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Recorded interview with
LAKSIRI JAYASURIYA
b. 1931

Interviewer: David Walker
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TRC 4904

PROFESSOR LAKSIRI JAYASURIYA

Interviewed by David Walker

File 1

David Walker: This is an interview with Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya. Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya will be speaking with me, David Walker, for the oral history collection conducted by the National Library of Australia. On behalf of the Director-General of National Library I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this program. Do you understand that the library owns copyright in the interview material but disclosure will be subject to any disclosure restrictions you impose in completing the form of consent?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes.

David Walker: This being so, may we have your permission to make a transcript of this recording should the library decide to make one?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: By all means.

David Walker: We hope you will speak as frankly as possible, knowing that neither the tapes nor any transcripts produced from them will be released without your authority.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Understood.

David Walker: This interview is taking place today, on the 12th of November 2002 at the National Library in Canberra. Can we begin, Laki,[1] with your family background? Where were you born, where did you grow up and so on?

[1] 'Laki' is an Aussie abbreviation of Laksiri. This was used after arrival in Perth in 1970s. Prior to this the nickname or abbreviation in Sydney during the 1950s was 'Jay'.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Well, look, let me start by saying that I'm the eldest son of a family of three. My father was a doctor. Now, given the Sri Lankan climate at that time, you know, they were a very privileged class of people. Of course, it's very interesting also - this also reflects the sort of colonial Sri Lankan background - my father married into a rich family. My mother was an only child and she had a lot of wealth. My father didn't have wealth. So we didn't have sort of that much wealth but we were comfortable. So one thing it meant was that I was able to go to a very prestigious school in Sri Lanka called Royal College, which is the equivalent of the Doon[2] School in the Indian context, which is a government school, a public school, but almost modelled on Harrow and Eaton.

David Walker: I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: This is the training ground. It was established in 1835, that school, and it was the training ground for the bureaucracy, the civil service. All the people who administered the country on behalf of the colonial powers were trained in institutions like this. Of course, there were other similar denominational institutions which also played a similar role as the training ground for the English educated elite. Anyway, I had that kind of, well, you might say privilege background. This is the English educated elite group in which I grew up. So let me confess that that was my social background.

But, I mean, I still didn't belong to the - what do you say? - elite class. Even within that group because there were relations of dominance within that category of people. This is largely driven by caste. I mean, for whatever value people put on the class ranking, I did not belong to the highest cast according to the proper ranking of castes.

David Walker: I see.

[2] Doon School was the training ground for the Indian Middle Class and elite seeking entry into the Indian Civil Service and bureaucracy. See S Srivastara (1988) *Constructing Post-colonial India*: Routledge, for a discussion of the role of this elite institution.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It was the next group, which was considered to be the sort of entrepreneurial group. Actually, there's recently a study published which shows the rise of the local bourgeoisie came from this kind of background. [3]

David Walker: The second rank.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: The second rank of people, you know. Whereas the others are the landed aristocracy, more the patrician class. Anyway, that's by the way of background. I went through this school in Sri Lanka. I had, you know, a very good academic record. One of the things I did was during the war the school moved away from Colombo into the hills and we had a fantastic four years in a residential school where all the children were boarded and, you know, how such a school is run. It was a fantastic life we led there. We were self-supporting, our own sports and we had a tremendous headmaster who instilled again typically British tradition of certain values. For example, every morning we had to get up and take exercise and do certain things and discipline and all that. Also, you know, we had a lot of very interesting activities. I mean, I was the editor of the magazine. The school was called Glendale and I was the editor of the *Glendale Gazette*.[4] More recently it came out, I remember having written something on - what was it?- not Trotsky, it was on the famous Russian writer, Tolstoy. I mean, that's the kind. Then there used to be a mock parliament. You know, this is a very interesting form of civic education. I remember I was the leader of the opposition and there were the ministers, they used to mirror the government. I mean, this is the kind of learning experience we had.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It created a certain kind of, you know, instilled certain civic values. I mean, British political culture … this is a training ground for inculcating the cultural values of the rulers and they wanted a governing class which would be very attuned to those. So that's briefly my background.

[3] See K Jayawardena 2000 *From Nobodies to Somebodies*, Colombo.
[4] Copies of this are still available from the archives of Royal College in Colombo.

David Walker: Yes, that's the background briefly.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Then I got into university. You know, that is again very highly competitive. I did history, English, Economics and French, I think. It was 1948 or '49 that I did that. Then I got into university. It was very unusual. I think the subject was French. I was the only student who did French at the university.

David Walker: Oh, a rare distinction.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Very rare distinction because the Principal (Mr J C A Corea), who later became a good friend of mine for other reasons later on in life, he said, 'I was most amused when you came in, walked into my office and said you wanted to do French'. Because there was no French classes in the school so I had to take private tuition. But what happened was I then went into university and I was again the only student for the French lecturer, Madam Valli Reich. I still remember her name, an Austrian woman who was teaching French in the University of Ceylon, as it was then known.

David Walker: I hope you came top of the class.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Obviously. I mean, the more interesting thing was that I read English and Economics. Now, that is very interesting because the professor of English was a very famous scholar, Ludowyck. In fact, it was only the day at this conference somebody came and asked me, 'Do you know the name of that English scholar from Sri Lanka?'. His name is Professor Lyn Ludowyck. He has written a book on Shakespeare.

David Walker: Oh, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But again he was married to a Viennese lay psychoanalyst. I had for different reasons - again, I won't bore you with the details - I had generated in terms of looking at my future career, academic and career, I thought, 'Well, I want to do criminology'. The reason I thought I wanted to criminology was my father as a doctor was in a prison as a prison doctor and the prisoners used to come into the house and they used

to do the garden and I used to go and talk to these prisoners. I thought, you know, these people are tremendous guys, you know, what the hell? I mean, I really established very good contact with these prisoners. My father also was very warmly regarded by the prisoners because they used to come to hospital and at last they found a human being in my father who was very sympathetic and very understanding. They used to make any excuse to come to the hospital. So, anyway, for that silly reason I thought, well.

David Walker: Why not?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I started reading on criminology. So I wanted to do criminology. I hadn't the foggiest idea what that involved.

David Walker: Yes, of course.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: My parents thought it was crazy but thought, oh, well, he must've cottoned onto something, because I had bought some books with some Prize money I won at school. I bought books on crime and so forth. Then I mentioned this to Mrs Ludowyck, you know, the lay psychoanalyst because I used to, like you, David, I have had an interest in drama. I used to take part in plays.

David Walker: I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I took part in several university dramatic society productions. So I came to know the Ludowycks very well and I used to discuss this with Mrs Ludo, as she was known, and she said, 'Oh, look, what you should do is study psychology'. That began to interest me. I thought, oh, look, in order to do criminology suddenly I got the idea I had to study psychology. Now, that's not necessarily so, as I realised much later on life. But I then said, 'I want to do psychology at the university level' and I was desperate to do this. So, again to fill you in the background, people of my station in life or our station, the family, used to always look to going to England, to Oxford or Cambridge. You know, if we had the money that's where the children of the elite classes would like to go. Not everybody but, as you know, this part. So I was trying to persuade

my parents to let me go to Cambridge and I was making all kinds of manoeuvres, writing to Cambridge and trying to get a place because one of my uncles had been to Cambridge. I was nearly persuading my parents to fork out the dollars or the rupees for me to go, I was nearly convincing them. It so happened that one of the lecturers in the English department was Peter Elkin. Now, I don't know whether you know Peter.

David Walker: No, I don't, I don't.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: He was Professor of English at New England and he retired as deputy vice chancellor. Peter was just returning from England and, because of the close connections Ludowyck had with Leavis,[5] he spent two years teaching English in Colombo before returning to Australia.

David Walker: I see, I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: As a result of my involvement and coming to know Peter, when Peter's father came to visit him, and he was none other, as I later discovered, he was a very distinguished and eminent Australian professor. Professor A P Elkin had very much a professorial image.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So I sat down with Professor Elkin, you know, it just happened in a social conversation, he said, 'What are you doing here?'. I said, 'I'm trying to do this'. He was a very kind man. He listened to me. I said, 'Yes, that's a good idea'. 'So why do you want to go to Cambridge', he said. Oh, I had no answer. I said to him, 'Most of us think of going to an English university'. 'Oh' he said, he just laughed and said, 'Come on, that's nonsense. We can do much better than …'. His own son is returning from Cambridge and he's telling me 'Come to Australia'.

[5] This is the famous F R Leavis of *Scrutiny* fame.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I didn't have the foggiest idea of Australia.

David Walker: Is that right? So you had no prior understanding of Australia?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes. But that is not entirely true. I'll tell you something else. Let me finish this part of it. So I left it at that and then Elkin went back I told my parents and my parents met Elkin. That was very fortunate because Prof Elkin persuaded my parents that this guy was not crazy, he had something, some idea in his head. Because my mother was very sorry that I didn't do medicine and for her, I mean, her eldest son and it was a terrible disaster that the only worthwhile profession is, you know, 'Be like your dad'. I said, 'No way'.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Then I think I had a gift for public speaking and they thought I'll be a lawyer. I said, 'No way, I must persevere in this idea'. 'It's a crazy idea' they thought, 'Oh, what the hell, let him work it out'. My father was a much more philosophical but very cultured person in many ways. He was quite different to my mum in the sense that he didn't have any kind of those aspirations for me but he's a very liberal person in attitudes and he said, 'Oh, look, all right'. He listened to Elkin and I think at the end of the day the money had to come from my mother's side, my father had to give the authority and I got the authority and I was ready to go to Australia. You asked the question whether I knew anything about Australia.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Now, let me tell you something, how I came to know about Australia before all this meeting. Before we got into the university, when we finished the university entrance exam, it took six months before we finally came to the university. That's because of the way their exams are held. We were at a loose end. So a few of our

friends got together - at least I was a prime mover in this - and said, 'Look, let's find some work to do'. I mean, this is not the norm in Sri Lankan society in the 1950s, I'm talking of.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: We graduated in 1949, end of '49, '50.

David Walker: '49.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So the boats from Australia used to go, the P&O …

David Walker: I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: And, for example, the *Oronsay* from the Orient Line used to go and there were two different companies which used to handle the tourists who spent a day sightseeing in Colombo. So I told the guys, 'Look, let's set ourselves up as tourist guides'.

David Walker: Oh, really.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I walked in with another friend of mine, it was a company called Ceylon Tours, and told the guy, 'We want to put an idea to you. We think you will lift the image of your company if you employ us as tourist guides'. This guy's a very interesting guy. He has Australian connections. The former head of the Swan Brewery in Perth, who I once sat next to in a plane and mentioned him, he said, 'Ah, look, I know Ediriweera very well, I worked with him'. His name is Lloyd Zampatti. You know, anyway, this guy picked up the idea and later I realised why he picked it. His company was wanting to outbid another company which did the other line, the Orient Line, and he was doing the P&O. So he thought he'll outbid that company by having tourist guides. So he said, 'All right, I'll think about this'. Soon on a Monday we got a call, six of us were called and we had the press photographers there and the headlines the next day, 'Undergraduates Act as Tourist Guides'.

David Walker: Wonderful, wonderful.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: He bought the idea. But what I did was - this comes in relevant to answering your question - I met an innumerable number of Australians and came to know a lot about Australia. Really it was a fun time because, you know, the nature of the Aussies and how they reacted and the ease with which you … compared to the British.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: They were so different. I'll tell you a little aside of this - somebody you might in fact know. Many years afterwards I was giving a lecture in Sydney University's Anthropological Society, I think, and Delbridge, Professor Delbridge, came up to me and brought a photograph and showed me and said, 'Do you recognise this guy?'.

David Walker: Yes, and you did.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: And I did. There are many others. There was a leading family therapist later on. She came up and said, 'Do you remember where we first met?'.

David Walker: Really.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I used to do trips to Kandy.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: The usual trip was from Colombo to Kandy and by the evening we used to bring them back. So, I mean, that was my first introduction, other than in the geography lessons we learnt about, you know, the desert and all that stuff - you know, we just had the usual geography lesson. But that's the knowledge I had.

David Walker: That's the background.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That' the background.

David Walker: Clearly, from what you say, you liked the Australians. You warmed to them pretty much.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Absolutely.

David Walker: Yes. There was no condescension in them?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: No. Compared to the way the British elite in Sri Lanka dealt with the natives, this was such a difference.

David Walker: Right, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, they were so easy.

David Walker: So there was more egalitarianism.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: More egalitarian.

David Walker: More friendliness and warmth.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes.

David Walker: Yes. So, okay, Laki, then how did you get to Australia then? What's the process?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That's very interesting. I was almost coming to the end of the first year and then Elkin, a couple of weeks after he got back, sends me a cable at that time but a telex or whatever it is, and says, 'I've enrolled you as a student of Sydney

University and also found accommodation for you at Wesley College. Please come in time for the first session' which begins on such and such a date.

David Walker: Really.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: And gave almost three to four weeks for me to pack my bags and go.

David Walker: And get out of there, yes, that's right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So that's an interesting story. I thought you would be very interested.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So I packed my bag and everyone was astounded. I mean, a crazy thing this, you know. I remember the ship I came on was the *Himalaya*, I think, that I came on from Colombo and it was so packed because of booking I had to travel first class.

David Walker: That's a terrible hardship.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It is a bloody hardship because it was like a villager come to town and a fish out of water.

David Walker: Oh, really. Oh, I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, all these people dressed up and I didn't know anything of the social etiquette of the culture of these first class passengers. I'll tell you a little story which is a fascinating one, I'll never forget this one. There was another person also from Sri Lanka, another student travelling. He was on a Colombo Plan. By the way, I was not a Colombo Plan.

David Walker: No, you were a privately funded student

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I was privately funded. So the two of us, that's the only way we could get to Australia in time. It was the Colombo Plan that paid for him, but we had to travel first class. So, you know, usually after dinner we learned that you go in to coffee. You know, never knew this. We followed the mob and we used to go into the lounge.

David Walker: Of course, for your port and cigars.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Well, I mean, too early for the cigars but still learning a lot about the social morays and the culture and quickly absorbing. All this was so different to me, I was scratching my head. We went and we stood there in the queue and went up and there was a waiter, you know, growled and was very rude, you know, sort of very dismissive of these two blacks. What the bloody hell are they doing in the first class? Like, you know, they just not should be here. In a very discreet way (inaudible). So I told my friend, 'Look, we'll do something'. This is very interesting beginnings of my encounter of colour and difference. So the next time, we went a couple of days later when we went up - you know, this was only coming from Colombo to Fremantle - he said, 'What do you want?'. I said, 'Two whites for two blacks'.

David Walker: He would've loved that.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You should have seen his face.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: He turned red, he just completely …

David Walker: So he was unenthusiastic about this or embarrassed?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: No, he was very …

David Walker: It was more just embarrassment.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Embarrassment.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: He became, I mean, more cordial.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You know, I have always repeated this story on many an occasion to tell people really you should not have a chip on your shoulder. You can just sometimes learn how to deal with this in these kinds of dismissive ways and you'll really then put … you no longer become the victim.

David Walker: Yes, you turn the tables.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You turn the tables. That worked beautifully.

David Walker: Yes. Well done, well done.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Anyway, so I landed. In fact, it's very ironic in many ways that the first place I visited and ultimately settled down was Perth.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I remember coming from Fremantle and coming and visiting UWA and I had heard from Ludowyck that the English department at WWA was very well known at that time in Australia because the head of it - I can't remember the name now - was a Leavite. You know, for people in English studies and English literature

this was a tremendous school. You know, it's around the magazine *Scrutiny*. I mean, we have read *Scrutiny* and we were brought up on it. I mean, that's the kind, Denys Thompson, I A Richard's *Principles of Literary Criticism*, that's the kind of thing.

David Walker: Yes, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So, anyway, I (inaudible) and I was thrilled, you know, it was a lovely campus. But then I had to get on a plane. I think it was an ANA or Australian National …

David Walker: That's probably right, Australian National Airways, I guess.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, which went from, you know. I had to get on this and I think it went to Adelaide and then from Adelaide we went to Sydney. I don't know how long it took, I can't remember, because I had to get there in time. Of course, then I was met, I think Elkin had arranged for somebody to come from Wesley College and I went and I became a student enrolled in three subjects - History, Psychology and Anthropology. Of course, I had to do anthropology.

David Walker: So this is, we're now talking March 1950, are we?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: '52, '51.

David Walker: So it's '51.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I arrived in '51.

David Walker: So March '51 you were enrolled in those subjects.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: And at Wesley College. I must say briefly something about Wesley College.

David Walker: Yes, of course.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It was very fortunate, you know. That is also very significant. The reason I discovered why Elkin had such control, at least influence on Wesley College, was not that he was a Methodist - I think he was an Anglican. He himself, by the way, was a Reverend. Very few people knew that. He was Reverend Elkin and he was head of anthropology and the doyen of anthropology in Australia. The wife of the master of Wesley was a man called Reverend Bertram Wiley, his wife was Margaret Wiley, or Mabel - or Margaret - I can't remember, was one of Elkin's students and a very bright student.

David Walker: Oh, I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: She had done a masters with Elkin in anthropology. By the way, interestingly, they had a Chinese boy they had adopted or looked after.

David Walker: Oh, I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: They lived with the Wileys. Bertram Wiley and (inaudible), I mean, they were fantastic. So you can see. And also the other person, the vice master, was none other than Charles Birch.

David Walker: Oh, I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So, I mean, it was very interesting here. I learnt a lot of Whitehead from Charlie, you know.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Charles Birch. I mean, he was a zoologist. So it was very fortunate that I got into Wesley College. I found a tremendously congenial home and

thanks to Elkin, who had arranged all that. Then I enrolled in psychology, history and of course I had to enrol in anthropology. There was no way …

David Walker: Of course, no. No, you couldn't spurn your benefactor.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Guardian angel.

David Walker: Yes, that's right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So, anyway, I got involved.

David Walker: In March 1951 at Sydney University you must've been a fairly exotic bird, Laki? I mean, is this right?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It is.

David Walker: Could you say something about the atmospherics of that? I mean, how did it feel. I mean, was it uncomfortable or did it make it easier for you in some respects?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It's very interesting that you ask that question because it is so different, you know. Let me put it in maybe a very simple way of putting it. In many ways this influx of students from these countries at this time as a result of the Colombo Plan made them a very special group because they were, you know, a curiosity. We were like museum pieces in many ways. I mean, it was not being patronising but people were being kind and extremely friendly. I mean, unusually helpful. Now, I mean, the college, the atmosphere was absolutely fine but it began to change for different reasons. I'll tell you some incidents. But, I mean, I had warmth and acceptance and never felt in the sense that nobody made you feel different because they were trying to be good and nice to you.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: There was a lot of this interest in, you know, finding another home for these overseas students and there were a lot of attempts being made. I think if you read my *Diary of an Asian Student*[6] I give accounts of how we used to be encouraged to go to Australian homes. Later on they called them foster families.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But, you know, they used to have Rotary, all the clubs used to make it a point. I mean, I learnt an enormous deal about this country, which sadly, I mean, I often have told many people with the new wave of students coming, they didn't have anything …

David Walker: They don't get that, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: They don't give that. I mean, we, that whole group of the fifties, sixties students who went, enjoyed a different kind of relationship, especially the kind of class of people that they normally dealt with. I mean, normally it was the professional middle class, fellow academics and so forth who went out of their way to be kind and nice. I mean, I can tell you innumerable stories of absolute and one particular person, lady was … the First Secretary of the Australian Embassy in Colombo at that time was a man by the name of Alan Borthwick. I used to go and meet his mother. He made the arrangements for me almost regularly to visit him mum. Old Mrs Borthwick in Sydney, you know, I used to go for Sunday meals and so forth. She was a delightful lady.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Now, Alan, I mean, this is also another aspect of how …

David Walker: Yes.

[6] Transcript of broadcasts on *Radio Australia* 1954.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But, of course, Alan was a very unusual immigration officer at that time, a diplomat at that time, because his wife later became one of the leading Thai scholars, you know, the Borthwick family was very well known for their interest in Asia.

David Walker: Oh, yes, yes, that's right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It was the Borthwicks. So sadly I was asking somebody, he has passed away and so has his wife predeceased him. But, I mean, people like that, you know, were fantastic. One thing I did at least personally was I got involved in the university.

David Walker: Yes. Can I cut in there and we'll come back to that?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, yes.

David Walker: It does strike me that the class of people that you were mixing with were at that stage conscious of the need to engage Asia, if you like. So that whole idea about 1950s neighbourliness and hospitality. So you got a fairly clear sense that that was what was happening in that group of people.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Absolutely, yes. I mean, I'll give you a copy of the *Diary of an Asian Student*, the scripts that shows. I mean, there were many others.

David Walker: So your experience was common to the students of that generation?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Oh, very common. I mean, I can attest it. There are some who are now orthopaedic surgeons, various people who've come back who are all products of the era. The important point is we did have good links with Australian people.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, our linkages with Australians, I mean we made powerful friends. You know, I can tell you numerous … recently one of my dearest friends was then a medical student I came to know and he then turned out to be a leading cardiologist, Ian Mackie passed away. I wrote an obituary in the Wesley College Journal to pay my tribute to him. Now, I think this was a two-way process. As much as we enjoyed them, they learned a lot from us.

David Walker: Yes, I'm sure.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I'll tell you one thing. Now, Ian came from a very conservative background and being a doctor, I mean, I hope Ian doesn't mind now that he's passed away - where he is watching us - mind saying this, you know, he became extremely culturally sensitive. When he became a doctor one of the things, the last things in my tribute I wrote was about Ian's encounter with, you know, Burnum Burnum?

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: When Burnum Burnum became a patient the only person that Burnum Burnum related to … and Ian told me this story, 'Look, Jay, I used to go in' and he said 'All my assistants and registrars used to say, "Look, Ian, for goodness sake go and talk to him. He'll listen only to you"'.

David Walker: That's interesting, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: The people like Ian - I can mention other names; I mean, I will mention, in fact, other very dear friends of mine who went through the same time. The very distinguished Australian, I think he would be the most distinguished Australian in international relations, Hedley Bull.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Hedley was a Rhodes scholar, was in Wesley with us. Another was Henry Bosch and his brothers; then another one, a former diplomat and still a dear friend of mine, Rawdon Dalrymple.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Now, all of us, you know, you can see the kind of people which we mixed and these people's attitudes. I mean, if you look at the role that Rawdon Dalrymple has played in foreign affairs in his various positions, and you know all that.

David Walker: Yes, a very considerable role.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes. I think it is very significant that in many ways their interactions with the group of students and, as I said, at least I may have been different to some others but I did make it a point to get involved.

David Walker: For you, you got to know other Asian students as well, I suppose.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes.

David Walker: So it's educational for you in that respect as well. So you're not only linking to Australia but to them, is that the case?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, I must confess that is true, I did make some friendships. For example, there was a friend of mine, he later became an orthopaedic surgeon. His parents were in Bangkok so sometimes when I used to return I used to spend time with his family. He was an Indian Sikh, right, and I came to know. But I then had some friends from Singapore who later went back and they held very important positions and maintained … but I don't think I learnt that much about them. They became good personal friends.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But I don't think I learned much about those countries or those people, but I began to sort of value for myself that, you know, we were different but we were similar. We were in a similar position, though we were different in colour, everything, or physiological features and so forth. But the important thing is that I think the involvement, I gained a lot in understanding by being actively involved in university life.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: For example, I'll tell you just an account of the things that I did. In 1953 I was President of the Sydney University Psychological Society. It was the 21st anniversary of Charles Spearman. I was Secretary of the Sydney University International Club. It was the beginning of establishing International House. 1952 to '53 President of the Sydney University Anthropological Society and I was a member of the Sydney University Union.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I represented the Faculty of Arts.

David Walker: Not bad going, not bad going.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Who was on the committee with me? Gustav Nossal.

David Walker: Right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Now, it is fascinating.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I'll tell you, I met Sir Gustav Nossal and I was reminded of this when Jim Wolfensohn, who was again a very dear friend of mine who's now the

President of the World Bank … and he referred to some of this in his opening acceptance speech on being awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University of Sydney in 1999, I think. I don't know whether you've seen the text of his speech but if not I'll send it.

David Walker: I have, I have seen that. I have seen that.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, so he referred to me and Gus Nossal, I was an invited guest of the University of Sydney and I was staying the Hyatt Regency. Of course, I didn't pay for the damn thing. Fortunately, University of Sydney paid, otherwise I never could have gone to the …

David Walker: More first class living.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Anyway, he had Gus Nossal coming to see him and he called me and said, 'Come on'. I was, by the way, known as Jay. Laki is a recent term.

David Walker: Oh, I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: All my school friends and students call me Jay.

David Walker: Jay.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So he said, 'Come on meet somebody you should know'. I went in and I couldn't remember and that was Gus Nossal. He remembered. I mean, this is by the way of saying. Now, what is significant is then I was also a member of the Wesley College debating team, I was on the union house committee. Now, that was very interesting. I contested a position from the Faculty of Arts. I can't remember what, for the Arts Faculty board or the Faculty council. I lost but I got a fair number of votes.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You see, you know, that was very significant.

David Walker: Yes, indeed.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So much so, I was so very embroiled and this is the part of it which I think I should also say others were very political. Let me confess again, coming from Sri Lanka, you know, you couldn't be a university student at that time and not have political leanings. Right through, mind you, though I went to a Public school in Sri Lanka, if you like, we were very sharply divided politically. In fact, the school became the training ground of a lot of the Trotskyite and, you know, Sri Lanka had a reputation for having been very a very strong Trotskyite movement. Now, I flirted with them. You know, I was not really very actively involved but a lot of my classmates and others, dear friends, were members of the LSSP (the Lanka Sama Samaj Party) – a Trotskyite group - as it was known, and I moved in. I was sort of very left orientated in my thinking and very politically conscious. So I had a sort of political antenna and so much so once in the Wesley College magazine - I can give this article to you - I wrote a piece there before I left describing the university apathy in the University of Sydney and comparing it to how lively it is back home as it was then.

Because of that I got involved in these kinds of political activities. One person who influenced me greatly, I must mention his name, it is very significant … but this also typical of what happened to many Asian students, the same thing that happened to colonial students who went to Britain and learnt the techniques of political agitation. But in a different way I got an insight into Australian politics because I was taken under the wing of like a guardian, of a friend, called David Ross. You might not know David because he's dead and gone now, sadly, very sadly. He was the Senior Student at Wesley. When he realised my political leanings and so forth he became a close friend. David Ross - I realised only much later the significance of who he was - was the son of Lloyd Ross (the Communist Trade Unionist).

David Walker: Oh, I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I didn't realise who Lloyd Ross was and the significance of Lloyd Ross in Australia as a Communist Party member and trade union leader. It was only Ann Curthoys the other day sitting down at dinner at the Academy meeting explained this to me.

David Walker: Explaining the context.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I told Ann this story and she said, 'Ah, yes, isn't that the brother of Edgar Ross?' because she was talking about the 'Freedom Riders' in the book that Ann has written. Then there were others. Another was Bill Ford, who was also associated with Charlie Perkins. Now, Bill Ford was in the Wesley College with me. Frank Stevens, who wrote the first book on Australian race relations. See, these were very Labor Party oriented people. It so happened that Wesley College was very politically more active and alert than, say, the other Colleges - what was it called? St Paul's just behind us was the Anglican College and then there was St Andrews; they were not as political, you know. They were more sports oriented and so forth. Sport was also there at Wesley but Wesley College had a different kind of mix of people.

David Walker: It was a bit more political.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, and maybe because of Methodists, I don't know.

David Walker: Yes, there's a Methodist tradition of radicalism and radical thinking.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Radical thinking.

David Walker: I mean, also actually this moves in, I guess, to some of the discussion about the relationship with Asia and White Australia. Because Reverend Alan Walker was very much one of the first critics of the White Australia policy, which would've been debated at Sydney University in that time presumably?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, it was. I think I have got some paper cuttings of that. I wrote something. I think I sent you, David, a transcript from Radio Australia.

David Walker: Yes, you did.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Of a discussion I had.

David Walker: That's right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: How I expressed it. A leading Indian academic there - and it would be good for you one day to interview him if you can, I think he's still living - he became the Director of Geological Services and in a very high position in India, Dr Harin Narain - I think Narain. He and I had different points of view.

David Walker: Yes, that's right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: He was also in that transcript. But I must confess that there were occasions when sort of in a very academic way we used to discuss this question. I almost took the view, I mean, I didn't take a stand, it was very interesting, despite my political leanings I didn't take a sort of very antagonistic or very critical stand on the White Australia policy. I mean, almost the generosity, the kindness, the hospitality and, I mean, the warmth that was shown by those whom you were interacting with in many ways a softened or completely made me suppress any kind of even, except at a purely academic level. So all that I was saying at an academic level was, 'Look, the Australians have got to learn more about your neighbours, come to understand them' but not casting any criticisms on Australian policy itself. Now, this is despite my being very political and moving with people like David Ross.

David Walker: Yes, that's interesting, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I was not taking a political stand against White Australia.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Sometimes much later in life I began to reflect on this and asked myself, you know, considering the role I played later on in life in the Whitlam era, you know, and working towards that, when I went and looked back at my fifties experience I didn't because I mean, this is again so significant and important. Of the strength of the friendships that existed, I mean, that's why I feel that if there's any way of discounting racism and prejudice, it is as the social psychologist would say, the only hypothesis which works is the 'contact hypothesis'. It is the relationships which you have with people. This is why sometimes I'm very saddened when I see Asian students now in the waves of overseas students, in the new ethos, not having sufficient relationships and contacts in the sense that we had. I mean, numerous incidents I can mention where I joined in. I mean, they couldn't see much difference between us, you know, but there were occasions when the difference showed up.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Let me give you some examples.

David Walker: Yes, yes, let's move to some of them.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: This is one of them. There was a thing called the fresher system at Wesley College.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I'm sure you know, right, that the freshers had to do certain things. A group of us in the Student Council in the College who were sort of very opposed to this kind of whatever you call it now, the terms, you know.

David Walker: Yes, hazing is one of the terms.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Ragging or whatever it is.

David Walker: Yes, ragging, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You've got to do various things.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: We objected to that and, you know, the fresher duties, the freshers had certain duties that they had to do. I mean, there were numerous. There was one occasion and there was a meeting of the Student Council, the student body. You know, it was very democratic, it was the body which controlled all this and the senior students were elected and so forth. So I happened to speak against this - there was a motion. Actually, in fact, I led the group on this.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It was a very fiery, heated debate. This is the one occasion that I remember when, you know, the racist overtones became very apparent. It was something like a war. I used my political nous and skills and I looked around saying, 'Look, there's a very simple way we can defeat this'. We didn't have the numbers. I just turned around and told my friends who were with us on this, 'Let's walk out'. If we walked out there was no quorum.

David Walker: Nicely done.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: This really … and I won't mention the name. I don't know if he's … because he later became a dear friend of mine. He said, 'You yellow bastard'. Now, that was very interesting. He suddenly referred to me as a 'You yellow bastard'.

David Walker: Yes, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So that was the only occasion in which I experienced this. You can see that here was a sense, you know, I'd been able to outmanoeuvre them and use the political strategy. That really, you know …

David Walker: Got him fired up.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Got him fired up.

David Walker: Yes, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But, look, he later became a good friend of mine.

David Walker: Was it as true with the atmospherics as congenial and hospitable off campus as on? So if you went into Sydney, was the same broadly true there?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, I would say. I mean, for example, I used to often go for concerts, right. It began my training and love of music - the Eugene Gooseus era I still remember. I mean, no problem at all.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So we used to be on the Sydney Hill and I used to go to cricket matches, I used to follow a lot of the cricket matches. You know, that was the days of the 3 W's, the West Indies coming. Again, you know, we were a small minority, I mean, in the sense of there were not many faces …we were visible but we were just lost in that.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Everybody seemed to know that these are students who've come.

David Walker: Yes, so you were a special category and allowance was made.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, and we were sojourners. We had no stake, you know. There is no point in showing any kind of ill will to these guys. There was a certain amount of, you know, feeling a kindliness, a charity, you know, we wanted to be good to these poor guys - you know, we must help them.

David Walker: Yes, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Perhaps we swallowed it up too to (inaudible).

David Walker: Of course, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Who cares, I mean?

David Walker: Yes, that's right. Why not use it?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Why not use it?

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But, I mean, except in sort of places like university discussions when it turned up. There was one public meeting that I addressed and one name I remember in this instance, the man who was the chair of that, George Caiger.

David Walker: Oh, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: If George Caiger is still living he is a person you must talk to because he was very active in terms of, you know, he belonged to the Alan Walker kind of group.

David Walker: Yes, with a Japan interest, is that right?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Well, I don't know, he was the ABC, he was the leading person in the ABC.

David Walker: Oh, I see, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: George Caiger. I think he's still around. I've read somewhere. But, see, there was a group of people like that.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Who were very, you know. I think (inaudible) looking at the *Sydney Morning Herald*, I can't remember the details now, it's too long ago, 50 years ago, but those kinds of persons. I mean, the Rotary clubs that we went to, I can't remember the names. I mean, the invitations that we had were coming from the corporate sector and the middle class, you know, the influential group of people who formed ultimately the ruling class. Oh, I'll tell you one very interesting thing. You know, if you look at the Immigration Reform Group, one of the members of the Immigration Reform Group later became a medical academic in Queensland, he was at Sydney University with us, and (inaudible) Chev Kidson. Now, this is the 1950s and remember the Immigration Reform Group work began in the late sixties. So these things, I mean, had a tremendous impact in helping that kind of middle class intellectuals who were wanting to soften ... I mean, when I say 'soften' because that was the original position of the Immigration Reform Group (IRG), was a quota system is what they advocated.

David Walker: Yes, that's right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, let's not forget it was not a complete abrogation of the White Australia policy which was being advocated by even people like the Alan Walkers, you know.

David Walker: No, that's right, it was largely the quota, the critics were after the quota.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Were after the quota.

David Walker: As the reform.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes. In fact, there was on dissent in the immigration reform group papers by Audrey Rennison, it's a very significant dissent. You should read that because she is the one who dissented and said 'No, there is no logic and reasoning for a quota system'. She was the Head of social work at University of New South Wales. That is in the sixties. But at that time in the fifties, David, I really couldn't think that there were any other incidents. I had so much of, you know. I mean, look, many other stories that I can tell you. For example, my farewell was reported in the ABC and the news.

David Walker: Really? Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It turned out to be a real tamasha, you know … they all had drinks galore and the Italian Line was so good. I cut my hand.[7] In fact, Bill Ford carried me, I put my hand through the ceiling and I had a cut and I didn't know. I mean, they had to sort of bandage it up. I mean, that showed that I was able to have made a lot of friends.

David Walker: Absolutely, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But I was not the only one.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You can talk to many others. That is what people don't realise when they talk of anti-Asian feeling, you know. You've got to ask, like that incident that I told you, it is like in economic competition when you are in those kinds of contacts, social contacts, that this erupts.

[7] The farewell party on board was broadcast by the ABC and a photograph of this appears in W Weerasooria's book on Sri Lankans in Australia.

David Walker: It will, yes, or it can.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It can.

David Walker: It can.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Right, it can. But otherwise there was a lot of goodwill.

David Walker: Well, what you say is really quite consistent with a lot of what is reported at the time. That among people of goodwill the desire to show their goodwill and demonstrate hospitality was very strong.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Absolutely.

David Walker: For the people coming in, as you did, you became in a sense showered in that desire to … and I guess for white Australians it was also an attempt to show that they weren't as they'd often been described.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, that's a very good point. I think that was extremely significant because they wanted to know that the White Australia policy, even among the intellectuals (inaudible), they wanted to show that the White Australia policy was not a cushion of a racist discrimination.

David Walker: Yes, that's right. It was an economic policy and so on, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: With the economic policy there was some kind of legitimate argument and, I mean, 'Don't misunderstand us. This is why we're doing it. We're not doing this because we don't …

David Walker: It's not about race.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Not about race, you know. I think there was a lot to that, you know. I mean, it was a softening, mellowing process. I mean, that's why I think it's so important that we can't rush changes. You know, we've got to be very careful to see how they take place over time.

David Walker: Laki, can I now turn you to the *Diary of an Asian Student*?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes.

David Walker: Which you did over the ABC, presumably?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes.

David Walker: Can you say something about how that came about? Was this also part of your entrepreneurial activity? Did you knock on the door of …

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: No, I didn't knock on the door. I mean, I honestly, to tell you the truth, I just do not know how the invitation came. Somebody like George Caiger might be (inaudible) but I just had … I don't know how it came but it was a fantastic thing. Merely that somebody heard me - or, I don't know, you might look at the Radio Australia history, which will give you some idea because maybe some producer. I mean, there were others. I was not the only one. There were other Filipinos and other names of people who were doing various programs. That's why I think Radio Australia was so significant. This was a program which has been going out not to Australia but going over to …

David Walker: Right into the region.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Into the region. I mean, my parents and others used to listen. I told them and they used to listen, they used to pick me up.

David Walker: Oh, I see, so they caught up with their son's activities.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Well, yes, I mean, I can tell you stories about that too. I just don't know, to come back to your question, I just can't remember. All I know is that it is was a fantastic thing that I really enjoyed doing and, I mean, the things that I have described there will give you some idea. Like, for example, this friend of mine (Jim James) with whom I drove around the bush. I learnt a lot about Australia.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, I learnt all the folklore, I learnt all about the literature of the bush. Of course, I went out of my way and, you know, I knew. I mean, I just didn't go out of this country when I left it completely ignorant.

David Walker: Yes, you travelled often.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I knew the country, I mean, inside out. That's largely because of the things that I was prepared to do. Now, I mean, I was not the only one - there were others too who were prepared to sort of make use of the goodness that was available to us and make full use of it.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: This didn't happen to the colonial students who went to Britain. They were much more restricted. There had to be more protocol, procedures were so important and they did imbibe in British culture and British values, but not in the same way. You know, there was …

David Walker: Something particular about the Australian experience.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: There was no difference of the governed and the governing class, you know. Here there was, you know, you were almost like, all right, one colonialist meeting another colonialist. I mean, there was a little bit of a sense of the colonial atmosphere. You know, if you look at the cricket matches and so forth you could see the

growing sense of Australianness which was very strongly developing at that time after the war.

David Walker: That's very interesting because it does coincide with some of the things that Australians were saying about themselves at the time. I mean, in this question of where Australia's position in the region and that notion that Australians don't have the history, don't have the colonialist baggage. So maybe they're in a position to connect to the region because they don't have that history.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Absolutely.

David Walker: I mean, that was very widely promulgated as a statement about why Australia might do this well.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Absolutely. I mean, look at the stand Australia took on, you know, I think it was at the time after Bandung (Indonesia)[8] and the beginnings of the consciousness of the region. Australia was very much … I mean, the Colombo Plan itself is an indication. The Colombo Plan is so significant because there, I mean, you will have to give it to the Liberals at that time, Percy Spenders and others.

David Walker: Yes, indeed, indeed.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: They really bent over backwards in the (inaudible) and others. This was a way of Australia demonstrating another side.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, all right, they had other reasons in terms of, you know.

[8] This was the non-aligned Conference of Third World Leaders like Nehru, Chou-en-Lai and others.

David Walker: Sure.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But they were beginning to recognise for the first time and that's why the Colombo Plan … I was very saddened that nothing was done really to celebrate the significance of the 50 years of the Colombo Plan - you know, it went unnoticed.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But it was especially in Australian and Asian relations it was a critical point of departure. It really created a new set of parameters for thinking from the Anglocentric image which was previous. It was breaking for other reasons, especially after World War Two and what happened in Singapore and so forth.

David Walker: Yes, that's right, that's right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But these then began to add, so it was a very important part of that process.

David Walker: Yes. On the question of Asian studies, was there much of it at Sydney University at the time?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: No, it came much later. As you know, Sydney University was one of the first to start the Asian studies in the sixties. I can't remember, you can ask somebody like John Legge, he'll give you the details.

David Walker: Yes, that's right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But I think it's documented too.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Jim Wolfensohn is one that asked me this question, whether it was not the first. It was the first. Sydney University was the first to have a Centre for Asian studies or a unit.

David Walker: Well, I mean, way back it had that guy, Murdoch, James Murdoch, which is 1917.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That's right.

David Walker: He was at Sydney University.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Sydney University.

David Walker: Professor of Oriental Studies.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes.

David Walker: Then they had, they had a character called Davis, who continued. It was mainly Japanese, but they had an Asianist interest.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Very much so.

David Walker: Which by 1951-52 had diminished somewhat.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes.

David Walker: But it was still there, still there.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, still there. I didn't know much of that, to tell you the truth, but what I do know is a very interesting (inaudible) and that I think I mentioned to you in other conversations, how I became involved with the growth of Buddhism, establishment of the Buddhist Society.

David Walker: Yes, I wanted you to say something about that.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Right. Now, that was very interesting. It so happened, David, as I discovered much later, that the man who was highly responsible for establishing, as it was then known, the Buddhist Society of New South Wales was a Dutch migrant. His name just escapes me. I can't remember it. Yes, Leo Berkley, right, he was the man who really put all his money and effort into it. There was another lady also associated with him, another Australian. But the way he became converted or interested in Buddhism was because he met a Sri Lankan, a leading legal personality, a member of parliament, Sir Lalita Rajapakse, on a ship going to London.[9]

David Walker: I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: He came back and then he learned as a result of the associations about Sri Lanka and Ceylon and Buddhism. There was a very influential monk and he was a very good speaker in English, Reverend Narada. He came in I think '53 or '52 and there was another Burmese monk who came. They were very significant. They were very good fluent English speakers (inaudible).

David Walker: So that's '53.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: '53, I think. I remember this very well because I knew Reverend Narada from my childhood days, having gone to his temple, and I was simply caught into that. But there was another reason. There was a strong background coming from my own family, from my father, who was turning out to be very much a Buddhist scholar. He has written a book, a very well known book, on Buddhism.[10]

David Walker: Oh, I see.

[9] See Paul Croucher's book on the *History of Buddhism in Australia*.
[10] *The Psychology and Philosophy of Buddhism*, W F Jayasuriya.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: As a doctor what happened to him, he had to give up his medical work because of health reasons and then he began an intensive study of Buddhism. So he was writing a book and he used to send his two sons, one was in England and I was in Australia at that time, the scripts. You know, it was on the psychology and philosophy of Buddhism, so I was looking at the psychology aspects. Surprisingly, like it happens to many people, I was not very much a Buddhist or conscious of religion at all at that time. But you became more conscious of where you came from when you are outside.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, like happens to Australians who go to Earl's Court in London and they become …

David Walker: That's right, more Australian.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: More Australian and they think of all the things about your background. So people like us also, you know, we were brought up in the terms of the British colonial culture and suddenly discovering our roots and culture.

David Walker: It's interesting, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Suddenly discovering, you know, the distinctive characteristics. I mean, suddenly I became interested in Buddhism. I mean, maybe because of the things I was reading of my father and when this monk came I became associated with him. I came to know a lot of people and found, in fact, so much so that I drafted the Constitution of the Buddhist Society of New South Wales. Then not only that, then they said, 'Well, you become the first editor of the journal'.

David Walker: Absolutely.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Now, I mean, here was a person who was almost as much a convert to Buddhism as the Australians because I was almost a newcomer to it. Editing the journal – *METTA*.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So that was great fun. But you should read that because what I did in that was I espoused very much a Deakinite kind of approach to Buddhism, that is Buddhism was more a philosophy than a creed.

David Walker: Really? Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I didn't know about Deakin at that time.

David Walker: No, no.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But later, I mean, somebody criticised Deakin and said the Deakin's kind of Buddhism would not be accepted by many others. It's not true. He has misread. I think it was Gabbay who said this about Deakin's Buddhism.

David Walker: Al Gabbay.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, it was he who said that. But, I mean, I was saying, in fact, pointing out the similarities between the Western intellectual tradition, the whole question of personal autonomy and individual freedom which is characteristic of Buddhism and its intellectual tradition. So I was marrying the two – West and East. I was being selective, I mean, somebody would argue I was being selective in trying to match this. But what is very interesting was, of course, now Buddhism has taken a firm hold and, you know, widely growing in Australia at the present moment, but at that time it was very insignificant.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Now, that was another indication of what I want to point out, as much as Deakin in the 1900s, the growing interest in people like that and largely through travellers, you know.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I've been trying to tell a friend of mine to look at the ways in which like *Road to Coorain*, you know, you find a description of Sri Lanka and people going to India and so forth, this was coming, you know. Australia was becoming exposed with increasing mobility and travel. I mean, they were becoming more cosmopolitan, more open. I mean, otherwise they were sort of concealed, insulated from the outside world. Of course, we didn't have the black box at that time, but it did come and the world was opening up largely through travel.

David Walker: Yes, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, it was the dream of every young Australian to go overseas.

David Walker: Yes, and they'd normally go via Colombo, presumably.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Colombo and Bombay.

David Walker: That's right, that's right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You know, India, yes.

David Walker: On the shipping lines that you so skilfully exploited.

David Walker: … and the social base, if you like of the Buddhist Society. Was it largely a student body? I mean, who came into it?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: No, it is very interesting. Again, you know, it was a Dutch migrant who started it. Whatever Australians who came in, I have no idea who they were and where they came from and I never bothered to find out. That's one thing you never did in Australia, you know, you didn't try to find out who somebody is and whom you know. The variation characteristics - though I should not say that in a stereotypical way - very often when Asian meet an Asian, you know, they try to stereotype and 'Where do you come from? Where are you going? Who are you?'.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But, I mean, you don't ask things and you don't bother with this.

David Walker: Sure.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I learnt that very early.

David Walker: You don't probe.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You don't probe and it didn't matter to you.

David Walker: Yes, not your business and not theirs.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes. But I must tell you also it's very interesting in terms of relations, you asked earlier. Now, I did have a lot of men friends and girl friends. That was very interesting. You would have thought that, you know, you couldn't. I almost became in many ways the matchmaker for many of my Australian friends.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: When they wanted to get to one of the girls that they were chasing they would say, 'Now, Jay, you come and help us'.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: These were all friends of mine in a group and they said, 'Now, look' and it was very interesting. I mean, in the sense that I did date. That wasn't something new. But, I mean, again there were occasions - not even my wife knows this but, I mean, put it on tape now - let it be said for the record, it's true, I mean, we used to fun in blind dates across RPH (Royal Prince Alfred Hospital).

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Giving that as an example, yes, there was a classic incident. Once a couple of friends were trying to play a trick. This was the time when the cricket match was on and they wanted to establish this date, this particular they want to get. So they rang and told her, 'Look, come and join us. We've got Sonny Ramadin in', the famous West Indian bowler. So I had to impersonate Sonny.

David Walker: Really? Nicely done.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I had to impersonate Sonny Ramadin.

David Walker: And you did it well?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I did it well, absolutely plum.

David Walker: Good. Yes, well, that's an interesting dimension of that question, isn't it?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Absolutely, yes.

David Walker: The gender dimension of those interactions.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, the gender dimension, exactly.

David Walker: Yes, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Now, I mean, again, this is the kind of image that people have of Australia which is so different. I mean, that's why in many instances, the growing incidence of interethnic marriages in this country is a factor. See, you have to put this against all the other things that …

David Walker: Sure, that's right. No, I agree, I agree.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You balance it out.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It creates a different kind of impression that the experience is so different.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: On the ground what you know of, what is sometimes written and said in terms of racism and so forth. Not that it doesn't exist but …

David Walker: But the experience of it can be very different from the way it appears.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Can be very different, absolutely. That's important.

David Walker: Incidentally, I'm very glad you introduced the gender dimension, Laki, because I would've been far to shy to do that myself, of course. But one of the things I read in the, you mentioned *Hemisphere* magazine, one of the things I read there which I found

quite interesting was that a lot of Australians parents were concerned about Asian males because they were so articulate, in a sense. I mean, because the Australian male is famously inarticulate, or the stereotypical understanding of the male has him that way. There was a fear that the Asian male, which is again another stereotype, of course, but had suave qualities and persuasive abilities and, obviously in your case, brilliant capacities of impersonation that were a danger. So their girls were at risk from these smoothies who were coming from Asia. Did you get any sense of that? I mean, was there any feeling that somehow smoothies such as yourself were risking Australian womanhood?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: No, not really.

David Walker: No.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, I don't know, you've got to check this out with others.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I can't testify to that. There was no way. I mean, I can mention one of my dear friends up to now and, you know, I had a large circle of friends from both sexes and we still maintain contact.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I think one thing I did learn, in fact, there used to be a joke, you know, I worked out I think one editor of the journal, the college journal, referred to that, that I had worked out a theory of love relationships. He said this psychologist has worked out the theory of love relationships or something, I can't remember what it was. But, I mean, we used to play around and joke about these things. I mean, what I did was - I mean, this is again I may be atypical in this - I was prepared to get myself involved in Australian humour and, you know, I was quickly Aussiefied.

David Walker: Yes, yes. So that was really apparent from quite early on, that you threw yourself into it.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, yes.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: In the sense that I was prepared. I mean, when I gave orientation lectures for Overseas Students – at the request of Mary Hodgkin in Perth.

David Walker: Yes, I have, I have.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You should look at Mary's work, she was fantastic at the time and I worked a lot with Mary when I came to Perth in the seventies with Asian students and I used to do the orientation lectures. My advice to them was, 'Look, you know, don't feel shy in coming forward. The more you are prepared to do, the more response you'll find from the Australians'.

David Walker: Sure.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, that way it was fine. I mean, there are many instances which I can mention of interactions of that nature.

David Walker: Yes, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But the friendships formed were so fundamental.

David Walker: Yes, absolutely.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, it was the basis for which I and many others have returned to this country.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: And had a deep love and respect for this country.

David Walker: Yes. Can we come back to that? So what happened after you finished? You did the spectacular farewell.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Ah, yes.

David Walker: In which there was a small element of self-injury. So you went back.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes.

David Walker: So what happened? Can we fill in the next …

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That is most significant. I went back. I did very well in the sense that I got the university medal and, you know, I was again the museum piece, I was all in the newspapers, all that, you know 'Asian Student Wins University Medal' and so forth. I was very proud and right through, you know.

David Walker: Why not?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, one of the things which I'll come back to, to Elkin in many ways, is that I must've upset him because I did double honours for a while but I did my major finally, finally honours in psychology. Elkin must've really been disappointed. But the man who did influence me greatly - to mention his name - was Bill O'Neil (Prof. W M O'Neil). He really had much more of an influence on me in the way of scholarship and academia than anyone else. He was a fantastic man. I'll tell you another little incident of that which will be relevant. I remember one of the Christmas parties at Bill's place and I'd never been able to call him, I used to always call him Professor O'Neil. He said, 'Come on, you bloody well know that I'm Bill'.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I said, 'Look, I can't call you Bill'. It was a big joke, you know. But ultimately he made me, you know, he insisted.

David Walker: You were forced, required.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I was forced to say, 'Look, forget all these bloody titles'. I mean, again I learnt a different aspect of being Australian is the nature of informality and reactions, that there was no sort of forced sense of pride or respect. We just float around and you were judged for your work, you know, in terms of how you were. But where was I, I was talking about, before I digressed onto what I was just saying?

David Walker: We were having you go back.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Oh, I was going back. I went back and Bill told me, 'Look, we're going to offer you a Teaching Fellowship'. Now, that is the equivalent of an Assistant Lecturer. That was what they were called. He says, 'Of course, as you know, we'll have to fight this. It won't be easy. But we are going …' and when he said 'we' he meant the university was going to make a very determined stand to get special permission for me to come and accept a full time academic appointment. This didn't take long, surprisingly. He came back to me almost within a couple of months and said, 'Yes, pack your bags and come back'.

David Walker: So you were back on the first class deck, I hope.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes. Oh, well, no, not this time. This time I travelled, I can't remember how (inaudible) I came but I came back to Sydney and I had …

David Walker: So when's this again, Laki? What year are we talking about?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: We are talking about 1954. I graduated in ’54 and later after a couple of months, ’54, I came, special permission was granted. That’s what is very interesting.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Very interesting. Harold Holt, who was the Minister of Immigration at the time …

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: As you know, the role that he played in the relaxation of immigration policy and so forth. The story goes, and I don’t know where it is, that it was a special endorsement which was given. The university had to make a special request.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Somewhere in the archives of the Immigration Department there must be some record.

David Walker: There’d be, I’m sure.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Because I think I was the second, if not the first, Asian academic. I was told that somebody was appointed in New England before me, but I’m not quite sure. Hari Narain also had a position, I think, a little after me. But, I mean, certainly I was among the first three appointees, or even the first, I don’t know, I can’t vouch for that. But that was very significant because I came back and it’s very interesting because now I’m in a different role. No longer am I a student.

David Walker: Yes, that’s right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You must bear in mind the students that I had to teach, I distinctly remember, you know, at this time were returned servicemen.

David Walker: Yes, interesting.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I used to do the evening classes.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I used to go to lecture and I was scared. They were in my father's age group, you know.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I was absolutely … here I was just about …

David Walker: So how old are you in '54?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: 23.

David Walker: Really? Yes, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Just imagine.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I was teaching statistics. That was a First Year lecture course. I said, 'Bill, come on'. I remember him coming before my lecture, first lecture, he said, 'Jay, remember that you know more than them. Go on'. He was such a good teacher. I learnt teaching techniques from him. Amazing. Oh, he was. I mean, I had a very good rapport right through all the teaching that I did as a teacher (inaudible). I mean, it was very short, unfortunately, because …

David Walker: How short? How long did that last?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It lasted till 1956.

David Walker: Yes, so a couple of years, two years.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: ’55 and ’56, almost the end of ’55. The reason for that was, well, this is an old affair of mine, I met Rohini and we decided to get married. More than that I also got a job. I mean, that was not easy. There was a slot suddenly in the Department of Sociology which was then at the University of Ceylon (Peradeniya). I mean, no commitment at that time. I knew it would be difficult. Mine was a contract appointment at Sydney, so I didn’t want to miss out on the opportunity of the job that I was offered at the university in Ceylon – as it was then known.

David Walker: Yes, the permanent job.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: And my parents wanted me to come back also.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Well, I went sadly. In many ways I regret and think to myself if I had continued what would I have been, you know. I mean, I wouldn’t had a different kind of experience.

David Walker: Yes, and career.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So I left in ’56 and remained in Sri Lanka till when I came back again on a Leeverhulme Fellowship in 1969/70 to the University of New South Wales.

David Walker: ’69, yes. You were here for how long then?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: See, that's very interesting. I did a postdoctoral, not a postdoctoral, a Fulbright, at Berkeley and I returned via Sydney and they gave me a Temporary Senior Lecturer's position in 1968.

David Walker: Oh, I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That was very interesting in '68.

David Walker: Yes, indeed.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I lectured in the Psychology Department and the Social Work department. That was very interesting. As a result of that particular short visit I got a Leeverhulme Fellowship at the University of New South Wales in 1969/70. I did a whole course on the psychology of communication for Professor Broadbent on Radio University, University of New South Wales.

David Walker: Oh, I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: In the University of New South Wales. So I had a very interesting period at that time, 1969/70. That time I really got involved. For example, I met Faith Bandler. You know, this is just after the referendum of '67 and there was a colleague of mine, a very dear friend, John Berry, in the psychology department who was very much involved. He's now in Canada. He's one of the leading academics at Queens. I came to know a lot, you know, got involved in the freedom movement at that time.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: We met people like Faith. Also at that time, I think it was the Auchmuty Report on Asian Language Teaching, which is out.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I wrote a piece in the *Australian*. I've got a copy of the letter that I wrote. Well, I argued in that instance that it is not a question of language. It is a point of view that I have maintained all the time. That Asian studies was not to be equated with the Asian languages. It was surprising they printed that in the *Australian* and said a visiting scholar from Sri Lanka. I argued for the study of what I call Asian civilisations. I said, you know, to make Australia more Asia literate.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That was my argument then.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It is an argument I have sustained, I mean, even in the Ingleson report I argued very strongly that it is a mistake to push just for Asian languages. This was a somewhat utilitarian form of thinking that somehow or other it would give us in the region a greater edge. Also I think personally a mistaken belief that understanding language necessarily gives an insight into culture automatically. That does not necessarily …

David Walker: You're not wholly convinced by this?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I'm not wholly convinced by that.

David Walker: No, no.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I argued that, you know, you're missing out on say, for example, the study of philosophies, civilisations and the cultural history and so forth are sorely lacking. So the thrust of that and the thrust of that is in my evidence for the Ingleson inquiry. Ingleson acknowledges this, you know. I mean, my position on that is that I go along with the kind of argument in the Lo Bianco Report that it is a pedagogical reason for

which you need language study – Asian Languages. As much as you study classics or you study any language but to see the language in itself, i.e. outside culture is a mistake, but sadly I think Australia's lost a lot by making it so narrowly Asian Language studies. So when we set up the Department of Asian Studies at UWA in Western Australia - there's a long story - I did a report on it. Professor Gareth Griffiths and I argued very strongly to give it a cultural dimension.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That is it is to be integrated with other kinds of disciplines and fields of study so that you became much more aware of political, historical developments (inaudible). So that was the thrust I took and I have maintained that right through.

David Walker: Yes. So when did you come back permanently then, Laki?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Oh, in the seventies.

David Walker: In the seventies. That was to Western Australia then?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Directly.

David Walker: You went directly to Western Australia and that was the …

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes. Well, how that happened is very interesting too. It also is an Australian connection. I happened to come to know Professor Ken Walker. Ken Walker belongs to the Alan Walker family.

David Walker: Oh, is that right? I didn't know that, I didn't know that.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: He's a brother of Alan Walker.

David Walker: Oh, I didn't know that.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: He was the Professor of Psychology and a former Chairman of the Professional Board, a very distinguished position in the University of Western Australia before he went to ILO. Ken had come with Bill Ford, my friend, who was working in industrial relations. I ran a seminar for ILO from the University of Ceylon at that time and I came to know Ken. Ken and I, because of connections with Bill, who was also working with him, there were two Australians, I had come to know, and became good friends. When for a variety of other reasons I suddenly made about a year later, when I made the decision to move out of Sri Lanka because I, as I told you in that little other incident of the radio interview in Sri Lanka and that, you know, I just asked Ken, 'What do you think of any openings in Australia?'. It so happened, it was just serendipitous or I was very lucky, that the head of the school of social work had died and the position was vacant.

Now, it is ironical because there was some kind of, you know, destiny for me in all this because when I was passing through Perth after my sabbatical position in '68-'69 I had dropped in on Perth. I had gone to this particular department because I was hoping to develop sociology and social welfare in Colombo – in the new Department of which I was the Foundation Professor. I had met Wally Tauss and I had a very interesting mutual friend, somebody else, John Huelin, who led a group interested in fostering good relations with Asia in Perth. John's dead and gone, you know. He was a lawyer. I stayed with John and his wife Helen. I gave a lecture at the University of Western Australia but never had any idea that I would ever come back in almost one year.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: The reason is Ken encouraged me to apply for the UWA position. It so happened I applied for another job too as Assistant Director of then as it was called WAIT, Western Australian Institute of Technology.

David Walker: Oh, I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Again there's a classic incident. That man too had died. He had committed some, oh, well, died under peculiar circumstances in Hong Kong.

David Walker: You're not involved in the sudden departures by any chance, Laki?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: No.

David Walker: No, you're claiming complete innocence?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Complete innocence. So, anyway, I applied for both and I got an invitation for an interview for the assistant director's position. I was offered the one at UWA in Perth. So I had a terrible problem of how to choose between these two, because I could've gone for the WAIT interview. I don't know whether I would have been offered the job and here was a job offer at UWA and I had this choice. So I asked Ken again. He became my guardian in this respect. I said, 'Look, what do I do?'. He said, 'Laki, you have no choice, go to UWA'.

David Walker: Yes, sure.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So when I came back the Director of WAIT, met me at a function and Hayden Williams said, 'You are the guy who didn't even care to turn up for our interview'. But I don't know whether I should've gone into an academic administrative position. You know, that's the choice I made.

David Walker: Yes. Well, it's hard to decide (inaudible).

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It's hard to say. But, I mean, that's how I came back.

David Walker: Yes. So what date are we on now? I'm sorry to be obsessive about the dates but you're back in 1971?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I came at the end of 1971, December.

David Walker: Yes, okay.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That's the exact date. I think I can give you the exact date. Yes, it's '71, right.

David Walker: Yes, okay.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That was very interesting because when I moved in as Associate professor in an almost fledging department.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: A much more interesting thing is again – this is like how I happened to come to Sydney in 1951. For some godly reason I was plunged overnight into setting up a new department.[11] As I was working at the University in '72, after the Whitlam government came into power. I don't know from where. I was invited to join the Immigration Advisory Council (IAC), an august body of the Commonwealth. I've often asked Al Grasby 'How the bloody hell did you find me?' – for I had not been only a year in Perth.

David Walker: Find me, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Because I was the token Asian.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: See, there was no immigrants on the Immigration Advisory Council.

[11] See *Looking Back: Reflections on 25 years 1965-90*, published by the Department of Social Work and Social Administration to mark the 25th anniversary of the department at UWA.

David Walker: Did you feel that to be the case at the time?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, I did.

David Walker: Yes, okay.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But again it became very different very fast because the man I worked with on the IAC was Walter Lippmann, whom you might know from Melbourne connections. A fantastic guy. I became almost his, you know, aide de camp. We were on a committee of the IAC - the Committee of Community Relations. We produced what is called the Lippmann Report, and I learnt a hell of a lot from him. But, again, I was thrust in suddenly overnight. There was Calamaris, Henry Biziak and another one and myself, four immigrants who were appointed. It was very interesting. Again I felt a bit like my going into Sydney in the fifties, when I had to encounter the establishment they just turn around and muttered, 'Who the hell is this guy?'.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, I was unknown and appointed to one of the most august bodies in the land.

David Walker: Yes, indeed.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: The Immigration Advisory Council. Again I didn't keep my mouth shut. I made my presence felt very early.

David Walker: Yes, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But, you know, this is why I have the respect of Australians, you know. Because of the aggressive attitude they may not like you but they respect you.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So one of the persons whom I really had running battles with was a former secretary of Arthur Calwell. What's his name? Yes, it is Andy Watson. Walter Lippmann, I was working closely with Walter Lippmann. I mean, it's documented, you can see the report for yourself, the Lippmann report (1975). I remember this incident clearly. We used to have long battles with this man – Andy Watson. He was a secretary, assistant secretary, he was a secretary and a very powerful bureaucrat. I mean, I respect him, he was a very talented and skilled bureaucrat but he just didn't want to be upstaged by Walter or myself. When it came to the writing of the report he said, 'Mr Lippmann, the departmental officers will submit to you the copy of the report of the committee on such and such a day'. Walter Lippmann said, 'No, Mr Watson. Laki and I will write the report and we'll give it to you'. Now, this shattered Andy Watson.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Walter Lippmann never took no from a departmental officer.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I learnt from that, you know, I learnt a lot absolutely. I was such a novice. I mean, just imagine being thrust into the top rungs of bureaucracy.

David Walker: Yes, indeed, indeed.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: A fledgling. Well, I must've just turned 39 or 40 in age but otherwise I was just thrust into mainstream politics and I virtually wrote, and it is acknowledged, the first statement - even Jersy Zubrzycki acknowledges that and I had running battles with Zubrzycki over many years - I wrote chapter five of the Lippmann Report - the Philosophy of Community Relations - this was the first philosophical statement of multiculturalism in Australia.

David Walker: Yes, that's quite a distinction.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Well, I mean, I'm really reflecting, I mean, Mark Lopez has given me due credit in that in his book on the *History of Multiculturalism*, you know, he has done a fantastic history. I mean, it was again a revelation to me that even after the abrogation of the White Australia policy in 1971, the formal abrogation, these remained very marked pockets and now I was beginning to feel something that I never felt in the fifties.

David Walker: That's interesting, isn't it?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Much more in the seventies.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: There I think it was beginning to become very apparent, especially from the kind of, you know … I mean, look, in the Immigration Advisory Council - this must go on record - the only man who came and spoke to the four new members was Bob Hawke. You know, we were intruders into this august body which was peopled by persons like the Wool Council President, et cetera. Really the establishment elite were the members of the Immigration Advisory Council. Bob Hawke was then President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: He came and spoke but not the Secretary of the Trade Union, who was a real working class. I can't remember his name but again you can check it.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: He never. He was very antagonistic. You could see this from the frowns he made. Zubrzycki was on that committee at that time. I mean, even he didn't want to acknowledge someone like myself when I was beginning to challenge him as an academic to academic. Zubrzycki was much more, you know, with the establishment, though he was taking a different stand on these issues. But for whatever reason he did not like me.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, I found that right through in a lot of my things, you know, who is this guy? Where the hell did he come from? What right has he to be …

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, it was not said like that but the body language and everything. But what I did, I just said, 'Look, anything that I said I put down on paper'.

David Walker: Yes. I suppose, I mean, one of the differences clearly must be that you're at this stage operating at a level that matters, a level of influence. So, I mean, one of the differences with the fifties is you're a student and you can be showered with hospitality but your position is as a visitor to the society.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes.

David Walker: But returning in '71 you're in there in the policy settings and that's different.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, that's different.

David Walker: I mean, I was just again a token, as I say, I was a token (inaudible). I mean, I was aware of that. All right, the European migrants were different. They had

fought battles as part of the ethnic rights movement and all the Broadmeadows, the conflicts, I mean, they had fought the battles, right. But I was a different kettle of fish.

David Walker: Yes, indeed, that's right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: This was very early before the influx of Asians coming into Australia.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, I came before the abrogation of the White Australia policy.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You know, it was the abrogation in '72 which led to my joining the Whitlam Government as a member of IAC, I mean. Not only that, then I also became the evaluator for the Australian Assistance Plan in Western Australia which was introduced by the Whitlam Government.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: In the Whitlam era at the university it was also very interesting that I was the only Asian on the professorial board for a long time.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: There too, I mean, again I can tell you a lot of interesting experiences I've had within academia of acceptance and non-acceptance.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Again the only way was really to prove yourself in terms of your ability and fortunately I knew as I was not a stranger to Australia.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: My great advantage was the fact that I could say look, 'I know your history, I know your background'. I could throw back and use that.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That was my main strength. There are many other academics who've come who can't do that and they find they get isolated.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But this nevertheless brought in resentment. I mean, I remember very many instances in the professorial board I had running battles with people like Paddy O'Brian and, you know, the very conservative group. There were other fellow academics. For example, I mean, Professor Aubrey Yates, who was the Board chair of social work, and Professor Dick Harding and others were supportive. I remember helping top organise a media statement - a Academic for Whitlam. You know, although I organised this in Western Australia I declined to put my name first on the list of signatories.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I told Peter Reeves - you know Peter.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I said, 'Look, Peter, this is not on. You know, if they see my name on top they will scream. You head it'. I think I've still got the list of the names of Western Australia which are published in support for Whitlam. I mean, again this is my

whole argument, that this ghettoisation is going to be a disastrous story for this country and that's why I've been very critical of the non-participatory culture of multiculturalism which grew up. Because the only way is really you've got to encounter, you've got to enter into the battle scene. I mean, even in academia.

David Walker: Sure, indeed.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You know, they don't like to give you the hearing and the recognition, you know, because I'm still, you know, you can see, if you say anything it doesn't get easily accepted.

David Walker: Yes, sure.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But it will change but only in terms of showing really that you've got something positive and significant to offer.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But, I mean, my experiences was very significant in terms of the different public roles I was called on to play.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But that's another story because one of the most engaging and the most difficult ones I had was I was on the Cass committee. Moss Cass, was chair, myself - a motley crowd of people - Alan Matheson, whom you might know from Melbourne, a Trade Union leader - and Eva Cox.

David Walker: Oh, right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, I must say again, like having worked with Walter Lippmann, a fabulous man, Moss Cass, I mean, we used to have real fights within the

committee which people didn't know. Because just imagine putting Eva Cox, myself and Alan on the one committee.

David Walker: Yes, indeed, it's a volatile mix.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, volatile mix and Moss sat in and again I wrote most of the report and funnily that report was written and I completed it - even had to delay going for my father's funeral. I think the government and everybody recognise that because that's called the Cass report, which is the review of AIMA (Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs).

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That was under Stewart West as Minister of Immigration and I've still got the *Hansard* proceedings of that. That was bitterly contested by Petro Georgio who was the head of the AIMA. I remember Petro Georgio saying, 'Look, never come back to Melbourne. We'll finish you'.

David Walker: Really?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I had then to appear once on a panel with him many years later and Robert Mann was there. In fact, I reminded Robert the other day that Petro Georgio was there and I was wondering what the bloody hell he would get his knife into me this time. Because we had not met after the Cass Report. But it went off all right but, you know, we were civil to each other on that session and Robert remembered that. But that was the intense politics of that time because it was a highly politicised debate.

David Walker: I'm sure, yes, absolutely.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It's very interesting but when it went into parliament and Ruddock was on the other side, shadow minister, I remember reading, they singled out Matheson, Eva Cox and Moss Cass for their political alignments and slammed this as a

biased committee. But nobody ever mentioned my name. That was very significant, I thought. Though they were critical of the report and they knew that I had written the report.

David Walker: Yes, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Partly the story to that is, of course, there was a fight going on between the Department of Immigration and the Prime Minister's Office. Petro Georgio reported because he was a former secretary to Malcolm Fraser, he reported directly to Fraser so the Department of Immigration had its knife into the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs. They were backing us in the report.

David Walker: I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: A chap called Lindemeyer was then the secretary responsible for AIMA. He held a very senior post. I remember, you know, they were very pleased with what was said because it just proved Departments point that this was simply like Max Milton-Moore running everything, being run by the PM's officer.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That time Petro Georgio had direct access to PM&C and that is the way it was run. So, anyway, that also began. You know, it's very interesting, that this was the first beginnings of anti-immigration meetings, the famous one in Perth before (inaudible). This is just before Blainey, 1984.

David Walker: Yes, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: See, the Cass report was '83.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So you can see the significance of Blaney coming in.

David Walker: Indeed, indeed.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Then my first public encounter, that was when I took the stand against Blaney, but it was much more people like Andrew Markus (inaudible) and others in Melbourne who carried the fight there against Blainey, but I carried it in a different way in Perth.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: But my encounter on that issue then later came in 1988 when I took John Howard on and that transcript is available if you want to look at it. I understand it's available in the Parliamentary Library.

David Walker: Oh, I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: If you want to check it because I did on - what's the afternoon program? - *This Hour* or whatever it is, compere John Highfield, I can't remember now, I did a critique of Howard's stand. Also I wrote several pieces later on the Asian immigration issue. Of course, then that went on in Western Australia into the (inaudible) and I was, you know.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: So you can see that once you get any slight economic competition, when you get into the political marketplace like when you get into the economic marketplace then different tensions appear.

David Walker: Yes, indeed.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That is the simple lesson of it, that it is when you really come into competitive interactions …

David Walker: Yes, that's right, it heats up.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Heats up.

David Walker: The temperature rises.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Rises, very much.

David Walker: Laki, I was wondering if I could take you back quickly. I guess we're running out of time a little here but I was wondering if I could take back to Mary Hodgkin? Because, as I understand it, the work that was done there was some of the first work on international students.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Absolutely.

David Walker: And what they were thinking and feeling.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Absolutely.

David Walker: So how did that come about? Who was she?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Oh, Mary Hodgkin was a lecturer in anthropology.

David Walker: Right.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Her husband was Eric, a professor of zoology or senior lecturer. She used to do this as a voluntary thing, as overseas students adviser at UWA.

David Walker: Oh, I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: And (inaudible) departments are close by. She was involved with this man I'd mentioned. We had a thing called Asia Australia House, which was supported by Tom the Cheap, the grocer.

David Walker: I see.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It was very interesting. That was a group and all we were doing carrying on again helping Asian students.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I mean, that's how the Buddhist Society in Perth began, and that's very interesting. Mary Hodgkin one day rang me and said, 'Laki, I've got a funeral to attend to of a Buddhist seaman. Do you know a person, how to perform a Buddhist funeral service?'. So I said, 'Mary, you present me with a hell of a problem'. I had to go and look up some books, how to do this thing. Then I came back, I said, 'There's nothing called a Buddhist funeral service, it's just a person going. You can say some things'. So my wife and I, there's fortunately a little text, which if you want to have a look, on how to perform this service. I said, 'All right, I'll become the monk' and we all went and recited certain stanzas because we wanted to do the correct thing by the deceased body. Out of that arose the Western Australian Buddhist Society.

David Walker: I see. Oh, okay, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes. But again it was Mary Hodgkin in that and the Australia Asia House with people like John Hulien and a group of people - oh, what's his name? Professor Bert Priest, I think, a professor of education. A few of us were involved and doing various things. I mean, it was a lot of work which Mary did.

David Walker: She wrote it up, didn't she?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes.

David Walker: She did a report?

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Yes, what I have done with all the papers, I had the documents, she wrote a book and there was a handwritten thing of Mary on this. I have gifted it all to Professor Geoff Soutar. So if you want to contact Geoff, he is in the Department of Graduate Studies Management. He has recently written a book on the Australia higher education and overseas students.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Now, if you ask Geoff to give you access, that's why you have to come to Perth.

David Walker: Yes, of course.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: All her handwritten things and you can also talk to some of the family who will tell you more and some other people in campus also who'll tell you the fantastic work that Mary did.

David Walker: Yes. Laki, I was wondering if we might close with a … I mean, it's a fairly dark time now for the world at large and quite possibly for Asian studies and the recent reports are that 'our capacity to understand our neighbours is either stagnant or declining'. I was wondering if you could say something on how you see the current situation, what kind of future you envisage for this enterprise that you've been involved in in various ways for long in Australia Asia connection and Asia literacy.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: I go back to saying like, you know, multiculturalism has run its course - that is the model - the culture of multiculturalism has run it's course. It was functional at a time. Asian studies as it grew from the (inaudible) days of the Ingleson report, and to the most recent one of the Asian Studies Association. I was very disappointed with this recent report because there is no theoretical analysis or critique or

understanding of the issues. I mean, I think it is a very pale document. It doesn't understand the current political/geopolitical realities or the social political realities of globalisation and of transnational emergence of a new culture, for example. To give you one simple example, we no longer deal with a migration for settlement because the (inaudible) is the temporary migration and the movement of labour.

Now, given all those circumstances, for a variety of reasons, utilitarian as well as national interest, it is very clear that we need to have a more world view and this world view cannot be Eurocentric. If you accept the fact that that is, as it was dubbed, 'the Pacific Century', that we are now in the Pacific Century, then we've got to learn a great deal more about with whom we have to deal with; our neighbours. This means not learning simply languages because the simple fact is let's not deny the fact or balk at recognising the fact that the Japanese are most eager to learn English, the Chinese are most eager to learn English, and everybody is. I mean, whether you accept the convergence argument or not, the convergence theory simply, there is a great movement towards the new middle class which has emerged, you know, all these countries and realised that they need a kind of link language which will enter them.

So yesterday I was told that one of the things, this is (inaudible) under Athu Korala, the economist that I mentioned at the ANU who's an expert on Malaysia said, 'Malaysia's one big mistake was made to introduce Malaysian at universities and they're switching back'. Sri Lanka is going, if you talk to Jo Lo Bianco, is going back into English. Now, given that we are under the impression that somehow or other learning an Asian language gives you simple economic access, which is not true. I think that assumption is palpably weaker now, even if it had any legitimacy in the past. Given that I can't see, if you look at the recent Asian Studies Association Report, again the push is on language learning.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: It is simply trying to bolster up the position of a kind of group of people who have grown up around it. Now, I think much more important is the most urgent need, I would say, I would give top priority to the study of - what do you call

it? - philosophical and religious systems in the Asian region, which also includes Islam. I mean, it's very significant. I have a theory about this. Many people say that the question of Asia is a mythical obstruction, a construction of the West, like orientalism. Now, you know, at least you can talk about European civilisation and there is a certain amount of core values which arise around from the Judaeo/Christian tradition. That is defensible and there is a lot of argument by which you can show this, although there are certainly differences. But, if you go back even to the period of the Holy Roman Empire and all that, you know, there are some. I mean, if you look at music, art and literature, you know, there are some very significant commonalities.

Now, many people have argued - and this is a very interesting proposition - what is there is in terms of an underlying core set of values and things across the major part of the Asian continent or the sub-continent, including from South Asia to East Asia. I have this hypothesis, it is still at a hypothesis but I think there's increasing evidence which is turning up, that the tradition of eastern religions, especially Buddhism, has expressed itself in a variety of forms. If you take the Ramayana myth, you know, which expresses itself in fantastic forms right across the whole region and admittedly there are different ways in which it is manifest - from Laos, from Thailand, you know, right down to Indonesia. If you look at Borabudur, if you look at (inaudible), I mean, if you look at a sculpture, then go across and look at … you know, the Chinese tradition, the Buddhist traditions are different.

I mean, the other day I heard none other than Professor Wayne Hudson from Griffith University, who was on a TV program (inaudible). He's a member of one of the leading religious sects which grew out of Japan – the Soka Gokkei. In other words, there is underlying two systems in Asia. One is the Islamic group, which are largely contained around Malaysia, south Thailand and Indonesia, but Indonesia has so much of the mix of the Hindu tradition and the Hindu absorption. You know, I'm not an expert on Indonesia but what the basic point I'm trying to say is if Australia doesn't understand this kind of 'cultural logic' which runs across the Asia region, we will fail to come to grips with the political reality of the world we inhabit.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Now, it is a cultural logic which has been now intertwined in many ways, especially in terms of the expressions in terms of the arts, in terms of the ways in which that is a mixing of artistic traditions from the West and the East. Now, this is not getting through except that we do find exhibitions of Eastern art and so forth, but no understanding of Chinese art or the Chinese civilisation. You know, look at the Chinese classics, the Chinese history. Now, I believe that this kind of Asian Studies does not come from Asian Studies departments or Centres but I think it has to go to the mainstream and incorporated into all its courses. What Asian Studies did was it created an awareness of the existence of that part of the world for us. It was an inevitable phase that we had to go through in terms of such bodies as an Asian Studies Council.

The other thing is, I think an extremely important point, it is one of the criticisms I made early, very early in the establishment of the Asian Studies Council, was that it was manned by Anglo scholars. Now, I think it's about time that the Asian academics who are very, you know, increasingly evident in all aspects of academia, not only in the sciences or medicine or anything like that, even in the humanities and the social sciences, they should be brought into. I think they are beginning to make an impact.

David Walker: Yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: You can see this very much in Britain. Now, the best criticisms of the Islamic issue - I will send you this; in fact, I was going to - it's off the Net, anthropologist of Pakistan extraction from Keel University – Professor Werbner - a fantastic piece on the Muslim situation after 9/11. Now, I mean, I call that Asian studies, if you want to put it within course.

David Walker: Yes, sure, sure.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Like Clive Kessler of UNSW Sociology. We need these kinds of people. Now, that comes not from departments of Asian studies. So Asian Studies has run its course. I mean, the ghettoisation of Asian studies, I mean, indeed, there is no

market for Asian studies students. I think it was John Legge who's done the deconstruction of Asian studies. When I wrote the Report for the establishment of the Department or Centre for Asian Studies at UWA this was what I stressed. Previously it was a Department, existing since 1960s. It was only following my report that the University formally agreed to make it a formal school of studies in the Faculty of Arts. Beverley Hooper was appointed chair. That was the first formal appointment of a chair. I can send you a copy of that report if it interests you, because that will show that essentially the same kind of argument I am making here, I think that still holds. It is not a kind of orientalism that we need. You know, when we were looking at the way we looked at Asia was simply from a purely utilitarian point of view, but that utilitarian angle has gone now. The trade relations which have been established will be sustained irrespective of Asian Studies because of the nature of the transnational economies that have grown in an age of globalisation. The transnational economies don't survive on language and the common language in the transnational economies is English.

David Walker: Yes, yes.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: That's the inescapable fact. I mean, that in brief.

David Walker: That's the core of the argument.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Core of the argument.

David Walker: Well, Laki, I'm sure there are many more things we could talk about but I'd like to thank you very much for discussing these matters, for discussing your own background and life and thanks very much. We might have to do it again if we have other issues that arise.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Oh, a pleasure. I'm delighted to do this and I hope you got some value out of this.

David Walker: I'm sure, I'm sure. It's been very valuable for me and it's a great record. Thank you.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya: Thank you.

[End of interview with Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya.]