This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan History Project for the Don Dunstan Foundation interviewing Dr Peter Hetzel. Peter was a school friend of Don at Saint’s, St Peter’s College, and knew Don at university and later was one of his doctors. The date today is 4th July 2008 and the location of the interview is at the Don Dunstan Foundation.

Peter, thanks very much for doing this interview for the Don Dunstan History Project. Can you just talk a bit about yourself so we can understand who you are, your education – and you’re a doctor, obviously – but how you moved through that system?

My primary education was at King’s College and then in 1937 my brother, who was also at King’s, and I transferred and went to Saint’s. He was in the Leaving and I was right down the bottom of the senior school. School at that time had seven hundred boys – two hundred and fifty in preparatory school, which was primary, and four hundred and fifty in the senior school, and you were started off, if you were at the Sub-Intermediate stage, which was where boys came in from the government schools, and there was one form for those, and some of the bright ones who came in were in a form called ‘Sub-Intermediate 2’, ‘SI2’. And Don Dunstan came into the school in 1940 in SI2. I was two years older than he but I was in the highest form, V1A. It was Sub-Intermediate, Intermediate, and then with the Leaving it was V1B and then for the Leaving Honours it was V1A. And the Leaving and Intermediate examinations, and the Leaving Honours, were conducted by The University of Adelaide, the Public Examinations Board, and you passed through that series of exams.

Now, when you are a senior boy you are aware of the new ones that come in each year but you don’t actually meet them, they are acquaintances; and Don Dunstan was placed in Da Costa House, which was the house that I was in, and that’s where I first met him, but I wasn’t a close acquaintance, but one knew – or I, by the end of each first term, I knew who every boy was because I sort of had that sort of memory to work out, and having worked out in my first year you only had to add on the new ones who arrived and you could identify or remember what forms they were in at a certain time, like 1937, that gave you an idea of their ages and what they were
doing. SI2 was a form which took some new boys in from the government schools but also some boys who’d come up from the preparatory school. Some of the boys would go first of all straight into the Intermediate, and those who didn’t go into Intermediate A or Intermediate C would generally be in SI2 or SI3 or perhaps even Remove A. And Remove B was the new boys’ form and then Remove C was just one of those forms right at the bottom of the senior school where you might move from Remove C and Remove A after another year.

Houses at Saint’s, there were two boarding houses and six day boy houses at that time. The day boy houses had roughly about forty-five boys, every age upwards. And the important thing was that you knew one another because you did things together on the field. Four days a week, the bell would ring at eleven o’clock and you would rush off, get stripped down to shorts and sandshoes and go out and do physical training for ten minutes, then come back and shower – towels were not always very dry in your locker, and you always had your locker locked because the towels would get pinched – always cold-water showers, and you’d then start again your class at twenty to twelve. And so for the boys in the house you knew one another, and you would see one another when you were getting changed or whatever you were doing.

Games were organised on a house system and sport was compulsory. You spent two afternoons a week after school playing games. In winter, it was just football. In summer, it was cricket, tennis, rowing and then athletics were sort of thrown in if you were a good runner; but there were ways in which boys could partake of athletics by things called standard sports where you had to run or jump all the things at standard height. It didn’t mean that you were a starring athlete, but it enforced your participation and it was a good system. Certainly I being not very keen on sport it did me the world of good.

Did Don – – –?

Well, I think he did. He would have had to have.

Do it? Right, okay. But he didn’t stand out.
Not in my memory.

**Right, okay.**

But then I wasn’t particularly sporting-minded. But it would happen, for instance, that boys who were good at football or cricket would be moved up the totem pole, becoming a house prefect or a prefect earlier.

Then the other things that were compulsory at that time was you had to be either in the Scouts or in the Cadets or else in a group called the ‘Ambulance’, whichever that was. It was something, I suppose, like the Society of Friends, that you were non-combatant. And Don was in the Scouts, and over his four years at Saint’s he was quite prominent. Scouts were Sea Scouts or Land Scouts, as they were called: he was a Land Scout. But, for instance, in his last year at school in 1943 one of the scoutmasters left earlier in the year to join the navy and so Don was appointed an assistant scoutmaster, which was an unusual thing, but he had a major role in the Scouts.

Scholastically, he shone later; but when he took the Intermediate – this was the exam, the first of the public examinations – he got a credit in English and he did English, Greek, Latin, French, Maths I, Physics and History. Maths II would have been an alternative to History. He did Greek because he was interested in it. Most boys who did Greek sort of were destined for the Church; but he was unusual and he did Greek.

**Greek was Ancient Greek language?**

Ancient Classical Greek, yes. Like Classical Latin. And the master who taught Greek taught Latin as well in the upper part of the school. So he did Greek and Latin – well, he did Latin all the way through. If you were going to do Law, you had to have Latin at the Leaving stage to matriculate, and he acquired that so that in the Leaving form, which he was in in 1942, he got a credit in English and a credit in French. He must have failed one subject, because he only got five whereas he would normally have taken six, but I have no idea. So in those days you did
English, Greek, Latin, French and Economics, and I would imagine he might have done Maths I, but I don’t know.

In his last year at school, he really had a very busy year. He had been in the Dramatic Society and in 1942 there was a performance of *Captain Brassbound’s Conversion* by Shaw and he played the part of Lady Cecily. The following year, his last year at school, in 1943 he was the Secretary of the Dramatic Society and these school societies, one of the boys would be secretary and a master would be the president and be the guiding influence and would write the account of what had happened. And he was also in the Debating Society and it is interesting that the debate one year was to the effect ‘That party politics does more harm than good’. And he spoke for the affirmative, and it was the same group who debated one year as the next year – was Welsh, W-E-L-S-H, Mark Clift, Joe Welsh, Mark Clift and Donald Dunstan was the third speaker and obviously would have been in that position each time because of his capacity to sum up the argument. In one year they were defeated by Woodlands, and I don’t know what happened the next year. But he was in the Debating Society and he was the Secretary of the Dramatic Society.

In 1943 they put on a performance of John Drinkwater’s *Abraham Lincoln*, and this is from the school magazine published in 1943, and this is the report that Martin Ketley, the master who taught English, an Englishman who’d come from Marlborough to the Saint’s some years before, has written about the performance:

The chief contributor to the success was D.A. Dunstan who, as President Lincoln, took what was by far the largest and most exacting part. His performance was one which has rarely, if ever, been equalled in a school play. Some of us had been afraid that the actor who gave Shaw’s Lady Cecily with such eloquence would be unequal to the task of speaking with Lincoln’s earnest, unpolished eloquence. Dunstan, however, satisfied all such –

He spoke with directness, scrupulously and above all a humility that made the President very real. The other characters were seldom more than Lincoln’s foils.

Very impressive.
So that year – we don’t know anything about his sporting achievements – he was appointed a house prefect, which was unusual for a boy in his first year in the Leaving Honours, and there was some recognition, clearly, of his ability for that to happen.

The headmaster at that time was a man called Guy Pentreath. St Peter’s College had always had English Anglican priests, being an Anglican school, and he was the last – for after him the next headmaster was a laymen. But Pentreath had come to the school as a young man in his early thirties, a Cambridge graduate and a man of some vision but also a man with a considerable social conscience. He was a follower of William Temple, at that time Archbishop of Canterbury, and we would be exposed to Pentreath in what was V1A Divinity class once a week. Temple had written a book called *Christianity and World Order*, and this clearly placed social conditions under the microscope, and what might happen in the future. Pentreath had been appointed in 1933 and had altered the whole school and rebuilt a lot of the buildings. In talking in the Divinity class in 1942, he often spoke of a group of men on both sides of the political menu with whom he was meeting. Some were public servants – I can remember a man called Wainwright[?], he was in the Department of Reconstruction; a man called Alec Ramsay, who was another public servant – I think a man called Thompson, who was in the Engineering Union; and a group of men, some public servants, some ministers, some in business; and they would get together I think every month and in 1943 an organisation called Common Cause was launched and Pentreath was a moving force in this, and I had left school but I became a member of Common Cause.

Pentreath had the capacity to inspire, and I never discussed this with Don, but I would imagine he would have been part of the inspiration. If I could be inspired, Don Dunstan certainly could have been. But what happened in 1943 was that it wasn’t quite the stage of ‘reds under the bed’, but the conservative element in the Old Scholars’ Association, of whom there were three members on the School Council, it is my belief – and I don’t have a lot of authority but I have some prejudice – that they were disenchanted with what he was doing with Common
Cause and thought he was becoming an ardent socialist, and he was basically – his contract was terminated.

Really?

Another aspect of it, which was explained to me by one of the masters whom I knew quite well, was that it was probably if he wanted his children to be educated in England it was the time to go. So probably all those things. But I think that Don Dunstan would have been influenced by Pentreath’s idealism, as I was.

Interesting, yes.

And there was a function held in the Town Hall full of people saying farewell to Pentreath.

Dunstan left school then at the end of 1943, but his academic record, for all the things that he did with the Scouts and the play, he took English, Latin, French, Modern History and Economics, and this year he didn’t get a credit in English like he did the other years but he did get a credit in Economics. But the other thing was that there was a list of what was called the ‘general honours list’, placing the boys and girls where they were with all their marks added up, and it was unusual for a boy in first year, unless he was exceptional, to get on the honours list. There were three boys from Saint’s, and Don was one of them – Drew, Taylor and Dunstan – who got on, which means that his marks in the other subjects must have been pretty good. There were no distinctions, there were just credits and passes – and failures. But it impressed me that in 1943, when I go back over his record of what he actually achieved, clearly his academic record was good.

At the University – – –.

Just before we get to the University, just at school you mentioned you saw him once reciting poetry or something like that. What was the background to that?

Yes, I’m sorry, I’d forgotten that. He always took out the Public Speaking Prize. Certainly 1941, ’42 and I think ’43. He would generally, I remember, recite Burke and he would stand up there and recite it and nobody, nobody, could compete with his capacity to present Burke’s argument and style. He got prizes – I haven’t been
able to trace all the prizes he got, but he got essay prizes a couple of years, Dr Suckling Essay Prize, which was a special essay, and I would imagine he might have got prizes in English because he’d done so well, though in his first year in the Intermediate another boy, Donald Simpson, who remained a friend, got the Tennyson Medal. Donald Simpson became a neurosurgeon of considerable distinction.

And you mentioned you saw Don read something and then he could just recite it.

Well, that was later.

That was later on, okay.

He told me that –

That he could, yes.

– that he had this short-term memory that he could just read it and then he would handle it all.

And do you know where Don was living at the time?

No, I don’t. His grandparents were at Murray Bridge. He wasn’t a boarder and I don’t know where he was living; but he wouldn’t have commuted from Murray Bridge to Adelaide every day, back and forth. That would have taken an hour and a half out of his day morning and evening. So I don’t know where he was living, but he was not a boarder, otherwise he would not have been in Da Costa House.

And what struck you about Don, apart from this record of public speaking and being the house master.

Scout master.

Oh, sorry, Scout master.

I wasn’t close to him at school.

Did he strike you as somebody special?

Oh, nothing very much, no. You know, when you’re a boy at school you look at those ahead of you; you don’t worry too much about those behind you. (laughter)
Okay, right.

Except that I knew who he was and I would have spoken to him a couple of times or something like that, but there was no normal relationship at that stage. But I knew him and I had respect and affection for him. And in my last year I was captain of the house and knew everyone.

Then at university, when I went to university I became involved with the Student Christian Movement and then – I was in about third year which would have been in about 1945 – I became also involved in student politics.

Right. You were doing Medicine.

I studied Medicine. And then I became involved in student politics, as my brother had before me – – –.

That’s Basil Hetzel.

Yes, there were only the two of us. I stayed on at school for an extra year in the Leaving Honours so that he was three years ahead of me, and then his course was five years and by the time mine came through mine was six, so he actually graduated four years ahead of me. But student politics in those days, there was a whole lot of strife with the Union or what the Union was, and in 1946 things were changed and the Students’ Representative Council was set up at that time and I was the first President. This was involvement with the NUAUS,¹ as it was called at that time, and there was a congress after the War in Hobart, we were in an army camp, and this was early 1947. Most of us didn’t have much money to go touring with, it was a question of crossing Bass Strait by sea and back and forth, and I do not remember Don Dunstan being at that, but he may well have been at that NUAUS conference, but in 1947 was when the Labor Government was setting up ANU,² so we were all invited to a meeting in Sydney for a few days, all the representatives of

¹ NUAUS – National Union of Australian University Students.
² ANU – Australian National University.
the universities, to learn about what ANU was about. Such a thing wouldn’t happen now, of course, but that’s the way things [were], much closer.

I resigned from being President of the SRC over an issue about responsibility for *On Dit* and I was ready to resign because it was time I did some (laughter) academic work.

Yes.

I had not done particularly well and, with a brother ahead of me who got a credit, who came second every year to Ron Hunter, people were expecting more of me and my short-term memory wasn’t quite as good as Don’s, but it wasn’t bad. And so I resigned. In 1996/97 there was a celebration in the University for fifty years of the SRC, and I think he may have been made a Doctor of the University on that occasion, I’m pretty sure it was about then, and at the dinner afterwards he spoke and talked about a man called Kevin Magarey who was in the English Department, but Kevin was at school with us and he was a direct, age-wise, contemporary of mine. But there was a discussion about who wanted to be what, and Kevin Magarety was never very organised. But I had thought that Don Dunstan had been President of the SRC, but he was in fact Secretary.

**Secretary, right.**

As shown by the book that was written. Not a very pretty colour, this book.

**So was Don on the SRC when you were, or you’d resigned already?**

I think he was on the SRC when I was, but I can’t find the list of membership –

**Okay.**

– and looking at the book called *The Lower Level* written by Margaret Finnis, there was only an account of who were the officers and it doesn’t even list those who were the editors of *On Dit*, which I think is a pity, because *On Dit* – and she pays credit to the fact that if you wanted to know about what was happening in the University at that time you would certainly read all the copies of *On Dit*, which was
the student newspaper. But this book is written more from the attitude of an older person than one who might have been a student at the time.

**Sort of recollection after.**

Yes, and I think it’s reference to minute books rather than colour.

**Can you remember anything of Don’s political activities while he was there?**

Well, the only thing – not particularly. I learnt later that he had initially been interested in the Liberal Club at the University but then he became a member of the Labor Club, which wasn’t surprising, because the Liberal Club was pretty strongly coloured by men like Sam Jacobs, who were strong, blue-ribbon sort of characters, were Establishment types. But I’m sure there would have been mutual respect between them because of the nature of the people. But Sam Jacobs was the sort of Men’s Union President before the SRC was formed, and then when the SRC was formed I think he might have been on a committee of the Council or something.

At university, then, I completed my course in 1948, but when you were in your clinical years, towards the end of third year, you were over the road and in the hospital and you didn’t take as much part in the ordinary parts of the University, though the medical students were there for such a long time that they tended to fall into sort of senior – but also the Law students; and he would have matriculated for Law, having got Latin at the Leaving stage. If you wanted to do Medicine you had to have Latin at the Intermediate stage, but you didn’t have to have it – and Latin was one of the alternative subjects for Maths.

I didn’t have much – I graduated in 1948 and the next three years were those spent in various forms of training and I was a Surgical Research Officer at the Institute the same time as my brother was a Medical Research Officer, and then I wrote my thesis for MD and I went away. I spent the next seven years overseas, and when I came back in 1958 again I was heavily-involved in doing things. And in 1965 his daughter Bronwen was referred to me – I was a cardiologist – referred to me for assessment. I didn’t really see Don at that time until 1966, when he invited me to a meeting in his office with Richard Stallings.
Richard Stallings was the man who came from the US to build Pine Gap, the place out of Alice Springs, which, being CIA,\(^3\) was \textit{bête noir} to all sorts of politicians, including Whitlam.

**That’s right.**

But the purpose of asking me to meet the Stallings was that Richard Stallings’s wife, Ishtar, who came from a distinguished newspaper family in Baltimore, her daughter by a former marriage had aortic stenosis and had been investigated and she was born in 1957 and it was necessary for someone to look after her. So I met and made and made the acquaintance of Richard Stallings and his wife and they became quite good friends. He subsequently was retired from the CIA and we would see them socially and he came out here and settled for a while, but the exchange rate sent him – he had a house at Willunga, and the exchange rate was unfavourable and so he went to live in Hawaii. He died earlier last year. But that was my next contact with Don.

And then in 1975 Brian Shea, who was at that stage Director-General of Medical Services, asked me to look after Don and so I saw him then as a patient, and he had hypertension and I was treating that, and that was reasonably controlled.

**Sorry, what was that from?**

High blood pressure?

**Yes, but as a result of pressures on him?**

No, I don’t think so.

**Okay, right.**

I think it may well have been part of his family history. But certainly it was aggravated by the pressures.

In February 1979 I was in a meeting in the Health Commission and I was called and notified that he’d collapsed, in parliament. So I arranged for him to be taken by

\(^3\) CIA – Central Intelligence Agency of the United States of America.
ambulance to Calvary and I went and saw him. I can remember that meeting very well because it was one of those occasions when the Government was unwinding a structure which I’d gone to great effort to build up and they were, instead of making a budget commitment from the Health Commission they were making it come from the budget of the three major hospitals, which meant of course it was at the bottom of the budget, and I was being very vehement in opposing what was being done, so much so that some of those present thought I was the Chairman. (laughter)

What organisation was that?

That was the Coronary Care Committee, and we had some members who’d come from country hospitals and that was all about making country hospitals capable of looking after people with myocardial infarction. And we’d been very successful with some money with a trained nurse in setting up this right throughout the country, and nurses were learning all about rhythm disturbances and monitoring the heart rate and all that sort of thing and having a defibrillator, and the whole thing was being dispersed. But in hospital he had, obviously, been going very hard. His second wife, Adele Koh, had recently died and this had been very traumatic – not just the death, but associated with the death were a whole lot of people coming into the house with homeopathic remedies –

Oh, no.

– and exposed to the whole of the Chinese culture, and whereas I think he wanted some peace and tranquillity in his life the house was full of these people, and I think he found that stressful.

Yes.

Shortly afterwards he’d gone overseas and he’d come back and had then gone straight in doing things in parliament, and the burden was quite heavy. He got off the plane and went to parliament rather than anything else. And so he was over-stressed.

I think he’d picked up a cold somewhere in his trip, too, a bad cold.
Yes. Anyway, I said to him – this was February 1979. He was born in September, 1926 so he wasn’t very old, fifty-one, fifty-two. But I said to him that I thought he couldn’t go on, that this was too difficult and he wasn’t well enough and the stress of this was such that he should really retire.

**Totally, not take a year’s break or anything like that?**

No. Well, I didn’t think he could do that and come back. We discussed the possibility of that and I felt that he should look at the rest of his life. I specifically said to him, ‘You should not apply for workers’ compensation because it would mean you would never be able to do anything again and it would be hard, and it shouldn’t be done’.

*The Advertiser* said that his doctor – not mentioning my name – had advised him to seek workers’ compensation.

**Really?**

I collected a whole lot of garbage from my colleagues, some of whom had known him at school but resented his political position, so much so that I was being in my own way verbally abused by those who were my friends – or I thought were, still are. And I rang up the AMA\(^4\) and said, ‘What do I do?’ And they said, ‘Well, why don’t you first of all speak to *The Advertiser*?’ So I spoke to *The Advertiser*, and the editor at that time was a man called Riddell –

**Oh, yes.**

– and I said, ‘Well, what you are saying’ – I went to see him, I said, ‘What you are saying is false’. I said, ‘I’m his doctor and I told him specifically that he shouldn’t, and he hasn’t’. ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘that’s not my information’. I said, ‘I don’t know what your information is, but if you go on I will sue you’. Where I would get the resources to take *The Advertiser* to court would be another matter. I said, ‘Your sources of information are false, and you want to rely on them so much the better, but I will have to proceed through the courts to defend my reputation’. Next day in

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\(^4\) AMA – Australian Medical Association.
The Advertiser there were three people who said that Don Dunstan – they got Millhouse to say it and two others to say it as well as saying it themselves – that Don Dunstan had specifically not applied for workers’ compensation. It wasn’t an issue with him, but I wanted to make sure he could do something with his life, and because I’d done quite a bit of medico-legal work the implications of workers’ compensation and what you get paid and how it was settled and all that sort of thing, what had to be said about your incapacity would be damaging. So that was all settled. But he took a long time to get over the whole business. He was depressed, he was lonely. I took him out socially and had him to dinner and to friends and that sort of thing.

I was impressed by the fact that his first wife, Gretel, was bringing meals to him. Really?

I thought that was a very gracious sort of act. And of course he had support from his family, and it was for him a hard time.

He had attracted a degree of animosity, which surprised me. In around about 1975 or ’76, one of my daughters was invited to go by a boy inviting her at university to go to a Liberal Club function. She went to that function, and there was a doctor there who was an acquaintance and quite well-known and that sort of thing and she went up to speak to him. And he abused her, in a way, for the fact that I was looking after Don Dunstan. He considered this a betrayal of the trust of what the Liberals were about, and I wasn’t a member of the Liberal Party anyway. And that appalled me; but it made it clear the degree of animosity that he had attracted in what he tried to achieve. I never told him that, of course, because if I had I would have had to say who it was and he would have known that already anyway, probably. But it was just – yes, it upset me. Partly made me angry with the individual, but the fact that there was in the way in which I was criticised over looking after him, both because then people thought he was going to get workers’ compensation, but also just because of the person he was, and that was unfair and improper.
Over the years that followed, he did various things. He had a passion for things Italian and he would go back to Italy, as you would no doubt know, and smarten up his Italian. And of course he was very highly-regarded by all the people around Norwood, and then he developed his culinary interests and then wrote again in the *Adelaide Review* from time to time. I saw him intermittently, when there were problems, but I wasn’t his general practitioner. And he had two sorts of problems: he had a bout of cancer of the common bile duct, which was a very unpleasant thing from which he recovered. And then probably in about 1997 or so he developed cancer of the pharynx, and that’s a very unpleasant condition, and this led to his death in February 1999.

I had not just respect but affection for the man which had developed after school through my contact with him since. I also looked after Gretel, his first wife, and also Bronwyn, and both of them, particularly Bronwyn, I had great respect and affection for.

*Just before we finish, I was just wondering, when he became ill back in 1979 did he ever talk to you about any frustration of not having achieved certain things?*

Not to that degree. He was concerned about what was going to happen to –

**Right, yes.**

– happen to the Party, and the Government, and it was clear that Corcoran was going to be the Premier and I didn’t know much about Corcoran but he pointed out that Corcoran had been an army man and they all called him ‘the colonel’ and he’d been in the Korean War and all that stuff. No, he didn’t express frustration about that. I always considered he’d achieved a lot.

When you see someone as a patient, and then you get to know them better, you tend not – or I tend not – to pursue issues like that at that level –

**I see, right, yes.**

– I suppose because of being busy or being cautious and not wanting to intrude, and unless somebody volunteered those sorts of things you wouldn’t ask – well, I wouldn’t.
Yes. And you mentioned earlier on the pressures on him because of Adele’s death and the Chinese ..... handling that.

Yes.

Did he talk about the pressures of being a premier at all?

I think he did. Yes, he did, he would talk about that and he would talk about the fact that he could, he could read things and go straight ahead and deal with it, and I think he took pride in the fact that he could do that and debate so successfully. But also my impression was he took pride in the things that he’d achieved. It’s interesting that in a recent publication of *Who’s who* called *Who’s who in South Australia* the question is asked on the form by this particular man who’s a retired professor of geriatrics, ‘Who do you most admire for South Australia?’ ‘Don Dunstan.’ And this man came from Melbourne originally and then New Guinea. Ian Maddocks, it was.

*Ian Maddocks, right. Interesting. Well, thanks very much, Peter, that’s been a great interview: lots of terrific insights about Don, his early years and later. Thank you.*

You’re welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW.