

Interviewee: Jean Slattery

Interviewer: Malin Lundin

Date: 25.10.2010

Also present: Arthur Slattery

Interviewer: This is an interview with Jean Slattery and the date is the 25th of October 2010 and the interviewer is Malin Lundin. Would you be able to tell me your date of birth first of all?

Jean: Yes, April 1933.

Interviewer: Thirty-three. So you were six when the war broke out. Where were you living at this point?

Jean: In Chelsea on Old Cadogan Estate which is Pavilion Road near Sloane Square.

Interviewer: And who were you living with?

Jean: My father, Arthur Davies, my mother, Mable and my sister Pamela and my brother Peter.

Interviewer: And you were the youngest?

Jean: I was the youngest of the three.

Interviewer: So what were you parents doing at this point? Were they working?

Jean: Because we lived on the estate, my father was a chauffeur for Earl Cadogan and my mother used to do work for the local nobbs, as we called them, I mean, mostly washing and ironing and cooking and cleaning and whatever they asked her to do.

Interviewer: Ok. Can you remember the first day of the war?

Jean: Yes.

Interviewer: The 3rd of September 1939.

Jean: Yes, very much so.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what happened that day? Can you remember how you felt after you heard the news?

Jean: Yes, but by that time of course we had been sent away and we had arrived at our place of evacuation which was Egham in Surrey which is not terribly far from London but was considered the nearest safest point and that Sunday morning we were told to go to church so we were waiting for the

announcement which would be around 11 o'clock but we were actually in church when the announcement was made. It's a very old big building in Egham and we were in the balcony seats rather locked in. The balcony seats were enclosed – enclosures and they had to be opened up at the back for us to get in and out in this rather strange cubicle style. So we, my brother, my sister and myself were in this enclosure looking over the balcony down at the congregation when it was announced that the war had, you know, been declared. Everyone knows this part of it; of course it wasn't so long afterwards that the siren went then pandemonium. Oh, it was pandemonium. As soon as the siren went everybody started racing around. We were as I said locked in this cubicle and couldn't get out and nobody came to undo it. It had to be done from the back somehow so my sister and I were sitting there looking down at this chasm as it were wondering how to get out in case we got bombed. My sister decided it was a bit far to jump which of course it was and my brother in the meantime had already clambered out and got out of the place and luckily someone came up and sorted us all out and we all congregated outside in the churchyard while they sorted us out because they were waiting for the bombers to come over but in the meantime, of course, the air raid – the all-clear started and that was the end of that. Now you must realize as – because I was only six and a half and couldn't understand what was going on when everybody panicked and they said the war had started I was waiting for the bombers. And then when the all-clear went and everybody relaxed and said that, 'it was alright, you can all go home now', I thought, 'Good, the war is over' and I said to my sister, 'Can we go home now?'. But of course being that much older she understood what it was all about and she said, 'No', she said, 'We have to stay here'. So that's what happened the very first day.

Interviewer: So when – what date were you evacuated?

Jean: On Friday the 1st of September 1939 with the school. The local school that we went to was the Holy Trinity School which was by Sloane Square and the whole school went together and as I said we were all sent off by train down to Egham. That day – that very first day that we were sent, of course, was two days before the declaration of war, that Friday. When we go to Egham¹ we were hustled into the – sort of the yard at the railway station which was only a little suburban station and people who knew to come to collect people did the best they could but like so many others we were told as three children by our parents, 'Don't be separated', you'll hear this over and over again and so therefore we kept being turned down. Eventually there was just groups of us left and we were split up into those groups with one supervisor going with us with their notes who could be approached to take children and who weren't already gone so they took us walking around Egham knocking on the doors of people on their list. We were having a bit of a job like most people that said we didn't want to be separated cos nobody really want to take three children especially one that was as young as me. So it was quite a performance but eventually we came to a very nice place called Manor Way and it's quite a unique place actually, the

¹ 5 min

houses down there are of a type and they have since been put on a preservation order because they were rather of that style, the 1920's I suppose. The lady who was there said, 'Yes', they would take two but couldn't possibly take three. It was quite a job having to take two so Peter much against our, you know, much against our parents, had to be separated from us and his initial evacuation was not happy but he did end up alright in the end and we were perfectly alright. The lady that took us in she really took great care of us and she was of a – of what we would consider of a status that was that much more educated and had a better background than we did and it did make a difference to the way we were treated and also how we were when we went back after the war because our own family were all what I call Battersea and Chelsea, rather Londoners and they considered that we were become a little bit sniffy by then [laughs] which of course we were [laughs].

Interviewer: Were you aware of what was going on when you were evacuated? When you were put on the train?

Jean: As far as you could be at such a young age. I understood that we had to leave mum and dad behind and it was accepted that when mother saw us off she said that she would keep the home ready for us for when we went home. The enormity of the occasion I did not understand but I knew it was gonna to be alright because mum and dad said it was gonna be alright. And all we had to do was to wait so from that point of view I had understood that. The fact of how I felt about it was somewhat different, I was very, very unhappy obviously of being parted from my lovely mum and dad and being away from all my toys which weren't many but they were mine. You didn't take them with you. I did take one which was my teddy bear and that stayed with me throughout my time. But it's very hard living in somebody else's home, with the best will in the world you have to mind your manners and I hadn't any manners at that age and my sister was continuing telling me off not to swing my legs and eat badly or whatever it was and I got really rather feed up with this so I hit her with my teddy bear and made her cry. The lady I was with she couldn't understand how I could be so naughty [laughs].

Interviewer: So how long did you stay?

Jean: I was with Miss Finn until my sister became thirteen because at thirteen you could start work, So it was the end of 1940s, my sister was going to go home. The people we were with was very unhappy about that because it was right in the middle of the Blitz and in fact we had got blitzed in Egham and some evacuees had been killed. My understanding of it at the time because I was young was that I couldn't understand why it was that these evacuees had been found by the enemy and killed by bombs. It – I know it sounds logical to you as an adult and understanding it now but as a child all I could look at was how did the enemy know where the evacuees were to kill them and why? Why did they want to kill them?

And I found that a very perplexing thing at my age – at that age. That was the way I viewed it,² you see. I thought, ‘that’s very odd’, that they knew where we were and could kill us.

Interviewer: How did you feel about that? Were you scared or –?

Jean: Yes, yes. I wondered who it was. We were told all sorts of things at the time and as a youngster I had to adapt to what I knew and one of them was if the enemy came we mustn’t tell them any directions because they’re taking all the directions down and all the names of places and I thought that was fine because I didn’t know where I was anyway so I couldn’t direct them correctly so [laughs] I felt that I was going to be alright. I know this sounds ridiculous but as a small child you try to adjust your – what you knew into what you were told and that was something. The thing that was the most horrific thing from my point of view was the Blitz. Now, I wasn’t in London during the Blitz but from our bedroom window – I always cry when I think of it now. I could see it. Can we stop?

Interviewer: Yes.

[Recorder paused]

[Interview continues]

Jean: So that first year away, by the following September my sister was thirteen and at that age you could start work. Now, my mother had told my sister that she would go home when she was thirteen which of course would leave me in a difficult position because the lady we were with was not really fit enough to look after a little girl so Pam, my sister, and I went home while it was arranged for me to find another evacuation. Now, the Blitz was still on but I was only home for a few days, it wasn’t so much – the Blitz did have an effect on me because obviously I experienced a certain amount of the bombing at that stage but it was only for a minimal period only for a day or two. My mother wanted my sister home because my father was terribly ill. In fact, he was dying from cancer. My mother was the only bread-winner so she had the difficulty of caring for my father at home, who was completely incapacitated, and going out to work so she had to leave very early in the morning and not get back till the evening so she felt that if she had Pamela home at least she’d have another pair of hands around to see that dad had what he needed. The people we were with in Egham, very nice couple, didn’t understand why we were going home and worried sick because we were going home in the Blitz but my mother had no alternative really but she knew that she had to get me away because I wasn’t going to be much use at home and she had arranged with my aunt, her sister, to take me in and that was my second evacuation which was in North Holmwood which is near Dorking, in Surrey and so I went to stay with my aunt for almost the end – till the end of the war. I was brought up in this little village at North Holmwood and stayed with them and that was a very happy time except that after I’d been with them a few months my father had died. My aunt took me up to see him

² 10 min

before he died and that's something that sticks in my mind very much. I didn't understand what it was all about but I knew it was a certain thing I ought to remember and I have always remembered. The circumstances you would have understood it better later. Yes.

We didn't have any schooling to speak of when I was in Egham because the schools were all full and any places that could hold a school had been commandeered as it were by many other schools and our school's only small, hadn't got the nonce (??) that the others had so we had to be fitted in where we could and my brother and sister had been taken in by a Roman Catholic School from Bethnal Green and – but it was a Secondary school and I was too young so I was put in to what we call 'makeshift place' which wasn't a school at all. All we were given was about two pieced of paper to put the alphabet on and I filled my paper up in the first ten minutes and got – the teacher, the so-called teacher, got crossed because that was all the paper she had [laughs]. I remember I couldn't think why she was so angry [laughs] cos³ I'd done it beautifully. Yes, that was – it was quite nice though, we sat out in the sunshine, out in the garden and it was a big garden and in a very old house all falling to bits but it was good fun but we stayed – I stayed there until I was sent down to my aunt. So the next school I went in to was a proper school – was North Holmwood in Surrey, near Dorking and that was a proper village school. So I had to go with the village children there and that was very pleasant and my time in North Holmwood was very good. It was a typical English village at that time, with a pond and a church and I sang in the choir there and my aunt and uncle looked after me very well there. My uncle was an Auxiliary Fireman, everybody had their jobs to do and he was an Auxiliary Fireman. While we were there – which is an area near Leith Hill and Box Hill. Leith Hill had a big explosion at the top at the time I was there and my uncle being a fireman had to go and help at this big fire. Now, ok, you have the Blitz in London which we could see from where we were but this particular fire was unusual because it was an ammunition dump. There were a lot of soldiers billeted in the area around Dorking, most of them were Canadian and some were Canadians that had been sent in to that desperate place Dieppe where they – where many had been killed at Dieppe that's another part of the wartime history though and it really upset the local people because they knew the Canadian soldiers. Now, I was told that the only ammunition dump was to do with them, on Leith Hill, and as I say as I went to stay with my aunt and uncle, it was a few months later when the ammunition dump blew up so it was also a question mark whether it was sabotage or whether it was accident. But my uncle being in the Auxiliary Fire Brigade spent days and nights up there at a trot and came home covered with black from head to foot and I can remember the smell of it singed all over with the heat from the flames of the fire. It was quite amazing they had fire appliances coming from all over the country trying to put it out. I've spoken to people since and it's funny how the collected memory as such – some people remember it very well while others said, 'What, I don't remember that', as if I'm talking about something from outer space. I stayed in North Holmwood until was fourteen coming up to fifteen and at that time we'd now got to the end of the war and because the invasion started, D-Day, while I was in North Holmwood we saw

³ 15 min

most of the troops going through, in fact, I was in the school house when we could hear the rumble with the traffic and the teachers who knew what it was about took the whole school out – the whole village school out to line the school fence to see the masses of the Army coming down in their big trucks down one hill through the village and up past our school and we stood the fence and cheered. When it came to lunch time, cos it went on hour after hour, when it came to lunch time some of us had to go home for our lunch and we couldn't cross the road cos they were nose to tail and it went on for hours and I can remember the – somebody must have got hold of the local Bobby cos we all had a local bobby in those days and he approached the men that were organizing it, you know, what do they call them? The snowdrops? They had the white helmets on, the army snowdrops, and I can remember them rushing around on their motorbikes and he stopped – they were mostly American or Canadians there, saying could you let the children cross the road and they just stopped – the traffic for just that few of us and I can remember – if I close my eyes I can see it now. The little group raced across the road and as we did we looked up at these big army trucks with the men behind the wheel⁴ and this chap put his head out the side and he said, 'Come on kids', he said, 'Don't hold up the war' [laughs]. And we stood at the other side of the road and still watching them going up and of course we had a view of the men in the back of the lorries with their rifles and that –. That was a bit sad because so many of them died on D-Day and I've often thought of that. But we waived and cheered and they went and that went on for hours them going through. Well, shortly after that of course we thought that the war was going to be ended soon so came September and I had to change schools by then because I was eleven, They said it wasn't much point staying there cos I would have to, you know, go to another school so soon especially if we were all going to be Victory V-daying. So in September in that year I was sent back home to start in to a school that had just been started up again in Chelsea because they'd all been closed down or most of them had. I started school in Chelsea when I was eleven at the end of the war and of course the war took a different turn because we were then getting the V1s and the V2s. And that's something I forgotten to say is just before I came home that summer, it was still the summer holidays and we used to keep rabbits and I went out to collect rabbit food, you know, dandelions and what not along the bypass at the back of the North Holmwood bypass and while I was there I heard this very strange noise coming along the bypass as I thought – I thought it was a motorbike which was rather strange cos you didn't get much in the way of cars and that and I couldn't see a motorbike anywhere but still this noise persisted, It was getting louder and louder and I suddenly realized it was one of the buzz bombs, you know, the un-manned planes that was just a big bomb and I saw it coming actually towards me at the back of me heading towards Flint Hill I had always been if anything happened like that you have to dive into the nearest ditch which I was lucky I was nearer the nearest ditch so I threw myself in the ditch and I can remember a shadow going over me cos it was a lovely summer that summer and banged into the side of Flint Hill and exploded further up and of course the blast went over the top of me. But it blew all the windows out in all the – in the little village

⁴ 20 min

that we – it blew all the windows in but I was alright cos I was in the ditch. But I heard later a funny little anecdote there was a postman up Flint Hill so he was further up than I was and as he turned around he could see this thing coming towards him you see. He fell off his bike and the thing exploded and he was alright but he was so shaken up as he was outside the Wheatchief Pub (??) they opened it up and gave him a drink [laughs]. And, of course, it was one of those sort of villages where the news gets around and they all give an angle to it. The question was, 'but he was on duty and he's not allowed to drink'. On duty! [laughs]. I don't think it really mattered. But that was something that happened there.

I came back and the war hadn't ended and as I say the buzz bombs and then the V2s started after the missiles came down. Of course, the home that I came back to was not the home I left. My mother and father luckily had moved out that Christmas and the following year our home that we'd known took a direct hit, there was nothing of it left. So if you go down the muse now, it's exactly the same as it was in the days that I was there except that this one – like a bad tooth being taken out of a mouth and they made it look completely different so my home doesn't exist anymore. My new home was still in Chelsea, my mother and father had moved out just before, luckily, before they were hit and they went into a new – well, new to them, new place which was further in to Chelsea which was vacated by my family one⁵ of whom had moved up to Wales and the other one who had died so we moved into grandma's old flat. That's where I went home to after the war, well, it wasn't after the war actually – actually it was the end of the war. So I came back home to this new so called flat and started a Chelsea Secondary School which was literally just under Locks Road Power Station. The war was still on, the place was bashed to pieces around there. There was hardly a brick stone in the area. And, of course, we were still getting air raids and they were still homing in on Locks Road Power Station and there we were right underneath it which wasn't too happy. We spent a lot of our time in the boiler room with the air raids on. After a while we didn't go down there anymore, we stayed in the classroom and decided that we wouldn't go down unless the raids got a bit hot but I can remember that particularly because sitting at my desk with all the other children and the air raid would go and I never did figure out how they discovered which way – which ones it was going to be. Whether it was going to be a heavy one or not, I think they were just waiting for the noise. An air raid went off and there was a bang somewhere, there were lots of bangs, and one of the children in the classroom dived under the desk and he was the only one to do it and everybody looked at him in an amazement but we'd all had different experiences of the war and his was obviously far more troubled than ours was. We had a lot of difficulties settling in after the war – or towards the end of the war with the way things were, you know, we had to adjust. We'd all come from such different experiences and in fact I can remember a teacher saying to me one day, she said, 'I can understand where many of the other children were sent away', because they had different inflections but she said, 'I haven't figured you out yet' [laughs]. I was still speaking the way they spoke in North Holmwood. I don't speak like that now

⁵ 25 min

[laughs]. It's funny how you adjust when you're a child to the way people speak and in fact if I went back there, I no doubt start speaking like them now.

As I say my father had died and my mother was still coping with us. I came back in time for my sister who was then engaged to an Air Force Officer, I came back and my first thing was – within that first month she married and I was her bridesmaid and a few weeks later the war ended. So I think I more or less covered it all.

Interviewer: Can you remember VE-day?

Jean: Oh, very much so. Oh, yes very much.

Interviewer: What did you do? Did you go out to celebrate?

Jean: Well, VE-day was expected. I was at school when it said, you know, Hitler had killed himself and we all cheered. And then VE-day was coming up and we weren't to go in to school until the next Tuesday. We could have the Monday off. Cos it had to be officially announced which day was going to be VE-day, you see. That day we had the party, outdoors, and that's something else I can remember. It's like book ends to the war. When we went away that weekend, there was a terrible thunderstorm. I've checked out on it since cos I thought it was my memory gone wrong because I thought how said it was that we'd been sent away and all we heard were the bangs and the flashes of this thunderstorm. You know, it's bad enough being sent away but having this happen to was bad. So then the war ended and we came home and the night before VE-day celebrations we had another storm. And I – it was just like book ends to the war for me. But it cleared, it cleared in the morning because everybody was wondering how they were going to sort out the outdoor celebration. The VE-night I went with a lot of other girls and we walked around London cos, you see, where we were was easy to walk from there to Buckingham Palace and the Mall and everywhere and we walked all around these areas that night. We just stayed up all night and we were in the crowds, I always laughingly say when they show you the pictures of thousands of people outside of Buckingham Palace, I say, 'Oh, look that's me!'. But of course you couldn't see anyone [laughs], because you see we were right at the back anyway⁶. But, yes, we were there and we saw Churchill and the Royal Family up there.

There's another thing too you might like to know going back to the beginning of the war when we were evacuated. It's something that's been settled a bit better now. They used to say that the Royal Family didn't leave London and that used to annoy me because I knew where we lived in Egham, which was not far from Windsor, it's all part of the same area. That the little train used to come up every evening with the King and the Queen on it to stay with their children at Windsor Castle and that used to enjoy me to think that they used to say that, you know, they were there and they weren't, you see. They were only there

⁶ 30 min

during the day if it was safe enough to be there but they seemed to have that sorted out now. Recently I have been watching programs and they do say that they went so that confirms what I thought [laughs]. And what, of course, everybody knew in the area, we used to see the little train go through, you know. We didn't see the King and Queen but it was there. Yeah. So where are we now? I don't know we had our celebrations and we and we went up and we saw what was going on. The thing was that standing up near Whitehall they put the searchlights on and it seemed so strange to see the searchlights going backwards and forwards not looking for anything. Just for the hell of it, you know. Then as I say we walked through so we didn't – we stayed up all night and when we got home and went to bed our flat was immediately over the Underground that went to South Kensington from Sloane Square to South Kensington so we heard the first rumble of the trains going through. Yeah. Yes, it was quite a celebration when it all finished, we enjoyed that.

Interviewer: So how would you say that your relationship with your mum –?

Jean: And everybody else.

Interviewer: And your –

Jean: That is quite an interesting point to put actually. Mum was always the same but of course we three had had different experiences. I found it difficult to get on with my sister or maybe she felt it difficult to get on with me, I don't know what it was but although we would still be family I think the adjustment of personalities was difficult but that didn't underline the fact that you were in the family. So I think it may have been the same even if I hadn't gone away, I don't know. Nothing terrible but our personalities did clash. But not with Peter, Peter seemed to be very laid back and easy to get on with but he'd gone in to the army soon after I'd gone back and there we are. With mum it was just as it always had been and that's really all I can say about that. I don't think there anything much else to say.

Interviewer: Did you find it – cos you were evacuated twice – did you find that the first evacuation, being billeted with a host family, different from being – from living with your aunt?

Jean: Yes, yes. It was different but very nice in instances but it was a different set up as you say. Because it was family in the second – in the second evacuation they could give you more love – in fact because my father had died while I was away and because my aunt and uncle hadn't got any children you will have heard this many, many times over. I fitted in to their family very happily and we all got on the three of us very well, it was going to be an upheaval for them and naturally they wondered what they could do about it and knowing that mum was obviously going to find it difficult and she was – she did marvelously during the war considering everything had to be dumped on her. They offered in other words to adopt me but mother said no, she's my family and that's it. And if I can remember my aunt very

carefully posing the question whether I'd like to stay and live with them and I didn't quite know how to⁷ answer it. My uncle I remember interrupted and said, 'No, she wants to go home to her mum' and he summed up exactly what I felt. He didn't want to see me go either but as they say blood's thicker than water. I had to go back, I just had to because that's where I belonged. But it was a wrench but in a funny kind of a way because all I longed to do throughout the whole of my evacuation was to be back with mum. That was the big thing.

Interviewer: Did you remain close to your uncle and your aunt?

Jean: Oh, yes. Yes. Oh yes, definitely. In fact they had a son the year or two after I – I came back home and he comes and visits quite often and I think although I'm obviously his cousin, I'm his special cousin because it's more like – I was going to say brother and sister but we're not really like at all. He's got a different kind of way of going on and we haven't got shared life together but in fact he treats me very much as an extra type of cousin, you know, because we could have been have been sort of half-brother and sister as it were.

Interviewer: So you did tell me before that you returned to your first host family?

Jean: Yes, the years went by and I started work at Avery Hill later after I had my family and on a couple of occasions we'd taken the car down there. Haven't we Arthur?

Arthur: Yes, we had.

Jean: And decided that we'd pop round to see and darn me on both occasions we went over the years. She was out and the next door neighbor said, 'You know, you've missed her. We told her that you've come but you've missed her again', she was on holiday or whatever it was. So the years went tumbling by and eventually I retired from – actually I was forced to retire from Avery Hill so it gave me plenty of time to do whatever I wanted to and we decided to go down there again didn't we? And funnily enough it was around the same time of the year as when I was evacuated, that's the thing that sticks in my mind and we went down there and even though when I think about the place I see it in little snapshots where we stood waiting to be allocated where we would go at the end of the road and then walking down the road and seeing the front of the house and when we went back, oh, she was so pleased to see us again. In fact when we had arrived, she didn't know we were coming, when we arrived outside the front of the house, I didn't quite know what the reaction would be at that stage, I didn't know that she was delighted to bits. I didn't know what the reaction would be so we saw there was a car in the front of her home you see and a lady came out. I was – Arthur was taking a photograph of the area and I thought I'd better make some comment, you know, why we were taking – I didn't know she was in there you see. I thought, 'Oh, she's quite elderly', I thought she'd gone. I said to this lady, I hope you don't mind me taking photographs but I

⁷ 35 min

used to be evacuated here. 'Oh', she said, 'The lady that', she had the hairdresser, 'The lady in there is always speaking about her two little evacuees', she said, 'She'll be delighted to see you but she's got her hair under the dryer so could you come back?'. And that's where we picked up again from her and we kept visiting her right up until she died when she was ninety-six, wasn't she? When she died. Lovely lady.

Interviewer: How was it coming back and seeing her? Did that –?

Jean: Oh, it was wonderful, wonderful and the memories that she brought back too which started off my own memory. And she answered so many questions that always got muddled in the back of my mind that I couldn't quite understand. For example I thought we – I wondered why it was that the police had been up to the school and asked me about crossing a railway line. Now it didn't make sense to me. Why was it that the police would come up and ask me about crossing a railway line. So I said to, we called her Aunt Queenie, the lady where we were evacuated, I still called her aunt Queenie then, 'What was the business about the railway line and the police coming up?'. 'Oh', she said, 'Oh, I was angry', 'Oh', she said, 'I was so angry'. She said, 'Your stupid headmistress had decided to give you a letter', I wasn't very old⁸, she said, 'to give you a letter to put in through somebody's door because this child had not turned up at school', whatever it was, anyway to take this letter but she said it wasn't the same route home that she would normally come. It was a very – we had to go right around Egham from down this area and at one stage you had to cross the railway line, the level crossing, and she said, 'We wouldn't allow you to do that, you know, cos you could have got knocked down'. I said, 'I remember that day very well because I found it difficult to find the way back'. I said – I've been there since and it is quite a long walk to get back to this place and she said, 'By the time you got back here -', she said, 'was so late we wondered what had happened to you'. She said, 'You were so exhausted that we had to put you to bed and call the doctor'. She said, 'I didn't know at that stage', she said, 'that you had a heart condition'. Well, I didn't know. I didn't know until recently that I had a heart condition. It's been dealt with now. But the thing is she said, 'I was so angry', she said, 'with your headmistress for sending you that the police came around to find out what –' something about the fact that, you know, I had crossed a railway line and apparently they had more or less wiped the floor with the headmistress for sending me back that way [laughs]. But yes, she answered many a questions of these peculiar – of why were the policeman there? What was it to do with the railway line? And did somebody get killed? 'Oh', she said, 'they didn't get killed but there could have been'. Yeah, she was a right spark, wasn't she? Very intelligent lady, she spoke several languages and her husband used to be employed at Pembrose?

Arthur: Premrose.

⁸ 40 min

Jean: Premrose Bank, he was a manager there, So it was a completely different level of background home life, I mean, they even had a bathroom! Which we didn't have [laughs].

Interviewer: How was it coming to – to a home that –?

Jean: Actually cos, you've got to realize that you look at it differently as a small child and the things that impressed on you at that age group would seem strange to an adult. For example because we didn't have a bathroom, I didn't like their bathroom. I was a bit worried about it, that sounds a bit quant but we were used to a big tin bath in front of the fire and going to a purpose made bathroom, tiles and sinks, well sink, baths and taps and handrails and things. It all looked a little bit like a hospital to me and I had quite a lot to do with hospitals before I went away so my first feeling was of – of – sort of a fear. Not of getting – being made clean but being in a place – I wasn't used to be in that sort of surrounding. I know it sounds quant but you must realize I was only six [laughs] and the bathroom had terrors for me that I associated with being in hospital, you know, my sister had quite a job getting me in the bath [laughs]. Yes, that was rather quant, initially – I don't mean as time went on but the initial fear. Also, the other thing I can remember and it's something that was brought very much to mind when I've spoken to classes of children now. There was one occasion when I was answering questions and after a while the children went off to do what they had to do and I was left putting my bits and pieces together and there was one boy who stayed behind. Now, I'd – they asked me what were the differences being home and being in a strangers home and I said, 'One of the things particularly being a youngster was that I hadn't any, apart from my teddy bear, I hadn't any of my toys and I mustn't touch anything', you know, one lady I went to she had a collection of glass ornaments and I mustn't touch them and, in fact, there was one place weren't – wasn't allowed into the front room. Things like that, you know, you just didn't do this and you didn't do that because you were in a stranger's home. And this little boy came up to me after a talk one day and he said to me, 'Going in to a place – places he said where you weren't to touch anything', he said, 'I have to stay', I think it was either with an aunt or a nanny or something and he said, 'that's like that where I go, I'm not allowed to take my toys and I mustn't touch anything there'⁹. We were chatting about this you see and how it felt and eventually he sort of wondered off and the teacher – cos there's always a teacher, they must never leave a child, you know, with a stranger unless there's a teacher. The teacher came over to me afterwards, he said, 'You know', he said, 'that boy in the class he never strings two words together I heard him speak more today than he's ever spoke before and I've found out far more about him now than I did before'. [Laughs] which is just a sign for – you know. So there's children today who – what we know that don't we? Who are under-privileged or in difficult situations which they have to adapt to which is the way we had to adapt.

Interviewer: Do you do a lot of talks in schools?

⁹ 45 min

Jean: I haven't done them since I had to have a major heart operation. I decided I wouldn't do so much. But yes, is the answer. I did an enormous amount and in fact locally we did two – two evacuations. It was done through the Bexley council and – and four – four local schools and we took them on the Bluebell Railway and we did it twice and we managed to get the Orpington Video and Cineograph people to come and film it and made a film of it. And we also went back to Egham because while we were there evacuee boys were killed there in the bombing and one had been buried there but had no headstone. Another one we never traced what happened, I mean, we know what happened about him being killed but we don't what happened about his family or anything. But the one that was buried without headstone, the rest of the story, I managed to contact a very – a distant relative. He only had on distant relative, we managed to contact him and he gave me a photograph of the boy and oddly enough what was really rather strange because we were trying to find out about the background both here in Bexley, who were interested in knowing had run certain items about it in the local news shopper and so on and also of course down at the area, in Egham, they were also hot on the – you know – on the investigation of anybody that knew anything about what had happened there. And then one day I got a phone call from a man who I knew reasonably well and he said to me about that business down in Egham. He said, 'That was where I was when the bomb came down and killed the boy', he said – and he and I had known each other and he also said he'd known some of the people there and they never talked about it. They kept it close all these years hadn't they but never talked about it. And –

Arthur: [Unclear] the family and the boy that was killed.

Jean: Yeah, one of the boys that was killed. They just didn't talk about him. And that – there was a lot of strange things that happened, it's of no consequence to the story of the war but trying to link things up. A lot of things happened since trying to find out that linked in quite accidentally, I phoned up one place to try to find out about a big school that was there where one of the children had died and I thought they'll have some information on it. When I contacted – or tried to contact the school I couldn't get any information and what was strange was – it's Raine's Foundation I'm talking about and when I went to look up the telephone number I looked down, there was Raine's Foundation at the bottom there, you see, so I phoned up this number and when I started talking to them it was quite obvious that we were cross-purposes and it turned out there was a Raine's Foundation that wasn't a school at all. It was another Raine's Foundation to do with the use of funds or whatever and the lady I was speaking to said, 'I don't think we can help you. We don't know anything about the children that were down the –? That's a bit strange. Well then I went back again, I don't know what made me look but I looked at the next column and at the top there was Raine's Foundation School and everything went on merrily after that but I thought, 'I know what I'll do, I'll phone up¹⁰ those other people because they were so kind and tell them I have found them I thought you'd like to know'. So I found this number again that wasn't Foundation

¹⁰ 50 min

School and said, 'Oh, it's about that phone call I made to you a few days ago'. 'Oh', she said, 'We been talking about that ever since', she said. And she said, 'You mentioned this gentleman's name', which was rather an unusual name and one of them said, 'That's odd', a relative of hers went out with a young man of the name of that but they've just broken up. It turned out that yes, it – it was the – the shop that had been hit by the bomb, that family where the children had been killed and they were the same family but I know it has nothing to do with the story we're having but I'm just saying isn't it strange how incidents happens that lock into each other which apparently have nothing to do with each other and yet suddenly, oh yes, that was the same shop – place that he was. They've put a plaque up now where the shop was and it's outside of – it's not Tesco, it's Coop or somewhere. They've put a big notice –.

Arthur: It's the Runnymede memorial –

Jean: Yeah, they've put a memorial plaque up there now about the children that died there, yeah. The council were – were incense – this is another thing to do with the Second World War and children in different areas if they were killed. I think I can say from what I found out that if evacuees were killed out of their hometown, which they would be in their evacuation area miles away, that although the people they lived with who may have been killed too were put on the Civilian Memorial, the evacuees weren't put on. When I went back to Egham, I said about the evacuees who had died there, I said, 'You've got the name of the family that were living there who'd died on the memorial but you haven't got the evacuees. The mayor at the time was absolutely horrified and she said, 'We should have it put on'. I said, 'Well, no you mustn't because this is a decision that was made at the time', you know, and although it's hard to know that you can't undo what was decided at the time. But there is actually a fail-safe on this up in Westminster Abbey, they have a huge book and in it are all the names of the people who died from London area during the war no matter where they were and the children of Egham are in there. And anywhere else – from anywhere else they're all in there. Which I thought was really rather lovely.

Interviewer: So how would – would you say that the war and having been evacuated that that had changed you as a person?

Jean: Of course I don't know what I would have been like, do I? Yes, I think it probably has, it – I'll give you an instance. Although my father and mother sent me to a – to the local Holy Trinity School, which is still in existence, and I did go to the Chelsea Secondary, which is no longer in existence, I think if I'd stayed in London I'd be more – more – I'd speak more like a Londoner. You see, my father and mother were both Londoners and there's a definite way that London people speak. I won't say exactly Cockney but almost and this made a difficulty when I came back at that age group with some of the cousins, locally. It was the way we spoke because of this, you know, you were putting on airs a little bit because it was always considered if you didn't speak like the people you were with you were putting on airs. So there was that tiny little bit of tension but not really but that – that was the only thing I can think of because we were a family.

Interviewer: How would you summarize your war – wartime experience?

Jean: Oh dear. Upheaval – which nobody wants at any age. I think a kind of a deep down sorrow of what I¹¹ missed by being away from my immediate family, it was softened a lot admittedly I did have what you might like to call an ‘easy war’. But it’s difficult to capsule. My brother as I say, he said ‘What you’ve got to remember, Jean, is that when we were away we were told to stick together. We were a family but because of the circumstances we all became unstuck’. He said, ‘We were never stuck together again’. Meaning father, mother, three children were never in that situation ever again. Dad had died, Pam married, Peter went into the Army. We never lived together as a complete family again. So that’s the way he summed it up and I think that I agree with him. But I think we gained a lot. We lost a lot but we’d also gained a lot of experiences that we wouldn’t have had. And who can know what experiences we would have had if we hadn’t gone away. You see, it’s not something you can really sum up is it?

Interviewer: Well, thank you very much. I don’t have any more questions, is there something that you feel like you haven’t had the chance to talk about?

Jean: I think I’ve talked myself to a standstill actually [laughs]. Yes. I’ll make some general comments. Evacuees were viewed quite harshly by some people. Because I had a lot to do with reunion and also commemorative places and gone back to some of the areas although I hadn’t been there had an association with. Like we had a – a big commemorative service down in Devon at a place called Torrington. The reason I went there is partly because our daughter now lives there, just so happens so, and when I went to go there one of our local evacuees or ex-evacuees said to me, ‘That’s where I was evacuated to in Torrington’. ‘Ask them about the big fire at the children’s home’. So this is what I did, I went down there and, cut a long story short, got in touch with people locally and there’s a doctor there, who used to be on the council I think. He, oddly enough, had been doing some research himself and was putting things together so we actually clicked in to each other. Clicked in to each other’s way of thinking. I said I wanted to do a commemorative. He said, ‘That would be excellent’, he said, ‘I’ll join in and the council will help and we’ll do all this’. And that was exactly what we did. It was a big weekend of World War Two, evacuees coming back and they all wore their labels and were interviewed by the local people and went back to see what –. And that was fine but some of the sadnesses that came out of it because we found out about this fire. There’d been a beautiful big old house there at the time and it took in children who were – what’s the word for it, dear, if they weren’t well? They usually had asthmatic conditions and that but they were also – it was also a children’s home. So that’s the way it was perceived, it was a children’s home and people were often staying there if they had asthmatic conditions. I said to the local librarian at the time, ‘Have you got any information on the children who were sent there who were evacuees’. Oh no, we don’t have any evacuees in there!’ She was wrong, you see, her experience

¹¹ 55 min

had been in Australia where she got the idea that she knew all about evacuees in this country I do not know. But she was quite convinced that we had never happened so we had to trot a few evacuees in front of her to convince her that, yes, they had been there. Unfortunately, there was a fire. Many children were killed in the fire so of course we had to look into that for the commemorative and find out who – which children they were. We found that there were eight and then there was the case to try to find out the locality of the next of kin now if they wished to be involved in this because we were going to put a big memorial stone up. Because where the house had been there's now a big car park so they wanted to put it in this car park was you went in¹². A lady who lived locally had a stone, a big slate stone – granite? Granite I think it was, a big thing and it had been part, originally, of a door step of this big house that had been burnt. But she had kept it and as soon as she knew what was happening she offered it. 'Do you want to use it?', because it has to do with the – this old house that was there so they said, 'Yes, we'll use it to engrave on it in memoriam of all the children who died'. There're about eight or more of them. As I say a few of them were evacuees. We located everybody except one but we did very well and in fact we found that one of these little boys who was an evacuee had been buried in their local little graveyard with no headstone. It was just a number so, of course, the doctor and I looked again and said, 'We've got to do something about that'. So they had a – a new gravestone made and they did a commemorative service at the same time they had all these people coming back for the whole weekend with their labels on to thank the Torrington people for what they'd done. I must confess that there were some downsides and when we went to the memorial service and so on and they were wonderful there. They really pushed the boat out, the locals did. But I over-heard one family and I must admit I was angry but I didn't say anything. I think I would have ripped them apart. She said, 'We had evacuees', she said, 'it was a little boy and he came up from the slums of London'. Because they always came from the slums, I thought you liked to know that. We were slums according to them. We were all slum children. The fact that we came under the Earl of Cadogan I really don't think made any impact [laughs]. But still the thing was, she said, this boy they'd taken him in and they shared all his toys – their toys with him and his father, I don't think he had a mother. His father came to visit on this occasion, now it's a heck of a way to get from London to Torrington and even in those days it must have cost a bit apart from the fact that it was wartime. He had visited them and he'd given his son a little bag of sweets, now sweets were quite – the thing in those days you hardly ever saw sweets so that was what he'd did and my mother would do a similar thing. She'd make little cakes and bring sweets and that because obviously you loved your children and you did what you could for them. She used to knit. Their complaint was that the boy had received these sweets and he hadn't shared them with the rest of the family and they were really – really angry about this. Even at – they were as old as I am now and they were saying that this boy hadn't shared his sweets but they shared all their toys with him and I thought, 'Hold on a minute they hadn't given him their toys but they were wanting to take something that was something between him and his father. It really took me all my

¹² 60 min

time to bite my tongue and not say anything and I thought, 'Isn't this odd –'. The other thing was that all the evacuees were filthy, now we came very clean home and of course the place we went to was clean but I was put in hospital because I had – now what did they –? Scabies, which was a rotten thing. Hmm?

Arthur: Impetigo was the other thing.

Jean: Yes, impetigo and scabies were two of the awful things that skin conditions and it ran riot at the time. The conditions as such and it was always said that the evacuees brought it in. Well, you can argue that until domes day but as if it – you never got ill in the country until the evacuees arrived [laughs]. And that really gets your gaunt, you know, that they were all dirty and brought impetigo and scabies in to the country. Quite forgetting that their own kids, you know, were having a pretty rough time. Many of these instances they didn't have bathrooms and they didn't even have proper loos and yet it was the London children that brought the problems in.

Interviewer: So was this something that you experienced at the time as well? That you were aware of?

Jean: No, because I was lucky with who I was evacuated in to, you see. They treated us beautifully. I mean, the fact that as I say I got impetigo, when I spoke to¹³ auntie Queenie, as she was known, when we went back to visit I said about the impetigo. She said, 'Yes', she said, 'I was always angry that you caught it because –', she said, we were clean but she said, 'You caught it from other children who weren't clean and they weren't being looked after. My brother wasn't initially looked after properly so I know what the situation is there. They weren't clean and that's when it's little illnesses run riots through and, of course, there was impetigo in the places everybody went because of the difficulties of keeping everybody clean and such an in-rush of extra people, you know. She said, 'I used to go on about your headmistress', it was only a tiny little school, we were only a handful of children so therefore the headmistress didn't have a lot to do but she said, she was always sat on a bicycle rushing around, poor woman. But she, my auntie Queenie really had it in for the headmistress, she said, 'I told her that if they send the children to school with impetigo, she should send them back again. They mustn't be in school for all the other children to catch'. Now I can understand auntie Queenie being angry but I could also see the other side of it. If you got children being sent to the school, it's very hard to send them back home again isn't it cos it isn't their home. The responsibility is not always taken onboard by the people who look after the children. They probably got enough of their own troubles and pleased to see the back of the kids for a few hours, you know. So I think the school teachers had a pretty hard time – taking the responsibility of it all, you know. After all they had their own lives to lead as well [laughs].

But yes, we'd done a lot with the local children as I say, we'd done several schools and done at least two evacuations so called at the Bluebell and the children have been marvelous. We've done hundreds of

¹³ 65 min

children and they've been really marvelous. We've had some funny comments though. There was one class I was speaking to with my friend and they were saying about the food in wartime so I told them about that and I said about the rations and so on. But then I turned to my friend, who had a completely different evacuation to my own, he was gone on a landed estate and I said to the class, 'I'll hand you over to my friend here because if you were on a farm or somewhere like that you did alright for food because there was milk and cream and eggs and whatever'. And I said, 'Of course, occasionally they killed the odd pig and hands shot up all over the class. What in earth are they asking about that for? The question came, 'How did the farmer know which one was the odd pig?' [laughs]. I don't know whether you've understood that or not but I thought it – my friend and I looked at each other and didn't really quite know how to answer it [laughs] and we've laughed about the odd pig ever since. You know, we refer to the odd pig [laughs]. And sometimes we give each other cards and that, you know, 'Happy Birthday' with a picture of the odd pig on it [laughs]. Yeah, but the – yeah and then there was another occasion where we said about rations they're very difficult and the food that we had and it was alright we had sufficient but it wasn't very interesting at times and a hand shot up at the back and said, 'Oh yeah', about rations, 'Oh', he said he'd be alright because his uncle worked at McDonalds. That sorted that problem out [laughs]. But we've had some lovely comments with the children and when we took so many hundreds on the Bluebell and did evacuation then we made up the gasmask boxes and they made gasmasks out of paper and we went through the whole thing of being evacuated and then we got to the station that we were supposed to be evacuated to. It was the same station that we'd gone on at, you know, we gone up the line and come back again but we had returned it was a new station and the children had to be chosen, so called, by the group that we had there each of the people would take a little group and sit them on a table up in the restaurant and they'd chat about things and ask questions and show them where they went and shared their – their experiences with them. It was a great success, the children loved it and there was one little group I can remember vividly, there were three little boys who were obviously from a Chinese family and they were so enthusiastic¹⁴ about this particular day and asked all of them to say what did they think of most when they experienced this day and the little Chinese boys said that the bit they liked the best was at the end where we all sang the old songs and I thought that was lovely. What made it particular – I'm homing in on that is that they weren't song of today, they were of all those years ago and here are incomers liking that part of it. I thought it was lovely. I thought it was really lovely. I could see them now looking at all the words we would do them [laughs]. They were lovely children. Yes, I really enjoyed that. One little boy said to me once, a little black boy, and he said to me –. Don't misunderstand me, I know – one always have to make an excuse, I don't know why but I'm just stating it as was. This little lad – we were making the gasmasks together and he said about the wartime and how it been. I don't know whether he said it or I asked him. I said, 'What do you think would be the difference now if we hadn't won the war?'. I wanted to know what his reaction would be, I ask questions like that. He said, 'Well, we'd all

¹⁴ 70 min

be speaking German'. So I looked at him and I thought about it about it a bit. I thought, 'Do I say it or not?'. I don't think I did say it but what I would like to have said was this: both he and I wouldn't have been standing there talking together because he would have been a black boy and I'm afraid that would have been gone as far as the German Nazis were concerned and I would have been killed too because I'm third generation from a Jew. So neither he or I would have been even discussing it. But I didn't like to tell him that [laughs].

Interviewer: Ok. How come you got involved with children and doing talks in schools?

Jean: It was over ten years ago. Funnily enough now you put me on the point now. Years ago on the television – they don't do it now. You used to get in to a section where people left messages, do you remember that Arthur? It isn't quite – it – I can't explain it. We go back maybe twelve years or more but I think it was BBC but I'm not entirely sure but there was one section which you could go in to and you could actually leave a message and get an answer. I put in a question for something to do with evacuation and the Evacuees Reunion Association was mentioned and it was just as it started at the very beginning. So therefore I got in touch with them and became a member of the ERA and then became very active with them and offered services of going in to schools. I think that answers your question as how it is that I started. But of course I always go over the top when I start anything. We always do something more than I should [laughs]. But it meant that I went in to quite a number of schools and as I say we did not only the evacuation, you know, thing up in Bluebell but we did things actually in –. One school we did something which I thought was a good idea – I still think it was a good idea and could still be done but it needs an awful lot of preparation – is that this particular year was studying World War Two and it was quite a big school, I remember, several classes and I said, 'What we could do is the group of us from the ERA could come along and do what we normally do anyway but we'd make each class once they come out of it to go in to the hall to have a talk, you know. When they go back in to their classroom, their classroom – each classroom will be a different destination where the evacuees went and that depended on who we had grouped up so we had one person who had been evacuated to Wales so a classroom was – it is now Wales, you know. Another classroom was South Africa, another classroom was Australia, another classroom was, you know, Dorking, Surrey, you see and so on. And so as all the children who were going to be taught were in the hall somebody raved¹⁵ round to all the classes and put these notices up, you see. So – and as they were in the hall and I had to tell each group to go and I said, 'Oh, the train has arrived', or 'The coach has arrived' and class so and so, 'You're now going to go to your destination' and they get up and they walk out of the hall and, of course, when they arrived at the destination which was their classroom they found they're in Wales, you see, with a Welsh evacuee to tell them all about it. I thought that was a pretty good idea and, of course, they had their – they each had a

¹⁵ 75 min

map to see where they had been put and I thought, 'Well, it's good. It's geography and it's – it's also history and you know. I thought it was a pretty good idea.

Interviewer: No. Yeah, very interactive.

Jean: The only trouble was that the headmaster in that particular school did japp (??) on a bit. It was difficult to get the damn thing of, you know, starting cos all he did was japp [laughs]. I've been told since that the headmasters are a bit like that [laughs]. We had some fun though, one headmaster really got up my snitch though. We went on the Bluebell this particular time, it was a very large school, and there'd been a landslide. The children were wonderful, they always adapt, and I explained to them that we couldn't go the full length of the line which meant it was quite a short journey. Well, of course, I said, 'The pity is it's such a short journey that you'd hardly got anywhere before you were back again', I said, So what I've done is I've arranged with the Bluebell that as you can't get as far as you want to go. We'll go up and come back and then go up and come back twice, you see. Well, they thought that was hilarious but they were quite happy about it, you know, so we did this and when we got back again they all had to congregate as if they were in a new place, you know, we've arrived at wherever the evacuation was to be; It was the place we'd left but never mind. So there they were all in their groups, you know, quite happily and all we wanted to do at this – we'd been around the village and these are the village people who want to take people in so this gentleman and his wife want a – three boys and they'd say you, you and you and then off they'd go upstairs and do what they had to do. Well, it takes a bit of organizing as you can imagine, you got about forty odd children up there. They were all behaving beautifully, they'd all got their gasmasks and their luggage and their – whatever it was they were going to eat and they wanted to get cracking didn't they and so did I, so did my group and then the headmaster took over I could have killed him. First of all, he went charging up to the back of the group of so called evacuees grabbed a kid, I won't say by the hair but by the collar and dragged him out the front. I thought – we all stood there wondering what was going on. But he – it was his – his contribution to the day and he – they – he had a tall lash.

Arthur: It was being filmed as well, you see.

Jean: It was being – well, actually, they scrubbed that one out. But yes, it was all being filmed and he brought this boy out to the front and apparently gave him a good hiding for whatever it was he decided was wrong and it was all part of his idea of drama – action. We all stood there thinking, 'What the hell is going on?' so headmasters can be a bit of a pain in the neck.

Interviewer: I can imagine.

Jean: But they weren't during the wartime. One headmaster's wife has since written about her husband's evacuation which is now, of course, second hand, isn't it. But I tell it to you anyway cos it amuse me [laughs]. When we were put on the trains it wasn't always known where you were going but somehow or other it was found out, normally, not by necessarily the children but you know. But often these places

ended up where they apparently weren't expected to go. For example a boy school might end up somewhere and children, you know, younger children end up where the boy school should have gone but that's another matter. That was a little bit of difficulties. Well, this was a particular school with a headmaster. Now, when you were in the train you didn't always go straight to where you were going you sometimes got shunted in the side and then other trains went by. It was all a bit haphazard but well organized but from our point of view – we didn't know what was happening. So this particular train of boys with their headmaster were going along and there weren't any loos¹⁶. Very often there weren't any loos and sometimes they did figure out what to do. They were gonna make a, what I call a loo stop, it didn't involve me but this particular train load of boys there was gonna be a loo stop. But the loo – the loo stop was on a platform in the country, a country station, and what they'd done was – was to put some sort of tenting, you know, not porter cabins but tenting with the front open and there was the bucket and the top, you know. So they got out and that's where you went apparently, I'm just saying what the headmaster's wife said that's what happened, they had these. Well, I suppose boys if it was a boys school wouldn't worry too much if the rest of the boys saw what they were doing but the headmaster wasn't going to use these damn loos, you see, so he decided that he'd find an alternative place to go. So he – he walked out of the station, I suppose, looking for a convenient hedge [laughs]. When he came back he found that the train had gone [laughs]. He was stuck on the station [laughs]. I always thought that was hilarious [laughs], the train had gone with all the children in it without the headmaster on. I like that one.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jean: But yes, this business of no – there weren't any loos on our trains as far as I can remember which was very difficult.

Interviewer: How long was your train journey?

Jean: Not very far. We were only thirty miles but it did take a long time. It was a very, very hot day. Very hot day. I know the storm broke that weekend but you – I've already told you. But it was a very hot day that day and mother had – because she hadn't got the suggested little carrier, you know, suitcases. She couldn't even afford to go out and buy these cheap ones from Woolworths which were being sold quite reasonably and she'd managed – she decided that they could cope with, what we call our big old suitcase. I don't know how big or how old it was but it was a bit of a thing for the – for my brother and sister to cope between the two of them. I didn't have to carry anything much. So we took that with us, it was quite a problem getting that around though. We got on the train at a London station it's a bit of a kafuffle between my brother and I which station it was. He said it was Victoria but I thought it was Charing Cross. I still think it's Charing Cross. We got in to – we got in to this compartment and there weren't enough overseeing adults cos obviously they had WVS and all sorts of teachers and what not. They tried

¹⁶ 80 min

to put an adult in charge of a group and because it wasn't a corridor if they put eight children in to a corridor – in to a carriage without an adult or without somebody in charge they'd put my sister in charge and she was only about what twelve, I suppose, so it was a bit much for her but at least she could bang on the side, you know. Well, we were on that blessed train for several hours and, of course, we'd left home quite early about seven-thirty and although we hadn't been lumbered with too much to drink it is needless to say that halfway through the morning there was a problem. But the boys managed, the boys managed quite well. I didn't realize it at the time and I didn't know quite what was going on and every time I asked my sister she said, 'Don't look, because, you know, it's not the thing you should be looking at'. But, of course, I had to look so what they'd done was, they put what suitcases or whatever it is they could by – by the door and they'd open up the window and stood on the suitcases which was alright because they could commune with the outside world through the window. Until, of course, next door people looked out the window and it happened to be in the next one downwind as it were – it happened to be the teacher in the next carriage. So then I wondered what was going on cos all I could hear was thumping on the side of the carriage [laughs]. So my sister hadn't quite got that in hand¹⁷ but what was she supposed to do. It's either that or a damp seat [laughs]. Oh, and my brother who was with us [laughs], he brought a comic to read which, of course, soon got read but he'd managed to bring some marbles in his pocket which he decided was a good idea to play marbles, which I don't really recommend on the floor of a carriage which in those days, I don't quite know, I think it was lino or something on it. It went under the seats and, of course, the blessed – because of the movement of the carriages the blessed marbles kept going under the seat. But, of course, I was small enough to crawl in under to get them out so you can guess what a mess I was in by the time we got there. I can remember my sister trying to clean us up at the end of Manor Way, where we eventually ended up, pulling up Peter's socks and it was the old spit and polish idea. You got the hanky and you spit the end of the hanky and tried to clean us up. Well, you try to imagine trying to clean up two filthy children that had been crawling around [laughs] with filthy knees and god knows what. We must have looked pretty ridiculous for the time we got where we were and, of course, it being very hot too sweat running down your face. Oh, and that was the other thing too, I looked there last time went there to see if that corner house at Manor Way used to have a tree in it and it had – it was a mulberry tree I didn't know it at the time but it was a mulberry tree. One of the things my mother that was very upset about us going away to the country – she said, 'Don't eat anything', you know, that was around. Well, I was thirsty and these lovely mulberry – not – sorry I said the wrong tree. They weren't Mulberry, they were elderberry. I beg your pardon. They are little round blackberries hanging in a group and they were elder – they were elderberry flowers. Elderberries, that's right. I picked two or three of them without my sister looking and they were lovely. But, of course, she could see the stain around my mouth. Oh, she nearly went bananas. She thought I'd poisoned myself, you know. Peter had a very bad evacuation to start with and they didn't feed him and I can remember us going through the fields and he'd

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eat a bit of the cabbage out of the cabbage field and then along the ditch along the end of Manor Way the old verge was and trees at the other side of the ditch, they were Conker trees and also Horse chestnut trees – that is Horse chestnut I beg your pardon. Sweet chestnut trees, know there's quite a conceivable difference between the two but I suppose Pamela who wasn't very worldly wise in the thing couldn't differentiate between a Conker and a – and a Chestnut. But even at that age I could see there was quite a considerable difference, you know, so we were jumping up and down on these little furry green cones to try to get the fruit out of them and I thought that was good fun, you know, but Peter had to make do with what he could find. We used to keep our sandwiches for him, I remember, at one stage because he had a terrible place to go to. They didn't feed him. They just used to chuck him out in the morning. But that didn't last too long cos mum came down and sorted it all out and he was alright after that.

Interviewer: Did he tell you that he wasn't feed properly or?

Jean: Pam soon found out – yeah. Pamela knew what was going on. They wouldn't tell me anything much because being a – a youngster, very young, they were always frightened I was sort of going to spill the beans and all the rest of it so whenever there was anything to be said it was always in a huddle somewhere else. [Laughs] I remember one occasion, I was dying to know what they were talking about so they try to put me off by saying they were doing a surprise for me but a long time after I found out what the surprise for me was. Which wasn't a surprise for me at all, it was just trying to keep me out of the garage while they were having a chat. I can understand it now.

Did I tell you about Peter and his jobs? Well, he wanted to earn a bit of pocket money and his first job he found he could work with the baker. They used to do bread deliveries in those days and he said, 'I got this job', he said, 'It's on the horse and cart', a bread delivery van. He said, 'They deliver cakes as well and if they get a little bit knocked about in their packs I'll have a few', which sounded alright, I thought, 'Great, maybe I'll have one too'. So I was looking forward to this idea. Oh, well, Peter turned up this particular day¹⁸ and it was all huff – h – you know, getting together and keep Jean out of it and they went in to the garage to have a chat. It was a long time afterwards I found out, Peter had gone along to the bakers and there was the horse and cart out front, the loaded the stuff on and Peter was to get up on to the – I don't know what you call it but where they sit where the chap that was delivering would look after the horse reins and he'd be sitting next to him. Unfortunately, Peter got up on to this area where they were going to sit and the horse moved forward, dislodged Peter, who fell down between the horse and the bakers van and the wheel went over his front. Went over his chest. Oh, of course, it was a very heavy van and he was very badly injured but he'd only just found himself in a new – which was to be his ultimate place to live – you know, his evacuation place. Very nice people they were and he didn't want to cause a fuss and they might think he was a nuisance and get rid of him or something so the first thing he did was to go

¹⁸ 90 min

round to Pam's and said, 'What can I do about this?', you see. So she looked at it and she should have taken him to the hospital or doctor or something but she bowed to his difficulties. They kept it from everybody until he got better but there's an aftermath to this. Years had gone by and then I helped with this commemorative in Egham and one day I got a phone call and this particular man, who had been one of the local people at the time had read about all this and he knew who to contact, it was me, you see. He said I was in Egham – living in Egham at that time, he said Peter Davies, he said, 'Is that your brother?', I said, 'Yes, it is'. He said, 'Only I remember a Peter Davies', he said, 'that was run over by a baker's van' and I said, 'Isn't that amazing'. I told him where my brother lived and, of course, I phoned my brother and I said, 'There was somebody that still remembers you getting run over'. Unfortunately, the man's died since but I thought, isn't that remarkable? Half a century goes by and that little instance he remembered. Yeah.

Interviewer: Ok. Was your brother ok afterwards though? He recovered?

Jean: Yeah, yeah. Yes, he's ok. But you get these frights, you know. All sorts of things would happen that Pam would try to cope with. I got stung that weekend. Yes, we all went out for a walk at the back, you know, by the railway line, and there was a big wasp nest in the bank and the children not knowing what else to do, decided they'd throw things on the wasp nest. You know, that's what children do. I had my teddy bear with me and my sist – brother grabbed this blessed teddy bear and threw it at the nest and he got stung. I got stung on the back of my neck. It's very painful getting stung by a wasp which wasn't very nice. They had to put TCP on it. Poor old Pam, she had quite a weekend that weekend. What with Peter not being put in a place to be looked after and me getting stung and one thing after another. She had enough to get on with poor girl but she coped somehow.

Interviewer: It's a lot of responsibility for somebody how's a very, very young teenager.

Jean: Only thirteen. Yes, but, you see, one of the things that was in her favour – I mean, she had a old head on young shoulders anyway. It was quite normal in those days for the older daughter to take care of the youngsters while mother went to work as no doubt they are now. Or perhaps it's not allowed, I don't know. But it was such a normal thing to be put in charge but she had it, of course, twenty-four hours a day after that. It wasn't just the case of while mum or dad were out. Peter was a handful though, he was always in trouble [laughs]. Yeah. I think I talked myself to standstill.

Interviewer: Well, thank you very much for taking the time to –

End of Interview.