

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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- \* Transcribed by Valentina Bold/ Standardised by Annette Kuhn
- \* HS = Helen Smeaton/VB = Valentina Bold
- \* Notes: First of two interviews with Helen Smeaton; Sound Quality: Good.

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[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[tape introduction by Valentina Bold; some echo audible on tape]

**HS:** The first thing the chap said was "What are you having to drink, Helen?" and I said "Oh, I'm not having anything. My husband informs me I've had enough." So that was that. Didn't think any more of... But towards the morning, about four o'clock in the morning, our host decided to run his tape and I heard this ghastly noise saying "Oh, I'm not having anything, my husband inform..." Oh! Goodness me! What a voice! Oh. So I tell myself [it's Mrs McCotton?...] [inaudible] [sound of tape being set up]

**VB: Oh, not at all. I think everyone feels the same. When you hear your own voice...**

[tape cuts out]

**VB: Let's see. I think this is working OK. Erm, it should be, because it's registering something. So if I ask you to just...**

**HS:** Where do I put it on?

**VB: If you just clip it on. About there would be fine.**

**HS:** Uhuh, in here.

**VB: The only thing with this one is that you can't actually hear anything back on it so I'll just unplug the headphones in a minute to make sure that it's working OK.**

**HS:** Right, uhuh. No, no.

**VB: I'm always terrified if eh...**

**HS:** [laughs] You sit all afternoon and have nothing. [laughs]

**VB: Right. We'll just see. Erm, could you say something?**

**HS:** Yes, uhuh. I just loved the cinema, I always have. Not nowadays. I'm not interested nowadays. When I could go freely, I, I, don't go, hardly ever. I just go, I go more when I'm in the States actually than I do when I'm at home here. But there are so few films that attract me nowadays. I hate violence, and I hate wars. I like romances and comedies and things like that. So there's so few of them, that I don't very often go to the cinema. But when I say that, the first film I ever remember was going to a cinema in Maryhill Road called the Blythswood. And I had pleaded with my parents to let me go, and it must have been about nine and I was told I could go and it was *The Four Sons*. [laughs] And we went, I went to the cinema on my own, and I was allowed to go to the first showing at 2 o'clock. And I went with a friend to the first showing and in these days you just sat right on. There was no change of, no going out. You just went any, in the middle, or any time you walked in, if you paid your fare. So at the end of that my friend said... "I have to go, Helen." And it just, as I say, went on again. I said "I think I'll watch it again." So I sat on and watched it again and I got out, got up to come out and was passing a friend with her parents and she said "Aw, come on, sit beside me. Don't go out, Helen. Just sit with me." [laughs] So I sat through it again! And as the end of it her parents were going and she said to her parents, "Could I sit through this again?" and they said "Well, if Helen'll stay." [laughs] I sat through that film four times. [laughing] And it was a very sad film. I must have been, if I'd saved my tears, I could probably have swum out of that. And when I got out, my father was waiting, absolutely in a terrible state and didn't know what had happened to me. They'd gone round all my friends and looking for me and the people at the cinema said, no they

couldn't interrupt the show, they'd just have to wait till I came out. And my dad was, he was so glad to see me, [laughs] he couldn't make up his mind whether to murder me or welcome me. So, my mum welcomed me home but said "If you ever do that again, you'll never get back to the cinema again!" [laughs]

And I look back to, I can't even remember. I remember the name and I remember it was about a lady with four sons and it was World War I. This would be about 19, what, 1926. And it was about World War I and every one of her sons were killed. [laughs] So I must have been sitting there wallowing in it for about approximately four hours or something like that. I don't remember films so much after that, but in Maryhill Road, in these days, there was the Blythswood cinema. And then you went down a little bit and there was the Seamore cinema. And then you went down a little bit further. At the foot of Maryhill there was one called the 'Electric Geggie' [referring to Electric Picture Palace] which you could get in if you had two jam jars and when you went in there it was just benches. Eh, no seats. You just sat on benches. And somebody sat playing the piano, looking at the screen. [laughs] I was never supposed to go there. That was out of bounds. The Geggie [crude theatrical show]. Because I suppose, because they were the poor working class that went there. We were working class. But they were the poor working class. So it was more the thought that you might pick up fleas and what have you. But one day again, I was supposed to be doing something else and I can't even remember but there was a film in there, I thought "Oh, I'd love to see that film!" and I think it cost tuppence to get in if you hadn't jam jars. You paid tuppence or something. I remember going, sitting through that and then coming home and I don't know what excuse I made to my mum for having taken longer than I should have done. I tell you [laughing] the cinema made me tell more lies there about anything than I'd ever done before. But they've all gone now. There's not one of them left in this day.

**VB: Really?**

**HS:** And then there used to be one. We moved from that part of Maryhill, then off Great Western Road and there was a cinema called the Gem. And, by this stage I was what, I was getting up to, I must have been sixteen, yes, erm, and in the Gem, you had, it was very comfortable and nice. And if you went up to the balcony they had the chummy seats. You just sat two each but it had a high, high back and it went straight around, and then it curved round the side. That's where all the [laughing] courting couples went, who weren't really interested in the cinema. So every time after I met, ended

up with my husband, eh, I met Bill and we started going out, we always used to go [laughing] to the Gem so I can't say very much about the...

Well we'd see the first part of the cinema, the big part. In these days you could see two films and a newsreel, and a comedy, I mean you really got your money's worth which was much, much cheaper than here. But, eh, in the early days it was really quite different than... even the [pause 2 seconds] acting was different. There was another one I can recall and it was someone called, a French girl called Simone Simon, and I think it was James Stewart, I'm not sure of the man, it was called *Seventh Heaven*. Oh, it was so romantic, it wasn't true. Eh, they were living in Paris and, in a back street, away up ladders and things to get into this place, and it was all so romantic. And years and years later once I had a family, I kept telling my family about this wonderful film I had seen with Simone Simon, *Seventh Heaven*, and it was gorgeous and everything. [laughs] And I saw it coming on television, and I told the children. Aw. And of course they were, I had two sons and a daughter and [laughs] they wouldn't stay in to see this. But they sat down. My younger son sat and watched it [laughing] and even me, I looked at it and I thought "Oh, crivvens! Did I really think that was great?" It was so soppy, it wasn't true. [laughing] And my son, he was about seventeen at this stage. He says "They don't make films like that any more, mother." [laughs heartily] Which, they don't. But many of the old ones are still very, very good. But I just, that one was just so [pause 2 seconds] eh, later in life, it just seemed so overdone in romance. But when I was young, it was a bit like, a 'People's Friend' story, or Barbara Cartland, or somebody like that. Looking at it once I was adult I couldn't think how I could be absolutely overwhelmed by it. But erm, it, it, these were the things that impressed me in the cinema, which I don't think they would make nowadays. Erm, then they come up to all the modern, what I call modern ones. I got married in 1939, we went to see *Gone with the Wind* when I was up in Montrose in a wee cinema up there, which of course, swept you off your feet. And nowadays I say, I hardly ever go. I go, I like to see things now like *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and these modern ones. But the old days, there were so many to choose from! And you didn't, the cost, I couldn't believe the first time that I took my grandchildren down to the Rio in Bearsden and it's gone now too. But once they were, I had grandchildren, it was my grandchildren I took down, I couldn't believe what I had to pay to get them into a cinema! And I suppose if you, you have to say of course, when you relate it I suppose to the salaries that we had, and the salaries that they have nowadays, it's, it isn't so bad. But I still find it difficult to figure out when I go to the cinema, what it costs to go to the cinema. Now, what else can I tell you about the cinema?

Actually, I was at the opening of what was the Cosmo, it's the GFT [Glasgow Film Theatre] now. The owner of the Cosmo, son, one of his sons, was our best man, Jimmy Singleton. Erm, and when I got married and Jimmy was my husband's best man, we got married very quickly, because the war started. We were engaged but hadn't intended to get married but since the war had started we thought, he'll get taken away before we get married. So the war was declared on the 3rd of September, and we got married on the 23rd. And we had a, just a very quiet wedding, with families and from there we went to the Cosmo and we saw erm *Un carnet de bal*, eh, for the adults to go to that after the service, after we had a meal. We got married about lunch-time, had lunch and then they took the, all the company to the cinema, to the Cosmo and saw '*carnet de bal*'. Including the minister! [laughs] It was one of these cinemas, I don't know if you know it, one of these films, where they were all going in and out each other's bedrooms. My mum saying to the minister [laughing] "I don't know think you knew that this sort of thing went on, did you?" [laughs] So after that the older folk all just went away and the younger ones went to the Plaza ballroom.

But eh. And then I remember another great one that we saw in the Cosmo. That's, we used to go quite regularly to the Cosmo. But some of them were so outstanding. I loved that *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*. You haven't seen that, that was another French one with, what was his name, he's a well know comedian [tch], aw dear! But there was queues and queues and queues and because we, I'd just had a baby, I was nursing a baby and my husband had taken the two older children to see it. And they came back in such a state of hilarity. And said "You've got to go and see it, Mummy! Oh, you've got to go and see it, Mummy!" So, we had to go early to get in because of the queues and me feeding the baby, and what have you. So I got a friend to come. [laughs] And we got in because Jimmy said "I'll meet you in the, I'll go and talk to the manager and see you don't have to stand in the queue." So that's what happened and really, we laughed and laughed. Although my friend with me said "It's odd, the man next to me never, never did a titter." He just didn't think it funny at all. Now, we went on about that film for years and years. And we still go on. It was on not all that long ago, on the television again. And I was, my younger son who was the latecomer in the family, was the kind who always fell about laughing. And he loved Laurel and Hardy and he loved all of these old ones. They were old in his day. So I thought Oh! When it came back to the Cosmo I said to Bill "Let's take Alan to see *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*." Well he was like the man that my friend said. He just sat and looked at it. He didn't think it was funny at all. And after, when he got older, he said, "Of course, what happened was, I had heard so much about it, by the time I got there, It had no effect on me at all. I didn't think it was all that funny." And yet for years, we just to say "Monsieur Hulot" and the

four of us fell about laughing and he just sat there looking at us. So whether that had an effect, if you hear too much about a story, whether it puts you right off or not. It certainly put him right off. But he lives in America now and he still loves Laurel and Hardy. Their type of comedy. And who else was there? Lots of funny people like... [pause 3 seconds] Abbott and Costello. I wasn't a fan of theirs I'm afraid. Wasn't a, I'm not really a fan of funny people in pairs like that, except, perhaps, Laurel and Hardy. I think they're, can you suggest anything else you'd might...?

**VB: No, I mean, I'm interested in, you know, what you're saying about the types of films that, that you liked yourself.**

**HS:** Yes, yes.

**VB: Was it mainly the erm, you mentioned the sort of romantic ones before, was that...?**

**HS:** Aw, yes. Even now, I mean. If I see a, there's been eh, all these eh, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers are on again.

**VB: I watched *Top Hat* the other day. It's wonderful.**

**HS:** Yes, and I'm sitting looking at these. And I sit up sometimes, I keep saying, it's either in the morning they put these on, or very early in the morning, and you can't sit down at night and have a good look at them the way you did, you used to do. [phone rings] Oh, 'scuse me. Oh, gosh, I forgot about this thing [referring to tape recorder]! [laughs] Hang on, I'll take this off. [a kerfuffle over mic being disconnected]. Oh, come on. [laughs]

[pause in recording while HS on phone]

**VB: That's fine. Yes you were saying that you liked the sort of, romantic...**

**HS:** Romantic, and I like, I like mystery ones... [pause 2 seconds] if I don't have to see them, doing the murder. You know what I...? I quite like, erm, the gentle ones, the gentle mysteries. How will you put it? What's their names, now? These ones on the television, like, eh, the Agatha Christie ones, where it's more a sort of mental thing. You know there's somebody been murdered or they tell you there's somebody been murdered, and then they've got to work it out. I quite enjoy that. I like

'Colombo' in this day and age, as a mystery. Because, you see the murder but it's never like what I've seen on trailers. I look at trailers, and I make up my mind, and many a good film I've lost, because I see a wee bit of a trailer and I say "Whoa, that's not for me." Now that, y'see, every time you say something. I remember way back, Marilyn Monroe in *The Seven Year Itch*. Now, we had films that were marked X, which meant it was for adults only. And I always presumed if it was X, it must be either, over sexy [laughs], or over bloody, and it wouldn't appeal to me. So, I wouldn't go and look at them. And [laughing] sometimes when my older children got up, they'd say "It's a great film, mum! Go and, Daddy, take Mummy to see that." And I remember going and seeing *The Seven Year Itch* which had an X. And when I saw it, to this day I can't figure out why they put an X on it. I had seen more sex and more violence in films that were for people over fifteen, but without any X, you know. So even today I find it quite difficult, eh, to figure out who, who makes the standard of what is over sexy, or what do they put...they don't have Xs nowadays, I don't think.

**VB: I'm not sure. That's right I think they've changed it.**

**HS:** I think they have. Something about, oh, more to do with the adults or something like that. But in these days it was an X, and if you all saw an X, [laughs] the children weren't allowed to go to them because they might get led astray or whatever it is, I don't know. But I found that very often that when I did get talked into going, they advertised maybe one wee bit that looked a bit risqué, so everybody went to it, and folk like me didn't go, [laughs] and then when you were talked into going, you went and you thought, "I can't think what all the fuss was, there's nothing there." I'm not all that shockable in, as far as, I don't... I hate seeing, what will I put, private sex on a screen. I can't understand why anyone wants to look at that. You see, it's something we all do at some time in our lives, and we all do it differently. So I go and look at these and think, crivvens I always thought everybody did it like me and I find everybody doesn't do it like Bill and I did. But nevertheless, to look at them doing it, does not amuse me, or entertain me, I just think "Oh, crivvens!" I mean, it's taken us a while to get used to all the kissing in the street, even. I mean, when I was young you wouldn't have dreamt of kissing in the street the way they do nowadays. So that... [pause 3 seconds] everything has changed along with the films. People's attitudes have changed. I don't think it's all films. I think quite a lot has to do with television as well. The standards, what I call standards, I think there's a lot more openness but eh, I sometimes think, it depends what you want to open and what you don't want to open. That's why sometimes the trailers that they choose to try and invite a certain section of the community to see it drive away another section of the community. What else? There's the Odeon, the Cosmo, that was a really good place to go.

**VB: Can you tell me a bit about the Cosmo?**

**HS:** Well the Cosmo was owned by a Mr Singleton, George Singleton, and he owned the Vogues as well. The Vogue cinemas as well. Now he started, Mr Singleton himself started, he was a compositor in a newspaper, like my father-in-law and my husband. And he decided, the senior, Mr Singleton senior, decided that he would like to get into the cinema business and he'd started, oh that was a way back, cor, I mean even before I started looking at cinemas, eh, to open a cinema, but he hadn't that much money. And he said to my father-in-law, long before he was my father-in-law "How would you like to give me £10, Peter, and I'll put £10 and we'll start a wee cinema?" And when my father-in-law suggested it to his wife that he'd give to, she just about went round the bend, [laughs] saying "£10! You're not giving anybody!" [laughs] Well £10 in these days was a lot of money. But Geor... Mr Singleton went on himself and started it himself. And he ended up a millionaire and my husband used to say "My mother wouldn't give £10. [laughing] What position my father would have been in if only he had." Because there was the erm, there was the father Singleton and then there was Vincent and George and Jimmy, who was our friend. And a daughter. And the daughter married Sir Hugh Robertson who, who used to conduct the Orpheus Choir; but that was the only one that went away from the cinemas. Their family all stayed in the cinema. Vincent died quite early. Jimmy died quite a few years ago. But he actually courted my only sister but it was just a... she wouldn't... it didn't come to anything. But they courted for quite a long time. That's how we got to know Jimmy. And that's why he ended up our best man. But they opened up a lot of cinemas and then they came to the Cosmo which was supposed to be for foreign films, you got more foreign films in the Cosmo than you ever did anywhere else in Glasgow before then. It was quite well known. Erm [pause 3 seconds] after be... Jimmy died and my sister went abroad that we've just lost touch. But I don't think Singletons have anything to do with it nowadays, I don't know. Erm, but it was a lovely cinema. We used to enjoy going and seeing something different.

**VB: What was it like inside?**

**HS:** It was very nice. It wasn't too big. It was a moderate size cinema and just a balcony, one not very big balcony, and not very, I don't know what it's like now. But it was very well, erm, very nice, very pleasant place to go to, but it, it was more like the size of the cinemas you get nowadays. When we went to the cinema, they were massive affairs, huge, huge they were. Hundreds and hundreds went. Of course, people went so much more then. I mean, we used to, at least twice a week, it was, you



just took it as granted. And Friday nights and Saturday nights were the queue nights. I don't know, I think they are nowadays still. I don't know. But I sometimes hear my granddaughter saying the queue at the cinemas... But we always used to be quite happy to queue on a Friday or a Saturday. You either went dancing on a Friday or a Saturday or to the cinema. I mean, to stay at home at the weekend. Och! You were dropped! You were in a bad, bad way if you stayed at home at the weekend. But eh, [pause 3 seconds]. And there was the Plaza Ballroom. Now there was cinemas out there, a lot of cinemas out there that are nearly all now, erm, what d'you, bingo halls.

**VB: Right.**

**HS:** The Kelburne, erm, Coliseum, gosh! The Coliseum was a huge cinema that we used to go to but we had. We lived in the West End. We used to take the subway out to Eglinton Toll and then go to the Coliseum to see films in the Coliseum. You'd such a wide choice of going to the cinema then. And so many films! And I say, you really got programmes. You didn't go and get one... one film and a.... You don't even get a decent newsreel nowadays. You used to have always a newsreel, *Pathé Newsreel* or *British Comet Newsreel* telling you what was going on in the world. And nearly always a comedy. I mean you were in there for a long time [laughing] if you went. And as I say, you could go in at any time. That was, my husband used to say when we were young, that was one thing I was great at. It didn't matter where we went in, in the middle of a film, within five minutes I could tell what I'd missed. I knew what the story was about. [laughing] And he'd be sitting thinking "What's all this about?" and I'd say [mouths garbling noises]. And he would say "I don't know how you figure all that out so quickly, Helen." But I always felt I was, I was just so attuned to it when I was younger, I really liked the films.

I'm trying to think. There was a Ginger Rogers one... [pause 5 seconds] that I, when I was, just not long started working [pause 3 seconds] in the Odeon. That's the one in Renfrew Street [probably referring to Renfield Street]. The great big one. And I'd gone home for my lunch and coming back from my lunch to go into the office, I worked in erm, Burns Laird shipping lines, I met this young fellow I knew and he was a student. And he said "What are you doing, Helen?" I said, "I'm going back to the office. What are you?" He says [in a smug voice], "I'm going to the pictures to see Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire." And I can't remember what it was. One of these singing and dancing... And I said "Aw!" He said "Come on." And I said, "Oh, no I can't, no, no I couldn't. I've got to get back to the office." He said, "Oh, look, look who it is. It'll be great." And I thought "Aw, right!" So I went to it. And, oh, I really did enjoy it. I remember it was all singing and dancing and romance and it was just

my cup of tea. And when I went home, as we were having tea, my mum said... [pause 3 seconds] "Where were you this afternoon, Helen?" Oh, crivvens! [laughs] I said, "I was at work, Mummy." And she said, "Now isn't that odd? Your office just phoned to ask what had happened to you." And that my lesson for [laughing] telling lies.

**VB: Laughs.**

**HS:** I had then to burst into tears and say, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to tell lies but I couldn't resist when Ian asked me to go to the films [apologetic, upset voice]. I couldn't resist it." [laughs] And I think if any of my children did that I'd throttle them.

**VB: Oh dear.**

**HS:** But my mum was very good. She said, "Well I hope that's a lesson to you. Don't go to the cinema!" But that's, in these days, the kind of, especially singing and dancing. I loved! And the music. The songs. Nowadays with music... [pause 3 seconds] you hardly ever get a tune. 'Course, when I was young we had message boys, riding along with their baskets filled with shopping to deliver to somebody. And we would always say it'll be a top favourite if you heard your message boy whistling the tune as he went along on his bicycle to deliver his messages [groceries]. You knew that was going to be a top favourite. You've got no message boys [laughing] nowadays to do these sort of things for you. And anyway, when I look at...I don't very often look at 'Top of the Pops' unless my grandchildren are about. And I keep saying, "That's not music, that's a racket! And they've only got one line to the song. They keep repeating the one line. And anybody could do that!" 'Course, they're highly indignant at granny. They see how out of step I am.

**VB: Did you erm, buy the... the sheet music from the films or...?**

**HS:** No. I didn't ever buy music. I had piano lessons. I just.. People hear it. You see there was gramophones, what we call, well they were, gramophones. You would buy a record, and play the record eh, quite a different kind of thing. I mean I... [pause 3 seconds] I'm seventy-seven now so you can see I go back quite a long way and I can remember my grandmother. My mum took a, a gramophone, just a wee, not a hand one, but a small one, down to my relations at the farm. My grandmother down there and my aunts and uncles down there, and took a record. And I could see to this day the look of astonishment on my grandmother's face at listening to this box. Having this

noise come out of it. And I feel in a way, I feel my grandchildren miss out on a lot that I have seen. There's so much has happened since I was born, quite a different way of life, quite a different attitude to life. I can remember the first radio we had, and sitting up, in a house in Springbank Street in these days in Glasgow. And whatever it was, we were too small to really realise. But my dad had earphones and he was jiggling about with some wee thing, and we weren't allowed to say a word or make a noise, while daddy listened to what this [laughing] wireless was saying. And it was only about this thing, and it certainly wasn't wireless to us. It was a mass of wires! And he had this thing on his ears and sitting there over it, like brushing at something, or trying to get into it. We never knew but. I think, and now you come in and they've got all these things that... My grandchildren play with their computers and what have you and just take it all in their stride. It doesn't mean anything to them. To me it's still astounding. In fact it frightens me, so much in my lifetime that has been erm... [pause 3 seconds] invented or thought of. And always it starts out, I suppose, thinking it is very clever but, it's never bothered to find out what whole effect it'll have on society or on... the one thing I'm glad to the television. I like looking at these erm, about other countries and where the people are not yet so educated. They have such a... [pause 2 seconds] an innocent, ah, look at life compared to what we do. They're not so grasping. This granddaughter of mine. She went through the Operation... Operation Raleigh thing and after she finished at university she went for three months to Zimbabwe.

**VB: Right.**

**HS:** And did digging a, erm, a foundation for a clinic, to a hospital, way out in the rough bits, where she said, you know, where they had a pail hanging from a tree, and the inhabitants put water in and that was their shower. But she said that the people that lived there were so poor and their payment was, she said, the same kind of yuck [poor stuff] as we got. It was like porridge for their lunch and some other horrible stuff for their meal. But she said they were so happy and they were so contented and they were so kind to us. And then, she said, when you come back here and see what everybody has, and they weren't, they're not happy the way these people were happy. You wonder. 'Course she said the answer was, they've got nothing to lose so they've nothing to worry them. I don't know. But that's not to do with cinemas but it is...

**VB: Actually, just as you're saying that I mean one...**

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

**VB: When you're talking about... [inaudible]**

**HS:** Yes, uhuh.

**VB: You must remember the coming of sound... [inaudible]**

**HS:** Oh, yes! I can remember. The first, the first one I remember was, Al Jolson singing in *The Singing Fool*, something like that. And I must have been about twelve then. But I remember my mother going with some of her neighbours. And when they came back, everyone was so sorry for Al Jolson, the part he played. Oh, and he'd cried and he'd lost his son and all this. Erm, and I remember my mum, [laughs] she must have been very hard she said, "I'm not sorry for him in the least," she said, "Any man that was daft enough to let a woman treat him like that deserved all he got!" So that was her [laughing] attitude. And I remember that 'Singing Fool'. No, I don't remember seeing it until years and years afterwards. I didn't go at that time. I just heard about it at that time. But we did see the difference in..., so many of the popular stars in the silent films disappeared when it came to talkies. And, I used to buy... read all these 'Picturegoer' magazines and the filmgoing magazines and all. That was the kind of thing I read. Not beauty magazines. All the film magazines. In these days, [laughs] my mum said if I knew my school work as well... I knew everything about the film stars. I knew... I read all about their stories and their homes in these magazines. And I don't know if they even sell these nowadays. I have no idea. They were just devoted to film stars and their homes and what they did and what they didn't do. Or what they had been. And, like, there was this man, Fatty Arbuckle [referring to Roscoe Arbuckle]. Now he, I can remember seeing him, and thought he was terribly funny. Now in the end he turned out to be an absolute horror of a man. Erm, he did all sorts of unpleasant things. I read in one of my magazines. [laughs] But when you saw him on the screen, well you wouldn't very often see anyone, the absolute monstrous size that he was. He was absolutely.... I can remember thinking, couldn't understand how anyone could get that size without bursting! Erm, he was so enormous. And then, of course, when the colour came, you couldn't believe it. What a difference it made. And yet I find now, you look at...they bring certain films back in black and white because they think it's more, eh, striking or more, something or another, than what the colour is. And of course I can't agree with that 'cause I can remember looking at the black-and-white ones and seeing. Like erm, Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire's before they were coloured,

trying to picture what the colours were like. Eh, and what their hair colour really was, and all kinds of things. It's like your camera. You look at the black-and-white film. It's not the same as seeing a coloured one. But on the other hand, I can see how people like the black and white. It's just a different thing. But it's not, to me, it's not so attractive as the colour. I, I think, these are things to me that have been an improvement. If you've not much imagination, which I don't have. To have it all laid out there for me, without having to think about it. It's like, if you see a, if you've read a story [pause 4 seconds], and then you go and see it on the cinema.... [pause 3 seconds] If you picture them in a different way and your book, it detracts from what they are, or it improves it, depending. So I really like to go and see... [laughing] the, the film, before I read the book, because then it's, it's imagined for me without me having to sit and think, "I wonder if this person..." and what their face is like. They don't give you any description in books about... They colour, they might colour them. But you don't get the shape of their face, or all kinds of things. But when you go and see something with Clark Gable in it from a book, then you can go and read the book and you picture Clark Gable in the book. You don't have to picture somebody of your own imagination. So sometimes eh, I enjoy films that are made from books, if I haven't read the book. I don't like it after I've read the book. [laughs] It spoils my own small imaginary things. Now, I think we'll have a rest and we'll have a wee cup of tea.

**VB:** That would be lovely, yes.

**HS:** Or coffee?

**VB:** Erm...

**HS:** Which do you prefer, either?

**VB:** Tea would be nice.

**HS:** Oops. [starts to remove mike] Now wait a minute. I see them doing this in the films. On the television.

**VB:** That's great. Thanks.

[tape paused]

**VB: Just as well we weren't... in the act of conversation. That's... that's picking up now. Erm.**

**HS: Do you want to go through that again then?**

**VB: No, that's OK. I've made a note of that. Erm, can I ask what it was your father did?**

**HS: Yes, he was a, he was a Glasgow Corporation gas department maintenance man. [laughs] He went round all the houses. If you'd anything wrong with your gas, Daddy went round. And if they'd, if they had any stray dogs, my dad was dog mad! And my mum wasn't dead nuts about dogs. But we had one wee dog of our own, a wee fox terrier called Terry, who was permanent. But we had a continuing stream, sometimes we'd have five or six dogs. If anybody in the house that Daddy went into was wanting rid of their dog, or was abusing their dog, Daddy would say, "Oh, I'll take it." And so it would come home to us. And then he would look around to find a place for this dog. Ah, Crivvens!**

**VB: An extra, an extra bit of work.**

**HS: Yes! For my mum. Never for my dad! He just brought them in and then my mum had all, all the work. That Jimmy Singleton, now, that I told you about. When he, he was really, really dead set on my sister. My sister was a very attractive girl and she always used to say she would never get married. She would never be any man's slave. That if she won money, she would travel the world. She would leave enough at home for me to have the babies for both of them, both of us. But she would never do it. So, and Jimmy was, he was really, really keen, but, there was nothing doing. And eh, what started me off on that? Where did I go? I'm away off now.**

**VB: We were just talking about your father and your mother.**

**HS: Aw, honest to God! I'll come back to, never mind this.**

**VB: Did your mother work at all or did she..?**

**HS: My mum was a nurse, before she, but after, before she got married she was a nurse.**

**VB: And was it just the one sister you had?**

**HS:** Yes, uhuh. Called Doreen. Commonly known as Dick.

**VB: Ah.**

**HS:** 'Cause when she was very little. Every time she was lost, she was in the coal bin, sitting in the coal and chewing lumps of coal. So she was always, my mum used to say, "Go and find Dirty Dick." And so, when she became an adult, or as she grew up, the Dick... the dirty was dropped. But the Dick remained until the day she died. She was, I mean the family, she was known as Dick. When she went to, she married, in the end, she married an American in the Canadian army, and ended her life in Canada. And I thought, we're too old for this Dick business. So I wrote 'Dear Doreen,' and I got a letter back very quickly to ask what she'd done wrong, that she would be called Doreen. [laughs] So I reverted to the Dick again.

**VB: I can imagine her having to explain that to practically everyone she met. [laughs]**

**HS:** [laughs] Yes, she did.

**VB: It's so unusual. Erm... [pause 3 seconds].**

**HS:** My mum was a nurse.

**VB: Right.**

**HS:** And once erm, her parents were farmers at Denholm. And so that she had seen a different way of... That's how, my dad was in the RAMC and they met when he was in the Royal Army Medical Corps during World War One.

**VB: Right.**

**HS:** And my mum was a nurse. And they met and got married, and then came to live in Glasgow. And then my mum still nursed on [pause 2 seconds] at the, erm, the what's it called again? [pause 3 seconds]. Where they have the babies. Not, not the Yorkhill. Gosh it...Rotten Row. Rotten Row. And

many, many... I could really write a book about the stories my mum told me about Rotten Row. And her, she was a real fun person. Erm, but she became, she couldn't, she just felt.... She had nursed, at the Borders, as a private nurse for the one lady who had a huge mansion and gardens and a gardener and a day nurse, and a night nurse, and her housekeeper and all that. And then she said, she came to Glasgow and found all these single ends [one-room flats in tenement blocks], with whole families of six living in them. And one toilet between three or four houses, not one. She became very political. And my earliest mem... among, among my earliest memories in Maryhill.... My mum worked very hard for Jimmy Maxton, MP.

**VB: Really?**

**HS:** Uhuh. On the Socialist side and. I can remember Dick and I going to the Seamore Picture House, where my mum would be chairing a meeting for the Labour Party with Jimmy Maxton and all the... Jimmy Maxton was a man with long hair always swept behind his ear, which was not common in these days. And very conscious of erm, hygiene. And when he would meet my sister and I, we probably were about seven and nine then, he never kissed us on the cheek. He always lifted our hair up and kissed us [laughs] on the back of the neck. We used to think this was an absolute hoot! And you see I can remember Pickard [referring to Albert Ernest Pickard] owned a lot of cinemas in Glasgow and the Seamore was one of them. And another one he owned was the White Elephant out at, erm, [pause 2 seconds] the other side of town. Giffnock side of town. But he was a horrid wee man. And I can remember after a, one of these socialist meetings, it was his cinema that they had hired. And of course he was very anti-Labour in these days. So I expect he still would be if he was alive. But standing and giving my mum a swearing and Dick and I standing there and my mum really infuriated and giving him a ticking off for daring to use that language in front of her two little girls. [laughs] I met that man Pickard years and years later. His wi... his... we had a house in Kew Terrace in Great Western Road and he had the... his wife had the Kew Hotel which was actually in Grosvenor Terrace, no not Grosvenor, the one further up than Kew. And his wife had a hotel in there. And he, he was driving in to Kew... Kew Terrace, where we lived and he nearly knocked my husband down in his car. And then he stopped when he did this. He never apologised. And he just stopped and he said, "That was a near miss." And I said, "It certainly was." And he said erm, "Well, have you got him well insured. Have I done you out of your insurance?" [laughs] I was livid. But then after that he was looking for another house and he said to my husband, "Would you like to sell your house? I wouldn't mind having another house on this terrace." So Bill said, "No, we weren't thinking about it but if you would be interested you could make an offer." He came and had a look at it but it didn't come to



anything. He was just a horrid little man. He wasn't well liked, you know, as a person for everybody he wasn't well liked. And he had lots of cinemas and dance halls. I was a secretary with a lawyer at one time, and there was a murder in that dance hall that we used.... beside the cinema. And we had to go and inter... my boss had to go and interview all the people that had been at it. And I remember sitting there, having to take notes of all that he asked and said and what have you. And Pickard coming in and he was highly indignant at us going to all this bother. It's funny. Anyway, back to me again.

**VB: Erm. Well that moves on to it, actually. 'cause I was going to ask about erm, the school that you went to.**

**HS:** I went to Wood, went to Dunard Street first as an elementary which was in Maryhill, Napierhall Street, I think it was. And then I went to Woodside Secondary which is, you know where that is.

**VB: Yes.**

**HS:** And erm, then I went to Skerries College.

**VB: Right. Was it a secretarial course that you did there then?**

**HS:** Uhuh. Uhuh.

**VB: Erm. And you said you were a legal secretary.**

**HS:** Uhuh. For a wee while. And then just a typist with the Burns Laird Shipping Lines for a while. I got married just before I was twenty-two so I didn't have a long time working.

**VB: Right.**

**HS:** Until after I stopped working. I stopped, I stopped working and then I had... When my first two children [pause 3 seconds] went to school. They went to Hillhead High, the two of them. I then got a job with Crittall Windows in Hillington, part-time. And then I got pregnant, [laughs] and left again. And I waited until he was twelve and then I got a job here as a secretary in the library in Jordanhill College. And I was there for eighteen years. I just retired, well, retired, ah God, thirteen years ago.

[said with emotion]. Phew, I can't believe it! I've been in this flat since [pause 4 seconds] when my husband died. We had a big garden. He was dead keen on gardening. I wasn't. I loved to sit in it. But he was keen on the gardening so when he died I felt I couldn't let the garden go to pigs and whistles and I couldn't sell it quick enough. So I moved here in February, 19... 82. So I've been here since then.

**VB: [pause 3 seconds] And erm, you said your mother was obviously a strong socialist.**

**HS:** Oh, yes, yes.

**VB: Is that in your background as well. Were you politically active?**

**HS:** Oh, but I'm not interested. I am interested in a vague sort of way. It's instilled in me. I can't be anything else. Eh, [laughs] what my mother more or less instilled into us. She was very... Although I can remember her, my dad used to babysit the two girls and my mum would go out canvassing round Maryhill. And I can, even now, see my mother coming in and sort of, throwing down her bag and sitting down and saying, "I don't know why I bother! They come to the door and you'll ask them what they're voting and if they'd vote Labour, they say things like, oh, no they've always been Conservative. These people were born to govern." And she said, "You can't get it through their head that they weren't born to govern, and especially if they govern in the situation that they were finding themselves in." And, but she never did give up until we got older, and then she wanted better things for her girls so she--

**VB: She sounds a formidable woman, actually.**

**HS:** She was. She was, I mean she was really, just.... my mum was my prac... she was practically my ideal. But her father was more my ideal. When I was down there for a year when I was about ten, because I wasn't very strong, and it was either home or to live in the country. And I can remember, every Sunday morning, we got up, I would go into my grandpa's bed and have my breakfast. And his sis.... daughter, one of the daughters that never married, would come up with our breakfast and we'd have a nice breakfast. And then she'd take that away. And then when she'd taken the trays away from both of us... y'see there was a great family bible, I can see it yet. She'd bring this and hand it to my grandpa and he would just put it on his... on the bed, we were all both in bed and he'd lay it down like this and he would say, hold it like this and he'd say, "Now, Helen, we'll hear what the

Lord has to say to us today." And he would just take his hands away and wherever it opened, he read that wee bit of the bible. [laughs]. And I think. My children never knew anything like that, and these to me are tremendous memories that I have of him. He was, he was such a lovely, lovely... everybody knew my grandfather, because he was such a lovely man. He was really super. But my mum was more, he was advanced in so far as he was liberal. He would never have been a socialist, but he was a liberal, which was more common in these days. But my mum was. She was, she would tell stories about when she was nursing and you had to be in at ten o'clock at night, and the things that they used to get up to. Another one and her, they were called the curlies, my mum had very curly hair. And they used to, if they were late, she said one night they were late... They thought, rather than get into trouble they tried to climb in, because they knew there were no bodies in the mortuary part of this hospital.

**VB: [laughs]**

**HS:** And they climbed in in the dark. [laughs] They were feeling their way along to find the door when they suddenly put their hand on a cold face. [laughs] They let out a scream and before they knew what had... half the sort of staff for that part of the hospital were in the mortuary with them. This was, somebody had died while they were out having a good time. And they just whipped it in like that and left it so. [laughs]

**VB: Oh dear. [laughs]**

**HS:** And then, she said, they had one very stuffy nurse from the Highlands who was always complaining and everything. And my mum said, "I can walk down Sauchiehall Street and every man in the place will have a look at me." And this other nurse said, "That's rubbish." My mum said, "It's not. It's perfectly true. I don't know what it is about me, but every time I pass a man he looks at me." And she said to her friend, "Isn't that true?" So her friend said, "Yes." So the other, "Well prove it." Mum said, "Right, when's your time off, my time off, right we'll go. She'll walk, you'll walk with my friend." "Yes, yes." So [laughs] they went on to Sauchiehall Street and my mum said as she walked up Sauchiehall Street. Every man she saw, she went [makes face].

**VB: [laughs]**

**HS:** So, they all had a look at her. [laughs] These were the sort of daft things she used to do. So she proved that every man looked at her. [laughs] She was a soul. Anyway, back to me.

**VB:** Eh, right. Well I was going to ask as well. Erm, were you raised in the church then? Were you raised in...?

**HS:** No we were... no, no. My moth..., it was funny, my grandfather and my mother... [pause 4 seconds] I went to every church possible. I went, whichever moved me. I went to the Socialist Sunday School, I went to the Baptist Church, I went to the Methodist Church, I went to the Church of Scotland. My mum hardly ever went to church 'cause she always said God was wherever you were, in what you were doing. And one of the things was she used to say, [laughs] "I don't care if you tell lies, Helen. It's you that were telling the lies and you know you're telling lies! But what's more important, God knows you're telling lies. He knows even better than you! You don't always know when you're telling lies, but God knows when." So God was always trotting around [laughs] behind us, my sister and I [laughs] a lot of the time. Whatever we did, we always sort of felt, if we didn't, if we had a look around, where was God? [laughs] He must've been somewhere. But she was, she didn't worry about religion. Until, that's how I met my husband. We moved into Rupert Street. And his, eh, my husband's brother and his sister-in-law, were going round looking for new members for this church, the New Church, it was called, in Woodlands Road. I don't know if you know it. It's a small church right next to the football cl... the bowling club.

**VB: I think I know the one you mean.**

**HS:** There's a bowling club.

**VB: It's actually on the street?**

**HS:** Yes, uhuh.

**VB:** Yes.

**HS:** It's got a wee bit... The bowling club's next to it. Well they came round looking for, eh, recruits or members or whatever. And I had my friend then from school, Effie, with me, [pause 3 seconds] in the house. So they... I went to the door and they said would we like to come and see their church

and all that kind of thing. And I thought, well we're just here and not going anywhere, OK. And it's a badminton night on Thursday night, they say. Now I was, it was about three weeks off my sixteenth birthday then. And eh, I said to Effie, "C'mon, let's go. We'll go." And Effie said, "Yes, right". I said, "We won't stay for more than half an hour. We'll just go and stay for half." "Right, right, right." So went up to this church and into their badminton club and were introduced to a few people. And then, this young chap, or one of the girls said to me, "I want you to meet somebody very special." And brought this fellow towards us and we were introduced. And I just thought, "Aww, oh God, terrific fellow!" I had no reason, I just had to leave after half an hour because I'd said to them we couldn't wait any longer. And I went home and I said to my mum, "I've just met the man I'm going to marry!" And my mum said, "C'mon, Helen." And I said, "There's only one snag, Mummy. I think he's got a girlfriend." And my mum said, "Now, Helen, if he's got a girlfriend, you mustn't do anything that would upset either of them. If it's meant for you, it'll be." And the next time I went, it was his sister! [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**HS:** And it wasn't his girlfriend at all. But he was twenty-one, and I was at school. He didn't know. He said he never had a remote... I'd got my claws into him right away! [laughs] So, we got married when I was nearly twenty-two. But I always say, people don't believe it, I mean I just had that feeling whenever I saw Bill, if I don't marry him, I'll not marry anybody. And, he didn't have it, but I did so. [laughs] He always said, "No, I only got interested in you when one of the other younger fellows in the church badminton club said, 'I would quite like to take that new girl out. What do you think about it?', and Bill said, 'Aye, she looks alright. You try it and see.' And then Bill said I thought, 'Oh, if he's interested, I must have a look at this.'" [laughs] C'mon, have another cuppa and another biscuit, dear.

**VB: Right.**

**HS:** Oh heck. [getting up]. I'm gonna give you a cup of tea. [adjusting mic]. I'm getting expert at this.

**VB: So the other thing is erm, places that you've lived. You mentioned that you were down in the Borders.**

**HS:** Yes. I have never, until now, I mean. My younger son went to the States in February 1985. And I have been visiting there every year since, and twice last year. But that's about my only foreign visits.

**VB: Mhm. Have you lived anywhere else in Scotland?**

**HS:** No.

**VB: Right.**

**HS:** Oh, well of course. I haven't lived in Scotland, during the war I lived in, I lived in Montrose during the war.

**VB: Right.**

**HS:** And I lived in Cheadle, Staffs.

**VB: Mhm?**

**HS:** During the war. It's where my husband was posted to. I used to say... [laughs] when he was first posted, he went to Montrose, and I was expecting Valerie. And after she was, no it wasn't [tape noise; voice in distance] that wasn't when I was expecting Valerie, yes it was, that was when I was expecting Valerie, we went to Montrose. And we stayed for a wee while there. And then he was posted down to Cheadle. So I came home here and changed my clothes and went away down to Cheadle when he found a place. And then I got pregnant, [laughs] and I came back to Glasgow again. And then I just stayed at home after that, after I had two of them. I stayed at home.

**VB: And erm, what was it that your husband did himself?**

**HS:** He was a linotype operator with Outram Press. 'Glasgow Herald' and the 'Evening Times'.

**VB: Ah.**

**HS:** For fifty-two years! Except for his war service. He went there as a boy, sixteen. He never did anything else. [sighs]

**VB: He must have been very good at his job actually.**

**HS:** He was, he was. He was very good at his job.

**VB: Now the new technology's coming in.**

**HS:** Yes, yes. Well, you see, the new technology started. My husband worked longer than he would have done and he was desperate to retire, he was desperate to retire! 'Cause he wanted to work in the garden, have the whole time in the garden. But the new technology was starting, when it was about time for him retiring. And they kept saying to him, let the young chaps go, and you older fellows keep working until we get them trained in the new technology. So they never got the new technology. But the sad thing was, you see, Bill worked until he was [pause 4 seconds] fifty-nine, fifty-nine. No, [pause 3 seconds], he worked till he was sixty-nine, what am I... he was sixty-eight, he worked till he was sixty-eight. He worked three years extra. [pause 3 seconds] And he died fifteen months afterwards. So he never got very long retirement. And I feel, really, that Outram. In these days you didn't have a, a pension. You had a, you didn't have a contributory pension, it was a, what was it called, they gave it to you if they felt it was eh, och, [sighs] non-contributory pension, really. Erm, and after all of these years, when he retired, [pause 3 seconds] he got £7.50 a week. And, when he died, which was, as I say, fifteen months after he retired. He, erm, died in the middle of the week. No, he died on the Friday. And his pension came in the middle of the week and they asked for it back because it was only half a week. And my pride was too, I mean I didn't need it anyway but, that badly but, I thought, they said, just to keep the books straight...

**VB: That's dreadful.**

**HS:** Could they have it back? I really thought, no wonder my mother was a socialist. [laughs]

**VB: it's hard to believe when you hear something like that, it's just so!**

**HS:** I know, uhuh. I know. I don't, nowadays, of course my husband said he was born too soon, because actually it was my nephew who arranged. He's a, he's the managing director of Scottish, Scottish, insurance company, not the Scottish Widows, Scottish Mutual, Scottish Mutual or something. It's a big, big place they have in Stirling. Erm, he was an actuary and Outram called the

actuaries in to make a pension that, sort of people pay for themselves and then get a big, big, you know.... It's a good thing to do. But Bill was too old, really, when all that started. Erm, so, he always said he was born too soon. It would be grand if it'd just been a wee bit later. However. We managed, we managed. No complaints. That's what he did. And his dad did it, and his grandfather did it.

**VB: I remember now when you said that, yes.**

**HS:** Yes. But they're not. They weren't all. His dad was with the 'Herald'. His dad went into the 'Herald' after the strike, the General Strike. But his grandfather was with them, [pause 3 seconds] 'Murrays Diaries'. My elder son, his grand, their great-grandfather, my son's great grandfather was fifty years with 'Murrays Diaries' so they've got a grandmother clock on it that's saying, fifty not out, and all that kind of thing, [laughs] for the great-grandfather. But the time they had their grandfather and their father came along, they weren't giving out grandfather clocks for not out. [laughs]

**VB: Erm, and how many sons and daughters do you have?**

**HS:** I've got two sons and one daughter.

**VB: Two sons and one daughter. I was trying to count.**

**HS:** Valerie's... well that's Valerie up there [pointing to photograph] with her husband and two children. And then there's Ken and his wife and three sons, and there's Alan, with eh, just his new daughter. His American wife and his new daughter, so.

**VB: They're all very attractive looking children, you have actually. [laughs]**

**HS:** They are, they are, they are. And they're all great. I mean Jill, Jill... while this thing's on, I'll not... Jill was eh... Jill was just something else [referring to granddaughter]. I mean she left school, six years at Boclair Academy and she had written and volunteered to do work at Yosemite National Park in California. So she went straight from school with her pack on her back to Yosemite and did a month there and then she travelled all round erm, California and these places, Hollywood, eh, all these places until it was time to come back to go to university. And then when she was at university she decided...



[End of Side B]

[End of Tape One]

[Start of Tape Two]

[Start of Side A]

**HS:** She wanted to see a bit of the world so she had volunteered to, erm, go to Zimbabwe with erm, Operation Raleigh, and did three months there, did the whitewater rafting when she, the last two weeks was whitewater rafting. Then she came home and her dad her gave her a gift and she... a month's travel around Europe... with aeroplane tickets. So she said if she wanted to work abroad she would find out by going to... she went to Switzerland and Spain, here and there finding out where she would like to work. And then she came home and set off for Australia and she worked in the harbour ships in Darling Bay in Sydney for a while. And then she went to the Barrier Reef and took two weeks deep-sea diving lessons and got her deep-sea diver's certificate. Then she went to New Zealand, and she learned how to ride a horse. And did, she her erm, ranching with sheep and cattle, riding a horse. And then from there she went to erm, Malaysia. And while she was in Malaysia, she got lost in the Cameron Jungle for four days, and they... with another fellow, an American bloke, and they had the police out, and the army out looking for them. Eh, and after they found them, the American Embassy in Harare gave an official reception to the army and the men that had found this chap and Jill, and then she went to Singapore. And now she's back home and she's only twenty-three! And she's away down, she got a job with Marks and Spencers techni... with their food department. She did Technology and Business Studies so she's got this technology for food. But she's, and she's a quiet girl, I mean to meet her, we all thought she was so quiet. But she always says to me "Granny, my inclination is to sit at home and do nothing. So every time I think 'I couldn't do that,' I say 'Right, get on and do it!' so that's what she's done. [laughs]

**VB: That's amazing.**

**HS:** It is.

**VB: Tremendous initiative.**

**HS:** She is, it is. I mean, I say it myself, I'm absolutely astounded, specially me! I've hardly moved from my own doorstep until my family moved away. 'Course I went to, I'm telling a lie, I've been to

Belgium quite a lot because my oldest son worked in Brussels and these two there [pointing to photograph] were born in Brussels.

**VB: Ah, I see.**

**HS:** And this one [pointing to photograph] was born in Oxford. That one was born in Glasgow. [laughs] So was Jill. It just so happened that he worked, my elder son worked in Brussels for eight years. My family are well travelled. I'm well travelled now, following them but never off my own initiative.

**VB: The other thing that I'd like to ask is, because I'm taping this, erm, these tapes are gonna be kept in the university.**

**HS:** Uhuh, uhuh.

**VB: And it's possible that someone in the future might want to listen to it, or even that we might use some of it for broadcasting. And I mean, do you object to that?**

**HS:** I don't think I've said anything that could...

**VB: I don't think there's anything. [laughs] But erm, if you don't mind, erm, I'd like to ask you if you could sign this form. It's just for, basically in case you wanted to see it.**

**HS:** Have a wee sue, as they say.

**VB: That's right. If you can just sign it there. That would be great. [pause 10 seconds while form being signed] Just one of these things that the, they like us to do to keep...**

**HS:** Aw, I can understand. I feel that nowadays in America, they don't sneeze--

**VB: I think that's what it's...**

**HS:** But they, eh, life's so difficult for doctors nowadays because of people suing them. I feel there are some things certainly that should be but I, I often think some people are looking for sues.

**VB: Yeah.**

**HS:** We make wee jokes amongst ourselves. We'll have a wee sue here and we'll have a wee sue there. [laughs]

**VB: Sue for anything now.**

**HS:** [laughs] Yes. So. Well I hope you've had a... [laughs] I've had a great afternoon.

**VB: Well I've thoroughly enjoyed it actually.**

**HS:** Talk, talk, talking. I've still got the card, is that the card that I got from the lady who came to Strathclyde. Is that where you got the name?

**VB: Yes. That's right, yes.**

**HS:** Uhuh. We just thought it had all fallen through. There was quite a few of us there. Have you?

**VB: Erm, I may have been in touch with some other of the people.**

**HS:** Uhuh. I don't, I can't remember them now. This is what, my memory, it always comes to me afterwards, when I don't want it to.

**VB: Oh, I'm the same.**

**HS:** I've tried the thing, my daughter says that too, "Aw mother, that's not old age." [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**HS:** I think, a lot of I think is this time of life. People have so much to do but young ones, that's what their trouble is. Mine is just sheer old age. Eh, I've probably got my mind so gummed up with so much to remember. [laughs]

**VB: Well it certainly sounds like there's a lot to think about.**

**HS:** Yes, and it's funny [pause 2 seconds], a smell or a word can suddenly make you remember something... [pause 2 seconds] that you had forgotten completely and one thing leads to another like this when I'm talking. When I say that, I can remember at Art School now once sitting out in the front being the model, and I had a terrible job there, sort of carrying on like an ass! And the teacher saying to me I was well named, Hell, Sin and Done. [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**HS:** So. But my sister was the... I just ever had the one boyfriend and she used to get so cross. She would say, "How do you know what sort of chap Bill Smeaton is? He's very nice but how do you know? What yardstick have you got to measure him by?" And I would say, "I am quite happy, Dick." Aw dearie me. But she had boys coming by the score. [laughs] Around the house all the time. Sometimes I'd be sitting and she'd have two boys there. Asked them for a meal, both of them. And then be jumping up and down. I would be jumping up and down in case one was hurting the other one. But she was making eyes and having fun and I'd do my best to keep this one happy. And then she would [inaudible] and I'd go, "De de de de de." And she would say... "Oh, I think you're so cruel, Dick!" She'd say, "Nonsense! I'm not cruel. He wanted to come and see me. I make it quite plain, plain. I have no serious intentions. If they want to come, they must. I'm not being unkind." And when my Val was born down in Duns... [pause 3 seconds] and I came back from the hospital, and in about two weeks, three weeks, she decided to come down and see me and Jimmy Singleton was going to run her down. And there was another fellow... [pause 4 seconds] John Emrie, I can remember his, he was a very handsome bloke. He was a naval officer and he had a fancy for Dick. And he'd been away at sea and he came back and of course, he phoned Dick up right away and wanted a date with her. He was going back to sea again soon and he would like to take her out and what have you. And, [laughs] Dick said, "Oh, I'm going down to erm, Cornhill to see Helen and the new baby. Jimmy's taking me down. Would you like to come too?" And John said, "Oh, yes." So Dick just said to Jimmy, "John Emrie's coming with us, that OK?" So, [laughs] he couldn't very well say no, I don't think. So when they were down at the farmhouse, I went for a walk and Jimmy said to me, "How would you like to come for a wee walk, Helen?" And I said, "Oh, that would be nice, Jimmy." So we walked along the country road and he said, "You know, of course, I'm very keen to marry Dick and I can't really pursue it. Would you like to put a word in for me?" And I said, "Jimmy, I've got nothing to do with it. I wouldn't dream of doing that. I'm very\_sorry." I said. "I know Dick's fond of

you, but I don't know if, she always says she's not going to marry." He said, "Oh, I don't believe that." But he said, "Oh, I wish she would marry me." So that was all I could do. And a wee while later John Emrie said, "How would you like to go for a wee walk, Helen?" [laughs] So I said, "Oh, OK," and he said, "I'm, I'm trying to get your sister to marry me before I go back to sea again. But she's having nothing of it. Could you try and change her min...?" I said, "I've got nothing to do with it, John." [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**HS:** "I can't do anything about that sort of thing." But they just thought, "Aw." And yet, when she met her husband [pause 2 seconds], he came, he was in the Canadian Provost Corps, and he came to. My mum had a boarding house and he was posted into our house. [laughs] He'd just come to see the place and the provost marshal, he was staying, he lived with us and after Bob had gone this provost marshal said to Dick, "Bob there is not much interested in women. He likes his beer but he's not much interested in women. But he said he's gonna marry you before he goes back to Canada." America, actually, he was supposed to be going back to. Dick says, "Huh! He's got a big shout for himself, has he not! He'll learn something when he comes back here." But six months they were married, just the same, so. And then she went to Canada and stayed there. Her two sons are, I'm just writing one when you came out. But eh, you look back, it's just astounding what you can remember. I'm reading this now, that book about Meg [referring to Meg Henderson], what's it called? 'Finding Peggy'. It's about a Glasgow childhood. And I have so much I feel that I have in common with the person that's writing. Her adoration of her mother, and an aunt. I mean I feel like that with my aunt down at the farm who was my mum's older sister. I went down there each time, during the war, when I was pregnant and she was like another mother to me. And I went to her when I wasn't very well as a wee girl. Eh, and she was just like a second mother to me. So I feel when I'm reading that book, it's almost like reading a bit of my own... Only we weren't just as poor as [laughs] the writer of that book. We were never well off, but we weren't poor. These things set you off. [laughs] And are you a Glaswegian or are you...?

**VB: Erm, no actually. I was raised in Fife myself.**

**HS:** Oh, Fife! Oh, that's, I always think the Kingdom of Fife.

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

**HS:** Nice, uhuh. Very nice. What about your husband? Are you married?

**VB:** He's from, erm, Dundee, actually. But his family are living in the Borders now. They've been there for quite some time.

**HS:** Uhuh, uhuh. Oh well, they might know Whites. The Whites are fairly well known round about there.

**VB:** Yeah.

**HS:** As I say, T.D. was president, oh years ago now, president of the rugby club. He was an awful fellow was T.D. [laughs] But anywhere round about St Boswell they generally knew T.D. He was always known as T.D. And my cousins are all farmers, well. Walter and Iris are still at Whitrig Hill in St Boswell. That's another farm. Going to Kelso. They were great ones for the ice rink, too.

**VB:** Oh, that's lovely, yes.

**HS:** For the curling. Erm, so they're very fond of that. I never got, I'm not sporty, I don't. This lot are all great golfers. This wee [laughs] one here [photograph], when he was about six, was doing a wee competition at North Berwick and he asked me if I'd caddy for him. [laughs]

**VB:** [laughs]

**HS:** But this one plays off twelve. And the older one plays off thirteen, and he's very annoyed because his younger brother's got one better than him. [laughs]. But down there I think is a great place to bring up children.

**VB:** Aw, I'm sure, yes.

**HS:** The sports that they have. Ken, eh, coaches the what's called the teenies in North Berwick Rugby Club from five till eight. He's the one that coaches them. So, they all started when they were quite young. But I don't know, I mean, it's such a wild sport. I'm terrified. But Ken always said, "Are you

terrified when they cross the road?" "No." "Well. There as much likely to get something done in the rugby as they are..." So that's that. [pause 14 seconds]

**VB: But I mean. I'm thinking actually that, erm, that everything you've been saying about going to the pictures has been really interesting. And I'm sure as I go away I'm going to think, "I wish I'd asked her about this."**

**HS:** Well. You know if you phone, I won't be, I'll be very pleased if you phone again.

**VB: Would that be all right?**

**HS:** Yes, of course it will. Yes, certainly.

**VB: I mean once I've had a chance to think about...**

**HS:** Yes, of course! I'd be delighted to see you again, my dear.

**VB: That would be great.**

**HS:** And it would please me too to chatter on as usual. Not feel that I'm boring you.

**VB: No, not at all. Far from it.**

**HS:** [laughs] Because when you get set off on a thing like this, you are inclined to go on a bit.

**VB: I think, well I mean, the thing that's been striking me talking to yourself and other people is you know, how important the cinema's been--**

**HS:** Oh, it has! It has! It's amazing. And as I say, I'm sad really now that they make the films they do. I'm sad also about some of the, I've never got over one of the, oh, you wouldn't see it, it was on television. It was about an old folk's home and it was Donald Sinden, or somebody like that. It certainly was somebody well on and going in, and, taking a fancy for the matron. And, the explicit sex! And I said, with all his wrinkled muscles. Yeugh! It gave me the, ooh Gahd! Why do they want to

show you that on the television? And I'm a great one to say to people "Well, switch off," but you have to get over to the thing to switch off before you miss a bit like that.

**VB: Yes, uhuh.**

**HS:** I certainly switched off and didn't see the rest of it, how it ended, 'cause I just thought... They could have made it quite plain that he was sort of taking advantage... I can't... she was younger than him which was the thing, I just don't know why they put it in. It was just horrid! And it's that one that sticks in my mind. I've seen lots of horrid things. But to me it was just so... in an old folk's home, [laughs] just seemed so out of place! Eh, I don't think that we don't have these sort of feelings when you get older, but, I don't think you want it when you're wandering around, [laughs] an old folk's home off the cuff like that. Ohaaa! So there are, to me it's not so important nowadays as it was when I was young. Maybe I was exceptional. I really, really liked the movies. I really did. I thought they were terrific.

**VB: Did your mother like them? 'Cause you were saying that your mother went erm...**

**HS:** No. My mum was not one to sit and look at things like that.

**VB: Was she not?**

**HS:** No. I don't think my mum hardly ever went, actually, when I think, [laughs]. She went and saw that 'Sonny Boy' [referring to *The Singing Fool*], she'd no sympathy for the man at all, just the silly ass, he deserved all he got. That was her attitude. Erm--

**VB: Was that quite, I mean..., were mothers of your friends, I mean, did they go to the pictures?**

**HS:** They went more often. I don't think they went as much as my generation did. But, you see, you young people, to me, I feel you can't even begin to imagine what life was like. And, that's what makes me realise how old I am. When I think, when the children were small, you got up in the morning. There was no central heating, so I used to get up much earlier than the family. It was just taken for granted that mostly the wife did it. Cleared out the fire, set the fire and had the fire going nicely before your husband got up, and the children got up. You had all that to clean out. The dust that flew, there was no.... I haven't dusted for a couple of days here. You couldn't have done that.



With the washing, when I lived, during the war, I lived in a, to be with Bill, I lived in a farmhouse outside Cheadle, Staffs. It was two miles walk into Cheadle, in a farmhouse. And we only had the big kitchen of the farmhouse and a bedroom. And the big kitchen of the farmhouse had erm, stone floor, coloured stone floor. And a great big, black grate, with fire in the middle and the cooker things at the end and you had to black lead it. And polish the wee bit strips of silver across here. And no running water. You had to go out and pump the water into a bucket and carry your... you had a bucket of clean water, and a bucket for throwing your dirty water and we had a dry lavatory away down at the bottom, [laughs] of this long garden. And when you did your washing, on a Monday, you went out into what was called the wash house and you had to carry the water, pump the water and carry it in, to a boiler. And then set a fire, and set that alight, and then take the hot water out into the...

**VB: Mhm.**

**HS:** And I did it this way... [demonstrates] English people did it this way... [demonstrates] And then you had to erm, put your washing out, and bring it in again. [laughs] It was a whole day's work to do a washing. Erm, and that certainly was, that wasn't what we had at home here. We didn't have it as bad as that. I mean that's what I thought. They talk about the primitive Scots! But this farm, I think because it was outside of a place like Cheadle, had never been modernised. I can remember my sister, [laughing] coming down to have a few days with us. And the pump that you had to do it was, and we had great roars of laughter. 'Cause Dick was smaller than even I am, and when she put the thing up [laughs] it took her off her feet. And she'd have to do a bit of kicking to get down again, and we used to roll about laughing watching her trying to pump this water. And then when you walked down to the toilet where all your excreta just fell onto the ground underneath. And there was two, one very big hole and one tiny one, as if you were meant to go down... [laughs] [inaudible] I remember Dick coming, the first time she went down, she said, "If I don't come back in a short time when I go down there, Helen, come and get me, because I've probably fallen through [laughs] that hole!" But eh, life was just so completely different. Particularly during the war, when we had, when we went to Montrose. We had so many alarms and the, the enemy planes used to come. There was a training centre for air... pilots at Montrose so sometimes the German planes would just come shooting in off the sea, and scatter a few bombs. And then tear off before anyone could kind of get them. You would just have to be... And I can remember there was wee girl who loved to take Valerie out in her pram. And eh, she had taken Valerie out in the pram for a wee walk when the alarms went off. And I, Bill was coming off duty at that time and when he knew Val was away with

somebody, he nearly went mad and just rushed out the house to try and find where she was. Well, the wee girl had had enough sense to go into a close and keep her there. And these were all things that you look back, you just learned to take them in your stride. The first time in Montrose when there was an alarm when she was just weeks old, I remember dashing about wondering where to put her that she would be safe. Because you knew how, you know, if they hit a building it wouldn't matter really but... They always said, if you put them under a table, and so on. And I would put her under the table, out from under the table, under the stair, and out from. Aw, no, no! I'll just sit and hold her, and hope for the best. These are all things that my children, and my grandchildren, just really... You might read about it, but it's never the same as erm, [pause 3 seconds], having experienced it. And actually, you don't ever really think about it until somebody like you comes and gets you off, looking back, and quite seriously... In fact, one of the presents I've got from my American daughter-in-law is for my granddaughter. I'm sitting studying it and thinking, "God, I don't know how I'm going to do this!" The Americans are great... [noise on tape; inaudible] generations. And my grandparents' reflections. And I'm supposed to sit down and fill all this stuff [turns pages] in. Just take a glance.

**VB: Oh, dear. It's like a novel, isn't it? [laughs]**

**HS:** Isn't it? I mean, how can I sit and remember? It's just that every while I look at it and I've done nothing about and I think... When I start I couldn't... I mean, that won't fill what I want to say...

**VB: No, no.**

**HS:** If I started. But eh, I'll do something about it sooner or later.

**VB: That's a nice idea, though, isn't it?**

**HS:** Yes, yes. They're very much like that, the Yankee Doodles.

**VB: Mhm. Yes, I would have liked to have something like this from my grandparents, I think, it would've been nice to--**

**HS:** Yes. Well I think lots of... You look back and you think, that would have been nice.

**VB: Yes.**

**HS:** What annoys me is that I've been so careless with lots of things that [noise on tape] I wish I'd kept, to let the children see them. I have a 'Glasgow Herald' there. I don't know, maybe you would like to see it.

**VB: Mhm.**

**HS:** I think I still have it. [pause; HS humming looking for paper; clock ticking; 33 seconds]

**HS:** What's this one? 'Glasgow Herald', '66. Now I wonder why I kept that? I always have some reason for keeping them. I'd no children born then. Oh, yes, this is it! Now the, that must be the farming review. It must have something to do with...

**VB: That's July '84.**

**HS:** That's my cousin.

**VB: Ah, I see!**

**HS:** Clarence. And they have a farm at Dalbeattie. And that's wife Poo, and they breed horses. That's why I kept that. [looking through other papers] 'Washington Post'. Oh, I kept that because it was the great carry on they had in '91 and this poor lady whose husband was killed during the war and didn't really enjoy it all.

**VB: Mhm.**

**HS:** [humming] '81. I gave the children, I kept the children's ones when they were born but I handed them all back to them.

**VB: Ah.**

**HS:** Now there's an Outram journal that cost sixpence. And it was printed in 1929.

**VB: 1929. Mhm.**

**HS:** And there's another Outram journal. It was printed in 1929 too, I think. That was when...

**VB: Was that when they did for the... a sort of in-house thing?**

**HS:** Yes. When they did that for the people themselves. Bill would get these.

**VB: That's interesting.**

**HS:** And that was the 'Glasgow Herald' after the strike. Still on strike, that was 1926. And that's where, the pays they got, you see.

**VB: That's amazing.**

**HS:** £7.50 a week for the night shift, and £6.50. When I got married that's what my husband had, and we were going to be very well off because that was well paid! What's this? 'Glasgow Advertiser'. That's at 1783 [sic]. [rustling papers]. You see it cost, where's the price, is it on it? No, it isn't. This is another here, there's fourpence ha'penny in 1847. And yet, you know what, I was told that in these days, they clubbed together, poorer folk, to buy a 'Glasgow Herald'.

**VB: I'm sure it must have been quite a lot of money, actually.**

**HS:** Yes, that's what I'm saying. They couldn't really afford it, the ordinary folk. I was trying... We came to the conclusion my family must have kept it because there was something about, erm, a Smeaton, a Doctor Smeaton, maybe. Och I don't know. But eh, [rustling papers] these are things that I've held onto for some reason or another. September. No, that wasn't an 'Evening Times' there. Must be a copy. [humming] No. [pause while looking through papers] See if there's another old 'Herald', way, way back. 1939. That one's not sold.

**VB: [laughs]**

**HS:** I don't know what I'm keeping them for. I just think maybe...

**VB: That's interesting.**

**HS:** The children could do something with them. But erm, it's quite interesting sometimes.

**VB: It is!**

**HS:** Because you can pick them up and just see the...

**VB: Seeing all these Glasgow papers in such, eh, different times.**

**HS:** Yes, yes. And of course I took this one I think to the erm, Mitchell Library. And you see, they said that the paper nowadays is quite different. That paper has a lot of cloth in it and that's why it has survived the treatment it's had, eh, from here. Just being laid into a book and stuck in a drawer.

**VB: Right.**

**HS:** But, eh.

**VB: It's interesting, yes. 'Cause I mean the modern ones tend to be really brittle, don't they?**

**HS:** Yes. Well, you know, we used to have a great deal of trouble in the library.

**VB: Mhm.**

**HS:** Of books going the way they shouldn't go. The paper going crackly and likely to burn [inaudible].  
Burning, burning.

**VB: Yes, yes. It's still going. That is interesting. I didn't realise that the 'Herald' did a paper as well.**

**HS:** All that time. They've been at it. Now they call it the 'Herald'. For us it was always the 'Glasgow Herald'.

**VB: Of course, yes, yes.**

**HS:** It was always the 'Glasgow Herald'. [pause 9 seconds]

**VB:** I'm sure your husband must have seen many changes in working now over that period of time.

**HS:** Oh, yes, he certainly did. Oh, gosh, yes! It used to break his heart because, in fact, [laughs] I could remember my younger son, Alan. Bill was terribly careful, very... about grammar and punctuation. 'Cause, when they were apprentices there, if they made a mistake, used to be if you wanted to know how to spell a word correctly, you would look at the 'Glasgow Herald'. There was never a mistake in the 'Glasgow Herald'. And colons and semi-colons and all of that were very important. And Bill would sit listening to the readers on the television and go bonkers with the wrong grammar and the wrong pronunciation. And one of the things, och it doesn't apply even nowadays, was saying 'further' or 'farther'.

**VB:** Right.

**HS:** And that used to drive him bonkers. How people would say... [tape cuts out]

[End of Side B]

[End of Tape 2]

[End of Interview]