed home and looked after *my* kids'. Never raised his eyes to me or to the Mayor in the chair and the others around the table. 'Aye', 'Aye', 'So did mine', 'So did mine'. I said, 'Your Worship, can I reply to Councillor?' 'Yes.' I said, 'Councillor Archer, wasn't till observing your children – indeed, your wife did stay home and look after your children, but', I said, 'it wasn't until observing your children that I came to the conclusion that not all mongrels walked on four legs'. Right over their head. The Mayor looked at me, never asked me to apologise, and I was deflated. One, they didn't give a damn about that; and

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about four years down the track, when Redcliffs was taken off the board – because of world prices and lack of demand for PVC, *et cetera*, Redcliffs never got built – they then wanted to change it into an aged home. I said, ‘You’re going to have trouble with the toilets because we’ve got little loos like that’. That was their mentality.

Then when I was introducing the homeless persons’, we managed – this is the Regional Council – had managed to persuade the Housing Trust, we’d bought this property, a homeless persons’ [hostel]. And the Mayor said to me, ‘You realise, of course, that you are going to attract all the riff-raff of Australia to our doors by opening up that homeless persons’ hostel’. I said, ‘They’re already here. They sleep outside’. I said, ‘They came generations ago’. I said, ‘You know what? Some of their offspring sit in this chamber’. No response. Not a thing.

Then when it was the women’s and children’s emergency shelter, well, that was just too much. *Too much*. It was centrespread in *Truth*. Yes. ‘Is Port Augusta the capital wife-bashing city of Australia?’ There was the Superintendent of Police, agitated face in the centrespread, there was the Mayor, there was the unionists, denying that there was any domestic violence in Port Augusta. And the Mayor said to me when I got up, he said – very agitated – he said, ‘Councillor Baluch,’ he said, ‘nice women don’t need a facility like that’. I said, ‘No. No, they don’t, Your Worship’. I said, ‘Do you know what they do? They put on their dark glasses, they put on their hats and they get a free pass from the railways to go to Adelaide until all their bruises have disappeared’. I had the support of doctors and everything, you know?

And so people say, ‘Well, what’s your greatest achievement?’ I say, ‘Changing attitudes. Changing attitudes’. I mean, the core business of local government is roads, rates, rubbish: yes, I acknowledge that. But it also goes beyond those boundaries. It goes to the welfare of your community. If you’ve got a pocket over there, that’s all right for the bourgeois and all those that don’t know about poverty and whatever, but if you’ve got one segment of your community that is hurting it foments and it’s like a cancer, it spreads. You can’t ignore it. And we are big enough, we’re small enough, we’re isolated enough, to be able to introduce programs, initiate things like this that we have. Now, these facilities are there. They’ve been there since 1978.

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And are they used a fair lot?

Yes. Yes, they are. So that's about the mayoral bit.

But then of course we went into dry areas in the '80s, '86, and we went through a big – you know, out on a limb: we were racists, we were this. And yet when I called upon my sister cities of Whyalla and Pirie to support us they didn't have those problems; but immediately we got that through, every council in Australia says, 'How did you do it?' I said, 'Bloody hard. You do it the same way'.

The press seems to paint a fairly negative picture of you sometimes, doesn't it?

Well, I don't care about the press.

Yes, I just wondered how you handle that and what you think of that.

Well, I think the press are trash. The press, the media, have a great influence on public opinion and if you go outside the square it's got to be wrong. I said to one of my colleagues today at the meeting I was chairing in Whyalla, when I was beating the drum about talking up, you know, 'We're only going to get one bite at this bloody cherry, this is our day in the sun and we are going to do it, the three cities together', there was a conservative member there – in a paid position, of course – and he said, 'Oh, that's not within our framework to be political and take on the Government'. I said, 'Society is divided into three classes: nine per cent who make the decisions; fifteen per cent who watch it happen; and the rest say, "When the bloody hell did that happen?"' And I say, "When you were pissed down the hotel, down the shacks, when you're either screwing the Government or your neighbour, *that's* when it happened". And I'll tell this much: it's going to happen again and again and again until you change your attitude. And I'm part of the nine per cent and if you don't like it you can get rid of me at the next election'. And that's been my philosophy. You have to lead.

Now, if by leading it offends somebody, well, naturally you're going to offend somebody. But I'm not going to find a hole and crawl back into it and die, one, because I'm a woman – and this is not so much today, but you get the smartarses in the media, written and printed media, who think – they're wet behind the ears and they think that they're Jana Wendt. I tell them that. 'You're no Jana Wendt and you're no match for me, and you will print what I say, whether you agree with it or

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whether you *don't*, and if you don't print what I say I'll sue you'. Simple as that. Life is too short to go tiptoeing around. You've got to walk the walk and talk the talk, particularly when you're dealing with governments and you're dealing with a community and you're dealing with councillors whose families were the last out of the trees, and they had to be pushed because they were too afraid to walk on two legs. They'd always been walking on four and they never experienced standing upright, and their families are the last. So I don't give a *damn* about the media. And that's what they don't like. They can paint me as negative as what they want.

I can show you reams and reams of letters – not only from my State; across the nation and across the world – when there's been controversial issues that have hit the headlines – and I've got in recent years, of course, emails; they were letters – urging me to go on when I was trying to introduce the curfew. And of course they tiptoe around everything, you know, 'We can't do this', you know, 'Civil liberties', all this; if they had done what I wanted done back in 1990 we still wouldn't have these problems today. That 'Gang of 49'? Half of them come from Port Augusta, and every time I see it on television that they've done something I say, (claps) 'You little beauty', because it's not until such time as people are affected in the metropolitan area that there's going to be change. *We* put up with it for twenty, thirty years. Who cared? 'Oh, it's somewhere up there in the bush. Up there at Port-A-Gutter.' I've almost killed people for that. They've got no comprehension of how we live but they'll make comment, and these fly-in, fly-out journalists – I mean, I'm so rude to the media it's a wonder I ever get comment. I'm rude because they only want a punchline and they don't want the guts of the story and you are educating the whole of the way along. Well, I'm not an educator and they're not a journalist, because they've got a long way to go.

Well, that's fair enough. So with introducing the things that you've done do you think it's improved Port Augusta society?

Indeed it has.

And how, how do you think it's improved? What have you done that you think's really made a difference?

Well, for instance, they're not drunk in the streets now. You haven't got them bashing each other up in the streets. All right, you've got the do-gooders from

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Adelaide who say, oh, but we're shifting the problem. Well, *you* belong to the agency, it's *your* responsibility: *you* go fix it up. But they're off the streets. And you have so many agencies. I have Sue Vardon here on 13th June – it's taken me some time. Sue and I work very well together. She's a very capable lady and without her help over the years there are many things that wouldn't have taken place. She's a lady of action, no nonsense. And I've got her coming up with ten CEOs of the various agencies to meet with my task force, the Mayoral Task Force, and the Aboriginal Consultative Forum over the issues, problems, that have increased over the last few years since Kate Lennon was taken out of the position and sucked in the bloody public service, and she tied all these agencies together, and as soon as she was gone it disintegrated and so we've got the problems back. But Sue will be up here and with these other agencies.

So I can say to them, 'Look, these are the facts about kids on the streets, four to fourteen, Thursday, Friday, Saturday night, kicking in cars, *et cetera*'. Why are they on the streets? Well, it's quite obvious that they're at risk at home. Their parents are drunk, under the influence of drugs, or they're not there. Or there's child abuse, sexual abuse. All the sexual abuse that's been going on in the Lands: it's been going on, we have known about it since the '60s. It's the agencies, the bloody do-gooders in these agencies, who've closed their eyes to it. 'Oh, it's part of the culture.' It's *not* part of the Aboriginal culture, but they're all too gutless to make a stand. And it's just so overwhelming what's been happening in the Lands, but it didn't happen overnight. And so, yes, there have been changes.

People are reluctant to change, this is what this colleague of mine said today: 'Oh, but I don't like change.' Well, get out of my sight. I said, 'Because things have to change'. I don't believe in changing things just for the sake of change, but let's change things for the better of the community.

So you think bringing up all the agencies you'll be able to solve some of the problems?

Yes, and Sue does, too. Yes. Because since Kate Lennon went off the scene they've gone into a lay-back mode, a comfort zone. Yes, well, old Joy's still around to beat the drum, and there are just so many people out there who are so politically-correct, which chokes me. I hate all this political correctness that has infiltrated every

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government department. 'Oh, you can't say that because it'll offend. You can't say that.' Why? It's the truth. If I offend somebody, bad luck. They've got the problem, not me. And all I'm concerned about – I don't give a *stuff* what happens in metropolitan Adelaide, you know? I'm only concerned about my city and my region, and while I'm in this position I will continue in the same vein and probably worse than what I've been in the past.

Why will you be worse?

Well, because time's running out for me and it takes time for people to get their heads around things. Why can't they make a decision, like I have to make in private enterprise? I mean, executive decisions have to be made at that time it's happening. Not, 'Oh, well, we'll set up a committee and we'll think about it'. Yes, you've got to make a decision there and then, whether it's for best, better or for worse.

So what do you think are the other major issues facing Port Augusta that really need addressing now?

Well, we're on the verge of this huge expansion, growth expansion, and I'm not going to sit by and see State and Federal Governments reap the royalties out of what's in my backyard without vast amounts of money being injected into infrastructure. We want development, but not for development's sake; we want it on our terms of attracting young families to Port Augusta, making our environment a safe environment, an environment where people will want to live and work and play. There is a lot of work to be done, as I said to my colleagues today. We're in the prime position, but it's not going to come easy. We're in competition with the world here, we're in competition with other regions, we're in competition with small communities on the West Coast, down in the Riverland. This is our time in the sun, and we're going to grab it, and I will not stand by and see it swept under the carpet or, 'You're only going to get this much'. No, I'm going to get *this* much. And that's the time I was born for.

And what do you think will be the problems, though, with all this development?

The problems? We have to control it. We have to control residential, light industry, we've got to control that and we've got to control the social, the environmental problems. And that's what this meeting's about and the Mayoral Task Force is about:

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we have got to be in control. I don't want some shiny-arse from Adelaide coming up and telling me what's best for my community. Go. *We* know what's best for our community. No-one knows it better than the local. For too long we've been dictated to. No more.

And what about things like water?

What *about* water?

Well, is there going to be a problem with that with development in Port Augusta?

Well, if there's going to be a problem that's the Government's fault. I mean, we've had an application for a desal[ination] plant, a solar desal plant, five k's down south of Port Augusta, that the Government, it took them twelve months just to get a letter of support for it. Why? Because they put their eggs all in one basket for a desal plant at Point Bonython or somewhere over there. Every community in future will have a desal plant. You know, they talk about climate change and all of this; this government can't look further than its nose. Water problems can be overcome, as can power. Wind energy, *et cetera*. I see no problem with that. I've got councillors who say, 'Oh, what about the bridge? What about the water? What about this?' Well, that's up to the Development Assessment Panel, I said, to go out to all of these agencies and ensure we've *got* water and power. I said, 'We produce forty per cent of the State's bloody power *here*, for god's sake!' It won't be easy, but it's good planning and we've got to be there at the table.

So how do you ensure, as local Council, or as Mayor, that you are at the table with the Labor Government in South Australia or with the Commonwealth Government? How do you ensure that you're heard?

We're already being heard. We're already being heard, under the Common Purpose Group, which takes in the three cities, in our own right. They know – they know full well – what my intentions are for this city for the next three years. And they won't want to do battle with me.

Okay. Well, that's good.

'Never' and 'Impossible' are not in my vocabulary.

So what do you see are the best things you've done for Port Augusta? Because you've been Mayor for how many years now?

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I'm in my twenty-fifth year.

So what would you see as the best things that you've achieved for the town?

Oh, they'd be changing attitudes, yes. Getting out of the core business into social justice issues, *et cetera*. Yes. I don't think you can point to one thing.

Oh, okay.

I think it's a conglomeration of many things.

Okay. What actually makes you so committed to the place?

I told you before. Loyalty to my great-grandparents and their memory, and how they struggled. I'd be turning my back on their struggles if I weren't committed to this great region.

And I read that, at the launch of your mayoral portrait in 2007, the Governor called you a 'multidimensional woman'.

Oh, did she?

Yes. And I was just wondering, what do you think she meant by that?

I don't know. I can't remember her saying it. I don't know. People perceive other people from different angles. The way people perceive me, they don't know me. They've only just formed an opinion.

So how do you see yourself?

How do I see myself? As a very caring person. Very forthright, yes – wasn't always like it. And if I were a man they wouldn't give me all these tags.

So has it made your road more difficult?

Yes. Although it's made it easy. I've said to my City Manager, 'I've really got away with murder in some cases, because they don't want to hit a woman in public'. No, I don't think that if I were a man I'd probably have got away with as much. Particularly in being forceful. Men don't like strong women, I've found.

So how long do you think ---?

But I don't care.

You don't care.

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My term ends in 2010.

So do you think you will retire then?

I'll be seventy-eight. I think I'm entitled to. I would have retired the last election but we had one very ambitious councillor who wanted to wear the red robes. 'You're not mayoral material, darling.'

So is there somebody that's mayoral material now, do you think, or looking -- --?

That person will emerge. They've got to have the passion. Leaders are born out of adversity and necessity; they're not made. Going to a leadership program, whatever, doesn't make you a leader. It gives you a piece of paper that you can sit on the wall that says, 'I attended a leadership program'. If you haven't got the passion, if you haven't got the intestinal fortitude to go out on a limb for what you believe in, well, forget it. You've wasted your agency's time in sending you; you've wasted your bloody time; and you've wasted those who have addressed it. That's just my humble opinion.

Well, I think we've sort of covered your business life and your mayoral life. Do you think there's something or other things that you'd like to talk about that I haven't asked you?

No. I'm a great family person. I have two precious children, two precious grandchildren. My siblings, my sister and brother, are here. The power of love is the most powerful force in the world, the power of love. And for those who haven't loved and been loved, well, they've certainly missed out on a great treasure. And, as I said, I've had an abundance of it and that's why I have to put back, I have to pay rent, because we're all part of the Creator's scheme. It's like the sands of an hourglass, you know? And we're gone. The three-score years and ten that we were promised – and some never reach it – it just goes like the wind. There's not enough hours in the day, really. I find there isn't.

Well, I think that was really wonderful, so thanks very much.

That's okay. But there was a time, you know, when criticism really hurt me. Doesn't today. Words. I know me; Lord Jesus Christ knows me; so anybody else has got a problem, not me. (laughter)

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Very good.

END OF INTERVIEW.