

TELEVISION INTERVIEW WITH MR. NORMAN BANKS  
ON CHANNEL GTV9, MELBOURNE  
ON 5TH AUGUST, 1963

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- MR. BANKS: How do you do, ladies and gentlemen. On your behalf, I would like to extend a cordial welcome home to the Right Honourable the Prime Minister of Australia, Sir Robert Menzies. How do you do, Sir Robert?
- PRIME MINISTER: Thank you.
- QUESTIONER: I would like to suggest at the very outset of this programme that we at least keep on the subject of Robert Gordon Menzies as a person instead of Sir Robert Menzies, Prime Minister. Could we do that?
- P.M.: Well, it is not a matter on which I am particularly well-informed.
- Q.: Sir Robert, talking of names, have you ever had any nicknames conferred upon you?
- P.M.: Oh, one or two.
- Q.: I remember one unsavoury one...but in your earlier days.
- P.M.: In my earlier days..... I remember at the old Grenville College at Ballarat I acquired the nickname of "Judkins" because I was even then, as a small boy, given to making speeches in a shelter shed or somewhere. There was then a famous social reformer called Judkins, you know. So I became Juddy to my particular generation at that time. Once when I got into a cricket team by accident and caught somebody in slips by accident and the scorer called out, "Name of the fieldsman, please", the answer was "Judkins" and that's how it went down.
- Q.: And how old were you then when you made that first public speech in the shelter shed?
- P.M.: Oh, about thirteen or fourteen. I got over it later on.
- Q.: What, speechmaking?
- P.M.: Yes. It only came back on to me again years afterwards.
- Q.: Do you find it difficult making speeches, preparing speeches or thinking off the cuff?
- P.M.: Oh, it's not so difficult thinking about it, but it's a nerve-racking business because every speech is another task. People think one has no nerves about speech-making. I'm as nervous as a cat before I have to make an important speech. I get over it. First hint of opposition and I cheer up.
- Q.: Of course, people viewing Channel 9 network throughout Australia will be wondering how you feel about television appearances.
- P.M.: I detest it.
- Q.: Yes, I thought you did. How do you keep so amazingly fit? You used to hike, didn't you?

- P.M. Yes, a lot, but I do very little of it now. I think the reason for my tolerable state of health is that I selected my parents well. There is no better reason than that.
- Q. We have a picture of Canberra here. You used to be seen walking around the streets of Canberra quite a deal even at night. You seem to have given that away now.
- P.M. Well, when I first went to Canberra, the population was 6,000 odd and you could walk around the whole place in two hours. Now it is 70,000 and so it has got beyond my scope.
- Q. And do you find people asking you how to get from A to B and C to D and so on?
- P.M. Oh, I've had a bit of fun on that in the old days, yes.
- Q. I suppose you gave it away partially because of this recognition?
- P.M. Oh, no. When I used to walk in and out of town from Kew and came out in the dusk as the hotels came out, I had some very amusing conversations. In fact, I was wearing a black homburg hat for some reason or other and I was addressed as "Your Reverence" three times coming through Victoria Street. A novel experience for me.
- Q. Sir Robert, what is a normal day for you in Canberra? What time do you rise, for instance?
- P.M. Oh, I rise as late as I conveniently can. I read the newspapers when I am in bed. I make my first appointment at about 10 o'clock in the office and I get home, as a rule, somewhere between 11 o'clock and midnight.
- Q. Do you work when you get home?
- P.M. No.
- Q. Do you read?
- P.M. I read.
- Q. And what do you read?
- P.M. Oh, a mixture. All the way from detective stories to the last historical study written by somebody or other. I do a lot of reading. I read a lot of poetry. Keeps the mind in order.
- Q. Have you any favourite poets?
- P.M. You mean Australian poets?
- Q. Yes.
- P.M. Yes, well, I think my favourite poets are Judith Wright and Douglas Stewart and Kenneth Slessor.
- Q. What about C.J. Dennis?

- P.M. Oh, yes. Oh, well. I was thinking in a different order. C.J. Dennis, oh yes. It was only the other day when I went abroad that I took a copy of "The Sentimental Bloke" with me to give to a friend in New York.
- Q. Do you have time for music?
- P.M. You mean as a performer? No.
- Q. Not as a performer but as a listener.
- P.M. Very little, but I am very fond of orchestral music. Chamber music is a little beyond me. I am not musically educated enough, but I like an orchestra.
- Q. Playing what type of music? Opera? Symphony?
- P.M. Symphony. Yes.
- Q. Sir Robert, do you share Dame Pattie's passion for camellias?
- P.M. No, I like the look of them very much but as she would tell you if she were here, I am not to be trusted to distinguish one flower from another. I am pretty good on roses. I can tell a violet when I see it. I think I can tell a geranium but sometimes I am wrong, but really I am not in any sense an expert. When I open a flower show as I have occasionally, it is a case of the blind leading the seeing so far as I am concerned. My wife's a good gardener. She knows all about them.
- Q. Do you have any favourite flowers at all? Which would you prefer in the way of flowers?
- P.M. I share her admiration for camellias, I assure you. I think they have beauty and distinction.
- Q. Looking back on your life, we have two pictures we would like you to see. One was taken at the age of 34.....
- P.M. Good Heavens! I wasn't bad-looking then.
- Q. You've always been very distinguished-looking, Sir Robert. The other one at 41. You might have noticed that in each one you are wearing a single-breasted suit.
- P.M. I can't tell from here.
- Q. Well you are. You can take my word for it.
- P.M. Well, you must put that down to the eccentricities of youth.
- Q. Is this the answer?
- P.M. Yes.
- Q. But you have been under fire, haven't you, for a considerable time about your clothing. Only this week there was a poem written by somebody dedicated to you about your clothing.
- P.M. I thought it was very good.
- Q. So did I. I liked the last line particularly. Who does buy your clothing? Do you always buy it yourself?

- P.M. Yes.
- Q. Always?
- P.M. Yes.
- Q. That tie wasn't bought, of course?
- P.M. Yes.
- Q. It's a club tie, isn't it?
- P.M. Yes.
- Q. Most of your ties are club ties?
- P.M. Well, a lot of them. That happens to be an M.C.C. tie London, of which I am a life member, but when you want a tie, you don't just go along to the Secretary and say, "Give me one." You go into Jermyn Street into the appropriate shop and you buy it.
- Q. Your son, Ken, was telling me that you have a talent for picking clothing for other people and I notice that his inflexion was rather interesting. He said, for instance, for his children, you can go into a London store and with great certainty pick the right colours and the right size for his little children 12,000 miles away.
- P.M. Well, I think I am not bad at it, you know. I have had some success with it. But it is even more difficult to buy a frock for your wife or for your daughter, and on that I think I have had a lot of success, strangely enough.
- Q. You stayed at Chequers for a weekend, didn't you on this last trip?
- P.M. Yes.
- Q. I wonder..... We have a picture of Chequers we would like you to see - you don't need to see it, of course, to remember what it was like - but what is the history of this building? Did Mr. Harold Macmillan tell you anything about it or did you know in advance?
- P.M. Oh, I've known a good deal about Chequers for a long time because the first time I visited Chequers was in the Prime Ministership of Ramsay MacDonald and that is going back a fair way. It is a very early 17th century house - around 1600 you can say - and at one stage it was in the possession of the Cromwell family, and up in the big gallery at the back of the house, the long gallery, they have some very interesting Cromwell souvenirs, including the original of the famous letter he wrote, do you remember, saying, "The Lord made them like stubble to our swords." It's there, under a velvet covering.
- Q. I suppose there are some rather wonderful paintings in there, too.
- P.M. Oh, yes.

Q. You are interested in art, aren't you?

P.M. Yes, I am.

Q. In fact haven't you, in your private collection at the Lodge, a picture by Sir Winston Churchill?

P.M. Yes, well to be precise, we have two. One belongs to me. It took me eight years to get it. And one belongs to my wife. She got it without asking for it. That's the difference between feminine persuasion and masculine.

Q. What's the subject of the one given to you?

P.M. Oh, It's painted in the South of France around Cap d'Antibes or round there. A fishing boat tied up, a lighthouse in the background. It's been on exhibition in Australia. Quite gay colours.

Q. Sir Winston had time for hobbies. I think he laid a few bricks in his time.

P.M. Oh yes, there are two or three cottages at Chertwell built by him. At least he did the brickwork. Some brick walls he did. He became a member of the Bricklayers' Union and, of course, as a painter, well, he began - have you read his little book about that?

Q. No.

P.M. He began comparatively late in life. He had been a prominent politician and he was out of office. Sir John Lavery the President at that time of the Academy said, "Why don't you take up painting for a hobby?" As Winston had said to me, "I'd never been in a gallery. I wasn't interested in pictures," but he took it up as a hobby, and he has turned out to be an extraordinarily good painter and gets great pleasure out of doing it.

Q. You've never taken on painting as a hobby?

P.M. No, not since I was a very small boy in the country doing little watercolour things at the top of the prize homework book, you know. That kind of thing.

Q. Of course, your friends who know you well would probably say you have laid one or two bricks.

P.M. Dropped them, you mean?

Q. Well, it's the same thing.

P.M. Oh, no. "Laid" is too polite. "Dropped" is the word.

Q. In this Chequers that we were looking at a moment ago..... Incidentally, can you recall any brick that you did drop that you have laughed about since? Or worried about since?

P.M. Oh, I'm not a great worrier.

Q. Aren't you? You don't worry at all?

P.M. Very little.

Q. That probably accounts for your fitness. But in this collection at Chequers, was there any painting of unusual interest that impressed you?

P.M. Yes, there is a very large canvas of the Lion and the Mouse and the Rat, you know. All of heroic proportions, and here is the lion struggling with the cords. Winston looked at this for a long time and then finally decided that there was no sign of a mouse, so he got a stepladder and painted one in.

Q. And is it there to this day?

P.M. It is there to this day.

Q. This is hanging in the main gallery of Chequers?

P.M. Yes, in the main central hall.

Q. Was Mr. Macmillan depressed when you were there?

P.M. I think he was and I don't wonder with all this Profumo business going on. Some of the most hysterical comments were being made even by normally dull and respectable newspapers, and he was worried, of course, because he, himself, is a man of the highest integrity, not to be associated with any dirty business like this other business, and so he was undoubtedly worried. When he spoke in the House I was there and I heard him. He was obviously a little depressed by what had gone on, but the next weekend at Chequers, talking up in the gallery, he was in the top of his form. I've never known him better, more vivid, cheerful, full of wit, full of historical allusions because he's a very good historian. And therefore I saw two men - one in the House looking pretty sad, as I think I would have myself and the other one out of it, bright, frightfully well-informed, all the qualities that we know Harold Macmillan to possess.

Q. Do you think that this, nevertheless, could have an untoward effect on his political career, without being political here, because I don't want to talk politics, on the party itself?

P.M. Well, frankly, I don't think that the effect of this business will be permanent. In fact, I was quite sure that so extravagant were some of the remarks made that there would be a reaction in Harold Macmillan's favour and I think there was in a personal sense. But the Government itself had apparently been losing ground, politically, before this Profumo affair ever occurred. I don't think that in the wash-up, as we would say, the Profumo case will have any permanent result, though perhaps it might have caused delay in the recovery of their stocks that the Government might have been hoping for. But I am an outsider, I don't know.

Q. Yes, I was just asking for a personal opinion there, Sir Robert. When you were in London, you spoke, I believe, with Mr. Selwyn Lloyd about the possibility of the formation of some economic or trade agreement among Commonwealth nations which hasn't come out in the press so far as I can see in the news. Is there anything you can say about it?

- P.M. Well, Selwyn came around to see me. He's an old friend of mine. He's been very troubled by some of the implications for the Commonwealth of the Common Market moves and he had been very impressed by the fact that although there is an export council operating into America and I think some form of export council operating into Europe, there is no body, no export council which is concerned with improving Commonwealth trade and he told me that this was the general idea in his mind and did I like it and I said, "Yes, I did", that I would be prepared to encourage him along that line. It has to happen in Great Britain, of course, but the idea of consciously promoting Commonwealth trade is, of course, a very good one.
- Q. Now, we are going to take you up to Edinburgh because this has been a very rewarding year and to my mind, Sir Robert, there are two highlights from the Australians' point of view - first the admission of you to the Order of the Thistle and the wonderful honour conferred on you by the United States of America in inviting you to give the Jefferson Oration. But can we go to Edinburgh and see you in the monitor, now Sir Robert? This is how you were arrayed for the big occasion.
- P.M. Gives me a rather sinister appearance, don't you think?
- Q. It looks as though you could have been a real Scot. How did you feel on this occasion? Do you remember the thoughts that went through your mind? You look pretty grim there.
- P.M. Well, you know, I realised for once in my life what it's like to be somebody who is being looked at on some ceremonial occasion. We don't go in for it much here. And you go along - you are really a mass of self-consciousness. If you look around and you smile at your friends, you appear to be smirking - you know, taking it all very lightly. If you go along, looking as no doubt I did, very grim, people say, "What's wrong with the poor fellow?" It is very difficult, but of course, it was an exciting event, no doubt about that.
- Q. Where did you stay in Edinburgh?
- P.M. At Holyrood House. The Queen was good enough to invite my wife and my eldest son and myself to stay there overnight.
- Q. That was very good.
- P.M. Yes, particularly for my son who had the opportunity that otherwise he wouldn't have had of having quite long conversations with The Queen and with Prince Philip.
- Q. He said you were dressed well in advance of the actual occasion and that you resembled a man padded up, who had been padded up, for some considerable time to go out to the batting crease.
- P.M. That describes it perfectly. I sympathised with, you know, Bill Lawry and people like that. There I was, sitting in the pavilion - calling the "pavilion" Holyrood House, you see - all dressed up and nowhere to go, waiting, wondering whether I would fluff my lines. I suppose you never have that feeling.

- Q. Not much! Sir Robert, you went from Holyrood House then to Signet House. That's alongside the Cathedral isn't it?
- P.M. Yes, Signet Library is across from the front of St. Giles. You robe there, or you are robed. It's a very complicated business and each Knight of the Thistle has a man who robes him and ties all the bows in the right places. All that kind of thing.
- Q. You are trying to make that robe a double-breaster.
- P.M. And then you march into the Cathedral where they had a full house. A lot of school-children singing hymns as we went into the Chapel of the Thistle which is up in the far corner, and allowed into the Chapel are The Queen, of course, the Prince, the Knights of the Thistle, the Lord Lyon King at Arms who is the great man on these matters in Scotland, the Green Stick, as they call him - he's a very distinguished man - the Dean and the Minister of St. Giles. And when we had gone in there, the doors were shut behind us with a clang and the curtains drawn. Very exclusive, you see. I thought it was tremendously exclusive until I found out afterwards that all the proceedings had been broadcast through the Cathedral. But anyhow, it was a great day, a great event.
- Q. May I ask what was your reaction when you realised that Her Majesty The Queen was going to confer this great honour upon you?
- P.M. Well, I don't mind telling you that I didn't know whether I was coming or going. This was in Canberra. This was the last thing that I had had in my mind and I probably wasn't frightfully coherent about it. I know that when I left her, I struck her Private Secretary in the corridor and he said to me, it being a suitable time of day, "Would you like a drink?" I said, "Not only would I like one, my boy, I need one." That perhaps describes it.
- Q. Did you tell The Queen that?
- P.M. Oh, yes.
- Q. Did you find her well?
- P.M. Very well. I think she is in the top of her form and that's a great deal.
- Q. Well then, you went across the Atlantic and you met President Kennedy. I think we have a picture of the President. I felt, looking at the movies that I have seen on T.V., that you were very impressed with this young President of the United States of America.
- P.M. Yes, I am. I know a lot of staunch Republicans in New York because we do financial business with them, and therefore I see something of them, but I never make any secret to them of the fact that I admire President Kennedy very much. He's made mistakes, no doubt, but he has learned from them and each time I encounter him, I find him more and more forthcoming, more and more mature, clear-minded, not afraid to say what he thinks. I think this is a very good man. I don't want to appear



P.M.  
(Contd.)

patronising about it. He's immeasurably more significant than any of us, but he is, I think, a man of character, clear-mindedness, conviction - sounds like an alliteration doesn't it - but all those things are true about him.

Q.

Do you think in view of the "winds of change" as Mr. Macmillan would say, that our destiny maybe is more with America than the Old Country?

P.M.

I don't think that's the choice. I can't, myself, imagine any state of affairs that would produce a separation between Australia and the United Kingdom. Oh, no. The blood is too strong for that and feelings and history are too deep for that, but I am quite certain that as time goes on, we will become more and more associated with the United States in matters of security, in matters of putting out assistance of various kinds to Asian countries, playing our own destiny in this part of the world. We will have a great deal more and more to do with the United States but it will be an alliance of friends, not one of those instinctive, intimate associations that we have with the Old Country. The two things are not mutually exclusive. A lot of people seem to make the mistake of thinking that they are. You can't get on to terms with the United States without turning your back on the Mother Country, they say. Well this is all wrong.

Q.

I like to think of the Motherland as the Motherland and America as a Brotherland.....

P.M.

That's right.

Q.

Now, you went to Monticello. This is a tremendous honour and I am quite sure you felt that way about it when you gave this oration. Did you keep strictly to the script which you had prepared in the way of a speech for this oration?

P.M.

No, I've been struggling for years, Norman, to confine these special lectures, or whatever they call them, to about one a year because although I am supposed to get up and talk out of the top of my head, I find that I have to start preparing one of these about three months ahead and putting in a few hours every now and then at a weekend in research, in looking up this and that and in making a few notes, and in the result I produced this Jefferson Oration as they call it, though I hate the word. And then when the morning came at Monticello - lovely morning - standing on the steps of Monticello itself and looking at a battery of microphones.....

Q.

This is the old Jefferson house?

P.M.

Yes.....I would interlard my written words by a few asides - you see? It's an extraordinary thing how if you look around an audience in broad daylight and you see half a dozen people you know, they provoke some observation in your mind and you practically say something to them immediately between two carefully-prepared sentences. It brightens it up. I find it is much better to have an audience laugh occasionally than sleep all the time.

- Q. You were very impressed, weren't you, with the University at Charlottesville?
- P.M. Tremendously. It is a lovely piece of Palladian architecture designed, all the old parts, by Jefferson himself. He was a very remarkable man. Terrific fellow. Architect, farmer, lawyer - a very good lawyer - a great statesman, twice Secretary of State under George Washington and Vice-President, then twice President of the United States. He was a phenomenal man. A bit of an inventor in his own way. In fact, I quoted that day something that might interest you and those who are listening to us. President Kennedy gave a dinner at the White House to all the Nobel Prizewinners and a lot of other high-powered people - great scientists, great humanists - a variety of people in the White House. And he began his speech of welcome to them by saying, "Well, gentlemen, I venture to believe that this is the greatest assemblage of talent, of human talent brought together in this room since Thomas Jefferson dined alone."
- Q. Fantastic.
- P.M. That was a marvellous thing to say. When I had refreshed my mind about Jefferson -- about his work I knew a good deal but I had to improve on that knowledge -- I came to the conclusion that President Kennedy was probably right.
- Q. I am sure you did. Sir Robert, it has been wonderfully kind of you to give us this strictly informal interview or yarn about your recent experiences. I have deliberately kept off politics and I am sure that met with your approval.
- P.M. Well, as a matter of fact, Norman, you see you and I happen to be old friends. I hope that will do you no harm. It's a long time now since you first interviewed me on a radio station - do you remember?
- Q. I certainly do. It was actually in Trades Hall.
- P.M. That's right. Right up in the Trades Hall, but a long time before the fire.
- Q. Well, thank you very much indeed. Ladies and gentlemen, it has been our great privilege and pleasure to talk with the Right Honourable the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies. I very nearly said - "Mr. Menzies" by force of habit.
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