

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.

* Transcript ID: HS-92-036AT002

* CCINTB Transcript ID: 92-36-17a-ac

* Tapes: HS-92-036OT003

* CCINTB Tapes ID: T95-72

* Length: 00:56:22

* Glasgow, 28 June 1995: Valentina Bold interviews Helen Smeaton

* Transcribed by Valentina Bold/ Standardised by Annette Kuhn

* HS = Helen Smeaton/ VB = Valentina Bold

* Notes: Second of two interviews with Helen Smeaton; Sound Quality: Fair.

[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[tape introduction by Valentina Bold]

VB: That should be all right now. I'll just make sure it's at a decent volume. Yeah, I think that'll be OK. Erm, need to make sure it's all connected up. [tape being checked] That should be fine.

HS: Right.

VB: Erm. So, I made a note of some of the questions that I wanted to ask.

HS: Right, right. Just take Twinkle off there and put it here.

VB: Ah, that's...

HS: Thank you. Toys. [laughs]

VB: That's lovely.

HS: [laughs]

VB: Erm. The first thing I wanted to ask a bit more about was, really the sort of atmosphere at some of the cinemas you mentioned.

HS: Yes, Mhm.

VB: 'Cause, erm, you were telling me about quite a range of ones from the--

HS: The better off ones.

VB: The better off ones, down to the electric one.

HS: Yes, yes, yes.

VB: Eh, was there a difference in the way people behaved in these cinemas, do you think?

HS: I don't really think so. The only difference. It's a terrible thing to say but it's, like... I don't know if you've noticed, you get it on certain buses, there's more, body odour. Eh, and when you went to a place like the Electric [referring to Electric Picture Palace], they were very involved in it. But there was just a different kind of aroma... [pause 3 seconds] around in the cinema, eh, than you would feel in ones where they paid a bit more to get into. I suppose it's just to do with the... it wouldn't apply so much nowadays, but in these days, not everybody had bathrooms and places to go bathing and things like that. So probably they didn't bath as much. But, it was amazing. When I look back on it, what a difference it made to the feeling of the place. You just felt, an odd smell in here. At that time, I suppose, I was too young to realise it had anything to do with the place and the people. It was just, it had a different smell when you got into it. You couldn't think that you were in a cinema in town. You definitely knew you were in a different type of cinema. And other than that. No, they were all very well behaved. And another thing I've just noticed is, it never happens now. At the end of every show, if you were in for the last showing, it always played 'God Save the Queen', or in these days, it was the King. And everybody stood until it was over. I can remember standing, waiting for it to be over, so you could rush out and run home or get a tram home or something. And then, of course, when politics started to come into it there was us that were rebelling, we refused to stand. We'd just either sit or we'd push out past all these people standing and they would think we were absolute horrors. Not standing for the Queen! And moving about when they were playing the Queen! That was more evident when you got into, the change was more evident when you got into the different tiles, styles. The poorer class ones were quicker to give up standing for the Queen than

the ones who were, well, better off or better heeled, I presume. It took them much longer. I don't think, oh, you do, I know, at opera and places like that, you still do. But you never see them in the cinema nowadays. Never. And nowadays, I mean, I'd forgotten all about that. Looking back, how absolutely true we were. We just stood there, although you might have been bursting... [laughs] to get away home. You stood for the whole length of 'God Save the Queen'. [laughs] Now that was one of the things. But there wasn't any difference. The poorer ones stood just as much as the better off ones, to start with. And then when politics became more active, when Labour came more into it, you noticed the difference then of people saying, "I'm not standing for this. I'll just get away out." And because the kind of, in the audience it did cause a feeling of ill-will towards each other, on the way out. When it first started, people would note she or he didn't stand for the National Anthem. They must be really dreadful people, dreadful people. And then it just slowly disappeared and nobody thought anything about it. After the war. You see, the war made all that difference.

VB: Mhm.

HS: People then, when you think about coming back after the war, it had nearly stopped then, standing for the, or playing even the National Anthem. I don't suppose I'm ever in at the last view nowadays but I don't think they play 'God Save the Queen' now.

VB: No. No they don't. [laughs]

HS: [laughs] Now I think, I can't see. And they were all full. They were always full. Even in the afternoons, they were pretty full. Nights. There were queues and queues at night, of course, for really good, eh, films. I suppose there still is. I don't know. I don't go out so much at night now. But in these days, on Friday and Saturday, there was something wrong if you weren't either dancing or at the films. That was your choice of entertainment. At least in my group. I know there were ones that went to opera and the theatre but it wasn't included in my curriculum, at that stage in my life. It was after I got married and got more interested in these things than when I was a youngster. I wasn't, I suppose in the financial class that could afford to go to opera. My parents had never been opera or theatregoers.

VB: That reminds me. I was meaning to ask a bit about your parents' attitude to the cinema. I remember you told me about going to one film with your mother.

HS: Yes. My mum, my mum just had no time for them. She just thought it was a load of rubbish. People could do better with their time. And of course, see I was the very opposite. I sat there lapping it all up and, living it all. I'm nearly as bad nowadays when I'm watching these things. Eh, but when I was young, I just thought they were terrific. But my dad was more or less indifferent. He didn't, we weren't a family to go to the films. I don't even remember ever going. I think maybe, very few times my sister, my dad and mum and I went to a cinema together. Eh, because it was... the thing I noticed was that one called *The Singing Fool* with Al Jolson and after... I think that finished my mum. She said any man that behaved like him deserved all he got. And everybody else had been weeping and I came out having gone through umpteen handkerchiefs and my mum came out feeling just... filled with contempt, [laughs] for this man who let himself be used in that way. And the people that felt sorry for him. She couldn't understand how you would feel sorry for somebody like that. [laughs] So I must have got my mum's nature after all. And yet, she was the kindest of people. That kind of imaginary thing, I think, didn't appeal to her at all.

VB: Did she actually discourage you from going to the cinema?

HS: No, no, she never, no. In fact, she always used to say, that's where I lived in my wee fairyland. She had a great deal of a job, in many ways, protecting me from my own... [pause 3 seconds] Not protecting, she did, always wanted, 'cause I... My sister was more like my mum. She just knew exactly what she wanted. Eh, well I had been the... the sickly one when I was [born?] and although I was the elder one I think I had more attention. Because, as a child I'd been quite a sickly child. So I'm told. I always remember after my mum died and I was a married woman with three children then. And my sister was over from Canada, her saying to me, I don't know how it came up but she said, "Of course we were always looking after you, Helen. Whatever happened, mummy would say, "Don't tell Helen, it'll just upset her, so just don't tell..." And do you know, I hadn't realised that until the minute my sister said it, I knew it was true. But I had never actually felt that way. And that's what struck, isn't it odd that you don't think it at the time, but when somebody tells you. I couldn't have said to her, "Aw, rubbish." The minute she said it, I knew my mum had spent a lot of her time--

VB: That's interesting.

HS: My sister was very, very pretty. We were supposed to be alike, if we were apart. But whenever we were together, you could always see. And Dick could get anything that she wanted. And men flocked to her like bees to a honey pot. And my mum used to say sometimes to me, [inaudible] "Don't you let it worry you, Helen. A good nature lasts longer than good looks. So don't you let that

worry you." So that made me think about that. She was once again trying to bolster up me, [laughs] with all this opposition. No, well, it wasn't. Dick and I were great friends. And I missed her so much, 'cause she could make me look completely different. When we got to be young women particularly, if we were going out somewhere I would go to put, she'd say, "Aw, don't put that on." And she'd go to my wardrobe, "Put that on and put that on." Then she would do my hair and I just took on a different air altogether. She just had that sort of knack of, anyway that's not to do with cinema. But it was just the different lives even in our family. And it happens nowadays too. We all lead, and you come from the same parents, and you have the same background, and yet there's something different in everybody that seems to make them such individuals. It's very hard to understand. And I suppose it's the same if you go to the cinema. Some of the films I just... I can't... I can't bear. And yet, particularly nowadays, the young ones think they're great. And I think they're abominable! I wouldn't go and see them. So maybe that was the same, mum hadn't been used to films. I hate any films that have what I call, uncalled for cruelty. I know what goes on in life. We get it on the telly. And I get it in the newspapers. When I go to the films or have a video, I want something that I know is not real but it would be lovely if only it were real. All romantic stuff. My husband used to say, "You like to go about with your head in the sands, Helen." And I'd say, "Yes I do," I said. "I know there's a sewer down there but I don't go about lifting the grating up to have a look at it. I know it's there but I would rather not bother with it as long as it's doing its job, I'll do what I have to do." So, I have a kind of erm, unreal attitude a lot of the time and I know it. And that's why the cinema appealed to me so much. But it doesn't appeal to me nowadays 'cause they go in for this realism. You see, I enjoy, I don't suppose that *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, I thought was super. Because although there was that amount of sex in it that was quite, sometimes, rather eh, overdone, you could have a laugh at it. And it wasn't in any way, really bearing on the real facts of life. If they were, they were doing it in a comical way. I've never got over seeing a play on the television about an old folk's home. I think it was Donald Sinden or somebody got into it and you saw this old man having literally sex with the matron in the thing. And every time I think about it, I feel quite ill! Even the man's... if it were a young man, he would have a lovely body. But this elderly gentleman with his sagging flesh and sagging muscles, performing on top of this younger woman. It really made me feel, "Ooh, gad!" So that I have a kind of idealistic look on these things. Even at this time in my life, I haven't seemed to cast it all off. [horn toots outside]. And the cinemas feed you with that. I don't see so much cinema nowadays and I'm very fussy which ones I go to. [laughs] Now, anything else?

VB: Well, I mean a couple of things that came out of what you were saying just now. Erm, one thing I was wanting to ask was, did you go to the cinema much with your husband when you were courting, say?

HS: Oh, yes, yes. But he didn't go nearly enough to suit me when we were young. In fact, I would do all kinds of things. If he had known, or my parents had known, how often I went to the cinema, they would have gone round the bend. I would have gone every night if I could have got away with it. Even when I was supposed to be studying at school, if I could dog off to go to the cinema, I was off. But, oh yes, we went regularly. In fact, gosh! After the war, we went. Oh, my goodness, we had been married, I had my mum with me then. She was an invalid. And my three children. And it was a bit of a trial. My mum had had a stroke and I had my late baby. And sometimes at the end of the day I was ready to tear my hair out. We went to the pictures, down at the Rio, [noise of car horn outside] it used to be at Canniesburn. We went twice a week because Valerie by that time was fourteen and I could leave her to look after my mum. My mum was all right except, sometimes she had, she was paralysed down one side, she had to walk. She might fall or, she might want to go to the toilet and Valerie would have to take her. And all these wee things. But, I used to think, whenever we went out the house, I'm leaving all that behind. I'm going away into a... I didn't even care what the film was. Just to go and sit in the Rio. And then when we came out Bill would say, "Did you enjoy that?" And I'd say, "If I get home and nothing's happened and mummy's all right, I've had a good time. If I go home and anything's happened to mummy, I'll wish I'd never gone." And I said that probably twice a week for about ten years. But I still went because it was such a handy place. You could walk down into the cinema and walk home. No bus waiting. Or if anything went wrong with any of them, they knew where I was and it was easy to get me. So, the cinema has always seemed to be to me a kind of place, and sometimes a place of comfort. And at other times, a place that helps me to forget if I've got a lot of things bothering me. You get carried away and forget about them if I get involved in the cinema. When I was younger! I don't know if it does that nowadays. But when I was younger, when I was a keen cinema person, that's what it meant to me.

VB: 'Cause, I was interested. I mean, when you're saying that. Do you think the cinema meant different things to you at different times of your life?

HS: Oh, yes! Absolutely. Without doubt. To me, when I was young, I believed all the romantic stuff. I could think of seeing a film, *Seventh Heaven*, it was called or something. Somebody called Simone Simon and James Stewart. They had an attic away up somewhere in Paris and it was all so romantic. And I sat there and I took all that in. I thought that was what love was like. I never bothered about what happened afterwards. I can remember going on thinking about that film for countless years. And then when my younger son, the one in America, was about seventeen, and I was always telling him about the great films that we had when I was young. How ours were so much better. Sometimes they would come on the telly and I remember saying, "This *Seventh Heaven's* coming on now." And I

said, "Aw Alan. If you're staying in, look at this, look at this film." [laughs] And we sat down to look at it and I remember thinking, "Oh, my gosh! Did I really think that was good?" And when it was finished, Alan nearly fell about laughing. He said, "You're right, mother. They don't make films like that any more nowadays." And I couldn't understand how my whole attitude had changed in what, about twenty, thirty years from I was sixteen, seventeen when I saw it and it was all just so romantic and wonderful, and then... once you've lived a bit and you see it again. [laughs] Oh dear, oh dear! There are still films that they show on the television that to me haven't grown, or they've worn well. There were these ones with William Powell and Myrna Loy [referring to *The Thin Man* series].

VB: Oh, yes, yes!

HS: And the dog. These were really good films. I enjoyed that. There was another one I saw fairly recently with, Clark Gable, I think it was. And Claudette Colbert.

VB: It wasn't that one that... that erm, she's Cigarette in? It's set in the desert and--

HS: Yeah. She was a very wealthy person and she'd run away because she was supposed to get married and decided she didn't... And he was a newspaper man that met up with her and,

VB: Oh, yes! I know the one. [referring to *Under Two Flags*]

HS: Yes. And to me, I can still look at that and think it's funny and enjoyable. Because it wasn't so way out and romantic. I suppose it's the difference between reading an Annie S. Swan novel and reading some... a bit more modern writers of romance. They have some sort of fact in life. Like, my mum used to read 'The People's Friend' and I'd always say to her, "Here's your ration of passion for the week, mother," when I bought her her 'People's Friend'.

VB: [laughs]

HS: And I feel, like that, they used to think the 'People's Friend' stories were really lovely. By the time my mum was reading it, I was thinking, "Gosh, what a load of drivel. Can't think why my mother reads that stuff." But then she had changed the other way. She wouldn't have read that when she was a younger woman. But when she got older, she liked her 'People's Friend' and read all about it and this kind of thing. So, I don't know which way. We all change. But... [pause 3 seconds] maybe if you're practical to start with you then lighten up a bit, and if you're impractical, you then get more

practical, I don't know. But that's how it seemed to run in my family. My sister was always the practical one. She erm... [pause 2 seconds] When I say always, as wee girls I was always looking after her. It was when we got to eh, fourteen and fifteen, that things began to change round. I stayed at school and Dick wouldn't stay at school. So, she then started really to lead the way in everything that we did. I mean, [laughs] I hadn't had a drink when I went out with her with this Jimmy Singleton and my husband. And we went... Jimmy Singleton took us all out to the Buchanan Arms and we were sitting in the bar there. I must have been nineteen, twenty and my sister two years younger. Saying, "What will you drink, Helen?" And I said, "What will I have? I don't know what to have." And my sister said in this rather, crivvens, overbearing, "Aw, have a whisky sour, Helen." Whenever I started to drink it, I started to giggle. [laughs] I always remember, she said, "Oh, don't give us that, Helen. One sip of a whisky sour and you think that you're tiddly! It's sheer imagination." And as soon as she said that I felt like somebody throwing a bucket of cold water over me. Because I knew it was. It was the idea of drinking alcohol and I felt I should be tiddly, so I started to giggle. And the minute she said, I straightened up straight away. I didn't giggle any more. [laughs] She just always had that ability somehow, to cope, and be sure of herself, and... It's not my sister we're talking about, it's cinema.

VB: Well, it reminded me of something else I was, that you said that was quite interesting about your sister and going out with your sister and she would just do something. Erm, did you ever... [pause 2 seconds] Were you ever aware of trying to look like any of the film stars or was there anything that inspired you?

HS: No. I think the only thing, the same as is happening nowadays. You all wanted to be as thin as they were. We never... I never thought of ever looking like them in a facial manner. Eh, and I liked to look smart or decent. But we all wanted to be thin. And they were all thin. I mean, even looking at them now, they're as thin as the other ones were nowadays and you used to read all these magazines, the 'Filmgoer' magazine [referring to 'Picturegoer'], what was the other one, oh, there was umpteen. And all my pocket money went on buying and reading all about these film stars. My mum used to say if I knew as much about my schoolwork as I knew about the film stars, I would pass every exam with flying colours. 'Cause I never forgot it. I'd read it, and read it, and read it. But they were all, nearly all slim. There was a few that weren't. Erm, what was her name? Wallace Beery. Marie Dressler, Marie Dressler. She was very plump. So, my mum was plump. And so, to me, plump people always represent somebody that's got a kind and affectionate and nice. And that's how Marie Dressler came over. But you never wanted to look like them. Although you thought they were great,

you didn't really want to look like that at all. So, I think these were things... the only things that I wanted to imitate. I wanted life to be romantic and I wanted to be thin. [laughs]

VB: So were you watching what you were eating and that sort of thing?

HS: Yes, yes. We were quite careful. The thing I feel when you're younger, you're doing so much. You don't have time, really. You don't need to worry about your weight. It's only since my husband died and I gave up smoking, I've put on over a stone in weight. But if you look around, lots of women do that because, I'm not doing the work. I don't... I mean when I think what you do when you're a young woman with a family or working or whatever, you hardly ever sit down. You're on the go all the time and to me, that keeps most people slim. It's once all that's past. And if you haven't got an active hobby which I do not have. I'm great at sitting about. Erm, it's very easy to put on weight. And it doesn't really, I'm not so bothered about it nowadays. Maybe, even twenty years ago it would've bothered me, I don't know. [horn tooting; sound of traffic] I never had the chance then. But now it doesn't bother me. I wouldn't like to put on too much, but, eh, what I've got doesn't bother me. [laughs]

VB: [laughs] And I would hardly have thought so. Erm, it is interesting that, when you're saying, eh, you know, wanting to look slim and smart.

HS: Yeah.

VB: I brought along a book 'cause I remember you talking about the magazines before.

HS: Uhuh.

VB: Erm. One of the 'Daily Express' film books I thought you might like to see.

HS: Oh, yeah.

VB: I think it's from '35.

HS: Oh, Greta Garbo.

VB: There's some of the stars here telling you about--

HS: Ye-es! That's super. [looks at book] These are all the things now and you wonder why you didn't keep them.

VB: Yes.

HS: I'd never keep anything like that. Oh I didn't know... I knew the names... I never was really interested in who made the films. It was just the film, aw gosh! I remember these two, very well. [laughs]

VB: Maurice Chevalier.

HS: Yes. And her, particularly as a singer.

VB: Jeanette MacDonald.

HS: Yes. And she was, she was a great favourite of mine. This Claudette Colbert, I loved. Charles Ruggles. He was more of a comedian, than ever taking him seriously. But I just thought she was terrific. There was a film on last week with her in it, too. Aw, all of these are, oh that Kay Frances. Oh, [swooning voice] what memories. He had a limp. Herbert Marshall.

VB: Oh right, yes.

HS: I think, I'm not sure whether he had lost his leg in the war or something, but he always limped.

VB: Mhm.

HS: Or whether he had something wrong. I didn't see much of Anna Sten and Joan Gardner I didn't know so very well. Mind you, I wasn't that nuts about British films, it was more--

VB: Aah!

HS: American films. British films seemed to be... to me, they just weren't so real, or weren't so attractive in some way or another. If you saw it was a British film, och I'll not bother going. Nearly always I used to say. Matheson Lang. Oh, very little. I didn't see very much to remember about him. [sound of traffic getting louder] [inaudible] I knew him.

VB: What was it that attracted you to Claudette Colbert in particular?

HS: To me she represented, eh, such a... [pause 2 seconds] This is the thing, you made her what she was doing in the film. She always sort of played the sort of, eh, jolly girl, eh, smart and clever but awfully nice with it. You never separated them from their roles. They were what you saw on the screen. When they got always the same, a similar type of role, you thought that's what she was. So she always seemed to play a role that was really, eh, she was awfully smart and clever and was witty with it, you see. So I always thought, "Ohh! I'd love to be like that! That's super." Madge Evans. I remember the name. I don't remember much about her. Jean Parker, Jean Muir. I remember them vaguely, but not a lot. Oh my, yes! I remember Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll.

VB: Ohh!

HS: And that *39 Steps*. I've seen and seen that. Never get tired of it.

VB: That's wonderful, isn't it?

HS: And *All Quiet on the Western Front*. You see, I know it got great write-ups. It still does. And because it was so real, although I didn't know anything about the First World War, it always disturbed me. I didn't like looking at things telling you the truth about it. I hated that.

VB: Mhm.

HS: Who are they, Clive Brook. Yes, yes. Again, they're British stars and you knew them but I never saw as much of them as I saw of the Americans. Charles Laughton. [laughs] He was great. Nobody's ever done Henry the Eighth like he did it [referring to *The Private Life of Henry VIII*]. Lillian Harvey. I just remember the name. Don't remember much about her. Yes, Leslie Howard. Saw many films with him. He was awful good too. He was a typical Englishman. You didn't have any typical Scotsmen, really, so much I don't think. It was really in British films, they were nearly all... Except, when you went to American films in these days, you got more Scots people as Scots people in them than you even do, well I haven't seen all these new ones. I'm trying to think, there was one that was always with Laurel and Hardy to start with. Was it Laurel and Hardy or..? [pause 3 seconds] Yes, I'm sure it was. He had a squint eye, he had a right Scottish voice. I forgot, he was only a third part... in it, but eh, he was a Scots fellow, supposed to be. [probably referring to James Finlayson]

VB: I don't know why, but I was thinking when you said that, there was that lady that was erm, James Cagney's mother in a couple of films. I think she was Irish though.

HS: Ah, yes. People mix up them. What's Scottish and what's Irish. [tape cuts out]

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

HS: He was one that varied his parts a great deal. Sometimes he was quite the gentleman and other times he was a tremendous villain. There was no way of mixing up his roles, with what the man would be like. You didn't, you never thought about him as other than as an actor, not really as a person. He was just an actor. [looking at book] Uh, Charlie Chaplin. 'Course I never saw him like that. And to be quite honest, I wasn't a great Charlie Chaplin fan. The only one I really remember and went to see was *Modern Times*. And I thought it was so very, very clever. But, his other ones did nothing for me at all. Elisabeth Bergner. She wasn't, didn't last as long as lots of them. Not... I didn't see so much of her. I saw her, but not a lot. [pause 2 seconds] These are all the men that did the films.

VB: Yes.

HS: They never entered, Raymond Massey, gosh! He and his children are still going strong, Raymond Massey. I think he's got a son and a daughter that are still in the films. He was very good. But he always had kind of villainous parts to play.

VB: It's funny that, isn't it? 'Cause you mentioned Lionel Barrymore...

HS: Yes.

VB: Of course, another family like that.

HS: Of course, yes, yes. They were all, and all had such different parts. John Barrymore. Ethel Barrymore I never really remembered very much about. But the two men, because they were so different, and Lionel was always the sort of, he never seemed to be anything in my life. But in my film [inaudible] about an elderly gent that was always in a wheelchair or, doing good things, where the John one was always the suave, eh, man about town type of actor.

VB: 'Cause, I saw him quite recently in erm, again when you mentioned Jeanette MacDonald, in *Maytime*.

HS: Oh, yes, yes, yes!

VB: With Nelson Eddy.

HS: That's right. Yes, that's right. I remember that one too. That Roland Young. He had many funny parts. He was quite good.

VB: Did you like that sort of musical with..?

HS: Yes. I loved musicals. I loved musicals. Mad on dancing, mad on dancing. And do you know, when I look at Riverdance you see the river, I cry. I mean I don't cry, I'm in tears! It's just so beautiful. And they're so perfect. You can get a whole bunch of people that can do anything as well as they do the Irish dancing. And their other dance, but it was the Irish dancing particularly. The tears just streamed down my face. [laughs] And I think, it's so stupid, [siren in background] they're dancing. It's just so, they're just so... it's like the ballet. Classical ballet does that for me. Sometimes I'm sitting, I go to the classical ballet whenever I can, and I'm sitting in tears because everybody's so graceful, every movement they make is so graceful and you wonder. I keep saying... I used to say to my husband, he wasn't a great ballet fan and my sons are not much better, "If everybody could move as gracefully as these people move, wouldn't life be beautiful?" Oh, here we are. [looking at book] Here's another, *The Ghost Goes West*. I liked Robert Donat.

VB: Aw.

HS: I thought he was awful good.

VB: D'you think... d'you think he's one of these eh, film people that's, as you say, you always recognise them?

HS: Yes.

VB: Or was he more--

HS: No, he was always. I don't think you ever thought of him playing a bad... playing a part in which he was bad. He was always, [pause 2 seconds] either very masculine or very clever. Parts that you admired, the role he was taking. Jack Buchanan was not a favour... I wasn't a fan of his either. I don't know why. He had lots and lots of them. But not me. 'Course he was, [pause; looking at book] that John Mills too. He's still going strong. He's older than I am. Gee whizz. Another coffin cheater.
[laughs]

VB: [laughs]

HS: [looking at book] Don't know these so well. I remember the names but not. You see, whenever the war came, [pause 2 seconds] that's when my visits to the cinema stopped. Erm, I got married and my husband was away. And then come back and I got pregnant, and go away and I'd get pregnant. I was living down at the farm, where there wasn't cinemas. Cinemas would come and go in the village hall, once in a month or something like that. And then by the time I came back again I had too much to do. It was really from about 19, just about... 19 what, 1930, uhuh, till about 1939 when the war started. My days of cinema were, ohaaa! When I look back, I think, gaw... [laughs] If my children had behaved like that, or my mum didn't know! [laughs] If I thought my children had wasted their time at the cinema the way I did, [pause 2 seconds] I wouldn't... I'd be cross with them. [looking at book] I never was a Jessie Matthews fan either. See they were all British, the different... They didn't have the... [pause; looking at book] Greta Garbo, I just thought she, and she played every part and she just seemed to always be that person that she was playing and you could forget all about her being an actress. Freddy Bartholomew! Huh! I remember seeing him in films.

VB: It's amazing. I saw, erm, quite recently, you know they were doing the thing at the Concert Hall where they were showing silent films and with an orchestra?

HS: Oh, no. I didn't see that.

VB: I went to see *Question the Devil*.

HS: Oh, yes.

VB: And it was, [pause 2 seconds] just amazing. I can... I understand totally what you say about the, you know, you're not cry... you're not sad but... 'Cause, just some of the scenes in that. And she was so beautiful, so perfect.

HS: Yes that's it. It's just so beautiful that you've got to release yours... and [angst?] [inaudible] a great weep, it's terrible. And even this morning they had that Liver... Riverdance lot on. The boy and girl that are the leaders in one of the programmes this morning and then you saw a bit of their dancing. And I'm sitting there and I'm saying to myself, "Good grief! At your time in life! There you are, sitting doing still that." It's just something that, when it's done so well...

VB: Uhuh.

HS: It seems to do something. [looking at book] No, I didn't see any, Claude Rains, I saw, but I didn't see *The Clairvoyant*. Fay Wray, I remember the name, but not much. You see, I was never a fan of Jessie. Sorry, Jessie!

VB: What was it put you off Jessie Matthews, d'you think?

HS: I think, she always came over, [mimics voice] high pitched voice and she was terribly English. And I think that's what, I always thought of her as a bit of a wimp, eh, you know. And when she was Bessie [probably referring to the 'Edward & Mrs. Simpson' series], oh I don't know what it was. Jack Hulbert, I wasn't fond of. I wasn't a fan of. But William Powell, you see, I thought he was terrific. I don't think I saw that film.

VB: Do you think there was a particular type of say, male actor that you were drawn to?

HS: No. I think it must have been the way that they played the roles. The roles I would be drawn to. And how they played them. If they could make me really forget that they were an actor acting a part, then I'd think, aw that's terrific. I was thinking they were the parts. [looking at book] He's terrific. And I mean, now that I'm older, it wasn't him that was terrific, it was the role he was playing. And I always feel, if I could feel there was a man acting, then I didn't get so involved with it. It's just when you've got a really good actor playing the part so that you forgot. You see, there's Wallace Beery. No, Victor McLaglen. He was great. He was really good. And Franchot Tone was another great favourite of mine. And I don't know why. He always struck me as being a real gentleman. [laughs]

VB: Right.

HS: Looking back.

VB: Did you ever, I mean just following on from what you were saying about actors there. Did you ever imagine yourself in the... that sort of situation? 'Cause you were saying like Claudette Colbert, she sort of, was someone you'd have liked to...

HS: Yes, well, I suppose inside I must've felt like that, but I was very, see, I was keen on dancing and I went to all the dancing films. They were the ones I would do things to get to. I actually, when I was just getting ready to leave school, applied. I saw, [laughs] an advertisement in a local paper for chorus girls, for some company. And without telling my parents, I wrote and asked, and said I would like to.... And I got an interview, somewhere down round about, oh, I was at Woodside Secondary School at the time, erm. Where did I go for the interview? It was somewhere in Great Western Road and as I say, it was a travelling company. I'd be travelling all over the place. And was I interested in coming for some rehearsals? And when I told my mum and dad, it was my dad... [pause 3 seconds] I've never seen my dad so angry. I never saw him so angry. Only twice was he angry. I've seen him really, really angry, and it was me both times. Eh, to even dream of going on a chorus to go around living in second-hand digs, and second-hand life and aw! He really got on to me so much, I hadn't the courage, [laughs] to go any further.

VB: Aw.

HS: And then another time I decided I would like hairdressing. And my dad thought, "Are you mad? Are you mad? Hairdressing! You want to be washing and combing people's hair with all the dirt from their hair floating up into your face, all day long! Working twice as hard at holiday times, when everybody else is going, you're work... What on earth put such a silly idea in?"

VB: [laughs]

HS: [laughs] I gave that up too. So I just landed at something. There you are. But eh, I never thought of myself as an ac--, [noise of traffic] my sister and I actually went into amateur dramatics for a very short time, but I couldn't take it seriously. I always felt I wanted to laugh, because I couldn't believe the part that I was supposed to be playing, so I wasn't meant to be an actress. And Dick was much the same.

VB: Mhm.

HS: We weren't meant that way. [pause; looks at book] You see, there's Tom Walls. What's his name? Ralph Linn. You see, there's another... These, eh... And what was his name again? They were tremendously, Tom Walls right enough, tremendously popular. But they weren't my cup of tea. I don't know whether it was their accents or the parts that they played but I just never could get enthusiastic about. Well, you see, these--

VB: Aw, Ginger Rogers, Fred Astaire.

HS: Ye-es. And Fred Astaire. They were a different cup, kettle of fish altogether. And Norma Shearer! Well, she was terrific. I was a great fan of hers. She was married to one of the directors of films. What was? Irving, Irving Thalberg. That was his name. Isn't it funny what you remember? Although I wasn't interested in directors or anything but I knew he was her husband. [laughs] I suppose if they stayed together for a long time, you felt they were something special. That was another one, [looking at book] Miriam Hopkins. She was terrific.

VB: Did you ever get any of the American magazines? Or was it just the...

HS: No. Mostly I just, I can't...

VB: 'Picturegoer' or..?

HS: 'Picturegoer'. Yes. I got these. Yes. I never knew whether they were American, I just saw them lying--

VB: Yeah.

HS: And I would just buy them. [looking at book] Evelyn Laye. She was another British star and, [laughs] that did nothing for me. Grace Moore. She was too much, [pause 2 seconds] opera for me...

VB: Yes.

HS: At that time in my life.

VB: They seemed to have a different sort of style about them, too.

HS: Quite different. And different sound of voices they had.

VB: Yeah.

HS: Nearly all the women spoke kind of high-pitched... [said in high voice] To me, I don't know if they still, no they don't. But then, they all seemed to have this, whether it was their training, but they all seemed to have very high-pitched voices and the men all seemed to come from upper class, ah--

VB: Uhuh.

HS: They never really spoke the way that I was used to hearing voices. And I didn't mind the American voices, but I seemed... The English tones seemed to put me off.

VB: Mhm. Even, I mean, just that one you were looking at just now, the hair and everything, it was quite, sort of, stiff.

HS: Yes.

VB: Whereas the Americans would have the same style but somehow it was more--

HS: Yes, that's what it is. You see the people. My ha... I could comb my hair in just the normal way. And my sister would comb my hair in just a normal way but you wouldn't think that it was the same head of hair. It's just, some people have that knack. My sister would go in and buy clothes in the C&A, and buy buttons. Take off all the buttons and buy other buttons. And another belt. Sometimes get a fur collar off another coat and put it on. And they looked terribly expensive. And she wasn't like me. [laughs] I'm a big mouth. She used to get great pleasure and say, somebody in the office said, "Boy, that must've cost you a lot, Dick." And she would say, "Well, I like nice clothes." She would never say, "Oh. I bought this in C&A. And I did this and this and that."

VB: [laughs]

HS: She just loved to enjoy them thinking... she used to say, "They think they know such a lot about clothes." And she said, "If they only knew what a good laugh I'm having!" [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

HS: And she could do that with dresses and everything. She just had that knack. If you have that knack, you're jolly lucky. [looks at book] Thelma Todd, that was another good one.

VB: Some of the gowns they're wearing--

HS: Oh, yeah. Well if you look at the figures there too.

VB: Mhm.

HS: They were so skinny.

VB: Yeah.

HS: [looking at book] Gee, this doesn't half bring back, [pause 2 seconds] youth, youth, youth. [pause 2 seconds] Myrna Loy. She was great with, and Asta was the dog. Asta. That's, [pause 2 seconds] [wait long enough?], so's she. Norma Shearer. Aw, yes. Who's this? I don't know who that is. That's not Ginger Rogers. Joan Crawford. So it is. But my gosh, I just had difficulty recognising her there.

VB: She changed quite a lot during the thirties, didn't she?

HS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes. She was never as, that's much thinner and different looking. I can see it's her but it wouldn't have been how I would picture her.

VB: Mhm.

HS: Oh, he was another favourite of mine, Robert Montgomery. Ooh, I just thought. He was not unlike what my husband looked like.

VB: Aaah.

HS: That kind of mouth. And terribly square chin. And his hair was well set back. [pause 2 seconds]. As a young man he was very--

VB: It's a lovely, sensitive sort of face.

HS: Yes, yes, yes, he had. Oh he was super. Joan, that's Joan, even that to me's not like Joan Crawford. That must've been her early days. He was quite a favourite too.

VB: Douglas Fairbanks.

HS: I didn't mind him. Gertrude Lawrence. She was the... Everybody liked Gertrude Lawrence but me.
[laughs] These two were very funny.

VB: Aw, Laurel and Hardy.

HS: Here's Robertson Hare and Leslie Henson. Did nothing for me.

VB: Mhm.

HS: All the kiddy winkies. And, I often wonder how they got any child to act like that--

VB: Shirley Temple.

HS: Like Shirley did. Very good. Unbelievable. And that Jackie Cooper was the same. He was tremendous favourite. Freddie Bartholomew. [pause 2 seconds] He's still acting a bit in films. I saw him not all that long ago as an older gent.

VB: Did you... did you like the child stars?

HS: These days, I did. Eh. When I was younger myself, I thought they were all clever but now, when I get older a bit, I would think they're a bit, you know. They're always so much to the fore and how can they get children to do that.

VB: Mm.

HS: She was terrific. She had even a terrific face.

VB: Oh, Carole Lombard, yes.

HS: Yes. And she always played in parts where she could be very funny. And he always seemed to be, grrrrrr!

VB: George Raft.

HS: The right evil face.

VB: Yes. [laughs]

HS: And dancing. I remember he was a great dancer. Aw, dear oh dear. Anna May Wong. [hums] Irene Dunne. She always had that terribly refined look about her. [pause 3 seconds] Joan, Jean Cornell [possibly referring to Joan Blondell]. I don't remember her. [pause looking through book] Oh, European cinema. In these days, I didn't have much interest. It was when we got older, started going to the Cosmo. Ida Lupino. Gosh, she's changed a lot over the years. Frances Drake. Remember her. Ah, Richard Tauber - I just saw him in the one film and, you know, I thought he was great singer but I couldn't think of him as a hero in a... in a cinema. Mary Ellis, I don't remember her. Robert Young. He was another favourite of mine. This was my husband's favourite. Loretta Young.

VB: Ah. Loretta Young.

HS: HUUUH! He thought she was just terrific. I thought she was terrific.

VB: Oh, Marlene Dietrich--

HS: So was Katharine Hepburn. Just to be the odd sort of person she was. And the odd way that she spoke. You know, she didn't. She always just to me seemed to be odd. But she's terribly attractive with it all.

VB: Mhm.

HS: Again it was her part. Myrna Loy was another one. There's old Jack. [flicks through pages] Anna Neagle. Anna Neagle, her name was really Robertson.

VB: Mm.

HS: Eh, her own name was somebody Robertson and, she had an uncle who worked in the caseroom [compositor's room] in the 'Evening Times' at the same time as my husband. And she, when she was visiting Glasgow, she came up to the 'Evening Times' erm, caseroom department and went up to see her uncle and meet some of the boys. They were all, all excited at meeting her.

VB: I bet.

HS: A film star.

VB: Did she chat to some of them?

HS: Yes, yes. She went around chatting to them all. My husband was all excited when he got home. Anna Neagle had been up seeing him.

VB: [laughs] I bet, yeah.

HS: There she is. Marie Dressler. And Wallace Beery. They were awful good. George Arliss. He was all the villain. And he was the villain. [turns pages]

VB: And Conrad Veidt.

HS: [hums; pause; turns pages 14 seconds]. *Julius Caesar*. [whispering voice] I'm sure I saw that, but I've forgotten it.

VB: Was Clark Gable in that?

HS: Uhuh. Oh, I couldn't have told you. But it's there, he's in it. So is Wallace Beery, Jean Harlow, she was terrific in her acting parts.

VB: Mhm.

HS: [flicks through pages]. Luise Rainer. She was the waif, the wee waif, always seemed to be. Couldn't take to see again [laughs] these British ones, I'm sorry. I always felt guilty--

VB: [laughs]

HS: I still feel guilty.

VB: Mhm.

HS: She was lovely. Merle Oberon.

VB: Oh, yes.

HS: Lovely. Janet Gaynor. Good grief! We're now going way, way back. Warner Baxter. I just remember him and no more. Oh, that's Bing Crosby.

VB: Did you like pictures, singing pictures like Bing Crosby?

HS: Oh, yeah. Uhuh, uhuh. Aw I liked all these pictures, yes. That's still my cup of tea and it was my, you know, the ones I really liked then too. [pause 5 seconds; flicking through pages] There they are! Character men. [pause; flicks through pages; hums 6 seconds]. Dick Powell. Oh he played lots of roles after being a singer. He used to do a lot of singing in the films. He was a crooner and then he went on to be, erm, detective films.

VB: I'd never have thought of him as a singer.

HS: Oh, yes. He was quite popular as a... singing, like, modern songs of that time. He was quite good. That's how I found it hard to believe that he'd gone straight, playing, being a detective. That doesn't look like Olivia de Havilland either. She's slimmed down. I didn't know here. James Cagney, yes. Joe E. Brown, yes.

VB: Did you like the gangster films? 'Cause we didn't really talk about that before.

HS: Yes. Some of them I did. Eh, they were never as vicious as they are nowadays. And so you were allowed to have some imagination or ignore what you didn't want to see. But some of them were very good. I can't name any of them just now but some of them I remember quite enjoying. Spencer Tracy. See, look how he changed too. Eh, they were... you did enjoy them. They were clever stuff. The films have just changed so much. Suppose, in many ways, they're cleverer now than they were. But, och it's choice. The old idea of memories. I don't feel that nowadays I would have been so bothered. If I were young today, the films wouldn't have the same effect on me now as being young in my day when we didn't have everything else to distract us. That was your main... There was no television in those... Even the radio was not very much in the swing. I always remember having to be quiet when my dad listened to the first radio we had. So the cinema just was your only real... [pause 2 seconds] To take you away from life as it was. As your life was. You went in there and then you were into another world, looking at people clothed and dressed. Most of the time. Not all of them, as I say. As far as I can remember one of the first films was that one, *The Four Sons*, which I'll never forget. [laughs] I shouldn't, I sat through it often enough. Erm. And it was so sad. Gaw, gee! Erm...

but it was just, I was just so carried away. I was dying with pain for this poor woman's that's four sons were killed and all the rest. I really lived that blooming film. [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

HS: I must've been, [pause 2 seconds] about ten, I think.

VB: Mhm.

HS: I was trying to think where we stayed [lived] at the time that I went. He was very good. Freddy March. So he was, Fredric. [pause 3 seconds]. When I say 'very good', I mean, they... they had a romantic, you, you could think about them in a romantic kind of manner. They were pleasant and nice looking and all this kind of thing. Took you away from your ordinary life. There's another one I'd forgotten about. What was his, Fred MacMurray. Gee whizz. Fay Wray. Margaret Sullavan. Ooh! [pause 4 seconds] Alice Faye. She's still going strong, is she not?

VB: I think that's right, yes.

HS: I think I saw something about her a wee while. Glenda Farrell. She was always the tough guy with the smart replies. [pause 6 seconds] You can't get away from Ginger. Ah! Jack Oakie. Gaw! He was another funny lad. Eddie Cantor. The Marx Brothers.

VB: Did you like the Marx Brothers?

HS: Oh, yes. I thought they were terribly clever. Terribly funny and clever with it. [pause 4 seconds] See, I didn't like these kind of films. I never went to them. Horror films.

VB: Horrors, yes.

HS: I still don't go to horror films. Constance [Cummings?] Ruby Keeler. She went a kind of short time compared to some of the others, as far as I'm concerned. Elisabeth Bergner. Who's this? [pause 9 seconds] Carl Brisson. I remember he was in the Glasgow Empire. Aw. No, the Glasgow Kings, Glasgow Kings. In a play, in a play. And a relation of my mum's who was quite well off was a fan of his, and she asked if she and another cousin of my mum's could come and stay with us. And my mum had to go and book seats at the Kings so the three of them could go and see Carl Briss-ong, [said in French accent] she called him. Erm. So my mum had never hardly ever, ever, ever got a day out or go

to the theatre. So since this rather well off cousin sent her the money, she sent, I think, something like £10, which in these days was a lot of money. My mum said, "I thought I'd go the whole way. Got the best seats for the three of us and ordered tea in the middle and just used up all her money."
[laughs]

VB: [laughs] Aw lovely.

HS: And, oh yes, they had a great night out. She said her cousin was a bit eh, taken aback when she didn't get any change. But, [laughs] she said, "I just did it. We thought I'd make it a very nice night." But they thought it was absolutely terrific. Now I don't remember him except by name. I don't think I actually saw him in a film, but I certainly remember his name because of that.

VB: Mhm.

HS: That cousin of my mum's was an only child of two only children and so she was left pots and pots of money. She lived in Stow, down in the Borders and when she died, [laughs] she left about £30,000.

VB: [gasps]

HS: But she left it all, [laughs] to the chagrin of all her many cousins, [inaudible] many cousins, to the Home for Retired Gentlewomen of Difficult Means, or something and a Cat and Dog home.

VB: Aw. [laughs]

HS: And my mum always said, she got her night out to see Carl Brisson off her before she left it to them. [laughs]

VB: [laughs].

HS: Sylvia Sidney.

VB: Mhm.

HS: We used to call her Saliva Kidney. [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

HS: Cagney, he was good. Jack Holt, that was away, I'd hardly started going to the films. Pat O'Brien, I remember him.

VB: Uhuh. He was good with Cagney, wasn't he?

HS: Yes, yes, he was. [looking at book] Don't know him very well, no. I think this is just before I started, oh Ronald Colman, I remember. Just about one film I saw with Raymond... [pauses]

VB: These wee moustaches were very popular, weren't they?

HS: Ye-es! Oh Yes. It was supposed to make you really, you know, gentlemanly. He was always a great comedian part. I remember his face, I don't remember much about him. Mae West, I do remember. She wasn't slim. But she didn't bother about it. Bette Davis, I could never understand how she got to be so great because you wouldn't have called her what we call 'pretty'. She had just a different kind of face than the normal run of it. So it was the same with Mae West, of course. Oh, I like Buddy Ebsen 'cause he was a good dancer. [pause 2 seconds]. That's Robert Taylor. He was a great favourite too. [tape cuts out]

[End of Side B]

[End of interview]