

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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[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[VB tape introduction]

**VB: I was interested there when you said it was very romantic.**

**NC:** Oh yes. That was lovely. And the films were so romantic, you know. I remember, what was it now? I saw the erm... [pause 3 seconds] What was that one now? *The Bohemian Girl*.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** And that was at the Cosy Cinema on the Hill. The niece that rang me up just now, she gave it the name, the Cosy and she won five shillings in the old money.

**VB: Oh was that her? [laughs]**

**NC:** That was Babs, yes.

**VB: Oh lovely.**

**NC:** Yes, she won that.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** And eh, we used to have a little bus and we used to go all round Harrow. Right up on the Hill. And eh, you know, take us to the cinema. And then we'd come out and we'd get on the bus and get all the way down. And it used to stop all round here. More or less outside your house. You know.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** And eh, course it was a long time before buses came in South Harrow, you know. Used to be, you know where the old station is now.

**VB:** Oh yes.

**NC:** Well it used to be round the back in South Hill Avenue. Used to be up there.

**VB:** I see. Yeah.

**NC:** And eh, I used to sell roses there, from the garden, to the Sunday School children from London. They used to think they were wonderful, you know. We used to grow them and make them up cheap for them, you know. And eh, then the first bus that came, the real bus, was erm, two pence. Tuppence in the old money.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** And that used to take you right to Harrow. But we used to have to walk. Before that. Before anything came.

**VB:** 'Cause I was interested before, when you were telling me about how it was erm--

**NC:** Yes, there were two men drivers. And eh, I mean this was just a rough track coming down here, you know. Buttercups and daisies fields. You know, beautiful. And eh, they started it as a taxi service.

Then they got a little erm, bus thing. And eh, just for two pence, we used to go all the way round and all the way up on the Hill to the cinema for two pence.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** Used to be lovely. But otherwise we thought nothing of walking.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** I used to go to the Speedway. Very fond of Speedway. And I'd walk home from the Harrow Station. Right home to eh, South Harrow. And I got home about ten to one in the morning. There was nothing to worry about in those days. No nasty people about, you know. We'd come from a dance and that sort of thing. And eh, it was so lovely. So romantic.

**VB: Mhm. 'Cause that was one thing I wanted to ask you. You mentioned a lot of different films and stars. Were there particular qualities that appealed to you in films? Was it the romance or?**

**NC:** Eh, yes, I should say. I should say because we had romantic days in my time. It was really all lovely stuff, you know. Really romantic.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** I mean, you never let a boy kiss you the first time. No way! You'd give him a clout if he did!

**VB: [laughs]**

**NC:** I remember I went to erm, it was the Harrow Coliseum, erm, picture place, you know. And we went to see *Ramona*. Aw, that was beautiful. I think that was Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon. And eh, it was really romantic. Really lovely. An then we'd walk all the way over the Hill at the back by the Cenotaph, all the way home. You know. Really lovely.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** Where else was it? The Odeon at South Harrow. I saw Gracie Fields in *Sing As We Go!* There. And a friend of mine was an usherette so, we used to get good seats.

**VB:** Ah. I see, yeah.

**NC:** And erm, saw *Sing As We Go!* Then we used to have a stage show with eh, Ralph Reader. The scouts. On the stage, you know.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** And the Dominion Harrow used to have a band in the interval.

**VB:** Ah, I see.

**NC:** You know, they'd play. I always remember that because eh, I was carrying my first daughter, the one up here. And eh, we used to go to the cinema quite often, you know. A couple of times or so a week. Maybe three if we were lucky.

**VB:** [laughs]

**NC:** And eh, now they all seem to be... [pause 3 seconds] Oh there's one at the erm, Granada's still there, but not the Granada. It's three, the Greenhill now [possibly referring to the area in Harrow].

**VB:** Yeah.

**NC:** There's three cinemas there.

**VB:** Yeah.

**NC:** I haven't been for years. I think it's about four pounds now.

**VB:** Oh it must be. Yeah.

**NC:** We used to pay a shilling. Or sixpence. Six pennies, you know.

**VB: Yes.**

**NC:** And erm, take jam jars. If we hadn't got that.

**VB: [laughs]**

**NC:** And then we used to have eh, an orange in the interval. And then there used to be silent films. And at the Coliseum I always remember I went with my mother. And we saw Mary Pickford. In the, it was called *Sparrows*. And it was an orphanage. All these little children. And I remember, you know, she had beautiful curls. Right natural, right down here. And erm, they were climbing a tree and they were going over a bog. And one little girl she dropped her doll, and it sank. In all this horrible stuff. And, you know, we were all, we were so tense.

**VB: [laughs]**

**NC:** But they got away with it, you know. And Charlie Chaplin. I went to see him. Every film he made, I suppose. When I was a little girl. I remember in Croydon I went to the cinema with my uncle and aunt. And we saw *The Kid*. Jackie Coogan I think it was. Yes. He was great. Laurel and Hardy. You know, we were only talking about those people the other day, you know. And erm, I could really laugh at those. But there's not many I can laugh at now.

**VB: Mhm. Cause I was going to ask you, how did you feel when you were going to the cinema as a child? How did it make you feel?**

**NC:** Oh it was great to go to the cinema. I think, no, we paid threepence. Three pennies. Three one pees like, you know.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** At first. And then it gradually went up, you know.

**VB: I see. Yeah.**

**NC:** But a shilling. That would be five pee, isn't it?

**VB:** Yeah.

**NC:** A shilling. I think so.

**VB:** How did you feel when you were at the cinema? How did it make you feel?

**NC:** Oh. Great.

**VB:** [laughs]

**NC:** We thought we were there. Actually on the film.

**VB:** Really!

**NC:** And then, 'cause it was silent films. But there used to be a lady playing the piano. And eh, when the guns were going, she'd play rapid, you know. And everybody was excited. You'd stand up, you know, and cheer! And then erm, when it was soft, you know, romantic. And then she played, very slow, you know. And eh, we often talk about those days. They were really, really lovely. Our childhood days were lovely. I really feel sorry for the children of today. Because, I mean, we used to have hoops and sticks. Tops and whips. And we'd colour the tops. And we'd spin them round. And then we'd hit them. And all the colours used to go round, you know. And then we used to have five stones and hopscotch. And eh, any old bike we could get hold of. To try and get, you know, learn. And eh, you know, we made our own. And we, 'course in those days we could go in the park all day. Whereas children can't do it now.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** You know, it's such a shame. You know, I mean, now a child wants a computer. We had, I had a penny a week. One pee. And I had to work for that money. Do dusting. And they were hard places to do in those days. We had the old kitchen range. Used to have to black lead and clean the fire irons an all that, you know. It was really hard. No hoovers in those days, you know what I mean.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** And erm, we really had to, and yet, [pause 2 seconds] that was a lot of money to me. A penny. It was wonderful. Now, they say it's nothing for a child to go into a shop with five pounds.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** The parents go to work and they just give them five pounds.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** To get rid of them. Terrible. [pause 3 seconds] Any more questions?

**VB: Well, while you were saying that erm, it sounds like the sort of values you were brought up with were quite different to children today.**

**NC:** Aw! And we had to behave. We would never say anything to our parents. We'd never argue. I had a Victorian mother. And, she'd just look, and you wouldn't dare answer her back. Not even my brother, when he was married. Therefore, we respected our teachers. We loved our teachers. And we were ashamed when we did anything wrong. Because it was terrible.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** You know. We really respected them. And eh, I know I loved my teacher. When I was in the sixth form. But erm, right from when I was five years old, you know. We had such lovely things, you know. Used to have a Christmas tree, at Christmas time. And we'd all take the thing that, Woolworths, there was nothing over sixpence. And we'd take a present. And course, naturally, we wouldn't get our own present. You know. It was great.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** No central heating then. We had one big fire in the classroom. Coal fire. And of course if you were lucky you could sit near it. But otherwise you were freezing on the other side of the room.

**VB: Aw-w.**

**NC:** You know, but really wonderful. When I go back on my days of being young, it was so lovely.

**VB: Mhm. Do you think the films you watched affected you in any way?**

**NC:** Are they what?

**VB: Did the films that you saw affect you, do you think you learnt things from the films you saw or?**

**NC:** What liked them better you mean? Do you?

**VB: Well, I wondered if seeing films eh, influenced the way you were or if you learnt anything from watching films or going to the cinema.**

**NC:** Well of course, we'd go and see a special one.

**VB: Uhuh.**

**NC:** We wouldn't just go and see anything. We'd have to like the film.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** You know. It used to be so exciting. Eh, cowboys and Indians. And eh, and then we liked the romance. I'll never forget *The Bohemian Girl*. Bet you've heard the music from that.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** I dreamt that I dwelt in great castles, always, wasn't it? And eh, I've never forgotten. I was erm, let me see, I was fourteen when I went to see that. And that was the old Cosy on the Hill. And eh, we used to watch out. You know, *The Blue Lagoon*, was another one. And then there was erm, Fay Wray. And Esther Williams--



**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** The swimmer. And then 'course, 'course it wasn't coloured in those days. It was black and white. But it was our time and we never took any notice.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** You know.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** And eh, I remember I went to see my first coloured film. I can't remember where I saw it. But I know I saw it in Harrow. But it was all black and white, you know, when I was a child.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** And yet it was lovely. And eh, used to be 'The Kids' [referring to *The Little Rascals*]. There used to be a gang of them. Eh, I think Jackie Coogan. There was a boy with freckles. His teeth missing in the front. And eh, Jackie Cooper. And eh, [pause 3 seconds]. Eh, it was like the Violet Elizabeth films. Well erm, what's her name? Bonnie Langford was the original. She was the original Violet Elizabeth [probably referring to *Just William*].

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** I don't think much of it now.

**VB: No.**

**NC:** *Just William's* on now but I don't think anything of it [referring to TV series].

**VB: Yeah.**

**NC:** It's not acting like they used to.

**VB: Well that brings me to something else. Were there particular qualities about the stars in the thirties, do you think? I mean, say as actors. What made a good film star for you?**

**NC:** Well, erm, eh, it's like. Well the acting ability, I suppose.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** It was real. Now, I just, well I don't go to films now. But the films on the television. They're just sex. It's sex all the time and I just shut it off. I mean we know it happens and all that sort of thing but it seems such a shame. You know that it's such a different world. It seems such a wicked world now. In all different things. But of course in those days we were brought up very differently. I mean you couldn't ask questions on that. You know it was taboo to ask questions. You know.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** I mean I was a child at thirteen. I had my doll and pram. And if I hadn't got a doll I'd put the kitten in the pram. Dress it up with a bonnet. Our little kitten. Used to lay it over, go to sleep and I'd wheel it round the park. You know, such innocence. It's such a shame that, even little children. They know it all now, don't they? And to be honest, Val, my son-in-law, my daughter's got no children. [phone rings] They said they weren't going to bring children into the evil world.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** [answers phone and comes back] You know another time I don't get phone calls for days.

**VB: [laughs]**

**NC:** That was a friend of mine. She's ninety-three. And eh, I could not get her to hear the number that she wanted. 'Course I told you that I have a faith healer.

**VB: Yes, you mentioned that, yeah.**

**NC:** Because actually, to be honest, I've never got over my daughter. I've never got over it. I don't think I ever will. And erm, she helps me. You know. And she goes to her now, help her.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** So she doesn't want her to come tomorrow 'cause she's got to go to the doctor's or something like that.

**VB: Ah, I see.**

**NC:** Anyway... [laughs] Another time I don't get any phone calls for a long time.

**VB: [laughs] Ah it's always the way, isn't it? If you've got company. [laughs]**

**NC:** Do you want another biscuit?

**VB: Eh, I will actually. Yes. Very nice these.**

**NC:** Help yourself.

**VB: Right.**

**NC:** Do you want another coffee?

**VB: E-erm, that'd be lovely actually. Yes. I wonder if I could, could I use your bathroom? I remember where it is.**

**NC:** Yes. Put the light on.

**VB: [goes to bathroom and returns] What was I going to ask? Yeah, I wonder how you felt erm, we've talked about how you felt when you were watching the films.**

**NC:** Yeah.

**VB: How did you feel afterwards? How did it make you feel?**

**NC:** Oh good.

**VB:** Yeah. [laughs]

**NC:** [laughs]

**VB:** Short answer.

**NC:** Oh we were right there, you know. We used to discuss it and say, "Oh! What a lovely film." They were beautiful films. All romantic. Nothing nasty at all. It was just romantic, you know. What's happened to the world, I don't know.

**VB:** Mhm. Do you see a big difference between the films you saw?

**NC:** Oh, yes.

**VB:** As a girl.

**NC:** Life was so different altogether. It's getting a wicked world.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** Really a wicked world. I mean, you'd hear of the odd murder but every day. There's muggings or there's murders or whatever.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** Isn't there? Look at that Rosemary West. [pause 3 seconds]

**VB:** Terrible.

**NC:** I mean she couldn't get out of it anyway, could she?

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** It's obvious she was there.

**VB: Yeah.**

**NC:** What a dreadful thing.

**VB: Awful.**

**NC:** I don't know, I mean, one's frightened to go out. See I had my chain on.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** I was expecting you.

**VB: Of course.**

**NC:** So I knew it was you.

**VB: Yeah.**

**NC:** But eh, I have my chain, 'cause I was robbed here, you see.

**VB: Tch! Oh dear.**

**NC:** Made me very frightened of men.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** And eh, they came, told me they were Social Services, going to help me. And he took forty pound.

**VB: Oh that's awful.**

**NC:** My pension.

**VB:** It's just awful.

**NC:** And Shirley, it was her birthday, it would've been her birthday that day.

**VB:** That's terrible.

**NC:** My husband had just died [the month?] before that. And eh, you know, I thought they were very good. She was a nice, looked a nice lady. Very well dressed. Very sympathetic. Looking at my daughter's picture. And he was upstairs taking money out my purse. My bag.

**VB:** Oh, that's dreadful.

**NC:** I didn't know for ages. It was only through Shirley's friend ringing me from London to see how I was. It was a coincidence that she rang me. But I was like a mother to her, you know. When she was young. And eh, I said, "I've been robbed." She said, "Have you told the police?" And I said, "Well, no," I said, "You've got to catch them." But that was a long time after. That was about, two hours or more--

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** Before I realised I'd been conned. I was the fourth one.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** It was in the paper. They never gave my name. They gave my age.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** And where I lived and of course people put two and two together, they knew it was me.

**VB:** Yeah. How awful.

**NC:** Horrible.

**VB:** Yeah.

**NC:** He never spoke a word to me. I can see their faces now. Great big scruffy man. And had I have gone upstairs he could've killed me.

**VB:** Yeah, you were lucky actually.

**NC:** Mhm.

**VB:** You were lucky, yeah.

**NC:** Lucky.

**VB:** Yeah. Oh, how terrible! That's awful.

**NC:** I've got so frightened now I don't go in a taxi with a man on my own.

**VB:** Yeah.

**NC:** I'm having a lady to pick me up.

**VB:** Yeah.

**NC:** You know. Although they're a family affair there. But there've been eh, three rapes in London in a taxi.

**VB:** Oh.

**NC:** Terrible. The taxi, the girl missed her last bus. And this fella came along with a black taxi and she looked inside and there was a meter. All above board, as she thought. And eh, he raped her. There was about three of them recently.

**VB: You'd think you were completely safe in a taxi too.**

**NC: Mhm?**

**VB: You would think that was the one place you were safe.**

**NC: Yes! Black taxi.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**NC: So now I'm frightened.**

**VB: Oh-h, it's terrible.**

**NC: I used to go and meet my daughter at the airport when she used to come from Canada.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**NC: And take her back. Always a man, you know. [phone rings] And never...**

**VB: Oh that's awful.**

**NC: Is that the phone again?**

**VB: It is.**

**NC: Oh no!**

**VB: [laughs]**

[NC answers phone; returns]

**VB: Talking about eh, the sort of different values in the films in the thirties and the films today.**



**NC:** Yes, we'd come out and feel real good, you know. We'd seen a jolly good film. And eh, *The Blue Lagoon* was beautiful. Eh, I did see it again, not too many years ago. I think it was on the television.

**VB:** Oh yes. Yeah.

**NC:** Yes, and eh, course now a lot of the old ones have died, haven't they? It was erm, who was that one used to talk a lot. Katharine Hepburn.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** Eh, I saw her in 'The Ocean Queen' [referring to *The African Queen*]. Erm, with Humphrey Bogart, do you think?

**VB:** Oh yes. Yes.

**NC:** Yes. Oh that was fabulous. I've seen that about three times. I mean they were films, in those days, that you wouldn't mind seeing a few times.

**VB:** Yeah.

**NC:** There was one that I really loved on television and that was 'Upstairs, Downstairs'. And a lot of us old ones would like to see that again because it was true to life.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** It was real, 'Upstairs, Downstairs'. You know the eh, Mrs Bridges the housekeeper. And eh, there was the butler and eh, you know, all the under housemaid and whatever.

**VB:** Mhm. Is that something that's important to you? That you can sort of believe what you're seeing?

**NC:** Yes. Because it's real, it's true to life. You don't know where you are with the films of today. They jump. Erm, you're watching something and you think you've seen something and it's a

commercial. It used to have a star come to the front. To tell you that the commercials are on. Now it's all jumbled up together. You know.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** Ooh. I just don't like the things of today at all. I really don't. And not many of us do.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** We hardly ever put the television on. Only 'Coronation Street' and things like that.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** You know. But erm, when we put erm, a good book like Barbara Cartland. Now she writes beautiful romances. And I read all her books. As many as I can.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** And eh, and erm, and Victoria Holt and Catherine Cookson. All those sort of things.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** And they make, they show the films. From the book.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** And that's really good. It's really worth watching, you know.

**VB: Is the story something that's important to you as well?**

**NC:** Pardon?

**VB: Is the story, when you're watching a film, is that important?**

**NC:** Ye-es. Yes, it's so true to life. [pause 3 seconds] You know, like, you see like the poor family and eh. But 'Upstairs, Downstairs' was absolutely fabulous. They did show it down to where the Titanic went down. You've heard of the Titanic.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** I was a year old when that was on and we had the record of it. And erm, [pause 3 seconds] Lady what was her name? Blakeney or something in it. And she went down with the ship. And then they stopped doing the other part of it.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** And eh, ooh, we used to love it. You know, things like that. Like 'Peyton Place' was good.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** And 'The Fugitive'. Erm, those are the type of things, you know. We like to, us older ones, like to sit down and have a really romantic story. True to life. Mind you, I like the whodunit ones as well.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** You know. I like Agatha Christie. And erm, erm... [pause 2 seconds] What's that man that's on now? He's coming back on tonight I think.

**VB: Ah.**

**NC:** What was his name? Beginning with 'T', 'H'.

**VB: Oh erm... No, it's gone. It's gone. [laughs]**

**NC:** I can't think.

**VB: No.**

**NC:** I can see his face.

**VB:** Yeah.

**NC:** ['Inspector] Morse'!

**VB:** Yes! That's it.

**NC:** Yeah.

**VB:** I was going to say that before actually and then you said...

**NC:** Yes. I think he's on tonight. Anyway eh, he was good. 'Taggart' was pretty good.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** They're doing a film again but of course he's dead. And it's not, I don't like it now. He used to be really good, you know. And erm, it's been really, really thrilling, you know.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** And eh, how he used to get them. I like those sort of films. And there was one called 'The Ten Little Nigger Boys'. And there was this big house by the sea. And you see one murdered after the other until there was only one left.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** You know. And that was good. I forget who the author of that was. And eh, but something interesting, you know. But I hate all these other things.

**VB:** Did you used to like the Sherlock Holmes ones, with Basil Rathbone?

**NC:** Oh-h-h!

**VB: Nigel Bruce. [laughs]**

**NC:** The old Sherlock Holmes.

**VB: Yeah.**

**NC:** Not the new ones.

**VB: No.**

**NC:** The first one. Erm, yes Basil Rathbone and eh, who was Doctor Watson?

**VB: Erm, Nigel Bruce.**

**NC:** That's it. They were really good. You know. Really good. I loved that. And most of us, we talk about it at the club. We talk about the old films. Most of us are elderly. Our youngest one is eh, sixty-six. She's the baby of the table.

**VB: Ah! [laughs]**

**NC:** We've got one ninety-one.

**VB: Hah!**

**NC:** Still sprightly. And eh, one next door, she's eighty-seven. We got another one, eighty-two. And I'm nearly eighty-five. You know, we're all elderly. But we talk about the old days.

**VB: Mhm.**

**NC:** We're always talking. Reminiscing. The same when I go down to my friend Nancy, you know. It's all we talk about is the old films and the old days.

**VB: That's interesting.**

**NC:** Lovely life!

**VB:** Yeah.

**NC:** We never had much money. You know. Just working class and, but we enjoyed life. And we led a good life too.

**VB:** Mhm.

**NC:** I mean, for instance, can you see a child now saying Grace before they have a meal? I wasn't allowed to leave the table. I'd say, "For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us really thankful". And then, "Thank you God for my good dinner," or whatever. "Please may I leave the table?" Never allowed to get down. And I think the children of today would be much better if the parents were more strict. But they're allowed to do as they like now, a lot of them. They answer back. There's good and bad in everybody. And, I mean, I've seen little boys on the bus and--

[End of Interview]