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- * Transcript ID: IL-95-207AT001
- * CCINTB Transcript ID: 95-207-10a-av, 95-207-11a-y
- * Tapes: IL-95-207OT001, IL-95-207OT002
- * CCINTB Tapes ID: T95-97, T95-98
- * Length: 01:29:43
- * Harrow, Middlesex, 21 July 1995: Valentina Bold interviews Irene and Bernard Letchet
- * Transcribed by Joan Simpson/ Standardised by Annette Kuhn
- * IL=Irene Letchet, BL=Bernard Letchet, VB=Valentina Bold
- * Notes: First of two interviews with Irene and Bernard Letchet; Sound Quality: Good.

[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[tape introduction by Valentina Bold]

VB: The other thing I was wondering about, erm, is if you would mind if I maybe asked you one or two questions about your own lives. Just so we can get....

IL: No. Yes. [laughs]

VB: Eh, nothing too desperately personal. [laughs] But eh, it's just really so we can get an idea of erm, you know, people's backgrounds.

IL: Yes! Yes.

BL: Oh yes, yes. Fine.

VB: Right. So I've got a sort of official form. [laughs] I'll get that out the way just now. Erm. [rustling] Right erm... So I know a few things about yourself after talking on the phone. Erm, you were born in 1925, is that right?

IL: 1923.

VB: 1923. I'm glad I checked that.

IL: Yes.

VB: Got that wrong. And you... were you born in Islington? Is that right?

IL: Yes. Yes. Yes.

VB: Right. Erm, can I ask what sort of work your father did?

IL: Yes. He worked for the Post Office.

VB: That's great.

IL: Yes. He started as a sorter and finished as a chief inspector. No. He started as a messenger boy, didn't he?

BL: Yes. That's right.

VB: And erm... did your mother work?

IL: Before she was married she was a dressmaker.

VB: Right. And then did she raise family after that?

IL: Eh, yes. Yes.

VB: That's great. And do you have sisters? Brothers?

IL: No. I'm an only, the only child.

VB: Ah! That's like me. I'm an only child too! [laughs] Erm, and can I ask what year you were married in?

IL: Yes. 1952.

VB: 1952. And can I ask what sort of work you've done?

BL: I was doing accounts work.

VB: That's great.

BL: Credit control.

VB: And do you have a family yourself?

IL: Yes. We have two sons.

VB: That's great.

BL: And five grandchildren.

IL: [laughs]

VB: Five grandchildren! [laughs] And the other thing I wanted to ask was if you had any strong political views iff any, if you're a member of a party or...

IL: No. Not really. I used to be stronger [laughs] than I am now!

VB: Yes. So, I mean you wouldn't describe yourself as strongly political or--

BL: No.

IL: No.

VB: That's great. Erm, and can I ask--

BL: Uhuh.

VB: You one or two questions as well? Erm, can I ask what your first name is?

BL: Bernard.

VB: That's great.

BL: Hulme. The Scottish side.

VB: Ah! And can I ask where you were born?

BL: In Finchley.

VB: That's great. And can I ask what your father did?

BL: Accountant.

VB: Ah. So that obviously runs in the family then?

BL: That's right! [laughs] My second son is one too.

VB: Ah! That's interesting. Erm, and did your mother work?

BL: Eh, no, not really. She did sort of erm, her father was in erm a pearl and diamond firm in Hatton Garden.

VB: Mhm.

BL: I think she used to go down occasionally to string pearls. But, you know, it wasn't really work.

VB: Ah I see. Erm, and do you have sisters and brothers?

BL: Yes. I've got one sister.

VB: Yes. Erm, and can I ask how old you were when you left school?

BL: Seventeen.

VB: That's great. Erm, and have you been an accountant all your life?

BL: Eh, no. I started in erm, I started in Foyles the bookshop.

VB: Ah!

BL: Which was very interesting but very underpaid. Then I went to the city. And eh, sort of order clerk I think then. When we were married. Then I went into Corley's and started the accounting and specialised in credit.

VB: I see. Right.

BL: And then it carried on from there.

VB: That's great. Erm, and can I ask where you've lived? Have you always lived in London?

BL: Yes. Yes. Finchley obviously to begin with. Then we were married and went to Edgware.

VB: Ah I see.

IL: Harrow.

BL: Oh Yes! We did. We came here for a while, didn't we? Yes. That's right. Harrow. And then, then we stayed the longest in Edgware. And then we retired and came here.

VB: That's great. That was all I wanted to ask.

IL: [laughs]

VB: Erm, so it's interesting actually that you both come from sort of different areas, 'cause that's--

BL: Not far apart.

VB: Not far apart, no.

IL: Well, we... we--

BL: Oh, I see, yes. Well Islington is a fair way, but we moved up

IL: When I was about eleven--

VB: Yes.

IL: We moved up to Edgware, which is... I met Bernard, you see, because his sister and I, erm, were in the Wrens together.

VB: Ah I see.

IL: That's how we--

BL: We met on leave. Very romantic.

VB: Ah I see.

BL: And eh... [pause 2 seconds] we waited a while, didn't we? Before we got married. Saving up.

IL: Mhm.

BL: [laughs] [You have to?] Is that working by the way?

VB: Yes. That's fine.

BL: Oh, good.

VB: It should pick up everything. No problem. I know, it's amazing. They're very good.

BL: Mhm.

VB: Erm, A mean the first thing I really wanted to ask you about was how often you attended the cinema as a child. 'Cause I know you were saying you went eh, at a very early age.

IL: I did. Yes. Mum and dad [pause 2 seconds] you know, they went every, I can't, I suppose it must've been Saturday or Friday. As long as dad wasn't working--

VB: Mhm.

IL: 'Cause he was always working shift work, you know. But erm, I mean we went once a week. It was the regular thing. [laughs] You know.

BL: Yes. There was a gap. My first, my first [inaudible] my first film I think I was about nine. And was taken to see Jackie Coogan in *The Kid*, of which I can't remember a thing. But the other films, *The Congress Dances*, which you've probably never heard of. My mother was horrified because it was girls dancing on a stage! You see.

VB: [laughs]

BL: And she thought that was dreadful! But eh, I can't remember a thing about--

IL: Oh I can remember that. Lilian Harvey was in it.

BL: Oh was she!

IL: Yes, [laughs] which is... [inaudible]

BL: I didn't care much for *The Kid*. That was supposed to be funny, you know. But it probably was to adults. But really, you know, I was just interested in the cinema, having never been there before. And then there seemed to be a gap, I can't remember. Started to go regularly with Mary, my sister, every Saturday from when I was about thirteen, I suppose. Something like that.

IL: Well I don't know when I started but I can remember various films I saw. One of which was Bebe Daniels [laughs] and Ben Lyon in erm, what was it?

BL: *Hell's Angels*.

IL: *Hell's Angels*! [laughs]

BL: The first time round.

IL: Yes. The first time round. And I can still remember the plane crash where he sort of came down and crashed, you know. I think it must've been on the Western Front or something.

VB: A-ah.

IL: The film was about the First World War, you know. So I can't reme... and the other thing that I think I've said to you before I definitely remember, was the *King of Jazz*. Because at one point there was a colour bit in it. But I don't think I could have been very old because I definitely remember going one time and being absolutely petrified by something I saw. And I can still see this thing now. And it was... it was in a sort of laboratory and a horrible sort of creature came out of the wall. Now I don't think it was a horror film 'cause everybody was in fits of laughter.

BL: [laughs] Yes.

IL: D'you know, I was frightened to go to bed for weeks after that in case this thing [amused voice] came out of the wall. So I don't think I could've been very old.

VB: Mhm.

IL: 'Cause I couldn't--

BL: *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* was it?

IL: Goodness. I don't know. Don't know what it was. But anyway, it was horrifying.

VB: It must've been very real to you.

IL: Oh it was. Yes. Yes.

BL: Oh I think they were. You entered right into the film, you know. I used to see a lot of erm, Fred Astaire. And on the way home we used to dance along the pavement. [laughs] My sister'd say "Stop it!" - she was older than me. [laughing] But you know, you really got into it. Didn't you?

IL: Yes. Well then when we moved up to Edgware, I was eleven and nearly twelve. And for about a year we went regularly to what's called Saturday morning pictures. And that was a sort of erm, it was always a western. And there must've been a cartoon, I suppose or something. But the noise was deafening! Because everybody screamed the whole time through it, you know. And eh, it was threepence downstairs and fourpence up. But it was advisable to go in the gallery because people threw things down. [laughing] So if you were down below, you got... [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

IL: After about a year I think I was a bit too sophisticated [laughing] for that.

VB: [laughs]

IL: And I used to go with, with friends. And we went regularly every Saturday afternoon.

BL: Mhm.

IL: And it was only ninepence to get in, you see, if you went and sat right in the front. Go in, very early, soon as the place opened, go in there. Well if it wasn't too full you could [laughs] keep nipping back a few rows, you see.

VB: [laughs]

IL: And I know, my school friend and I, Iris, we used to stay. [pause 2 seconds] We saw everything twice.

BL: A good four hours.

IL: Yes! Used to come out, well, hunger drove us out in the end, you know.

VB: [laughs]

IL: We'd been there so long. But it was definite thing that you went every week.

BL: Mhm.

IL: And of course there were more cinemas then, you see. In Burnt Oak, there were three. I don't think there are any now. So you had a choice.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: I mean you were a little bit erm, eh sort of eh, choosy. Because, I mean, now Iris had to see everything with Clark Gable in. You did, you went to see your favourite film star. Because they were all the same, you kn... I mean, Clark Gable was always Clark Gable, no matter what film he was in.

VB: [laughs]

IL: And Spencer Tracy was always Spencer Tracy. Or... or the other ones, you know. So that it was, it was a regular thing.

BL: Yes. [it was a real following?]

IL: And people didn't go in at the beginning, you know.

BL: Oh no, you just went in, didn't you?

IL: People would come in say, in the, you know, we'd go to the pictures or something. Get there at six o'clock. Never mind. There was a regular... people coming in and out saying, you could hear people saying, "Oh this is where we came in."

VB: [laughs]

BL: Yes, that was quite a regular thing. When they started to say the show would start at so and so. Doors would open. You know, you weren't really expected to go in, it was quite a change--

IL: The first film that was [with?] was when *Gone with the Wind* was on.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: 'Cause I went with Iris there. And that was a four-hour, you know, it took four hours. And you had to be there. You couldn't sit through it [laughs] twice. [bursts out laughing]

VB: [laughs]

IL: But I definitely remember there. And it was sort of considered quite strange. You had to leave. You had to get there at the film, when it started and get out when it finished.

VB: A-ah.

BL: Mhm. Otherwise, you just turned up. Oh yes. [pause 2 seconds] I remember the New Bohemia in eh, Finchley Central was a, well it wasn't exactly a free picture but it was getting that way. And the front row, the screen was about, you looked up like this [demonstrates] and there were [laughs] immense faces.

VB: [laughs]

IL: Yes. You could get a terrible headache.

BL: You moved back as soon as you could.

IL: But I suppose then I, [pause 2 seconds] getting back to the, you know, chronological thing. I really went regularly from, what shall we say, '36 to the outbreak of war really.

VB: Mhm.

BL: Mhm.

IL: I mean, it was rather [pause 2 seconds] sort of curtailed, really.

[both talking together]

IL: And then of course when the Blitz came--

BL: The sirens. Nobody liked you going out.

VB: Mhm.

IL: Well, no. That's it.

BL: Just in case, you know.

IL: And it sort of tailed off.

BL: Mhm.

IL: But I used to go with erm, a friend in the Wrens. She and I liked the old musicals, you know. Betty Grable and that. And she and I used to go. Nobbie Clark.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: She and I would go. But we'd rather sort of, [pause 2 seconds] I think in a way, we got out of the habit.

BL: Oh that, yes.

IL: You know. It sounds silly to say that.

BL: That's why the erm, the erm... [pause 2 seconds] What do you call it? The run in for next week.

IL: Oh the trailers.

BL: The trailers.

IL: Oh yes, that's right. Yes.

BL: To keep you interested.

IL: Yes.

BL: Oh yes. Of course you could get out of the way. If you went on holiday or something, you didn't always click back immediately.

IL: Yes. It must've been a habit. Oh, yes. And so you had the main film. And then the B feature. And a cartoon. And the news.

BL: Mhm.

IL: 'Cause I had a friend who said, "I only ever go for the news." [laughs] Which I used to think--

BL: Well there were news theatres or cinemas--

IL: Oh yes.

BL: Jolly good news theatres.

IL: Yes. They were just news.

BL: Mhm. There was small theatres. There was one in Picadilly Circus. One on Tottenham Court Road. On the corner, I think [probably referring to Sphere News Theatre, 28 Tottenham Court Road, W1 1BT]. And you went in and the whole thing lasted about, oh, half an hour, an hour at the most. You had news flashes which were the up-to-date, not the same as nowadays. But they really were pretty up to date. And then you had a cartoon, didn't you?

IL: I don't know, I never went--

BL: Oh! Didn't you? Oh.

IL: No. No.

BL: Oh yes. And eh, and that was that. You know. I don't think you paid as much.

VB: Mhm.

BL: But, that shows how interested people were with the news. As my father was on the radio. Listening to the news broadcast-- [laughs]

IL: Well in the war. That was what everybody did, didn't they?

BL: Yes.

IL: Expecting some cataclysmic event.

BL: Mhm.

IL: Mhm. Erm, I can't think of anything else to say! [laughs]

VB: I was wondering about what the cinemas were like, erm, where you both lived.

BL: Oh.

VB: I mean, you mentioned one that was a bit of a fleapit eh--

BL: Yeah. The fleapit was down in Highgate. It was called the Electric Palace. And it really was. My friend lived not very far from it. And we went once and you really felt as though you might be getting... [laughs] You know. It was very old seats and everything else. Erm, the New Bohemia which I spoke of, wasn't, wasn't like that all. It was perfectly clean. But it was small.

VB: Mhm.

BL: Eh, but then we had the grand ones, didn't we? The Odeons.

IL: Yes.

BL: And the Granada. The Granada at Tally Ho [referring to Tally Ho Corner, London, N12 9PT] was beautiful. And there was another down Holloway Road. [probably referring to the Holloway Gaumont] There was a huge one built, just before the war. And they were magnificent, you know. Like palaces. Huge entrance halls. Carpeted, where, you know, in those days, you would probably have a carpet square, with lino around it. But these were carpeted wall to wall.

IL: And I can remember, when I went to the Savoy [probably referring to Savoy, Burnt Oak], you felt you were sinking down--

BL: Yes.

IL: Ankle-deep. I'd never been on such a soft carpet.

BL: And the seats were very comfortable.

IL: That was what I was just thinking about. They were a bit garish, really, you know. Very much art deco, weren't they?

BL: Yes. Yes.

IL: You know, it was a proper sort of Hollywood erm, decoration. You know.

BL: Yes. Yes.

IL: But I mean now the Gaumont State in Kilburn was a huge place. I mean if you were up in the eh--

BL: Gods.

IL: You never got, well--

BL: The upper gallery I suppose.

IL: The back of the upper gallery. The screen was really quite small.

BL: That's right. Like the [stall?] at Kingsway.

IL: Yes. That's right. Yes. Mhm.

BL: And it's probably still the Dominion in Tottenham Court Road [possibly referring to the Dominion Theatre]. The [rack?] was so strong, you sat here and the head was there, of the next person. And you felt you were going to go right over. That--

IL: [laughs] But it was much, of course, people's homes, as Bernard was saying, you know, I mean, homes now are quite luxurious to what they were. You said a carpet square but you'd have the carpet square in the parlour, wouldn't you? I mean the ordinary dining room was usually just lino.

BL: No, we had a carpet in both. But we had lino in say, the hall and the kitchen.

IL: Oh I think we had it in the--

BL: In the bathroom.

IL: Well in Islington, we only had a carpet in the parlour.

BL: In my bedroom...

IL: Lino. Everywhere.

BL: I think Mary had a, had a rug in hers. Mum and dad had a rug in their bedroom. I didn't. [laughs]
[Not sure that meant too much?]

IL: But I mean, they were... [BL and IL talking at same time] quite luxurious places to go really.

BL: Do you know, it certainly wasn't carpeted all over.

IL: You know, for the ordinary person.

VB: Mhm.

BL: Yeah.

IL: You might say.

BL: Mhm.

IL: And of course, what you saw in there from American life was... seemed to be much more luxurious.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: Obviously, not everybody in America. We know that--

BL: Lived like that--

IL: Lived like that. As a lot of GI brides found out when they went back, you know, thinking they were going to go to the place they'd seen on the films and they turned up in a sort of shack in West Virginia or somewhere, you know. But the lifestyle as given in, unless you went to something sort of [pause 2 seconds] eh, you know, very erm, kitchen sink, down-to-earth film, but the ordinary one--

BL: There weren't many of those.

IL: No. There weren't really. 'Cause people would like to be entertained.

BL: Most films were nice, weren't they?

IL: Yes.

BL: Entertaining. And you felt happy when you came out and it was a good experience, you know.

IL: I suppose the cinema sort of went... [pause 2 seconds] It was a bit of a... sort of make-believe world.

BL: Oh absolutely.

IL: The cinema itself. Apart from the films.

BL: It was an escape.

IL: You know. Yes it was an escape.

BL: Another. Did you ever go to the Astoria at Finsbury Park?

IL: No.

BL: That was magnificent. It was [laughs] done like a Moorish palace. Inside. They had like, boxes. Not that people went in them. But they were like oriole windows. All picked out in gold. And the entire ceiling was the sky with golden stars on it.

VB: [gasps]

BL: They used to have erm, pantomimes there sometimes too. But as a cinema. [pause 2 seconds] And these huge curtains that swept open.

IL: Oh that's right.

BL: It was really... [voice filled with awe] you know. It was sort of heavenly luxurious.

IL: Well of course, some had the organ too.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: That came up in the interval. And the man played. And all this business.

BL: Mhm.

IL: [laughs]

BL: Oh yes. Well that was quite a big ev... And, unusual thing, when I was in the Army and went occasionally up in Yorkshire, they had brass bands. Instead of an organ.

IL: [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BL: Oh yes. The curtains would open and there was a full-size stage at the back. And there would be the brass band. And it was quite well-known that eh, the Northerners. I don't know about in Scotland. Erm, 'cause you don't go in for band music up there, do you?

IL: Bagpipes. [whispering]

VB: Erm, yeah the pipes. Not so much the brass band. [laughs] Yeah.

IL: Well another thing I remember that some... When Mary and I were stationed in Woodford Green, we went into Walthamstow to see *The Man in Grey*. We never saw the end of it 'cause we didn't have a late pass and we had to be back by ten. And, blow me down, halfway through the film they stopped and had a talent evening!

VB: Aw dear.

IL: They came on and did these terrible turns, you see. So then, by the time the film started, we had to leave! We had to get the bus back!

BL: Yeah.

IL: So that erm, in some places they sort of had this on a Friday night.

BL: Mhm. That's right. I'd forgotten that.

IL: [laughs] There'd be a riot if you had that sort of thing now.

BL: Mary and I, we had to leave. On a, it was always a Saturday and we always went to our grandparents. For tea. Tea was five o'clock. Not one second before, one second after. So we had to leave the cinema, for about a ten-minute walk to get there. So whatever, we just missed the end of the film, you see. But, I don't know, you sort of accepted that. Nowadays--

IL: Well they wouldn't do it, would they?

BL: No. No.

VB: I mean, did you talk about films much with your friends and sister?

BL: Oh! Oh yes!

IL: Yes!

BL: If, if there was, no. Mary and I didn't share the same, the same sort of--

VB: Mhm.

BL: She loved Robert Donat and those sort of films. I liked eh, dancing and, you know, jolly films. But we used to talk at school and that with other people who also liked them. You did.

IL: Oh yes! Because I had two friends--

BL: With Iris--

IL: Who were absolutely mad. We all had, you know, the magazines the 'Picturegoer' and all this sort of thing. And read these avidly. And collected postcards of your favourite stars. You know. This sort of thing. And I remember, one particular [laughs] girl. Used to write to America--

VB: [gasps]

IL: To the studios to get these things, you see. And I can remember my friend's mother saying to her, "I don't know where she gets the money!" [laughs]. "For the postage!"

VB: [laughs]

IL: And I can remember saying, "Well it's only tuppence." Or whatever it was. "Mrs Gardiner." And she said [laughing], "Every tuppence counts!"

BL: [laughs]

IL: [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

IL: Then, I know she wrote to Errol Flynn. And she got back a thing giving a price list. [laughs] She didn't like him any more!

BL: [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

IL: But I mean, oh yes! And under the desk lid, you had your favourite film star.

BL: In school. Mhm.

IL: Pinned. You know. Oh. That was the first man sort of man [laughs] you fell in love with.

BL: Yes.

IL: A film star. [laughs]

VB: A-ah.

BL: I had a great crush on Carole Lombard. And I used to see her films. And eh, I realised an ambition. We went over to America, over to the West Coast. And eh, we went through Hollywood. And there on one of the pavement things [laughs] was Carole Lombard's name! You know. Oh-h yes.

IL: And a sleazy place Hollywood is too [laughs] now.

BL: Oh yes.

VB: Aw.

BL: Oh yes. Horrible place.

VB: Ah.

BL: Well, it's all right up through Beverly Hills and Aire Drive part [possibly referring to Bel Aire or Rodeo Drive]. But, you know. It's the Hollywood Boulevard that we always used to think was--

IL: Yes. Well one of the men in the party said, "Well I've waited all my life to [laughs] see Hollywood Boulevard but I didn't think it was going to be like this!"

BL: No.

IL: [laughs]

VB: Aw dear. I mean did you have a Carole Lombard equivalent? Did you have a favourite?

IL: Eh, I must say, I like Clark Gable.

VB: Mhm.

IL: Yes. Yes.

BL: I didn't like him, erm--

VB: What was it about Clark Gable that appealed to you?

IL: I don't know. I don't know what, I don't know what it was really. I suppose he was quite macho wasn't he? [pause 3 seconds] Yes. I don't really know.

BL: Ruth Hussey was another one I liked very much. She was always in the films where the living room of the apartment was the size of the garden, you know.

VB: Ah. [laughs]

IL: [laughs]

BL: Yes. And eh, Charlotte Green or Green somebody. [referring to Charlotte Greenwood] She used to be in those films with eh, Frank Pangborn [referring to Franklin Pangborn].

IL: Oh they were the bit part players, weren't they?

BL: Yeah. That's right.

IL: But there again, the bit parts--

BL: You'd see them, time and time again.

IL: Were always the same. You know they had their sort of, Mischa Auer was always a mad Russian, wasn't he?

BL: Or erm, or a head waiter. He used to do.

IL: Oh that's right. Yes.

BL: Mhm.

IL: But he was a bit mad in all of them.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: Franklin Pangborn was the maître d'hôtel.

BL: Mhm.

IL: Brian Donlevy was the heavy in the westerns.

BL: Yeah. [laughs] That's right.

VB: [laughs]

BL: Yes.

[pause 2 seconds]

IL: Yes it's erm... [pause 2 seconds] But they were always the same weren't they?

BL: Well, yes, that was their role.

IL: Yes.

VB: It's interesting that. It sounds almost like you knew what to expect, if you--

IL: Oh you did! Ye-es.

BL: Oh yes!

IL: Oh yes, you did! Yes. I mean--

[BL and IL talking at once]

BL: [It was just?] served in a different way really.

IL: Yes.

BL: Wasn't it? The stories were always finished off nicely. And eh--

IL: I mean you'd never expect Clark Gable to be a villain. I mean he might've been a bit of a villain.

VB: Aye.

IL: Like *Gone with the Wind*, you know. But not, not an out-and-out dyed-in-the-wool villain.

BL: No. No.

IL: I suppose there must've been some who, who sort of really acted. [pause 2 seconds] Can't think of any though. Basil Rathbone was always a sort of erm sinister sort of--

VB: Mhm.

BL: Yes--

IL: Creature, wasn't he?

BL: The Barrymores. Eh... [pause 3 seconds]

IL: I can't think of anyone who... [pause 3 seconds]

BL: Well, I can't think of names of films.

IL: Ah yes. Spencer Tracy was supposed to be a marvellous actor. But he always sort of played the same sort of parts.

BL: Oh yes. Yes. [pause 2 seconds] Now.

IL: Yes, and you didn't go to have your, you know, have your ideas [laughs] turned upside down.

VB: Mhm.

IL: You just went so... purely as an entertainment.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: Really.

BL: That's why we don't go at all now. There doesn't seem to be anything entertaining--

VB: Mhm.

BL: On the cinema. You go to the art galleries quite a bit but eh. [pause 2 seconds] And I just eh, listen to music. I, you know, we've lost the thought of the cinema altogether.

IL: And of course, another thing, I think, you know, the entertainment is in the home now. You know, with the television, isn't it?

BL: Mhm.

IL: You haven't got to erm, you haven't got to go out for your entertainment really--

VB: Mhm.

IL: Unless you're a very keen theatregoer or something like that.

BL: And of course, being in London, you're a bit dubious about going to town in the evenings.

VB: Mhm.

BL: And even round here, you know. Like Harrow St Ann's [shopping centre]. They have muggings going on so--

VB: Really.

BL: You know, you don't really feel [pause 2 seconds] that you want to go out.

IL: But I think mainly, I think mainly we got out of the habit.

VB: Mhm.

BL: Mhm. [pause 2 seconds] And it wasn't too dear. Nobody was rolling in money in those days. [pause 2 seconds] One and six I think was the front circle. At one time. That was the luxurious seat. Otherwise it was ninepence, a shilling--

IL: One and threepence.

BL: One and three. Yes. And you queued up [pause 2 seconds] for the more popular films.

IL: Mhm.

BL: They had special little stands with the price on.

IL: One and nine.

BL: The commissionaire. All dressed up. Like a general in the forces. Would eh, line you all up. And then they'd call out, "Three for one and threes!" Or, you know. [laughs] And get you to move forward.

IL: That's right. Yes.

BL: And of course, that meant you went in in the middle of whatever was going on! Just when there was space.

IL: That's right! Didn't have any choice! [laughs] That's right, yes! Well that's when somebody was coming out from seeing it the first time round.

BL: That's right. Yes. [pause 2 seconds] And we didn't eat as much as they seem to nowadays. There used... I don't remember sweet kiosks. There used to be the girl come round with ices.

IL: Sweets on the Saturday morning pictures! Everyone went in with a great bagful! [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BL: But, you know, nowadays where they sell popcorn, all this sort of stuff, I don't remember that at all. [pause 3 seconds]

IL: Well I, no. No I can't remember. Well I think we were just given the money to go in.

BL: Exactly yes.

IL: We didn't have anything extra, did we, really? But now, there's all sorts of merchandising as they say, isn't there?

BL: Mhm.

IL: You know, T-shirts. And colouring books. You know, for *Jurassic Park*.

BL: CDs, tapes, everything.

IL: I think nowadays... the film companies, you know make--

BL: More money.

IL: it's quite, you know, a good proportion of their erm, profits, isn't it--

VB: Yeah.

IL: On the extraneous things like that?

VB: I mean was there much advertising?

BL: Well, the papers.

IL: Yes, local. Local. Erm, or what, when you were in the cinema itself you mean? Yes. They, you'd get local people sort of saying eh, you know, Blobbs the Butcher.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: That came in in the interval. When the lights came up and the ice-cream lady came round.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: This all came up on the erm--

BL: The screen, the smaller screen--

IL: On the screen. Like hairdressers--

VB: Yeah.

IL: Local people like that. And then outside advertising eh, you'd get sort of hoardings wouldn't you?

BL: Small posters and stands outside newsagents. Which you never see now.

IL: That's right. You don't see... No, no. That's right.

BL: And erm, yes, big hoardings.

IL: I don't know whether they were advertised in the local paper the way they do now.

BL: Yes they used to.

IL: I can't remember that.

BL: 'Course erm, when was it? Several, well several months back, there was, I can't even remember what it was. I thought, oh, I'll look it up in the paper and there was nothing in the paper at all about cinema. I mean not even printed. They used to have proper adverts with a picture of Clark Gable smiling, you know --

IL: Oh you do. Your local paper. Because Heather always looks up the 'Times' [referring to the 'Harrow Times']. 'Cause when we went to, the last time I went, I went with my daughter-in-law and granddaughter to see, oh I've forgotten what I went to see. Whatever was it? Not *The Secret Garden*. Tch! Oh dear, never mind. Doesn't matter what it was. And eh, she looked up then. And she always looks up the 'Times'.

VB: Mhm.

BL: Well it must be then.

IL: She said... Don't you remember? She said... You took us there in the car.

BL: Mhm.

IL: To the Harrow one.

BL: Oh Yes! That's right. Yes--

IL: It was *Little Women*.

BL: Because nowadays they put all the cinemas up into the little boxes.

VB: Yes.

BL: And there used to be just one large auditorium--

IL: Oh, have I seen all three of *Little Women* then? The first one with Katharine Hepburn--

VB: [gasps]

IL: And the second one [laughs] with June Allyson. And the third one with, I can't remember! [laughs]

VB: Which do you think was best?

IL: Ah, I still like the first one.

VB: Yeah.

IL: I think it was nearer the eh, nearer the book. The trouble is, you know, if you read the book before the film--

BL: Mhm.

IL: You're always disappointed.

VB: Yes.

BL: 'Cause you've got an idea in your mind--

IL: Yes.

BL: Of the person.

VB: Yeah.

BL: That's true.

VB: Do you think Katharine Hepburn was good in that part then?

IL: She was. She played Jo. And it was... well... But I mean, there again, it was typecasting to a certain extent, wasn't it? [pause 2 seconds] Yes, I was erm... [pause 3 seconds] It did, did follow more... more of the book I think. Definitely.

VB: Mhm.

IL: Except that I didn't think Laurie was right. He wasn't dark enough. It was Douglass Montgomery, was it? Yes.

VB: Mhm.

IL: And I didn't think he was. 'Cause Laurie was part-Italian, wasn't he? He didn't look dark enough to me.

VB: Yes. I know what you mean. 'Cause you build up these pictures of the characters from the book.

IL: You do. Yes.

VB: Never quite-- [laughs]

IL: No.

VB: Matches up to it--

IL: Now with *Gone with the Wind* I saw the film before I read the book.

VB: A-ah!

IL: So that was all right. [laughs] 'Cause when you read the book, you visualise who you'd see in the film, you know. And that kept quite to the storyline too. Sometimes they'd change [tape cuts out]

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

BL: Mary had a thing on erm, Robert Donat. And she saw *The Ghost Goes West* about four times. That one about five times. Oh, she would go during the week you see. Whilst it was on. I went once each time. Shall I put the kettle on?

IL: [inaudible]

VB: That would be lovely. Yes.

IL: Have you got any more to ask?

VB: Erm--

BL: Yes. We could carry on after coffee?

VB: That would be lovely. Yes.

IL: Coffee or tea?

BL: Coffee or--

VB: Erm--

BL: Tea? Or--

VB: Coffee would be great.

BL: Mhm.

IL: Will you make it?

BL: Yes.

IL: Or shall I?

BL: No.

IL: All right.

VB: That'll be lovely.

[pause 4 seconds]

IL: Oh gosh. Stroll down Memory Lane.

VB: Mhm. So when you said that about the newspaper adverts, I've... I managed to find some from the Harrow Library--

IL: Oh yes!

VB: Of the local cinemas here. Eh, I don't know. I mean some of these'll probably have been the same. Like the Odeons everywhere.

[BL whistling in background] [pause 3 seconds]

IL: [inaudible]. What year was this?

VB: Erm, I think they're sort of late thirties.

IL: Late thirties. Yes. Charles Boyer, certainly. Oh that was a serious one I think. *History is Made at Night*. I don't think I bothered to see that one. [pause 2 seconds] I was too, oh *Dawn Patrol*! Yes! Errol Flynn. That was a wartime one. [BL whistling in background] [pause 3 seconds] Yes! See these are the two. Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge *Take My Tip*. And then *Special Agent* would be the, the B picture. [pause 4 seconds] Oh yes. 1939. [pause 9 seconds] "Luxurious comfort and perfect

service” [reading]. The cinema at Rayners Lane, it's still there but it isn't a cinema [referring to the Grosvenor].

VB: Mhm.

IL: For ages it was all derelict. And then it was taken over and I think it's a sort of nightclub or something now. But erm. [BL whistling] Oh these are wartime ones, aren't they? *Ceiling Zero...* [pause 4 seconds] Ooh look! Prices for admission. Stalls, sixpence. Circle, a shilling. In the evening, sixpence and a shilling in the stalls and one and six in the circle. Oh Jessie Matthews! And Sonny Hale! In person. Gracie Fields! Oh! Gracious! [pause 8 seconds] [There's a piece?] when the Granada opened. That says [pause 3 seconds] “Proud to be open...” [laughing; amused voice] [inaudible] “to music played by the band of the Scots Guards. A fanfare of trumpets played by six of the guards and herald the rising of the curtain in the brief opening ceremony.” [What a scream?] Oh! The Dagenham Girl Pipers! “The skirl of distant pipers can be heard and into the auditorium march the Dagenham Girl Pipers band. Behind them Jessie Matthews and Sonny Hale who was, boisterous reception...” [pause 8 seconds] *The Show Goes On* starring Gracie Fields. [laughs] *Ready, Willing and Able* with Ruby Keeler and Ross Alexander. [pause 5 seconds] Oh yes. “The outstanding feature of the programme was the organ recital by Harry Farmer. [pause 2 seconds] The organ recitals were undoubtedly the attraction of Granada.” [pause 5 seconds] I wonder when was the Granada opened?

VB: I've a feeling it was about 1936.

IL: Oh! The wonder theatre of 1938.

VB: '38. Yeah.

IL: [pause approx 17 seconds] It said they showed films at the Coliseum at Harrow!

VB: Mhm.

IL: 'Cause that was a theatre there. I can remember going to erm, the theatre there... [pause 4 seconds] Oh the Embassy, North Harrow. Now where that used to be, I think that's Safeways now.

VB: Mhm.

[BL whistling in background]

VB: It's hard to eh, for me to visualise these 'cause they are, most of them are gone or changed use.

IL: Oh yes. That's right! Yes. Because um, I think, I mean the ones I used to go to when we were in Burnt Oak. But erm, one... don't know what it is now. I think it was an Iceland. It was the Sainsbury's Freezer Centre and then it was an Iceland. Then the Savoy's now a bingo club. And the one at Queensbury which had various names. One of them was the Essoldo. Is now a block of flats.

VB: Mhm.

IL: So there erm, I think the one at Edgware's still there. But erm, no, I mean everywhere, you know, wherever you lived, you had a choice of at least two cinemas that you could, erm--

VB: Mhm.

[BL comes into room with coffee]

BL: Now, do you take sugar?

VB: Eh, no I don't.

BL: Right.

VB: That's lovely, thanks.

BL: That's your one there.

VB: That's great. Thanks very much.

BL: Irene.

IL: Thank you.

BL: [I'll take this somewhere else so it's no temptation?] [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

[pause 4 seconds]

IL: [looking at book] Ooh! Cesar Romero. Yes, that's right. [pause 3 seconds]

BL: So. How far have we got?

IL: 'Course you liked the horror films. I didn't. I never went to see those.

BL: What horror films?

IL: Well you saw *Dracula*! [clock chimes]

BL: Oh! Yes. [pause 2 seconds] Ah yes! You know, it was in North Harrow.

IL: Yes. Now, isn't that where Safeways is now, [inaudible] where Safeways is now?

BL: That's right. Yes. [reading; inaudible] ...crusade. Loretta Young! Yes. What year was that? 1936. I was ten. Yes. [pause 3 seconds] Granada stationary...

IL: Read that, Bernard. Can you see that it's about... [chuckles] the opening of [pause 2 seconds] Granada. Which must've been 1938.

BL: Jessie Matthews!

IL: Ye-es!

BL: Ooh yes. Granada Cinema. [pause 2 seconds] That was, oh! Where the Granada is now.

IL: Oh yes.

BL: Oh yes, yes, yes.

IL: Yes.

[pause 3 seconds] With you saying about bands, when you get down you'll see further on... [pause 2 seconds]

VB: I heard that some of the Harrow ones had, had cafes in them.

BL: Oh yeah. Very nice.

IL: Oh! The Granada had a very nice cafe.

BL: Mhm.

IL: Because, when the boys were little, we used to go to Sopers which is now Debenhams. To see Father Christmas. This is when they were little. And then we always used to go the Granada for tea afterwards.

BL: Mhm.

IL: And that was on the eh, upstairs, wasn't it? In the big--

BL: Yes. In the front. That big window.

IL: That's right.

BL: Opposite.

IL: Yes.

BL: Very nice.

IL: Yes.

BL: Well they all had erm, well, it's not true to say they all had. Muswell Hill, the Odeon had, but the Ritz didn't. It was slightly smaller. And the Summerland [also know as the Muswell Hill Electric Theatre], which was an older and smaller one, that was just eh, an up-class fleapit [laughs] you know. Erm... [pause 2 seconds] There were quite a number. Of course in East Finchley they had the Rex, which specialised in films of about six months old. You could catch up on the film there.

IL: Did that have a restaurant?

BL: No, no. It was quite small. About the size of a shop.

IL: No. They were the bigger ones--

BL: Mhm.

IL: That had erm... [pause 3 seconds] I suppose the affluence of the area would affect it too.

BL: 'Course.

VB: Yeah.

BL: [reading] "The skirl of distant bagpipes!"

IL: Yes! [laughs]

BL: [laughs]. Ooh! The Dagenham Girl Pipers!

IL: [laughs]

[pause 3 seconds]

VB: Did you like Jessie Matthews?

BL: Ooh Yes! What was it? 'Greensleeves'? Or something. Green something.

VB: Oh *Evergreen*.

BL: *Evergreen!*

IL: *Evergreen!* [simultaneously] That's right. Yes.

BL: Yes. Yes.

IL: That's a film I saw, yes.

BL: Mhm. [There was eventually?] singing and dancing, so I liked that

IL: She finished up on the radio as Mrs Dale, didn't she? 'Mrs Dale's Diary'.

VB: I read that. Yes. [laughs]

IL: Yes.

BL: Gracie Fields. Ruby Keeler. The organ recital. Yes. [pause 2 seconds] [Mattie Verne?]

IL: Did a lot of stage work too though. Jessie Matthews. Like Cicely Courtneidge and Jack Hulbert. They were, did a lot of stage work as well as um, more stage work really than films.

VB: Ah I see.

BL: You see how they, how they, how they treated them. Like gods and goddesses almost, you know. They, they--

IL: Well they still do now, don't they? If you see--

BL: Oh did you know Jessie Matthews is erm, buried in Ruislip?

VB: No, I didn't.

BL: Yes! Like, Ruislip's got a very nice parish church. Just behind the shops. And the graveyard is round it and erm, very small little plaque there. 'Course, she died actually in, what's the name, the actors' place?

IL: Denville Hall.

BL: Denville Hall.

IL: In Northwood.

VB: A-ah.

BL: Which is in Northwood. Which erm, Laurence Olivier was erm... [pause 2 seconds] sort of—

IL: Patron.

BL: Patron of it, you know. And it's, it's definitely for old actors and film stars, you know.

VB: Right.

BL: So they were buried in Ruislip. Oh yes. I liked Jessie Matthews. She was ever so [posh voice] ever so, frightfully nice, you know. She used a terrible accent.

VB: [laughs]

IL: She came from the East End, didn't she? [Note: Jessie Matthews came from Soho, London]

BL: Yes. But she was... [pause 2 seconds] You know, she did jolly nice films.

IL: I mean I think she had the elocution, you know in excelsis! [laughs]

BL: Yes. Who's this person lurking? It's James Cagney!

IL: But they did have funny accents. If you, if you listen erm... [pause 2 seconds] Was it early in the war they had the Rank starlets. And they all spoke exactly the same.

BL: Oh yes!

IL: Didn't they, you know. "Oh, he-llow" [putting on posh accent]

VB: [laughs]

IL: That kind of accent.

BL: Petula Clark. She was one, wasn't she?

IL: Patricia Roc.

BL: Yes. [inaudible] Belmont Cinema, Belmont. That's Belmont Circle.

IL: Yes.

VB: I mean, did you notice a big difference between the English films and the American films?

IL: We certainly noticed a difference in the accents. Obviously.

VB: Yes.

IL: You know.

BL: Oh yes! It always took you quite a while to understand what they were saying!

IL: You sound like Mr [Worry?] who went to see *Oklahoma!* and said, "I didn't understand a word before the second act!" [laughs] But erm--

BL: [laughs] Charles Boyer.

IL: Well I think the English films aped the Americans to a certain extent. You know. But I mean, for example, you'd say the music was much less sophisticated. Because I mean, to be honest, Gracie Fields, when she first started--

BL: [laughs]

IL: I mean, it's a bit [pause 2 seconds] ludicrous really to, to erm, to sort of, I mean people like George Formby. I mean they were awful really, [laughs] you know.

BL: Yes. Yes.

IL: They really were awful! The films were ghastly! When you think of--

BL: 'Course they were quite happy sort of things, weren't they?

IL: They were soppy, to be honest.

BL: You didn't go to expect a Royal Shakespeare production.

IL: No. But if you went to see a musical you wanted to see something a bit slicker than, than--

BL: Oh! That was Betty Grable.

IL: 'Trouble at mill' sort of thing, didn't you?

BL: Oh yes, yes. But then you had Will Hay and those. They were very, all sort of church hall productions, weren't they?

IL: They've got quite a cult following now. If you look in the erm, the reviews. You know. Of the old Will Hay films. They get something about four stars. You know, which erm... But he was a funny man, I think.

BL: Oh yes. This explains, this explains what we were saying about the adverts in the paper.

VB: Mhm.

BL: And eh, you know, they were quite, it really hits you. As I suppose [inaudible].

VB: Yes. Well I mean, you can see the size of them as well.

BL: Oh yes! Oh yes.

IL: That's true. Yes.

VB: Yeah.

IL: That's true.

BL: You've got quite a collection for this area. My goodness! Where did you get those from? The Library?

VB: Well, yes. And the Civic Centre Library--

BL: Mhm. Yes.

VB: Eh, has a very good collection of eh--

IL: Newspaper--

VB: Newspaper clippings.

IL: Yes.

BL: Ah-h.

VB: Yes.

IL: They're pretty good down there.

BL: That's a very good library, yes.

VB: Yeah. Very good.

IL: They've got all sorts of things down there that you, you know, that aren't in the ordinary...

VB: Yeah.

IL: Like erm, records and things like that, you know.

BL: And maps. We were looking up the maps of the area.

IL: Yes. They've got an IGI there too [probably referring to the International Genealogical Index]

BL: Mhm. [pause 2 seconds] So!

IL: Any more questions?

VB: Well. I mean we've talked about eh, musicals and erm, and some of the English films. But I was wondering, did you like say, comedies? Did you have any favourite...?

IL: Ah.

BL: Ah, ye-es.

IL: Let me think.

BL: Now. Well Will Hay was one.

IL: Mhm.

BL: Erm, W.C. Fields I never found very funny. He was supposed to be a great comedian. Jimmy Durante.

IL: [inaudible] Oh! I loved Laurel and Hardy.

VB: Ah.

IL: I really loved them. Didn't like Charlie Chaplin. I didn't think he was terribly funny.

VB: I've got some stills with me actually as well. And one of them is Laurel and Hardy. [laughs] Right.

IL: Oh yes.

BL: Yes.

VB: What was it about them that you particularly liked? Is it--

IL: They were very innocent.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: And there wasn't anything [pause 1 second] unkind about them. I think Charlie Chaplin was rather unkind. Because although he was supposed to be the little man, he always came out on top. Really in the end, you know. And it was, they were terribly violent too, weren't they?

BL: Mhm.

IL: They were always sloshing each other about. Whereas these, used to sort of slap each other. But it wasn't sort of unkind. And some of the gags were very funny 'cause they were funny visually. You know.

BL: Mhm.

IL: It wasn't a verbal gag. It was a visual. Eh, one. [pause 2 seconds] But, and of course, they were so different, physically. That was funny in a way.

BL: Yes. And... their style...

IL: And eh, Oliver Hardy was sort of the knowing one. And Stan Laurel was, you know--

BL: [laughs]

IL: "Ooooooh!" [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

IL: But what I always remember about Oliver Hardy, he was ever so light on his feet. And, do you remember when they erm, 'Trail of the Lonesome Pine'? What is that song? Something Virginia, on the trail of the lonesome pine. And he used to dance to that. He used to be ever so light on his feet. Which again was a funny sort of thing really. But I think it was really the interplay of character.

BL: Mhm.

IL: And the sheer innocence of both of them, really.

BL: Very good situations. Very simple but funny ones, wasn't it. 'Cause I quite liked the Keystone Cops. But erm--

IL: Oh yes. They were funny--

BL: Did you? Ah! My sister didn't at all. I suppose I was about that age.

IL: They were very, very clever. There again, the gags were visual, weren't they? Really. These chases, where things exploded and all this sort of thing, you know.

BL: I liked Buster Keaton. He was terribly clever.

IL: Oh Harold Lloyd. I used to find him funny. He was the chap that wore a straw hat and--

BL: Horn-rimmed glasses.

IL: Horn-rimmed glasses. And he was the sort of archetypal innocent, wasn't he? Who got into all sorts of scrapes. Remember him hanging on to a clock?

BL: Yes. That's right.

IL: Over... [laughs]

BL: The clock face came down like this [hilarious laughter] and he was hanging on to it. That was very clever. He finished up owning half the land of Hollywood, didn't he? [inaudible]

IL: Oh! I love Bob Hope and Bing Crosby in the Road films.

BL: Oh ye-es!

IL: They were terribly funny, I think. And Bob Hope I think was very very funny in... Do you remember him with, in, was it with Jane Russell? In erm, tch! When they sang 'Buttons and Bows'. What was it? *The Paleface*.

BL: Mhm.

IL: Wasn't it? And then there was *Son of Paleface*. They were very very funny.

BL: I liked the Tarzan films.

VB: Mhm.

IL: They weren't supposed to be funny. [laughs]

BL: I wasn't thinking about that, I was just thinking generally. It's surprising how [laughs] how many films we saw. I mean we saw at least fifty films a year. But I mean you might've been away on holiday.

IL: That's true. But it was only for three years.

BL: Well, yes.

IL: That's a hundred and fifty plus your B feature ones.

BL: Plus your B features, yes. [pause 2 seconds] I liked the Walt Disney, the small cartoons.

VB: Ah.

BL: They were very beautifully done.

IL: Oh mind you! *Snow White* was a sort of a revelation when that came on 'cause that was the first, full length... [pause 2 seconds]

BL: Cartoon film.

IL: Animated film, you know.

BL: Mhm.

IL: And that was eh, everybody had to go and see that.

BL: Yes.

IL: Didn't they?

BL: And I mean they were beautifully produced. Other firms tried it, didn't they, and they were never quite as smooth. I suppose it was the number of [inaudible] they used--

IL: And of course another erm, erm sort of milestone in animation was erm... [pause 2 seconds] Oh, trying to think. Erm, huh! Oh, where they played the music, you've got it on a tape. Ooh! *Fantasia!*

VB: Mhm.

BL: Oh yes!

IL: Yes. Yes.

BL: Well then again, it's Walt Disney.

IL: Yes. Exactly. Yes. But that was very good. That was another. It's quite innovative.

VB: Yes.

IL: That's the word! [laughs] Really.

VB: Well thinking of *Snow White*. That's one of the earliest colour films as well really, isn't it? Full-length.

BL: Yes.

IL: That's right. Yes. Yes. For the full, yes. And of course, it was much more clever than... Apparently now, if you draw one animal you can then do all sorts of other ones in different positions on a computer.

BL: The computer.

VB: Yes.

IL: But in those days, everything had to be drawn absolutely.

BL: Yes, every movement.

IL: You know, every frame was a different erm--

VB: Was there a lot of publicity about that at the time? When it came out.

IL: Ooh yes!

BL: Oh, Yes.

VB: Yeah.

IL: Yes. Eh, *Snow White* definitely was erm,

VB: Yeah.

BL: Oh yes. You were worked up to go and see it, [laughs] weren't you?

IL: Yes.

VB: Yes.

BL: And it was well worth it. It was quite scary. For children. All this wicked witch bit, you know. Of course the first erm, Disney ones, those little, little cartoons, with the water babies and the fairies. It was all very pretty. Nice music sort of thing. [clock starts chiming] Quite short. Then suddenly they'd come with eh, the wicked witch. And her face was like--

VB: [laughs]

IL: [laughs] That's right, yes.

BL: It really was quite scary.

IL: But there's always been something scary, with Walt Disney, isn't there--

BL: 'Course, *Fantasia* works its way up. 'Night on Bare Mountain' [also known as 'Night on Bald Mountain', Mussorgsky]. What an evil--

IL: Oh, that's horrible, I think.

BL: Yes.

IL: When that horrible devil thing comes out and skeletons.

BL: [laughs]

IL: And they erm--

BL: 'Sorcerer's Apprentice'.

IL: Stravinsky's erm, 'Rite of Spring'.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: That's where all the dinosaurs come out.

VB: Mhm.

BL: [BL and IL talking at the same time; inaudible] ...volcanoes erupt in that. That wasn't so scary so much as noisy.

IL: [laughs]

VB: [laughs] I mean talking about scary erm, films, I don't know what the connection is in my mind. But I was thinking about the gangster films when you said that. Did you enjoy the sort of James Cagney, George Raft?

BL: Yes. [pause 2 seconds] James Cagney, not, eh, no. I used to see them. I can't say I really enjoyed them very much.

IL: No. Not really. No.

BL: They were quite eh... [pause 3 seconds] I suppose they were quite thrilling. But they were so alien. Really, I always felt.

IL: Well in those days, yes they were.

BL: They're not nowadays. It's universal.

VB: Yeah.

IL: In the papers, all the time. You read about it now.

BL: In those days--

VB: That's interesting. So it was something that wasn't so familiar?

BL: Indeed!

VB: From your own experience.

IL: Oh yes. Yes it was a... [pause 2 seconds]

BL: Of course, I probably wasn't old enough, really. [pause 2 seconds]

IL: Well I think if there was any choice Iris and I wouldn't have gone to see one, to be honest, you know.

BL: Mhm.

VB: Yeah.

IL: But they sometimes came in on the B, on the B picture, you know. You expected to be bored probably, you know. [laughs]

VB: [laughs] Yeah. I've got a still of Edward G. Robinson.

IL: Oh! Yes!

BL: Oh! Yes! Before he became short and dumpy. His face is--

IL: In fact, yes, he was quite a cultured man really. He always played these terrible parts and yet he was eh--

BL: James Cagney was the song and dance man.

IL: Dance man. Yes. That's right.

VB: Mhm.

IL: Yes.

BL: In eh, *Yankee Doodle Dandy* or whatever--

VB: Oh yes.

BL: That thing was called. [laughs] He was very good in that. Which was a surprise.

IL: 'Course it was part of American culture, wasn't it? Then.

BL: Oh indeed. Yeah.

IL: *Baby Face* and *Scarface*.

BL: Mhm.

IL: And Al Capone and that.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: I suppose we had... [pause 2 seconds] I've no doubt we had it over here. I mean there were the East End. There were the race track gangs and all that. But it wasn't thrust down your throat all the time.

BL: No. It wasn't in the papers we had.

IL: And I think, in a way, it's a bit like they said about the Kray Twins. They kept the, [laughs] the violence in the family. They didn't sort of go out and beat up the first old person they saw walking along. It was usually some sort of, with another gang. Do you know what I mean?

VB: Yes.

IL: So that if you weren't in that, sort of milieu--

VB: Yeah.

IL: It didn't affect you.

VB: Yes.

IL: Whereas now. I mean, okay. I think perhaps sometimes it's [pause 2 seconds] perhaps over-exaggerated now. So old people do tend to get, be frightened to go out!

BL: Yeah.

IL: You know. Really.

BL: The local paper, week after week after week, tells you about muggings.

VB: Yeah.

IL: Yeah, but they don't tell you about the three hundred and eighty-five who aren't mugged every week.

BL: No, no, no.

VB: [laughs]

IL: That's the thing. Really.

VB: Yeah.

IL: Oh he's quite young there, isn't he?

VB: Yes. Quite a flattering one [laughs] actually.

BL: Yes. Oh yes. It is. His face became rounder and rounder in the end, you know.

IL: Yes. But apparently he was a great art collector.

VB: Really?

IL: Yes. Mhm.

VB: 'Cause he was Eastern European, wasn't he? He was erm, someone was telling me about--

BL: Oh really? Oh, I didn't know that.

IL: He could well be. Because it was such a melting pot.

VB: Yeah. He was one of these that changed his name.

IL: Oh yes. Yes.

BL: Yes. He certainly could've been Italian.

VB: Yes.

BL: So he could've been--

VB: I can't remember.

BL: Yugoslav or somewhere like that.

VB: Yeah, something like that. Hungarian or something.

BL: Yes. Could well have been.

IL: Because all the movie bosses were... [pause 2 seconds] I mean a lot of them were Jewish, you know.

VB: Yes.

IL: Who'd come over--

VB: Yes.

IL: In the late erm, nineteenth century. But erm, and then of course they got a lot of erm, once, you know, the persecution started in Germany they got an awful lot of people came over then. In fact I think erm, you know, a lot of the creativity really, came from, came from those people, really--

VB: Yes.

IL: Who came over--

BL: Mhm.

IL: Just before the war.

VB: Yeah. Very much so.

IL: Yes.

BL: Mhm. Mhm. [pause 2 seconds] A lot of musical talent too.

IL: Yes.

BL: 'Course I mean the Jewish race is, is a very artistic race.

IL: Yes, creative, very creative. Yes. [pause 2 seconds]

BL: Very creative. Now. Any more?

VB: Well I mean, you might enjoy seeing a couple more of these stills actually that I brought. Erm, well I think you would enjoy [laughs] seeing this one. Fred Astaire in *Top Hat*.

IL: Oh! Yes!

BL: Yes! Look, Ginger. [pause 2 seconds]. Mhm!

VB: It's a wonderful film that though, isn't it?

IL: Yes. Yes.

BL: Oh, it is indeed. The settings were so marvellous.

IL: Yes. Oh! Most of those erm, you know, Fred and Ginger ones were--

VB: Yes.

BL: The story's nearly always the same.

IL: Yes it was. Yes. Yes. She didn't like him.

BL: She didn't like him. He tried hard. In the end they clicked.

VB: [laughs]

IL: But they were marvellous dancing together.

BL: Oh yes!

VB: Oh! Wonderful.

IL: Absolutely fantastic.

VB: I mean the last scene in *Top Hat*, where they dance with, when she's got that feather--

IL: Yes.

VB: Feathery gown on.

BL: Yes.

VB: It's something.

BL: The eh, the story about the feather gown, he didn't want it, did he?

IL: No, because it kept, it kept going up his nose!

BL: The bits kept coming off on his [laughs] his suit! He was terribly particular. But she was determined to have it.

IL: Once they had sort of split up--

VB: Oh.

IL: He had an awful difficulty finding--

BL: Mhm.

IL: You know, he never really got another... [pause 2 seconds]

BL: Cyd Charisse.

IL: Eleanor Powell.

BL: Eleanor Powell.

IL: Cyd Charisse. And various other people.

BL: Mhm.

VB: 'Cause there were sort of rumours that they didn't get on too well. Weren't there?

BL: Yes, there were.

VB: Although I think she denied it.

BL: There often is with these partnerships, you know.

IL: I think he was an absolute perfectionist.

VB: Mhm.

IL: Because he had everything eh, done in one take, didn't he?

BL: Yes.

IL: If you look at, next time you see a Fred Astaire film, you look. And it is definitely. I mean nowadays it's one angle, another angle, and so on.

VB: Yes.

IL: But was straight through. So of course, they must've done it a tremendous number of times.

BL: 'Course, I mean, it would be complicated.

IL: Oh! 'Course. Yes.

BL: Very complicated--

VB: Mhm.

BL: Routines.

[pause 3 seconds]

IL: And I think his wife was erm.... Because they never kiss. That's the other thing. She wouldn't have him kiss anybody, would she?

BL: Oh!

VB: Ah!

BL: What? Fred's wife?

IL: Fred's wife.

BL: [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

IL: And I'll tell you who else was like that. [laughs] And whoever wanted to kiss him must've been potty. The chap that played the ukulele.

BL: What George Formby?

VB: Oh George Formby.

IL: Yes. His wife was [laughs] terribly jealous about him.

BL: [laughs]

IL: Can you imagine!

VB: [laughs]

IL: [laughing]

BL: Well she must've found him attractive so--

VB: Mhm.

BL: Somebody else could.

VB: What did you think of Fred Astaire as a singer? Do you--

BL: Not much.

VB: No.

BL: He had a very pleasant way--

VB: Yeah.

BL: Of putting a song over--

IL: [coughs]

BL: But eh, he had a pretty limited range.

IL: Bit like Jack Buchanan.

BL: Yes.

IL: The same type really.

BL: Yes. Yes. Very much so.

IL: Yes.

BL: Very clever the way he put it over.

IL: [sings]

BL: Marvellous rhythm. Always absolutely on [thing?] But not a terribly [pause 2 seconds] great voice--

IL: No.

BL: Shall we say, you know. Not a Pavarotti.

IL: No. Well, his talent was in his feet, wasn't it?

BL: Yes.

IL: Not in his voice.

BL: And I don't think he ever pretended to.

IL: Oh no, no. No. No. [pause 2 seconds] Oh dear, yes. They were lovely.

BL: It was more, he had more of a voice, he didn't croon it, you know. He did sing the songs.

IL: Oh Yes! It was a musical comedy talent, wasn't it?

BL: Yes.

IL: Really. You know.

VB: Yes.

IL: In the days when they didn't belt it out, like Ethel Merman.

BL: [laughs]

VB: Yeah. [pause 2 seconds] Another one I've got here is eh--

IL: Oh! Joan Crawford. Yes. Now, she was always terribly intense. Wasn't she?

BL: Yes.

IL: Oh, gosh. Yes. Apparently she was a dreadful woman, wasn't she?

BL: Her eyes always used to open up like a tigress.

VB: Ah.

IL: Another one who was a bit like her was Barbara Stanwyck. Do you remember? She was another--

BL: Yes. Yes.

IL: One who was always--

BL: [laughs]

IL: Terribly intense. Or Bette Davis of course. Oh! Bette Davis!

BL: And the background!

IL: Yes. And her clothes!

BL: Oh yes. They did have wonderful clothes.

VB: Yes.

BL: All the film stars. And eh, I suppose as designs, they were beautifully designed.

VB: Mhm.

IL: Oh yes.

VB: Was that part of the attraction of it?

BL: Mhm.

VB: The way the stars looked?

BL: Oh, absolutely.

IL: It was, you see, I think. Because, there again, you've got that luxury--

BL: Mhm.

IL: Erm, sort of motif again.

BL: They had marvellous figures, didn't they? Nearly all of them. And they dressed beautifully, didn't they? If a bit way out sometimes. Some of the feather hats and things. But--

IL: [laughs] They were always immaculate. Even if they just sort of [laughs] sort of rushed over the moors--

VB: Yes.

IL: Like Madeleine Carroll. They still sort of look... When they woke up in the morning they were fully made up, you know. With their hair all in elaborate--

BL: Yes! [laughs]

IL: [laughs] Oh dear! [laughs]

VB: Ah.

IL: I mean, we never thought anything about it then! But looking back on it now I think, you know, gosh! [laughs].

VB: Ah! That's right. I mean when you mention that, I mean Madeleine Carroll and there's that scene in *The 39 Steps* where she's sort of in bed with Robert--

IL: That's right. Yes.

VB: But they're fully clothed and everything.

BL: [laughs]

VB: And as you say, she's totally unruffled--

BL: Oh. Oh yes.

VB: After a night.

IL: [laughing] And they've been dashing over the moors.

VB: [laughs]

BL: And Madeleine Carroll's hair was always, was that 'Marcel waved'? It was always very--

IL: Oh yes.

VB: Yes.

IL: That's right, yes.

BL: Nicely done.

VB: Yes.

IL: [laughs]

VB: Did she make very, very many movies? 'Cause that's the only one I can really think of.

IL: Eh...

BL: No. 'Cause Jean Arthur was--

IL: That was the American one. Madeleine Carroll was English, wasn't she?

BL: Yes.

IL: Yes.

BL: Well I mean Jean Arthur... [tape cuts out]

[End of Side B]

[End of Tape One]

[Start of Tape Two]

[Start of Side A]

BL: What? Another film she was in?

IL: Yes.

BL: Mhm.

VB: There's something about a spy or something. [pause 2 seconds] I don't know. I've a vague memory of another one as well.

BL: Mhm, there could've been.

VB: Ah.

IL: There could've been. I honestly can't remember though.

VB: Yeah.

BL: First World War.

VB: Something like that.

BL: They were still doing films--

VB: Yes.

BL: At that time, up to, up to--

VB: Yeah. But as you say, yes. I mean it's interesting that. When you say that about *The Ghost Goes West*. And Jean Arthur. And sort of similar types that he got--

BL: Yes!

IL: Yes!

VB: Together with.

BL: Mhm. Mhm.

IL: Yes. Now I don't know which one came first.

VB: No.

IL: So, *The 39 Steps* I should've thought.

BL: *The 39 Steps* was a very good film.

VB: Aw, it's--

BL: Have you seen it?

VB: I have. Yes. Oh it's tremendous.

IL: Now that's Eugene Pallette.

BL: Yes.

IL: He always made those sort of... He played Friar Tuck didn't he? In um--

BL: 'Robin Hood' [referring to *The Adventures of Robin Hood*].

IL: 'Robin Hood'.

BL: Yes. But in this one he was of American Scottish ancestry I think.

VB: That's right.

BL: Because he strutted round in a kilt looking ridiculous! [laughs]

IL: That's right. Yes.

BL: And he had a thing I shall never forget. He had a suit of armour. And he lifted up the visor and there was a radio inside.

IL: [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BL: I found [laughing] him [inaudible] about it. I thought it was just [laughing] marvellous!

VB: Aw.

IL: Well going back to comedy, which I know we're not at the moment, the other one, the other double act that I thought was very funny. Abbott and Costello.

BL: Oh yes!

VB: Aw!

BL: Yes. Yes. Yes they were innocent again weren't they?

IL: Yes. Oh and the Ritz Brothers. Do you remember the three of them? The Ritz Brothers.

BL: Yes.

IL: They were in a sort of a spoof, *The Three Musketeers*. Don Ameche was d'Artagnan.

BL: [laughs]

IL: And these three were the Three Musketeers. And they were ever so cowardly.

BL: Oh-h.

IL: And I remember Don Ameche was saying, said to them, "On to Calais!"

VB: [laughs]

BL: "On to Calais." [laughs]

IL: [laughs] Oh, it sounds so weak now, doesn't it? But that's one of the things I can remember. They were ever so funny I think, the Ritz Brothers.

BL: I remember seeing Harpo. The Marx Brothers.

VB: Oh yes.

IL: No, I didn't find them. They, they were very erm, Groucho Marx was another spiteful sort of character, wasn't he?

BL: Yes.

IL: Really. You know. He got the better of everybody.

BL: Zeppo only appears in about two of them. As more normal.

IL: Yes. Harpo was potty.

BL: Harpo, potty. But terribly clever when he played the harp.

IL: Yeah. That's right.

BL: Really marvellous.

IL: I always remember Chico played the piano with an apple.

BL: [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

IL: [laughs] I'm sorry. I'm going off to--

VB: No. Not at all.

IL: I'm going back to the comedy now.

VB: Not at all.

IL: You suddenly sort of think, oh yes.

VB: It's int... I know what you mean. Some of these situations don't sound so funny. But it's seeing the--

BL: Oh yes.

VB: Person doing it.

IL: I think it's the cumulative effect, you know. It's like a running, you know, sometimes you get a running gag, don't you?

VB: Yes.

IL: Which is sort of funny. Funnier perhaps the third time than the first or something.

VB: That's right.

BL: [yawns]

IL: I forget what were we talking about there?

VB: We were on erm--

BL: Robert Donat.

VB: Robert Donat.

IL: Oh that's right. Yes. Yes.

BL: Madeleine Carroll. She was always rather [pause 2 seconds] stiff, wasn't she?

IL: Yes.

BL: Madeleine Carroll. Her parts.

VB: Mhm. I was talking to someone who was a great Madeleine Carroll fan and--

BL: Mhm!

VB: Described her as sweet. And thought that was her sort of appeal.

BL: Oh yes!

VB: Don't know if you agree with that.

BL: Yes. Yes.

IL: Yes.

BL: She didn't sort of eh, descend into comedy.

VB: No. No.

BL: Or anything like that, you know.

IL: No. She was very erm--

BL: She was the nice girl next door. But not like June Allyson.

IL: No.

BL: Who was a sort of erm--

IL: I don't think Madeleine Carroll had much pep, did she, really?

BL: No. No.

IL: No. She was erm... [pause 2 seconds]

BL: Well she was very like the girl next door sort of thing.

IL: [went to bed with?] [laughs]

BL: [laughs]

VB: [laughs] **That's true.**

IL: [laughs]

BL: But June Allyson was the American counterpart.

IL: Oh I liked her. I liked June Allyson.

BL: She was a bit sugary though.

IL: Oh I don't know. I thought she'd a bit more go in her.

BL: Oh Yes. She'd more go. Deanna Durbin, all those.

VB: Ah.

BL: Andy Hardy films.

IL: Judy Garland.

BL: Yes.

IL: She was another.

BL: And the early Judy Garland's with Deanna Durbin. Eh, and what was that one. Eh, '101 Men' was it?

VB: *One Hundred Men and a Girl?*

BL: *One Hundred Men and a Girl!* That's right.

IL: That's right. Yes.

VB: *There's Three Smart Girls.*

IL: That's right.

VB: Yes.

IL: And *Three Smart Girls Grow Up.*

VB: Yeah.

IL: That's right. Yes. That was Deanna Durbin, wasn't it?

VB: Ah.

IL: And two other people who sunk without trace.

VB: Did you like her?

BL: Oh I did.

VB: Deanna Durbin.

BL: She had a nice voice. I think it was erm, burnt out in the end, you know. She was really very young and doing very fine songs but I should imagine, filming, she had to do it and do it and do it--

VB: Mhm.

BL: Until her voice was, you know, roughened...

VB: Mhm.

IL: Now, and they, she started off at the same time as Judy Garland.

BL: Yes. Well, they were quite different.

IL: They were quite different.

BL: I mean they were both good singers.

IL: Yes.

BL: But Judy Garland was on the jazz side, and she could really pack a song, couldn't she?

IL: Mhm.

BL: She was marvellous. [pause 2 seconds]

IL: But you see, a lot of these people, Judy Garland was really exploited by the studios, wasn't she? Really. It's very sad really.

VB: Mhm.

BL: Mhm.

IL: Same as Marilyn Monroe, really.

VB: Mhm.

BL: Mhm.

VB: I mean, were you aware of that, at the time? Erm...

IL: Not really, 'cause you see--

BL: No. I don't think so. Well the 'Picturegoer' would say. Mary used to have that.

IL: Well, yes. But they... [pause 2 seconds] it was all sanitised there wasn't it? Really, you know. It was all just publicity wasn't it, really? Judy Garland would erm, eh... [pause 2 seconds] She... oh I can remember her saying she loved to go the soda fountain for a malted milk. Well I don't suppose she was allowed a malted milk.

BL: No.

IL: She had a sort of weight problem.

VB: [laughs]

IL: Same as I had, you know, so, I mean, apparently she was actually expected to dance for about fourteen hours a day on a lettuce leaf! Well I don't wonder she had to, in the end, take something to get her weight down.

VB: Mhm.

IL: And erm--

BL: Something to wake her up.

IL: 'Cause I remember seeing her on erm, I think it was a television um, eh thing of her when she was in town, over here for... And she was enormous.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: And it wasn't long after that that she was in erm *A Star is Born*. And she was as thin as a rake! And I used to think, gosh, I wish I knew how you got your weight down like that. Well apparently it was just drugs, you know.

VB: Yeah. But as you say, it must be terrible stress for a--

BL: Oh. Oh.

VB: Basically a child.

BL: Mhm.

VB: To be in that position.

IL: Well that's right. Well it's like Mario Lanza apparently.

VB: Yeah.

IL: He, sort of, was an enormous man.

VB: Yeah.

IL: You know. Because apparently, in the films you've got to be sort of about half a stone lighter than you look. Do you know what I mean?

VB: Yes.

BL: The camera.

IL: 'Cause the camera puts on about half a stone. So when you see somebody who's very slim, they must be phenomenally thin, mustn't they?

VB: Yeah.

IL: Really.

BL: I'm going back a bit. Shirley Temple. I saw a lot of, a lot of her.

IL: Oh yes.

BL: Oh yes.

VB: [laughs]

IL: 'Lollipop'. [referring to the song 'On the Good Ship Lollipop']

BL: Yes.

VB: [laughs]

BL: 'Cause she was, she had some quite good tap routines. Eh, one with erm a coloured chap--

IL: Oh yes.

BL: Down the steps.

IL: That's right. Was that in *The Little Colonel* or something?

BL: Yes.

IL: Something like that.

BL: I mean she wasn't as young as she was meant to be, but she was still a young child. I mean she was meant to be about four and she was actually, I think about six or seven.

IL: Yes.

BL: Still had an awful lot to learn. Yes. Look at her here.

IL: But she had a pushy mother, didn't she? Apparently she used to be on the sets calling out, "Sparkle, Shirley! Sparkle!"

VB: [laughs]

IL: [laughs] Aw dear.

BL: And there was a whole rash of Shirley Temple dolls and things. That was a--

IL: Oh, that's right!

VB: Ah.

IL: Yes. Yes.

BL: Marketing.

IL: But she sort of rose above it, didn't she? Really. Pushy mother or not. She became a politician didn't she?

VB: Yes.

BL: An ambassador I think, in the end. Oh yes, she was no fool. [pause 2 seconds] It was a very good con. You know, that she made good films and you, sort of thought, amazing! [laughs] This child of three doing this! [laughing] And she just looked very small.

VB: Mhm.

IL: Well she was a short, I mean she was a very short woman, wasn't she?

BL: Oh yes.

IL: So she was a small made child anyway.

VB: Mhm.

IL: That terrible sausage hairstyle.

VB: [laughs]

IL: [laughs] Oh dear!

BL: There's quite a few of those.

VB: Did you ever try and erm, copy the stars. I mean, not Shirley Temple but some of these glamorous hairstyles and erm...

BL: Well I didn't. [laughs] Did you dear? I'm not sure Mary did.

IL: [pause 2 seconds] I don't think [pause 2 seconds] Erm, I can't really remember. Erm.

BL: I doubt if mother would've let her.

IL: No. I mean you had to sort of toe the line more than you have to now sort of thing, you know. Erm... [pause 3 seconds]. No, I don't think. Well for one thing, my mother always had my hair cut

short which I hated. I mean I have it cut short now 'cause I like it but erm, in those days I always wanted to grow my hair long so I could do all sorts of different things with it but... Used to say, "It takes too long to dry!" So, no! I didn't quite honestly.

BL: I think young girls used to try make-up and things, to make themselves as glamorous as possible. Because of the, the films.

VB: Mhm.

IL: Yes, but I mean erm...

BL: I know erm some of the girls...

IL: I mean what, I was fifteen when the war broke out, nearly sixteen and I don't think we sort of... We were just getting into make-up then.

BL: Mhm.

VB: Mhm.

BL: Some girls in the office, one said she used to go out of the house and down to the nearest alleyway and put on her, her make-up and go off. On the way back [laughing] she'd to wipe it off before she got home! So, and that was probably--

IL: Oh that was later on in the war, wasn't it?

VB: Mhm.

IL: No, I can't say, I can't say anybody I knew, really. I mean we all used to put our hair in curlers and that sort of thing. But I don't think we eh, actually... [pause 2 seconds]

VB: Do you think, were your parents quite strict with you then?

BL: Oh yes.

IL: Oh yes. Most parents were then.

VB: Yeah.

IL: To be honest, you know.

BL: Mhm. My grandfather. I only had the one grandfather. And, as I was saying, you know, we had to go tea. Every Saturday we went there and every Sunday they came to us. And eh, nothing was allowed to detract from it.

VB: Mhm.

BL: Yes. It was quite a strict... I don't feel it ever made me go crazy, you know. Or frustrated, or anything like that.

IL: Mhm. I don't remember having any terrible trauma about it.

BL: No!

IL: 'Cause everybody was the same. It wasn't that, that your eh, it wasn't everybody else, you know, was free to do as they liked and you, we were the only one that wasn't allowed to. [laughs] Everybody was in the same boat! Which made it, I suppose we didn't even think about it really.

VB: Mhm.

BL: No. It was just life.

IL: I mean you had to do [pause 2 seconds] within reason, what you were told. And you had to--

BL: You went into the Forces, and you, you had to do what you were told, you know.

IL: Yes. You didn't have much choice then, did you?

BL: No. [laughs]

IL: So. [laughs] So I suppose, really, we're the generation that ought to be all [laughs] peculiar - [inaudible] lots of frustrations.

VB: [laughs]

IL: [laughing] If we all keep quiet about it! That's it.

VB: Mhm. I mean were there other forms of entertainment available, like say dancing or...?

BL: Oh yes. Yes, I used to go dancing eh, our local church hall, from the age of about... I joined Muswell Hill Youth Club when I was fourteen. And we used to have--

IL: 1940.

BL: Yes. And we used to have various activities and then the rest of the evening I used to have records on. Used to have dancing. And eh, so then with June and Mary we went to a dancing class, which was a shilling a night. Which included a cup of tea and a biscuit! [laughs] For two hours! Very good.

VB: [laughs] Very good.

BL: And eh, Miss Iris Cambridge. Yes, she taught us jolly well. Eh and then we started to go, the erm, the church in Muswell Hill. I lived in East Finchley. Right on the border of Muswell Hill. And that's part of Finchley and Hornsey, you see. My local church was actually in East Finchley. But I often used to go to the one in Muswell Hill, about the same distance. Because they had a very fine choir. And they had a, quite a lively social--

VB: Mhm.

BL: They had a church hall and everything else and they used to have these dances. Oh, went quite a lot. Once a month, at least. [pause 2 seconds] Did you go out?

IL: No. I didn't. I wasn't erm... [pause 2 seconds] I mean I liked dancing later on but I never went to... [pause 1 second] Ooh, we used to do it at school. Wet Friday afternoons you couldn't have games. They used to line up the girls on one side and the boys on the other, shortest in the top, tallest at the back. And you took the person who stood opposite you - usually somebody you detested like poison!

VB: [laughs]

IL: And they didn't exactly tell you what to do! So you'd just sort of push each other round! In a circle.

BL: Oh, gosh! What a waste of--

IL: Absolutely Dreadful. [laughs]

BL: Yes, no wonder!

IL: So that rather put me off.

VB: Mhm.

BL: Erm, what else? We didn't go to the theatre very much. Erm there was a Golders Green Hippodrome. That was a bus ride away. But that was a treat you know. At Christmas we might go to a pantomime. Or to erm, Islington, the [pause 2 seconds] Agricultural Hall - it had a circus.

VB: Mhm.

IL: Oh that's right. Yes. Now, yes, pantomime, yes, I can remember that. Now erm, when I lived in Islington, we were quite near Islington Green which had the old Collins Music Hall there.

VB: Mhm.

IL: And they had erm, they used to do a real old-fashioned pantomime. And I know I used to go with my cousins. And erm, after the pantomime was over they had the 'Harlequinade'. Which is a very very old, like the Commedia dell'arte.

VB: Ah.

IL: With Harlequin, Columbine, Pantaloon--

BL: Yes.

IL: And the clown.

BL: The clown with the sausages.

IL: That's right. The Pantaloon had the sausages.

BL: Ah.

IL: And the clown had the red hot poker.

BL: Oh yes!

IL: That used to terrify me! 'Cause I used to think, ooh! Somebody's going to get burnt with the red hot poker!

BL: [laughs]

IL: But erm, and they also had erm a transformation scene. Where--

BL: Yes. Apparently... I never saw those.

IL: Yeah. They're marvellous. Yes. At some point, don't ask me how. And it's usually, it was completely irrelevant to everything else that was going on. Oh 'Cinderella'. You'd have erm, all the roses growing up and that sort of thing. And the fairies coming in. But I know one, was one where they had an underwater, underwater thing. Green and silver came like, curtains came down. Things went on behind it sort of thing. But erm--

BL: It was very clever, because, you know they couldn't have had much in the way of scenery--

IL: Mhm. Yes. And then of course at the end they used to come out and these marvellous--

BL: It'd all be hand done I should think.

IL: These marvellous costumes at the end.

BL: Oh yes.

IL: You know, where--

BL: The great parade.

IL: The great parade at the end. Where they came down to take their bows and that. Yes. And erm...
[pause 2 seconds] And we used to sometimes go to the Lyceum. I think I went up there a couple of times.

BL: What, in town?

IL: Yes. That was, that was very--

BL: Mhm. No I never went to the town ones. Oh yes, pantomimes.

IL: Oh yes, I can remember, yes at Christmas. Again the Agricultural Hall was in Islington, you see. And eh, yes I've been to the circus there.

BL: [inaudible] They had erm, later on they had like a funfair there as well.

IL: Well I can remember that. Yes.

BL: But erm, we weren't allowed to go to the funfair. It was too rough. [laughs] Walked back home again. [laughs] I loved funfairs.

IL: Well, apparently I was taken to the Wembley Exhibition too. Which was in 1926.

VB: A-ah.

IL: I must've been about three.

BL: Ah.

IL: But I don't remember anything about that, but that. Except that somebody bought me a basket, a little basket.

BL: Ah. [pause 2 seconds] That's as far back as we can go. I was only being born then.

VB: [laughs]

IL: [laughs]

BL: [laughs]

VB: Did you spend time outdoors as children?

IL: Oh yes. Erm... [pause 2 seconds] particularly, well, I mean, you know, in Islington we were, well we played in the street, quite honestly. Because we were in a side...

VB: Mhm.

IL: Mind you, I wasn't allowed to play in the street until I was eight. But erm, then [pause 2 seconds] there was no traffic, you see. I mean we were erm, a side road off a side road. So I mean the only thing you saw was the milkman, coming round in a thing like Boadicea's chariot.

VB: Mhm.

IL: And eh, the coalman used to come round. You didn't have cars.

BL: No. No.

VB: Mhm.

IL: So I mean, you could play, well, you played sort of grandmother's footsteps. Across the road, you know.

BL: Mhm.

IL: Because there was so little traffic. But then when we moved out to Edgware, it was a housing estate that was being built, you know. A private one. And then so half the houses weren't built and there was a whole lot of fields and things round, so we used to sort of eh, you know, you could just go up the road and across into the fields. Which was lovely really. Bit like being in the country. 'Course it's all built over now.

VB: Mhm.

IL: We used to go up the erm, Chandos Park. Quite a long walk up there really.

BL: Oh yes. Quite a long walk. I was thinking, I used to go over to see Christian. And we went into Hampstead Garden suburb, which was still being built. And they were, as you say, empty houses and there was space.

IL: My father had a motorbike and sidecar so we used to go out, when he was, you know, not working at the weekend, that sort of thing. We'd go out on the Saturday or the Sunday. One of the two days out. Somewhere into the country. Went to Southend quite a lot.

VB: Ah!

IL: Being sort of north-east London then.

VB: Yeah.

IL: So you could get out quite quickly. Used to go to Shoeburyness and have a picnic. My father was a great swimmer. So [laughs] we used to park the motorbike and then he'd go down to the [laughs] and I was sort of swimming about [laughing] and he used to change and swim out as far as you could see.

VB: [laughs]

IL: And swim back! And get out and change, and that was, that was it! [laughs] He never sort of larked about in the water or anything like that. [laughs] He sort of taught me to swim, you know.

BL: Mhm.

IL: Oh that was another thing you see. In London there are a lot, well, not a lot of but we had one near us, a covered-in swimming pool. So you could go all the year round.

VB: Ah.

IL: And I know some relative of my mother used to take me every Thursday evening and we used to swim up in eh Green Man Lane.

BL: We used to go swimming to the open-air pool.

IL: Yes.

BL: Only really in the summer holidays I suppose. And you'd spend a whole day in those days there. The Finchley open air.

IL: Yes. The Kingsway open air. That was a nice one too.

BL: Yes, that was very similar.

IL: But if it was crowded you all had to get out after a certain bit.

BL: Oh yes, that's right. Yes. You know, if your mother was there, she'd have a deck chair so that you had a rubber band, yellow, blue, green whatever. And you went to the changing rooms and you used a locker with a key. And then they'd say, "All yellow bands in!" or something. So you used to go, take your clothes out and give it to mum! Sort of thing. And you could carry on there.

VB: Mhm.

BL: And of course, you could always go back to the changing rooms to change from a swimming costume into your clothes.

IL: Yes.

BL: Or you could stay on. Used to stay there all day sometimes. And beautiful. They had all grass, gardens round it. Used to be a lovely place. Terribly, terribly hot.

IL: No shade.

VB: Mhm.

BL: No. They had like sunbathing terraces which were just like a frying pan! [laughs]

IL: [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

IL: That's right. [laughs] Yes.

BL: Yes, so the cinema was really sort of once a week.

VB: Thanks.

BL: We did other things. And eh, didn't really play much sport.

IL: Well we did at school, didn't we?

BL: Yes. It was compulsory. It's what put me off. But eh...

IL: [chuckles]

[pause 3 seconds]

BL: Used to play, used to be outside, in the garden. Particularly. Another neighbour's children used to come in--

VB: Mhm.

BL: And we used to go into their garden. And that was when you were about eight or nine.

VB: Mhm.

BL: That sort of age.

IL: When we moved out, of course a lot of the houses hadn't been erm, sold, you know, so there was the odd empty house. So, we used to play in there. And I've said to Bernard sometimes, you know, we never dreamt of sort of writing on the walls or doing that. We used to play in there, mainly sort of have a theatrical performance or something. I mean we never even used a lavatory in there! We always used to go home for anything like that. Nobody ever sort of--

BL: We never dared mess the place up.

IL: No.

BL: Or anything like that. It wasn't in your, your nature to, to wreck anything.

VB: Mhm.

BL: You treated everything with a bit of respect, didn't you?

IL: Suppose you did. I was a great one for putting on theatrical performances. [laughs] We used to do erm, well sometimes we'd erm, it was next door where this girl's mother and her aunt came over one day. So we put on a display, [laughs softly] we all sang, danced and acted the fool generally. And I know that erm, eh one year I sort of wrote a play. And there was Renee and Joyce and her little sister was the statue--

BL: [inaudible]

IL: And eh, we all dressed up in crepe paper.

BL: Oh! Goodness. [laughs]

VB: Ah.

IL: [laughs] I think I was a bit of a bossy boots. Everybody had to do... I can remember [inaudible] My mother won't, I said, "You can't wear that vest!"

VB: [laughs]

IL: "My mother won't let me take it off!" [laughs]

BL: Well you see how your mother ruled you. You know.

VB: Mhm.

BL: If your mother said you didn't, you didn't.

IL: Mhm.

BL: And there was no resentment.

IL: No. It was just life. [laughs]

BL: You did what mother said.

IL: [laughs]

[pause 4 seconds]

BL: Any more--

IL: Any more questions?

VB: Erm, I think we've covered a lot actually.

BL: [laughs] We've covered quite a lot.

VB: Eh--

BL: What else about the cinema? [said quietly] If you went to town it was a great sort of treat wasn't it? To go to a [inaudible] cinema

IL: Oh, I only went once to see *Gone with the Wind*.

BL: I went to the Stoll to see *Lost Horizon*.

IL: Oh, did you?

VB: Ah.

BL: And eh, the screen was about that size. 'Cause we could only afford the very top.

IL: Yes. Quite. Yes. Mhm.

BL: We had to pay for the tram ride and that. And eh--

IL: See money was quite tight in those days.

VB: Mhm.

BL: Yes, I mean, we weren't poor but you know, you didn't have money to waste at all. And eh, it was a marvellous film.

IL: What, *Lost Horizon*?

BL: *Lost Horizon*.

IL: Oh yes. That's Ronald Colman.

BL: Yes, that's right.

IL: Yes. Mhm.

BL: And eh, course black and white. Which, it's funny, you didn't think of it. Black and white you just accepted and eh [pause 2 seconds] you could almost put a colour on things. It was funny. Because when colour came in it was quite a shock.

IL: Yes. Yes, that's true. Mhm. Mhm.

BL: First coloured film I saw I think was called the *Dancing Pirate*. Which was [inaudible]. And, the colour was awful!

IL: Well I was going to say, I think it was a shock.

BL: Yes.

IL: Because -I'm going to get a handkerchief- because it was so ghastly!

BL: He was supposed to be a brigand. But a nice brigand who danced. [laughs] And his face was terribly dark brown. And the reds were a very muddy sort of brown colour, you know. It was a great thrill to see the first colour film. [laughs] Pity the film itself wasn't any good. It was Alan Jones.

IL: Oh yes!

BL: And he sang 'Donkey Serenade' in it. [referring to *The Firefly*]

IL: Oh, I saw that! That wasn't *The Dancing Pirate*. No. But those early musicals, oh the colours were awful! You know, they'd give you a, a headache almost looking at them.

VB: Mhm.

IL: Terribly garish colours.

BL: Yes. 'Course nowadays, when you hear the original soundtrack, the sound was very poor. It's crystal clear--

IL: [coughs]

BL: Nowadays. But you didn't again, because I suppose the radio is the same. And a gramophone, an acoustic gramophone with 78s and that, you know. They weren't that--

VB: Mhm.

IL: Pretty awful, weren't they?

BL: So, you know, your ears weren't tuned to it.

VB: Mhm.

BL: And then they kept [thinking?] the great panoramic things. When the sound came from everywhere. That was the next terrific step.

IL: Oh yes. But that's not the thirties, was it?

VB: Mhm.

IL: That was after the war really.

BL: Mhmm.

VB: You mentioned, you mentioned *Lost Horizon* there.

BL: Mhm.

VB: Was Ronald Colman someone else that you...

[pause 2 seconds]

BL: Well I quite liked him.

VB: Yeah.

BL: But I didn't have, you might have had a pash on him.

IL: No. No.

BL: No. Eh, yes. He was--

IL: He was another really gentlemanly one, wasn't he?

BL: Yes.

IL: Like Robert Donat really.

BL: Mhm. That's right. And the one in *Lost Horizon*, the great abbot of the place--

IL: Yes, who was he?

BL: Used to see him quite a bit.

IL: I can't remember. He was quite well known. He died not all that long ago.

BL: He reminds me, the bishop, of granddad. Erm... [pause 2 seconds] and oh! What was her name? [pause 2 seconds] That eh Austrian woman I think. She was in it. And they come out through the, through the passage range of a cave and she all, all aged right in front of you!

IL: That's right! Yes. Because in *Shangri-la*, they were um, it was a sort of paradise, you know.

VB: Mhm.

IL: Have you seen the film?

VB: Yes. I have. Yes.

IL: Yes. Wasn't that horrible when she came out and she sort of aged. Oh that's like that age, eh, she-

-

BL: Yes. Don't digress. Erm he wanted to get away, didn't he?

IL: That's right.

BL: And he persuaded her to come with him and she was young and about twenty-five or something. And she aged to about ninety-five. And what was her name? Rainer! Elizabeth Rainer was it?

IL: Oh.

BL: Luise Rainer.

VB: Luise Rainer.

IL: Luise Rainer. That's right. Yes.

BL: Was she in it?

VB: I think that's right. Yes.

IL: She played a Chinese thief in *The Good Earth*. All that sort of thing. Paul Muni! He was always in miserable films!

BL: Anna May Wong too.

IL: Oh yes. [laughs]

BL: Something to do with Shanghai. [referring to *Shanghai Express*]

IL: Oh the other thing that we very often used to do. [laughs] When I used to go, after we'd been to the cinema, once a week. One week Iris used to come home with me and the other week I used to go home with her sort of thing, for tea. And I know, we always used to act it out to Iris's mum.

BL: [laughs] To give her an idea--

IL: Give her an idea what the film was about. Can remember being Nasimova with a tea-towel over my head after seeing *Blood and Sand*, saying, "Juan, Juan, I want you to queet the bull ring!" [said with accent; laughs]

BL: [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

IL: And she used to sit there in fits [laughing] of laughter!

BL: How would you remember this?

IL: Well, we'd only seen it that afternoon.

BL: Yes, yes. *The Mark of Zorro* and all that.

IL: Oh that. Yes, we taped that. I said to Bernard "Tape that"—

BL: Yes. There's been a re-issue on--

IL: it was on yesterday afternoon. So we were dancing around, going [makes action] [laughs]

BL: Yes. Tyrone Power. Yes there were some very good film stars. You know. Shining brightly. They may not have been superb actors but they gave a great entertainment--

IL: Great deal of pleasure anyway, I suppose. Which was--

BL: Oh! Yes.

IL: Which was something. [pause 4 seconds] Anything else?

VB: Erm, as I say I think we've covered a lot. [laughs]

IL: [laughs]

VB: Understatement but it's been tremendous. It's been really useful for me to--

IL: Oh good. Good.

BL: Good good. Were there any queries or points that you've been trying to eh puzzle out, you know, that we might have an answer for?

VB: Erm, I can't honestly think of anything just now. Erm, what I was thinking, I know what's going to happen is that I'll go away and listen to this and I'll probably think, I wish I'd asked about that.

IL: Yes. Yes.

VB: Why didn't I eh--

IL: Yes.

VB: Eh, follow that up.

IL: Yes.

VB: And I was wondering, I'm going to be coming back probably in about September, certainly later in the year.

BL: Mhm!

VB: And I was wondering if maybe I could perhaps visit you again.

IL: Yes. Yes.

BL: We are going--

IL: Ring first because we're going away at the end of August and again in October.

VB: Right.

BL: Let's have a quick look. Yes, we'll be back mhm, the 7th of September. Then we're--

VB: Right.

IL: Going away the 14th to the 21st, that's October.

BL: Oh yes, yes. That's right. Yes, there's practically a whole month there. You should be able to get us.

VB: That would be great.

BL: If we're not in the first time, just keep phoning.

VB: Yeah.

BL: We might be at the shops, all sorts of things like that.

VB: 'Cause as I say, that's invariably what happens.

BL: Oh yes. It is. I agree.

[End of Side B]

[End of Interview]