

Interviewee: Pat Field

Interviewer: Malin Lundin

Date: 06/04/2013

Interviewer: This is an interview with Pat Field and the interviewer is Malin Lundin and the date is the 6th of April 2013. If you would be able to tell me when you were born please?

Pat: The date I was born?

Interviewer: Yes.

Pat: In 1934, in April.

Interviewer: Ok. So it's coming up to your birthday soon then [laughs]?

Pat: Yes, I know. We don't look forward to them so much now [laughs].

Interviewer: So whereabouts were you born?

Pat: I was born in a hospital in Kensington, which probably doesn't exist now, and I think my mother and father lived with me in my grandmother's house for a while and then we lived in his parents' house which was in Eltham. Then we had a flat in Kidbrooke Park Road, a basement flat and that's when war was declared in 1939. I remember we were watching on the pavement as the tanks went down to presumably go abroad from Dover or somewhere, which is one memory in a way.

Interviewer: What kind of memories do you have of the time before the war? Were you in school or –

Pat: Sorry?

Interviewer: Had you started school?

Pat: Yes, I started at a school along, near the Standard, Sherrington Road School, which is still there. I can remember going to – although we lived in Kidbrooke Park Road, which is quite a way away, my mother walked to a library at Charlton House, which I think that you knew. Libraries in those days had to be very quiet, you know, you didn't have groups of children. They had these metal shelves and either I banged into one or knocked it and, you know, the librarian sort of looked around and sort of 'shush' [laughs] which is always a memory that's always stuck with me. I had my tonsils out, I think, when I was about four. That was at Great Ormond Street Hospital and I can remember the bus journey home because, you know, things weren't very affluent in those days and my mother came and I think she didn't recognise me at first because I'd lost quite a lot of weight over about two days. I think I remember we used to sometimes go, my mother had relations in Gloucestershire and we used to go down there but, no, it is very patchy, you know, sort of things. Yes, I certainly had started school. Yes, I would have been five in '39 and – do I get onto when I was evacuated?

Interviewer: Yes.

Pat: Yeah, I went – I was evacuated in June of 1940, which I think was the second wave of evacuation because I was told that the King had said we had to go out of London [laughs]. I was quite looking forward to it until the actual morning when I can remember sitting on a table in this basement flat in Kidbrooke Park Road and thinking, you know, 'I don't want to go' and they were trying to persuade me. So I think we, I think we had to meet at Fossdene School and we got on buses. I said goodbye to our parents and we went to a railway station, I don't know, it could have been Deptford, it could have been New Cross and got on a train. Then we must have got on a long-distance train to North Devon but I don't think parents knew where the children were going. I think that was a secret, you know, for sort of wartime sake. I went with a class from the school and a friend that I already knew from my class, Erica, and I remember we sat in the – it was the village school hall and the people who came to choose you or take an evacuee. This lady chose Erica and myself which was nice so we were together. We went to their farmhouse. We had a – it was quite a big farmhouse – and really it was quite an experience being on a farm. I've got quite a few photographs; they're a bit faded now. But it was, you know, we were able to – they used to put us on the carthorses because I think in the school holidays they didn't know what to do with us, you know. Their children were grown up¹. But they had this son and he was very, very patient with us and very nice. So we used to sit on these carthorses, even out in the field when they were working, you know. But I don't think we had saddles. When the horse's head goes over, it leans down to feed, you feel like you're going to slide down. So I think we had squeals. We did some picking up of the potatoes in the sort of built up mounds. We went along and we helped with that. When we started the village school – and our teacher from Sherrington Road had gone with us so she taught us in the village school with the other children. I suppose the village children were there. Whether they were in a different class I don't remember. We had a long walk there. I would say it was about a mile, you know, and it was sort of up and down. It was alright in the summer but in the winter it was a bit chilly. My mother and the other girl's mother came down to visit us, I've got one or two pictures of that, which was nice and then eventually I went to stay at another farmhouse a little bit further down the road 'cos I think my mother thought it was getting a bit crowded. There were two – there was another family there as well, whom we also knew. It was from our school. I stayed there for a while. My father came down to visit me. Then eventually, my mother was expecting my brother and we went to Exeter and she had to join the NAAFI because I was school age and if you didn't have a child under school age you had to do some sort of war work. We didn't stay in Exeter for very long. But she worked in the NAAFI and the manageress's husband used to give my crunchy bars. Do you know what – they got a sort of honeycomb, very sweet, centre. Because, you know, we had a sweet – you didn't get many sweets or anything so I used to enjoy that. Then from, yes, she tried to get into a maternity hospital or book into one but there wasn't any room or something so we came back to London in the end of 1941. So I was really, I was away, actually evacuated for about eighteen months I think. I had this, sort of, one visit from my mother and then we moved to Exeter.

Interviewer: So did your mother kind of come and pick you up and then take you away?

¹ 5 min

Pat: Yes, yes. Yeah, you could. There was no restriction. A lot of evacuees, well as you probably know, a lot of evacuees did come back.

Interviewer: Do you know why? Did they kind of tell you what was going on?

Pat: Well, it was - because my mother couldn't get into a hospital down there she, you know, she just had to come back and he was born in the old Greenwich Hospital, St Alfeges. We just sort of moved. We were just in rented accommodation. I went back to school. Then when the war ended – do you want that? My sort of age group were the first sort of entrance into secondary school after the war and I went to, what is now, Plumstead Manor. It was then called King's Warren because it was Henry VIII; it was part of his hunting grounds. Then – do you want me to tell you more?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Pat: Then I left there when I was sixteen and went and did a secretarial training college called the City of London and did a course with languages. Then I went to two publishers over the years and I went to Canada for a few months. I had relations, right in the far west, but I don't know. I think I got homesick and I came home much earlier than I planned. I went back to the job with the publishers and then I was very unhappy about something and I had some friends who were working in Rome². They were teaching English sort of on a very loose basis so I thought, well, that I could probably do the same. I went out there and for about six weeks I just walked around Rome getting to know the layout. There was, or there still is, a UN organisation, Food and Agriculture. I got a job there which was very well paid and stayed there for three years and I came home but I decided to go back for a few months and then what did I do? And then I came home because there was some complications, my parents had to move from the flat where they were so I came home. I did some temporary secretarial work and then they were very short of teachers in 1968 and I went to training college. Then I went on to teach in primary school until I retired about nineteen years ago now. So that's a quick resume of my life [laughs].

Interviewer: Returning to the early parts [Pat: Yes] of the war when you were or even before you were evacuated, 'cos many children were evacuated in September '39. Do you know why you [Pat: I didn't go] weren't evacuated at that time?

Pat: Whether the school didn't go then? No, I don't know about that because I think, I'm not sure, because nothing happened I don't know whether a lot of people came back because it was a sort of. But no, I don't know why I didn't. Well, I would have been five, yes. No, I don't know why I didn't go until 1940. It might have been that, you know, school decided not to – I don't quite know what the official thing was about it.

Interviewer: At the time that you were evacuated in 1940, were you aware what was going on? Did you kind of understand why you were being evacuated?

² 10 min

Pat: I didn't know – I hadn't got much idea of the geography of England at that time. I didn't know really where I was but I knew that there was a war on. But I wasn't in London during the actual Blitz and, you know, when I see pictures on the television it's so appalling. It was night after night and it must have been awful. But I've got a friend, who's a few years older than me, and she was here all – she was evacuated but not to a very nice place and her mother was so shocked at the state and the food they were getting that she went down and brought them home. But so she was in London during the Blitz. Yes, I knew from, yes, we had a radio and also I had watched these tanks going down the road and knew they were going to war. Also, people's sons in Devon, you know, came back on leave sometimes and they were in uniforms. Oh, and Home Guard, you know, the son was in the Home Guard. And used to have to go out at night and patrol things.

Interviewer: What kind of relationship did you have with them – the family that you were billeted with?

Pat: Oh, they were lovely. She was a grandmother. She and her husband were, you know, very kind and she made room for my mother when she came down and the other girl's mother. And then another family who had two, she had to children the other lady who came down. My mother used to write to her after the war but eventually we lost touch I suppose because, you know, she was getting older and died. But I did go down to visit them when I was twelve, I think, yes. Yes, that was nice. The son had married by then.

Interviewer: So how old was the son when you were there?³

Pat: Um, he wasn't in the Army because he was a vital part of running the farm. I should think he was, probably, maybe, mid-twenties. It's difficult, you know, you can't – people look much older when you're very young. He was in his mid-twenties. He worked hard and was a very pleasant person. Oh, I've got a photograph but I don't know that you can really tell from the photograph. But where are you Austin? He's sitting behind the girl on the far horse.

Interviewer: Oh, yes.

Pat: It's difficult to tell how old he is.

Interviewer: So, this photograph, it's three girls [Pat: Yes] so was that –

Pat: Oh, no, there is a boy in one of the photographs but he wasn't staying. They had this marvellous orchard, it was marvellous, because all the trees were so old they'd bent over so you could use them as a house to play in through the branches. That was really lovely.

Interviewer: How was the reception in the local area for kind of –?

Pat: I think it was quite a small – it wasn't, well, there was a school and a church and a big vicarage but it wasn't like a close, confined, village. It was sort of strung out. A bit further down the hill on the

³ 15 min

way home there was a blacksmith and that was quite interesting to look in on our way home. Of course, a lot of them had evacuees as well 'cos the whole class was –. What happened was the older children went into the town, Torrington, because of the secondary schools they needed. Whereas we had to go to the schools outside and had to walk quite a long way. No, I don't think it was - and also they did get some money I think, you know. I don't know how much was paid for evacuees but they were probably very pleased to have it because I don't think it was, except for sort of gentlemen farmers who had a lot of land, I think people weren't very well off, thinking back on it.

Interviewer: Did you have many friends kind of among the local children? Did you kind of mix or were you just with [Pat: Well, I think –] the other evacuees?

Pat: No, not – no because we were – we were quite away from the school and I had this other girl to play with. No, there was no such of social life, really. I suppose there was a pub in one of the little strings houses and the blacksmiths which was on our way home but, no. I don't remember there being a lot of children. There must have been because there was a village school. No, we were sort of – I think, I don't remember other children at the school but I imagine there must have been. But I think our teacher just taught us, her class from London.

Interviewer: And were you in school kind of all day or was it half days?

Pat: No, it was all day, yes, all day. And in the summer holidays we used to help, or do what we could, on the farm. This orchard was lovely to play in, you know, we had great games there.

Interviewer: Was it very different from London? From kind of where you had been living before?

Pat: Yes, I mean it was a long, um; this was sort of the back of the farmhouse. It was – you went in, you used to go in the back, you went in to a place where you used to eat and there was an open fire and a bread oven 'cos they used to make, they used to make their own bread I think. Then you used to go through there was a little, sort of, bit where – and there was a sort of kitchen with, possibly, maybe a sink and a small oven to, you know, if they didn't have the fire alight. Then you went to the front of the house and it was like a great big stone flagged room⁴ and then the other side of that there was a little sitting room which was quite cosy. Then upstairs there must have been about four bedrooms probably. But you all had washstands, you know, with china bowls and jugs in them, you know, like that. That was your washing, I can't remember, having baths there. We may well have done. I expect they had these big metal baths, you know, and filling up with hot water. I suppose it's sort of memory, well, I suppose so many things happened after that when I came back and everything.

Interviewer: What kind of contact did you have with your parent's whilst you were evacuated?

⁴ 20 min

Pat: Well, yes, letters. Yes, I got letters from my father 'cos he wasn't actually in the Army but he was on RAF maintenance and used to go around to various airfields. As I say, my mother came down to stay with us for a while. I don't think it was for very long and then – I don't know if that's when she – whether she came twice – that I can't remember. Or maybe at the end of this one visit she took me to Exeter. Oh, and then my father he had use of small car and he did come and take us round. Once, the lady where we were staying, she got us all to sit, there was a sort of wall, high wall, and we were sitting there one evening and some friends came from London that my parents had known since before they were married. It was a surprise and they took us to Westwood Ho which is a seaside resort. That was a lovely day out. With their little girl but I don't know how they arranged it because there was no telephone. She must have written and said, you know, they would like to come and see us but keep it as a surprise and it was. You know, some social life went on. Oh, Exeter was bombed which is about thirty or forty miles away I suppose. I think we heard planes but I don't think we were aware of any bombs dropping near. Because there was nothing that would have been of value to destroy around there as far as I know.

Interviewer: And you returned to London in '42?

Pat: Yes, yes. It was a bit before I expect because he was born in January of '42.

Interviewer: Had London changed at that time, kind of, after the Blitz? The landscape?

Pat: I wasn't aware. I think, probably, we went into this flat in Shooters Hill Road, I must have seen, yes, I think, you know, bombed damaged houses. But I don't think I went into the centre. Oh, yes, every time there was a new sort of weapon dropped on London. Sometimes, you know, my mum with a young baby, we went down to her relations in Gloucestershire and they had American servicemen, not billeted with them, but they had a camp on the outskirts of the village. I think one of them was very friendly with my aunt's daughter and they came up and they with us for a week and we went up to London then. I can remember we went up to St Paul's Dome and this soldier carried me up because the stairs were quite, you know, narrow and twisty. But there was a raid on the way up there. We were in a, not in a car, a tram⁵ or something and he, the American, was in the medical corps and he wanted to get out and help. Because I think also there was some sort of road accident. But we said, you know, he better not. That was the only time I can remember going into London, you know, while the war was still on.

Interviewer: Did you experience a lot of bombing around the area where you lived?

Pat: Well, yes, sort of houses and some schools were hit very badly. There was a Lewisham school were a lot of, you know, it was in the daytime and a lot of children were killed. We had these, sort of, few months away in Gloucestershire from time to time.

Interviewer: Were you in school then or?

⁵ 25 mi

Pat: Yes. Oh, yes, I was, um. I think I went to a different school. The school that's now the Blackheath and Bluecoat was once a small primary school so I think we went back there. Oh, and then we used to go down and have school dinners at something that was called Sunfields, but it's now a church, in Old Dover Road, just up from the Standard. I remember finding a caterpillar on the cabbage there and that stuck in my mind.

Interviewer: What kind of periods were you in Gloucestershire?

Pat: Oh, we were there, I remember, we were there must have been over a Christmas, or a winter because it, but just matter of – [pause]. Oh, I did go to school there. Yes, because I took my eleven plus when I was going to the village school in Gloucestershire. So we must – yes, because my mother had got a little, some rooms in a little house with a very nice couple just out of the town. Yes, I enjoyed, loved, the school. It was a church school but it was, you know, it was very nice. There were three of us from London and we all sat and took our eleven plus exams there. I can remember the date to this day. It was the 2 March [laughs]. Yes, that was nice. I would like to have stayed down there actually and if possible have gone to the grammar school because it was quite a historic one. I had made friends there, you know. I haven't been back there for years now but I loved it around there. We used to sort of run free up in the hills. It was just the edge of the Cotswolds and it was lovely. I mean, terrible thought, but I often think I probably had a more interesting childhood because of the war than if I would have been in London all the time. I certainly got, you know, I like being in the country and I like walking 'cos that's what you had to do in those days. Whether it's, you know, because of that I don't know. But it was – it was nice when you knew the war had ended.

Interviewer: Do you think the war and kind of having been evacuated to, first to Devon and then going with your mum to Gloucestershire, do you think that that's affected your education at all? Kind of studying at so many different schools?

Pat: Yes, I suppose I did. My mother counted up, yes, she counted up that, not all different schools, but I changed schools about eleven times during that time. [Pause] No, it was nice, I think possibly it – if I was anywhere, you know, if I went away on my own – because at one point – oh, I know. I think it was in my first year at secondary school. All the family got flu and I think our doctor said I should go to sort of a convalescent place by the sea and I was there. I was quite happy the but then though I was coming home but my mother was in hospital, my mother was in hospital for some reason, and I couldn't actually go home. I got to the station⁶ in London and my father met me and I thought I was going straight home but because there was nobody to look after me at home. Father's didn't take time off then. I went down to this place in Newbury with a lady who, sort of, foster children for a while. But I was homesick I kept writing to my aunt who was living with us in London and she eventually, after, I don't know if I was there a week or two. But I was just so unhappy that she came, they arranged, I suppose, she came down and took me back home. I'm always happy to get home, I suppose most people are but –. I think it gave on a certain sense of insecurity. I don't know if you had people say

⁶ 30 min

that, you know, when you've been interviewing because to be whisked out from your surroundings and your parents at quite young age. I don't think I could have done it if I had children. I think the propaganda about it was very intense and people just – and also in those days authority, you know, people didn't go against any orders like that and I think they wanted children out of London. So yeah.

Interviewer: Do you know if your mother had, when she had your brother, do you know if she was offered any other kind of evacuation to go to be evacuated as part of a government scheme?

Pat: No, I don't think so. As far as I know, you know, everybody did their own thing. We must have had a spell, could he have been two? And I would have been in school down there possibly not for a whole year. Yes, when he was about two so that would have brought us up to '44 and I think we then came back to London and stayed there. Then the war ended in '45. Then we were in London for all these horrible doodlebugs o flying bombs that they sent over. We used to play in the garden. We had a, well, we had a rented house, the sort of kitchen where we mostly lived or a big sort of dining room with a stove there was a window on the level with the ground outside ad we used to go in and out of the garden. Every time you heard something coming we'd dive into the house. Things seemed to get quite normal after the end of everything and we just carried on.

Interviewer: Can you remember the end of the war?

Pat: Yes, some people went up to town but we didn't go to, sort of, join in the flag waving and everything. Yes, I do remember. It was only the end of the war in Europe it wasn't the end of the war in Japan. Then, sort of, life settled down.

Interviewer: Do you remember felt kind of in the end of at the war? 'Cos you were so young when the war started.

Pat: I think very relieved that you wouldn't be hopping off away and staying in different places. Yes, it certainly wasn't a normal childhood but then, you know, in Europe they had a much worse time, sort of occupation, and things.

Interviewer: Had your father – was he based in London during the war?

Pat: No, he travelled around to these airfields. Oh, and he met some of the film stars. I think Clarke Gable was with the American forces and he'd seen him. I can't remember anybody else. No, he was travelling around all the time. After the war he – the American companies wanted people to work on oil installations in the Middle East and he had, oh, he went to Kuwait⁷ and then Bahrain. Then he went to West Africa for a while but he picked up some sort of nasty skin disease and then he came back and eventually it did clear. But that was the end of that. Then he worked in London, sort of, in building and I think it's quantity surveying of, you know, materials and things.

Interviewer: So what was his occupation before the war?

⁷ 35 min

Interviewer: Sort of estimating quantities for buildings. I think he enjoyed being out in the desert when they were doing these installations for the oil pipes. It was the oil pipeline that he was working on. They had a snippet in a local paper, I suppose produced by the oil company. If they had bottles of beer they'd put them deep in the sand to keep them cool. Because my mother as a – she went to America to be a nanny for about eighteen months to two years and he'd never travelled, you know. So when these jobs came up abroad she said she wouldn't stand in his way and off he went. She'd worked in France as a nanny and also she also looked after some American people's children, just a little girl, when they went to the theatre one night. She'd got on so well with the child that they'd asked her if she'd go back with them and I think she stayed there about eighteen months. We always kept in contact. I'm still in contact with them so. That's all a bit rambling but [laughs].

Interviewer: So if you were to summarize your experience of evacuation?

Pat: Well, I think, you know, there was some good in that, you know, I enjoy the countryside and I'm, you know, sort of. But then, you know, the other side, you haven't got the continuity of a, sort of, family life. But then it seems normal because you don't, I think, as a child, you don't question things too much. I can't imagine – possibly things would have gone differently, I don't know.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you – kind of any other kind of experiences that you –

Pat: No, I can really think of anything else which has any bearing on the experience. Well, I used to do some voluntary work at a local school and, you know, the schools had a thing about evacuation and the war etcetera. So I took in this photograph, you see, I was able to, sort of, you know, that was the second farm that I was at.

Interviewer: So which farm was this at? Where you evacuated to two farms?

Pat: Well, when there were three lots of mothers in this first farm house. I mean, I didn't really have any say in it. She thought things were getting a bit difficult with three women so I think she arranged for me to go to this other farm which was – they were more sort of gentlemen farmers. They had land and they obviously owned it and they used to take me to church on Sundays. Oh yes, before that I think, I don't know if I went to the chapel or the other one. But there were two women, two daughters, who weren't married and they were – one would tell me to do one thing and one would say no don't do that. It was a bit confusing. The parents were very nice. I used to ride in the tractor with the father and he was very nice. But I was on my own, you know, so it was –

Interviewer: So was this just before your mum came to –

Pat: Yes, she left me there and then she, I think she came back and I think my father came down. I'm not sure whether he took the photograph or who took it.

Interviewer: It's a lovely photograph.

Pat: In the orchard, that's my mother holding the cart up and the other woman is the girl's mother I was with. I can't remember who the boys are; whether they were children of the daughter at the house. It might have been but that I don't remember. But it was a wonderful orchard, you know, where you could play and I enjoyed that.

End of Interview.