



TRANSCRIPT

The Money Pit

Program transcript from Matthew Carney's "The Money Pit", broadcast 18th August 2008.

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MATTHEW CARNEY: It's showtime in boom-town, or more accurately, Black Rock Stakes Day in Port Hedland and like any country carnival there's side-show alley, kebabs, kids and clowns.

But here there's a race, a very long race - an event that was hatched out of the searing Pilbara heat, in a bar over beers more than 40 years ago.

Push a wheelbarrow loaded with iron ore from a mining settlement 100 kilometres away, all the way to Hedland's commercial heart.

COMPETITOR: I tell you what, they must've been men of steel back then because we struggled today and they would have had a lot less comfort back then you know, so I take me hat off to those sort of guys mate.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Ever since the early days of the mining industry here, this community event's grown with the good times and the bad. But this one's the last - and it's a boom that's killed it.

ORGANISER: I'm just disappointed that this is the end of an era. I just hope that we can find something to replace it with but I don't think we can ever replace the Black Rock Stakes.

MATTHEW CARNEY: The roads have become too busy with trucks and mining activity. Overwhelmingly, the people who work here don't live here.

CHRIS ADAMS, CEO, TOWN OF PORT HEDLAND: This ain't home, they don't treat it like home, they expect home style services but don't commit to the community.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Hedland's become a dusty doormat for a nation's mining stampede, used by industry, ignored by governments and blighted by deep social and economic problems.

CARAVAN PARK RESIDENT: The heat, the flies, nothing here, the infrastructure. There's no infrastructure here. It's a terrible place.

MATTHEW CARNEY: And what happens in Hedland ripples through the economy, affecting the nation's wealth.

Tonight on "Four Corners" the boom at ground zero - who wins and who loses in Australia's mining money pit.

The source of the wealth is iron ore. The Pilbara has one of the biggest lodes on earth and this is the planet's largest open cut iron ore mine - BHP Billiton's Whaleback at Mount Newman in the eastern Pilbara. They can't get it out of the ground fast enough. Production never stops.

The ore is loaded onto trains to start the 400-kilometre journey to the coast.

Bruce Martin will guide this \$5-million load to a queue of foreign customers.

BRUCE MARTIN, TRAIN DRIVER, BHP BILLITON: This train's just over, well, three-and-a-half kilometres, three-and-a-half kilometres long this one. The biggest, longest trains, heaviest trains in the world and you know, you get well paid for it and it's very rewarding bringing one of the big things home, you know, it really is.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Home is Port Hedland. It's supposed to be one of the engine rooms of the nation, the rail and shipping centre of Australia's iron ore industry. Giant ships from Asia come and go around the clock.

But Hedland isn't coping. The town is being crushed by the weight of the ever expanding boom.

It's a town divided physically and socially - the old town of Port Hedland on the coast and comparatively up-market; 15 kilometres inland, South Hedland established in the 70s as a cheap accommodation solution.

And in the middle of it all is the Port Hedland Caravan Park known locally as The Walkabout.

CARAVAN PARK STAFF (on phone): We have to get a house if you want to stay permanently with your pets. Yep.

SHERRYL ARMITT, PORT HEDLAND CARAVAN PARK (to other staff member): We haven't got any more in the grassed area.

MATTHEW CARNEY: It's a melting pot of low paid drifters, punters prowling for big paying jobs and families of all shapes and sizes making do. They're all sheltering from Hedland's chronic housing shortage that's brought punishing rents. But even here it's full up.

(To Sherryl Armitt): So this is the waiting list?

SHERRYL ARMITT, PORT HEDLAND CARAVAN PARK: Yes, this is the waiting list.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Sherryl Armitt): How many people do you reckon you have on there?

SHERRYL ARMITT, PORT HEDLAND CARAVAN PARK: Forty, 50 I suppose, yeah.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Sherryl Armitt says she still gets up to 20 calls a day from people looking for somewhere to stay while others just front up cold in the hope of securing something.

GARRY STEWART: The main reason I came up here was Perth's turning into a police state and everywhere you go you've got to pay fees and fines and taxes by some other name. You know, you can't even go fishing any more without licenses and tickets and all this garbage. And up here it's just a different way of living, so.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Garry Stewart has chanced his hand, arriving from Perth three weeks ago.

A demountable or donga has just become available. Someone just upped and left. He's next in line on the waiting list.

GARRY STEWART (inside donga): Oh, it's not too bad. There's no cooking facilities, nothing like that. All you get is a bed, (laughs) a little fridge and that's it - \$250 a week.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Garry Stewart): So this is a bargain is it?

GARRY STEWART: This is a bargain! Up here, this is good.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Garry Stewart): Do you reckon you'll take it?

GARRY STEWART: Oh yeah, definitely. (Pulling back the curtains and looking out onto neighbouring caravan.) Look at view (laughing). Oh God, million dollar view eh?

MATTHEW CARNEY: Like many at The Walkabout, Garry Stewart's trying to make a fresh start. He's come for the money but he's also running from a failed relationship.

GARRY STEWART: If you apply for a job up here without accommodation, unless you're getting \$100,000 plus a year, you're crazy. I was just lucky that the guys that offered me work gave me free rent for a month and then I could have a look around. And then I've got this beautiful place here to move into.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Garry Stewart): So what type of job will you be doing?

GARRY STEWART: Well I'll be doing security up at the wharf which pays pretty good money.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Here, even the person running the show's a blow in. Sherryl Armitt came for a change two years ago.

SHERRYL ARMITT, PORT HEDLAND CARAVAN PARK: You know, you're just constantly on call...

MATTHEW CARNEY: Now she's working around the clock because there's next to no-one to help.

SHERRYL ARMITT, PORT HEDLAND CARAVAN PARK: But this type of like, all the laundry and...

MATTHEW CARNEY: If she's lucky enough to find someone to hire it's only a matter of time before they leave for the bigger paying mine jobs. Often she doubles as the cleaner.

SHERRYL ARMITT, PORT HEDLAND CARAVAN PARK: And you know, cleaning jobs are not highly paid.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Sherryl Armitt): So it's left to you to do it?

SHERRYL ARMITT, PORT HEDLAND CARAVAN PARK: Yep.

MATTHEW CARNEY: The Walkabout's a rolling neighbourhood of people fleeing their own financial disasters in the east for the prosperity of the west.

KYLIE SIMCOE (in kitchen): Seems late to have dinner organised but I had to have a change of plan.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Kylie Simcoe arrived here a year ago with her husband Phil and their two daughters.

KYLIE SIMCOE: You've got to have back up, just in case you don't have time.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Phil Simcoe's business was struggling back in Newcastle so he packed it in, packed up the family and headed for Port Hedland.

He now works as a truck repairer and earns \$4,000 a week. It's money he could never make back home.

PHIL SIMCOE: I work seven days a week and I start at six and I finish at five. I generally work 26-28 days out of the month.

You come here to work. It's not the best place to live. The environment now is perfect but come the end of September through to the start of March, end of March when you get days of 48, 49, 40 and you're under a truck welding, you soon earn your money.

MATTHEW CARNEY: The Harris's next door came here out of desperation a year ago from Maroochydore in Queensland.

(To Rob Harris): Just watering the grass?

ROB HARRIS: Yeah, just trying to keep it like we'd have it at home - green, clean.

SANDY HARRIS: We didn't want to lose the house.

ROB HARRIS: Basically, totally and utterly that was it.

SANDY HARRIS: Yeah.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Defaulting on their mortgage, they put their four kids and the dog in the car and headed for the boom.

Within days Rob Harris was earning big money as a truck driver and his wife Sandy got a job at the local council, but even with a combined income of \$300,000 they're not about to rent or buy a house in town.

ROB HARRIS: Quite frankly we'd love to set up here, we'd love to be able to afford to buy a block of land in Pretty Pool, Port Headland, somewhere like that, but at the moment with such a small amount being released so irregularly that it's, it's still out of the market, we're still out of the market.

JAN FORD, REAL ESTATE AGENT (in car): I love this. This is a beautiful part of Port Hedland called Pretty Pool. This is our dress circle of Port Hedland and this is where we have the most expensive property and the most expensive houses...

MATTHEW CARNEY: In the past few years local real estate agent Jan Ford has seen house prices more than treble.

JAN FORD, REAL ESTATE AGENT: Okay, this house we're coming up to now is in the oldest part of town and it's just been sold for \$1.3-million.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Jan Ford): One-point-three-million dollars?

JAN FORD, REAL ESTATE AGENT: Yes, it's the land value.

MATTHEW CARNEY: And the rents here have exploded.

PROPERTY MANAGER (to Jan Ford): In Port Hedland we've got a three bedroom one bathroom for \$1400 dollars a week and a five bedroom two bathroom for \$1500 a week in Port Hedland...

MATTHEW CARNEY: For newcomers, it's puzzling that here, where the red landscape stretches as far as the eye can see, land is so scarce.

The State Government has a stranglehold on land and it's been reluctant to release it. This has been a curse and a blessing for agents like Jan Ford.

JAN FORD, REAL ESTATE AGENT: For 10 years since I've been a real estate agent here in Port Hedland I kept saying we need more land to be released and I was told if I could prove the demand by the sale of land then we'd have more to be released. But my sums don't work that way, if I don't have it to sell I can't prove the demand to sell it.

So I guess it's an example of Government needing proof before they will invest. And how can we get the proof when we didn't have the product? So unfortunately the proof had to come by way of escalating rents and really high prices and industry being hamstrung by not enough housing.

MALE (speaking at council meeting): And it was noted that this particular new development had actually more infrastructure and cranes than the whole of Australia itself.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Listening to a briefing on China's industrial growth, Port Hedland's local councillors - Jan Ford among them - must surely be envious.

MALE (speaking at council meeting): They're actually building a hotel in the centre of the bridge...

MATTHEW CARNEY: In China, Pilbara's iron ore is used for nation building but Hedland

CEO Chris Adams is not sure his town can become the city that will be needed to service and sustain the boom.

And the pressure is on. Within five years iron ore production will triple and the workforce will double.

CHRIS ADAMS, CEO, TOWN OF PORT HEDLAND: The companies are now telling us that their biggest risk in growth isn't China falling over, isn't environmental or Native Title or the traditional problems. The biggest risk in getting the growth projections are people. How do we get people to come and live here?

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Chris Adams): And how do you get them to stay here?

CHRIS ADAMS, CEO, TOWN OF PORT HEDLAND: Yeah and how we, it's attraction and retention of people. That is the biggest, biggest challenge up here.

Education is seen as not being good enough, health systems are seen as not being good enough and then community facilities. Because we're growing so fast, we just don't have the community facilities that are considered normal in the city or in big regional towns.

(In his office, to planner): You're happy with the way I've answered the questions though?

PLANNER (to Chris Adams): Yeah, pretty much so. Going through here...

MATTHEW CARNEY: Chris Adams administers a local budget painfully light-on for State Government contributions. This year the WA coffers will all but burst with \$2.6-billion in mining revenue - the return here only \$2-million to the council.

Most alarming for his cash strapped council is the lack of planning from both State and Federal Governments and that could threaten future growth.

CHRIS ADAMS, CEO, TOWN OF PORT HEDLAND: We're riding on the back of the miners here, the whole of the economy is. And when you've got the big boys, Rio Tinto, Woodside, BHP bashing on the State Government's door saying this is going to hurt not only our bottom line, it's going to hurt your bottom line, I think they're starting to hear it.

We'd love a lot more and we believe we deserve a lot more, but yeah, it's being drip fed to us at the moment. There's a lot of promising statements coming out, we just want to see some action.

ALANNAH MACTIERNAN, PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE MINISTER WA: Of course it's frustrating. I mean it's taken us more than we would like to get through all of these various layers and obstacles but we think that considerable progress is being made and that we will see in the space of the next five years a very, very substantial make-over of those towns.

I mean we've got all of the building blocks are in place. As I said, \$160-million package now to re-do the roads, \$150-million package to re-do the hospital, and a town centre revitalisation, more land being released wherever we can find land, a hotel being built. I mean look, all I said here, it is, we have all been working extremely hard to deliver this.

MATTHEW CARNEY: While the State Government plays catch up the companies kick in to help Hedland cope. BHP Billiton will pour \$15-million into the council's budget this year.

CARL BINNING, VICE PRESIDENT SUSTAINABILITY BHP BILLITON: There are huge challenges. There's no doubt that the scale of investment by all parties needs to be increased over the next period of time. What we need to do is work together to identify those priorities and make sure that they are appropriately resourced.

MATTHEW CARNEY: For old war horses like Deputy Mayor Arnold Carter arguments and promises have been ricocheting around the Pilbara for as long as he can remember.

ARNOLD CARTER, DEPUTY MAYOR, TOWN OF PORT HEDLAND: What does worry me is the survival of small business, I think that is a concern, and the survival of the infrastructure to encourage people to live in the town of Port Hedland. That's the thing that worries me.

MATTHEW CARNEY: At 81, he's been a successful businessman in Hedland for more than 40 years. And for him it's the same old story - small business struggling to compete with the mining giants. They can't match the big wages or provide staff with accommodation.

Just a few troopers like Kath Nile remain.

KATH NILE (in cafe kitchen): I come home about anything between half past four and five in the morning and I get home about, hopefully close off at about two in the afternoon. And that's enough every day, seven days a week. And the only reason I don't open longer is because I can't get staff. Beryl just helps me out.

BERYL (in cafe kitchen): Doing the chips to put on a hamburger with the lot.

MATTHEW CARNEY: But most of Arnold Carter's contemporaries have either left or passed on - the dream of a bustling local economy and a growing population unrealised.

ARNOLD CARTER, DEPUTY MAYOR, TOWN OF PORT HEDLAND: I think if you went to anyone in the business sector down here they'd all come up with exactly the same answer - staff, staff, staff.

RAY SKENDER, SKENDER CONTRACTING: Out of about 70 workers I've had go through me books, I'd say two of them actually left town with money in their pocket. The rest thumbed in and thumbed out.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Ray Skender runs a small construction company in a town where there are basically two jobs - a big earning project with a mining company and the odd cheaper job for anyone else.

RAY SKENDER, SKENDER CONTRACTING: This job here to supply and lay the concrete is about \$800 a cubic metre. If I had the job in at BHP doing the concrete I'd be getting \$4,000 dollars a cubic metre. That's the difference.

MATTHEW CARNEY: But his biggest problem is labour. Over the years his business has become a revolving door for workers who've come north for the big money only to blow it all on booze and gambling.

RAY SKENDER, SKENDER CONTRACTING: Everyone comes up here hoping to make a big dollar. Then they find out they can't get accommodation. The infrastructure up here's just ridiculous. There's no day care centres. There's really nothing for families up here and Port Hedland actually breaks a lot of marriages up.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Ray Skender): Why is that?

RAY SKENDER, SKENDER CONTRACTING: Well there's nothing for entertainment basically. You work hard, you drink hard.

VOICEOVER (excerpt from "This Day Tonight", ABC TV - 1973): The Pilbara people are proud to help Japan's industrialisation but after putting up with the heat and the flies and long working hours they want more for themselves - better roads, more entertainment, less profits going south and less company involvement in the running of their lives.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Back in the early 70s the ABC's "This Day Tonight" reported on

the Pilbara's failure to build on its natural wealth and create sustainable, prosperous communities.

VOICEOVER (excerpt continued): Those who live here say the Pilbara is being planned just as a quarry, as an industrialist paradise, not as a place for people to live, grow up and develop.

MATTHEW CARNEY: And what must have seemed a stop gap solution in the beginning would become one of the few structural mainstays of Pilbara life - a workforce that calls somewhere else home.

(Excerpt from "This Day Tonight", ABC TV - 1973, continued):

REPORTER: How long would you stay here?

MALE: Twelve months.

REPORTER: And then you're off?

MALE: And then I'm off.

(End of excerpt)

MATTHEW CARNEY: The difference between then and now is mobility. They call them Fly In Fly Outers and they come from all over Australia and from as far away as New Zealand. Half of the Pilbara's workforce does the shuttle and every day hundreds surge through Hedland's airport.

While at work they live in single persons' quarters like this one in Hedland's industrial zone. It can feed and sleep a thousand.

Camps like this are proving to be a solution for the housing crisis and the mining companies can't get them up fast enough. Two more are just about to be completed.

Even Port Hedland's infamous detention centre has been converted into workers' accommodation - now calling itself a beach-front village.

The work-rest cycles vary. For these blokes it's four weeks on and one week off.

They come for the money.

Nineteen year old Anthony Parks came straight from school and is now earning about \$120,000 a year laying asphalt.

ANTHONY PARKS: I've just recently bought a house. I've just sort of got a new entertainment system and lounges and all that in there. I've got sort of my toy car. I've got the (inaudible) boat, all that sort of toys and that.

MATTHEW CARNEY: But for the older guys at the camp the long work days and weeks away can take a toll.

(To Chris Hedley): Wife and kids back in Melbourne?

CHRIS HEDLEY: Yes, back in Melbourne.

MATTHEW CARNEY: It's Chris Hedley's last week. He's leaving for good, heading back to Melbourne to save his marriage.

CHRIS HEDLEY: I've been here a year and half now and she just said yeah, she feels like she's a single mum. You know, I'm only back every four weeks for a week and a week seems to go that quick. So, you know, she's mentioned that she's sick of being a single mum so I've decided well, I'd better get back there before anything goes any further.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Unlike the workers at the caravan park, there's little reason for these guys to spend their money in Hedland or be part of the community. Here everything is supplied.

CHRIS ADAMS, CEO, TOWN OF PORT HEDLAND: Fly in fly out causes all sorts of issues for communities. The people when they come up here, this ain't home, they don't treat it like home, they expect home style services but don't commit to the community.

So finding people to run the Little League footy side or help out with variety clubs and Rotary Clubs and those sort of things, they just don't exist. The Fly In Fly Outers aren't doing that sort of stuff. So 12-hour shifts, fly in fly out kills communities like this, it doesn't create sustainability.

ANTHONY PARKS: The only sort of relaxation and that you get up here is to drink. It sort of lets you escape from the work days.

MALE: Yeah, aside from the Sundays. Sundays you can't actually buy alcohol up here.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Anthony Parks and his mates are heading for the pub. Tomorrow will be their only day off in three weeks and they'll hand it over to a hangover.

In Port Hedland, even the entertainment is fly in fly out. Far from home, these girls have been touring the remote towns of the west for three months.

KAREN, STRIPPER: Yeah, we love it though because they love the show and half of them haven't seen females for that long so when they see our show they go off. It's good, yeah, I like it.

MATTHEW CARNEY: The girls are playing Port's last pub standing – the Pier.

Lynn Taylor used to run security here. Then she bought the place. Now she's had enough.

LYNN TAYLOR, OWNER, PIER HOTEL: You've probably got between 70 and 80 per cent doing amphetamines here in this hotel on a weekend.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Lynn Taylor): Seventy to 80 per cent of the people in this hotel are on amphetamines?

LYNN TAYLOR, OWNER, PIER HOTEL: Yeah if not every weekend, once a month at least, yeah.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Lynn Taylor): And how does that make your job difficult?

LYNN TAYLOR, OWNER, PIER HOTEL: Extremely hard, extremely hard.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Lynn Taylor): Tell me why?

LYNN TAYLOR, OWNER, PIER HOTEL: Well they're way more violent.

MATTHEW CARNEY: She's tired of breaking up brawls and the methamphetamine aggro that's flown in with the fly in fly out workforce. The Pier is up for sale.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Lynn Taylor): And it's just because of this mentality that they're out of their environment, they're out of home, they're just...

LYNN TAYLOR, OWNER, PIER HOTEL: Oh no they think they can play up, no-one can see them, they're way away from home, they're not accountable to anybody.

CARL BINNING, VICE PRESIDENT SUSTAINABILITY BHP BILLITON: We test regularly for drug and alcohol use and our program is consistently adapting to ensure that people when they come to work are safe for themselves and their colleagues.

MATTHEW CARNEY: It's probably not surprising that those losing out most here are the people who've made their home in and around Hedland longer than anyone.

LINDA DOOGIEBEE, BUNARA MAYA HOSTEL: Now, mining boom-town has come, it just blew everything out, blew our people away from each other.

(In house): They have three bedrooms, no gas...

MATTHEW CARNEY: Linda Doogiebee has come to check on traditional owners sharing a house in South Hedland.

LINDA DOOGIEBEE, BUNARA MAYA HOSTEL (in house): This is Mummy Lucy's room. She has to have two people in there.

MATTHEW CARNEY: They're unwell and are crying out for proper care and they're living two or three to a room.

LINDA DOOGIEBEE, BUNARA MAYA HOSTEL (in house): This is aunty Alma's room and this is how they have to share the room. Very confined spacing. It's too hot.

ELDER FEMALE: ...Gone down a train too, but nobody to help us, trying to take all our family...

MATTHEW CARNEY: The major complaint from these elders is that they're being paid next to nothing in royalties from the companies mining their land.

ELDER FEMALE: They should realise to help our young people, put them on the right track.

MATTHEW CARNEY: They all share the same view - the Pilbara boom has been a curse.

ELDER MALE: You know, it's been a shame.

ELDER FEMALE: Sad yes, it's very sad for our people.

CARL BINNING, VICE PRESIDENT SUSTAINABILITY BHP BILLITON: Unfortunately we have seen a number of the Indigenous groups fracture into ever smaller family groups and the number of beneficiaries of some of those agreements has become smaller. That's a trend that we are not particularly in favour of. It's an area where we would like to see some of those benefits flow more broadly into the community.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Linda Doogiebee grew up around here, gained a city education and returned 40 years later to help her people, even though some seem beyond help - like the homeless who live just behind South Hedland's main shopping complex.

LINDA DOOGIEBEE, BUNARA MAYA HOSTEL: Pension time you can get a community of over 50 people around but they spread a bit, and that will include young mums with babies, old people...

MATTHEW CARNEY: In town they call them the Ditchies but the people who live out here call it Two-mile Camp.

LINDA DOOGIEBEE, BUNARA MAYA HOSTEL (in car, rolling down window and looking out): There's one lonely person.

MATTHEW CARNEY: It's a transient community and today some have left for sorry business - a funeral - and others are drinking in town.

They live in squalor, sleep in broken cars or under canvas sheets. The numbers swell here on pension day because the outlying communities have no facilities. Most don't even have a shop.

LINDA DOOGIEBEE, BUNARA MAYA HOSTEL: Life is pretty hard for my people up here, mainly because we don't really get much help from anyone really and so our people just drift around and Government just sit on their laurels and pretend that they're experts at, you know, on our people.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Linda Doogiebee): So the mining boom?

LINDA DOOGIEBEE, BUNARA MAYA HOSTEL: The mining boom like we have said, it has done nothing to come to the party to help our local people in this situation.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Alannah MacTiernan): The Indigenous people are the real losers in this situation.

ALANNAH MACTIERNAN, PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE MINISTER WA: No, this is so wrong. I mean this is so wrong. The Indigenous people are being employed in record numbers. I mean it has been a great travesty that we've had the mining industry operating in the Pilbara now for some 45 years and really until the last five years there has been very little Aboriginal employment in the mining industry. What we have seen, we've seen an absolute sea change.

CARL BINNING, VICE PRESIDENT SUSTAINABILITY BHP BILLITON: Since 2002 we've essentially increased our Indigenous employment by one per cent per annum and we reached 10 per cent in the last financial year. We're extremely proud of that achievement but we think we need to do more, but we're on track to hit a 2012 target of 12 per cent.

MATTHEW CARNEY: David Powdrill has a job but his problem is accommodation. He has no choice but to live in South Hedland's only homeless shelter. Most of the people here have jobs and nowhere else to go.

DAVID POWDRILL, COUNCIL WORKER SOUTH HEDLAND: This is my home town.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to David Powdrill): Right, this is your home town and you can't find...

DAVID POWDRILL, COUNCIL WORKER SOUTH HEDLAND: I can't even get accommodation here.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to David Powdrill): It's just what, too expensive?

DAVID POWDRILL, COUNCIL WORKER SOUTH HEDLAND: Too expensive and they reckon there is not enough housing.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to David Powdrill): Have you tried? How much have you tried?

DAVID POWDRILL, COUNCIL WORKER SOUTH HEDLAND: Oh I've tried mate, 45 years old and I tried. Still can't get nothing here.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to David Powdrill): And you worked most of your life?

DAVID POWDRILL, COUNCIL WORKER SOUTH HEDLAND: Worked most of me life.

MATTHEW CARNEY: It's a new definition of the working poor. David Powdrill works for the council five days a week and makes \$500, but that's not enough for rent.

He says he'll have to leave town and his job to join his family now living in the Kimberley.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to David Powdrill): So do you think you'll stay in Hedland?

DAVID POWDRILL, COUNCIL WORKER SOUTH HEDLAND: No, not really, I don't think so.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to David Powdrill): Why?

DAVID POWDRILL, COUNCIL WORKER SOUTH HEDLAND: Cost of living and housing, you know. You can't just keep sleeping and living in hostels. It's bad.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to David Powdrill): So you've got no choice, you'll be forced out then.

DAVID POWDRILL, COUNCIL WORKER SOUTH HEDLAND: I'll be forced out, yeah, and I'll be without a job unless I sleep in my car.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to David Powdrill): Have you done that before?

DAVID POWDRILL, COUNCIL WORKER SOUTH HEDLAND: I've done that before, slept in my car out of town, drove into town every day just to go to work.

(Excerpt from "This Day Tonight", ABC TV - 1973, continued):

VOICEOVER: South Hedland - a Government project described by some residents as a dreary and desolate place and by other as an instant slum where you just add people.

REPORTER: Well do they have a name for this sort of community?

GEORGE FORMBY, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER: Well unfortunately they call them cells. It reminds me of Stalag to a certain extent. And I think this is bad in itself.

(End of excerpt)

MATTHEW CARNEY: From the moment the first asbestos sheets went up, South Hedland was under fire, a cheap and cheerless shanty town for Pilbara's lower paid workforce. At least one prediction, unlike most made here, was accurate.

GEORGE FORMBY, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER (Excerpt continued): And this is going to be the problem - you have the haves and those who haven't.

MATTHEW CARNEY: In the decades since this report was aired, South Hedland has indeed become a town of haves and have-nots with an appalling reputation for crime and anti-social behaviour.

There's a pervasive view, even among newcomers, that South Hedland is a lawless wasteland, Aboriginal kids out of control.

CARAVAN PARK RESIDENT: They're the worst in the world the blacks around here.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to caravan park resident): Why is that?

CARAVAN PARK RESIDENT: They do nothing but thieving.

MATTHEW CARNEY: South Hedland crime is one reason Kylie and Phil Simcoe send their girls to a school in Port Hedland and the major reason they stay put in the caravan park.

PHIL SIMCOE: The police do their best but they just can't control the problem over there so if you have a house in South Hedland or a flat you've got a fairly high chance of actually getting broken into and I wouldn't take my children over there.

MATTHEW CARNEY: It's pension night and the officers at South Hedland Police station are bracing themselves for a busy shift. Their first call is a report of a missing person.

SERGEANT ROHAN FOX, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE: Our worst fear is that it's sudden death. Best case scenario is she's perhaps gone on holiday and just hasn't told anyone.

MATTHEW CARNEY: An Indigenous woman has gone missing from this makeshift camp on the outskirts of town. She hasn't fronted for work for the past three days.

CONSTABLE DAVE GROENENBERG, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE: A lot of people, just the workers, they can't find accommodation or can't afford the accommodation in town. It's not far from town and so there's a good chance that she's been here for a while.

SERGEANT ROHAN FOX, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE (shining torch in window): Looking in there, there doesn't appear to be anyone in there. A good sign is that it's all secure, it's all locked up. And it looks like the dogs have been given lots of food. And the vehicle that she's known to drive isn't actually here, which is another good sign.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Turns out she's gone north for family reasons. Generally though, they know from hard experience the local Indigenous population ebbs and flows according to the social security calendar.

(Police speaking to group of Indigenous people, one woman is holding a small baby.)

CONSTABLE DAVE GROENENBERG, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE: So what are you doing out here? I thought you were staying at that other place?

FEMALE (to police): No, we're not from Robertsford (phonetic), we just live round the corner, yeah, Yuranga (phonetic).

FEMALE 2 (to police): ABC News? No...

MATTHEW CARNEY: And they know the hours ahead are going to be a familiar routine - trying to keep a lid on South Hedland's regular bender.

SERGEANT ROHAN FOX, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE: This town certainly does have an alcohol problem. It's a very high consumption. I think Pilbara is one of the highest consumption per capita in the world.

FEMALE 1 (to police): We just live around the corner...

MATTHEW CARNEY: According to WA's Health Department, dangerous drinking in the Pilbara among Indigenous and non-indigenous people is double the State average.

FEMALE 2 (to police): ABC News? No...

MATTHEW CARNEY: Among the Aboriginal population alcohol related disease and death is high.

CONSTABLE DAVE GROENENBERG, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE: Take off home eh?

MATTHEW CARNEY: So too the violence.

(Man shouting, hands up against the back of the police van. Police are checking for weapons.)

CONSTABLE DAVE GROENENBERG, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE (to man): No, no, stay down here. Just stay down here for a sec, I'll tell you when you can get up okay?

MALE (to police): Mother f****r!

CONSTABLE DAVE GROENENBERG, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE: (to man): Eh!

MALE (to police): F**k off!

CONSTABLE DAVE GROENENBERG, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE (to man): Jump in.

SERGEANT ROHAN FOX, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE (to man, helping him into the van): Come on, in you get.

CONSTABLE DAVE GROENENBERG, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE (to man): Come on, quick.

MATTHEW CARNEY: It's grinding, repetitive police work requiring the gentle hand of a social worker and the tough resolve of a law enforcer.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Rohan Fox): And is it likely some time in the future he'll do the same thing?

SERGEANT ROHAN FOX, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE: My guess would be yes.

(Man is heard swearing from the back of the van.)

It's not the first time we've dealt with him and probably won't be the last.

MATTHEW CARNEY: At least police numbers are back up. Last year they were down 15 officers until a free rental deal brought more officers north.

CONSTABLE DAVE GROENENBERG, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE (to man, at police station): Are you a prohibited drug user?

MATTHEW CARNEY: But this is the work - dealing with public drunkenness and hosing down violence.

CONSTABLE DAVE GROENENBERG, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE (to man): Are you on any medication?

SERGEANT ROHAN FOX, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE (to children on the street): What time you going home?

CHILD (to police): We need to wait for the bus.

SERGEANT ROHAN FOX, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE (to children): Bus? It's half past nine already. The shops are shut.

MATTHEW CARNEY: They deal with a constant stream of burglaries and car theft and spend a lot of the night getting the kids who roam the streets safely home.

CONSTABLE DAVE GROENENBERG, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE (to young men on the street): You guys all right?

MALE: Yes mate, we're just going home now.

CONSTABLE DAVE GROENENBERG, SOUTH HEDLAND POLICE: A large percentage of the burglaries and steal motor vehicles in this town particularly are committed by juveniles. Generally they'll break into a house and steal car keys and steal the motor vehicle whether the house is occupied or not. Generally there's no problems, there's no issues with assaulting people when they're inside or anything like that, but yeah.

MATTHEW CARNEY: The break-ins, the booze, the drugs - the rationale for most of the crime and substance abuse is boredom. There's just nothing else to do. It's a legacy of inaction and it's not going to go away any time soon.

RAY SKENDER, SKENDER CONTRACTING: It's the booze and the hard work. You work hard, we work like pigs, and you drink like a pig.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Sooner or later in Hedland it's decision time and most decide to leave, even long-term locals like Ray Skender.

(To Ray Skender): It's time to go?

RAY SKENDER, SKENDER CONTRACTING: Yeah. If I want to keep my relationship going I've got to leave. To shift into a cooler climate and settle down a bit more and do what I want to do, yeah, look I'd reduce me alcohol consumption by half.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Unlike most of his workers he'll leave with something to show for it. His property is on the market for more than \$1.5-million. He'll head south and put his feet up.

RAY SKENDER, SKENDER CONTRACTING: This boom is going to get bigger and it's going to get worse and the only way you're going to survive in this town is basically be a fly in fly out.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Wheels are turning at the caravan park as well.

SANDY HARRIS: Wayne and Sherry are moving. They leave for Cairns on Tuesday.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Another family is moving on after 14 months carving their slice of the boom.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Sherry): So why are you leaving?

SHERRY: We're tired. We've been working like seven days a week pretty much since we got here. It wears you down after a while.

MATTHEW CARNEY: In the short time we've been here Phil Simcoe has gone from his \$4,000 a week pay packet to nothing at all.

PHIL SIMCOE: They just made me redundant. They've put about three of us off in the workshop so, just end of financial year. They just want to save money so the easiest way to save money is to put blokes off.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Phil Simcoe): So what are you going to do?

PHIL SIMCOE: Oh I'll find another job, won't be a problem.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Phil Simcoe): And what happens if you don't get a job?

PHIL SIMCOE: We'll just pack and leave and go somewhere else. It's not hard. We've done it before so we'll do it again. But I'm pretty confident I'll have a job to go to, so.

MATTHEW CARNEY: And Garry Stewart will bide his time. He hasn't exactly landed his dream job. He's lugging furniture for a removalist on an hourly rate he'd earn in Perth.

GARRY STEWART: People tell you about this boom and they're full of crap.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to man): What do you think of the boom?

MALE: There's not much of one is there?

MATTHEW CARNEY: As he guides his train into Hedland, mining company stalwart Bruce Martin can count himself lucky - a big wage, a waterfront home and a string of investment properties. In Hedland, he's a winner.

BRUCE MARTIN, TRAIN DRIVER, BHP BILLITON: I think I was lucky I got established before the boom came along and have been there, you know, every time there's been an expansion up here I've sort of rode along with it, so yeah I have been very lucky, yeah.

MATTHEW CARNEY: It's hard to see how Hedland itself can be judged a winner. The town at the epicentre of the boom fears it's been lost in the rush. Most take the money and run.

And all these years on there's not a lot of evidence that lessons have been learned and that other mining frontiers will be treated any differently.