

Disclaimer: This interview was conducted in 1994 and concerns memories of 1930s life; as such there may be opinions expressed or words used that do not meet today's norms and expectations.

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\* Transcribed by Valentina Bold/Standardised by Sarah Neely

\* SI = Sarah Irvine, VB = Valentina Bold

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[Start of Tape]

[Start of Side A]

[VB tape introduction]

**VB: But yeah, you were saying that the first time you went to the pictures was like, the children's matinees?**

**SI:** Mhm. Aye, it was Saturday afternoon most times, you know--

**VB: Right.**

**SI:** Because, we were at school the rest of the week, you know?

**VB: Aye.**

**SI:** It was a Saturday afternoon and, well, your mother and father would be going out. And, eh, well, I only had one brother so I would have to take him away to pictures. Well we'd only be in from say about two to about five, you know?

**VB: Right.**

**SI:** And then we'd be back home again.

**VB: Right. So what sort of things did you see there?**

**SI:** Aye, well, we used to see funny pictures. Comedy pictures just for children, you know.

**VB: Right.**

**SI:** Oh we were jumping up and down and thought they were marvellous. Getting coppers for the pictures, it was only a few coppers to get in.

**VB: Mhm.**

**SI:** I'm talking about many years ago! [laughs]

**VB: What were the picture houses that you went to?**

**SI:** It used to be cowboys and, either that or boxing, things like that that wouldn't have suited old people, but children all went mad if there was a boxing picture or if it was cowboys, oh the cowboys was favourite. [laughs]

**VB: [laughs] How, how, when you say they went mad--**

**SI:** Eh, jumping up on the seats and, some of them all running about. Och, there were no, no eh, holding them down sort of style. Them that was looking after the picture hall was glad when they could get you all out! [laughs] Pap [throw] you out! [laughs]

**VB: [laughs] Right!**

SI: [laughs]

**VB: Were they quite strict with you then, then? The folk in the picture houses?**

SI: Yeah, they had to go round and some of them had to shake up. You know how children at that age, they just go a bit mad. Well, they had to, words aren't helping, you know? For keeping them civilised! [laughs] I think some of them thought they were cowboys! [laughs]

**VB: [laughs] What, what, what were the names of the, the cinemas round where you grew up?**

SI: Eh, well there was one in Cowcaddens, it was called the Bijou. And then, further up Garscube Road, there was one called the Phoenix. Then away up at the Round Toll there was one called, eh, what was the name of that, now? Oh my, it was a horrible place, you know [possibly referring to the Astoria]. It was a smelly, rotten place, it wasn't kept clean or nothing. You were forbidden to go to it! [laughs]

**VB: Really?**

SI: Oh aye. I forget the name of it. Eh, [pause 2 seconds] it's a wee short name. [pause 2 seconds] Was it... there was the Bijou in Cowcaddens, and eh, there was the Phoenix further up the road, and then, eh, the, oh I forget the name of the other one. Oh it's a simple name, you know? But I just forget it at the moment. But there were, from Cowcaddens, do you know Cowcaddens? From Cowcaddens right up, there was either one on this side or one on that side, you know? There were quite a lot, you know?

**VB: Really?**

SI: But, eh, can't mind [remember]. Too old! [laughs]

**VB: It wasn't, it wasn't the Gem, was it? Cause I've heard folk talking about the Gem?**

SI: Oh, the Gem.

**VB: Do you remember that?**

**SI:** Oh the Gem, aye. Oh, it was in Great Western Road.

**VB: Right, right. I was thinking you were meaning a bit further, but there was another one before that?**

**SI:** Aye, aye, Great Western Road. Right, and there was the bigger ones in the town, you know. But these were the wee local ones that I'm talking about.

**VB: Right.**

**SI:** Oh aye. For, well, children's matinees then, you know, money was awful scarce in they days? And the older people seemed to maybe get in just for coppers. You know? Maybe fourpence or sixpence in old money, you know?

**VB: Right.**

**SI:** But, eh, they were cheap, you know? Well people that was old then, in they days, they would slip in because, oh their pensions was nothing, you know? They were nothing, nothing like what it's like for them now. All the rogues that's going about, all the money they're getting. See in they days, oh no. It was awful hard. People that was down and out used to have to sit in George Square all night. Sit in seats or lie in seats 'cause they had nowhere to go, and no money to go to model lodging houses or anything like that. The streets were so hard in they days. Oh God. I was blessed with a father that was a tradesman and had a good job, you know? But, eh, oh my, people were awful poor. Then, there were people that the few pound they would get or the few coppers they would get off the government, they went and spent it on drink or something like that. Because, och drink was so cheap then and all. Drink, you could get a wee half of whisky for about tuppence or thruppence in they days! [laughs] You know? I'm talking about away far back!

**VB: Aye!**

**SI:** You know? Some price now! [laughs]

**VB: Aye! [both laugh]**

**SI:** Oh! See if you go for a night out now! [laughs] Oh!

**VB: Oh dear! [both laugh] It's a different story, isn't it!**

**SI:** Not half! [laughs]

**VB: 'Cause I was going to ask you, when you're talking about these early films you went to, I mean, that must've been the silents, was it?**

**SI:** Oh aye.

**VB: Was it the silent films?**

**SI:** Aye, the silent pictures.

**VB: Aye.**

**SI:** Eh, if it was something that really happened, you know? Oh the whole hall would all shout!  
[laughs] Sorry! Aye, they were silent pictures.

**VB: Aye.**

**SI:** It was, eh, thingummy that did the first talkie picture. Eh. Now what was his name. Oh my God, they were standing in queues, double queues and all that. Eh, for that first talkie picture.

**VB: Is that right?**

**SI:** Aye, oh people were coming from far and near. Because it was all silent pictures, you know? Silent pictures till eh something happened in the picture and then the whole hall went bonks!  
[laughs] Oh! I love when somebody talks about the bad old days, you know? Because, eh, I could go in to quite a lot of it! [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**SI:** [laughs] Aye, oh aye.

**VB: Did you go to that yourself the first talking picture? Was that one of the Al Jolson ones, or?**

**SI:** Al Jolson was the one, the first talkie one.

**VB: Aye.**

**SI:** And it was away over in the Coliseum. Well, the Coliseum was a posh hall in they days compared to all the dumps, you know. And eh, aye, well, there used to be standing in double queues to get into it because it was a marvellous novelty to hear them talking in a picture. Because all you heard was noises, you know? Guns shooting in the old pictures, you know? Bang, bang sort of style. But, eh, oh, some of us was going back two or three times to hear it, you know? Because, oh it was such a novelty. Oh! To see the queue! You were standing there, going on one leg, and then you'd get off that one leg onto the other leg! [laughs]

**VB: Oh dear!**

**SI:** And eh, oh you were that sorry when it finished! 'Cause it was marvellous, you know? Oh aye, marvellous pictures. Well all of them after that you got, eh, the original talking pictures. But that was the first one. And it was in the Coliseum. That was away over by, eh [pause 2 seconds] where was that one? That was away over, over by Bridgeton way or somewhere like that, you know? It was a big hall anyway and that's where it was first shown.

**VB: Right.**

**SI:** Oh I liked Bing, I liked Bing Crosby. And, eh, he was great, so he was. But, eh, some good stars in they days, you know? Even yet there's good ones, you know? But, eh, I've come out without my glasses. I've only got them a fortnight. And I came out in such a hurry--

**VB: Oh dear.**

**SI:** I knew there was something missing. So one of the maids said, "Sarah, where's your glasses?" I says, "I forgot them!" [laughs] Forgot part of me! [laughs] Oh well.

**VB:** But you were saying that you liked Bing Crosby. Were there other stars that you liked? Were there other stars that you liked in particular?

**SI:** Oh aye. Aye. And I liked, eh, oh what's that other one? Eh, I've forgotten. Oh what's his name, again, oh he was great and all. Wait till I see if I can mind [remember] his name. And I liked Charlie Chaplin! Oh! Oh God! He was great! [laughs]

**VB:** [laughs]

**SI:** And, eh, there was someone like that. Some of them are on yet but, like, very old men. But they were young in them, and I liked eh. See, a good lot of them are all dead, you know? But, eh, there were some good pictures, with them, you know? They were all handsome men. [laughs] So they were! [laughs] Marvellous pictures, you know? But, oh see now. The pictures is not so good now. Rubbish, you know? Getting on, I sit up late at night, you know? Eh, my son, I've got a son in the house and we've got the, eh, cable, you know? So I sit up and some of the pictures you get are the old pictures. Really marvellous. And even although, what I mean, in bygone days you, you saw them, when you see it again it all comes away back to you, you know? What you see? Great. So I sit up, I can't sleep, and I sit up late. Well, last night, at half past two in the morning and then I've a friend that gives me all they Bella books, you know? And all the romances you read about, and the broken marriages and all their romps and, oh God! [laughs]

**VB:** Aye! I was going to ask you there if you liked the romantic films when you said, you know the men were erm, so good looking. Did you like the romances?

**SI:** The what dear?

**VB:** [speaking up] The romantic pictures, with a bit of a love story in them?

**SI:** Oh aye! Aw aye! Oh aye, I liked a good picture, you know. I like Gracie Fields and I like, I liked John Wayne. Because, that was them in their prime of life, you know? They were young and that was them in their prime. But, eh, I don't know about pictures now because, well, I've a son in the

house and he's really got away you know? He's a high flyer, is it a high flyer you call it? You know?  
It's a big--

**VB: Aye.**

**SI:** But then he's got another business and then he's got an accordion, you know? Because my husband was an accordion player and he played in the dancing you know? But, that was over twenty years, twenty odd years, aye. So I've three grandsons and my daughter and my granddaughter and then I've got about six great grandchildren, you know? So all them's to go over. I've got a son in the house but he's never been married, you know? He's a bachelor. So we've got to get round all of them. So it's a bit of a job.

[0:13:43- 0:19:45 mentions letter received from the factor and that sometimes things “don’t worry you” but she is a person that but that does get “flustered” in certain circumstances; asks about time; mentions men playing boules in the Day centre and a woman who has been away in an ambulance today; mentions her walking has slowed down and a broken hip; carer comes in with whisky and lemonade to celebrate as she’s getting married]

**VB: Well, I was going to ask you a bit more about your husband actually, when you were saying that he was an accordionist in a band. ‘Cause that must've been quite an exciting time for you.**

**SI:** Aye, aye well, eh, it was the time of the Depression and he didn’t have a job and well they got paid awful poor money then. Eh, it would be ten shillings in they days, from eight till two in the morning, playing. And then, for just an ordinary afternoon, it was about four shillings. Och, I'm talking about years ago.

**VB: Mhm.**

**SI:** But, eh, we managed, because I was out working, you know? Oh I, I started in the corporation and then I went in the post office to be a cleaner, you know? So I was in, in the post office for a good few years and, eh, I used to, I was what you called a floater. And, I thought, see the sub offices, you know? Well, if there are anybody off there they're going to be off for a week or a fortnight or maybe a month. So you're away over in that job, then, you come back again. You'd maybe be a wee while in the big place, down in George Square. But then, there would be people, workers come in after me



but they'd always excuses, that they'd children to go to school and all that, so of course Sarah was sent. But ach, I quite enjoyed it, you know?

**VB: Mhm.**

**SI:** Because eh, well I mean. One postman, it was at Bridgeton. And this postman, he was always well dressed. You know, there were some of the postmen, poor souls, and on a Friday some of their children used to have to come along to get their Dad's wages. But this one, well, in my time you would have called him a toff, because, he was [brilliant?], and it was the time when the giros got sent out to people, you know. And he'd been doing the giros, and oh, so highfalutin, and never bothered with any of the postmen, just thought he was something. But eventually he got caught out anyway and his excuse was, "Well my son was at college." Did you ever hear the likes of it? "My son was - putting my son through college," and all the other things, but then you never hear how that man got on. Oh no, and there different lights - different things on the roof. You can't see them, you don't know where they are, but they can see down, you know, to the men when they are sorting out the mail before they go out to post it. See, big bags of mail come in and they all stand and eh, they have their wee divisions, they have to sort out their mail and then get out and get away to deliver it. But, eh, it was the time when the bookie people, they used to post their mail. So some of them, you know, would eh slip it in their pocket. Uh, they'd spot it right away. But nobody knows, nobody knew, until that leaked out about these – a big flash thing—

**VB: Right—**

**SI:** You couldn't see it on the roof, you know. Oh, it was terrible...

**VB: It must've been hard, hard times, I suppose, for a lot of people, I mean. Did, did you manage to get out a lot in, in those times? Did you go to the pictures, to the dance halls?**

**SI:** Oh aye, I went when I was married. We used to go to the kind of swanky ones, you know? Where maybe you would have a leader, you know. We, I remember, there was a wee man and he was the sort of the boss. And it was figure dancing, you know. And if anybody tried to be funny, to try to do something else he'd get over, boof! [indicates tapping on shoulder] With the stick! [laughs] Ho, ho! Oh no, you'd to go kind of swanky to something like that.

**VB: Did you?**

**SI:** Oh aye. Long dresses in, you know? And well, I mean, when I was younger I had raven black hair, you know? And, eh, I only needed to wet it, put my fingers on it. It was waves in they days. And, eh, I hadn't much bother with my hair other than getting it cut. But, eh, oh then the perm stuff came out and of course you died for that. I ruined my hair.

**VB: Right.**

**Carer:** Can I be excused a minute?

**VB: Aye, sure.**

[carer comes into room and potters around in the background]

**VB: Aye! 'Cause, I brought, I was going to ask you about that. I brought some of the pictures from, eh, some of the film magazines of - this is 1933, Bette Davis and erm--**

**SI:** Oh, she's a skirt on something like mine! [laughs]

**VB: Aye! She has, hasn't she! [laughs] I mean, do you remember these sort of styles?**

**SI:** Aye.

**VB: Aye. Did you ever, you know, dress like some of the stars in the pictures? Did you...**

**SI:** Oh aye, I was awfully fond of clothes.

**VB: Were you?**

**SI:** Oh aye, oh aye. I was a [barama?] for dress. A wee bit like it yet, you know?

**VB: Aye. 'Cause that one with Norma Shearer. Is that the sort of thing you would wear for the dancing? One of these long dresses?**

**SI:** Oh aye, aye. We wore them in my time, and, eh, these kind of hats, you know?

**VB: Sort of over the eye?**

**SI:** Aye.

**VB: Aye.**

**SI:** Aye. That hat - that was a great one.

**VB: One of these wee. What, what sort of colours did you wear? Was it?**

**SI:** Well, whatever was fashionable, you know? Because, me having such dark hair and all the rest of it, I suited colours in, maybe a kind of darkish red or navy blue or green, whatever. I remember one time that I stood at a sale. [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**SI:** Aw, years ago and this green, it was like a bottle green. And I says, I'm determined to get that dress. So when I come out of my work I went up and I stand in the queue to the place. I'm up to, five shillings it cost me, oh it was dandy!

**VB: When, when, whenabout was that?**

**SI:** Eh?

**VB: When, how many years ago was that? When did that happen?**

**SI:** Aw, oh I was married. Married and two of a family, you know? But, oh, this dress I'm telling you about, it was a lovely bottle green and, eh, there used to be a lot of people jealous of me. Honest to God, or may I never move of this chair. They used to say, "I wonder where that lady gets all the clothes", you know, and all the rest of it. I used to go to sales, you know? But, eh, there was a lot of

jealousy. Because, I was easy dressed, if you know what I mean. Not so easy now! [laughs] Too old!  
[laughs] But I've still got quite good gear, you know?

**VB: Aye.**

**SI: So.**

**VB: So that was, that was an interest? Fashion and...**

**SI: Oh aye.**

**VB: And keeping up to the minute.**

**SI: Aye, aye, aye. That was a great coat in they days.**

**VB: With the wee--**

**SI: Aye, aye.**

**VB: Things over the top, epaulettes or whatever.**

**SI: Oh this was, this was real, aye, you know that longer jacket and...**

**VB: Right.**

**SI: Aye. And that wee hat, oh aye, that was great.**

**VB: Did you like - did you like Bette Davis as a film star?**

**SI: Aye, aye. Oh aye. Aye she was good.**

**VB: That's from--**

**SI: Oh aye.**

**VB: Again, one of the film magazines.**

**SI: Mhm.**

**VB: I don't know if you, if you read these yourself, the film magazines, 'Film Pictorial' or--**

**SI: Naw, not really, hen [term of endearment]. Because I always had too much to do then. I had my mother to look after, you know? My mother lived to ninety-six.**

**VB: Ah, I see.**

**SI: I had a bit of trouble off her. But then she was in the Forest Hall for eh, oh she must've been in about seven or eight year. But then you'd always to go and visit, you know? To take up stuff and all that, you know.**

**VB: Aye. [pause 2 seconds] I mean, coming, coming back to the pictures, sorry to interrupt but--**

**SI: No.**

**VB: You know when we were talking about, you know, you were saying you liked the good looking men and everything. Did you, did you like these pictures with a bit of history to them? Things like that one, *Tudor Rose*?**

**SI: Oh aye, oh John Mills.**

**VB: Aye. 'Cause you were saying you liked, erm, Gracie Fields and people like that as well.**

**SI: Aye. Mhm.**

**VB: Was it the musicals you liked mainly or?**

**SI:** Naw, I liked her acting mainly. They were good, you know? I liked Gracie Fields because she was poor at one time, you know? And, eh, she worked in a mill. She just was a good singer and got picked up you know.

**VB: Aye.**

**SI:** She just went up and up all the time you know. John Mills, oh I really liked him. See my, eh, grandsons, I've got a John Mills!

**VB: Really?**

**SI:** Aye! Oh he's got a very good job. Two lovely daughters and a nice wife. Oh his name's John Mills. Then his brother's name's Brian Mills. Then his other brother's Glen Mills. That's three Mills brothers.

**VB: Aye!**

**SI:** [laughs] Oh aye, when I saw that name there!

**VB: Aye!**

**SI:** You know?

**VB: That's interesting.**

**SI:** Oh aye. Oh they're good to me, 'cause I was good to them when they were young, you know.

**VB: How about Nova Pilbeam? Did you like her, or?**

**SI:** Who?

**VB: Nova Pilbeam? [pause 2 seconds] Is she not one that...**

**SI:** No. naw. Not really, no. Not really. Aw, John Mills was great and so was, eh, who was that other one? I'll get his name. Funny how you should forget it but, eh, they used to come to the Pavilion [Theatre], periodically, you know and, eh, good singers, you know? And the Pavilion would be mobbed, but--

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

**SI:** [audio starts mid-conversation] You're completing your college?

**VB: Aye.**

**SI:** And what're you going to be then?

**VB: Well, what we're doing with this is we're going to, erm, we're talking to quite a few people--**

**SI:** Uhuh.

**VB: In Glasgow.**

**SI:** Oh aye.

**VB: And we're also going to be talking to some folk down south, in London and in Manchester.**

**SI:** Oh aye.

**VB: And what we're planning to do is to see if there are any similarities between the sort of pictures folk went to.**

**SI:** Aye, aye. uhuh.

**VB: And what pictures meant to folk.**

**SI:** Aye.

**VB:** You know, how you felt when you were there.

**SI:** Aye, aye, aye.

**VB:** And, erm, there'll maybe be a book coming out of it--

**SI:** Uhuh.

**VB:** Eh, or we might put some of this together--

**SI:** Aye.

**VB:** And make broadcasts out of it. So it might...

**SI:** Have you to pay for it, or do you get a wage?

**VB:** I get a wage.

**SI:** Oh!

**VB:** Aye! [laughs]

**SI:** Oh good!

**[both laugh]**

**SI:** I was wondering. 'Cause years ago you used to have to pay for if you worked, with the children, to college.

**VB:** That's right. Well this is. I've been through college.

**SI:** Aye.



**VB: So this is.**

**SI: Uhuh.**

**VB: It's run by the University but I'm not studying while I'm doing it.**

**SI: Oh.**

**VB: If you see what I mean.**

**SI: But you're really high up, what you have done.**

**VB: [laughs] Well, I don't. You might say that! [laughs] I don't know.**

**SI: Ah, you must be when they're sending you out.**

**VB: Aye.**

**SI: You know?**

**VB: Well, it's very important, I think, to talk to folk--**

**SI: Uhuh.**

**VB: About this sort of thing. Em, and just find out from people--**

**SI: Aye.**

**VB: What, what it was like.**

**SI: Aye, aye. Well your manner of approach is very good.**

**VB: Aw, thanks very much.**

SI: It really is. You're a pleasant person. And, I hope to have made the grade.

**VB: Well, I hope so. It's very interesting to talk to yourself.**

SI: Aye, ah, well as long as you're built up and that and you like it, you know?

**VB: Aye.**

SI: It's not a drag, you know, and you're wondering "If I'll ever do this or if I'll ever do that," you know? There is plenty's went into college and just dropped out because they never, sometimes it was their parents couldn't pay for it and that, you know?

**VB: Aye.**

SI: But on the other hand, eh, it's good that you've made it, aye. So, you might be back again?

**VB: I might, I might be, yeah.**

SI: Was it just this twice you were to come, really?

**VB: Aye, aye. But I, I'll maybe come and catch up with some of the others that were playing the dominos and things today.**

SI: Aye, aye. They'll be able to tell you stories, you know. That, eh, well, I mean, I've tried to tell you a bit. [laughs]

**VB: It's been really interesting. It's been really interesting. It's nice of you to come especially when the others are busy. I appreciate that.**

SI: You need to go away again. So, I'll let you know how the other half of the world got on. [laughs]  
Aye.

**VB: That's right. Aye. I suppose I better let you get back to the others. I hope it's not so noisy for you just now.**

SI: I'll need to take this glass back, you know.

**VB: Aye.**

SI: The boss is off ill. She's--

**VB: Rita?**

SI: Aye, Rita, she'd swollen glands. So, I think, she was in - she wasn't in hospital – maybe just overnight, or something like that. But eh, she's no another business you know, but she'll be back.

**VB: She's had quite bad health hasn't she? She's had a few health problems.**

SI: Aye. And her husband was having the heart attacks and that. She's a lot to contend with, you know.

**VB: Aye.**

SI: With different things, you know.

**VB: Aye.**

SI: You've got to get the education for, to do these things, you know. Not everyone's blessed with higher education. I was one [who] wasn't. [laughs] I had to educate myself as I got older. [laughs] [My mother's approach?] I had to learn how to. But eh, ach.

**VB: Right, so it sounds like you had some interesting jobs along the way, from what you've been saying.**

SI: Aye, aye, aye. Oh aye. I was in service and all, you know.

**VB: Aye right, I didn't realise that.**

**SI:** Aye. We couldn't get jobs years and years ago when I was young. And you had to go to this training school and then when the training school finished you got sent out to, you know, whoever was wanting a maid, you would say, a servant. So I got sent out to this old woman. And I think her two sons was petty officers and that, you know. But eh, every, all of the message boys and all that would come away out and I would talk to them, you know. This morning she got up and she said you know, "Sarah, how you can manage your work, but when you come to do that stair, you are not to talk." And I'd say "Where do you stay, son?" [laughs] I would ask them where they stayed [lived]! So I says to my mother, you got thirty shillings a month, and whenever you got that she would tell you well, you are needing a uniform. My mother's waiting on my money, you know. 'Cause we were poor! And I says "Aw, I can't do that, because," I says, "my mother's waiting on my wages", which was the truth. And ... "Oh well, you'll have to get a uniform." So that was it, my mother says, my mother was an Irish woman, you know, and she says, "Bejesus, you're getting no uniform, just give it up, get into sweetie working, get in here." [laughs]

**VB: Oh dear.**

**SI:** Aw, it was terrible how scarce money was in they days. Food was cheap, oh food was cheap, it was that cheap. Some of the poor people, well, I mean we weren't bad, my father had a decent job. He was a tradesman, you know? And, eh, we weren't all that bad. But, eh, well, we were still poor. Huh! I remember my first job and, eh, I think it was twenty-one shillings or something like that was the wage. From eight o'clock till five at night. So, aye, it was twenty-one shillings. I had to give my mother the pound! [laughs] That was my pocket money! A bar of chocolate or something like that and it was finished! [laughs] Oh, I love to talk about it, it's real. I'm pretty comfortable now though. I have a nice home and a good son. You know.

**VB: Aye.**

**SI:** And, eh. I'm a Catholic. The van comes and gets me. Gets us, takes us to mass and then takes us home.

**VB: Oh, well that's handy.**

**SI:** I might live a wee while yet.

**VB:** I'm sure, I'm sure. I'm sure that's right.

**SI:** Well, I have to go dear. It's been nice meeting you darling. Nice.

**VB:** Thanks very much.

**SI:** God bless you.

**VB:** You too.

**SI:** And may you reach the top. I think you will, with God's goodness.

**VB:** It's very kind of you.

**SI:** [laughs]

[End of Interview]