

Disclaimer: This interview was conducted in 1995 and concerns memories of 1930s life; as such there may be opinions expressed or words used that do not meet today's norms and expectations.

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\* Harrow, Middlesex 23 November 1995: Valentina Bold interviews Irene and Bernard Letchet

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\* IL=Irene Letchet, BL=Bernard Letchet, VB=Valentina Bold

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[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[tape introduction by Valentina Bold]

[setting up tape]

**VB:** Maybe I'll... that would be quite good actually.

**BL:** Did you sort of want to put it on there?

**VB:** I was just thinking, I'll pop that there and then that should erm pick it all up quite well. Right, erm, I mean as I say, what you were telling me before I found very interesting. And you mentioned a number of film stars that you liked.

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** Oh yes. Yes. [laughs]

**VB:** Quite a lot. [laughs]

**BL:** [laughs]

**VB:** And I was wanting to ask you, firstly, if there were any particular qualities you liked in a film star? And I'm thinking about, you mentioned people like erm Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

**BL:** Oh yes. Yes.

**VB:** I mean, what was it about them do you think, that made them so good?

**BL:** Erm, well I used to go to the cinema as erm [pause 2 seconds] a sort of release, you know. It was another world really.

**IL:** Yes. I think it was purely entertainment. We didn't go to sort of be harrowed. [laughs]

**BL:** No.

**IL:** Or, [laughs] you know. But, I think, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. For one thing, it was very light-hearted which was one of the criteria that you went for, you know. And they were sort of, they hit it off. I mean I don't know how they got on in private life. But they, they--

**BL:** In the films, they really... gelled--

**IL:** Gelled together, didn't they? You know. I mean eh--

**BL:** They appeared to be enjoying themselves and that let you enjoy it. You know.

**IL:** And there was a sort of erm, what should I say? A bit of an edge between the characters, wasn't there? I mean, he was much more--

**BL:** Oh yes. He always played the diffident one.

**IL:** Well. Who was it said that erm, eh Ginger gave Fred sex and Fred gave Ginger class.

**BL:** Class. Yeah.

**IL:** And that really,

**BL:** Yes.

**IL:** Put it in a nutshell, really, I think. Because erm... I mean he had other partners but they didn't seem to sort of sparkle, did they?

**BL:** Oh no. Do you remember, Leslie Caron? She danced awfully well, didn't she?

**IL:** Yes. [I remember?] Cyd Charice in those. But they didn't seem to dance--

**BL:** I remember seeing Cyd Charice. Long, long Legs.

**IL:** Yes that's right. Didn't, didn't seem--

**BL:** Didn't sparkle.

**IL:** No, they didn't seem to go quite the same--

**BL:** Never see the same again.

**VB:** **That's interesting. So it's the way they interacted.**

**IL:** I think so!

**BL:** Absolutely.

**IL:** Yes. Definitely. Yes.

**VB:** **Yeah.**

**IL:** And now we had seen erm *Top Hat* or something, just recently.

**BL:** Yes!

**IL:** And we still enjoyed that. But, I'm going off the point here a bit but we, I used to like Myrna Loy and William Powell you see.

**VB:** Aw. Yeah.

**IL:** I used to think they were ever so good.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** And we saw them, a few weeks ago, and I said to Bernard, "How could we have thought this tripe was good?"

**BL:** Well it was an early one, wasn't it?

**IL:** I mean Myrna Loy, just seemed to me--

**BL:** Wasn't it?

**IL:** No! It wasn't all that early. They were all early, weren't they? But she just sort of said her words. I mean how I thought she was witty and sophisticated, I don't know. Because she appeared to be sort of deadpan didn't she?

**BL:** That's what I say, I think later. It wasn't *The Thin Man* one was it?

**IL:** No I know it wasn't. I thought it was a later one.

**BL:** I think she sort of got into--

**IL:** No. I thought it was the one after. Anyway, we won't argue about that.

**BL:** [laughs]

**IL:** But sometimes, when you see them now, you are disappointed.

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** I am. I think what--

**BL:** Laurel and Hardy.

**IL:** On Earth did we see, oh no! I still find those funny--

**BL:** Oh no.

**IL:** But erm, eh these so-called oh, witty, sophisticated comedies as we thought. I, you know, it seemed to be very very--

**BL:** I'd like to see Ruth Hussey again. And Carole Lombard. To judge from today's criteria.

**IL:** Mhm.

**BL:** They were the height of sophistication [amused voice]. Now mark you, I was what? About sixteen, something like that you see. You know. I thought [inaudible] [laughs] Hollywood living in vast rooms or--

**IL:** Well everybody thought Sonja Henie was a marvellous skater--

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** Until we realise what they can do now!

**VB:** It's interesting. Because it sounds from what you're saying as if your tastes changed quite a bit from the thirties.

**IL:** Oh, oh well, well they must have done, mustn't they?

**BL:** Sure.

**IL:** Because I mean we were sort of what, in our... fifteen, thirteen, seventeen, you know. And now we're [chuckles]--

**BL:** Well,

**IL:** In our seventies! You know, obviously you--

**BL:** Oh yes. You change.

**IL:** And of course erm... [pause 2 seconds]

**BL:** Well the comedy scene has changed. I mean now we just don't like it, it's so rude. But it has changed, hasn't it? Into a more slick type of comedy.

**IL:** Oh yes. I mean because if you look at--

**BL:** Some of them.

**IL:** Even old television programmes. You know, you realise how things have changed.

**VB:** Mhm.

**BL:** Yes. [inaudible]. So, we've changed with it I suppose, you see.

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** Although we haven't, well, from my point of view, I just don't like the very modern types. They seem to be so vulgar. You know. But... [laughs]

**VB:** It's interesting. Because I remember the last time I was here you were saying that you preferred the sort of gentler comedies. The Laurel and Hardy to the--

**IL:** Yes. Yes.

**VB:** Sort of nasty, mean sort of comedy.

**IL:** Yes, yes, yes.

**VB:** And I wondered what for you, for both of you, made a good film. A film that you would really enjoy in the thirties.

[pause 3 seconds]

**BL:** Ah. Well it'd be the late thirties for me. '39. Erm the early forties. What did I enjoy? I liked Betty Grable. The beginning of colour. And it was all bouncy, and you know, and again that was release. Not that I needed release, I was happy at home. But, you know, it was something out of this world and it was very dreary [in the war?] time. No, there was nothing really to do. But--

**IL:** I think I'm just frivolous. I think I just like the sheer entertainment--

**VB:** Mhm.

**IL:** Ones. You know. Unless you went sort of like for a, for a star that you particularly liked. I mean, I'm sure I said this before. I used to like to see all Clark Gable ones. All Spencer Tracy ones. Even if they were... But they were usually fairly light. Although some Spencer Tracys were a bit eh, you know. I wouldn't have gone to see *Bad Day at Black Rock* for example. [laughs]

**BL:** There was a clip we saw--

**IL:** Yes, that's right. That reminds me, 'cause there was a clip on [the television last night?] No, I think in my case it was sheer entertainment--

**BL:** It was every week you see. We just went, I used to go with my sister. I mean we just sort of went along. Eh almost regardless. Well we knew because from the previous week we had the, the, what do you call it?

**IL:** Trailers.

**BL:** Trailers. Yes. But it was, we didn't sort of sit down, think, shall we go to this one or that one. The Odeon was really our nearest one [possibly referring to Odeon, South Harrow]. You could walk or take a bus. So we went [bursts out laughing] you know!

**IL:** And don't forget--

**BL:** Well we did go to town, sorry to interrupt, for the *Lost Horizon*. That was a serious sort of film. And we went to the--

**IL:** [faint voice; inaudible] ...but there again it was entertainment.

**BL:** Oh yes, there was.

**IL:** There was enough dreary things going on in real life at that time! You see, really, you really needed a bit of release from it. I mean, every time the news came on it was, particularly the early part of the war, it was defeat after defeat--

**VB:** Mhm.

[IL and BL talking at same time]

**IL:** And this ship has been sunk. And this convoy was being bombed.

**BL:** Yeah... and the bombing had started.

**IL:** And then you were being bombed. So, you really wanted... Although, mind you, I wasn't allowed to go out in the Blitz.

**BL:** Yeah.



**IL:** So we just had to get on with it. But, even erm it was even before the war, not that you really... we didn't have the news thrust down us but I'd read the paper. And it was all worrying like, even from before Munich, wasn't it? And I mean I was what? Fifteen.

**BL:** Mhm. That's right. [inaudible]

**IL:** You know. It was a dreary time really.

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** So that, you know--

**BL:** Well you, you didn't, well I for one, didn't realise the seriousness of it at fifteen. You don't. But erm obviously from my father's reaction it was pretty much so--

**VB: Ah. That's interesting.**

**BL:** You pick up the, the ambience really.

**IL:** Mhm. Yeah.

**BL:** And certainly the cinema was still--

**IL:** It was a form of release really.

**BL:** Escapism.

**VB: So how did you actually feel when you were watching an enjoyable film?**

**BL:** Oh! You went completely into it.

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** As far as I was concerned.

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** Didn't you?

**IL:** Yes! Yes. Yes. Yes.

**BL:** Entered into it completely, you know.

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** I mean the place could've blown up round you and you really wouldn't have known [laughs] unless the screen was alight.

**VB:** [laughs]

**IL:** I don't think it's like watching the television. You're in the dark.

**BL:** Yes.

**IL:** You know, your eyes are focused on just this one thing really. Yes.

**BL:** And it was always pretty full wasn't it?

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** You know. You had to queue often outside. Ninepence, shilling and--

**IL:** I mean, you weren't enthralled by them all, obviously. I mean some films were just damn boring.

**BL:** [inaudible] films used to be...

**IL:** You know. But erm if you were really enjoying it...

**BL:** When you got a cartoon...

**IL:** You did, you did erm, you really, yes...

**BL:** Mhm yes. Got right into it--

**IL:** Mhm.

**BL:** Which is a thing you cannot do with television. Probably it's the mere physical size of it.

**VB:** So did you actually--

**BL:** You have a screen about that size, you might! [laughs]

**VB:** Did you ever actually imagine yourself in the films.

**BL:** Oh yes!

**IL:** Oh yes!

**VB:** [laughs]

**IL:** [laughs]

**BL:** Oh! Particularly Fred Astaire. I used to tap dance all the way home! [laughs] My sister said, "Stop it!"

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** [laughs]

**IL:** Oh yes. Yes. Yes.

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** Yes. It was a sort of vicarious life in a way. The Saturday afternoon. [laughs]

**VB:** 'Cause I remember you telling me about sort of acting out the films and--

**IL:** Oh yes!

**BL:** Oh yes!

**IL:** That's right! Yes.

**BL:** Oh yes.

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

**BL:** Well I suppose, today's parallel, it's erm what do they call it? Something reality, where they--

**IL:** Virtual reality.

**VB:** A-ah.

**IL:** That's right.

**VB:** Oh that's a wonderful description!

**BL:** And you can go right into it.

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

**BL:** You really did feel you were in that flat or room, or whatever was going on. That you were observing it, you know.

**IL:** Oh yes.

**BL:** Mhm. [pause 3 seconds]

**IL:** Yes, more so than the theatre really.

**BL:** Yes, I--

**IL:** Isn't it?

**BL:** Yes. Probably.

**IL:** I mean not that I went to the theatre--

**BL:** You seemed to, you weren't physically that far away. But no, I could never enter into it as I did...  
'Course you got close-ups and everything in the cinema--

**IL:** No. Because you got the proscenium arch and that, haven't you? Which is a barrier to a certain extent. And the footlights whereas with the cinema--

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** And of course you get the erm, you know, the real close-ups. And the, and the cinema actually is different isn't it? From theatre because it was Michael Caine who said, you know, you have to sort of make a face in the theatre but in, you've just got to lift an eyebrow in the cinema.

**VB:** Ah that's interesting.

**IL:** So I think that got you, really close up to the people.

**VB:** It's a sort of more intimate--

**IL:** That's right!

**BL:** Oh yes. Yes.

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** One to one really.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** Yes.

**VB:** Yeah. I mean the way of life in the Hollywood films though must've seemed quite--

**BL:** Oh-h!

**VB:** Different to what you were used to.

**BL:** Oh absolutely!

**IL:** Oh, yes! That's why you didn't want to go and see somebody who was struggling in the, you know--

**BL:** Wartime. [laughs]

**IL:** With six children in the kitchen or something like that.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** Not that I had anything like that at home but you know, I mean there was enough of that going on in real life!

**VB:** Yeah.

**BL:** Oh no. You went for the glamour. And eh...

**IL:** But as I said, perhaps we were very frivolous minded. Perhaps other people went, you know. Well I suppose perhaps people who were older then--

**BL:** Yes.

**IL:** You know. You know if you were sort of in your fifties then. I don't know whether people went, oh yes, they must've done I suppose, but perhaps they didn't go for them.

**BL:** [Might have been called up?]

**VB:** I mean what sort of impression did you form of life in America from the films?

**BL:** Oh everyone was terribly rich.

**IL:** Yes.

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** They could eat anything which of course, we couldn't. You couldn't have bananas or all sorts of food. You know. It just wasn't there.

**IL:** Well, not before the war.

**BL:** No, not before.

**IL:** No. Everybody thought that they lived in these, you know, you go into a bedroom and it's the size of the Albert Hall! In some of those Hollywood films, you know.

**BL:** And they put on furs and jewellery.

**IL:** And of course, in fact that was true, because lots of girls, you know, the GI brides, girls who married Americans, thought they were going back to live in the, you know, in one of these eh sort of Hollywood-style houses, and they finished up like in a shack in Virginia or somewhere.

**VB: Yes.**

**BL: Mhm.**

**IL: You know. I mean it was, it was... [pause 2 seconds] And of course you see that, your cousins sent food and that over didn't they?**

**BL: Oh yes.**

**IL: During the war. They were... they were.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**IL: And of course when the Americans came over that was reinforced because the private soldiers had, the material of their uniforms was the equivalent of officers over here.**

**BL: Oh yes. The uniforms were better than our officers' uniforms.**

**IL: They had masses of money you see.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**BL: Mhm. And they had things like ice cream. Brought specially to the barracks and that for them. Whereas, you know, we just had to get on with it. [laughs]**

**IL: Yes, so that--**

**BL: Oh yes! They were a race apart.**

**IL: The eh, the sort of eh conception of the Americans that we had in the films was in a way reinforced when they came over in the war.**

**VB: Yeah.**



**BL:** Mhm.

**VB:** That's interesting. 'Cause it sounds like you were learning things from the films as well as enjoying them or--

**BL:** Oh yes!

**IL:** Well I suppose you were absorbing it by--

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** Like osmosis, you know.

**BL:** Yes. Oh, yes.

**IL:** You'd absorb it. 'Cause whether they were, you know, right. Obviously they weren't right because, I mean there were films that showed you it. Because I mean there was erm what's that one with Henry Fonda? About the Dust Bowl?

**VB:** Oh yes. Erm--

**IL:** *The Grapes of Wrath.*

**VB:** Yes.

**IL:** That was it.

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** Now I mean, I just wouldn't go, I mean, I wouldn't go to see that because having seen the trailer I thought, oh no. Don't want to see that, you know.

**BL:** What's the one with Paul Muni? 'Mother Earth'--

**IL:** Oh, *The Good Earth*! Oh, no. I never went to bother, to see those.

**BL:** Oh I did. I just found that dreary you know.

**VB:** Mhm.

**BL:** But eh, I didn't enter into that. I just sat thinking, oh no!

**VB:** [laughs]

**IL:** Well you did enter into it if it made you feel the way you would've done if you were over there!

**BL:** Well! But not, not in the same light-hearted way.

**IL:** [laughs]

**VB:** I mean, how did you feel when you came out of going to the cinema? [pause 2 seconds] If it was a good film.

**IL:** Well I used to feel hungry because we used to go in [laughing] and see everything round twice!

**VB:** Oh!

**IL:** So my main thing [laughing], gosh I must have something to eat! But erm ... [pause 2 seconds] I don't know that we felt particularly let down. You'd think, wouldn't you, having lived in all this glamour you'd come out and think--

**BL:** Oh I did. I always used to feel like a cold douche as I came out.

**IL:** Oh I didn't.

**BL:** Just, there was Muswell Hill you know. And I'd just come from [laughs] Hollywood.

**IL:** Oh no. I just used to think, oh well, that's eh, that's one compartment, you know, you'd shut the door there and go onto something else sort of thing.

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** You know, I didn't sort of feel, I didn't feel resentful, that I wasn't living in a place--

**BL:** Oh no! I didn't feel resentful. Just like coming out of the tunnel into the light. It was different, you know.

**IL:** I think we were brought up to be more philosophical about things then. You know, I mean...  
[pause 2 seconds]

**BL:** Oh yes. You didn't--

**IL:** Can I have this? No I can't. Well why not? Well just hard luck, sunshine, you know.

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** I mean we weren't, I don't think we all sort of felt we had to have our space and to be strong and  
[laughs] all this business the way people do now. Do you know what I mean?

[talking at the same time]

**BL:** Mhm. You did absolutely everything--

**IL:** You know, I've got to be able to do what I like. You couldn't do what you liked. You had to do what your mother told you.

**BL:** Absolutely. Yes. Well we had to always leave--

**IL:** Well you said that before--

**BL:** Ah.

**IL:** At the last one.

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** In time to get home for tea, you know?

**VB:** Yeah.

**BL:** That was, I mean we didn't like it but there was no question of not doing it. Whereas nowadays I can't imagine this happening at all.

**VB:** Mhm. It's interesting. Because it sounds like quite a different erm... [pause 3 seconds]

**BL:** Discipline.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** It's a whole different lifestyle, to be honest.

**VB:** That's it. Yeah.

**BL:** Whole different lifestyle.

**IL:** It really is. [pause 4 seconds]

**BL:** So, so mainly we went to the local cinema. There was another one, you see, the Ritz. We must have gone to that if it was a particular film. That was [inaudible]--

**IL:** And of course there were many more cinemas. I mean, you had a choice. Where I lived, you could go to three---

**VB:** Mhm.

**IL:** Within walking distance, you know.

**BL:** Well, the Ritz--

**IL:** There were two in Burnt Oak.

**BL:** Which was that little cinema that showed films about a month after they'd been released. They were quite good. You could pick up a film. That was quite close. Then the two in Muswell Hill.

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** The other ones were quite a way... There was the Gaumont but that was right at the Tally Ho [referring to Tally Ho Corner, London N12 9PT]

**IL:** Mhm. But there were plenty of--

**BL:** North Finchley. They were huge.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** So that, if you didn't want to see *The Good Earth*, there was something else.

**BL:** Oh yes!

**IL:** Somewhere else.

**BL:** That's right. And there were plenty of posters weren't there? All the street shops had posters.

**VB:** Ah!

**BL:** And the local papers always showed you what was on. You could easily find out. Whereas nowadays--

**IL:** Well the local paper still does them.

**BL:** Does it?

**IL:** Heather always looks up, you know.

**BL:** Oh. Do they?

**VB:** **But they had them in the shops as well?**

**BL:** Outside the shops, little boards.

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** Little boards like that. You know, ABC, Clark Gable.

**VB:** **[inaudible]**

**BL:** In fact those pictures were all [Pinner?] Showed them outside.

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

**BL:** Eh, what else? Didn't have much to eat in the cinema. Perhaps they had a sweet counter.

**IL:** [laughing] You may not have had much to eat. We used to take in a bag of [biscuits?!]

**BL:** They used to have the ice cream girl.

**IL:** [laughing]. Bought by, I bought it in Woolworths en route! [laughing]

**BL:** The ice cream girl came down. Then the trailers came with the spotlight on. She was very glamorous. That was about the height of the food. At last night's showing, or was it an advert showing the audience, they were all eating popcorn and stuff.

**IL:** I think I used, we used to eat quite a lot in the cinema. Take it with you.

**BL:** Chacun a son goût! [laughs]

**IL:** Yes.

**VB:** It sounds like you needed it though, if you were sitting... [laughs]

**IL:** Well that's right. [laughs] Yes.

**VB:** Take supplies. [laughs]

**IL:** Before it opened at about, I don't know, half past one, quarter to two. We didn't come out till, ooh, six at least.

**VB:** Oh.

**IL:** 'Cause in the winter you come out and it was dark!

**BL:** Yes. Yes. But then there was no worry about walking in the dark.

**IL:** That's right. [pause 2 seconds] Right. What next?

**VB:** Can I ask you some more of the stars that you mentioned?

**BL:** Oh Yes!

**VB:** Erm, Bette Davis was someone else that cropped up.

**BL:** Yes.

**IL:** Oh yes. That's right. Now I wasn't all that, sorry, no you carry on--

**VB:** Yeah, you were saying that. You weren't. And I wondered what it was about Bette Davis that--

**IL:** Well her films were much more serious, weren't they? You see, it wasn't my cup of tea, all this stuff.

[speaking at the same time]

**BL:** I wouldn't say... But she played Elizabeth the First, didn't she?

**IL:** Eh, we had the stars, you know.

**BL:** Bette Davis. Queen Elizabeth the First.

**IL:** Yes. With Errol Flynn. [referring to *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*]

**BL:** That's right.

**IL:** [inaudible] Oh I quite liked that one.

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** 'Cause I liked anything, you see, I liked historical things.

**BL:** Yes. Well, Errol Flynn too.

**IL:** False or not! [laughs]

**VB:** What--

**IL:** [laughs] Yes.

**VB:** What about, just when you said that it reminded me, I don't know why, of erm Henry the Eighth and Charles Laughton. [referring *The Private Life of Henry the Eighth*]

**BL:** Oh yes.



**IL:** Oh Yes! Yes. I liked anything like that.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** Yes. That's right. And eh, of course all the Errol Flynn ones, because they were, as well as being light and entertaining, they were also historical.

**BL:** Swashbuckling things. Yes.

**IL:** Which was erm...

**BL:** Well of course, the Douglas Fairbanks were really too old for us.

**IL:** Oh, a bit before our time. Yes.

**BL:** Douglas Fairbanks Junior. But the original one, you know, the original swashbuckler.

**IL:** Oh that was [too soon?] A decade or more in front, yes, mhm.

**BL:** We didn't really see any silent films.

**VB:** Ah.

**BL:** I can't really remember any. I think they were all talkies. The first, I saw erm, what was the first colour one I saw? *The Singing [Pirate?]*, I think [probably referring to the *Dancing Pirate*] with erm, Allan Jones. Which 'Donkey Serenade' came out on [referring to *The Firefly*].

**IL:** That couldn't have been the first...

**BL:** No. That's what I saw.

**IL:** Oh. Oh, I beg your pardon. I'm sorry.

**BL:** 'Course a lot of them were black and white, weren't they? For ages.

**IL:** Oh yes.

**BL:** The colour wasn't any good either but you didn't realise that. [laughs]

**VB:** I was going to say. Did it make a big impression on you, seeing that?

**BL:** Mhm.

**VB:** The first coloured film you saw.

**IL:** Oh yes. Yes.

**BL:** Oh, yes.

**IL:** Yes, because a lot of them came in during the war didn't they? Because I remember going with erm, Nobbie to see erm, we used to go and see the all the musicals, when I was in the services.

**BL:** This was about '41. Well [Bessie?; inaudible], they saw the musicals.

**IL:** Yes, that's right. Yes.

**VB:** Mhm.

**IL:** And they were... oh gosh, they were so garish the colours!

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** Mind you, the colours they put together now.

**BL:** They were like a comic, weren't they?

**IL:** Mhm.

**BL:** Bright reds, yellows and greens.

**IL:** Yes.

**VB:** 'Cause I remember seeing *The Garden of Allah*, which I think must be one of the--

**IL:** Oh that's right. Marlene Dietrich.

**BL:** Oh, that's Marlene Dietrich!

**IL:** And Charles Boyer!

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** That's right.

**VB:** Yeah.

**BL:** No, I never saw that.

**IL:** No, I didn't see that. But erm--

**BL:** That was frowned upon for me to see it. Goodness knows why.

**VB:** Well I think it is a bit sort of risqué maybe, for a young person.

**BL:** Oh! Is it? [laughs] For a fifteen year old!

**VB:** For a fifteen year old, yeah.

**IL:** Yes, but your mother carried on about the *Congress Dances*! Well I saw that as a child and I couldn't under--

**BL:** Yes! [laughs]

**VB:** [laughs]

**IL:** I don't know why she asked.

**BL:** I can't remember. It was Jackie Coogan and *The Kid*.

**IL:** That's right.

**BL:** Well I can't remember a thing about it. The *Congress Dances* which was 'with it' [pause 2 seconds] All I can remember is these girls in feathers dancing. And I just thought, oh, [laughs] you know.

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** Whether they were dressed provocatively or not, I wouldn't know! Certainly didn't provoke me.

**IL:** I don't know a lot about it. I know Conrad Veidt was in it.

**BL:** Oh, was he?

**IL:** Mhm.

**BL:** Oh.

**IL:** I think it was Metternich or something. But it was years and years ago, so it's very vague—

**BL:** I don't know what it was.

**VB:** That's interesting though. Did your mother like to know what you were seeing and erm--

**BL:** Oh yes! Oh yes.

**VB:** Ah I see.

**IL:** No, my mother didn't. I don't think my mother did--

**BL:** Erm--

**IL:** Particularly.

**BL:** Once Mary, 'course, she was three years older than me, my sister. Erm, once she and I went together, I think mother relaxed then.

**VB: Ah.**

**BL:** You know. Eh, but I mean my reading was always supervised. I was only allowed to have certain boys' papers. [pause 2 seconds] Radio was supervised.

**IL:** Oh I don't know. Perhaps it was. I never noticed it.

**BL:** Yes. Quite. No, I'm thinking about it now. Some things you're always unclear about. Ever so [strong?]

**VB: Mhm.**

**BL:** So there was a sort of... [pause 2 seconds]

**IL:** Censorship.

**BL:** [laughs] Censorship. Sounds too strong a word, you know.

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** But just keeping a wary eye on--

**VB: That's interesting.**

**BL:** What was there, yeah. Mhm.

**IL:** I don't honestly think my family did. I can't remember anyway. [pause 2 seconds] I mean they never said, "What are you going to see?" "No," I shouldn't see that, or anything like that.

**BL:** Mhm.

**VB: Mhm.**

**BL:** Yeah. I can't remember mine ever refusing. [pause 2 seconds] It was just that, when I was younger, I couldn't afford to go on my own, obviously, so that I went with a member of the family and I would just have been taken, I suppose.

**VB: Yes.**

**IL:** Oh no! Well when I was little, and mum and dad used to take me, obviously they, they--

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** I only went to see what they wanted to see, I suppose.

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** No one said to me, "Would you like to see this, dear?" or anything like that. [laughs]

**VB: Yeah. That is interesting because just erm, your sort of families' attitudes to--**

**BL:** Mhm.

**VB: Erm, going to the cinema.**

**IL:** Yes.

**VB: Yeah.**

[pause 2 seconds]

**IL:** No, I should think mum was quite pleased to get rid of me every Saturday afternoon, quite honestly.

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** Well you used to go to the [Jones?]

**IL:** Oh that was, yeah, well that was when I was younger. Yes.

**VB:** Mhm.

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** I was about, I suppose about eleven then. We didn't, I didn't go in Islington. When we moved out to Edgware.

**BL:** Mhm. I never went on my own.

**IL:** So now--

**VB:** I mean, some of the others stars you mentioned--

**IL:** Yes.

**VB:** Are people like erm Katharine Hepburn and Joan Crawford.

**IL:** Now erm [pause 2 seconds] I did see Joan, because there again, Joan Crawford's were again not sort of a barrel of fun, quite honestly.

**BL:** Tempestuous.

**VB: Yeah.**

**IL:** You know, these sort of awful women [would?] appear, this sort of business. I like Katharine Hepburn because she did quite a lot of comedy. You see I was really more for the comedy and musicals and things like that.

**VB: Yes.**

**BL:** Mhm.

**VB: Yeah.**

**IL:** And she was erm, of course, she and Spencer Tracy were very good together.

**VB: Oh yes.**

**IL:** Because they, there again, there was that sort of spark between them.

**BL:** Yes.

**IL:** They seemed to hit each other off--

**VB: Yeah.**

**IL:** Sort of thing, you know.

**BL:** Still, even that later one, *On Golden Pond*, which is, you know, recent--

**IL:** Mhm.

**BL:** They went awfully well together.

**IL:** Well they weren't in that. Spencer Tracy wasn't in that.



**BL:** Wasn't he?

**IL:** No he wasn't. It was Henry Fonda.

**BL:** Oh! I thought it was Spencer Tracy.

**IL:** No.

**BL:** Never mind. Back off then.

**VB:** [laughs]

**IL:** [laughs]

**VB:** Well it's a similar sort of partnership.

**BL:** Yes.

**IL:** Yeah.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** Yes, yes it was. Because Henry Fonda was another irascible sort of--

**VB:** That's right.

**IL:** Yes, that's right. Yes.

**VB:** Yeah. Yeah.

**IL:** Sorry, em,

**VB:** Erm, I mean someone else that you mentioned, you mentioned Madeleine Carroll--

**BL:** Ye-es! Aw.

**VB:** As someone you liked.

**BL:** Oh yes. Madeleine Carroll and Carole Lombard. Yes.

**VB:** What was it about them that made them good?

**BL:** I don't think it was sex. At all, you know. Erm I think it just, I thought them nice people, very sophisticated, you know.

**IL:** Mhm. I could take them or leave them. I didn't like them to be honest.

**BL:** They were always dressed beautifully, you know, their hair was done beautifully. And, well it did sort of--

**IL:** Whatever was it to do with the film [laughs] if their hair was done beautifully!

**BL:** Oh yes!

**IL:** [laughs]

**BL:** They could come out of the water, it would still be perfect. [laughs]

**VB:** It would be lovely to have that ability! [laughs]

**IL:** [laughs]

**BL:** Sort of idolising them you know. They, they were on a plinth for me.

**VB:** Ah. Yes.

**IL:** Well they were called screen goddesses, weren't they?

**BL:** Oh yes.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** And in a way they were, weren't they?

**BL:** Well they were to me.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** Removed from life in a way.

**BL:** Oh yes. Oh yes. I couldn't imagine them walking down Finchley High Road. They were. They went by in gilded coaches, [laughs] you know. They really were--

**VB:** Yeah.

**BL:** Something very high.

**VB:** So was that part of their appeal, do you think?

**BL:** Mhm.

**VB:** That they were, sort of--

**BL:** But I wouldn't have ... [pause 3 seconds] I mean if the film was on, and she was in it, I wouldn't have then said "I must go and see it." It just happened to be on.

**VB:** Ah I see.

**BL:** If she was in it, "Oh good!" Whereas my sister had a great yen on Robert Donat and she would go anywhere to see him. Saw the same film [pause 2 seconds] oh, I dunno, five or six times, one of them. Don't know which one it was. *The Ghost Goes West?* Anyway--

**VB: Oh yes.**

**BL:** It was, that to her, she really was quite keen. And erm I used to tag along 'cause she, she got the autograph bug. And we used to go to Golders Green Hippodrome. See in those days they used to have quite big stars there.

**VB: A-ah!**

**BL:** And erm, we used to wait outside for Franchot Tone and people like that. And... [pause 3 seconds] Oh! And erm, of course we were lucky in Muswell Hill, at the Alexandra Palace there used to be new television coming up. And they would come out. And their faces were almost the colour of your jersey.

**VB: Really! [laughs]**

**BL:** Yes, really.

**VB: [laughs] Green, ah!**

**BL:** Green colour, because of the cameras. And eh--

**IL:** Surely that put Mary off! [inaudible; laughs].

**VB: [laughs]**

**BL:** Annabel. Amy Hall. You know, all eh, people who happened to be there at the time used to stand and wait. Pass the books in, and out they'd come again. [laughs] That was quite a [great thing?].

**VB: Ah. It must've been quite exciting actually.**

**BL:** Oh yes! Of course, you actually saw them. Certainly at Alexandra Palace cinema. Yes.

**VB: [laughs]**

**BL:** 'Cause they, they came, they were very good. They must've come out in their break. You know, coffee break or something, just to say... And there were never more than about six people there. It wasn't as though it was a Beatles thing of a million people. And they'd sign, smile sweetly and go back in again. You know. [gasps] "I've seen Franchot Tone!"

**VB:** [laughs] Ah.

**BL:** Did you ever do that?

**IL:** No. No. [tape cuts out]

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

**VB:** You mentioned there the film *The Ghost Goes West*. That's a great one, isn't it?

**BL:** Oh yes, yes.

**IL:** Yes, that's--

**BL:** That was very good because it sort of showed the interaction between Scottish society and American society when we moved over.

**VB:** Yes.

**BL:** And the thing that... what's his name, Eugene--?

**IL:** Palette. Played Friar Tuck in 'Robin Hood'. [referring to *The Adventures of Robin Hood*]

**BL:** Yeah. In this one he was the rich man—

**IL:** That's right.

**BL:** Who was transferring the castle.

**VB:** Ah-h! Yes! Yes.

**BL:** Stone by stone.

**VB:** Yes.

**BL:** And erm, he had it all built somewhere in America. And he was showing his friends round and said, "Gee! This is the latest thing."

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** And there was armour here, a suit of armour. He opened it up and there was a radio fitted in.

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** I thought, that was, you know, I thought, how marvellous! It had two dials and everything! Showing the age of it.

**VB:** Aw.

**BL:** But eh, that was very good. Was it with Jean Arthur in that?

**IL:** Yes, I think it was. Yes. Yes.

**BL:** He appeared in the boat going over because he was the ghost of the castle.

**IL:** Oh yes. He appeared in the hold... with all the stones.

**BL:** Yes!

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** That's right. That's right. And then he appeared again when they built the castle.

**VB:** Mhm.

**BL:** And he was himself as his great great great great grandson.

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

**BL:** He used to talk to the ghost.

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

**BL:** Yes, I did enjoy that. But I should've thought [inaudible] was in there. Must've been one of the other Robert Donats. Was it *The 39 Steps*? Not sure.

**IL:** 'Mr Chips'. [referring to *Goodbye, Mr Chips*]

**BL:** Oh yes, yes.

**IL:** I wasn't all that keen on him.

**BL:** No.

**IL:** I didn't really know very much about him.

**VB:** That's interesting. Was there something about him that didn't make him in the top rank for you?

**IL:** Oh I don't know. [pause 2 seconds] I thought he was a bit of a wimp really, to be honest.

**VB:** I suppose compared to stars like Clark Gable--

**IL:** Well, that's right!

**BL:** Oh yes!

**VB:** He was a very different type.

**IL:** That's right. He was.

**BL:** Yes, he was quite a different type.

**VB:** Yeah.

[pause 3 seconds]

**BL:** Just trying to think. Just trying to think of all the hundreds of films that we've seen.

**VB:** Erm, well someone that you mentioned again as someone you weren't so keen on was **Jessie Matthews**.

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** Oh yeah, no, I wasn't so keen on her.

**BL:** Well she was a, well, as you know, musical comedy, and did, what was it called? 'Greensleeves'.

**IL:** *Evergreen*.

**BL:** *Evergreen*

**VB:** Mhm.

**BL:** Well I enjoyed the musical side of it. She was all right.

**IL:** Mhm. I don't think--

**BL:** I didn't put her on the same pedestal though.



**VB: Yes.**

**BL: Definitely not.**

**IL: I don't think the British musicals were as slick as the American ones, you know.**

**BL: No, I'm sure that's--**

**VB: Yeah.**

**BL: [sings extract from 'Over my Shoulder']**

**VB: [laughs]**

**BL: She's buried, you know, in Pinner.**

**VB: Is she really?**

**BL: Oh yes!**

**VB: Ah!**

**BL: No, not Pinner. Ruislip.**

**IL: Ruislip.**

**BL: St Martin's Church at Ruislip cemetery.**

**VB: That's interesting.**

**BL: 'Cause erm, when she was old and ill, she was at the actors' home which is in Northwood.**

**VB: Ah!**

**BL:** Denville Hall. And that's their nearest church. And there's a little plaque to her in the cemetery.

**VB:** Ah. 'Cause I knew she came from--

**BL:** She came from London, but I'm not quite sure where.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** Berwick Market.

**BL:** Oh! Was it?

**IL:** Yes. She was really quite a Cockney. I think which is why the accent was so sort of pseudo cut-glass really.

**BL:** Yeah.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** You know, she'd obviously been to--

**BL:** To RADA.

**IL:** And thought about, you know, had to think about how... she was speaking. But she had quite a resurgence of her career where she was Mrs Dale in the [series?], wasn't she?

**VB:** Yes.

**IL:** Yeah. Yeah.

**VB:** Absolutely.

**IL:** Yes, yes.

**VB: Yeah.**

**BL:** Oh, I thought she had a pleasant personality.

**VB: Ah.**

**BL:** But not in, funny isn't it? When you ask us to think about it. Not in the same league as [pause 2 seconds] them, Betty Grable.

**IL:** 'Course, she was a little bit earlier, wasn't she?

**BL:** I can't remember if she was in colour.

**IL:** No.

**BL:** Or whether she was in black and white?

**IL:** Black and white, I'm sure.

**BL:** Jack Buchanan. Another one. He also was, erm, in musicals--

**IL:** Yes, but mainly, they were on the stage weren't they? That's right. They didn't make all that number of films.

**BL:** Oh their films were like a film-stage thing, weren't they?

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** Erm, Cicely Courtneidge.

**VB: Ah.**

**BL:** *Under Your Hat.*

**IL:** And Jack Hulbert and those. But they were mainly stage people.

[all talking at once]

**VB:** Yeah. So you associated them more with stage.

**BL:** He did a film with [inaudible] different.

**VB:** Did you like their partnership? Did you think they were good? Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge.

**IL:** Eh... No, I wasn't all that struck to be honest--

**VB:** Mhm.

**IL:** You know. But as I say, I think I must've been young. I think I must've gone with my parents to see that. That was earlier.

**VB:** Ah. Do you think it might have appealed more to your parents' generation then?

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** Yes. I think it probably did.

**BL:** It is an age thing.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** Yes. Yes. Yes I think that's so.

**VB:** Yeah.

**BL:** 'Course I can remember the coming in of, erm, cartoons. First of all, I don't know why they don't redo them. Walt Disney did beautiful things called *Silly Symphonies*. They were only about ten minutes? Something like that. And they were beautifully done. And then he went into his bigger films. *Snow White* and those sort of things. And it's a great shame that they, they never redid them because they were timeless in a way.

**IL:** I can't say I remembered them all that much.

**BL:** Ah yes.

**IL:** I know the name but I can't remember.

**BL:** They were allied to music. Rather like erm *Fantasia* [inaudible] music, but in a small--

**IL:** Oh I don't remember that at all. Thought they were just ordinary cartoons.

**BL:** Oh, no, later on of course, *Silly Symphonies* are those things with Quacky Duck and all that.

**IL:** Yes, that's right.

**VB:** Mhm. Yes.

**BL:** Oh no, I don't mean those.

**IL:** Oh I don't, I don't remember the others.

**BL:** They were really beautiful but they were a long time ago. At the very beginning I should think, of what he was doing.

**VB:** That's interesting.

**BL:** Because... [pause 2 seconds] Well, as you know, the cartoon system takes thousands of drawings. I suppose, at the beginning, ten minutes was probably the most they could handle.

**VB: Yes.**

**IL:** 'Course that's all different now.

**BL:** If you went to a Monseigneur News Theatre, or to a cartoon--

**IL:** You also had cartoons, yes.

**BL:** They used to have just cartoon theatres in London.

**VB: Really?**

**BL:** Oh yes. You could go in and just see a series of Donald Ducks and Mickey Mouse and--

**IL:** [chuckles] I don't know why you'd want to!

**VB: [laughs]**

**BL:** Well! They were used a lot near stations where people, say, had an hour to wait, and they'd pop in for half an hour to see--

**VB: Ah, I see!**

**BL:** That's why this, the Monseigneurs, which were dotted around Piccadilly Circus. They were just news.

**IL:** Oh I know they were. Yes.

**BL:** And the whole thing was repeated, I should think in about half an hour, and it started again.

**VB: That makes sense. Yes.**

**BL:** They weren't expensive.

**VB: Yes.**

**BL: You could just pop into them.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**BL: And they were quite small as well.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**BL: You know. Would hold perhaps a hundred people.**

**VB: Ah that makes a lot of sense. As you say, if you had half an hour or--**

**BL: Mhm.**

**VB: Twenty minutes or something.**

**BL: Yes, yes. Of course. Otherwise you'd kick your heels around.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**IL: 'Course animated films is a whole, another chapter isn't it? Really.**

**BL: Oh yes.**

**VB: *Snow White*.**

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

**BL: Mhm.**

**VB: Did you enjoy films like *Snow White*?**

**IL:** Oh yes. That was quite a--

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** A sort of eh... [pause 2 seconds]

**BL:** Quite scary wasn't it? The witch bits.

**IL:** Sort of breakthrough wasn't it, really?

**BL:** Mhm. *Fantasia*. I saw that several times, that was... I'm very keen on music, you see, so that's why--

**VB: Ah I see.**

**BL:** Whereas *Make Mine Music* which was more a pop, well, not pop but a lighter thing, didn't make the same impact at all, I mean--

**VB: Did you listen to music a lot then as a... when you were in your late teens?**

**BL:** Well I, I used to, because erm I had a wind-up gramophone and father had collected quite a lot of records and in a strange way. He collected them by instrument. So he had a Viennese waltz played on an accordion. And all sorts of odd things like that. But, I mean... [laughs]

**VB: How interesting!**

**BL:** Yes. [laughs] And eh, several orchestral ones as well. And I suppose that started me off.

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** No I didn't.



**VB: Ah.**

**IL:** I'm not fond of music at all, quite honestly.

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** Although, as I say, that sounds daft doesn't it? 'Cause I used to go to musicals. But I used to like, I think it was the dancing I liked.

**VB: Yeah. It doesn't really sound, I can see what you mean. As you say, it's a different sort of thing 'cause you've got the dancing and--**

**IL:** That's right. Yes. I mean I'm, I'm not, I wouldn't sit down and listen to a piece of music, to be honest, you know--

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** Because I'd rather have movement or words.

**VB: Yeah. Do you think there was something about the musicals as well and the way that they looked? Eh, I'm wondering if it, you know, not just sound on its own but erm--**

**BL:** Well, it was very slick. I mean the whole staging of it.

**VB: Yes!**

**IL:** Oh yes. The choreography and that.

**BL:** Yes.

**IL:** Yes. Yes. That was very... Especially those Busby Berkeley ones, you know--

**VB: [gasps] Oh!**

**IL:** Those lovely patterns they made.

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** I loved that.

**BL:** And you looked down and they're all, all the legs came out--

**IL:** That's right. Flowers. Yes.

**VB: Yeah.**

**IL:** Yes. That was very very fascinating. Yes.

**BL:** The camerawork was very good in those.

**VB: And of course the costumes.**

**IL:** Yes. Yes. Yes.

**BL:** The early camerawork was very static. You know, weren't they?

**IL:** Yes. Yes. Yes.

**BL:** Some of the early films. Making it very like a stage play.

**VB: Yes.**

**IL:** Well of course they had to crank the camera, didn't they, in the very early days?

**BL:** Yes. [inaudible] [laughing]

**IL:** [laughs]

**VB:** 'Cause, I mean, you mentioned *Top Hat* there a minute ago.

**BL:** Mhm.

**VB:** The sort of dance sequences in that.

**BL:** Oh yes!

**IL:** Yes. They were very very clever indeed you know.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** And he used to have them all done in one take, didn't he?

**BL:** Yes.

**IL:** I mean--

**VB:** It's incredible.

**IL:** If you look, he's so--

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** Whereas, nowadays--

**BL:** They cut films—

**IL:** Erm, you see a bit of this and a bit of that and a bit of that.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** But, you know, since I read that, if I see a Fred Astaire film, I really look hard and I think, yes, it is one take.

**BL:** Yes.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** You know, there's no sort of break in there. Which is fantastic really.

**VB:** And yet it looks so effortless. Never out of breath! [laughs]

**IL:** That's right! Yes.

**VB:** [laughs] Ah.

**BL:** Yeah, [inaudible] [be true?] but in his tribute film where he said that Ginger Rogers in one had a beautiful gown of sort of feather stuff. It was all flying on his face! [laughs]. You know.

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** And you don't realise that. 'Cause his evening dress was all smothered with little bits all over it.

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** Just... the latest one, we have got a video of Riverdance [possibly referring to *Riverdance: the Show*].

**VB:** Ah!

**BL:** Now that is very much in the style, isn't it? Of those [type of?]-

[talking at once]

**IL:** Well...

**BL:** Staged production. It's, it's a slick... in [inaudible]--

**IL:** Yes! The production. Yes. Exactly. The dancing is quite different.

**BL:** Oh yes! Yes. But it was the, you know, the actual stage [inaudible].

**IL:** Yes.

**BL:** And we both like ballet too.

**VB:** Ah! I see.

**BL:** You see, which is again choreographed.

**VB:** Yeah.

**BL:** Dance.

**VB:** Yeah.

**BL:** [We used to go?] [inaudible]

**IL:** Couldn't afford to go now. The prices at Covent Garden.

**VB:** Oh! It's ridiculous.

**IL:** Mhm.

**BL:** And opera, or any of those. Still. Now!

**VB:** Well, the other thing I was going to do, I brought a couple of film books from the thirties--

**BL:** Oh Yes!

**VB:** That we have in the office that I thought you might like to see. [laughs] So, I've got one of them I think from about 1938. I think it might be this one.

**BL:** Gosh! [That looks venerable?]

**VB:** No, this is 1935. So it must be this one that's 1938. [laughs] But of course a lot of the stars that you've mentioned there.

**BL:** Oh! There's Garbo! Yes! Yes. 'Daily Express' book. I didn't know they did these.

**IL:** Yes, I used to find, I mean I saw quite a few of Greta Garbo's films, but she again's a bit, oh, there's Robert Donat. She was a bit of a misery too [laughs] wasn't she?

**VB:** [laughs]

**IL:** Greta Garbo really.

[pause 3 seconds]

**BL:** [looking at book] Charlie Ruggles as a young man. Good Gracious! Claudette Colbert. [pause 2 seconds]

**VB:** Was Claudette Colbert someone that you--

**IL:** Oh yes! She was good. She--

**BL:** Oh yes. She was very--

**IL:** She played in comedies, didn't she, too?

**BL:** [reading from book]. "One of the most beautiful," no, I never thought her beautiful.

**IL:** Who was that?

**BL:** Claudette Colbert. "One of the most highly accomplished actresses in pictures today and also one of the most beautiful."

**IL:** Oh now, I did like that one. Charles Boyer and Greta Garbo in Mar... *Marie Walewska*. I liked that one. That again, you see, was historical.

**VB:** Ah. Claudette Colbert was in a film with Clark Gable as well, wasn't she? Erm--

**IL:** Oh *It Happened One Night*.

**VB:** *It Happened One Night*. Yes.

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

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** Now I think I saw that with mum and dad. I think that was a little bit before I went on my own.

**VB:** Ah.

**IL:** I didn't, I didn't go on my own. We used to live in Islington and I didn't go on my own when we lived there. But we moved in 1935 and I was eleven.

**BL:** Oh! It's Madeleine Carroll in *The 39 Steps*.

**IL:** And it was then I started, yes. Oh Robert Taylor. No, I was never struck on him. He seemed to be too keen on [his own looks?].

[talking at once]

**BL:** Charles Laughton... [pause 3 seconds] Oh *Cavalcade*.

**IL:** Ooh! I remember seeing that.

**BL:** Ye-es! Clive Brook and Diana Wynyard.

**VB:** Was that one you enjoyed or...?

**BL:** Oh yes! I enjoyed *Cavalcade*. I remember that. It was quite unusual, wasn't it?

**IL:** I don't remember very much about it. I went with mum and dad to see that. Went to the Blue Hall Annex. The only thing I remember about that is that the young couple went--[pause 2 seconds]

**BL:** *Scarlet Pimpernel*.

**IL:** On a boat, on a liner, for their honeymoon and they were talking together, and they moved away and you saw the--

**BL:** Oh.

**IL:** The lifeboats with 'Titanic' on it.

**BL:** Lifeboats with 'Titanic' on it. Oh yes.

**IL:** And I remember as a child, feeling all cold, I'm gone all cold now, thinking about it.

**VB:** Aw.

**BL:** Yes, yes. That was terribly clever, so [simple?] [pause 3 seconds] 'Bengal Lancers'. [referring to *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*]

**IL:** Oh! I remember that. That was Gary Cooper. You'd better look at the 1930, oh, I liked him, Anton Walbrook. Anton Wohlbrück

**BL:** Oh, Elisabeth Bergner!

**IL:** Oh, Joan Blondell.



**BL:** Oh! [inaudible] wouldn't she? [laughs] [pause 3 seconds] Ah! Raymond Massey. In *Things to Come*. Now that, that was erm, because I'm quite still keen on science fiction. And that really awoke my interest in it. I thought that was brilliantly done--

**VB: Ah!**

**BL:** And there were several articles at the time, showing, well [inaudible] showing that erm, they used things like glass tables for perhaps the first time ever. And, you know, glass that's strong enough to take somebody standing on it. And erm, yes, helicopters. Do you remember that?

**IL:** Mhm. Yes. And at the end they went off in a rocket, didn't they?

**BL:** Oh, yes, I always thought that was foolish. They went off in a bullet, a gun firing it. A monstrous bullet.

**VB: [laughs]**

**IL: [laughs]**

**BL:** They were pointing at the moon. How they were going to get out of it, live when they were up there--

**IL: [laughs]**

**BL:** [laughs loudly] Unless it was a boy and a girl, one presumed they were hoping to colonise the place. That really, no, that struck me as quite wrong. [pause 4 seconds] *The Ghost Goes West*. [pause 3 seconds]

**IL:** Gosh these are... Errol... oh, I used to love Errol Flynn. That's... A friend of mine from school, she still, [laughs] she still likes him! She taped erm 'Robin Hood' for her grandson! [referring to *The Adventures of Robin Hood*]

**VB: Aw!**

**BL:** Oh, good heavens!

**IL:** [laughs]. And she's made him a, she made him a cloak and a sword and I don't know what else. The two of them can practically [laughs] join in with the, with the, erm, words.

**VB: Ah!**

**IL:** The script, you know.

**BL:** Oh *The Tunnel*.

**IL:** Oh! That was the most dreary thing!

**BL:** Oh no!

**VB: [laughs]**

**BL:** That was great. They only drove a tunnel under the Atlantic. When halfway through--

**IL:** You can imagine what happened, can't you?

**BL:** This chap, what's his name? Richard Dix. This chap's son was in one section where they cut through the middle of a volcano or something ridiculous. And [laughs] they closed great doors and he was trapped the other side or crushed in the middle. Oh, I thought that was... great.

**IL:** No. I remember being bored stiff with that--

**VB: [laughs]**

**IL:** I'd keep looking at my, trying to see my watch. Thinking, how much longer is THIS rubbish going on?

**BL:** [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**BL:** You didn't get up and go out.

**IL:** No, course not. [laughs] Wanted to see the main film again! [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**BL:** Here we are. "How the Silly Symphonies Are Made." [pause 4 seconds]

**VB: Ah!**

**IL:** And of course, we used to have these erm [pause 2 seconds] erm, film magazines.

**BL:** Oh yes. 'Picturegoer'.

**IL:** Each week. 'Picturegoer'. [pause 3 seconds] Oh, look! Here's erm Don Ameche. He's only just recently died. Now he had a resurgence, didn't he? In his career.

**VB: Yes.**

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** Em, eh there were two. The *Cocoon*.

**VB: *Cocoon*. Yes.**

**IL:** And there was another one where he played a sort of erm. [pause 2 seconds] I didn't see it. But it was something about, something to do with the Mafia, wasn't it? And he was the sort of fall guy or something. I can't remember... [probably referring to *Things Change*] but I know, I mean, he's in his eighties anyway.

**BL:** And there was also that peculiar film, where a group of Americans--

**IL:** *Cocoon*, the *Cocoon*.

**BL:** Ah! Were taken up by space people.

**VB:** Was he someone that you liked in the thirties or...?

[pause 2 seconds]

**IL:** Yes, I did. Yes. Yet again it was, it was very light-hearted you know. You did erm [pause 3 seconds]

**BL:** [looking through book] [inaudible] Oh, there's Jack [H?]. [inaudible] [laughs]

**IL:** He was d'Artagnan. Yes I quite liked him. He was... You see, there again, if it, I should have to see it if it came up again and see, I wonder what it's really like or whether it was, [pause 2 seconds] or whether I should just be as disappointed as I was with Myrna Loy. [laughs]

**VB:** Mhm.

**BL:** *Mutiny on the Bounty*. [inaudible] Tom Walls and Ralph Lynn. Mhm. Oh, Fred Astaire. Norma Shearer. Oh Grace Moore, Evelyn Laye. I was never terribly keen on them. They used to do these sort of operatic musicals.

**VB:** Mhm.

**BL:** But in those days it was too operatic for me. I liked a bit of, a bit of zip in it.

**IL:** Isn't funny how some of these people sunk without trace and people like Joan Fontaine are still going.

**VB:** Mhm.

**BL:** Yeah, I mean who on earth was Leonora Corbett? In *Heart's Delight* [also known as *Heart's Desire*] with Richard Tauber. [pause 3 seconds] What are they wearing in this? You see, absolutely elegant. Very dainty now but... [pause 2 seconds]

**VB: Did you enjoy, was that part of the film that you enjoyed? Was the way the stars dressed?**

**BL:** Oh yes. Oh yes. Very much so. The way they presented themselves to us. Yes! Yes. [pause 3 seconds]

**IL:** [inaudible]

**BL:** Oh of course Shirley Temple. Saw a lot of hers. [pause 2 seconds] Freddie Bartholomew. I never liked him very much.

**VB: Ah! Well what was it about Freddie Bartholomew that--**

**BL:** Well he was a stuck-up...

**IL:** He was too good to be true, I think.

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** He always, he always played [pause 2 seconds] some sort of sickeningly good child, didn't he?

**VB: [laughs]**

**IL:** Bit like Margaret O'Brien.

**BL:** Ah, there she is! Carole Lombard.

**VB: [laughs]**

**IL:** Mhm.

**BL:** [reading] "Ivory smooth in beauty, with a flair for wearing lovely clothes." Ye-es! [pause 4 seconds]

**IL:** Gene Cagney.

**VB:** Did you like these gangster films? I don't think we really--

**IL:** Erm... [pause 2 seconds] Well, I wasn't all that keen on them, really, you know.

**BL:** Were they second, were they B films? Not, James Cagney would have been the A film.

**IL:** Yes. Mhm. [pause 2 seconds]. No, I wouldn't have gone out of my way to see those. I would've gone to one of the other three cinemas. [pause 4 seconds]

[both speak in quiet voices while looking at books; inaudible].

**BL:** Richard Tillman. [inaudible] Marlene Dietrich. Yes.

**IL:** I wonder what these people look like. You know, when they weren't all made up off the set.

**BL:** Yes, exactly. *Modern Times*. Didn't think much of his. I was never terribly keen on him. Charlie Chaplin. Wasn't my humour. Marie Dressler. Yes.

**IL:** Oh she used to be with Wallace Beery.

**BL:** Mhm, that's right. Wallace Beery. *Tugboat Annie*.

**IL:** I saw *Tugboat Annie*. Can't remember anything about it. I should have had that one and you should have had this one. That's my gen, my erm--

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** Jean Harlow. [pause 3 seconds] You know there's a picture here, she looks awfully like Katharine, my cousin.

**VB:** Ah.

**IL:** Do you think so?

**BL:** Yes. [pause 2 seconds] When she was younger.

**IL:** Mind that book doesn't fall to bits--

**VB:** Aw it's not in very good condition I don't think. [laughs] Wouldn't worry.

**BL:** I'm treating it with care.

**IL:** It's sixty years old. Good Lord [inaudible].

**BL:** Oh Warner Baxter. [inaudible]

[talking at same time]

**IL:** Warner Baxter... he used to be

**BL:** Oh Bing Crosby. Yes, well of course that's coming later on, the erm, the Road films.

**IL:** No, I was thinking of Warner Baxter. He used to be in 'Gold Diggers' of whatsit? You know. 'Gold Diggers' of this that and the other wasn't he? [Warner Baxter was not in *Gold Diggers of 1933*]

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** I'm sure he was the theatrical impresario. 'Course a lot of these people, I'm sure I said this the last time we saw you, always played the same part. You know, Mischa Auer was always the sort of mad Russian.

**BL:** The maître d' of a restaurant.

**IL:** That's right. And Franklyn Pangborn was always the [pause 2 seconds] butler wasn't he?

**VB:** Mhm.

**IL:** Edward Everett Horton was always the, sappy friend of the hero.

**VB:** [laughs].

[talking at the same time]

**BL:** Yes. Yes. It was very much. But in erm, Fred Astaire, Charlotte somebody used to kick her leg up in the air.

**IL:** Charlotte Greenwood, yes.

**BL:** Yes. [inaudible]

**IL:** I suppose really if we'd gone on... [pause 2 seconds] seeing them any longer we'd have got fairly fed up with it really.

**BL:** Well then the war came in when--

**IL:** I suppose.

[pause 3 seconds]

**IL:** I suppose we only really went for, regularly for five or six years.

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** Seemed a long time at the time but--

**BL:** Oh, Elsa Lanchester!

**IL:** Whereas now we'd probably have thought, oh, I can't bear to see that man again playing the butler! D'you know what I mean?



**VB: Yes.**

**BL:** *Frankenstein* [probably referring to *The Bride of Frankenstein*]. Yes, I thoroughly enjoyed that.

**IL:** I didn't like it.

**VB: Yeah I suppose it's the right amount of time to feel familiar and sort of comfortable with the people--**

**IL:** That's right.

**VB: But not long enough to get bored.**

**IL:** You'd get bored stiff with them.

**VB: Yeah.**

**IL:** Yes. Mhm.

[pause 3 seconds]

**VB: Was this, no sorry--**

**IL:** No, I was just thinking. We were getting older all the time, you know.

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** Between sort of say, what shall we say? Eleven and eighteen.

**VB: Oh. Yes.**

**IL:** It's a long seven years isn't it?

**VB: Yes.**

**IL:** A lot happens in that seven years.

**VB: Yeah.**

**IL:** Much more than say between, forty and forty-seven!

**VB: Yeah.**

**IL:** Really.

**VB: I suppose that's right. And your tastes must have changed quite dramatically.**

**IL:** Yes. And our lives changed dramatically you see.

**VB: Yeah.**

**IL:** You know, from going to [pause 2 seconds] primary school. Practically to being called up into the services.

**VB: Yes.**

**IL:** You know. It was a big difference and a difference, you know with the war and that you, sorry to keep on about the war.

**VB: Yeah.**

**IL:** It was a big--

**BL:** Right. A great thing in our teenage, wasn't it?

**IL:** You know it was. Yeah, we didn't have any teenage really.

**BL:** We weren't called teenagers then. It was a word that didn't exist.

**VB: Yeah.**

**IL:** You know, we were watching a programme the other night about the erm erm sort of, it was a part of that thing about the war years.

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** It was about the effect of the war on civilians, you know? Oh I know what it was! It was erm Edward the Eighth.

**VB: Yeah.**

**IL:** The Monday series, you know.

**VB: Yes.**

**IL:** About him, and the bombing came into it. And I said to Bernard, "Gosh!", you know. About 1940 I was, erm, I mean, you know, just seventeen, wasn't I. You know, seventeen, eighteen, we were just sort of [pause 3 seconds] just sort of waiting to be killed really.

**BL:** Oh yes, once I was called up--

**IL:** You know, well, you see with the First World War there were so many. Our generation was brought up with a horror of war really. 'Cause, you know, odd bits that you heard, not from my father, he never spoke about the war, but you know, bits and bobs you heard, and people saying, you know, my grandmother saying and every day you saw these casualty lists. So, you know, when the war started you thought you were gonna die anyway.

**BL:** Mhm. Oh yes.

**VB: Yeah.**

[speaking at the same time]

**BL:** We had erm, since the First World War--

**IL:** It was miserable really. You couldn't get clothes, you know. It was a miserable period, really. So, not that we were miserable all the time.

**BL:** No, but--

**VB: No.**

**IL:** I don't mean that, but erm I suppose in a way it gave an edge to life. You were glad you got up the next morning if you were still alive! So that was something.

**VB: Yeah.**

**BL:** Now this, this is typical. "In the garden of her house."

**VB: Ah, yes!**

**BL:** Always! Never had anything less size than that.

**IL:** No. No.

**BL:** Absolutely vast.

**VB: [laughs] Did you enjoy the, the cinema magazines? The 'Picturegoer' and--**

**IL:** Oh yes! Read them from cover to cover.

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** Cut the pictures out. And erm and of course then, you could write off if you liked, for a--

**BL:** Photograph. Yes. Well I never read... My sister had 'Picturegoer' and another one.

**IL:** [pause 2 seconds] Oh there was another one.

**VB:** Mhm.

**IL:** I had 'Picturegoer'. I can't remember.

**BL:** Oh... there we go. Now, shall I put a kettle on or would you rather have a glass of sherry?

**IL:** What would you like?

**VB:** Oh. Erm I'll leave it to you to decide. [laughs]

**IL:** No. Go on. You say what you'd prefer.

**BL:** Coffee? Tea or--

**VB:** Erm--

**BL:** Or sherry or--

**IL:** You can have whatever you fancy. Go on. Just say.

**BL:** Or you can have a gin and tonic or something like that if you--

**VB:** E-erm, well it's gone 11 so it's respectable!

**BL:** [laughs] Oh, sherry!

**VB:** Sherry would be lovely!

**IL:** [laughs]

**VB:** Thanks very much.

**BL:** What can we offer you? Sweet, medium or dry?

**VB:** Erm, dry please. That would be lovely.

**BL:** Oh yes. Renee, would you have some?

**IL:** Yes please. Gitta Alpar!] Never heard of her.

**VB:** I'm sure some of these people are folk that you would have liked to become stars [laughs] but, sort of being a... a...

**IL:** Oh yes. Yes. [tape cuts out]

[End of Side B]

[Start of Tape Two]

[Start of Side A]

**VB:** Yes, I wonder if, you know, like you're saying *The 39 Steps* was disappointing. Did you find that, if it was a film that you'd read the book first?

**IL:** Yes.

**VB:** Ah.

**IL:** Yes. Yes, that's so true. Yes. Erm it's quite different the other way round. If you've seen the film first and you read the book. [pause 2 seconds] Unless it's completely different, you know.

**VB:** Mhm.

**IL:** Which you're going to be disappointed anyway. But erm I think [pause 2 seconds] I don't know whether it still holds good, but once you'd seen the people--

**VB: Thanks very much.**

**BL: Cheers.**

**VB: Cheers.**

**IL: Cheers. They, you know, that was them.**

**BL: Mhm.**

**IL: But when you read the book, you visualise the people, don't you?**

**VB: Mhm.**

**BL: You visualise the different purpose and, yes.**

**IL: Yes, you know. I mean that was like *Little Women*, I could practically recite that. And when I went to see it I was so disappointed because it didn't look, it didn't appear to be,**

**VB: Yeah.**

**BL: And yet *The Scarlet Pimpernel* with em Leslie Howard was exactly as I thought it would be.**

**IL: Yes. Occasionally you did get, yes, occasionally you did get that.**

**VB: Yes.**

**IL: But that was erm--**

**VB: And with *Sherlock Holmes* as well. I think Basil Rathbone just,**

**IL: Oh, the definitive—**

**VB: It's hard ever to read it without seeing--**

**IL:** Yes, it is.

**VB: Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce. [laughs]**

**IL:** It is. Yes, yes.

**BL:** Yes.

**IL:** Yes, that's right. Although that chap who's just, Jeremy Brett was--

**VB: Yes. He was very good.**

**IL:** He was very good, wasn't he?

**VB: Yes.**

**IL:** Bit over the top but erm [pause 2 seconds] but erm--

**BL:** Dr Watsons varied, didn't they--

**VB: Yes. I mean did you enjoy these eh, the Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce?**

**BL:** Oh yes!

**IL:** Oh yes. Yes. Oh that's another one. I like the detective ones too.

**BL:** Mhm. But erm--

**IL:** It's a different--

**BL:** If the actor is completely at variance with what you expected then I don't think you did enjoy it so much. You know, it was just a--



**IL:** No.

**BL:** A tale.

**IL:** The chap who played Watson with Jeremy Brett was the son of Cedric Hardwicke.

**VB: Really? Was he?**

**IL:** Edward Hardwicke. Yes. Do you know when he was playing, I thought, that chap looks like someone. And then I read it somewhere. And I thought, oh, that's very inte... that's who it was. Oh, there's Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge. [pause 3 seconds] She, she was a know all Nick wasn't she, really?

**VB: [laughs]**

**IL:** Cicely Courtneidge, I used to think--

**BL:** Well I actually saw a stage, *Under Your Hat* on the stage with that, it was very rare we went to the theatre. Erm, we went Golders Green Hippodrome. Of course that was in the area. To go to town was quite an outing, you know.

**VB: Yes.**

**IL:** Oh I didn't go to the theatre. Apart from pantomimes. Until erm--

**BL:** Yes. Pantomime as a child. And the circuses.

**IL:** And the circuses.

**BL:** We used to come down to Islington.

**IL:** Oh We'd go there. The Agricultural Hall? [referring to the Royal Agricultural Hall]

**BL:** Agricultural Hall.

**IL:** Yes. Oh here you are. Edward Everett Horton. Oh look. Frank McHugh. Hugh Herbert.

**BL:** Oh, Hugh Herbert [pause 2 seconds] Yes... there were some—

[talking at same time]

**IL:** Jack Oakie. Groucho Marx. I don't know how the Marx Brothers--

**BL:** Very good supporting actors.

**IL:** Stuart Erwin, do you remember?

**BL:** No.

**IL:** Oh yes you do. Look. [pause 3 seconds]

**BL:** Oh Yes! Later on though. That's an oldish man.

**IL:** Look, Frank McHugh. [pause 2 seconds] Edward Everett Horton. Oh they haven't got that man, that used to [imitating sound]

**BL:** Oh! His cheeks flapped.

**IL:** That's right! [laughs]

**BL:** He was Swedish or something.

**VB:** Who was it? Someone was telling me about someone who had this catch phrase, "Oh Calamity." Was that erm--

**BL:** "Oh-h! Calamity!"

**VB: Who was that?**

**IL: Oh!**

**BL: That was Edward Horton.**

**IL: No. No, no. Robertson Hare.**

**BL: Oh yes.**

**VB: Robertson Hare, yeah.**

**IL: Yes. Little man with the bald head.**

**VB: Yes.**

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

**VB: Was he someone you enjoyed?**

**IL: Eh, he, he was more on the stage. He was with Tom Walls, Ralph yinn, Robertson Hare. They used to do farces.**

**VB: Yes.**

**BL: Yes.**

**IL: On the stage.**

**VB: Ah I see.**

**BL: Whitehall farces.**

**IL: No, not Whitehall... before that. Earlier. Much earlier. I never, I never saw them on the stage.**

**BL:** Saw them in certain films.

**IL:** In films, yes.

**BL:** Always the same character.

**IL:** That's right, yes.

**BL:** There was always a lot of these. Certain characters that came in just to sort of pad it out didn't they?

**IL:** Oh of course in terms of characters, he was the star of... what are they called? Em, that chap that wrote, oh. Tom Walls was sort of blustering type. Ralph Lynn was a silly ass with a--

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** Monocle.

**IL:** Monocle. And eh, Robertson Hare was a sort of... [pause 2 seconds] a bit like Mainwaring in 'Dad's Army'.

**BL:** Yes. [laughs]

**IL:** But not as forceful.

**BL:** Yes.

**VB:** Ah.

**IL:** You know, erm, and everything, everything happened to him didn't it, really. He was the one that [laughs] lost his trousers! And all that sort of thing.

**BL:** Oh Yes. Yes.

**IL:** In these a... these a... And of course they all had, I can't remember some of the catchphrases now but a lot of them did have catchphrases didn't they?

**BL:** Mhm.

[pause 3 seconds]

**IL:** "Ooh! Calamity!"

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** Yes. [laughs]

**IL:** [laughs] But erm, would you like a biscuit? 'Scuse me. May I just--

**BL:** Mhm.

**VB:** Yes. Thanks so much. I was very interested by what you were saying about erm, the sort of intensive picturegoing for a certain number of years--

**BL:** Oh yes.

**VB:** And getting used to stars.

**BL:** Yes now, if the war hadn't come, I often wonder whether it would have continued or whether getting that bit older erm... [pause 2 seconds] I was called up when I was eighteen. Two days after my birthday. [laughs] [a bit shocked?] Anyway, from then on [pause 2 seconds] eh, you know, it cut me away completely. I never went to the cinema really after that until much later. Erm, up to then, no, I think from about [pause 2 seconds] sixteen, from fifteen, I was allowed to join the Muswell Hill Youth Club.

**VB:** Mhm.

**BL:** And erm,

**VB:** Thanks very much.

**BL:** We used to do things like eh amateur theatricals and things like that.

**VB:** Ah I see. Yeah.

**BL:** You know. There were other things to do in other words.

**VB:** Yeah.

**BL:** Rather than go to the cinema. And then I also used to go dancing. Local churches, several of them used to--

**IL:** [speaking quietly] Sorry to keep walking backwards and forwards--

**BL:** Have halls with... the [Cross?] used to do dances. I think it tapered off then, really, the cinema.  
[pause 2 seconds] Did you ever go to local halls?

**IL:** No I didn't. Didn't have anything much round our way.

**BL:** Well what about [inaudible] Lane, wasn't there a hall there, attached to the church? Oh, erm--

**IL:** Well we weren't churchgoers.

**BL:** Mhm. [pause 3 seconds] So, I suppose it would've tailed off just because the age changed.

**VB:** Mhm.

**BL:** Ideas changed.

**VB:** It's very interesting that. I mean it sounds as if the sort of things you were interested in those years sort of went very well with going to the cinema.

**IL:** Yes. Yes. That's true. Yes. I mean we were lucky really that they were type, sort of [pause 2 seconds] light-hearted entertainment. I mean what do you do now if you want light-hearted entertainment? You'd be hard pushed to find something like that every week now wouldn't you?

**VB: Absolutely. Yes.**

**IL:** But of course Hollywood used to turn them out, didn't they? You know, I think they did a sort of film a week didn't they?

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** So that you wouldn't expect to get sort of high art. But I mean we didn't want high art, you see.

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** Well, I didn't particularly, you know, I mean, I think—

**BL:** I didn't. [I just wanted?] fun.

**VB: Yeah.**

**BL:** Well, yes. I suppose perhaps films like *Lost Horizon* were, more art forms. It had some very fine photography.

**VB: Mhm.**

**BL:** I think you were sort of, like osmosis, [laughs] began to realise how good the photography was.

**VB: Yes.**

**BL:** And I suppose again as, the war did this, as the lens improved, the cameras took better pictures and the whole thing became a much better product. 'Cause when you look back, look at, even at the

early television. You know. But, you know, they were a little bit blurred. They weren't as sharp. Well they can zoom in now from half a mile away, you know.

**IL:** And I don't think when you're eleven and twelve you analyse, do you?

**BL:** Oh no!

**IL:** Really. You know, you don't sort of go to the cinema and think, oh, you know. [pause 2 seconds]  
What were the production values or--

**BL:** Oh, no.

**IL:** The characterisation and that sort of thing.

**BL:** Who cares?

**VB:** Mhm.

**BL:** You just went for the story.

**IL:** Well that's right. Yes, exactly. Yes.

**VB:** Ah. Yes.

**BL:** Well, really. That was it.

**IL:** Mhm.

**BL:** And if you had an organ playing in the middle and everything else it just made a jolly good entertainment. I mean the bigger, oh, I don't know. No. I suppose the Odeon had an organ. You used to get that.

**IL:** The Savoy had an organ.



**BL:** What surprised me, in the Army for quite a while, I was up in Yorkshire. And they just had brass bands, half-way through the films! [laughs]

**VB: Really!**

**BL:** In the films.

**IL:** Did they really?

**BL:** Oh yes!

**IL:** [laughs]

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** The stage opened and there was a, you know, really big. About fifty strong, brass band!

**IL:** [laughs]

**VB: That's amazing.**

**BL:** Mhm. And a lot of the pubs had a band room at the back.

**IL:** Did they?

**BL:** Could hear them practising in that. Oh, it was an absolute religion up there, brass band music.

**IL:** Ooh.

**BL:** Oh yes. [inaudible] Band. Big ones.

**IL:** Mhm. Mhm.

**BL:** That was in Halifax.

**IL:** Black Dyke Mills.

**BL:** Mhm, yes. Black Dyke Mills Band. That really struck me. This is like being in an, another world, you know.

**VB:** It must've. Yes.

**BL:** Quite different.

**VB:** Yes. Yeah.

**BL:** Whereas we would have the organ coming up, playing 'We all like to be beside the seaside'!  
[laughs]

**IL:** Yes, definitely! [laughs]

**BL:** Whereas here we were having classical things [laughs] which I think always come over horribly on brass bands. But, you know, they were really, really top class bands. [pause 2 seconds] [But didn't go off much?]. Didn't have much money in the Army. But eh, couldn't always get time off, you know, to go.

**IL:** Mhm.

**BL:** But there again... [inaudible] you just... that was it. That was life.

**VB:** 'Cause I was wondering as well if, looking back, do you think that erm, you saw going to the cinema as a sort of special occasion? Or was it more of something that you just took for granted?

**BL:** Mhm. Was.

**IL:** No. It wasn't a special occasion. No, it wasn't, was it?

**BL:** No.

**IL:** 'Cause I mean, something you do every week isn't really a special occasion, is it? You tended to go... So that you erm... [pause 2 seconds] You weren't really terribly erm, I can't think of the word. [pause 2 seconds] Sort of fastidi, well I don't mean that you... Perhaps this isn't quite the right word.

**VB: No.**

**IL:** But anyway, you sort of had a choice of say two or three cinemas. You thought, well, what shall we see? Oh no, I don't fancy that. But I mean you didn't sort of think [pause 2 seconds] like erm oh, I must see Kenneth Branagh's four friends or something like that [possibly referring to *Peter's Friends*].

**VB: Yes.**

**IL:** You know. You just thought, oh, well I'll go and see that because that sounds more my cup of tea than, you know, A sounds to me more than B and C or whatever.

**VB: Yes.**

**IL:** But I think it was an automatic sort of thing you know. I mean,

**BL:** Mhm. And the special ones, you see, if you did go to town, which was a special thing anyway. Now this was in Finchley.

**VB: Mhm.**

**BL:** It's not very far from town, you know. But it, it eh, seemed quite an outing. Just walking, either taking the bus or walking to the cinema was, was just a normal Saturday afternoon.

**VB: I see. Yeah. And as you say if it was in the town, that was special, 'cause it was going on an outing.**

**BL:** Well, yes. And it was more expensive, so--

**IL:** I only ever went once to town and that was to see *Gone with the Wind*, 'cause you couldn't see it anywhere else.

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** It was on at the Odeon, Leicester Square. In 1940, I went before the Blitz, so... and I'd just gone out to work so, that was the only time I went to town. I mean I might've done if there hadn't been the Blitz. We might've gone again if there was something we particularly wanted to see.

**VB:** Yes.

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** But I mean you sort of think to yourself, oh, I really want to see *Snow White*, we'll say, or whatever, you'd make an effort to see that. But otherwise you'd make do with what was on, really!

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** You know.

[pause 3 seconds]

**IL:** 'Course you see, I mean. [pause 3 seconds] I mean most of my cinemagoing really was done when I was at school, you know, at secondary school.

**VB:** Mhm.

**IL:** Well, you know, what else did you do? Otherwise you'd be sitting at home, wouldn't you, really. Or go out shopping with mother or something thrilling. You know, I mean eh, it meant... it was a way of meeting your friends, you see.

**BL:** Mhm. Well the youth club, I was saying, that was one way. Erm in our road about five of us all comparable in age used to all go off together to the youth club. It was threepence a night.

**IL:** [laughs]

**BL:** But that was very good. It was a couple of hours.

**IL:** That's only just over a penny in decimal money.

**BL:** Mhm. And eh, you could walk there and back. And if you were flush, take a bus. But you know it was quite possible to walk there.

**IL:** That was another thing, the cinema had to be within walking distance, didn't it?

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** You know, I mean--

**BL:** You normally walked everywhere.

**IL:** We weren't poverty stricken but we didn't have an awful lot of money, you know.

**BL:** No. Oh no.

**IL:** But erm, and after that, you see, I would either go home to tea with Iris or she would come back to me, you see.

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** So that was the sort of... [pause 2 seconds] The social event.

**BL:** The thing was erm, when we went to the youth club. [pause 2 seconds] There were three girls and three boys I think, so we all went in a group and back again.

**VB:** Mhm.

**BL:** There was no worry for the mothers of the girls, worrying or anything.

[talking at same time]

**IL:** [inaudible]

**BL:** Well the only thing was walking through Fortis Green, there were two pubs and occasionally you got a drunk coming out.

**IL:** Oh yes.

**VB:** Mhm.

**BL:** You'd sort of cross the road and come back again. But that really was all, you didn't think of mugging or any of those horrible things that go on now. [pause 2 seconds] It was quite light. The street lights were on.

**VB:** I mean it is interesting what you're saying, the chance to sort of have a social outing--

**IL:** Yes!

**VB:** Outing to see your friends at the cinema.

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

**BL:** Yes. 'Course, mark you, later on, when we had the blackout, that put paid to a lot.

**IL:** Oh that put paid to a lot of everything.

**BL:** No streetlights. No headlights of cars. They just had a sort of hood over them, you know they just had a tiny hood. You had erm, a torch. You know the famous Number 8 battery.

**IL:** Mhm.

**BL:** Could never buy them anywhere. They only lasted a very short time. Nothing like the batteries of today. And it was really, almost impossible to get anywhere. So dark. You couldn't see the kerbs or anything at all! Bumping into people. Quite fun when you were young, you know, but it really put paid to most evening entertainment.

**VB:** It must've meant a really sharp change to your lives, actually.

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** I was just thinking the same thing. It was like a sort of shutter coming down.

**VB:** Yeah.

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** To a certain extent.

**BL:** And of course, it was linked with the Blitz anyway.

**VB:** Yeah.

[pause 6 seconds]

**VB:** I mean I was interested when you were saying a while ago about sort of your parents being probably aware more of the political changes that were going to come--

**BL:** Mhm.

**VB:** And you maybe picking up some of these eh [pause 2 seconds] feelings.

**BL:** Slight anxiety. Well, realising they were worried about something--

**IL:** Mhm.

**BL:** But you didn't actually understand what the something was. But you realised it was there.

**VB: Yes.**

**IL:** Yes, not that we sort of went through life thinking, oh, what's gonna happen next? I don't mean that, you know.

**VB: No. No.**

**IL:** But erm, I suppose there were a certain, sort of... You could feel an undercurrent of worry, couldn't you? Really.

**BL:** Mhm. And we all had to go and get gas masks. That petrified me. And erm--

**IL:** [laughs] You should have gone with my grandmother, she had a row with the woman! She had a [laughing] bun, you see, and they fitted you--

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** 'Cause they were different sizes. And she said to my grandmother "You're going to have to have a large one! Or else you have to have that bun cut off!"

**VB: Oh!**

**IL:** I'm not going to have my hair cut for blasted Hitler!

**VB: [laughs]**

**IL:** [laughs] Oh dear. [pause 2 seconds] And they weren't any good anyway.

**BL:** No.

**IL:** [laughs] We found out later. Just, you know--



**BL:** Well later on, they gave you another--

**IL:** Just to keep them quiet.

**BL:** Filter on the front. Didn't they?

**IL:** Mhm.

**BL:** So the thing was more piggy-like than ever!

**IL:** [laughs]

**BL:** We did look like pigs. We took photographs of them.

**IL:** Oh did you?! We didn't, waste of film.

**BL:** Yes!

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** Well they were so awful. And father joined the ARP and he was given one of these ones with round the eyes of the [piping?].

**IL:** I had one like that 'cause I worked on the railway. And a tin hat--

**BL:** Yes, that's right.

**IL:** Which was kept in the office cupboard. I never took it home or anything! [laughs]

**BL:** And going to school we had to take gas masks with us.

**IL:** [laughs]

**BL:** A cylinder tin thing. It went on the back of the bike.

**IL:** Oh dear, honestly.

**BL:** Well that was more of a, eh, sort of booster, wasn't it?

**IL:** To keep you quiet.

**BL:** Yes.

[pause 5 seconds]

**IL:** Anything else?

**VB:** Well I think actually we've covered most of the things I was going to ask you.

**IL:** [laughs]

**VB:** And some more as well. Erm... [pause 3 seconds] I don't know, I mean, it sounds from what you're saying as if cinema really was, even if it wasn't a special occasion, it was quite an important part of your life.

**IL:** Oh yes.

**BL:** Oh yes. Oh indeed. Yes.

**VB:** In the thirties. Yeah.

**BL:** Yes.

**IL:** Because you sort of talked about it, with your friends afterwards.

**VB:** Yes.

**IL:** "Did you see so and so?" and all.

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** And course, I'm sure I said this before, we all had pictures of our favourite film star underneath the desk lid, you know, that sort of thing.

**BL:** Well I had Carole Lombard on the wall at home.

**VB: Ah! [laughs]**

**IL:** And people would discuss it. The way they do television programmes now, you know, that sort of thing. Mhm. And we had collections of postcards. You know, albums with all the photographs in. I'm sure Mary must've had that.

**BL:** Oh yes. [pause 2 seconds] And there was that chocolate biscuit, de Beukelaer. You got little tiny pictures of the screen stars with those.

**IL:** Mhm.

**BL:** That was why, you know, you used to collect things.

**VB: Did you ever sort of daydream about the stars?**

**IL:** Oh yes! Yes.

**VB: Ah.**

**IL:** Yes. Did you?

**BL:** I suppose so.

[speaking at same time]

**IL:** I did. I used to think, wouldn't it be marvellous to go to America. And actually see them, you know--

**BL:** So when you did go to America--

**IL:** Just to see that they were actually alive.

**BL:** And walked up Hollywood. It was the most dreary, horrible place possible!

**VB: Really!**

**IL:** Oh! Awful.

**BL:** In the roads they had these stars set into the pavement with names like Carole Lombard.

**VB: Mhm.**

**BL:** I found that one. But it was the most dreary, dreary road--

**IL:** Well we've probably said this before when you were here before, but erm, one chap on the, we went with a group, you know. And one man said, [laughs] "All my life I wanted to see Hollywood Boulevard and I've been so disappointed. It's so scruffy." Apparently it was a lot, you know. I think they're trying to do something to sort of tart it up, you know.

**VB: Yes.**

**IL:** But it was just sort of run down.

**BL:** Little scruffy mean shops.

**IL:** Well everywhere goes down, doesn't it?

**BL:** Right up the top, was the tour of Beverly Hills where Rodeo Drive was, wasn't it? That was still very expensive, up there.

**VB: Mhm.**

**BL:** Sort of like a Bond Street. But the one, it was right by Grauman's Chinese Theatre.

**IL:** Mhm. Which used to be a famous

**BL:** I can't remember what it's called now, it was called just the Chinese Theatre.

**IL:** Yes, I think so. Yes.

**BL:** And that was a very famous area, you know. And there was the theatre--

**IL:** People went for the 'premeer'.

**BL:** Yeah, that's right.

**IL:** But I, I did used to think, you know, it must be absolutely marvellous--

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** To actually see them. That they're actually living at the... It sounds ridiculous, doesn't it now?

**VB: Not at all.**

**IL:** But erm--

**BL:** Well you could, in those days, have coach tours going round the Hollywood homes. "This is where Clark Gable lives."

**IL:** Oh that was up until fairly recently.

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** They don't do it now, of course. [pause 2 seconds] I don't think they do it now. I didn't see... Oh I think you can get a map. But I mean, who wants to... I dunno, I suppose if Iris and I had gone in 1939 we would've been delighted to have gone round and looked at them all, you know. [pause 2 seconds] As you say, as you get older your tastes erm--

**BL:** Oh. I should think so too, otherwise you'd remain very childish.

**IL:** [bursts out laughing]

**VB:** [laughs]

**BL:** [laughs]

**IL:** Ye-es! [laughing] Pre-mature.

**BL:** I suppose we were fortunate. Oh, I remember the war, but I remember all these, these very pleasant times that went on. You know. [pause 2 seconds] What do the youngsters do nowadays? With the Discos, [anything else?] Either that or a pub. There's not much else.

**IL:** Well what do you do? What do you do? You know, I mean, when you were a teenager.

**VB:** **When I was a teenager. Erm, well I actually went to the cinema quite a lot.**

**IL:** Did you? Oh that's interesting.

**VB:** **Yeah.**

**IL:** That is interesting. I wonder if it's a thing you do when you're--

**VB:** **I wonder if it is. Because it erm, it definitely appealed to me at the same sort of age that you're talking about.**

**BL:** Mhm, mhm.

**IL:** Oh that's interesting.

**VB:** Yeah.

**IL:** Now on your, now I'm going to do the questioning.

**VB:** Okay. [laughs]

**IL:** As you've gone round to Norfolk and all these places, you've had a, obviously a wide range of ages and things.

**VB:** Yes.

**IL:** Now, has that sort of come out as a point? That most people went more when they were--

**VB:** I think it probably has. Yes.

**IL:** Yes.

**VB:** Sort of, like you were saying, maybe from about twelve to eighteen, something like that.

**IL:** Yes. Now that's interesting, isn't it? Yes. [pause 2 seconds] Yes.

**BL:** I feel quite sorry for the youngsters now. There's not much, there doesn't seem to be much for them to do.

**VB:** Mhm.

**IL:** Oh eh, somebody said to me once, you know, "You don't have to worry. Because for every age, they're born with those... [pause 2 seconds]. Ready for their age." Do you know what I mean?

**BL:** Oh, I see, mhm.

**IL:** And I do think that's true. I think we sort of think, oh, dear, you know. I mean, Iris, for example won't go on the Tube [London Underground]. [pause 2 seconds] "Ooh! I wouldn't go on the Tube! I wouldn't go on the Tube!"

**BL:** What, now?

**IL:** Yes. Whereas, as she apparently said to Jackie, who's her daughter, "Auntie Bess goes on the Tube!" And she said, "Well, good luck to her." You know. Why shouldn't she go on the Tube if she wants to? But I think you tend to get thinking, or every time, I mean, I do think you read so much in the papers. You think, every time you step foot outside the door--

**BL:** Oh yes.

**IL:** You're gonna be mugged. But, you know, honestly, it isn't true, is it? I mean--

**BL:** No.

**IL:** If it was true it wouldn't be in the paper because everybody would have it. It wouldn't be news.

**BL:** I mean really, I only had that one slight brush with erm, with that gypsy woman. Apart from that the whole place was perfectly all right. You were being warned the whole time. You know, "Mind your handbags and cameras."

**IL:** Well, mind you, I hang onto my handbag. Now, I did see an elderly woman on the Tube the other week with a shoulder bag open.

**BL:** Yeah.

**VB:** Mhm.

**IL:** And, you know how easy it is with a shoulder bag, to push it behind you?

**VB:** Yeah.



**IL:** When I'm in, I'm afraid, when I'm in a crowd, I keep it right under my arm. And I thought, well you are asking for trouble.

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** And then she had an open-topped bag with her, sort of thing. And I thought, well that is ridiculous, really. [pause 3 seconds] So I think, perhaps, sometimes it's a bit [pause 3 seconds] dare I say it? Exaggerated, really.

**BL:** Mhm. Well we went to St Peter's. We were there, during high mass. And there was, erm, we'd been warned about these gypsy women with children. And I looked behind me and there was one. And you said you felt childish fingers running all over the spine. You know, open pockets and that.

**VB: Yes.**

**BL:** So, but that was all. Whereas, you know, we had been quite scared by the—

[speaking at the same time]

**IL:** Well we went, before we went we'd been told--

**BL:** Everywhere you go, you're going to see--

**IL:** "Oh you want to be careful of these gypsies. Because they come up and show you something and then they pick your pocket." I thought, oh lawd, I don't think I want to go, if I'm gonna be inundated with this. But really, we didn't see anybody, did we?

**BL:** No.

[pause 6 seconds]

**VB:** I suppose as long as you're aware of possible problems, and you're careful. As you say, you don't walk around with your bag open.

**IL:** Yes. I do think that's asking for trouble. Really. You know.

**VB: Yeah.**

**BL:** Could be anywhere. If you went to a football match or walk down Oxford Street. There's a crowd of people and you've just got to be circumspect.

**IL:** Yes, I mean, I had my handbag picked, coming home from Portsmouth. Because, you've no idea what it used to be like at Waterloo. You had to fight, it was one solid mass of people. From the platform down to the Tube.

**BL:** Yes.

**IL:** And I had a shoulder bag and it got pulled behind me and somebody took the wallet out of it. [pause 3 seconds] You know, so, it's very easily done. Particularly if you're in a great mob of people.

**VB: That's right.**

**BL:** Well that's what they rely on, you see.

**IL:** Well of course they do, yes.

**BL:** In High mass we were all standing there, about a thousand people.

**IL:** Well that's right. There were a terrific number, anyway. But we were all right, anyway.

**BL:** Mhm. [pause 3 seconds] But we haven't been to the cinema [pause 2 seconds] for a long, long time.

**IL:** I went to see [pause 2 seconds] *Little Women* [possibly referring to the 1994 version].

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** Well I'd seen that before. With Heather and Jennifer.

**BL:** My last film was *The Towering Inferno*, which, goodness knows. And then it was only Simon and Lesley, that's my son and daughter-in-law, said, "Would you like to come and see it, Dad?" I said, "Ooh yes! I will."

**IL:** I think you would go more if there was one within walking distance.

**VB: Mhm.**

**BL:** Possibly. Yes.

**IL:** But I mean, even if you got into Harrow, you've really almost got to go by car, haven't you?

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** Which is about, you don't want to drive by night anyway.

**BL:** North Harrow [inaudible; both speaking at once]. So that would've been possible.

**IL:** That would be possible you see.

**BL:** Rayners Lane.

**IL:** They had one there. That would've been possible.

**BL:** Now some sort of seedy bar or something. [inaudible]

**IL:** Yes. But I think you would go if, if conditions were the same as they were--

**BL:** Mhm.

**IL:** When they were sort of well, here, you'd have had two within walking distance.

**BL:** Mhm. Yes.

**IL:** And probably know one in South Harrow too.

**BL:** Yes. [Been there?]

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

**BL:** Where Safeways is.

**IL:** Yes.

**IL:** So that I would then you would tend to think, oh! I'll go and see that. Whereas, you think, oh, I can't be bothered, you know, to make all that effort to go.

**BL:** Mhm. Well particularly--

**IL:** Well that's age.

**BL:** Cars and parking.

**IL:** You wouldn't think that if you were young.

**BL:** As you get older,

**IL:** You'd think, oh. It's no distance to go. You know. I'll just nip on, you know.

**VB: Mhm.**

**IL:** But erm, as you get older you think, oh, I can't be bothered to turn out at the moment. Specially if it's cold!

**VB: Mhm.**

**BL:** Well that was another thing of course, the cinema was--

**IL:** Lovely and warm!

**BL:** Very comfortable.

**IL:** Warmer than at home probably.

**BL:** Comfortable seats, warm. Very nicely lit, you know, in the modern way. Beautiful curtains, you know. Oh, very luxurious. Whereas, nowadays, it would be accepted as normal, I suppose. But, you know, the lifestyle then [pause 2 seconds]. You had carpets but you didn't have them right to the wall. You had carpet with a strip of wood or lino round it. To go into a foyer of a cinema which was carpeted, there were acres of it, right across! It was very luxurious.

**IL:** Mhm. Oh yes.

[pause 3 seconds]

**VB:** Yes. And even looking at the, the remaining cinema just beside where that hotel is in Harrow, and looking inside, I mean the decor's beautiful. Almost--

**IL:** Oh yes.

**VB:** As it was originally.

**BL:** Where was this?

**IL:** Next door to where she's staying.

**VB:** Granada.

[End of Side B]

[End of Tape Two]

[End of interview]