

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

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- * Harrow, Middlesex, 7 July 1995: Valentina Bold interviews Nancy Carrington
- * Transcribed by Joan Simpson/Standardised by Julia McDowell
- * NC=Nancy Carrington, SN=Sue Nicholls (Harrow Housebound Readers Service), VB=Valentina Bold
- * Notes: First interview of four with Nancy Carrington; Sound Quality: Good

[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[VB tape introduction]

NC: I think the last film I can remember I saw with my mother. And we went to see Mary Pickford. You've heard of Mary Pickford?

VB: Yeah.

NC: In the *Sparrows*. And it was an orphanage, you know. Oh, it was a thrilling film, you know. And erm, we had that. And this other one, there used to be a little tiny cinema. But it used to be thruppence to go in. And then there was, erm, another one in South Harrow. Erm, in the main road there.

VB: Mhm.

NC: And that was called the Odeon. And eh, friend of mine, she was an usherette there, so I used to get a good seat, you know. And then eh, what was the other one? The Cosy Cinema. On the Hill. And my niece named that. She got five shillings in the old money.

VB: Really!?

NC: For naming that cinema. She had to guess. It was a--

SN: She had to guess what, Nancy?

NC: Guess the name of the cinema. And they chose the Cosy.

SN: Yes.

NC: Obviously. So she got the money for it.

VB: Right.

NC: She chose the Cosy. And it was cosy. It was a lovely cinema, you know. But it was really nice, you know. And there was three in Harrow. They still got them now. It used to be the Granada. But now it's erm, it's called the three, the three films or something.

VB: Mhm.

NC: The 'Greenhill', I think it's called now.

VB: Did you have any favourites out of these cinemas?

NC: Any what?

VB: Were there any that you liked particularly? Any favourite cinema?

NC: What you mean at the end?

SN: Which was your favourite cinema, Nancy? [said loudly] Which cinema did you like going to best?

NC: Erm, I think I liked the Od-, the eh, Cosy. Because it was really cosy, you know. It was only tiny. But we saw some great films. 'Cause they were all silent, you know. And eh, have you heard of Peggy Mount?

SN: No.

NC: Big woman. She was in *Sailor Beware*. Very big woman she was but she was a marvellous entertainer, you know. We saw her there. But eh, it used to be so thrilling to go the pictures each week. Sometimes we went once, sometimes twice. And there used to be, in the Odeon in South Harrow there was sixpence and a shilling. That was like, [pause 2 seconds] 6p.

SN: No.

NC: Now a shilling would be 5p, wouldn't it. I have to think back. 5p I think in the money nowadays.

VB: But some of them you were saying you could get into with a jam jar.

NC: Oh yes. That was in eh, Harrow.

VB: Yes.

NC: That was in a little tiny one, you know.

SN: That was erm, three, three, threepence. Thruppence.

NC: Three pennies.

SN: So how many jam jars did you have to take to get thruppence?

NC: Oh, we'd probably get eh, penny on each jam jar. We saved them for that. Special.

SN: And you took the jam jars to a shop nearby.

NC: Yes, well, anywhere.

SN: Yeah.

NC: We flogged them there, you see. And we got in for the 3p, you know. But eh, they were really lovely cinemas. And then the Coliseum was turned into a theatre. And they had some lovely, lovely things, lovely plays, you know. And then of course, it all went when they made a supermarket.

VB: Mhm. 'Cause some of the cinemas that you mentioned there erm, I was in Harrow earlier in the year.

NC: Yeah.

VB: And I picked up some pictures of cinemas. I'm not sure if they're ones that you mentioned there. Eh, I don't know if you remember that one. The Dominion.

NC: Oh yes.

VB: Yes. What was that like inside?

NC: [coughs] Used to have erm, a band on there. They used to play music. You know, [inaudible; Brothers?], when I used to go to that cinema. They used to have like a band come on the middle of it, you know. Eh, that was quite a big cinema.

VB: Ah.

NC: Ooh, I remember that very well. Yes. I think it's a bingo hall now. [pause 2 seconds] You got any more?

VB: Yeah. There's one at the back of that as well. Erm, the Grosvenor in Rayners Lane.

NC: [pause 2 seconds] Yes. Well now, [pause 2 seconds], that is erm, what do they call it now? The something experience.

SN: The cinema experience. Have you been in there?

NC: Oh yes.

SN: What? In that, in that bar?

NC: Oh it's smashing inside!

SN: Is it?

NC: They've still got the screen up in there.

SN: They've not got the big screen, have they?

NC: Well it was quite big.

SN: Was it?

NC: We went to erm, birthday dinner. You know, one of our members at the club.

VB: Mhm.

NC: And we went there. The something experience it's called. And course it's drink. You have drink, you know. And there's all these beautiful eh, models and everything inside. And we saw Charlie Chaplin, that was on where we were there. And that was about, just before I went to Africa, I think. About two years ago.

SN: What was that cinema like before, Nancy?

NC: Oh nice! Used to be lovely, the Gaumont [probably referring to the Gaumont, Rayners Lane].

SN: Did it used to be full?

NC: Ooh, ye-es.

SN: 'Cause it was very big.

NC: We used to stand out and queue, to get in. All the cinemas, we queued. You know. Oh we miss them, we really do. We haven't got any now.

VB: Mhm.

NC: Don't think there's, oh yes. There's that one at the Granada. I think they call it the 'Greenhill' or something.

SN: Mhm.

NC: But eh, we used to walk, you see. There was no buses in those days. 'Cause I was born in South Harrow. That's nearly eighty-five years ago. And eh, South Harrow station used to be up the side turning there. Not where it is now. Used to be up in erm, South Hill Avenue. And eh, we get the children their school [treats?] from London down there. And there was no buses. So you used to walk to Harrow. And I was very fond of speedway. You know, the motorbikes. So I used to go to Wembley, Wembley Park and meet a few fellas there. And I was so tiny they used to have to lift me up on top of the wall.

VB: [laughs]

NC: I liked it where, we stayed like where the erm, the men used to come round with their bikes, right on the edge where we were. And then after that when we watched the speedway, we'd go in the ballroom until 12 o'clock. We'd catch the last bus home from Harrow Met. And then we'd walk. And I'd walk right from Harrow Met station, right to South Harrow where I used to live.

VB: [laughs]

NC: And I used to get in at ten to one in the morning.

SN: What did your mum say?

NC: Ooh, she knew where I was. There was no nasty people about then. I used to come every week, I used to go there every week. I had a boyfriend that would've brought me home but he lived in Pinner Road. And that meant he would have to have brought me all the way here and then gone all the way back. And I said, no way. You know, I wasn't frightened in those days.

VB: Yeah.

NC: Now I won't even go outside the door at night.

VB: 'Cause I wondered if you would mind if I asked one or two questions,

NC: Yes.

VB: About yourself. Just so that I, you know, get an idea.

NC: Yes.

VB: Erm, can I ask what year you were born in? You said you're almost eighty-five.

NC: The year?

VB: Yeah.

NC: 1911.

VB: 1911.

NC: I'll be eighty-five in April.

VB: That's great. What date?

NC: [date redacted].

VB: Ah. I'm the fifth of April so I... [laughs]

NC: Oh are you?

VB: Yes.

NC: Oh-h.

VB: And you say you were born in South Harrow.

NC: Yes.

VB: That's great. Can I ask what your father's work was?

NC: Yes, he worked for the Harrow Council.

VB: That's great. And did your mother work?

NC: No.

VB: Erm, what size of a family were you from? How many sisters and brothers?

NC: The size of the family? Oh well I had two brothers and two sisters but one died. One brother died.

VB: That's great.

NC: I've just got one, what am I talking about, one sister. Two brothers and one sister. Yes.

VB: That's great. And can I ask how old you were when you left school?

NC: When I left school?

VB: Yeah.

NC: I was fourteen.

VB: Fourteen. That's great.

NC: Started work straight away.

VB: What was your--

NC: I was a mother's help.

VB: Ah.

NC: Children. Six children under ten.

SN: Huh! Nancy.

VB: A lot of work when you're fourteen.

NC: Yes, yes. I was only there for three months.

VB: Oh.

NC: Said I wasn't really old enough, you know.

VB: Yeah.

NC: For it.

VB: So what sort of work did you do after that?

NC: Oh. You name it, I've done it.

VB: [laughs]

NC: I've done engineering. Which I loved, I loved engineering. I worked for the eh, spectacle place in erm, Park Royal. I worked at Callard and Bowers as a packer for twelve years. You know, the sweets. Eh, I've worked in maternity. Private. In West Harrow. But I didn't help with the babies. I was just there with the nurse, you know, in case, I had to clear up or whatever, you know.

VB: Yeah.

NC: Never worried me at all. And, 'course I got scarlet fever and I had to leave. My mother was taken seriously ill.

VB: Yeah.

NC: So I had to spend the rest of the time with my mother.

VB: I see. Yeah.

NC: And erm, my brother went in the Royal Navy. He'd been in the two World Wars. Volunteered for the last one. He was fifty-two then, you know.

VB: Mhm.

NC: But he was... If I'd have been a boy I'd have been in the Navy. I'd have loved it.

VB: Yeah.

NC: And then I wired electric fires. [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

NC: Don't know what you'd call that.

SN: [laughs]

VB: I think I've probably got enough, [laughs] of occupations.

NC: [laughs]

VB: Erm, can I ask if you have any strong political views. Have you ever been in a political party or anything like that?

NC: To be honest I don't, I never argue or anything over politics because I'm not very well up on it.

VB: Mhm. That's great. E-erm, and the only other thing is that I know you know each other from the church. So is that erm--

SN: Which Sunday school did you used to go to, Nancy?

NC: Well, I used to go to the Baptist Church.

VB: Mhm.

NC: I was a Sunday school teacher. Eh, in those days. But I'm really Church of England.

VB: Ah, I see.

NC: I was married at erm, Church at Roxeth Hill. Christchurch. I was christened there.

VB: Mhm.

NC: My little girl was christened there. She was married there. You know. My sister was married there. And my mother and father were married at St Mary's on the Hill.

VB: A-ah.

NC: The big church on the Hill.

VB: Yeah. That's interesting. So, erm, can I ask what year you were married in?

NC: Erm, 1934.

VB: 1934. That's lovely. Erm, so did you do quite a bit of your courting in the cinema then?

NC: Eh--

VB: When you were courting your husband, did you go to the cinema with him?

NC: Oh, I went with him.

VB: Yes.

NC: Oh, yes, yes.

SN: Did you used to sit on the back row?

NC: Yes. [laughs] Yes we did if we could get there.

SN: [laughs]

VB: [laughs] Yes.

NC: Yes, it used to be very good then, you know, very romantic. Very romantic. I mean, when my husband and I were courting, we used to get, used to be sweets called 'fairy whispers'. They were all colours. And we used to sit, when I lost my mother, we used to sit in the kitchen with dad. And it got on it, "Do you love me?" And I'd pass one and say, "Yes". "Will you marry me?" "Yes." And, do you know, it was all so beautiful. You know, it was a lovely childhood. And eh, course I was a Sunday school teacher. I loved the church. And I went in for three exams, and passed them. The scripture, you know. But I'm really Church of England. But I went in there for convenience sake. To do with the white ribboners or something.

SN: The what? The white?

NC: The white ribboners. To do with no drink for children. They called them the white ribboners.

SN: I don't know, what that was, Nancy.

NC: No. Well it was for children, you know. That meant to say you wouldn't drink. You wouldn't be allowed drink, you know. And eh, oh yes, my father used to take me to a shop in South Harrow every Christmas and eh, I was five. Christmas Eve he'd buy twelve records. And he bought me one called 'Why Doesn't Santa Claus Bring Something To Me?' And I can remember that right from then. Right from all those years ago.

SN: Mhm.

NC: And my father, he used to be good at poetry and he used to teach me. I used to sit on his knee. 'Cause my parents were forty-one when I was born.

VB: Ah I see. [laughs]

NC: My sister was seven years and four years older, my brother was fourteen years older.

VB: So you were the baby.

NC: We had a very, very happy childhood. You know. Very Christian. My mother was a churchgoer. She used to go every week. And Mondays was the mother's meeting. She used to belong to the mother's meetings in South Harrow. And it used to be called the old tin chapel. It was made of tin.

VB: Mhm.

NC: And that was in Northolt Road. Now, of course, they've got the big Baptist church, you know. But eh, I mean Eastcote Lane was just a mud track. Just, you know, sandy. And you could walk up at half past ten at night, you know. I used to bring my little girl, come down to my sister's and go home. Half past ten. You'd never be accosted. And, you know, there was all fields with buttercups. All these houses were on fields with buttercups and daisies. Milkmaids. Celandines. Oh, beautiful. I had a lovely childhood. And I was married from Parkfield Road where I was born.

VB: Mhm.

NC: And eh, my sister lived in Kings Road, just round the corner. She's gone blind now, so she's in Andover, in a home.

VB: Mhm.

NC: But these bring all the memories back. [looking at pictures]

VB: Well, I've got some more here you might erm, like to see as well, from old cinema adverts. I mean there's one here from the Odeon in South Harrow. A film with Douglas Fairbanks Jr. [laughs]

NC: Douglas Fairbanks! Oh! He was my idol. Mary Pickford. She had long curls. She was a beautiful lady. And eh, she used to be on the posters. Used to be big posters with her picture on it, you know. She was noted for her ringlets. She had long curls right down here. She married Douglas Fairbanks. Yes. [Will? inaudible]. Charles Boyer. Oh-h! Jean Arthur. Oh, they were lovely.

VB: Here's one from the Grosvenor in Rayners Lane as well.

NC: Ye-es. Yes, they turned that into a bar, you know. But you can have a meal in it. We had a lovely meal in there.

VB: Ah.

NC: So--

VB: 'Cause I was hearing--

NC: Beautiful.

VB: That some of the cinemas did have cafes in them. Is that right? That you could get--

NC: What?

SN: [speaking loudly] Some of the cinemas had a cafe. A cafe in them.

NC: No.

SN: Didn't that cinema at Rayners Lane have a cafe in it?

NC: Well it's got one now but it never used to.

SN: But didn't it have in the olden days, Nancy?

NC: No.

VB: Yeah.

NC: I don't remember a cafe.

VB: Yeah. I think that was maybe ones in different parts of Harrow.

NC: Maybe when they changed over.

VB: Yeah.

NC: Yeah. It could've been, yes. Well now, of course, they've got big restaurant there. It's, oh it's beautiful inside. It's worth paying to have a drink. Have a sherry in there and see what it's like. It's absolutely beautiful. All these models. I think there's an aeroplane and all these beautiful models. And when you go round to the toilet in the front of the screen, screen's there. It's all fancy, you know. All brass rails and, it's beautiful. Flowers and, you know. Never dream really. But erm, yes I used to go to all these, all the pictures, you know. In those days. So you're doing a survey are you?

VB: That's right. Yes. I mean as I say it's--

NC: And you've come all the way from Scotland.

VB: I have. Yes.

NC: Well of course my sister-in-law, she was on the borders of Scotland. Newcastle.

VB: Ah right.

NC: She came from Newcastle.

VB: Yeah.

NC: My brother married up there. Ye-es. [looking at book] George Arliss. A-ah! Lana Turner's just died.

VB: I heard that. Yes.

NC: She was seventy-five. She was super. 'Course they're all going now, you know. But, erm, they were really lovely.

VB: I've just found one as well from the Coliseum that you were telling me about. The--

NC: A-ah, yes. Loretta Young. A-ah! Oh yes, it's beautiful. Spencer Tracy! Huh! Gosh!

VB: Did you have any particular favourite kinds of films? You were saying that you liked the romance. Was it the romantic films you liked?

NC: Oh romance! Well, we used to have lovely romances. They were so beautiful, you know. Clean romances. You know. Like they'd never show you a couple in bed together. They always had separate beds. You used a lot of imagination but it was really all clean, beautiful.

VB: Mhm.

NC: You know, it was real romantic. And of course if we could get at the back seat, then of course... [laughs] We used to have a good time, you know. Used to get ice creams in the interval, you know. And eh, oh it used to be great. I was sorry when that Odeon was pulled down in South Harrow.

SN: Mhm. Mhm.

NC: We used to go there every Boxing Day. And my dad used to look after Shirley, you know. And we used to go down there on Boxing Day and see the films.

SN: Did they have something special on Boxing Day?

NC: No. Just a good film, you know. You'd have to queue up for quite a while, you know.

SN: How d'you mean quite a while? How long would you have to queue?

NC: We-ell. Mhm. Sometimes eh... [pause 2 seconds] You could queue nearly an hour. If it was a special film and there was crowds of people. Used to be all along the High Street. You know, and in Harrow, from the cinema doors. And now they have them right round the corner. Where the erm, Granada used to be. I saw them there not so long ago, the kids there. They went to see the lion, you know. The lion film.

SN: Oh that one, yeah. Daniel would've seen that, yeah.

NC: Oh yes. The kids were there. They were all round the corner. There was hundreds of them there.

SN: Did it bring back memories that?

NC: Oh, [inaudible] we had great times!

VB: Were the cinemas round here open on a Sunday? 'Cause I've heard--

NC: Yes, I think it was. Yes. I believe it was.

VB: Yeah.

SN: Was there a fuss about that, Nancy?

NC: No. No, I'm not quite sure but I think it was. I'm not dead sure.

SN: Would you have gone to the cinema on a Sunday?

NC: No, I used to go to church.

VB: Mhm.

NC: I used to go to church with my mother. You know, and eh, I used to do a lot of like stage work. Not professional. Well. You know.

SN: You were in a lot of shows, weren't you?

NC: Dressing up. And eh, my mother did as well.

VB: It sounds like—

NC: But she used to, years ago, when eh, before Sue was born, [laughs] and before I was born. Erm, my mother, eh years ago, in London, the society people, they would never have thirteen at a table. Thirteen guests. They would never have them. So they used to come for my mother and she used to be in evening dress, with long glo-, used to have long gloves in those days. And eh, they used to send the chauffeur down with the Rolls Royce or whatever. And she'd be taken and she'd make the thirteenth up, eh, the fourteenth. At the table. And if she sang, she'd get a guinea extra.

VB: How lovely.

NC: My dad used to get a bit mad. I think he got a little bit jealous. But she was a beautiful lady, my mother. And she used to go up there. And that's when we lived in Parkfield Road, you know.

VB: Mhm.

NC: And eh, she used to go to make up the fourteenth, you know.

SN: Did she have singing lessons, Nancy?

NC: No. She was erm, natural. So was my sister before she had her son. 'Cause she's blind. My sister had a beautiful voice. Not me.

VB: Did you sing much as a family? Was that something--

NC: It's in the family. I've got a nephew that sings in six languages.

VB: Yeah.

NC: He's gone to Australia. He worked with eh, Bernard Manning. Eh, in Manchester.

VB: Ah I see. But when you were a child, did you ever sing as a family with your mother and--

NC: Well we used to have get-togethers at home. Make our own entertainment.

VB: Mhm

NC: And we had a big box. It was a huge chest. And it was full of fancy dress clothes. And we used to go to the dances. There used to be the parish hall. That's all down now. And you could stand up in the balcony and watch all the dancers. And I was taught ballroom dancing when I was a child. Eh, the modern I picked up myself. But I was taught dancing. And eh, in those days you had to have a chaperone. My sister was sixteen. So my mother used to go as a chaperone. Take me with her and course I used to dance with the Air Force fellows. Her Air Force boys. You know.

SN: Were they at Northolt then?

NC: No, they were at erm--

SN: Was Northolt there then?

NC: Ruislip.

SN: Ruislip. You know about the Air Force base?

VB: Ah.

NC: I went there dancing actually. I used to go with a friend of mine, you know. When my husband was abroad. But he knew all about it because he knew I was crazy on dancing. I still am.

SN: But they weren't Americans then, were they?

NC: Mhm?

SN: It wasn't an American base, [louder voice] then, was it?

NC: Erm, no, they weren't American, no. No. I went up to the Hammersmith Palais and I did dance with a professional at one time, you know.

VB: Mhm.

NC: But dancing is my life. Even now, quickstep. My friend and I do the quickstep when we get a chance at the club, you know. They were standing outside the other week. Eh, Trixie and I were dancing the quickstep and they pulled up in the cars to pick up the old people to take them home. And they were watching us. [laughs] It was great. Yeah.

VB: Ah dear. I mean did, did you find, when you started to get really interested in dancing, did you stop going to the pictures so much or was it... did you keep going to the pictures and dancing?

NC: Oh well, no. We used to go because the dancing was on. There used to be, you know the Baptist Church in South Harrow?

VB: Yeah.

NC: Well, that used to be, Mr Farr owned that place and erm, he had a hall built. It's still there. And he had all erm, a fountain outside with all fairy lights round. And you used to have the deck chairs out there. And during the interval, we used to go out with our boyfriends and sit there in the interval. And then when it was the interval waltz, the boy you danced with always paid for your refreshments. You know, and I mean the boys, the men wore gloves when we went to the big

dances, when my sister was sixteen. All the men wore white gloves because of soiling the girls' dresses. And my sister had a little book. They used to issue them out to all the girls there. Erm, used to be if you had a pink book, you had a pink pencil. And the boys used to come and sign it, saying a dance with erm, Frank, or whatever. Erm, fox-trot. The lancers. I used to love the lancers. 'Cause they used to lift you right off your feet.

SN: Was it very expensive to go dancing?

NC: [pause 3 seconds] No, well. It was to us but not--

SN: It was expensive then.

NC: I mean sixpence or a shilling was quite a lot of money in those days.

SN: Mhm. So did your mother pay for you?

NC: I don't know who paid. I can't remember. I was only nine.

SN: Yes.

VB: 'Cause I was interested when you said about the boy who'd get you a refreshment. Was it expected that the boy paid when you went to the cinema as well? Say, when you were courting your husband. Did he pay for your ticket?

NC: Oh they'd buy us some ice creams.

VB: Ah I see.

NC: Or chocolate.

VB: Yeah.

NC: Or sweets or whatever.

VB: Yeah.

NC: Yes, in the cinema.

SN: Would they pay for your ticket as well?

NC: If you were lucky.

VB: [laughs] Depends on the boy, I suppose.

NC: Yeah, when I went with my husband, 'course we were courting then, 'course he paid for my ticket.

VB: Right.

NC: But sometimes we used to go half, you know, if there wasn't much money around. Oh yes, we'd take our turn.

VB: Mhm.

NC: And I used to go to the Harrow Schoolboys erm, Toc H [international Christian movement] in Crown Street. You know, the Harrow School.

VB: Mhm.

NC: Public school. I passed an artist's badge there. With the art master of Harrow School. I sat there for two hours. I failed the first time. And I was in the Girl Guides. And I wanted to pass my artist's badge. So I had to compete against all the grammar school children. Harrow County School and all that. And erm, I lost the first time. But I was determined to go in again so I did. And I had to sit for two hours with the art master there. And he showed me all the boys' pictures.

VB: Ah.

NC: Oh, it was beautiful there. And my nephew went to that school. My sister's boy.

VB: Uhuh.

NC: For eighteen months. During the war. He was at the Harrow County School, which was a grammar school. And they exchanged eight of their boys for eight Harrow schoolboys.

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

NC: Well if you look right opposite erm, you got the steps and there's a room up the top and there's another room down below a bit.

SN: Mhm. Yes.

NC: Just below. Opposite the church.

SN: Yes.

NC: Well that was my nephew's classroom.

VB: Mhm.

NC: And he went for the last eighteen months, you know. And eh, he was lucky. So he went to America. And he went as a teacher. And a lecturer. And eh, he got on very well in America. He's just lost his wife, you know.

VB: Mhm.

NC: Living in Florida.

VB: I mean that kind of reminds me of another thing I was wanting to ask you. Erm, how did you rate the American films compared to the English films in the thirties? D'you think there was any difference?

NC: Well, of course it was the American, well, we got used to the American. They were mostly American films really. Mostly Americans.

SN: Were they?

NC: Mhm. I mean Spencer Tracy and Loretta Young. They were all Americans, you know.

VB: Mhm.

NC: They were beautiful. beautiful. And I remember *King Kong*. Remember *King Kong*, the gorilla. They made a big film of it.

VB: With Fay Wray.

NC: Yeah.

VB: Yeah.

NC: And the girl who was in it. Now who was it? [pause 3 seconds] Oh, she was a lovely girl [referring to Fay Wray]. He got hold of her in his hand. 'Cause it was made up of, it was all electrical. It was a wonderful film. And he was so, he loved this girl. But he picks her up, she was screaming, and shouting and screaming and this ape was about as big as this house. It was made up of about seven people I think. And eh, I saw it again. It came on again. Ooh, that was wonderful. We used to go and watch all those films, you know. And I saw the, you've heard of the music of *The Bohemian Girl*? Have you?

VB: Can you tell me a bit more about that?

NC: 'I dreamt that I dwelt in great castle halls'. "I dreamt, [singing], that I dwelt in great castle halls".

VB: [joins in singing]

NC: 'Course I can't sing. But eh, that was at the eh, Cosy Cinema, Rayners Lane.

VB: Right.

NC: I was fourteen when that was on.

VB: Yeah.

NC: I remember going to see that. But eh, you know, we had a lovely life. I mean, the poor kids of today, they really haven't got much.

VB: Mhm.

NC: We used to have hoops and sticks. And tops, whips and tops. And we used to colour the tops different colours, and then, you know, all colours. And then we had a scooter, you know. And I learned to ride a bike. Fell off it the first time.

VB: [laughs]

NC: But I did ride it in the end. [coughs] And erm, skipping rope. We used to have a skipping rope right across the road. And then when the cars came by we'd put it down, let the cars run over it and then start again. Or tie the rope on a lamppost. And then go all round, swinging round the lamppost, you know.

VB: Yeah.

NC: We made our own entertainment.

VB: I mean we've talked a bit about the romantic films. Did you like the comedies?

NC: The what?

VB: Comedies. I mean--

NC: Eh, oh yes. I used to like Laurel and Hardy.

VB: I was going to say--

NC: Oh-h! Laurel and Hardy were my two favourites.

VB: So I brought some stills along with me too.

NC: Laurel and Hardy.

VB: What was it about Laurel and Hardy that made you like--

NC: Well this man, [pointing to still]. His hair was all on top and he used to go like this, [demonstrates].

VB: [laughs]

NC: And Ollie. Ollie they called him. And he says, "An-other fine mess you've got me into!" [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

NC: He used to say, you know. And they were real comics. 'Course he was a big man, you know. He was a bit soppy, you know. Acted soppy. And he'd say, "An-other fine mess you've got me into!" I can remember them. Oh they were lovely. And Charlie Chaplin. Eh, I went to Croydon to my cousins' place. They had a cinema there. And you'd queue up to go to Charlie Chaplin. Oh it was funny. Marvellous. And we had a boy called 'The Kid', was in the Charlie Chaplin films. He used to have a--

VB: Mmm.

NC: Cap back to front.

VB: Yeah.

NC: And he was called 'The Kid'. And eh, he used to get up to all sorts of antics [referring to Jackie Coogan]. You know. Yes, I loved the comedy. But of course romance was the best when I was, you know.

SN: When you were that age.

VB: Yeah.

NC: When I was that age.

VB: Did you like those two? Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers?

NC: Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Oh my God, they were--

VB: [laughs]

NC: They were terrific. Specially because I love dancing.

VB: I was thinking that.

NC: I'd loved to have danced with a prof-, well I did dance with a professional but not a film star.

VB: Yeah.

NC: I'd love to have a dance with Bruce Forsyth. I'd love to have a dance with him. Be my ambition.

VB: I mean when you were watching a film like say *Top Hat*, how did you feel?

NC: As if I was there. I, oh I was there. In the film, you know.

VB: Really!

NC: And eh, she just died Ginger Rogers.

VB: That's right, yeah.

NC: He's still alive. He married again at eighty, didn't he?

VB: Mhm.

NC: I think he's still alive. Oh, *Top Hat*. I saw that. A-ah. Irving Berlin.

VB: The music of course. Did you like the music in the films as well?

NC: Oh ye-es. Yes.

VB: Mhm.

NC: 'Course when the eh, I remember the first movie that came on, and I think that was at the Coliseum. In Harrow. Think that was the first talkie film. It was erm... But we got used to the silent films, you know. But you could follow it all right. And then this lady she would play the piano and, the guns were going and she would, play rapid [high voice], you know.

VB: [laughs]

NC: And then she'd slow down. And then when the romance came on she'd, you know, 'Hearts and Flowers' used to be played, you know. And you used to follow it. All the lights went out. It was all dark, you know. But it was really lovely.

VB: Did you ever, did you ever get any of the magazines about the pictures? Things like the 'Picturegoer' or 'Film Weekly' or...?

NC: I don't remember.

VB: Nuh.

NC: I remember Gracie Fields in *Sing As We Go!*

VB: I can do that. [laughs]

NC: That was in eh, at the Odeon at South Harrow.

VB: I think this is from *Sing As We Go!*

NC: Gracie Fields, yeah.

VB: Did you like Gracie Fields?

NC: I saw that film.

VB: Yeah.

NC: And I always remember, I was going in hospital to have an operation. And she sang this, she sang that on the film. And it seemed to give me a lift. And I wasn't frightened. I always remember that. You know. Oh she was lovely, Gracie Fields. She was. Lancashire lass.

VB: Of course, yes.

NC: What's that one. [referring to stills]

VB: Erm, got one, I think it's Joan Crawford.

[pause 4 seconds]

NC: Who's that?

VB: [speaks louder] I think it's Joan Crawford. Yeah, yeah.

NC: She was a nasty bit of work, you know.

VB: Mhm. She changed a lot, didn't she?

NC: She adopted four children but she was very cruel.

VB: Yeah.

NC: In real life. Wonderful actress. I saw her with Bette Davis in a film and erm, Bette Davis killed her, I think. If I remember rightly [referring to *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*]. 'Course she was a wonderful actress. But they were all American.

VB: Mhm.

NC: You know, all these films. There's Joan Crawford.

VB: It's interesting you say that cause of course a lot of the English stars ended up going to America.

NC: That's right.

VB: Like Ronald Colman and--

NC: Yes. Yes. A-ah, Ronald Colman.

VB: [laughs]

NC: They were... David Niven.

VB: That's right.

NC: I saw 'The Five Feathers' [referring to *The Four Feathers*]. It was a war picture. Where they had eh, refused to go in the army, you know. And they all got these feathers. I remember that as plain as anything. I still like the war films. Specially the eh, the 1914-18. 'Cause I was three when that started and seven when it ended. And I was in London.

VB: Mhm.

NC: In Peckham. We had a street party. And I was seven years old. I was with my cousin. My grandma had a big grocer's shop in Peckham, you know. In Gibbon Road. And erm, I remember that very plainly. That was lovely.

VB: Mhm.

NC: When the war ended. And eh, I used to love all the film stars. And I was talking to two friends of mine yesterday. They live in, they're South Harrow people.

VB: Mhm.

NC: And eh, 'course they used to come to the cinemas as well. And the dances. You know.

SN: Who's that, Nancy?

NC: My friend Nancy and her sister Elsie.

SN: Do they go on a Tuesday afternoon?

NC: Mhm?

SN: Do they go to the Tuesday club?

NC: No.

SN: Which club do they go to?

NC: Erm, they live in Eastcote Lane.

SN: Oh I thought you said you saw them at the club.

NC: No, I saw them yesterday at their house.

SN: Oh.

NC: I went for lunch, I went there for the day yesterday.

SN: Yes.

NC: And I was saying about you coming.

VB: Right!

NC: Oh! And of course we got carried away. "Oh Nancy, do you remember so and so," you know. What happened.

VB: [laughs]

NC: "And do you remember the old jam jars we used to flog?" You know. And it all came out yesterday. And 'course they went to the same cinemas as I did.

VB: Right.

NC: The same dance halls.

VB: That's interesting.

NC: Yes.

VB: So they remember the same places and--

NC: Mhm?

VB: They remember the same places and the--

NC: Oh the same things. Yes. We reminisce every time I go down there.

VB: Yeah.

NC: Every time I see them. 'Course her sister's a bit dodgy now. She can't walk very much.

VB: Mhm.

NC: She's eighty-six. And Nancy's younger than me. About two years, two years, few months younger than me. You know. But we all went dancing together, you know. And it used to be beautiful.

VB: Do you think, do you think they might be interested in doing what you're doing just now and talking a bit about that?

NC: Oh!

VB: D'you think they would be?

NC: Yes.

VB: 'Cause that would, that would be great. It would be lovely to have a chance to meet them as well.

NC: Oh yes. Absolutely.

VB: If you think they wouldn't mind.

NC: Yes. Yes, Harrow-on-the-Hill. Two friends of my daughter's--

VB: Mhm.

NC: Came over from Canada. And I walked them, right from Harrow, right over the Hill and I showed the school where I went to. Roxeth Hill School. Where I was married. And I was in hospital there. My husband was in hospital there. And eh, I showed them all the, took them up to Harrow School. And eh, 'course we weren't allowed to go in, but I showed them where my nephew was, you know. And eh, she said, "I can't walk." She said [inaudible]. I walked right back to South Harrow from Harrow, you know. And we went into St Mary's. 'Course that was a thousand years old. And we saw all the workings. We went all round the cemetery there. There's Byron's tomb. We used to sit up there. And you could look all over Harrow. And all over Kenton, you know.

VB: Yeah.

NC: And I can see it. When you're walking along here, you can see St Mary's. And our church, Sue.

SN: Yeah.

NC: I can see from my bedroom window.

VB: Mhm.

NC: You know. I always look over there at night. Before I go to bed, you know. Before I say my prayers. I always look over there.

NC: Nancy. You said to me on Sunday, something about a bus. A cinema bus. Do you remember? On Sunday.

[pause 2 seconds]

SN: You said something about a bus. That took people to the cinema.

NC: What, in a box?

SN: No. About a bus. [speaks louder] A B, U, S.

NC: Oh a bus.

SN: That went to--

NC: Oh yes! Yes. Erm, well otherwise you'd have to walk. We used to walk up there. Erm, and as I say there was no buses here at all.

VB: Mhm.

NC: And there were two fellas. And they had a little taxi thing. And eh, they used to take us right up to the cinema. And all the way round Harrow. And back to the cinema. Eh, at first you never paid. Because it was, well, kind of illegal. And then afterwards, we paid two pence.

VB: Mhm.

NC: Tuppence in the old money. You know. And they'd bring you right round to your house. They would. Because it was all eh, as I say, Eastcote Lane was just fields.

VB: Mhm.

NC: And we'd go all the way round Harrow. Oh it used to be great. Really great [fun?]. Really. My childhood, we never had a lot a money but, it was absolutely wonderful. You know. I was brought up, very religious, my parents were. And eh, we weren't allowed to sew or knit or anything on a Sunday. We used to have hymns. And my father had a gramophone. And it had a big brass horn. Scalloped. Sold brass. Used to go right down to deep red. Used to wind it up. You know. And we used to play all the hymns. On Sundays. Eh, that was at first but as the years went on, my mother died. He had his brother up. He lost his wife. And then we used to play dominoes or something like that afterwards.

VB: Mhm.

NC: It changed, you know. I remember when the Titanic went down. We had the record of the Titanic. You know. And eh, that was an unsinkable ship, supposed to be. You've heard of that, haven't you?

SN: Mhm. Yes I heard of that.

NC: "Every man at his post as the big ship went down. To save other lives there behind them. They died like heroes true. There's something we must do for the wives and little ones they left behind them." And that was on the record.

VB: Mhm.

NC: Yes. In mid-Atlantic. Yes. I could write a book on my life.

VB: Sounds like it. Yeah. Yeah.

NC: Yes. And eh, I'm hoping next year to go to Africa again. I wrote a poem about Africa. Everything that happened.

SN: What? When you went last time?

NC: No. It was about when my husband came the first time. And eh, it was about fifteen years ago. And everything that happened, I put it to poetry.

VB: Mhm.

NC: And it was absolutely hilarious. It was funny. You know, it was all to do with erm, whatever happened. And it was funny.

VB: Uhuh.

NC: And I said to Hazel, "Have you got it?". 'Cause she typed it out for me. And she said she'd lost it. And I'd lost it. I carried it around so much, you know. And eh, erm, as Sue knows, I make up poetry now.

VB: Mhm.

NC: I'm going to a garden party. I think there's going to be eighty there. To [my healer?].

SN: Yes.

NC: She's coming tomorrow.

SN: Yes.

NC: And I've got to recite in front of all these people. If I can remember it.

SN: When's that, Nancy?

NC: July the 26th. And it was a poem I learnt at school when I was a little girl.

SN: A poem you learnt at school. Not one you wrote?

NC: No.

SN: No.

NC: Would you like to hear it?

VB: **Very much so.**

NC: I would like you to imagine there's an old shepherd. And he's going along. He's just finished [covering?] the sheep, you know, in the hills. And he's got a blind old sheep dog. And they're trudging along. And it's the evening. And all the dew's coming. The sunset in the distance. And it's called 'Nod' by Walter de la Mare. "Softly along the road of the evening, in a twilight, dim with rose, wrinkled with age and drenched with dew, old Nod the shepherd goes. His drowsy flock streams on before him, their fleeces charged with gold, to where the sun's last beam leans low, on Nod the shepherd's fold. The hedge is quick and green with briar, from their sand the conies creep, and all the birds that fly in the heaven, flock singing home to sleep. His lambs outnumber a noon's roses, yet, when night's shadows fall, his blind old sheepdog slumber-soon, misses not one of all. His are the quiet states of dreamland. The waters of no-more-pain. His ram's bell rings 'neath an arch of stars. Rest, rest and rest again."

VB: **That's beautiful.**

SN: Beautiful, yes.

NC: I was only a little girl when I learnt that. And I had to represent Harrow. It was a film called, erm, a poem called 'Barbara Fritchie'. But I don't know that now. And I had to represent Harrow. I had to

go to London. I belonged to a girls' friendly society, you know. And I worked for a lady that eh, her daughter used to found all these in Harrow, you know.

SN: Found the friendly societies?

NC: Girls friendly society.

SN: Yes I have. You've heard of it, haven't you? Yes, yes.

NC: Well, I used to belong to that. And eh, her father was a retired major. And eh, they took my mother and I to the Albert Hall. And we had a box. And we saw 'The Fantasy of Youth'. And my sister and her husband came and her little boy. And my husband and I, oh, my mother came. And they paid for us to have this box. And it was the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. It was wonderful. You know. And eh, oh, you know I could really write a book on my life.

VB: Mhm.

NC: And eh, then of course, I've made up stacks of poetry. Course, my friend's got a toast I made up for her daughter's wedding forty five years ago. And it's almost in pieces! But you can still read it. And they read it over the microphone, you know.

SN: Yeah, at the wedding?

NC: Yes.

VB: Mhm.

NC: But, you see, always remember that when you get old, don't think you're old. You're not old. You've got to feel young, and then you are young. The only time I feel old is when I get these bronchial attacks, you know. But eh, then I pass it off, you know. But eh--

VB: Is your voice? Is it sore just now?

NC: I've been in hospital nine times.

VB: Yeah.

SN: Yes, your voice sounds a bit hoarse.

VB: It sounds a bit hoarse.

NC: Yeah, well I've been coughing now for three days and three nights.

VB: Yeah.

NC: I was up twice in the night making tea. And I'm on antibiotics. My doctor gives them to me, you see. You know.

VB: Mhm. Yeah.

NC: And eh, there you are. I've been in hospital twelve times. And, I used to get out of bed when they were short staffed. And help.

SN: What in the hospital?

NC: Yeah. Did all the bedpans out one night. Yes, well, they were short staffed. There was a lady dying at the end of the ward. And everybody was waiting for a bedpan. I thought, well, there's nothing else for it, to get out and pass them round.

VB: [laughs]

NC: And I used to take the teas round and I used to say to Vera, I had a very big operation on my eye. I was in there three weeks.

VB: Mhm.

NC: Absolutely wonderful 'cause they kept me blind. You know.

VB: Mhm.

NC: I had a blind book. You know, I was absolutely blind. I was fed and everything. When I started to get a bit better, Vera was in the next bed. I said, "Come on, Vera." She said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Come on, get out of bed and let's go and wash up," I said. "There so short staffed in that kitchen!"

VB: [laughs]

NC: But I wasn't allowed to bend, you see. You know, I've got a tube in there.

VB: Mhm.

NC: Wonderful operation I had. Wonderful surgeon. And he said to me, he said, [coughs] "Do you know, I think we're going to get the sight back in your eye." And I was heading for a stroke. 'Cause I had one stroke.

VB: Mhm.

NC: I was in Northwick Park. But there you are. You know, you get over these things.

SN: You're brilliant, Nancy.

NC: And if you feel old, you think, "Oh, I can't walk," you know. They tell me I've got to use a stick in hospital. I said, "No blinking fear!"

VB: [laughs]

NC: I said, "I'm not using a stick." She said, "Well, it's best for you to." I said, "Well it isn't. Because I don't want to. If I start using a stick, I'll feel old and I'm not going to do that."

VB: Mhm.

NC: So I wouldn't use them. No, I don't, no.

SN: Val, did you want to see those other ladies? I'm not sure if she heard.

VB: Erm, yes. I mean that would be quite good if... We're just saying, [to NC], the friends that you mentioned--

SN: You know that friend, Nancy, that you were talking about?

NC: Yeah.

SN: Would she be prepared to see Val before she goes back to Scotland?

NC: I'm sure she would.

SN: So how can we, do you want to ask her?

NC: Okay. I'll make an appointment to. Because Nancy goes out sometimes but her sister's usually there. She doesn't usually go out 'cause she's, you know.

VB: Yeah. 'Cause what I was thinking is, I can hear your voice going just now and I don't want to, you know, tire your voice. Erm, but I've been very interested in what you were saying.

NC: I have to move in.

VB: Well, I was going to suggest, [lower voice to SN], if Nancy didn't mind, I could maybe come back and see her again. Just to follow up some of the things she was saying. Erm, so maybe I could arrange something.

SN: [inaudible].

NC: I've haven't got my glasses here. Can you see... It's got P, Prudhoe. [coughs] Name is Prudhoe.

[pause 8 seconds]

SN: Oh here it is. Nancy Prudhoe. [number redacted], is that 7949.

NC: 949. Yes. When, you know, when do you want to go, any particular...

VB: Well--

NC: I'll get her to talk to you, okay.

VB: Okay. That'd probably be easier.

SN: [quiet voice to VB] Last year I was driving up the road when this one was running up the road to Rayners Lane which is a good half an hour and it's all uphill, with a great big bag, in her stiletto heels. She'd taken all her nets down, 'cause she wanted new nets. [inaudible]. And she was running because she'd missed the bus and she wanted to get up there before the shops closed. At eighty-odd, in stilettos. I stopped and picked her up.

[NC on phone in background; talking to Nancy Prudhoe; arranging meeting with VB]

NC: [on phone] She's here now.

SN: Shall she come?

NC: Eh, yeah. Would you like the lady on now? Or d'you want to come here?

SN: You decide. It's just they might be apprehensive if you go on your own. Probably not.

NC: [on phone]. No, no. No I won't come down 'cause I've got this eh, bronchitis, you know. Do you want to come up?

VB: [goes to phone] I'll maybe leave it for just now. If I could maybe, could I...?

NC: Before you go back. Oh, [to Nancy Prudhoe]. She said eh, before she goes back to Scotland, Nance. She's here now. So, you'd like to make an appointment with her. She's here now.

VB: Would that be okay? If I came back and had another chat with you too?

NC: Yes! If you want to.

VB: That would be great.

NC: 'Course you can.

VB: [on phone to Nancy Prudhoe] Hallo! This is Val. I believe you're Nancy as well. Nice to meet you.

SN: [to NC] Can you hear what she said?

NC: She can see better, otherwise she was going to come up here.

SN: Can you hear what Val says?

NC: Mhm.

[VB arranging time of meeting on phone]

NC: [coughs]

VB: Right. [On phone]. Well I've been really fascinated talking to Nancy so, it would be great to hear--

NC: Yes, I told her that you were coming. And course that got us talking, you know. [coughs] This is going to break. Once it's broken, then it'll be all right. [croaky voice] But I won't come to church Sunday.

SN: No.

VB: [on phone] A couple of weeks or so.

SN: How long will it take to clear?

NC: Well it depends on the antibiotics. See, I've got them here in advance. My doctor gives me, in case I get a turn of bronchitis. Because if I get a cold it gives me turns, if I'm not careful. But this time it's turned but, I haven't felt so ill that I usually do.

SN: No. You probably caught it just in time.

NC: Yeah. Well, my voice started to go. The other night when my friend was here. I said, "I think I've got a cold coming."

VB: [talking on phone in background]

NC: And then from there, all that night I was cough, cough, cough. All night. All yesterday. Three days now I've been. I've coughed all night. You know, on and off all night. And the day.

SN: Mhm.

NC: But it's started to break. So that's a good sign. If I can bring the phlegm up, you know.

SN: Mhm.

VB: [on phone] Right. Whatever suits you really.

NC: But you see, I get spasms of coughing, and then in a church, you know, it might be in the middle of the sermon. I wouldn't like that.

SN: No, no.

NC: If it catches, you know, when it's beginning to get better. Sort of catches you, you know.

SN: Yes, yes.

NC: She's a nice girl, isn't she?

SN: She's lovely. Yes.

NC: Is she a friend of yours?

SN: No.

NC: [coughs]

SN: I met her for the first time today.

NC: Oh-h!

SN: She phoned me from Scotland. And erm, I had a chat with her on the phone.

NC: Yes.

SN: Because it was in the local history library.

NC: Oh-h! With your work.

SN: Yes. With my work.

NC: Oh yes.

SN: The local history librarian gave her my name.

NC: Oh-h!

SN: And she was asking me and I said, "I think I know somebody." And of course... [tape ends]

[End of Interview]