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* Harrow, Middlesex, 18 July 1995: Valentina Bold interviews Olga Scowen

* Transcribed by Joan Simpson/ Standardised by Julia McDowell

* OS=Olga Scowen/ VB=Valentina Bold

* Notes: Second of two interviews with Olga Scowen; Sound Quality: Fair; interview took place in July 1995, not June 1995 as mentioned in VB introduction.

[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[VB tape introduction]

OS: Yeah. He was always a bit of a sappy part, sappy part player, you know.

VB: Oh! Now I see him I recognise him.

OS: Yes, yes.

VB: Yes.

OS: And there was another Howard, Ronald. Who was Leslie's son as I understand it.

VB: Mhm. It is interesting though as you say. They're quite alike as well actually, when you see them.

OS: Yes. Mhm.

VB: Yeah.

OS: Eh, Ronald, Leslie's son was like him but in a rather a soft sort of way. You know. Soft sort of jowly chap. [paper being rustled]. I have been writing notes. [laughs] It occurred to me afterwards that a lot of what I spoke about was more likely to have been in 1940. That's the difficulty I find. Incidentally I was trying to think of Noel Coward's work. Daft. I've got a book over there, a dictionary of English literature. I thought, wonder if anything of Coward's is in there. He was. The only work they mention was the one I wanted, *Cavalcade*.

VB: Right.

OS: And my grandmother used to call it 'Calvacade'.

VB: [laughs]

OS: And I knew it was something like that but I [laughs] couldn't remember. Anyway, I found that out and erm, oh the other one I couldn't remember. Anna Neagle's dancing partner in the civil films was Michael Wilding. He was the one who married Elizabeth Taylor. One of her husbands. [laughs] Erm, and of 'course Noel Coward, another of his films which was very good is *Bittersweet*. That was with Evelyn Laye. It was a musical. That's got Noel Coward out of the way anyway. Erm, thinking back to the British films that I saw, was, I'm pretty certain this was in the thirties, was *Disraeli*. George Arliss. I loved that film. I liked all the sort of semi-historical. Henry the Eighth [referring to *The Private Life of Henry VIII*], Charles Laughton. And his wife Elsa Lanchester was in it. And Merle Oberon. Charles Laughton I once saw in the Albert Hall. He was coming out from his seat and just walking past me and somebody called, "Hello, Charles! Do you remember me?" And he said, "Should I?" [haughty voice]

VB: [laughs]

OS: Nasty bit of work Charles Laughton was. I think he was as nasty as he looked, you know. The way he said that, "Should I?" [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

OS: Oh dear. Erm, Tauber, Richard Tauber made some musicals. I think the one I particularly remember is *Lilac Time* [referring to *Blossom Time*]. It was about Franz Schubert. These were a few British films that were worth seeing although I rather decried them the other day. But there were a few.

VB: Do you think the British were particularly good at these sort of historical ones?

OS: Well I think they were good at historicals. Particularly our own history.

VB: Yeah.

OS: And erm, but then there was another one that wasn't historical, *The Wicked Lady*. James Mason and Margaret Lockwood. They made several films together but that's the only one where I can remember the title. Where you've got me is memory. I can't remember names. Erm, and then there was a film about Queen Elizabeth the First and I don't know what that was called but Flora Robson played the leading part [referring to *Fire Over England* or *The Sea Hawk*]. Always remember with Flora Robson somebody said to her, "How do you manage to cry when you have to?" And she said, "I think of the tragedy of the Thetis." That was a submarine that sank in the Irish Sea and all the crew were drowned. They died with it. And she thinks of that and that made her cry for the part. [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

OS: She was a very ugly woman, Flora Robson, but a very good actress. Oh another film, [*The*] *39 Steps*.

VB: Oh!

OS: I read the book of that before I saw the film. Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll.

VB: Yes.

OS: She was another beautiful woman. And *I Was A Spy*. That I know was a 1930s. Howard Marshall. Herbert Marshall, sorry. Madeleine Carroll and Conrad Weiss. I loved Conrad Weiss! 'Course before the war the fact that he was a German didn't matter, you see. And eh, when I see him now, if they show an old film, he's so wooden I could cry, [laughs]. But in those days, oh! This tall handsome man, you know.

VB: 'Cause I was going to ask you that. I mean what sort of qualities do you think appealed to you in stars?

OS: Well I don't know. Erm, [pause 3 seconds]. I didn't like the rough Yankee knockabout types. I liked, I liked the Englishman, you know. Now the other great hero of mine was Clive Brook. And he made, I've got a note here what films he was in. Oh I'm trying to remember if he was in *East Lynne* with Ann Harding. Erm, that was a real [laughs] weepie, you know. He turned his wife out 'cause she had an affair with somebody else. I remember her looking at her son and saying, "My son..." or something, "never called me mother." [laughs]

VB: Aw. [laughs]

OS: But Clive Brook I liked. And my son is Clive. And I think that's cause I liked Clive Brook. The name sort of stuck with me, you know. Erm, who else? Oh I made a list here. The British actors who settled more in less in Hollywood and made most of their films there. Like Ronald Colman. There was one of

his films that I liked very much was erm, [pause 2 seconds]. Oh, where have I got it? Down here. *Lost Horizon*.

VB: Mhm.

OS: With Jane Wyatt. Where it was rather like Tibet in the mountains and nobody got old. Until they came out! And when they came out their faces suddenly dropped, [laughs. But it was a nice film. And he made another film that I can't remember the name of, with erm, Greer Garson. It was erm, he lost his memory. Erm, he was called Smithy. I remember that 'cause I was a Smith. Erm, but I can't remember the name of the film [referring to *Random Harvest*].

VB: Mhm.

OS: And of course he made Bulldog Drummond films. I read the Bulldog Drummond books. Trouble with Ronald Colman was, he had this lovely voice and he was quite good looking but he was so little. Little chap, you know. Erm, who else have I got down here?

VB: He's quite sort of similar in a lot of his films as well, isn't he? The sort of dashing--

OS: Who?

VB: Ronald Colman.

OS: Oh yes.

VB: Sort of similar parts.

OS: Yes, *A Tale of Two Cities* he was in. And erm, trying to think what else he was--

VB: Was he not in *The Prisoner of Zenda*?

OS: Mhm?

VB: *The Prisoner of Zenda*.

OS: *The Prisoner of Zenda*. Yeah, that's right. Erm, trying to remember who the other one was in *The Prisoner of Zenda*. 'Cause they were twins or something, weren't they?

VB: Yes.

OS: Took the place of each other. I can't remember who the other was. Erm, 'course Cary Grant. But I don't know if he was around in the thirties.

VB: I think he made one or two towards the end of the thirties.

OS: Yes. Because he died recently. He was over eighty so he could've been about then. But I can't remember what the films were. Erm, 'course Charles Laughton again, *Mutiny On The Bounty*. Now I don't know whether that was the thirties.

VB: I think it was.

OS: Yeah. 'Course that was Clark Gable as well. I liked that. Another famous one was C. Aubrey Smith, who actually was Sir C. Aubrey Smith. He was an elderly character actor. He started a cricket team in Hollywood. You know, he was the typical Englishman. He even took the cricket with him, [amused tone]. But he spoke beautifully. Another one was Richard Greene. He was particularly chosen for Robin Hood [probably referring to the 1950s TV series 'The Adventures of Robin Hood'].

VB: Mhm.

OS: One of the first Robin Hoods. Quite a nice looking chap. I was interested in him because he was related to somebody my brother-in-law worked with. And eh, so we heard all about him being chosen for it. But erm--

VB: That's interesting.

OS: He sort of died out. I saw him in a couple of films but he didn't sort of go on.

VB: Cause when you saw Robin Hood I thought of Errol Flynn.

OS: Yes well Errol Flynn was.

VB: Yeah.

OS: I had a little jigsaw puzzle of Errol Flynn erm, fighting a duel, no it wasn't, couldn't have been a duel 'cause they wouldn't have them. Anyway it was a Robin Hood jigsaw.

VB: A-ah!

OS: I used to do a lot of jigsaws at one time. I don't any more but I used to. [pause 8 seconds] I made a list of foreign actors that I like. Charles Boyer.

VB: Mhm.

OS: There was a film he made and I think that was in the thirties, *All This And Heaven Too*. I can't remember who wrote it. I think it was Rachel somebody [the author was Rachel Field]. I read the book but I just can't remember.

VB: Did you often read the book first and then go to the film afterwards?

OS: No. It just happened, you know. I belonged to Boots Library at one time and I used to get them from there. I mean we've got our own library here but it wasn't very good. In those days we just had it in a school. Open two evenings a week. You know.

VB: Mhm.

OS: If it didn't happen to suit you, you didn't get there! Erm, oh another film that I think Boyer was in was *Mayerling*. That was about the erm, it's a true story of erm, an Austro-Hungarian prince or count or something.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And had an affair with this woman and they shot themselves. Or somebody was shot in this lodge at Mayerling. An I think that was Boyer. Erm, another chap that I hardly ever, [coughs]. I liked him, was Carl Brisson. I think he was a Swede or a Dane or something like that. He was Scandinavian of some sort. An he sang a song erm, 'I Wear A Little White Gardenia'. An I can still sort of hear him singing it. I think it was that that attracted me to him in the film. He was blond, quite attractive. He made one or two films but, sort of lost him. An then there was Anton Walbrook.

VB: Mhm.

OS: In *Gaslight*. Where he was trying to make his wife think she was going mad, you know. Stole things, hid things an put the lights out an that. Erm, I liked him. I saw him in a film. I suppose it was made actually just at the beginning of 1940. Where he was a pianist and he'd been flying in the Battle of Britain. Something *Moonlight*, *Dangerous Moonlight*, I think it was. But whether that's '39 or '40 I don't know. But it's... Well you know, if it was, if it was flying in the war it must've been '40 [1941, according to iMDB].

VB: Mhm.

OS: Erm, another singer I liked an he didn't make many films was Jan Kiepura. He was a Polish tenor. An I saw him at the Albert Hall. He came over and was in a concert. And I can't remember the names of films he was in but eh, I liked him. And there was Anna Sten. And I saw her, picture of her on television the other night. And she was a Russian actress. Supposed to be rather the Garbo type and she made a film called *Nana* which was written by a Frenchman, I can't remember his name. Which French author it was [referring to Émile Zola]. But she sort of didn't make, she made one or two films an then disappeared. And of 'course there was Dietrich. Who I didn't like actually.

VB: Mhm.

[clock chimes]

VB: What was it about her that,

OS: She was, eh, her acting was so obvious. The way she used to sort of flutter her eyelids. An erm look up. She always apparently spent her life trying to be beautiful. And you got that impression, you know.

VB: Do you think you liked the more, 'cause when you mentioned Madeleine Carroll, I mean she's one, she doesn't have so many airs.

OS: No. No. liked her. She was a gym mistress or something at Birmingham before she became an actress.

VB: Mhm.

OS: I think she was a dancer too. I remember reading that she liked to have her hair in one deep wave and she always did. A good looking woman. I liked her. I don't know that she was a very great actress. I was not very critical in those days. I liked people for themselves very often, not their acting really. It's only later when you look back and see these old films you realise how stilted they were and of course the camerawork wasn't so good.

VB: Mhm.

OS: As it is nowadays.

VB: But, I mean as you say, someone like Madeleine Carroll, there was a certain quality about her that really appeals I think.

OS: Yes, yes. I liked her very much. Now what else have I written down here? Oh I put down a list of the American actresses that I liked. Oh, on the English ones, I didn't mention Basil Rathbone.

VB: Mhm.

OS: [*The Hound Of The Baskervilles*] and oh, he was in a lot of films an he was always nasty. He got that sort of face. He couldn't really [laughs] be very nice but he was a good actor.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Then the women I remember in American films. Joan and Constance Bennett were sisters. Constance was rather, [pause 2 seconds], rather more of a glamour puss than Joan. Wasn't such a good actress and she went around marrying all sorts of different people. Counts and things. And Margaret Sullivan. I can't remember the film she was in. She was dying of cancer in it, I remember that. But I liked her. She was in several films but I really can't remember what they're called. Then Marion Davies who was supposed to be very funny but never really amused me. She was a bit of a

scatterbrain, you know. 'Course she lived with Randolph Hurst the erm, [coughs], newspaper man. Erm, Carole Lombard. I like her. She was, she had a light touch. And she, she actually married Clark Gable. I think she did. An then she was killed in an air crash an it nearly finished him.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Anita Page was a name that struck me the other day. She was in a lot of these sort of Joan Crawford type films. The second supporting actress, you know. And Fay Wray. In *King Kong*.

VB: Mhm.

OS: I didn't like that. I never liked anything that was at all horrific. You got this great big animal on the top of the building, holding her in his hand. No. Katharine Hepburn. [*The Philadelphia Story*]. I thought she was most odd when I saw her in that. She had this strange, rather tinny voice and she was never a great beauty. But I mean she had an interesting sort of face, I mean 'course she was a good actress. And I liked her later on but I suppose that's more the forties-

VB: Mhm.

OS: When she acted with Spencer Tracy. 'Course they lived together for years. And another one here, silly, I can't remember the name. Myrna Loy and William somebody.

VB: William Powell?

OS: Powell!

VB: Yes. [laughs]

OS: I could not think what it was. In 'The Thin Man' series.

VB: With the little dog.

OS: That's right, yeah. And I liked Myrna Loy when she started doing films like that. Before that, she was always made up [puts cup on saucer] as Asian or something. Her eyes tilted up, sort of Chinese parts. But once she became normal, 'course she subsequently became quite a politician. I don't know if she was a governor anywhere, but she was very much involved in politics in America. Dolores del Rio. She was, I think she was Mexican or something like that. And I remember my father taking me to see her in *Resurrection*. Which was a Russian tragedy. I don't know which Russian author that was. But we saw it under the arches near Charing Cross Station. I was in town with my father an he took me to see that. And oogh! I was young and I found it very depressing. And my father, my parents lived in Russia for a while. And eh, that's why he was interested, you see. And eh,

took me there. The other one I didn't like was Mae West! And again I don't know the names of her films but I didn't, didn't care for her very much.

VB: Mhm.

OS: She again was too artificial. Apparently to her dying day she was artificial! 'Cause she wore masks an all sorts of things so she didn't look any different, [laughs]! And Barbara Stanwyck. I read somewhere that she had the most beautiful face but I could never see it.

VB: Mhm.

OS: It wasn't a face I liked particularly. I suppose with beauty you've got to have a certain distance between your eyes and your nose has got to be a certain distance. All balanced up. She was probably all right but erm, the expression, I think, spoiled her. But I can't remember what I saw her in the old days but I know I saw her a lot. I remember cutting pictures of her out and sticking them in albums and that was before the war.

VB: Did she not get married to Robert Taylor?

OS: Robert Taylor. Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

VB: Yeah.

OS: And 'course he died. I don't know whether they were still married when he died. Did she die recently?

VB: I'm not sure. I think she might have actually.

OS: She may have done. She must've been pretty old.

VB: Uhuh.

OS: Erm, [pause 3 seconds]. What else have we got here? I'll come back to the men. James Stewart. He was coming up in the thirties. And I liked him. And I can't remember the name of the film that I particularly liked him in but it was one, silly little one that Gary Cooper made which was called 'Mr Deeds Comes To Town' [referring to *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*]. With Jean Arthur. And I liked that. And James Stewart made a similar, it was a similar sort of title but I can't think what it was.

VB: It's not that, the one that I really like with James Stewart was *Destry Rides Again*.

OS: Oh yes!

VB: With the sheriff and he's very gentle.

OS: Yeah. I think I saw that in Blackpool when I was up there. So that would have been the end--

VB: That's later.

OS: Mhm. Gary Cooper again. Very wooden when you come to think of it. He was no, he wasn't particularly handsome either but he sort of had something about him. I don't know what it was. [pause to drinks tea; puts cup on saucer]. Erm, Franchot Tone. Used to be in the erm, Joan Crawford films. And I think he married her at one time but then he became an alcoholic or something. He faded out but I liked him. He was humorous. And Robert Montgomery, now he was really one of my pals. I thought he was lovely. One film he made about a prison, I don't think, it wasn't Alcatraz but it was something like that. Where he was a coward. And it was a very, very unusual part for him but I liked it. I can't think of the others that he was in because there were so many. I always went to see him. And Robert Young was another one. He made a series, was it *Claudia*? No. No! Actually I've got the book upstairs. Something like that. Erm, George Brent. Do you remember George Brent? [drinks from cup]. He was quite a big handsome man. I think he was Irish actually. Erm, he made a film which I think was called *Dark Victory* with Bette Davis. Where she had a brain tumour. And erm, she went blind. I remember her doing some gardening saying, "Oh the sun's gone in. Isn't it getting dark?", you see because her sight's just going. And that scene impressed itself on my elder sister. Who subsequently went blind and died of a brain tumour. Erm, after cancer it was a secondary.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And that was what finished her. She had to have an operation for a brain tumour and she didn't get over it.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And erm, she went blind too so it was rather strange that. Humphrey Bogart! Erm, [*The Petrified Forest*]. With Leslie Howard and Ida Lupino. It was one of the Lupino family who went over to America and she always acted there. I don't think she made any films here. But erm, that was interesting that 'Petrified Forest'. And Paul Muni was another one I used to like. In *Scarface* and 'Louis Pasteur' [referring to *The Story of Louis Pasteur*]. An he made, I think he made several others about well-known people like Pasteur. I can't remember exactly. Just trying to think, who was in the film about erm, [pause 2 seconds]. Oh dear! The first discovery about radium. Erm, famous woman who discovered--

VB: Oh. Marie Curie.

OS: Marie Curie. Now I'm trying to remember who played the part of that. But it was a film that I enjoyed. Can't remember who it was [possibly referring to *Madame Curie* with Greer Garson]. This

memory's awful. Erm, Orson Welles. *Citizen Kane*. Now I don't know if that was in the thirties. Yes, I think it, probably at the end of it.

VB: Just as the end, I think, yes.

OS: With erm, Joseph Cotten who I liked very much. And I never liked Orson Welles but eh, I saw that. Another one was Joel McCrea. I think he was at one time married to Fay Wray. Erm, made several westerns. Again he was a man who didn't sort of have any impact on me. Johnny Weissmuller! In 'Tarzan' [probably referring to *Tarzan the Ape Man*]. With Maureen O'Sullivan. Who is the mother of Mia Farrow.

VB: I didn't know that! Ah!

OS: Yes, yes. She married a man named, somebody Farrow. Howard Farrow or some such name [referring to John Villiers Farrow]. [drinks tea] And Mia was the daughter. [puts cup on saucer] I saw Maureen O'Sullivan in lots of things. But eh, I remember the 'Tarzan' one in particular.

VB: Ah, that's interesting 'cause I wouldn't have said, I wouldn't have noticed a similarity.

OS: [Dunno?].

VB: They're quite sort of different types.

OS: They are really. Yes. And you see a picture of Maureen O'Sullivan now, she looks really quite old.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Talking of people looking old, there was a British actress. Chili Bouchier. And I saw her the other night on television in erm, Barrymore, Michael Barrymore's programme. And I thought, good god that woman looks, her face was covered in make-up! And then I realised who she was, well she must be a lot older than I am. And there she was. Still going strong. Erm, Spencer Tracy. I always liked him. I didn't like him in the early days. 'Cause he used to play the sort of wise-cracking reporter. And he wasn't my type. But I liked him as he matured.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And made better films later on. And the Charlie Chan series. With Warner Oland who I think was Danish or Swedish or something like that. But he was always made up as a Chinese. He'd talk about my number one son. He used to do all his devilling for him.

VB: There's another, there's a similar series as well. I noticed one was on the television the other day. Is it Mister Motto or...?

OS: Oh yes, that's right! That was with the little chap, wasn't it?

VB: Yes.

OS: Peter?

VB: Peter Laurie.

OS: Laurie.

VB: Yes.

OS: Yes, that's right. Yeah. He was a funny little man. I remember him in erm, [pause 2 seconds]. Did I make a note of it? Is it somewhere? Erm, well the thing with Sydney Greenstreet and I think, Humphrey Bogart. *Maltese Falcon*.

VB: Oh yes.

OS: An I think that was one of a series. [pause 3 seconds] Where's that page? [laughs] Erm, the musical aspects that I liked. *42nd Street*.

VB: Oh yes.

OS: With Ruby Keeler. Who was married to Al Jolson for some time. Erm, she was a dancer. She wasn't particularly, not really much of a glamour girl, in my opinion. She was rather homely looking.

VB: Mhm.

OS: But she was a good dancer.

VB: Ginger Rogers was in that as well, wasn't she? But not in a big part.

OS: I suppose she probably was. Yes.

VB: I think she was one of the chorus.

OS: Yeah. Yeah. Erm, Deanna Durbin.

VB: A-ah!

OS: I can't remember the names of her films. I remember one of her riding along singing on a bicycle. A lot of schoolgirls going on bicycles [probably referring to *Mad About Music*]. But I can't remember what it was called. But I saw quite a lot of hers. And then she gave up.

VB: Mhm.

OS: I suspect that they used her voice too soon. And I suspect that as she matured, you know, she'd overdone it.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And she married a Frenchman and moved to France.

VB: 'Cause she made a big long series, didn't she? *Three Smart Girls* and--

OS: That's right! Yes. That's the one I'm thinking of.

VB: Yes.

OS: *Three Smart Girls*. They were on a bicycle [possibly thinking of *Mad About Music*].

VB: Yeah.

OS: Yes. And I'm trying to think of the erm, conductor who was conducting the music when she stood up and sang. A man, an Englishman. Changed his name to a foreign name but I can't remember what it was now [probably referring to Leopold Stokowski]. Eh, Shirley Temple.

VB: Ah!

OS: I didn't really like her all that much. She was too precocious [laughs] you know.

VB: [laughs].

OS: Pretty little thing. I remember her dancing with a tall chap. I can't think of his name but it was a sort of Scandinavian name, I think. Eh, Buddy Ebsen. No. Something like that. Something similar to that. [drinks tea; puts cup on saucer]. Take another biscuit. Help yourself. [laughs]

VB: I'm fine.

OS: Erm, film I liked was Walt Disney's *Fantasia*, [pronounced Fantaseea], or *Fantasia*, [usual pronunciation], whatever you'd like to call it. That had some lovely music in it. And I went down to town to see that. Erm, when that was made, I don't know. If I saw it town--

VB: Mhm.

OS: Chances are that it was in the forties [release date is 1940].

VB: Mhm.

OS: Because I was back from Blackpool then, working in town. So, it could've been. And of 'course *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. That was the thirties, I would think.

VB: Yeah.

OS: Erm, that was different. We hadn't been used to things like that. [pause 2 seconds]. Irene Dunne. She sang in some of her films. [clock chimes]. She was a nice looking woman. She was in a film with Charles Boyer. And she got killed by a bus or something at the end. I can't remember the details. 'Course Charles Boyer committed suicide, you know. He shot himself. His son died or something,

VB: Mhm.

OS: And he shot himself. And then of 'course there's MacDonald and Nelson Eddy.

VB: Ah.

OS: We mentioned the other day.

VB: Yeah.

OS: And Alan Jones. Who was also with Jeanette MacDonald. Betty Hutton! I think she was the one who made the song 'Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend' famous.

VB: A-ah.

OS: She was erm, oh very lively, you know. Peculiar. Big bands. Paul, Paul Whiteman. That's the name. I've been trying to think of it. I liked films with him in it because, you know, music interested me. Erm, that's the music. Erm, oh these are odds and ends. Steinbeck erm, stories. *Of Mice and Men*. Erm, I think it was Lon Chaney Jr. in that. 'Course Lon Chaney, his father made *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, originally. Charles Laughton, I think, made it later. But I saw the original one with Lon Chaney who, I gathered died very much as a result of all the things that had been done to his body. To make films that, you know.

VB: Yeah.

OS: They damaged him. Erm, oh *The Grapes of Wrath*. That was a Steinbeck film. That, I'm not sure when that was [1940 was the release date], it was erm, all about the mid west, I think. [tape cuts out]

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

OS: The Marx Brothers. Now I couldn't stand them.

VB: [laughs]

OS: They never made me laugh. I thought they were so contrived. And Groucho, oh! I thought he was terrible. A lot of people think they're wonderful. I don't. George Raft and Edward G. Robinson. George Raft looked more like a dancer than an actor. Mean, usually had nasty parts as erm, erm, a gangster or something. I didn't like him. We had trouble with him over here. He wanted to come over here a few years ago and start a nightclub or something. But erm, I think he thought he was something do with the Mafia.

VB: Oh that's interesting.

OS: He didn't get, he didn't get the permission. Edward G. Robinson. For years I thought he was a Red Indian descendent. He wasn't. He was a Rumanian. [laughs] But he was quite a good actor. Another man who was too small.

VB: Uhuh.

OS: Didn't look impressive. Another film *The Invisible Man*. I can't remember who was in that. That was certainly in the thirties and I think there were two or three of those. And I saw them. This man all wrapped up in bandages cause you couldn't see him. [laughs]. Erm, the Barrymore family. I liked all of them. Ethel the sister and John and, oh! Who was the other one? The old one.

VB: Lio, not Lionel?

OS: Mhm? Lionel.

VB: Yeah.

OS: That's right. Eh, John Barrymore's supposed to have had such a wonderful profile. So handsome. Couldn't see it myself.

VB: [laughs]

OS: Didn't appeal to me like Conrad Weiss did.

VB: Yeah.

OS: But made a film, *Grand Hotel* which was supposed to be quite a oh, big film, you know. Was gonna make a fortune. I don't know that it ever did. With Garbo and I think Dietrich was in it too. Eh, people with erm, all sorts of different parts interlocking, you know. [pause 2 seconds]. Another film I liked and again I can't remember who was in it, was *Double Indemnity*.

VB: Mhm.

OS: He was an English actor. I can't think of his name and I'm not sure when it was made. But it was about a man who got away with one murder and got hanged for one he didn't do or something like that. And 'Our Gang'. I couldn't stand 'Our Gang'. We used to get them thrown in as a sort of an odd part of the programme. With Mickey Rooney. Mickey Rooney was all right but some of the others were pretty dreadful.

VB: Mhm.

OS: So [laughs] that's my recollections as far as I can gather.

VB: That's amazing. I mean when you mention all these stars as well.

OS: Yes. I wish I could remember more of the names of the films.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Oh another English actor who went to America and again I didn't think much of him. I think he was one of our first knighted actors. Sir Cedric Hardwicke.

VB: Mhm.

OS: He was straight-faced, expressionless and always the same, I thought. But he was supposed to be a great actor. But he wasn't my, my cup of tea at all. [pause 5 seconds; cup put on saucer]. I just remember erm, oh! Dickens. Erm, can't remember the name, [straining voice]. Oh, famous Dickens book. [pause 3 seconds] A young boy. [pause 3 seconds]

VB: Not 'Nicholas Nickleby'.

OS: Not 'Nicholas Nickleby', no.

VB: No the other one. Erm,

[OS goes to get book]

OS: It's silly because I mean this is something I know so well.

VB: I know exactly what you mean, it's just--

OS: It's infuriating. [brings book over; turns pages] Dickens. [pause 13 seconds] *David Copperfield!*

VB: Ah!

OS: And there was a, his aunt or something who'd erm been jilted and I think she'd lived for the rest of her life in the wedding dress that she was going to wear. In rooms full of swathes of cobwebs and things all round her. Edna May Oliver.

VB: Ah.

OS: She was a tall, fearsome looking woman. She was very good. And *David Copperfield* of course was erm, [pause 2 seconds]. Our little chap erm, he was subsequently in a film with Spencer Tracy. Oh dear, dear, dear, dear, dear! He was English boy, pretty, curly hair. [pause 3 seconds] I can't remember.

VB: Mhm.

OS: But I know I liked the film. And I suppose, Edna May Oliver was in it. I suppose that was an American film. The trouble was in the sort of forties I suppose it was, that the Americans started making films here. With our, some of our cast and some of theirs. An it got a bit confused, you know. You weren't sure whether you were watching a British film or an American film. But erm, that was later, I think, than the thirties.

VB: Mhm.

OS: The thirties, they were all still making a fortune in their erm, MGM, United Artists and places, people like that. They got everybody under contract that they couldn't break. 'Cause Bette Davis had trouble over that. But erm, I think that's about all I can remember of my childhood as you might say. [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

OS: I don't know where we'd have been without films, because when you went to work you got something to talk about, you know. Or at school, you chatted about these films. All had your own favourites. [pause 3 seconds] As I say, I didn't go to the theatre much. My sister, my middle sister didn't go to grammar school as my elder sister did and I did. Because she was very nervous. She couldn't pass exams. And she was always very conscious of the fact that she didn't go to grammar school. But she worked at the Prudential in Holborn. And she used to go to erm, the Old Vic and see a lot of the erm, eh Shakespeare plays. Now I'd been to school where we had to learn Shakespeare, we had to [inaudible]. And I've hated Shakespeare ever since! But she didn't have that. And she used to go and she used to enjoy all the British actors, you know. Who were making their names in Shakespeare. Erm, like John Gielgud and people like that.

VB: Mhm.

OS: But erm, if you have it pushed into you as we did at school, it puts you right off. And for the same reason I never really liked Dickens when it came to reading. It was too depressing. Again we had to do it for school. Eh, my sister used to go to opera too. Erm, Sadlers Wells and places like that. Used to go and sit in a queue, you know. Have a stall and sit there for hours at a time to get up in the gods. Couldn't afford anything better than that. But she thoroughly enjoyed all that. So perhaps there's something to be said [laughs] for not having a grammar education!

VB: [laughs]

OS: But she was always very conscious that she hadn't been properly educated. My grandmother used to tell her so which wasn't very fair. But erm, even to her dying day she used to say, 'Oh, well, 'course, I'd expect you to know that. I didn't go to grammar school,' and it was so silly.

VB: Mhm. I mean it's interesting when you say that because I was wondering about how you felt when you were seeing films. Erm, I mean I know, for instance I had quite a hard weekend so I went to a film and all the troubles seemed to sort of recede for a couple of hours. I wondered if it was like that for you or if you got something different from it.

OS: I don't know. I mean we just had nothing else to do. And it wasn't expensive if you could go and sit in the front row for ninepence. Eh, that's why I was very glad when they opened the Odeon down here because you didn't even have to add bus fares onto it. Whereas to go to the Dominion or the Granada in Harrow. Or the Embassy in North Harrow and the Majestic at Wembley, we had bus fares. And I know it was only about tuppence each way in those days, but that added up and I was, I told you, when I started work I was only earning twenty-eight and six a week.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And that soon went up to thirty-one shillings which these days sounds utterly ridiculous! But you certainly couldn't afford to lash out on theatre tickets.

VB: Mhm.

OS: The cinema gave you an interest and you learnt all about what was going on in America which is a faraway place. Erm, oh, another film I'd forgotten that I enjoyed and I'm not sure, I think that was the 1930s, [Nurse] *Edith Cavell*. You know, she was shot as a spy by the Germans, having helped a lot of the British get away. I'm trying to remember, was that Anna Neagle? 'Course Anna Neagle was in a Queen Victoria thing too [probably referring to *Victoria the Great*].

VB: Mhm.

OS: They puffed her face out. To look like Queen Victoria and her voice was so funny cause she was, [imitates voice], short of speaking through this mash of cotton wool. [laughs] But erm, it was

interesting again because it was our, our world, you know. But I did like to see the Americans because they, well they got so much money. Or apparently, according to the films, you know. The women were always dressed in furs and fancy hats an erm, lived in lovely homes an got refrigerators! I mean we hadn't got a refrigerator! [laughs]. You saw things that, you know, we, I mean you probably wouldn't remember a time when people didn't have refrigerators. But where I used to live down the road we had erm, a very nice larder that was on the back of the house away from the sun. With marble slabs and a stone floor and a walk-in larder, you didn't really need a refrigerator. Except we used to have something to keep the milk cool. We used to have a special thing over the milk. But erm, I mean I didn't have a refrigerator until, [pause 2 seconds], well, after I was married. But we didn't even have electricity down at that house. Until 1938.

VB: Mhm.

OS: So I was brought up in a house full of gaslight and erm, oil lamps and things. We had an oil lamp in the kitchen. We lived with my grandparents and they weren't going to spend money having electricity put in. We had it done in the end. But erm, when we went to the cinema and people switching lights on and opening fridges and hoovering, it was a different world. I think it made us all a bit more ambitious. I think we all tried to dress a bit better and tried to do our hair a bit better. As far as we were able to do it. Erm, and I think this goes on now. I mean the adverts on television make people want things that they didn't think they needed, you know. [laughs] I remember hearing a woman talking on television about, she was an unmarried mother, I think, trying to live on her benefit. She said, 'Oh well, the nappies cost me six pounds something a time!', you know, these Pampers things.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Well in my day we didn't waste money like that. We bought the towelling nappies and we washed the damn things!

VB: Mhm.

OS: And it wasn't much fun, I can tell you. But erm, they've got to have it because it's advertised on television. And seen in films and that. And so much we saw in films that erm, nylon stockings and things like that, we heard of before we ever saw them. Here we were darning lisle and silk and whatnot during the war because [laughs] we had to have coupons to buy more, you know. And, I suppose, particularly during the war, it took us out of ourselves, really. We forgot that we were living on rations. I remember women in films making aspic. And I thought, what the heck's aspic? It's really a meat jelly, you know. Erm, you learnt things. You saw tables nicely laid. Mind you I was always taught to lay a table nicely anyway 'cause my mother was like that. But, I mean I wouldn't put a milk bottle on the table or anything like that which a lot of people do, [clock chimes]. But erm, I'm sure

that seeing films, you take them in. As long as they're nice films you can improve your outlook. What I don't like is things like *A Clockwork Orange* and that--

VB: Mhm.

OS: Which encourage youngsters to do unspeakable things in my opinion. Erm, that's why I think one reason, [coughs], I've lost interest in films. Because so many of them are rather unpleasant. And in our day, I mean you had Joan Crawford, Norma Shearer and that. They were nice films. Erm, Norma Shearer, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. Now I don't know when that was made. But eh, that was, who was the father in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. Was it Charles Laughton?

VB: I think it might have been. Yes. Rather stern.

OS: Yes, I think it was. And we saw one or two films of erm, the erm, again I can't remember. The young couple who went round killing and robbing. Erm, in America. And it was a true story. [pause 3 seconds] Oh, what were their names? [pause 3 seconds] But you saw something that really happened.

VB: Mhm.

OS: As I say, I liked the historical ones for that reason because they happened. There's something I had never seen and that wasn't the 1930s anyway was erm, uh! Peter O'Toole in the desert thing. Erm, *Lawrence of Arabia*.

VB: Oh yes.

OS: Erm, I've never seen that. It was on television one night. And it was just starting, and suddenly the screen went all, [demonstrates], like that. All wobbly.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And what had happened. I'd had a plant on top of it. It was a wider television than this one. Had a plant on the top and I'd watered it. And it had run like that.

VB: [laughs].

OS: Down the back of the television set. And it didn't, surprisingly, didn't wreck the set. They borrowed my hairdryer to dry it out.

VB: Mhm.

OS: But that's about all I've ever seen of *Lawrence of Arabia*. [laughs]. Just starting and all this water coming down the screen! So don't put--

VB: Right! [laughs]

OS: A plant on top of your television. [laughs]

VB: Aw.

OS: It's dangerous. But erm, no I suppose we modelled ourselves very much on, or tried to, on these film stars. And what I don't like is the way that the names have been used here. I mean all the Traceys and the Darrens and things like that. I prefer ordinary names. Although, I should talk. I talk about Clive Brook and, [laughs].

VB: [laughs]

OS: I like the name Clive, [laughing]. Ah. [pause 2 seconds] It was a long time ago. [pause 3 seconds]

VB: It's really interesting what you're saying about erm, learning.

OS: Yes. I think it is, yes. Well it's an impressionable age, you see. Eh, we were in our teens and we were seeing things that we didn't have here.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And as I say, like refrigerators. I didn't know many people got a refrigerator. I didn't know many people who had a car! And yet there you saw people like Mickey Rooney dashing around in jalopy as he called it. Erm, and they could afford it. And 'course we saw a lot of their football which I think's atrocious.

VB: Mhm.

OS: We did see it. We did know what they were doing. [pause 2 seconds] And another film I liked very much was *Northwest Passage*. Now I don't know whether that was 1930s. That was eh, Spencer Tracy, I think. That was very interesting because it was a historical thing. How they tried to find their way through. I enjoyed that. I like quite a lot of the 'snowy' films. Taking place in Alaska and places like that. An 'course, California seemed a wonderful place.

VB: Mhm.

OS: I think it's pretty awful now because I mean Los Angeles, you can't breathe for smog. And eh, Hollywood I gather's pretty tatty.

VB: Uhuh.

OS: The days of the wealth have gone. You think what people were earning then. The marvellous homes they lived in. But erm, in our day, in our day, that was, that was wonderful, "I'd like to go there". I remember seeing all the scenes in New York. Erm, of people sitting out on these awful erm, tenements. And people sitting out on the front steps because it was so hot. And running the erm, hydrants to wash themselves. Apparently they just had to stop that in America. They've had to cap the hydrants because people are just wasting water. They had a terrible heat wave there, you know. Very recently. This last week or so.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And they had erm, hydrants being used for people to cool down. And, so they've had to stop that. And they're running out of water. But erm, you see these old tenements and you think what people were willing to take on when they went over to America,

VB: Mhm.

OS: From Europe. And lived in these pretty awful places. All on top of each other. All higgledy-piggledy.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And sitting out on the front. A lot of them were coloureds. I shouldn't say it but I'm not keen on the coloureds. And, then, in those days they were kept in their place. Because they're not here now. [laughs] We've got to put up with them.

VB: Mhm.

OS: But I don't think we've ever mixed with them myself, properly. But it's interesting, seeing... And Ellis Island. Now, I'd never heard of Ellis Island till I went to the cinema. And there were these erm, immigrants coming to this island and being checked through. Saw one or two old films an I don't remember the names, of people sailing across, packed in their thousands in these boats to get across there cheaply, you know. A lot of them died on the way. Various epidemics and things. And I used to like the erm, and I still do, the hospital films. Now I don't know when they were made. Richard Chamberlain and erm, oh, oh, Doctor, Doctor--

VB: Is it Dr. Kildare?

OS: Kildare! That's it [referring to 1960s television series].

VB: Yes.

OS: I'm trying to think of the old man, erm. Famous English actor. [pause 2 seconds] Massey! Raymond Massey. But when that was made I don't know. But eh, there were several of them. And they used to put them on television too.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And 'course, Raymond Massey's daughter is Anna Massey, who's still an actress here. And Daniel Massey. His son. Who I gather is struggling against cancer at the moment. Ah. Very ill. But erm, no I liked the hospital films. Not because I wanted to see people being ill but it was quite interesting. I mean I watch 'Casualty' on television. Pretty bloody sometimes, you know. [laughs]

VB: Mhm.

OS: I say to myself, oh, well it's ketchup. [laughs] See the blood pouring down them. But erm, no, they were interesting.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Erm, incidentally when the South Harrow Odeon opened, they opened with *Die Fledermaus*. And that was lovely. I always remember that. It was a great occasion, you see. Opening the Odeon. Did it with, with style. I always remember enjoying that. I can't remember who was in it.

[audio is missing for the following section]

VB: Did they have any big stars to open it?

OS: I don't remember.

VB: Ah.

OS: I honestly don't remember. I imagine somebody must've done but I don't remember it. I know we were all amazed at the name Odeon. "What? How do you pronounce that? Od-ayon? Odeon, or," 'Cause apparently there was a French theatre of that name. I imagine it was originally Greek, I don't know. The old Greek names. But we thought it was most extraordinary. 'Cause we got used to Dominions and Majestics an all sort of funny names.

VB: Mhm.

OS: But Odeon was something quite new. I liked that little cinema. It was very small but it was comfortable and handy. Plenty of room for queues outside. We used to queue a lot. [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

OS: Couldn't afford to pay. Sometimes there'd be seats at the higher prices and we couldn't afford to pay. And standing in the queue, perhaps two or three of you together, somebody'd come along and say, "Seat for one! Anybody want one seat?", you know. Questions. Do we break up and go in or not, you know. [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

OS: But I don't know if anybody queues for cinemas any more. And in the old days if you really wanted to see a big film you went up to town. Because it was months before it ever came out here. You know, they had it running in Leicester Square and places like that for months. And if you really wanted to see it, if you were in a hurry to see it, you had to go up there. Nowadays it seems to me, they sort of come out everywhere almost at once!

VB: Mhm.

OS: Erm, people can't afford to go to town, I wouldn't think. When you consider if you're going up from here to town an you have to pay the train fare which I don't, I think it's about three pounds return.

VB: Yes.

OS: And then you've got theatre or cinema seats are jolly expensive. Eh, you probably find that eh, they're gonna make money out of the film they've got to push it out quickly into the suburbs. But erm, I cannot remember when I last went to a cinema. [pause 2 seconds] Probably on holiday in Bournemouth or something. But erm, [pause 2 seconds]. Oh no, we did see something in Swanage. Fifteen years ago. That's probably the last time I went to a cinema.

VB: Mhm.

OS: But erm, I used to go and see some of the better films on my own, after I gave up work. Erm, oh, [exasperated], why can't I remember the names? Erm, [pause 3 seconds]. Audrey Hepburn thing. Erm, [pause 2 seconds]. She was the little flower girl trying to be a lady.

VB: Oh yes. Erm,

OS: [laughs]

VB: My Fair, was it *My Fair Lady*?

OS: *My Fair Lady*.

VB: Yeah.

OS: That's right. Yes I went to see that. I went to the Dominion to see that. All by myself. Rex Harrison's another of our actors. Pre-war? Just about I would think. And his wife Libby Palmer. Or one of his wives. Erm, I quite liked him. When he was light and amusing. And eh, he had a sort of style. I gather, he again wasn't a very nice person.

VB: Mhm!

OS: You hear about these people when they die. [laughs]

VB: [laughs].

OS: But erm, I liked him. He was going for a jolly long time. And Hyde-White. He was also in *My Fair Lady*. Can't think of his Christian name. But eh, he was rather, [pause 2 seconds]. But he was quite a nice actor. [pause 2 seconds] I don't know who else I can think of.

VB: I did bring along erm. Remember I was saying I had film books from the thirties that I thought you might be interested in seeing?

OS: Yes.

VB: Erm, there's this one from 1938. It's a Daily Express book.

OS: Bet I had that. That's Norma Shearer. Yes. Now Norma Shearer was not beautiful. She had a slight squint and she had to have all her teeth capped.

VB: Ooh!

OS: Because she had, oh dear! Vivien Leigh. Goodness me, doesn't she look young there? I liked her. There again she was a bit, Virginia Bruce! Yes I remember her. Gene Raymond, yes. Now he was in, oh there's a picture of Jeanette MacDonald there. Well he married her, didn't he? Yes.

VB: Mhm.

OS: I liked him. Dorothy Lamour didn't have any effect on me at all. Louise Rayner! That's the one I was thinking of. *The Good Earth*. Erm, there was a film I mentioned just now and I couldn't think who was in it and I can't remember what the film was now. An I think she was in it. I liked her. Oh there's Janet Gaynor.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Who I saw, I mentioned last time, with Charles Farrell. *7th Heaven* they made. [pause 2 seconds]. Jean Arthur. I mentioned her in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. Tom Walls. Now they were the pretty awful British films. Tom Walls and Jane Baxter. Gosh, Spencer Tracy looks young there. [pause

3 seconds] Mischa Auer. Yeah. Saw him in many, many films. Carole Lombard. Virginia Gray. Joan Bennett. I remember all these people. I don't remember Marla Shelton. Never heard of her. [turns pages]. Oh, behind the scenes.

VB: Were you interested in the sort of technical side of film in the thirties or was it more,

OS: Well, not particularly. I rarely understood what was going on, you know. I told you I had an uncle who used to make the scenery,

VB: Mhm.

OS: But I didn't know very much about it. Tyrone Power! That was another one I was gonna mention. Eh, *Lloyds of London*, was it? He made. Yes, *Lloyds of London*. [clock chimes] He was such a pretty boy. And *Lloyds of London* was another semi-historical one, you know. He died of a heart attack. [pause 8 seconds] Ah there's Franchot Tone, is it? No, it's Barry Barnes in [*The*] *Scarlet Pimpernel*. I liked the 'Scarlet Pimpernel' series. Leslie Howard was in one of those. Leslie Banks. He was a funny man. He got a funny face. He was damaged in the first war. His face was blown up or something. And he sort of had a line like that. And that side he looked like one man and that side he looked like another. Most peculiar. And I remember I was living in Blackpool and my sister came up and we went to the theatre. And Leslie Banks was on the stage. And she said, "He's got a funny face, hasn't he?" I said, "I can't see it." She said, "Try my glasses." And then I could see it and that's when I realised I needed glasses. And that's when I first had them was in Blackpool. Because having seen it with her glasses on,

VB: Mhm.

OS: I thought, my goodness! What have I been missing? And eh, cause of Leslie Banks' funny face. Ray Milland! That's who I was thinking of. *Double Indemnity*.

VB: Ah yes. Did you like these sort of courtroom dramas?

OS: Oh yes, very much! And 'course I liked all the series on television of erm, oh-h! The big fat man.

VB: Oh yes erm,

OS: Just died. Erm, [pause 3 seconds].

VB: I know the chap you mean.

OS: Yeah. Can't think of his name. Raymond Burr was his name.

VB: That's it, yes.

OS: But I can't remember his, oh it'll come. Deanna Durbin there looking very young. [pause 2 seconds]. Loretta Young. Now I'd a friend who looked just like Loretta Young.

VB: Mhm.

OS: She was the friend who used to cut out photographs for me and she liked Marlene Dietrich. But she was awfully like Loretta Young to look at.

VB: Did she make the most of that? Did she try an--

OS: We-ell, I don't think she did very much. [pause 3 seconds]. Errol Flynn. I never liked Errol Flynn.

VB: Mhm. What was it that put you off with Errol Flynn?

[audio exists from this point]

[End of Side B]

[End of Tape One]

[Start of Tape Two]

[Start of Side A]

OS: The actor who died. Can't think of his name now. It doesn't tell you. [looking at 1938 cinema book]. [pause 2 seconds] Oh sorry, you've got your coat, you could put it on the sofa.

VB: Ah, it's okay. I was going to put this in the pocket.

OS: [looking at book]. Ah there's Anton Walbrook. 'Michael Strogoff'. That's right, he was the Prince Consort in *Victoria the Great*.

VB: Mhm.

OS: That's right. Joan Blondell. I saw her on television the other night. Bit of an old film. I wasn't watching it but I just happened to see her. [pause 5 seconds] All the Anna Neagle parts. [pause 2 seconds] *Goodnight Vienna*. With erm, Jack Buchanan. I liked that. Vienna [laughs] Jack Buchanan sang 'Goodnight Vienna' in about three different keys. He was a terrible [laughs] singer.

VB: [laughs]

OS: I don't know how he got away with it. *The Flag Lieutenant*. That was pretty awful. *Bitter Sweet*. That was 1933. Yes. That was the Noel Coward one I mentioned. [pause 3 seconds] *Peg of Old Drury*, I remember that. *Victoria the Great* was 1937.

VB: Mhm.

OS: So, it was in the thirties. You know I had quite a lot of these books given to me to sell in a jumble sale.

VB: Mhm!

OS: Didn't half go. One man took the lot.

VB: I'll bet!

OS: Gracie Fields. Now she was one I [coughs] she had a nice singing voice but as an actress she was pretty awful. I mean the films she was in were dreadful. And the same with George Formby. I quite liked his, his erm singing, well, I don't know about singing but, his general act.

VB: Mhm.

OS: But he was no actor.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Oh there's Robert Taylor. He was lovely. I used to like to see him. Oh there's Robert Montgomery. *Night Must Fall*. Yes. I saw *Night Must Fall*. That's erm, he was a murderer, wasn't he? In *Night Must Fall*. [pause 2 seconds] Can't remember the details but, [pause 3 seconds]. His daughter's just died. Elizabeth Montgomery.

VB: Mhm!

OS: She was in the erm, [pause 2 seconds] series of where she was a witch. 'Bewitched'!

VB: Huh!

OS: But she'd just died of something or other. [pause 2 seconds] That's the trouble. Everybody's getting old. A-ah! Clark Gable at his best.

VB: [laughs].

OS: Elizabeth Allan. I remember Elizabeth Allan in British films. She was again not much of an actress and she had a tremendously long neck. And she was always rather prim. And they all spoke so nicely, the English actresses. You know, they'd been trained to speak just so. I don't think it did them any good. Robert Donat. He was an attractive man, I thought.

VB: Mhm.

OS: *Knight Without Armour*. Marlene Dietrich. Yes I saw that.

VB: Mhm. Was it Robert Donat that was in *The 39 Steps*?

OS: Mhm?

VB: Was it Robert Donat in *The 39 Steps*?

OS: Yes. In *The 39 Steps*. Yes.

VB: Yes. Aw he was great.

OS: He was unlucky. He had erm, asthma.

VB: Aw.

OS: There's Robert Montgomery again! [said excitedly]

VB: Ah!

OS: I don't know why I'm so attracted to him but I thought he was lovely. Sonja Henie. Now that was something. We didn't know anything about skating. Although I used to go skating before the war. Erm, not that I could skate. But I used to go. And eh, 'course the Sonja Henie films were exciting to see them pirouetting around on the ice.

VB: Was there somewhere around here to go skating?

OS: Yes, Wembley.

VB: 'Course.

OS: Wembley and Richmond. We didn't go to Richmond. We went to Wembley. And eh, I used to go with a next door neighbour and her husband and one of their nephews who was my boyfriend for a while. I used to hire my skates in those days. I did have a pair in the end but erm, I was never any good. Ah, there's Raymond Massey! A name I couldn't think of. And Valerie Hobson. She was another very plain woman. And she of 'course got married to John Profumo. Still is as far as I know. [pause 3 seconds] Wallace Beery. He was another one I was gonna mention. Wallace Beery. And Noah his brother. And there was Noah Beery Junior, I think it was. But he was a rough old lot. But he was a good actor. Quite a lot of western and that sort of film. Oh Irene Dunne. There we are with Cary Grant. So this is 19-?

VB: '38 I think.

OS: Yes '38.

VB: Yeah.

OS: So Cary Grant was about then. With Irene Dunne in *Theodora Goes Wild*. I don't remember that. [pause 5 seconds] Nova Pilbeam! I remember Nova Pilbeam. An English actress. She was, can't remember if she got into films 'cause her father was in the business.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Eh, there's Ronald Colman. [pause 3 seconds] Handsome beast. Constance Bennett and Brian Aherne. Brian Aherne was another one I liked. And he had a brother. Now what was his brother's name. Brian and, [pause 2 seconds]. Can't remember. [pause 3 seconds] Bonita Granville. She was a bitch! [laughs] In the American films. Absolutely nasty, bitchy child parts and young woman parts. She was horrible. W.C. Fields. Now I never liked him very much. Supposed to be very funny but eh, he wasn't on my wavelength.

VB: Mhm.

OS: [pause 3 seconds] Jane Withers. Yes, I remember her. Now there's David Niven. And Paul Lukas was a Hungarian. Eh, with a rather fascinating accent. He never had a leading part but he was always quite good. [pause 3 seconds]. Charlie Ruggles. I remember him. He was funny. Beulah Bondi and James Stewart. So James Stewart was certainly about then. And *Jezebel*. I remember that erm, with Bette Davis and Henry Fonda and George Brent! There it is. George Brent. [getting up]. Ooch! I can't get up. That was George Brent.

VB: Ah yes.

OS: I liked him.

VB: Is that the one where she wears the red dress to the ball and her reputation is lost?

OS: Yes I think it is.

VB: Aye, yes.

OS: [turns page] Warner Baxter. Saw him in many, many films.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Usually a sort of supporting film.

VB: He's not unlike Ronald Colman, is he?

OS: A heavier version, yes. But he was American I think. Kay Francis. I always thought something ought to have been done about her eyebrows.

VB: Mhm.

OS: They were sort of right low down over her eyes. She always looked a bit peculiar to my way of thinking. *Vessel of Wrath*. That was Elsa Lanchester.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And Charles Laughton. They were, they were married but nobody ever knew why because he was homosexual anyway. [pause 6 seconds] Powell.

VB: Ah.

OS: I liked him. Dick Powell. He died of cancer. [pause 7 seconds] John Clements. British actor. He was quite interesting. Gracie Allen and George Burns. I quite liked them. She was funny. You see, Gracie Fields was no beauty, was she?

VB: No.

OS: She'd a great long jaw. And she never looked to me like the heroine. *Rosalie*. I remember that. Eleanor Powell and Nelson Eddy. Eleanor Powell was a good dancer. Yes now that's the other Robin Hood.

VB: Basil Rathbone was in that, wasn't he?

OS: Yes, that's right.

VB: He was the bad sheriff or something [laughs].

OS: There's old Herbert Marshall. Deanna Durbin. *100 Men and a Girl*.

VB: Ah.

OS: [pause 3 seconds] *The Great Garrick*. I remember something about that. That was Brian Aherne again. Yes, yes. [pause 3 seconds]. Joan Bennett. No! Constance, no! Joan. 'Tis Joan. And Henry Fonda. I never liked Henry Fonda very much. I don't know why. There we are. Jack Buchanan and erm, Maurice Chevalier in the same film.

VB: Ah.

OS: Fredric March. Fredric March was another one I didn't like. There's Jessie Matthews [inaudible] when she's talking. There's Claudette Colbert.

VB: Ah.

OS: I didn't care very much for her. Well! I never thought she was particularly, [pause 2 seconds]. Well, she certainly wasn't sexy. They tried to make out she was. Shirley Temple. Alice Faye. Yes I remember her. She was in *42nd Street* too, I think. And Tyrone Power. *Tovarich*. I remember that and Boyer. [pause 3 seconds] *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. *The Adventures of Marco Polo*. I saw that. Oh! What a dreadful picture of Boyer! [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

OS: It's horrible. Barbara Stanwyck.

VB: Oh.

OS: There we are. There's the beautiful face.

VB: Mmm.

OS: Can't see it.

VB: I see what you mean. There's something a bit sort of stiff an unnatural about her.

OS: Yes. Didn't have a lot of life in it.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Joan Fontaine.

VB: Ah.

OS: She was the sister of Olivia de Havilland. [pause 3 seconds] Or half-sister I think.

VB: Mhm.

OS: There's Valerie Hobson again. Ann Todd! I remember her in a lot of British films.

VB: Mhm. The gowns are really beautiful, aren't they?

OS: Yes, yeah. Yes that was another thing. You saw these beautiful gowns in films that you would never see here.

VB: Mhm.

OS: There's Loretta Young again. Looked like my friend. Claudette again. [pause 3 seconds] There's Joel McCrea.

VB: Ah!

OS: And I said I thought he married Fay Wray. No, Frances Dee! Frances Dee who looked like Fay Wray. That was it. That was Joel McCrea anyway. And Mr and Mrs Ray Milland. [clock chimes]. Fred Astaire. Myrna Loy married Arthur Hornblow.

VB: Ah.

OS: And as I say, she later became a politician. Cagney. [pause 2 seconds] Didn't like his looks. He had a sister who used to be in some films and she looked very much like him. [pause 4 seconds] "How The Stars Keep Those Figures" [reading title?] Don't know how they got them in the first place! [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

OS: Robert Montgomery again. [pause 3 seconds] Henry Wilcoxon. He was an Englishman and went over to America and made his name there. [pause 2 seconds] Huh!

VB: Ah. George Formby.

OS: Formby. Nova Pilbeam again. Don Ameche. He died recently.

VB: He did. 'Cause he was making films right up till very recently.

OS: Oh yes. [pause 4 seconds] Paul Muni.

VB: Mhm.

OS: As Zola. Yes, I saw that. [pause 3 seconds] *The Life of Emile Zola*. D'you know who he reminds me of? Erm, Sampras the tennis player.

VB: So he does. Yes.

OS: Sorry you're getting uncomfortable.

VB: No. I'm all right. [laughs]

OS: There's a stool somewhere, if you want to sit on that. Look. Over here. [gets stool] Got a collection of stools around here.

VB: Ah. Thanks.

OS: [comes back] Oops! [pause 3 seconds] There we are! William Powell.

VB: Ah.

OS: It's silly but I could not remember. I never liked him.

VB: Mhm.

OS: He always seemed too old somehow. As I say I didn't like Fredric March. Oh! Got back where I started. More or less. Yes, and Gene Raymond. Yes I saw that as well, didn't I? [pause 3 seconds] She was made to look quite glamorous there but really she was a very plain woman. She'd sort of very full eyes.

VB: Yeah.

OS: Smoking there. [referring to Bette Davis]

VB: Yeah.

OS: She died of cancer. [pause 5 seconds]. Judy Garland there. Very young. [pause 4 seconds] Dietrich. Tomato juice, water and cigarettes. That's how they keep the figure. [inaudible]

VB: [laughs].

OS: [laughs] Yes that was an interesting book. All the people I, ten pounds!

VB: [laughs]

OS: [laughs]

VB: I'm sure it cost a fraction of that when it was first sold.

OS: I mean as I say I had a whole lot of them given to me to sell at a jumble sale.

VB: Yes.

OS: Often used to run jumble sales. And one man just took the lot! I think there were nine or ten of them or something.

VB: Yeah. 'Cause you were saying that your mother had got rid of your collection.

OS: Yes.

VB: How did you feel? I mean that must've been--

OS: Well I was very upset. But you see when we had the war, we had to move downstairs and my grandparents and my mother and my sisters. And I came back so there was all the lot of us there and

we just had to live downstairs. It didn't occur to her I think to move all the stuff upstairs. She just threw it away.

VB: Mhm.

OS: I think at one stage it was put out in the cupboard in the veranda. We had a veranda there. Erm, and then gradually it sort of got shifted. It was a shame 'cause my sister-in-law was very interested in film books. We used to give her film books as presents, you know. I think she's still got hers. She might have. Although she's moved up to Norfolk recently and I expect they got thrown out when they were moving, you know.

VB: Yes.

OS: And you don't want to take everything with you. But she was always very interested in films. Used to go quite a lot in Muswell Hill. [pause 2 seconds] But erm, she was very ill for three years so she got a gap in her film memory.

VB: Ah I see.

OS: [pause 4 seconds] Oh well, [pause 2 seconds]. Brought back some memories. [laughs]

VB: Yes. I mean it's really interesting for me because obviously film was a big part of your life.

OS: Oh it was.

VB: Yeah.

OS: Mhm. Erm, especially so during the war which is not the time you want. But erm, I mean it was then because we hadn't anything else.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Hadn't anything else at the best of times cause I mean by the war my fiancé was a prisoner of war so I had five years sort of trying to fill in time.

VB: Mhm.

OS: I used to go to the cinema a bit in London then because I used to have to do night duty and go in the evening.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Erm, but otherwise I used to go round here. I don't know if I would now. I'm not so brave as I was then. I think we just sort of thought, well, if you're gonna die, you're gonna die, you know. Wherever you might be. You can't be sure.

VB: Mhm. Were you married just after the war then?

OS: Well 1946.

VB: '46.

OS: He came home in '45. It was six months before he was demobbed and we were complete strangers by then. And eh, we both worked in the same government department so we used to go to lunch together and that. Then it was a question, I got a gr, er, gratuity when I married, 'cause you had to, you couldn't stay on after you were married. Least not as a permanent civil servant.

VB: Mhm.

OS: So you've got to have a month's salary for every year. [coughs] That you'd done. So we waited till August till the year completed itself and I got another month, when I think of it, a month's salary.

VB: Uhuh.

OS: It wasn't much in those days. But erm, no we got married in 1946.

VB: Uhuh.

OS: And I went on working then till 1955.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And haven't worked since. Aren't I lucky? [laughs]

VB: [laughs] Certainly!

OS: Oh I get bored actually.

VB: Mhm.

OS: In some ways I would've liked a job but erm, you can't do it all. And I think many of these modern women who are working all the time and got families. The woman next door's a solicitor and she's at home, now she's working from home. But she wasn't. And they had to pay a nanny and a cleaner. Erm, either that or you've gotta come home and do it all yourself!

VB: Mhm.

OS: And I think, when they get older they're going to find a legacy from all that work.

VB: Mhm.

OS: It's too much. That's why marriages break up, I think. Instead of sitting down and chatting with your husband, you're rushing around doing the washing or scrubbing something or other. I didn't work. I used to make up my mind that since I wasn't contributing to the family fortune, as such, I would do the things that saved money. I used to make all my own jam. I still do. And marmalade. Patch sheets. I haven't done that lately. I've decided, blow it! I've got enough sheets to last me out, [bursts out laughing] and I'm not gonna patch any more. But I did. And I used to patch my husband's shirts. Even the ones he wore in the garden.

VB: Mhm.

OS: He'd say, "If you keep on mending these I shall keep on wearing them." I said, "Well you're not going out in the garden with the elbows sticking out!"

VB: [laughs]

OS: My sister used to let her husband go out in rags! And I couldn't bear that. So I used to patch shirts. You know cut bits off the tail and put a patch on the sleeve. Darn woollies. And I used to knit all the woollies for him and my son. I don't now. I've given up knitting but I used to. And I felt that, time I'd done that and eaten more eh, we didn't have to buy erm, fancy foods that were prepared or anything like that. I made it all myself. So we saved money on that.

VB: Right.

OS: I felt that we probably weren't any worse off in the end and at least I was at home and I was able to mix up what I was gonna do. If I didn't feel like doing any cleaning, I'd do some cooking or go and do some gardening or something. Erm, it's true you haven't got any contacts. And I find that now because my husband was retired for six years and that was lovely. And he was erm, a part-time planning inspector after he retired from the service. And we used to go out and have wonderful trips, [said nostalgically]. Go and do the planning application somewhere in Essex or Blackpool even. And Isle of Wight. And then when he'd done that, we'd walk along the beach or go and see a stately home or something. And it was a lovely life! And then of 'course he died suddenly. I didn't know what to do with myself! My son, at that time wasn't too bad. He was working as erm, a law reporter and he used to sit in the court all day erm, making notes and come home at night, type it all himself. And I used to read it through to see if it was all right. And I had company. But then he became a councillor. I never see him now.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And it's a very long day. Yesterday I spoke to my next-door-neighbour over the fence. And I didn't go out. I was going to but I was fiddling about and the time ran out. And erm, I thought to myself eh. Clive came in to dinner at quarter to seven and went off again at quarter past. That was it. So apart from speaking to the next-door-neighbour, all I had was that half an hour with Clive until he came in at half past eleven!

VB: Mhm.

OS: And it gets very lonely and you think, well, if I had a job I'd have somebody to talk to. On the other hand I've got to the stage that I simply can't rush about.

VB: Uhuh.

OS: I have my hair permed tomorrow. Ten o'clock in the morning. That means I've gotta get up and get moving. Because Clive doesn't go till after nine usually. And I have it done at Debenhams. I've got to get into Debenhams. Eh, I'm downright mean. I've got a bus pass which operates after half past nine, so I've got to time it so that I don't get on the bus before half past nine! [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

OS: I get to Debenhams by ten. It cost so much to have my hair done.

VB: Mmm.

OS: I can't afford to pay the fare as well. Sometimes I drive halfway there. And park where I know I can park. And get a bus from there. 'Cause it's no good parking in Harrow. It costs a fortune. It's usually for about two hours and that's not long enough.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And erm, it's just not worth the trouble. So I get on the bus. For nothing. I hear old pensioners saying, our pensions ought to be put up! It's not fair, you know. They don't stop and think that the bus pass they have costs the council ninety pounds a year, I think. So when you think of paying a high council tax, you can knock that ninety pounds off for a start. And if there's two of you, you can knock off double. And erm, they forget that they can get prescriptions free. I go out with Clive on holiday and that adn we go to stately homes. Nine tens out of ten I get it cut price because I'm an old age pensioner.

VB: Mhm.

OS: Even in Switzerland we found that. Anybody over 60 got reductions. Erm, so, yeah, people they're all grasping. They all want their old age pension put up. And they never stop to think, a) that their children are having to pay for it.

VB: Uhuh.

OS: And there aren't enough of them about now to pay for it. And erm, they should have saved, well, not everybody can save, I know. But there are a lot of people who could. There a lot who've spent their money on holidays in Spain and erm, smoking all the time and backing horses. I'm being prim. I don't smoke. I never have. I was the only one in the family who didn't. Everybody else did. Why I haven't died of passive smoking I don't know. Because I lived in a house which [laughs] was full of it. I worked in an office that was full of it. Everybody was smoking. If you'd walk into a room, you could've cut the atmosphere, you know. Erm, but there are a lot of people who could save for their old age and don't. Oh, I'll get the old age pension! And then they moan like mad 'cause they don't think it's enough. They never stop to think where the money's coming from. I mean, we've always been hard up but, you might think this is quite a nice house but when we bought this it was eight thousand pounds. Eight two-fifty. And that was, my husband nearly had a nervous breakdown.

VB: Mhm.

OS: The night before I saw the estate agent about it cause he'd been on holiday and he was coming to me on the Monday the night before.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And my husband said, "Oh, I'm not bothered about that house if you're not." I mean we just lived down the road, you see.

VB: Mhm.

OS: In an old Victorian villa, I think they called it, when we sold it. And erm, it was hard work. We didn't have a garage. And my sister was on the corner here. And I wanted to come up here. And I was determined I was gonna come cause we were in a semi-detached and the elderly couple next to us, brother and sister, the place was filthy. And they suddenly announced they were moving. And I thought, goodness knows what we'll get there. Nobody's gonna buy that if they're any way decent.

VB: Mhm.

OS: And we had a path across the garden to get to theirs. They had to go through our garden to get to their back door. And that was all right 'cause we always had elderly people there. But if we'd had a load of children there it would've been pretty hectic, you know. And I didn't want to stay. I wanted to come up here. We had that to sell. I think we only had to borrow four thousand. But, at that time,

on his salary, which I think was two thousand five hundred a year. And he was a higher executive officer in the Civil Service.

VB: Mhm.

OS: It wasn't a bad job. Erm, he was worried how we were going to pay for it. 'Cause we were coming here not knowing the new house. We didn't know what the rates would be. We didn't know what the central heating was gonna cost us.

VB: No.

OS: And erm, we had to be careful, you know. And Clive was, I didn't have Clive till I was thirty-nine. I lost my first baby. And erm, he was, gotta be thought about. There's a school called John Lyons School which is known as the lower school. John Lyons founded Harrow School,

VB: Mhm.

OS: And there's a connection with it. Erm, and eh, he could've, it was a question of going to grammar school. I was determined he was gonna do that. But we weren't sure he would get to it! But John Lyons, we applied here. He not only got in there, we got a free place! Because the council used to buy a certain number of places at the school, you see, to make up for the shortfall. And he suffers from migraine and this was just up the hill.

VB: Ah.

OS: It was the nearest school of all. And so he went there and, thank goodness, we got a free place. But we'd always had to think that time might come and he was gonna cost us a lot of money.

VB: Uhuh.

OS: And this house to pay for. We'd bought this fifteen years before my husband retired so [clock chimes] it had to be a short term loan. We didn't want to be paying it afterwards. So we were always careful with money. We always had to be. And erm, people always seem to think, oh, you're all right. You've got plenty of money. I haven't, [laughs]. I've got a pension because he was a civil servant. And eh, we've got a nice house because we happened to get it at the right time.

VB: Mhm.

OS: I've got a car. We bought the car three months before my husband died. We had an argument as to which car we should have. Mind you, I usually prevailed. I insisted on John Lyons school for our son. I wanted this house. [laughs] And when it came to the car, we'd had a Triumph and my husband

thought he'd have a Maestro. Well I didn't like it because it's a hatchback. He used to grow plants for the Conservative Association. Had a plant sale and he thought a hatchback would be nice and handy,

VB: Ah.

OS: To put in plants and carry them around. I said, "Well that's only once a year." I wanted an Orion. And I got the Orion. And three months later he died. And he'd only done 3000 miles on it. I never really knew what he thought about it. Seemed to like it all right but [pause 2 seconds]. And well that's eleven years old now. No, we've always been quite careful. I do get cross with people who seem to think the state should provide everything. The state that, the state is the people who're doing the work! And there's not enough of them doing it. And they're the ones that are clobbered for the insurance, national insurance and things like that. They have to pay for all their prescriptions whereas we don't. Yeah, I think of the days when the National Health Service first started because I was in the Ministry of Health. And Bevan, Aneurin Bevan was our minister and he talked to us all about this. Erm, people were going out buying two pairs of glasses c'ause they could get them free. If they wanted a bottle of aspirin, they'd get it on prescription!

VB: [laughs]

OS: It was free! Erm, dentists were going broke because the people were having everything done they'd never had done for years. Maybe it's a good thing but you've got to stand on your own feet occasionally. You might not agree with me. I, I'm old-fashioned and I'm Conservative. But I think people should be more careful with their money. But erm, it does worry me. I think it's worrying the government and all over the world, for that matter. The birth rate has dropped.

VB: Mhm.

OS: The pill's done that. And there just aren't enough young people coming on. And those that are can't get work. [tape cuts out]

[End of Interview]