

Francis William Hay:
Interviewed in Christchurch on 18 February 1995 by Bramwell Cook

BC: Uncle Frank, can you tell me about your early life?

FH: The earliest I can remember is starting school at Oamaru – the Oamaru South School. We lived at the cemetery lodge with my grandfather on Mum's side. I can remember a little bit about that. I wasn't going to school then, but I did remember being there and running over to my grandfather at the cemetery to a little office that he had and calling him for tea and calling him for dinner.... He died, I don't know when he died, but I can remember Mum and Dad took me in to see him in his coffin. I wasn't a bit afraid of it, either, and I remember how peaceful and happy he looked.

Then after that we had to shift from the cemetery lodge seeing my grandfather had been the sexton there – after he died we had to make a shift. We went to Tees Street in Oamaru.

BC: What can you remember about your grandparents?

FH: As far as Mum's side of the family, I only remember those little incidents about my grandfather Baker, I don't remember a great deal about him at all.

BC: You don't remember much about what kind of people they were?

FH: No, I was too young. I wasn't going to school. It was only when we left there and went down to Tees Street that I remember starting school. After that at Tees Street – I don't remember a tremendous lot about that. I remember we had playmates; and we lived next to a big house which housed the proprietor of Lane's Emulsion. He was a chemist.... Lane's Emulsion, in those days, was well known by everybody because they took it for colds and they took it for.... So he was well known. We didn't see a great deal of him as there was a big high fence between him and us which made us think that he was a very wealthy man, and I think he was a very clever man, in any case....

Then I started school.... My earliest recollections of school – we had playmates; I don't remember any of their names, the only thing was when I was about six or seven we moved away and went to Nelson. Dad had an idea of buying an apple farm there. When we went to Nelson, the first fortnight or so we went to the Catholic school, because Dad and Mum were looking round the farms, which were a good way away, so they had to do something with us.... We weren't very happy there because most of the time they spent in prayers we thought. But, however, the nuns were very kind to us....

Dad and Mum joined up with the [Salvation Army] corps at Nelson and we went to Sunday school there for a matter of three or four years before we shifted back not to Oamaru but to Timaru. Dad had got a job at John Mill & Co. He was wool-classer and grain-grader, he was the foreman, actually; he had about 20 men under him, and he worked there for 25 years.

So we were well-established in Timaru: we went to the corps, Dad was in the band, he was sometimes sergeant-major, sometimes secretary, he had quite a number of jobs. My greatest recollection is that I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ there, but I had been out to the penitent form several times and didn't seem to get anywhere, and I'd been through school – I was about 15 – and was

now playing in the band. I had a job with one of the drapers in town, Ramsay & Miller, and I was there for a year or two, but I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ. I think I must have been about 17 when that happened. I remember going to a Sunday night meeting and feeling that somehow I had to go forward. I went forward and was dealt with but I didn't seem to grasp anything, but the next Wednesday, we had band practice night, I went to band practice as usual and they asked for someone to pray – we always prayed before band practice – and without – I often wonder how it was I got courage because I was a very quiet chap, hadn't a great deal to say... but somehow I felt I had to pray and I did; I prayed a very short prayer and I can still remember the silence there was after I stopped and sat down. Just for a moment or two there was absolute silence, as if they were thinking, 'Well, who is he trying to...'. But that was the beginning of my real conversion because after that I got a bit of courage and took up different things at the corps.

About that time the Army started young people's councils.... I was asked to go and I went – I had been going for a year or two – they used to hold them in the Caroline Bay hall on the seaside there. And this time I went and felt somehow very much by myself, I don't know why.... and I felt a bit lonely sitting alone. I was in the crowd but I didn't feel as much at home as I usually did. It came to the night meeting and they had a call for anybody who wanted to come forward to come forward. And without really being conscious or feeling any feeling I went to the front. They had started then to take us out the back to deal with us – counselling they call it now – so, I don't know who the lady was who took me out there, but she was a soldier from Waimate, all the smaller corps round used to come in, and we talked together for quite a little while, and then she said to me, 'Have you ever thought of becoming a Salvation Army officer?' and I said, 'Oh no, I never have.'

She didn't say any more than that, but that question stuck in my mind and gradually gained a good deal of force until I felt – I wouldn't say I knew it was God's will because really I... wasn't in an advanced spiritual state at all. But the corps officers were Smith and Birks and they helped me and encouraged me and got me out to the platform at different times to give my testimony and it gradually grew. But I think that one of the greatest influences on my life – we had a huge big volume of *Pilgrim's Progress* and it also included *The Holy War* and I got hold of this book and read it and I think it was the foundation really of my spiritual life. I began to see that there was much more to it than I had ever thought about.

Then Comr Hay came to conduct a weekend and he wanted to see all the candidates... so I was taken out to the office and he interviewed me and said, 'Now, is there any possibility of you coming into college?' I had made up my mind to go to college but I wasn't prepared then because I had nothing behind me as far as money was concerned, and I knew I would have to save up if I was going, but he talked to me and said, 'Now, I'd like you to come in next year', and I think there was only about six months before the new year came. So I hummed and harred and I said, 'All right, well I'll do my best'. And so from then on I began to save all the money I could and got myself ready to go into college.

Now, the fact was that I was a very home – well, I loved my home, and I had rarely been away from it. In fact, I only remember one occasion of being away from home: that was when the Dunedin exhibition was on and I went down to

there for a week and came back again. But I hadn't been away that I can remember and I was particularly fond of being at home, I didn't mix a great deal.

[Track 2]

The time came and I packed up my tin trunk and went off to college. On the way there I met Len Millar who has been a life-long friend. In college we had Staff-captain Atherfold... he was a very enthusiastic sort of chap.

BC: What year did you go to college?

FH: 1928. And that year I thought I'd be terribly home sick but I wasn't, and frankly I never have been since.... When we were appointed I was sent away up to Dargaville. On the side that I was there was no other corps. My first recollection was – the officer there (I'd better not name him, though I've never seen him since, strange to say) – he wasn't much of an officer. And in those days the train didn't go to Dargaville, and when I got out at Kirikopane I thought I was at the end of the earth: there were Maoris sitting around with big straw hats on, really the whole place shocked me; I'd never seen anything like it in my life. However, the officer turned up in an old Ford T car and we got my luggage out and put it in the car. Then we started off home. He arrived all dressed up for tennis, wearing white trousers, and I was surprised I thought he could have been in uniform to meet me. However, we got in the car and went off. And on the way he said to me, 'Now, you'll find I take things pretty easy easy. And I – if anyone had stabbed me in the back I wouldn't have been surprised, coming straight from college with all the enthusiasm. I was really thunderstruck.

So that was the Saturday. So on the Sunday he said, 'Now we'll go down to ?' It was a corps with a lot of outposts. This was a Sunday school outpost. And he said we could have a cup of tea with a farmer there and we can go to the Sunday school. And I said if I'm going anywhere I'm going to have an open-air. So that was agreed to. So Sunday came, and before the holiness meeting I went out and looked around for a place where I could have an open-air. There weren't many houses around – two or three, it was a very small place in those days. However, I chose a street with three houses and I had my open-air and read the scripture and gave my testimony and sang and so on, then went back to the hall. But as I got to know people I found that I had stood outside the Methodist minister's house. That was that; he was a very decent chap, in fact he became the moderator... and he told me afterwards he had been much impressed by – I don't think it would be with what I said, but it probably was just that he thought it was a good example or something.

But after six months my CO, a captain he was, went away to get married.... I don't remember the sequence of events – It was congress time, that was right, and we were going to congress. But we had to leave on the Sunday night and he had a motorbike and side car, and we were going to go down to Auckland, they had special meetings there, then go on to Wellington to the congress. Well Sunday came and we packed up everything we wanted in the motor bike and side car and off we went. On the way – I always think he went to sleep – we had an accident, we went over a bank; I don't know whether went through the fence or over the fence. But when I woke up and looked around, he was down the bank of the river. He hadn't been hurt; I had a bad cut on the back of my head, and I've still got a scar there, and we seemed to be miles from anywhere. But when we got back on the road we managed to get the motor bike and side

car, I don't know how, up on the road. And when we pushed it along the engine wouldn't start but he said, 'Oh, I think I know this place', he'd been on the railways. He said there was a boarding house not far down there. So we went on and came to the boarding house and we knocked up the proprietor and he took us in and washed my wound and put a bandage on and we stayed there the night and went on the next day to Auckland and then went down to congress. What happened at congress I don't remember – it was my first congress. I don't remember who conducted it, even.... So, he went away and got married. He married an ensign, a very fine officer, too, and they were only together for a week and they split up.... And I've never seen him since. I think he came out of Otahuhu or somewhere.

BC: Were you left in charge of the corps then?

FH: Yes, I was left in charge of the corps.... I was there for six months on my own, and then they sent Bill Crichton, who's still alive in Auckland, as the CO and we were there for a further year.

BC: Where did you go after Dargaville? It's very important that first corps. Those experiences didn't set you back in any way? To meet an officer like that first time up is not a good experience.

FH: Yes, I was most unhappy while he was there, but otherwise....

BC: You must have been very resilient and firm in your faith at that time.

FH: Yes, well in college we always had a half hour in the morning of prayer and Bible reading, and I always maintained that over the years and increased it, and I found that it was my anchor. And Dargaville was quite a good corps. Travelling round there were.... In the winter we used to go out to the outposts; we couldn't go to a lot of them; there were no proper roads and we had to go by horse. It was great meeting the settlers out there; they were lovely people – welcomed you and sent you away again with produce and anything they had they gave. So, it was a happy experience in the end.

BC: So what other special experiences would you recall after Dargaville?

FH: From there I went down to Rotorua with Captain George Thompson. I had formed a very warm spiritual companionship with him in college. He was the side officer, and I was very happy to go to Rotorua with him. It was a very small corps in those days, though it had been a big one; Sammy Hayes had been there, just after the First World War it must have been. There was a big military hospital there, and Sammy Hayes had been there as chaplain, and he would draw a big crowd to the Army, but when I went there maybe 30 or 40 people, but it was quite a good corps. And as far as my spiritual experience was concerned it was a time of growth in my spiritual life.

In those days we had the Self Denial Appeal, and did all the collecting for the out-districts, and there was a chap by the name of Bro Whitley and his wife, they were perhaps our most prominent soldiers, and I think some of his family are still in the SA somewhere in the North Island, but he had a car, and this was most unusual for any Salvationist to have a car..., so he was taking us out to collect; he drove, the captain was in the front seat and I was in the back....

[Track 3]

and I got out my pocket New Testament and was reading it, and I came to John 7:38 about how the Holy Spirit is given: 'If any man believeth on me out of him shall flow rivers of living water'. And with that came a tremendous realisation – and I'm quite sure it was a visitation of God's Holy Spirit – the back of that car became a real holy place. I've remembered that so often during times of stress, in itself it was God's message to me. I know that those words were indelibly printed on my mind, and I'm quite sure it was God's Holy Spirit....

We were just a year at Rotorua then George Thompson was appointed to Lower Hutt, and I was appointed to Cambridge – was it Cambridge? I'm not quite sure about the sequence of the corps there. No, it must have been Karori I was sent to; that's right, there were two girls at Karori and they had had burglars there and were terribly afraid. No, they were stationed at Cambridge and had had burglars in the house and were terribly afraid. So they decided to change them over and they would do Karori and my lieutenant and I would go to Cambridge, and we changed over.

Cambridge was one of the corps that stretched me a little. About that time there was a fellow from Auckland, I forget his name, he was one of these Pentecostal people, and he was doing a great thing and he used to come down to Cambridge sometimes. And while we had some of his people coming to our meetings, I went to see what he was about. I'd heard a lot about him, his healings, and I thought, well, I'd better go and see what's happening here. And I went along, but I wasn't a bit impressed by him. And some of our soldiers who were going went out to the front, and like in many of the early-day meetings they were flopping out on the floor. And I said to one of the ladies who was a constant attendee at his meetings, 'Now, what is it that attracts you out to the front?' 'Oh,' she said, 'it's a wonderful feeling.' 'Is that all there is to it?' And she went on about this 'wonderful feeling'. And she still continued to go, but I came away feeling that there was nothing he had to offer me that was important.

I was at Cambridge for 18 months. We used to go down to the Putaruru farm where Brigadier Fitness was in charge. We held meetings there; once a month we'd go down and have Sunday school. It was boys, of course, as the boys' home was on the farm, and we used to hold Sunday meetings as well. And we used to bike from Cambridge to Putaruru and get very dusty because the road was very dusty in those days. That was a break in the month because we enjoyed going down. Cambridge was a very small corps, we had, I suppose, about 12, 15 or 20 people in the morning meeting and less than that at night. But we had a lot of outposts that we went to; we went to Te Awamutu.

While I was there we had a great abundance of officers, and the college was ready to commission the officers, and they rang from Auckland and asked me if I would take two other new lieutenants. So there were three of us there. We had to find something to do, so we used to go over to Te Awamutu and have open-air meetings, and visit round the small town. It was quite useful as far as witnessing was concerned. I don't know how long we had the three lieutenants there. There was a bit of a difficulty in a little place like that with not many soldiers and we had to plan fairly carefully our time and then they took one away and there was the two of us. I was there for 18 months and then they sent me to Island Bay.

Island Bay was something quite different because it was the time when Comr Hay was there, and he knew what he wanted and he told all the officers who lived in the district that they had to go to Island Bay Corps. It went much against the grain, but they were a lovely crowd of officers, and there was a fair crowd of them, I would say at least 10.... I don't think anything very wonderful happened at Island Bay. It was hard work: we used to, with the lieutenant, get away from the quarters by 9 o'clock, visit all round, we used to spend our time visiting from street to street, and it was pretty difficult work, really. We had the commissioner as a soldier of the corps, too; he rarely came, he was always away specialising somewhere. But his wife did; she was a fine woman, very helpful and encouraging.

Then, in the middle of my term there, it seemed that something had happened... but they sent me back to Cambridge again. There had been some difficulty – oh, the officer who was there was a very young chap, he had been in my session, and they sent me back to him as captain. And he received me quite happily, he didn't show any anger at having me put over him at all. But he had spent his time playing tennis with some church people that he had got closely associated with, but we got back onto a sound basis, and I was there another 18 months. I spent three years at Cambridge. I didn't leave it a much bigger corps unfortunately, but at least we kept it going.

It was there I met Anne. Not I had been looking round for a partner but hadn't come across one. The congress of that year was held in Auckland. I stopped with George Thompson – he was stationed at Newmarket – and he had his wife's sister – that was Anne – stopping with him. I decided that she would suit me. She was stationed Te Kuiti and so we came home in the same train, and I arranged to sit beside her and got to know her a little better. Then after some time – I was still at Cambridge – I had been praying very earnestly to God for a partner, and one morning I had been thinking about it and it just seemed that God said: 'Quit your praying and go to Te Kuiti to see this young lady'. So I did. And I asked her if she would become my partner and she said 'Yes'. So that was encouraging, but in those days we weren't supposed to visit other corps, particularly with lady officers, and Sammy Hayes, who was then the DC in Auckland, he somehow found out and he gave me a real roasting for that. But I found out later that it was the very same thing that he had done in his early days. However, that's past history now, but that's how I came in contact with Anne.

From Cambridge I went to Levin. Nothing of great note happened at Levin.

[Track 4]

BC: How long was it before you and Anne were married?

FH: I was then 25 and was married when I was 26.

BC: So you knew each other for about 12 months?

FH: Yes, that's all....

BC: If you were not supposed to go across to another corps, especially one with a lady officer, how did you get to know Anne? By correspondence or did you get chances to meet?

FH: No, apart from the fact that I met her at the congress and she was George Thompson's wife's sister, and we had... that was the main time we had together. Then I felt this was something that was in God's will for me and I went over and saw her.

BC: So you hadn't really known each other very well for very long.

FH: No, not a great while at all. But you had to make the most of your opportunities. I had been praying about it, and I'm quite confident that the Lord didn't make a mistake....

BC: After she said 'yes' were you able to get chances to meet?

FH: Yes, I did. Whatever Sammy Hayes said, I know I went across at least once a month to Te Kuiti, and they used to make a special spread for me. They were very poor; Te Kuiti was a very small corps. She was the lieutenant and the girl who was her captain, Captain Lavis.... She was also in my session, you see, Lavis was, and when I went over the first time and knocked at the door – the quarters was on the back of the hall... – I went to the door and knocked and she came and she was all excited because she didn't know whether I had come to see her or Anne. However, I made it plain that I had come to see Anne. So we said we would like to go out and have a little time together. She said, 'All right you can go out but I want you back by 9 o'clock'. At Cambridge we had a little Ford tourer two-seater, it was winter time and I remember we went out into one of the back streets and had time together until 9 o'clock. But after that I went over fairly regularly, and we got to know each other a bit then.

She was from Gore, and when she went home on furlough I think she called in at our home in Timaru and saw a little of Mum and Dad.

We didn't get married that year, I know, because in the meantime Jimmy Hay had gone across to the High Council – the first High Council – and he didn't come back again, or did he? But he was appointed to Canada and we had Comr Cunningham and he wouldn't let us get married. Actually there were only two officers allowed to get married the year we did, and that was Fred Searle and his fiancée and Anne and I. It was during the Depression... and I was then at Levin.

We got married. We were very poor we had very little money, and we went home to Timaru. We couldn't have the wedding at Gore because her mother had had a stroke..., so my people arranged that at Timaru....

BC: Can you tell me about your parents – the kind of people they were?

FH: Well, Dad was always a very faithful Salvationist; he was a local officer for many years, he played in the band, he went to every meeting from kneedrill to the prayer meeting on Sunday night. And in those days we had an afternoon open-air, we had an afternoon meeting, we had a prayer meeting at half past five, an open-air at 6 o'clock in the main street and then the night salvation meeting and that could last until nine or half past, and Dad was never absent. He was loyal; he wasn't brilliant at all, but he was very loyal to God and the Salvation Army.

He had been converted at – it wasn't Herbert, was it Georgetown? -- in any case it was a little place out of Oamaru. But he got into the Oamaru Corps....

That's some of my recollections, too, going to the Army. I was a very curly-haired little boy and everybody used to rub my hair up. I hated it. We went to the night meeting, too, however late it was. In those days all the Salvationists sat on the platform, the hall was all un-uniformed people.... And I remember halfway through the meeting I would get sleepy and I would sit beside Dad because he was in the band... I leaned against him. I would go to sleep leaning against him and would wake up at the end of the meeting and they would cart me home. And that went on... until we shifted away, I suppose.

I met some of the first Salvationists to be converted in Oamaru, and they were great people, too. The Hallelujah Coalman they called him and he had been converted and was an officer for a short while, but his health gave out, and he came back to Oamaru and started up a coal business, and if he saw anybody that he knew he would call out 'hallelujah!'

BC: And your mother?

FH: Well, Mum was a good Salvationist, too. We lived a long way from the hall in Timaru, so she rarely got to a Sunday morning meeting. And she felt, too, that she had to be home to cook us a good dinner on Sunday. We biked everywhere: Joe, Effie and I all had bikes and used to bike back and forth to the meetings. But she always stopped at home and had a good Sunday's dinner for us and she used to come out to the meeting at night. But she was very deaf; she had an affliction... it used to give a lot of bother. She didn't take a great part – though she was home league secretary for quite a while. Specials who came to the corps were always billeted with us because Mum was a good housekeeper and she was a good cook, and I think that was why we got all the officers who came to special – well not all of them, of course.... We got to know quite a few of the older officers, I remember there was Major Powick..., Colonel Carmichael.

Transcribed by Laurence Hay
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