



## John Hughes

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*Born in Wellington, NSW, in 1932, John grew up in Dripstone and worked at anything he could lay his hand to in the Wellington area after he left school. This included seasonal work, truck driving, bus driving, cab driving, rabbiting, and local parcel deliveries. Most of his working life has been with the post office, where he did various jobs, but mainly worked as a postman. He now lives at Ettalong, NSW, with his wife, who still works with the post office in the area.*

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I was born in Wellington, NSW in 1932. We actually lived in a town called Dripstone which is about 7 or 8 miles south of Wellington on the main railway line. I had a sister five years younger than me and we lived there till I was about 18. There was a primary school at Dripstone with a teacher living on the premises and I went there when I was young. When I went to high school I used to ride my pushbike a lot of the time. When I didn't ride my bike I had to catch a train on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays about 7 o'clock in the morning. Tuesdays and Thursdays it left around 6 o'clock in the morning, and sometimes on Tuesdays and Thursdays I didn't get home till about half past seven or eight o'clock. On the other days it was anywhere from six o'clock to half past seven.

I didn't do any paid jobs while I was still at school. We lived a fair way out of town and there wasn't anything like paper runs or deliveries to do the way some kids make a bit of pocket money. I used to go and help neighbours at harvest time, helping them cut chaff and that. The hay would be put up into stooks - they were tied with stalk from the plant, which was quite an art in itself. Some blokes were really good at it and made good money stooking hay. That'd be left out in the paddock until it was dried off enough, then they'd go along with a horse and wagon and pitchfork it up onto the wagon. After that they'd build them into

haystacks. They way they packed the roof of the stack no water could get it. That was quite an art, too. We kids just used to go along to help, and just for something to do. The only thing I used to do to get a bit of pocket money was to set a few rabbit traps. I'd go around the traps in the morning, and usually get about four or five. We'd keep one of those to eat, and the others I'd throw across the bar of the pushbike and pedal off into Wellington and sell them on the way to school. I used to get around two and six a pair.

My father was an apiarist - only in a small way, and after I left school I worked with him quite a lot. We'd go and catch rabbits - anything we could do. In some of the droughts that we had there over the years, I always say that if it wasn't for the rabbits we would have starved. We'd catch them any way we could. There were so many rabbits about there at one stage that what we used to do was to make a sort of wired-in trap in the corner where two fences came together. One particular family there made a living out of catching rabbits. They had ten kids and heaps of relatives with kids, and they'd all get out in these blooming paddocks banging tins and baying, and they'd drive the rabbits like sheep up into this corner trap. They'd catch them there and wring their necks and then gut them. They had big trucks with rails fitted, and they'd hang the rabbits in pairs over the rails, and they'd be really loaded down going in to the freezer works and what have you.

There was a hell of a lot of seasonal work around that area. Three very good friends of the family used to have orchards, and we'd do some work on them - picking and that. I don't know if you've heard of the Elberto peach - the common name for it is the Dripstone peach - well this peach was developed by George and Peter Althofer. It's a beautiful big slipstone peach. So we used to go and pick fruit and things like that when the season was on. George has written a lot of books on arboretums.

In 1950, when I was eighteen, my father got up one morning and announced that he was going into Wellington to buy a block of ground. Just like that! When he came home he'd bought a six-acre block! It cost him 150 pounds. We built a house almost in the middle of it, and a big shed that we used for the honey and that sort of thing. We built it out of concrete blocks that we made ourselves. We had some moulds made, and there's very good sand in the area. As the years went by, if Dad got a bit short of money he'd sell off a block of ground. In the end all we had left was the old original house and the shed. When Dad died, the house was too big for Mum, so she got the old workshop, which was about 28 foot square, converted into a house. Then when she died it was sold off. It was quite a nice home.

Round about this time we bought a 1942 Ford 5-ton truck. It was a lend-lease job. We had to do that because as we got more hives of bees we had to have something bigger. So as well as the seasonal work we did transport, like wheat carting. In those times honey was done in 60 pound tins - about as big as a four gallon drum. We used to send them off on the train, but they'd often get all busted up. I got a truck licence as soon as I was old enough, and I used take the honey to Sydney in the truck. I'd drive down overnight, and PDS (The Producers' Distributing Society) was across Broadway from Central Railway. I'd get there about two o'clock in the morning, back the truck up to the door, settle down and go to sleep, and when they got there in the morning they'd wake me up and we'd unload it, and I'd get a cheque for it, and I'd head straight off for home again.

I've had some great times wheat carting and that sort of thing. We had three or four regulars that we used to cart wheat for each year. That used to start around

Christmas, but the trouble was, that was also the busiest time as far as bees were concerned. But we always managed to work it in somehow. Money was money then... like it is now, for that matter.

When I was transporting I was somewhere out around Nyngan, sailing along at night pretty late, and I went to sleep at the wheel - doing about 50mph. When I woke up, (it was a loaded truck), I was on the wrong side of the road - right over off the bitumen, going alongside it perfectly parallel to it. It was the thistles slapping against the bottom of the truck that woke me up!

One of the other things I used to do in Wellington was drive the school buses. One particular run I used to do was out on the Molong Road. There was a little service station there with a bloke living on it who had an old ambulance. It was an old '48 Ford - a single spinner - on the grille they had these round things - later models had two spinners. I used to leave the bus at the service station and drive the old ambulance home. It was just a casual job that I did for about two years. If they had one of their regular drivers with nothing to do they'd send him, but I used to do it when they needed me. You'd get up early in the morning and it'd take maybe a couple of hours by the time you drove the bus back, and you'd have the rest of the day to do whatever you were doing. The kids on the bus used to play up, and fight and everything. I remember one time there I had to stop the bus when they were fighting and tell them that if they didn't stop it they could all get out of the bus and bloody well walk home!

Eventually I was doing anything that was going. I used to do cabbying too. There were about ten cabs in the town. I might do an occasional night through the week, but it was mainly weekend work. Sunday mornings you'd do the church run. Early in the morning you'd do the Catholic Church - you'd have them there at six o'clock and you'd pick them up afterwards. The Court House Hotel was opposite the post office, and the bus depot was alongside the pub. The mother-in-law of one of the blokes who owned the cab was the cook in the pub, so what my mate and I used to do was drive the cab up and park it behind the bus depot, hop through the fence, and go into the kitchen of the pub. We'd have our couple of schooners each then whip off and have lunch. Many's the time we've been in there when this bloomin' Sergeant - (Sergeant Cooper - he was a real mongrel. To talk to him you'd think butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, but he was a mongrel of a thing) - many a time he'd come through the pub, checking that there wasn't anyone in there that shouldn't be - someone that wasn't a bona fide visitor or what have you. We'd be sitting up there in the kitchen with our couple of schooners and we could hear him talking, but he never came down to the kitchen!

I played a lot of tennis, a lot of cricket, a lot of football. A friend of mine had a property there that he sold, and moved up to Queensland. He asked me if I'd take his furniture up for him, (because I could take it up a lot cheaper than he could get it taken up by someone else). I said I would, and we packed his furniture up and he drove up behind me. We got up there and unloaded it, and I headed for home. It was a Friday morning, and I had to be home by the Saturday to play cricket. I stopped at one of those all-night truck stops around ten or eleven at night to fill the thermos and have a bite to eat, and got talking to some of the truckies. I told them what I was doing, and how I had to be home in time for cricket. One of the drivers gave me three pills. He told me to take one of them then, and another one later on when I felt myself starting to get tired. Now I'd never had anything to do with pills or anything like that before.

I got down to about Gunnedah, and I started to feel a bit sleepy, so I pulled over to the side of the road and had a cup of coffee and something to eat, and took this other pill, and away I went. I was home about five o'clock in the morning, and I thought I'd have a sleep. Do you think I could sleep? I couldn't sleep for two nights! I don't know what they were - they were those tiny little pills that they take, you know? I played my cricket, then all that night I was wide awake, and all the next day - and the next night I still couldn't sleep! I think it would be different once you got used to them, but I thought: "Bugger this! I'm not going to have anything to do with these damn things!"

I was married in 1955, when I was 23. I continued to work with my Dad for a while after that, until I got the country mail contract from the local post office. You used your own vehicle. Most people had letterboxes made out of old five gallon oil drums sitting on a post, and that sort of thing, and as well as the mail you took bread from the local baker's shops, or you might have to go to the butcher's and pick up somebody's meat order and take it out to them. They let you know what they wanted. I think I got something like two bob or two and six for a parcel, depending how far out it was. You got paid for that once a month. With things like the butcher's delivery, the butcher paid you when he gave it to you and put the cost on the customer's bill.

My wife and I did that for about three years. When I got something else to do she'd do the parcel contract. Then I was offered a job in the post office in Wellington. I was shown how to be a postman, and for about twelve months my wife was still doing the mail contract. That was all right. But then she got very sick and had to have an operation, and she was laid up for about five months. If I'd known what I know now I would have got someone to do it for us while she was sick, but as it was they got someone else to do it while she was sick, so we lost the contract.

When the contract came up for renewal I put in a tender again, but someone put in a bid which was under ours. The Post Office is still the same - they don't care whether you can actually do it at the price, the lowest price is what they always take. They say this is not necessarily so, but it's always the lowest price that they go for. Many a time they've had them put in for a contract and the tender is so low that the ones that get it only last three or four months and then they have to pull out. Yet they still take the lowest tender!

So missing out on the mail contract left me with nothing to do, and my sister and brother-in-law had a store at Coonabarabran - they were selling floor covering, tiles - all that sort of thing. He rang me up one night to tell me that the bloke he'd had working for him had left, and asked me if I wanted to go up and do his job. I said I didn't have any experience, and he said not to worry because he'd teach me. So I said fair enough. I'd go up there and stay a couple of weeks, then come back to Wellington again. I learned to lay tiles, and to lay carpet, and to lay vinyl on floors. He had a really good business. He sold washing machines and all that sort of thing, and he used to do his own repairs. Then the recession hit and the arse just fell out of everything, and that was it.

I didn't know what to do. I was friendly with the postmaster (from when I was working there previously), and I was talking to him and he told me to put my name down for an entry exam into the Post Office that was coming up. I sat for it and passed, but there was nothing going at Wellington at the time so I packed up and went looking for a job in other post offices. Chatswood was the Head Office then, so I fronted them there and they said, "Yes, we've got a job for you at

Turrumurra if you want it." I went there, and worked for two years on the counter despatching mail and all that sort of thing.

When I first started at Turrumurra my wife and family were still living in Wellington, and I couldn't get anywhere down here for them. My wife had been down in Sydney to have another operation, and in the hospital she'd met a lady who lived at Mt Kuringai. They used to keep in contact. My wife phoned me one day and said that this lady had contacted her to let her know that there was a Department of Main Roads house right near her at Mt Kuringai that was falling vacant. I can't remember exactly what the procedure was, but I applied for it and eventually I got a letter saying that the house was becoming vacant and that we could have it. We ended up living there for about fifteen years.

Working at Turrumurra, it didn't take me long to realise that the postmen were getting more money than me, so I put in for a transfer to be a postie. That was 26 years ago. I worked as a postman at Turrumurra for two years. But money speaks all languages, I suppose, and I realised that the relief postmen were getting more money than the ordinary postman. There was a relief postman's job going, so I put in for that. If you're a relief postman you could finish up anywhere. I used to go to Chatswood, and St Ives. The trouble with St Ives was that there was no public transport and you had to have your own car to get there. But it was very interesting.

When I was posting at Turrumurra our postmen supervisor was a terribly nice bloke, but he hated long hair - you had to have short back and sides. This included his son, who was a postman at Turrumurra too. In those days the postmen supervisor wasn't stationed at any particular office. He was given a car and he'd turn up at one office one day and do all his staffing from there, then the next day he'd turn up somewhere else and do it from there, then he might pack up and duck into an office just to have a look around. We had a young chap working with us who played in a band, and he had quite long hair. One day the supervisor turned up to have a look around, and when someone called out, "Oh, here's Mr Robinson," this young bloke, whose table was near the window, just went straight out the window - head first! He didn't even touch the sides going through! It looked so darn funny to see him diving out there and seeing his heels disappear. The supervisor was all right, but he kept at this bloke to get his hair cut. He even threatened to put him off if he didn't get it cut, even though he couldn't have put him off for that reason.

Then my wife got a job at the post office. She fell in with this bloke she was working with who was having problems at home. This is back in the days when we were working Saturdays, and one Saturday morning I walked in after work and my eldest son was there. He was almost 14 at the time. I said, "Where's Mum and the kids?" and he said, "Here. Read this," and gave me a note to read. The other bloke had turned up with his bloody car after I'd gone to work and piled them all in - kids and all - and zoom! off to down in Victoria somewhere! Any rate, that was all right. We survived. The eldest boy stayed with me. He knew what was going on. She took all the bedclothes and all that sort of thing... But anyway, these things happen. The two girls don't talk to me - I think their mother did a pretty good job on them. It hurts a bit, but if that's the way they want it... The boy that stayed with me lives down at Hornsby now and I see him occasionally, though not as much now as I used to. I used to see him quite often when I worked down there. But he keeps pretty much to himself and I let him go along that way. If he wants to come and see me OK, and if he doesn't, he doesn't.

Then I met the girl I'm with now, and we've been together for over 23 years. She works in the post office too, now! She was a medical technologist when I met her, but she'd done quite a few other things as well.

Anyway, then I had an operation on my back, and I was off work for about six months. I got it on compensation.

I used to walk to do the mail deliveries, or sometimes I'd ride my pushbike, and then they brought the motor bikes in. I had a small motor bike of my own, and they brought in that you could use your own if you wanted to, which I did for a while.

Jean (that's my present wife) got a job contract cleaning. It sounded pretty good, so I left the post office to go into it with her. I'd been there about twelve years, and I went out on this contract cleaning, but that didn't work out the way we'd hoped. We bought into it, but it didn't turn out to be at all the sort of thing we'd had in mind, so I had to look for something else.

I'd done quite a lot of bar work over the years. A bloke in Wellington showed me what to do before I left there, and I got a job at the old pub in Hornsby while I was working at the post office. I used to work there from four till seven, Monday to Friday, and every second Saturday night from seven till eleven. I used to get... I think it was thirty-something dollars, and that was bloody good money then. I worked at Asquith Bowling Club too, and I worked for a little while at what in those days was called Fahey's Hotel in Hornsby.

We had to get out of the house at Mt Kuringai, and when things didn't work out with the cleaning business I bought this place here. We virtually rebuilt it. I worked on the buses here for about twelve months - the routes went all around the Central Coast. The bus depot was only just down the road here at the time. I didn't have to leave home till five minutes before I was due to start, and you could walk down to work! That part of it was beaut, but I didn't like the actual job very much - they sort of owned you. You didn't know when you might be working - you couldn't plan anything. If you decided to go for a picnic or something next Saturday, on Friday they'd tell you that they wanted you to work. One particular day I'd played bowls in the afternoon and I was tired when I got home, and decided to go to bed. I'd been home about fifteen or twenty minutes when the phone rang: "John, there's a train breakdown and we want you to pick a bus up and drive down to Hawkesbury River and bring a load back." Well that was about three hours by the time I'd got down there and loaded up and came back again. That sort of thing.

Then I got a job at Umina Bowling Club. I worked there in the bar for round about twelve months. On one of my days off I decided to wander down to Hornsby and see if there were any postie jobs going. I got down there about six o'clock and asked a mate of mine there (that I used to know from my time at the post office previously) if there was any chance of a job. "Yes mate," he said "there's one going at St Ives." So I started there the next day - I could do that because I was working at the Bowling Club at night. But the job at St Ives wasn't full-time - I was sort of filling-in when needed. One day I had a hell of a big mail, and I was supposed to be at work at the club by four o'clock in the afternoon, but the mail was so big I was still at St Ives doing the run - I hadn't nearly finished work there, so I rang up the club to tell them I couldn't be there on time. They weren't too keen on this, so not long afterwards I left the bowling club and went to them at St Ives post office and asked if there was something there more full-time. "Yeah,

they're putting in a new beat here, and you can go on that." So I started doing the Plugs as we called it, for the new beat. The Plug was a little list of the beat, and you had to write down all the street numbers and the names of the people that lived there, and put them in the order that you do the run. Some streets you go up one side and down the other, while with others you've got to go backwards and forwards sort of criss cross.

Anyway, that was all right. I'd been working at that for about three or four months when the postmaster came over to me one day and told me that he was going to send me for a medical. I looked at him and laughed, and said, "What? With my record with my back and that sort of thing you've got to be joking!" Anyway, he insisted, and told me where and when I had to go to have it, which I did. About two weeks later he came up to me and said, "Congratulations, you've passed the medical." "You must be joking!" "No. You've passed the medical. So the new beat's yours." And I worked on that beat for about five years.

It doesn't take all that long to get to know a beat. Once you've done it a few times you're usually pretty right. It takes a little while to get the hang of it, but you've already got the general idea of what you have to do from working other beats, and it's not as though you've just come in off the street and have never done it before.

I used to ride my pushbike down to the station, and one day on my way home from work I moved off the bloody bitumen onto the side of the road and there was some sand along the soft edge. The bike stopped and down I went. I came down on my shoulder and I had to have about three weeks off work with it. But the pain in my shoulder was still bad, and after twelve months I decided I couldn't put up with it any longer. The doctor sent me to see a specialist and he said it would need operating on. He put me into Hornsby hospital and I was in there for about ten days. It turned out that I'd separated the collar bone from the shoulder bone. After the operation it was better, but I still can't lift my arm above shoulder height. Anyway, I went back to work, and they sent me to various government doctors. After about three months of them looking at me they decided that I wasn't to ride a motor bike any more and that I wasn't to lift heavy weights - so I worked for about eighteen months on light duties.

Then we got a new supervisor, and he decided that I was always doing things that the doctors had said I wasn't supposed to do, and I ended up going off on six weeks' stress leave. This is about twelve months ago. Anyway, the postmaster called me in one day and said, "This is no good. What do you want to happen?" I said that I supposed that I wouldn't mind getting out. He told me that I didn't have much hope of getting a redundancy or an early retirement, yet despite him saying this about three weeks later I got a letter to say that I would finish up on the last working day in December. I got redundancy pay and all that. I've been retired for about seven months. It wasn't a great lot of money, because I'd only been back in the job about six years, but it meant that I could pay off what we owed on this house, buy an almost brand-new car, and still have a bit over. The wife's still working. She's been working in the post office now for about six years - I think she'll stay till she's done ten years and will be eligible to get long service.

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I had some great times with the post office, but the post office has had it now. You know, they don't use their common sense any more - at least in my part of it. Everything's done by computer. Anything the computer says, goes. If they

punched up the computer one day and it said to jump off the harbour bridge, they'd race out and go down and do it. That's how much bloody common sense they use now.

There've been a terrible lot of changes over the years, too. When I was at Hornsby the mail used to arrive in a truck at six in the morning. It had parcels and mail. One truck would do Pymble and Turramurra and another truck would do Wahroonga and Hornsby. Now, there's a Parcels Centre at St Leonards, and all the contractors have to go down there to get the parcels from there and bring them back. They bring up the parcels, and they also bring up any parcels for the private boxes and all that sort of thing.

Today the post offices have a section they call Retail, where they sell all sorts of stuff as well as do the mail. It's run separately, by a different mob to the mail delivery. You walk into a post office now and it's just like walking into a glorified newsagent. The personal touch, as far as the post office is concerned - it just doesn't exist any more.

My wife works at Umina Post Office, but that's about to be sold and she'll become redundant. She won't get a redundancy pay-out because they won't give you redundancy if you're over 55, but she'll have a position down at Woy Woy. There's a terrible lot of old people around here and different ones come in to her and say, "Oh, Jean, what are we going to do when you've gone?" because she looks after them and does things for them, and that sort of thing. But now that they've gone retail...When they close down the little post office at Ettalong everything for this area will be centrally located at Woy Woy. It'll all be done from there.

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When I was a postie, we'd start at six o'clock. The truck brings the mail in, and it's tipped in a bin. Mostly they used to be in bundles, and some in bags, but these days they're in plastic tubs. They get weighed. They know how many kilos of letters and that they've got, and that's punched up on the computer, and the computer works out how many letters there is and what time you should be finished. Some of the runs vary in size - not a great lot, but they do vary in size.

Then you have sorting divisions, with lots of holes, and the letters have to be sorted into them. As well as that you've got private boxes and private bags. (Of course, you get a lot of mis-sorts and that sort of thing.) When that's all done and all the sorting is finished they're taken to the tables and packed ready for delivery. Generally we'd have someone separate to do the private boxes and the private bags.

At the table, either sitting or standing - I used to find it easier to stand - the postman picks up a bundle of his mail and starts to sort it according to how his beat is organised. There are divisions for all the streets. There's a pigeonhole for the odd numbers and another one for the evens. All the streets have pigeonholes - one each for odds and evens, and the letters are all broken up that way. Then you've got your second class mail - the advertising material, magazines and all that sort of thing - the same thing is done with that. Someone else sorts all that into beats, and then we have to sort that as well, the same as you've done the letters previously. So when you set out the mail is all organised the way you've worked your beat out.

When you've done all that you get your Plug with the names and numbers for all the streets. Normally you start at the back of your run, and pack the mail out of the pigeonholes so that you've got it in order. Then you put your second class stuff in. If you've got a street where you criss-cross from one side to the other you would have them sorted to take this into account. You tie the mail up into reasonably sized bundles in order. If there's more than you can take with you, you put out a Depot Bag. You number the bundles, put them in the Depot Bag with a label on it, and a contractor takes them out. They used to leave them at private houses, but what they have now is bins that lock. The contractor has a key to it and the postie has a key to it. You have two bags - one on each side of the motor bike. We used to ride along on the bike with a bundle of letters in one hand, and stop and take them out, but now you have a container on the front of the bike and you put the mail in that. This means that you have two hands on the bike.

With most other jobs, if you've done your work for the day, you still have to hang around till knock-off time, but what I loved about being a postie was that you had a certain amount of work to do, and when you'd done it you were finished. We started at six in the morning, and usually you'd be finished somewhere around half past one. Sometimes, if the mail wasn't much you might be finished by eleven thirty - so you went home then. But on the other hand, if there was a lot of mail, and it took till, say, four o'clock to get it all delivered, then you were there till four o'clock. But the good thing was, that if you wanted to really hop into it and go like blazes, you could get off early.

But they've cut that out now, and people have to hang about the place to put in the time. If they're not due to go out on the beat till eleven o'clock and they're ready to go at ten, then they just have to hang about and muck around until eleven. Then they have to take their time doing the round so as to get back close to the correct time that the computer has worked out for that day. To me it's holding things up unnecessarily. If you're prepared to hop to it and get everything done early, I can't see any reason why you shouldn't do that. But a lot of people don't see it like that. But to me it just makes bludgers out of them because they just bludge around. I'm not giving away trade secrets here, and I've done it myself - but if you get finished early you have a little 'plant' somewhere... like at Hornsby three of us would leave our bikes in behind the butcher's shop and we'd spend an hour at the bowling club. When it was time we'd go and get the bikes and report back at the office.

Then you'd get some blokes who'd go really slow, because if you went longer than the computer said, then you got overtime. There's not too many runs now that they don't get half an hour or an hour's overtime pretty well every day. Monday is always the biggest day and everybody gets overtime on Mondays. But it varies, even so. The other day I met a bloke I used to work with who now does the shops at Hornsby. They encourage him to get into it and get the run done as quick as he likes. As he says, this means he doesn't get any overtime, but he doesn't have to fiddle about and muck around. He said that sometimes he's back from his run and some of the other blokes are still plugging up and haven't even gone out on their runs. But on the other hand, the bloke that does the factory area all round Asquith there - I saw him recently and he was telling me that he'd worked till dark the night before, and had gone out at nine o'clock that morning to deliver what he hadn't been able to deliver the day before - and then had to go back and set up all over again for that day's mail.

As far as I know all post offices worked the same way - the sorting and

organisation of the beats was much the same everywhere, though as I said, round here at the moment everything is being changed. But for most of the time I was a postman I was able to come home and potter around the garden - and fill in the day however I wanted to. If you had enough money and wanted to go to the pub, then you went to the pub, or the club, or something like that, you know. I've always had a pretty big garden, (though it's a bit haywire now because of the renovations we've been doing on the house).

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I've got some real top mates that I've met in the job. One bloke who I've known since I started in the post office, we've kept in touch, and when Wellington Bowling Club had their anniversary recently I went up there for the weekend and stayed with him and played bowls and went out to the club with him. I've got a real top mate up here who's still in the job. He lives on his own - his Mum died about two years ago - he looked after her for years. And there's another one that lives up at Gorokan that I worked with for years, and he comes down now and again. They were a good bunch of blokes that I worked with over the years. But it doesn't matter where you go you'll get one or two that are real arseholes, and there've been one or two like that, but that's just part of life.

I've never been used to doing a job where you're inside all the time. I really liked the outside part of being a postie, even though you have to work out in the pouring rain, or when it's 100 degrees in the shade. And you get to talk to people. I'd stop and talk to people, though some of the posties don't. When I was doing light duties at Hornsby I used to wheel a trolley left-handed, delivering mail to various shops around the shopping centre. I got to know some of the people in some of the shops. I'd only been doing the job for about six months or so, and when Christmas came around some of them would give you a present. This Christmas just gone I got a bottle of scotch. Some of the posties would get anything up to \$100 in tips at Christmas time - especially those that had been doing runs for some time. Around this area though, with the older people, there's no tips or anything like that.

I think the motor-bike took the personal touch out of it. When I first started as a postie at Turramurra I used to walk around the beat, but on the motor bike you don't have that personal contact with the people.

I used to do things for people. They'd ask me to post a letter for them and that was no worries at all. They'd leave the letter out and I'd take it and post it for them. But a lot of blokes don't worry about that personal touch. All they're interested in is getting done and getting finished. But I liked being out in the open and being in contact with people. You meet a terrible lot of nice people.

It's funny, as far as dogs and that are concerned. At one place the woman was calling out to me, "He won't bite, postie, he's all right, he won't bite", and here's the bloomin' dog got hold of me by the bloody trousers while she's saying it! But there's not all that much of that sort of thing goes on, though the motor bike does stir them up a bit.

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When I was in my late teens and still living at Wellington, everybody had wood fires and a chap that I'd done some work with wanted some wood. I had a utility and a trailer at that stage, and one of the woodcarters who made his living out of

supplying wood had a mobile circular saw - a Hagen saw. I was using it to cut wood there this time, and I can remember it as clear as anything still. It was a weather-cracked log, and I'd made one cut and had just moved it along, when a piece broke off and flew towards me and hit me in the head. I didn't feel anything, but suddenly I just couldn't see anything. I stopped the saw and my mate came up to see what had happened. I had a little piece of skin off my face, and a cut, and a tiny little bit of skin off my nose, and it broke my teeth, and that was the only outside damage there was. The piece must have had a knot or something in it that hit my lip and split it. I was laid up on my back for over a week. My missus told me when she came to visit that they'd found out that I had a fractured skull - a long hairline fracture. About twelve months ago I was having some problems and the doctor sent me to some specialists to have some tests done and that sort of thing. The first time round nothing showed up, but my wife kept insisting that there was something wrong with me (I was going all stiff and tight in the body during the night) and so I ended up going to another doctor here who sent me to other specialists, who found out that I had brain damage from that accident all those years ago. It's only just come to the fore. I've got a very mild epilepsy, and that's only come in the last eighteen months as well. I can remember heaps from the past, but the trouble is with more recent things. And names. I'm hopeless at remembering names. I've always had problems with people's names, and you've got no idea how many "buddies", "cobbers" and "pals" I have! (*Laughs*).

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There was a union you could join when I worked at the post office, but it wasn't compulsory. I didn't join the union for a long time. I had a bit of a problem there once and I went to the union about it to see if they could help me with it. Things got worse, till it got to the stage where I really needed them, but nobody in the union wanted to know about it. So I pulled out of the union. When I went back to work at Hornsby the second time there was a bloke there wanted me to join up again. He threw the application down in front of me and said, "Here, John. I want you to join the union." I just looked at him and said, "Look mate, I was in it for years, and when I wanted you fellers before you didn't want to know me." "But it's changed a lot now," he said. "Yeah. I know," I said, and just tore it up and threw it in the garbage bin.

As far as politics is concerned, my Dad used to lean towards the Country Party, but I'd say he voted Labor more than he ever voted for anyone else. We were very fortunate in having a fantastic bloke as the Federal member for our area who was with the Labor Party. Dad used to say, "Why vote for someone else? If I want something done he always does it for me." I just can't think of his name now. But it was a similar situation to what we had down here till recently, when Tony Doyle was our local member. He was always there when you wanted him, so why vote for someone else? I've had blokes say to me that it's no good voting for the man, that you have to get the party in, but I don't give a stuff what his party is if the bloke that's representing me will be there when I want something done - who'll listen to me and do his best for me.

Speaking of unions, when I was at Turrumurra there was a strike over something or other, and we didn't go out. We worked on. (Not that there were no union blokes there. One bloke was a real staunch unionist, and he worked on too.) Anyway, for weeks and weeks after the strike was over the phone would ring, and you'd pick it up: "Good morning. Turrumurra post office," "Scab-a-murra, you mean!" they'd say, then hang up. It was over some issue that we didn't think mattered much. Back in those days they'd throw a strike over anything at all.

I think that some of the things they strike over these days are in a good cause, but with the post office, when you go on strike you're not only hurting the boss, but you're hurting other people as well. I think that it's better if you can keep the strike to use as a very last resort, instead of using it as a first resort. Most bosses are pretty reasonable. You can talk to them. Of course you get the few that aren't, too.

I can't say that there's anything in particular that stands out above the rest as being an especially enjoyable time in my working life. I think I enjoyed most of what I did. I think the job that I enjoyed the most for most of the time was being a postie, because you were outside and out among the people. You could always find someone to talk to and that sort of thing. But at the same time, I also enjoyed my transport work. I enjoyed driving around. But being a postie would have the edge, I think.

I haven't been retired all that long, but so far I'm thoroughly enjoying it. Of course there's not as much money as there was before, and I'm still trying to come to grips with that, but otherwise it's terrific. I don't think I'd be interested in very much at all as far as getting some sort of part-time job. Certainly not more than a few hours a week. I certainly haven't got time to get bored. The things that have to be done around the place - having the garden and that as I do - I sometimes wonder how I ever found the time to go to work!

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*(Recorded July 14 and July 19, 1995.)*