

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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\* Transcript ID: SM-92-004AT001

\* CCINTB Transcript ID: 92-4-17a-ae

\* Tapes: SM-92-004OT001

\* CCINTB Tapes ID: T94-4

\* Length: 01:19:58

\* Glasgow, 21 November 1994: Valentina Bold interviews Sheila McWhinnie

\* Transcribed by Valentina Bold/Standardised by Jamie Terrill

\* SM = Sheila McWhinnie/TM= Tricia (Sheila's daughter)/VB = Valentina Bold

\* Notes: First of two interviews with Sheila McWhinnie (VB gives incorrect date in tape intro); Sound Quality: Good; This interview was originally transcribed in a phonetic manner. The original phonetic version can be accessed through our physical collection; please contact Lancaster University Library for more details.

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[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[VB introductions and completion of archive form]

**VB: So you don't mind if I go ahead and ask you a few questions?**

**SM:** No. As I say, I'm used to it with George [SM's son-in-law is a history teacher who has interviewed her in the past about her experiences of Glasgow life]

**VB: Oh, that's just as well, because I sometimes feel that these sort of big forms....**

**SM:** Well, as I say, he asked me to write a few pages! In fact he sent a wee girl from the school with a tape recorder one time!

**VB: Oh, right! So, it's Sheila McWhinnie, is that your full name?**

**SM:** Aye. O'Connor was my own name. When I worked in the cinemas it was O'Connor. Sheila O'Connor.

[TM brings in tea and assorted cakes--comments relating to this]

**VB: And what's your date of birth?**

**SM:** [month and date redacted], 1919. I have to put the two nineteens in, because it's rather awkward! My husband used to say, why've you got to put the two 19s in? Because everyone thinks you've just put the 1919 in and forgot the other half! You know!

**VB: Right! Whereabouts were you born?**

**SM:** In the Gorbals, where the Nautical College is now. It was called [street name and number redacted]. It became then Ballater Street, or Ballater Street. Everyone in the Gorbals called it Ballater Street! They changed a lot of streets in the Gorbals. There was South Wellington Street, they changed that to Longmuir Street. There was Rose Street, became [Florin Street?] where Benny Lynch was born. Because there were a lot of streets called Wellington Street in the town, and that was South Wellington Street... and the one we stayed in eventually was South Charlotte Street, [Campden?] Street. And that was the one on the corner, Ballater Street.

**VB: It must have changed a bit actually from when you were growing up there?**

**SM:** It hasn't half. Evidently it was the worst housing in Europe, they said at that time, the Gorbals [all laugh]

**VB: That leads on to what I was going to ask next, which was what was it that your father did?**

**SM:** My father went through the war, [likely referring to World War One] he was sixteen when he joined up. He got all his stuff, and he was wounded. He joined up, because he was only sixteen but his mother had died. It was a big family and his father took to the drink and eh, what it was, he joined and he was taken. Nobody bothered what age you were, so he was there for four year. He came out and he got a job, believe it or not, sweeping the streets. Then that job went, and he was

on the labour exchange for years. He did make some money on his own, selling fish, you know? Things like that, on his own. Going round fairgrounds and things...

**VB: Yeh. Like many others, of course.**

**SM:** A lot had to do that, uhuh. He knocked out quite good money, but as I say, my mother was a terrible gambler. So, we could've had, what you wouldn't say a good life, but an easier life, but she gambled it all with the bookie. The unfortunate thing was the bookie was at your corner. You wouldn't thought Benny Lynch, to box, had been a policeman, retired, he became a bookie. He was at one corner, Patsy [Lannagan?], the other one, was at the other corner, so there was bookies everywhere!

[tea and cakes offered by TM, general conversation on this]

**VB: And did your mother work at all herself?**

**SM:** My mother never worked in her life! She just spent the money! [laughs] On her gambling!

**VB: How many sisters and brothers did you have?**

**SM:** I'm the eldest of five. There was two brothers and two sisters.

**VB: Two brothers and two sisters. What school was it you went to?**

**SM:** It was called St Luke's, and it was in the Gorbals, and then there was St Luke's School went away. It was a church, St Luke's. It was always there the church. Now I've discovered it's St John something. Funny name! It's something they've discovered recently. It's all changed from St Luke's.

**VB: And I know you worked in the cinema? Was that what you did all your life?**

**SM:** No, my first job was for a fortnight, making overalls, and you were supposed to be an apprentice. Then at the end of the fortnight you were making the overalls, but you were still on an apprentice's wage! It was five shillings a week for, twenty-five pence! You brought your own scissors and your own cup! [laughs] At the end of the fortnight, somebody come in to there, and she said

she'd worked in this sweetie factory, M and Ms, not the M&M's you know now. It's not there now, it was Macmillan and Munros. It was actually somebody called Hunter that owned it, and she says, "It's ten bob a week in there!" So this preys on my mind, and it did for a long while, for a long while, so this girl and I decided, because her mother was a widow, with about five or six of them, we'd give up this job there and then, it was a Friday, we got our money, and the next Monday morning we'd go along to the sweetie factory. So we did that, we got to this sweetie factory, there was a big row of us, and I'm standing there with all my certificates from the school. I was a very clever girl at the school. Standing there like this. They picked me from this because I was standing there with the certificates! Went along and he says, "Up the stairs!" and I got the job. But what worried me was Agnes King, whose mother was a widow, who needed this job, never got the job. There was she out of a job, and I persuaded her to come. So that went on for a month. Every day I was there, this lassie standing there waiting for a job, and it was terrible to pass her and go up that stair. At the end of the month she finally got a job, and she was up, I could breathe easy! So I was three years in the sweetie factory which was really very hard, dirty work. And I was telling Tricia just the other day, just yesterday, wasn't it? Anyone that was sixteen, as soon as you were sixteen, they came on your birthday and give you your books, because they had to pay the Big Stamp. And when I turned sixteen I was ill. That day I was ill, I was working up waiting on my books coming. I was really ill, and they didn't come! I was some good worker that they kept going, I must have worked like a nigger. It was the good workers they kept on. And I finally kept there till I was seventeen and a half, when they finally did come, and they didn't give me my books, but they'd say, "You're suspended until we open a new bit of the factory" which was just another way. So that's when I went on the cinemas. I was off one or two weeks and I couldn't afford the money, so I went to the Labour Exchange and I said, "Look, I've not been sent after a job, I can't afford to be off all this time" So she said "Oh, you're only suspended!" And I said, "You don't think they're going to send for me, are they?" Never. So she says, "There's a job for you, in the New Star cinema. This is the only one I've got, I've nothing for anywhere else. She says, "There's a job at the New Star, do you want to go along?" To this day I remember. I went along to the cinema and sitting there on one of the seats, and "This is a great job! This is great! Much better." And the foreman, eh the manager came along, gave me a sum to do, and I still remember it! Ninety-two sevenpence ha'pennies! And I got it all wrong! I think it was the excitement. I couldn't do it, and I was sitting thinking! No I can do it in my head! I never counted from the day I went into the sweetie factory, you had no need to! And he said, he looked at the thing and he said, "Aw, start anyway!" Do you know where he put me? In the cash desk! Somebody that got a sum wrong! So, I was in the cash desk there, it was a wee, it was a big cash desk. So I worked there for three and a half years, and we then moved, and the war [referring to World War Two]

came on. And when the war came on, it was two buses and a subway to that cinema. So eventually I went straight into town to the, it used to be the Picture House, then it became the Gaumont, and now it's the Savoy Centre! So I worked there for about six month, but that was only the evenings, but the money was rubbish, so I still needed money. It was rubbish. So in the day I would go to the labour exchange, and they finally said there was a full time job in the Regal, which is now, it used to be ABC and then it became Cannon, and now it's Metro Goldwyn Mayer, that's what it is now. So I got a job in the Regal, and that was about six years in all in the cinemas, in the three cinemas. And I was saying to Tricia the other day, I went to the doctor's one day. And I've got emphysema now. And I went to the doctor's one day and I never smoked, two cigarettes in the whole of my life. And aye this old doctor says, "Where did you work?" "In the cinema." "That's a dirty job, that's a really dirty job." And I says, "How do you mean, it's a dirty job?" All in a uniform, nice and clean compared to the sweetie factory. I know now what he meant. Everybody smoked, everybody, and there was an awful lot of TB, you were in amongst this all day, so I finally found out what the man meant! [laughs] He was right.

**TM:** She never smoked.

**SM:** I was in the hospital the other day, and one of the doctors come up, and "How many cigarettes are you smoking now?" Oh I was really annoyed, because I've never smoked!

**VB:** That's interesting. It's something you would never...

**SM:** Aye. Well, they didn't know about passive smoking in these days, you know. [clearing up cups]

**VB [indicating questions]:** I'll just finish these up then. Have you ever been a member of a political party, or have strong political beliefs, or...?

**SM:** I've got strong political beliefs, yes. Very left wing! [laughs] Been in Russia six times!

**VB:** Really!

**SM:** I've got the dolls up there! [several painted Russian dolls] It all fell apart. But I still think, I don't believe in the capitalist system. Well, obviously if you came from the Gorbals, you're not going to

believe in the capitalist system are you? Not when you're at the bottom, maybe if I was at the top!  
[laughs]

**VB: What about religious beliefs?**

**SM:** I was born a Catholic, but I've got nothing. And when I go to the hospital, I keep saying "Nothing" and then you get the minister, and you get the priest! [laughs] It's very awkward!

**VB: What about where you've lived. Is it, where did you live then, after the Gorbals?**

**SM:** It was, as I say, two buses and a subway to the cinema.

**VB: And have you been in this sort of area ever since?**

**SM:** Unfortunately yes. I've been fifteen years in this. What happened then, I was one of the first in the call-up range. When the war [referring to World War Two] started, they called women up and I was the first, my age group, I was the first. And luckily, Rolls Royce was just up the road from Cardonald, and that was where I landed up, in my own place. We moved then, the house in the Gorbals was above a pub and one day they decided the building was bulging out and the pub was about to bulge out. And they sent us off to Maryhill. They were building, this was the thirties and they started building these houses in Maryhill. You know, these with the bathrooms. So the whole block, en-masse, went to Maryhill. And that's when I worked in the Star [New Star], because I could walk down, and that was Maryhill. And then, I don't know where we landed in. Cardonald, we landed in on Cardonald. And was there three and a half years. That's where I met my husband. These houses were built for Rolls Royce. They must have known the war was coming. In '38, they had twenty factories built there, over at Rolls Royce, sixteen factories and they came, it was 20,000 people. All these houses were built for them, the whole place, workers, it wasn't corporation, and everybody had to work for Rolls Royce to get a house, and they thought it was marvellous. Because you got a house with a bathroom on it, those who had never had a house, you know? And a job in the Rolls, which had a good name and all, you know?

**VB: I see, whenabouts were you married?**

**SM:** 1943.

**VB: What was it your husband did?**

**SM:** He was a, he'd been a motor mechanic, and he was in a reserved occupation. He got called into Rolls.

**VB: Right, of course! [both laugh] Silly of me!**

**SM:** These were all men, bachelors, in their thirties, who had never really mixed with women, because they had worked as motor mechanics, and they'd never! And all of a sudden, here were these twenty-year-olds! Working with these thirty-year-olds! And the marriage rate was phenomenal! [laughs] And of course you were getting a house with a bathroom which a lot of them never had! [laughs]

**VB: How many children do you have altogether?**

**SM:** Just the two girls.

**VB: Well, that's the easy part over! [both laugh] The other thing that I'd like to ask you is [SM asks if warm enough, discussion of heat] the other thing I'd like to ask you is, we've got, em, these tapes that we're making are going to be kept in the university,**

**SM:** Uhuh.

**VB: And I was wondering if you had any objection to other people listening to them in the future? I'm talking about, you know, people researching the cinema and...?**

**SM:** No, no.

**VB: Well, if that's the case, I'd like to ask you to sign a form [both laugh] just to say that's all right, and to keep everything straight.**

**SM:** It is all right. [signs forms]

**VB: Thanks very much. I brought along a couple of photos for you to see, but I'm interested in these ones [SM had mentioned, pre-tape, photographs of co-workers in the New Star]**

**SM: It's the New Star cinema, It's just some a boy took.**

**VB: Right. I was quite interested as well in, when you said that about being brought up in the Gorbals, and what the film meant to you.**

**SM:** It meant a lot. This is what I was saying to Patricia. There was only two outlets in the Gorbals. One was the cinema, and the people lived in them. I mean, it was quite common for people to live in a single apartment. Luckily we didn't. We had a room and kitchen. But there was seven of us. And the only outlet they could get was the cinema. They were very cheap and there was one on every corner. I could name all the cinemas to you that was in the Gorbals. There was practically one on every corner, so people lived in them, they really did. The kids went in for a penny, when the matinees were on they cadged money for them. I've never yet though found the jam jars, for all the cinemas I've worked in! Never been [laughs] anywhere you could sell the jam jars! Never, ever! I think that's a tall tale. But, eh, there was that and the wee dance halls on the corners when they got up to teenagers, and that was it. There was nothing, there was no money for anything else, and people did live. As I say, my mother used to go into the cinema and it used to carry her away. When she went back into the house, she was in an absolute foul mood! [laughs] Because she was back into reality, you know? But it was, eh, you wonder how we did because it was really from when you were a kid. Because we were desperately poor in the Gorbals, tuberculosis was rife. You would be playing with pals who looked hale and hearty, and the next minute they would disappear, you wouldn't see them, and where we stayed in [Campden?] Street, which became South Charlotte Street, where we stayed the whole close was Lithuanians, that came over from Lithuania, and I don't know whether they felt this was a stigma, but they never seemed to take them to the hospital, they just stayed in the house till they died. So you would be playing in the house for one minute, with your pal, and you wouldn't see them for months and then they'd be dead. It was really dreadful, it really was. It was really rife, it really was. And it was a big thing if a kid died, if a kid died it became like a party! That was the only time you got into the house! Soon as a kid died it was, "Come on, you'll get in and see her!" So you went into see this wee kid in its coffin, you know, somebody you'd played with. [pause]

**VB: It's hard to imagine now, when you say that. [pause] You were saying that your mother was in a foul mood sometimes, when she came back in?**



**SM:** [laugh] Back to reality.

**VB: Were the cinemas quite grand then in the Gorbals?**

**SM:** They were a lot grander than the houses, but they weren't grand. There would be carpets on the floors and things like that that you wouldn't have; it was linoleum, you know? They weren't, in the city they were pretty, I was telling Tricia there, in the city, there was always a restaurant, of course, and you could order a meal and it was brought down to where you were sitting in the cinema, in the Regal. And she said, "Oh, I'd like that" and I said, "Oh, I didn't know they didn't still, that they'd stopped that." I thought it was still going on!

**VB: Is that right? So were there tables in them, then?**

**SM:** In the La Scala, I didn't know where that is now, it was based in the Savoy Centre, there was a part where you could sit, there was a restaurant part. It was an awful nuisance, because there was dings of china and everything at that. You could sit in this half and watch the cinema, and this half was just the seats. But in the Regal, in your ordinary seat you could order up a meal and it was brought into your ordinary seat, so you could sit and eat your meal in the seat. That was in the Regal.

**VB: Did they sell drinks and things as well, then?**

**SM:** No, no, there was no alcohol at all.

**VB: I'm just asking that because I know a cinema in the Borders where they serve drink as well.**

**SM:** I think they do it now, but they didn't. There was no alcohol.

**VB: And the more local ones, in the Gorbals, did they have these bench seats I've heard people talking about?**

**SM:** No. The only bench seats I ever found was in the Princess's [theatre] which is now the Citizens'. It used to be the Princess's and it had bench seats, up in the balcony, the gallery, and they used to

come along, when things got tight, and lift you, like that! [lifting motion gripping arms] along! And [laughs] when you were shoved up you'd get back in again, trying to get more room! You know.

[offered more tea]

**VB: The ones round where you were, they weren't the bench seats then?**

**SM:** No, no, no, they were never, we must have been a wee bit toffy! [laughs]

**VB: Did you go to the cinema quite a lot yourself when you were a child?**

**SM:** Yes. I was actually taken in arms and that was very common, for a kid for children to, as soon as you were born, you were just taken, wrapped up in a shawl and taken. In fact in one, they called it the Bees [referring to the Wellington Palace], I don't know why they called it the Bees, it was South Wellington Street and it, Lawmoor Street it became. And this cinema, and they'd had a competition, they used to try things like that, to get you in, but they never really needed it. And it was people walking up and down with their shawls and their babies on the stage, and to see who could do this best! [laughs] Everybody, but everybody went with their baby in their shawl! And the rest of the family, when they could afford it.

**VB: So you were saying about your mother, did a lot of women go during the day?**

**SM:** Not during the day, mostly at night. The first show, mostly at night, six o'clock, say, till about eight. Mostly at night, very, very seldom during the day. In fact, these cinemas in the Gorbals, I don't think they were ever open during the day, they were only open at night. The ones in the city did, right enough, and the New Star did in Maryhill, it did.

**VB: So it was something to do after the housework and...**

**SM:** In the evening, uhuh.

**VB: Right, I see. I mean, was it expensive then?**

**SM:** No, I remember distinctly what it was. It was fourpence for the ordinary flat, and sixpence for the balcony, which in the Star it must have been a bit upmarket, 'cause it was sixpence for the flat and ninepence for the balcony! [laughs] And of course in the city one and six for the back stalls, and I can't remember, probably two shillings, I remember the one and six.

**VB: I mean, you say they sold, did they sell sweeties and ice cream?**

**SM:** Aye, all these things. In the New Star, when I first arrived, now it was the Regal, I cannot remember about the New Star, funnily enough. In the Regal, you could eh, take on the choc ices, that was what they sold, and you could take these on, when the break was on, and you could make, whatever number of boxes you sold you'd get so much rebate back, you know, you made up a wee bit extra money on your wage, you know, if you wanted to do it, but some people felt it was beneath them and didn't do it, but I did it! [laughs]

**VB: I mean, I was very interested by your work, because you were an usherette and a cashier, is that right?**

**SM:** Aye, in the Star I was a cashier, in the Regal and the Picture House I was an usherette.

**VB: What actual duties did you have as an usherette?**

**SM:** You sat and, this is funny what I'm doing now is what I did then! I'm sitting watching all the old thirties films, because I very seldom see any, and all the old thirties films, and I'm sitting here and I'll suddenly say, "God, this is what I was doing sixty year ago, sitting watching these, and here I am still at it, sitting watching the same film!" But you had a wee, there was a corridor, and there was a wee seat that come up, it come up against the wall when you stood up. So you sat there and as they came in the door, you jumped up with your torch, and took them to wherever you wanted filled up. Once that passage was filled up, you went on to the second one and so forth, you know? And filled it all up and that was up, came down and sat in your wee seat, and that was it. In the afternoon you got peace, and in the evening you got no peace! And suddenly sit and realise, "I'm watching the same films as I watched sixty year ago, and I'm doing the same thing! [laughs!] And I'm not happy! [laughs]

**VB: I mean, did you have a uniform?**

**SM:** Uniform? Unfortunately, I've no pictures of me in the uniforms. You had very nice uniforms and they used to send them to get tailor made and all this. And I don't know what happened to this, pictures of me in the uniform, I've got none of them, I've only got this staff. In the Star it was a wee bloke it was an Irishman called McMann he had owned six cinemas, he had actually started off with pig farms in Ireland, and then he had six cinemas, I could tell you all them. And what else did he have? Clyde football team. McMann his name was. And he used to come round on a Saturday, round all his cinemas, with his chauffeur and his big car. And he was so mean, that you bought, at seventeen and sixpence was what you got for a wage, you'd to buy your own black dress, and what they supplied for a uniform was collars out of Woolworths, and say for six or seven usherettes, seven collars let's say, and you'd put them on your black dress and that was it! He was mean!  
[laughs]

**VB: I mean, did they expect you to be fairly smart?**

**SM:** They did, they did, aye. They never took anybody very tall, I think. I was only five foot two, I think it was, probably in the Gorbals they were all five foot two! But eh, I think you were better being kind of small, going up and down. You didn't need to have to, they didn't want too tall a person to go up, you took up less room! [laughs]

**VB: Was it all women then?**

**SM:** It was all women as usherettes, there was a few men, but they were mostly doormen and things like that, there was no men going up and down the alleys, you know.

**VB: And you worked as a cashier as well?**

**SM:** In the New Star, uhuh.

**VB: What did that involve?**

**SM:** Well, I was thinking the other day, in the Saturday matinee there'd be about six hundred kids. They were only a penny. But when you worked that out, that was only a few pounds, wasn't it? I

mean two-hundred-and-forty pennies to the pound, so five hundred, that was roughly about a couple of pounds! What was that all about? Because they did have the men to keep them in order, that was the only time the men were up and down, and the doormen at the front and the usherettes and [laughs] they can't have made very much money, we must have been getting paid so little, you know? You wonder about it, just the other day, six hundred, that's rubbish! [laughs] I remember one time it was an awfully good picture, one of the times it was about sixty pounds. And it was on recently, what was the name of it? *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*. And some pictures really got huge queues, you know? If it was something good you got a big queue, and if it was really good, not so much in the Star, they had a change twice a week, but in the town, if it was good they kept it for a fortnight. They usually kept their films for a week but if it was good they kept it for a fortnight. And then latterly when I left they used to keep it for months. We'd never have done that. We couldn't. I mean *The Sound of Music*, that was on for months. We could never have done that, we'd have went bammy [mad]!

**VB: I mean, how often did they change then?**

**SM:** In the New Star they changed twice a week, and in the city it was once a full week, and then it was changed the second week.

**VB: I mean, can I ask you about something you said that was really interesting, about the children. How did the children behave in these matinees? [both laugh] I mean if they needed someone to keep them in order?**

**SM:** Oh aye! Some of them spent their day running up and down to the toilet. They did boo the villain, you know? It was very noisy, very, very, noisy. And they needed to bring the men in for that particular. They ran amok, they really, really did. And they kept the men in to get them back in, and they did shout and bawl, and I don't know if they ever heard. It was 'Hi Ho Silver' at the matinees, he's on now again! [laughs] That was one of the stars! That was one that was on. They did things like that. Brought them back every Saturday!

**VB: Did they have a club or anything?**

**SM:** No, they had no clubs, nothing like that, nothing.

**VB: I mean, what about the adults, how did they behave?**

**SM:** They were in the main, very very quiet, never any problems. The one problem you did have, now I can't remember if it was the Star or the Regal, I think it was the city. What they called 'Seat Shifters'. And these were blokes and, I think it was the Star, it was "Keep an eye on him, he's a Seat Shifter!" He'd go and sit beside a lone girl, and then we don't know what happened after that, and then the girl would move, and then he'd sit a wee while, and then he would move. And, when he came in at first, the doorman would say, "He's a Seat Shifter, keep your eye on him!" [laughs] So that was about the only problem that I ever remember in these cinemas.

**VB: So, not something to do on your own then, with the Seat Shifters! [both laugh]. I mean, did they have any, I've heard people talking about 'chummy seats'?**

**SM:** The Picture House, that was the Playhouse, now that's the Playhouse I'm talking about, they used to talk about the divans at the back, the back ones. Uhuh! I used to hear them talking about that, but I never ever experienced them! [laughs] Just doublers I remember, but not them.

**VB: Was it mainly couples that went to the pictures?**

**SM:** No, everybody, but everybody went. You could walk in on your own and think nothing of it. You just walked in. You know, everybody went. It was not a great deal to walk in on your own, but as I say there was these Seat Shifters, but there was not many, maybe one or two they would say, "A Seat Shifter".

**VB: Would they put them out?**

**SM:** If they thought they had done that, if they thought there were too many girls getting out of their seats, yes, they'd get put out eventually.

**VB: I mean, how often did you go to the pictures yourself?**

**SM:** Before I was working there? I'd say twice, three times a week easily. Easily. As I say, that was the only outlet, until you discovered the dancing. And then there was Diamond's Dancing Academy in the Gorbals. That sounds good, doesn't it! And that's where we all went to learn. And of course

every wee church had its wee dance hall. And, och up the road, everywhere, it was like the cinemas, there was a wee dance hall everywhere. So from about sixteen you started going Saturday nights, and sometimes week nights. And when, in your teenage you gave up the cinema quite a lot, you know? But unfortunately by that time I'd got hooked into the cinema as a job. But up until then, you went to the dancing once you became a teenager.

**VB: That's interesting. So you, sort of switched?**

**SM:** Over, yes. None of the married couples did, you know, the families and people, they didn't go, just the teenagers. And as I say there was wee dance halls everywhere, and a wee dance hall. And you had no distance to walk, you had no bus fares. Both for the cinema and the dance hall, you had no bus fares, so that was good too.

**VB: Did you say what the dance hall was in the Gorbals?**

**SM:** Diamond's. There was Diamond's Dancing Academy. That was, that sounded good, didn't it! I'll tell you where it was. See the Citizens [Theatre] now? There was the Palace Cinema and it was the Citizens, and somewhere in there there was a big close, and you climbed up the stairs and that was Diamond's Dancing Academy. Tricia might be able to mind [remember] more, she's not at the age to mind Diamond's Dancing Academy, but she goes to the Citizens a lot. The Princess's Theatre, the Palace first, the Princess's on that side, and in the middle Diamond's Dancing Academy. It was actually quite a big ballroom up the stair. I think he had two, the Learners and the Advanced [classes]. And you went to the Learners for a few weeks, and then you went to the advanced. It was quite good actually! It was sixpence, which was quite dear! [expensive]

**VB: Did any of the cinemas, I've heard some people say there was a cinema and a dancehall.**

**SM:** That was only the Play [Playhouse], that was the Playhouse. That was the only one. That was the only one that ever had that that I knew.

**VB: And did people move between?**

**SM:** No, I don't think so. You had to, you went to the dancing or you went to the cinema.

**VB: Aye, I see. 'Cause I wasn't quite clear about that.**

**SM: Do you want the big light on? You finding that dark?**

**VB: No, I'm fine, I'm fine. No, I've just got a note of things I really wanted to ask you about so.**

**SM: Well, go ahead, go ahead. We'll have a wee blether [chat], and I'll wait till you ask me! [both laugh]**

**VB: Well, I was wanting to ask you as well about the other workers in the cinema. I mean, you mentioned there were men.**

**SM: Mhm.**

**VB: At the door. Did they have organists or anything in the cinemas you worked in?**

**SM: In the Regal they had the organist. Oh God, I used to remember their names, one was Shaw, Gerald Shaw I think his name was. They had the organist in the Regal and they had the organist in the Picture House, and it was quite good. You know, they were down below and they came up and it was quite good. They only came in, of course, played the organ and then when that session was done away out and then back for the next session. So you never really got to know them very well, you know?**

**VB: Aye. I mean were they the sort of people who were doing other work as well? Or were they?**

**SM: I don't think they did anything else. I mean they made enough with that to keep it going. Who was the other bloke now, at the Picture House. I used to know their names but I'm getting a bit [laughs] senile I think!**

**VB: [both laugh] Not at all!**

**SM: I used to know their names.**



**VB: Right, because I was interested in that, and when you were talking about the competitions as well. Did they have turns at all?**

**SM:** They had turns in the wee cinemas, not in the big cinemas. In the wee cinemas they always tried to bring the turns up on the stage: 'Go as you please' and things like that. And as I said, the ones where they posed with the shawls and the babies.

**VB: Right. I mean, did they do songs or?**

**SM:** Whoever could sing, aye. It was that kind of thing, you know, it was. I can't mind [remember] mikes in these days, funnily enough, they must have had, but I cannot remember. But it was all to get you in and it was only one cinema that did that, the Bees [referring to the Wellington Palace]. They called it the Bees but I never found out why. [both laugh] Only in the one cinema.

**VB: Whereabouts was that?**

**SM:** That was in the Gorbals. That was in the, it's still there, called Lawmoor Street. It was, South Wellington Street, as I told you, they changed it to Lawmoor Street, and that was where the Bees was. Don't ask me what the right name was! I think it was the Wellington Cinema [referring to Wellington Palace], but I wouldn't swear to that!

**VB: Right. Mm, I mean the other thing I was wanting to ask was, I mean did you basically just go to the pictures a couple of times a week, I mean did you just go to what was on?**

**SM:** You just went to whatever was on, really. You'd meet your pals and somebody would decide where to go, and that was it. That's if you had the money. I was telling, and here's a tale, I don't digress too much. All my pals had tuppence one time, that's what it cost to go, in the evening. And all my pals had tuppence and I had a ha'penny, and they were all going. And it was the time, we were somewhere about fourteen, we were interested in boyfriends. So the boyfriends were going and all. And I still hadn't. I was telling them about this the other night, funnily. And we all arrived at this cafe and that's the only thing I ever gamble on, and I still do funnily enough, the bandit machine. So I went in with a ha'penny and they were all passing me, going to the cinema, and I went, "Oh, I might as well just gamble this". So I gambled it, and won the jackpot! Which was three shillings! Well that was seventy-two ha'pennies! [laughs] But you didn't get money, you'd to take goods! [both

laugh] So I thought, "What can I sell?" It was no use taking piles of sweeties, because I still couldn't get in to the cinema! So I thought, "I'll buy the smokes: Woodbine. If I get Woodbine and sell them to him for a penny, when it's tuppence for five, I can get enough to get in here! So [laughs] I got it mostly in Woodbine and things like that, and ran away down and got my tuppence! [laughs] And ran away into the cinema! It was Maureen sitting there yesterday. I says, "I don't gamble." That's me finished with the lottery. I just did it once for my birthday. "But you gamble on these bandit machines!" [both laugh]. And I says, "I'm afraid I got hooked on them!" [both laugh]

**VB: You were lucky at that! Lucky at that obviously!**

**SM:** I got hooked, I don't think I've won the jackpot since! But I could go that night, with sweets galore, the big shot! [laughs] That was almost like winning the lottery though, when you think on it!

**VB: Aye!**

**SM:** A ha'penny into seventy-two! [both laugh]

**VB. I mean, em, what about your own taste in films? Do you have favourite stars?**

**SM:** I still like the old thirties, even yet. I feel the stories were better. They didn't sort of bore you. I don't know, they had the, they could go at a merry pace, they kept you interested. I mean, even yet if I find a good old black-and-white, I prefer it. I think they, I don't know, the pace was better, somehow. Not so much car chasing and things like that. I mean, there was good stories then, you know? Really. That was good stories. I might be a bit biased, I don't know! [laughs].

**VB: I mean, did you prefer the American films or the British films?**

**SM:** I preferred the American films every time. The British films were. I'm not going to. They used to put trailers on, what they called trailers, and see when it was a British film? The cinemas were empty. They were really diabolical. They really were. There were one or two good ones out of hundreds of terrible ones. They really were honestly terrible. Well they had this accent that nobody could follow [laughs] but everyone could follow the American accent! They had this accent that nobody could follow! [laughs] Well it was nobody really, I'm not kidding you! There was a terrible dearth in the New Star cinema when there was a British film on. Nobody went. Nobody went.

**VB: That's interesting. Why was that?**

**SM:** They just didn't make good films. They really, honestly didn't know how. They make not bad films now, and some of them are really good. But they didn't then. And they had this high-class accent and women, you know, they never came down to earth somehow. They just didn't have the know-how. Just didn't. Even now if I see a British film on, I'm apt to give it the bye and go, you know, to the other film, even yet!

**VB: It's interesting that, 'cause I mean I've heard other folk say that as well. I mean, I brought a list with me of some of the, you know, the more popular films and I was wondering, I mean, I'm sure you'll recognise.**

**SM:** I'll just put the big light on, will I now?

**VB: I'll put the big light on if you like.**

**SM:** Aye. [pauses to look at list] I remember Ralph Lynn, funnily enough. They weren't bad, *The Love Parade*, I remember it. Gracie Fields, she wasn't bad, we could stand her! [laughs] But I never did like her. I mean, I don't remember the titles. I remember Norma Shearer, Clark Gable, Sunshine Susie. Jack Hulbert, he was British, no I didn't like him! [laughs] Ronald Colman, Myrna Loy, *I was a Spy*, I dimly remember that film. *Cavalcade*: I should remember that, but I don't. That was a good one, that was a British one, *The Private Life of Henry VIII*.

**VB: What was that like?**

**SM:** Charles Laughton was good. He was good. I mean, that was his wife. *Queen Christina*. I mean, I remember all these, but nothing could, but I do, that was a good. [pause]

**VB: Do you think that they made good historical films, the British?**

**SM:** No, och, there was maybe one out of about twenty or something like that, you knew. That was a good one, I worked with that one. That one lasted a fortnight. I think. It must have been good!

[laughs]

**VB: Is that right?**

**SM:** Aye, Gary Cooper. That was a good one. That I don't remember, *Victoria the Great*, Shirley Temple, that I, that one, everybody went to see her. George Formby I hated. He actually came into the Regal.

**VB: Is that right?**

**SM:** Aye. We had a few, there's another tale I must tell you. He came in to.

**VB: [indicates] I'll just turn this over.**

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

**SM:** Just looking down your list, *Three Smart Girls*, that lasted a fortnight. Eh, George Formby came into the cinema. I don't know what he was in for. He came in, but they knew he was coming, you know what I mean? And he come in, and he was, the wee page boy was taking him up to the manager, but there was a reception and a wee group waiting on him. As the page boy's taking him up, he says, "Can I have your autograph?" And the page boy was, he was quite curt with him, and "No! I don't give autographs! I don't give autographs to anybody!" And the page boy was quite hurt, and I never liked George Formby after that [laughs]. Another thing that happened was, David Niven, I was standing at the back stalls, and this man comes in with uniform on, and he was standing talking to me. And it was a David Niven film that was on. And I'm looking at this bloke, and I'm saying, 'That's David Niven! But it can't be, he's got a British uniform on! It's not David Niven!' So I thought, and he stood and he chatted for quite some time and then he went and he sat down. And it was only afterwards that I discovered that he had joined the British Army, came back from, and he came in and saw his own film! [laughs] So it was quite a few of them did that.

**VB: Is that right?**

**SM:** Who was that big fat bloke [man], who was that? I was telling them; they knew him. One of those big fat blokes, I mind seeing him. Quite a few of them come in. But that was David Niven and I was frightened to say! [laughs]

**VB: What was the film?**

**SM:** Oh God, I can't remember. It was during the war anyway! So, *In the Air*, George Formby. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, I didn't work with that but I liked it. Most of them I'm too old now to remember but *Two Smart Girls* [sic] I do remember very well. *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* A do remember. They were both in the Regal I'm quite sure! [laughs]

**VB: Interesting.**

**SM:** And they lasted the fortnight anyway!

**VB: What about your own favourite stars?**

**SM:** Bing Crosby. Ah, I know what I've got, I've got somewhere, Bing Crosby's autograph, a wee letter.

**VB: Really.**

**SM:** Aye. If I thought I'd have dug it out for you! I mean, I could dig it out but it'd take quite a bit digging out! What've I got? I'm trying to think. My memory's really getting poor now. Eh, Bing Crosby I did like, and before I ever worked in the cinemas I went to my cousin's house and she had all of their addresses this day, and she was writing to all the different ones, and "I'll write to Bing Crosby!" So I thought "He's not going to read much of this" so I'll write a wee terse letter:

I have watched most of your, all of your films and enjoyed most

And that was the letter and the next thing I got this back. It was a lovely big photograph and a letter! And this, if I could dig it out the letter's still there. nineteen, oh, thirty-five or something, and the photograph somebody purloined off me. The envelope, with the stamp, the fancy stamp. That was something great in the Gorbals! Somebody got that! I was left with just the letter. So Bing Crosby,

many year, just before he died, was coming to Edinburgh. And Tricia booked me, booked us all in to see him! She'll tell you the hall, I can't remember. He was seventy-five or something at this time and she booked, and I sent the letter, and I said, "Look, I've had this letter since 1936 or something like that, and I'd like to" I can't remember what I put, "I'd like your autograph or something" and we did see him and I think. What I didn't know was people were then going out and trying to meet him. We didn't go, I was expecting someone to come and see me because the seats were, what seat I was in. And nobody came so we just went home and I thought, "That's my letter lost, absolutely". And the next thing a letter comes months later with the original letter in it and another picture and this time it's "To Mrs McWhinnie from Bing Crosby!" So it was quite nice.

**VB: That's lovely.**

**SM:** Aye, it was quite nice. So that was my only favourite. I liked him. It was his voice I liked! [laughs]

**VB: Did you like the songs from the movies then?**

**SM:** I liked the songs, uhuh. I did, I did. I'm afraid I can't keep up with my granddaughter, not with the stuff she likes! [laughs] I feel it's not music! Ach well, I suppose it's the same with every generation! You know? I suppose my mother and those people couldn't stand Bing Crosby! [laughs]

**VB: I mean, did you like other singers or...?**

**SM:** I'm trying to think who I liked. I liked Gary Grant [referring to Cary Grant], I liked him. Gosh, I can't remember. Och, I really liked, you know I had nobody really out, I suppose when you've seen films day in and day out.

**VB: I'm sure. You've just reminded me I brought along a couple of photos I thought you might--**

**SM:** When that gets too warm just let me know and I'll put it off.

**VB: --remind you of some of the stars.**

**SM:** Is that Gracie Fields?

**VB: Janet Gaynor.**

**SM:** Oh, Janet Gaynor. I didn't recognise her. George Formby!

**VB: George Formby you talked about.**

**SM:** [laughs] I didn't like him.

**VB: Did you like his pictures at all?**

**SM:** No, I wasn't very keen on him at all. Never, never. [looks through photos] Who's that?

**VB: Jessie Matthews.**

**SM:** Ah. I didn't like her either! [laughs] I just didn't like the British!

**VB: I brought all the ones you didn't like! [both laugh]**

**SM:** And what's, who's that?

**VB: *Catherine the Great* with Flora Robson and Elisabeth Bergner and Douglas Fairbanks.**

**SM:** Ingrid Bergman I liked. Is that it, aye!

**VB: Aye, I think so. There might be one on the other side of that actually, I don't know.**

**SM:** Deanna Durbin. [laughs] Uhuh. I liked her! [laughs] I liked her. I did like her, funnily enough, I did. My husband liked her too. He went to see all her films before he knew me. I did like her.

**VB: Did you go a lot to the pictures.**

**SM:** Afterwards? Uhuh. Well, once again it was the only thing. My husband didn't dance, so the dance halls were out. So once again, this was where you went. You were not into going to restaurants or things like that, funnily enough. I suppose, he was brought up in Govan, you weren't

used to it, you just didn't have the money, you were not used to it. [coughs] [looks through various items] First of all, that's to tell you how hot my house is. That's to tell you when the times to get the trains back! [takes out photos] That's the New Star cinema. This was the staff. This was the black dress. There's a tale about that black dress too. This was the collars he bought you and this black dress here that cost me a guinea. Now at that time you could buy one at four and elevenpence at Marks, so I could have bought four. But I saved up and saved up and went.

**VB: It's a beautiful dress.**

**SM:** To a shop that was called The Guinea Shop. And it was a lovely dress. It had a gold zipper up here which you cannot see there and this, and that was a guinea and that was a marvellous dress. I managed to buy two out The Guinea Shop. Their dresses were dear but you could get a coat for a guinea in The Guinea Shop which wasn't dear. But eh, that was, I had hard times there when that was up. So that's the staff, that's some of the staff.

**VB: That's lovely. Who's this, who's the wee boy? What did he do?**

**SM:** He was what they called the page boy. My daughter says you can see 'New Star Cinema' up on his hat. I couldn't see it. I'm frightened you'll get too warm there.

**VB: So what was it he did?**

**SM:** Just stood there at the top! [laughs] and looked a bit of an ornament! Ran messages for the boss.

**VB: Aye.**

**SM:** That was, this lassie was seventeen, that's her.

**VB: The middle one?**

**SM:** That's her. And she was, when I saw her she was up on the balcony and I came up to start my work. And she's standing there taking tickets and I went, "What have they started a woman at forty for?" And somebody says, "She's only seventeen!" But she was so dowdy and so... [pause]



**VB: I wouldn't have said from that she was seventeen.**

**SM:** Uhuh, well she was so dowdy, but she was glamourised. Wait till you see, I didn't leave you out a glamourised one. She wasn't long to get glamourised! [laughs] So that was her. Because she looked the part it was a promotion for Ovaltine and he gave her the uniform! [laughs] And that's her again! [laughs]

**VB: I see. So are these all at the Regal?**

**SM:** No. These are all at the New Star.

**VB: Sorry.**

**SM:** I've nothing from the Regal. I don't know what happened to them.

**VB: Did they do a lot of promotions in the cinemas?**

**SM:** Quite a lot in the wee cinemas funnily enough. Not in the big cinemas. Quite a lot in the wee cinemas. They were always thinking of something. Like I remember *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*. That was in the New Star. Eh, he got a lot of wee rings, cheap rings. Eh, and gave out cheap rings, these cheap rings. They must have been, I don't know, maybe a penny or tuppence. But he gave everybody a ring. All the women got a ring, going in to the... Things like that, you know? Things like that. That's the dress. You can see the dress better there because there's no collar on it! [laughs]

**VB: That's lovely. And who's this you're with?**

**SM:** Just one of the usherettes. She's not got a uniform. [laughs]

**VB: Oh, that's a nice one.**

**SM:** That's the projectionist. He's a project... they were all wee, I tell you why. They started off as page boys and they wanted wee ones. And then of course, if they didn't give them their books and there was a job in the projection box they got that. So all your projectionists were wee! [laughs] So

that's, that's that again. And that's the group of us. No, there's a tale about that boy here. I'll take that out. So, him there.

**VB: The one with the long coat on.**

**SM:** He was called up into the army when the war started. And he was taken prisoner on St Valery and he was there for the whole five years. And he sent me that, you can see it, 'Stalag'.

**VB: That's amazing. So it was John Dillon? [reading from back]**

**SM:** Johnny Dillon. That was him. So, I never. When he came back I was married of course, so I never found out. One of his aunts says, "He's come back", and that was the last I ever found out about him.

**VB: That's amazing.**

**SM:** So that's all I've got in the way of [laughs].

**VB: These are really interesting. They really are.**

**SM:** That's all I've got.

**VB: I mean, even just seeing the uniforms, I mean it's... was that what they wore for the projection? [indicates]**

**SM:** Aye. The brown jackets, aye. If you like, if you wanted to take a copy or...

**VB: That would be great.**

**SM:** Do you want to take a copy of them and you could send me them back?

**VB: Yes, that would be fantastic. Yeh.**

**SM:** And that, anything that's interesting. Anything else you want? And that's another group.

**VB: Yes, that would be fantastic, because I could get copies made and send you these back.**

**SM:** Uhuh, if you want to do that, fine.

**VB: I'll get them back as soon as I can.**

**SM:** I don't think there's anything else, there's nothing here much interesting.

**VB: Because it is really interesting to see that.**

**SM:** Uhuh.

**VB: And especially when you're all...**

**SM:** Are you wanting the one with the promotion?

**VB: Yes, that would be great as well. Thanks.**

**SM:** I don't think there's anything [pause].

**VB: Did you go around a lot together then?**

**SM:** Eventually I palled out with that girl. Aw, I wish I could, I wonder what I've done with her, it's a shame, 'cause I was showing it to them the other day. Wait, just wait till I see if it's in, I had some out you know. Oh aye, here she is, here you are, uhuh. This is a bit glamourised but she became an absolute blonde.

**VB: That's amazing.**

**SM:** [laughs] She became an absolute blonde, and I think there's another one. That's her again!  
[laughs]

**VB: That's amazing!**

**SM:** I remember going with her mother, her mother took her to C&As to buy a coat at C&A the coat the mother was picking out. And I was there, and, "Oh!" But that was the last and after that she started glamour.

**VB:** I mean she looks almost like someone, you know, like a movie star doesn't she!

**SM:** Uhuh.

**VB:** Did you ever copy the styles they wore in the movies.

**SM:** I think we must have and awful lot. I think we must have. I think you actually became quite a good dresser. That's me the year after we were married. [shows photo]

**VB:** That's lovely.

**SM:** That handbag. You couldn't buy a handbag, we made that out of carpet. And my husband, he was in the Rolls of course, he was an engineer.

**VB:** Of course.

**SM:** And he made the letter 'S'.

**VB:** It's beautiful isn't it. It's very glamorous.

**SM:** [laughs] The letter S. [coughs]

**VB:** It's a lovely photo that.

**SM:** Everybody said I married him because he looked like Bing Crosby. But I married him, I'll tell you why I married him, eh, we couldn't, eh, it was the Edwardian style. And you couldn't buy kirby grips. And all your hair took up in wee rolls, like this [demonstrates]. And, eh, he [laughs] he started making me kirby grips! And, big and ugly kirby grips off the machine! And eh, two or three times I said, "I'm going to give him the chuck. But if I give him a chuck I can't get any kirby grips. [both laugh]

So I kept going with him to the end! [both laugh] "If I give him the chuck I can't put up my hair into the style! Oh dear!"

**VB: Oh dear! It's a lovely outfit you've got on.**

**SM:** Oh it was very cheap, it was really very cheap. Nothing was dear in those days. [pause]

**VB: I like this one of the uniforms as well.**

**SM:** Aye, take that, take that and get your copy of that.

**VB: What was it he did?**

**SM:** He was a page boy and he was a page boy.

**VB: He was a page boy too.**

**SM:** He was a page boy. He was bigger than usual.

**VB: Yeh, that's what I was thinking.**

**SM:** He was the biggest.

**VB: Did they have commissionaires and things?**

**SM:** They had doormen and commissionaires. They had a doorman, and what they called chucker outs! [laughs] I don't know how, [laughs] they actually stayed out in the foyer and, you know, if there was anything you called them in. There was the foreman who was, who had a uniform, the doorman had a uniform. Normally, as I say, we should have had uniforms but they made us buy our own [laughs] black dresses in that place.

**VB: What about the managers, 'cause you said--**

**SM:** The managers always had a nice wee suit on. A nice suit, the manager. And they were the big shots. You were afraid of them, you really were, because, I mean, jobs were jobs.

**VB:** I mean, did you have to, I suppose you wouldn't, but did the doormen have to keep order, I mean say if there were a long queue or...?

**SM:** Mostly the queue, uhuh. The queues, and at the cash desk, you know.

**VB:** Did they ever have, you know, a continuous programme in the cinemas you were in, or was it always...?

**SM:** In the, in the Star, in the Star, aye even in the Star it was one o'clock, not in the ones in the Gorbals funnily enough, but in the Star in Maryhill it was one o'clock 'till eleven o'clock at night. In the Regal the same and in the Picture House the same. Aye, 'till eleven at night and it was continuous all the time. So you were in that atmosphere from one o'clock till eleven. Six days a week. And then sometimes they'd say, "It's a Cinema Sunday, and it's for charity" So you came in and you got nothing for it. This was for charity. So sometimes it was seven days a week. And then I went into the Rolls Royce and it was, that was a twelve-hour day. You went in at seven in the morning 'till seven at night. And then you did your night shift the next month from seven at night 'till seven in the morning. You wonder how I'm still here! [laughs]

**VB:** That's amazing. I mean did you get any holidays at all?

**SM:** You got your fortnight. You did get your fortnight.

**VB:** I suppose when you were on holiday, you didn't want to see a picture house!

**SM:** [laughs] You did go funnily enough! See on your night off, that's where you went! 'Cause there was nothing else to do! And you used to get a free pass to some of the ones in the town. You got a free pass from one hall to another, so you went there. How stupid, but that's what you did! That's what you did. There was nothing else to do.

**VB:** Were they showing quite a lot of different films then in the different cinemas?

**SM:** Aye, all round about. It was good, they were. I notice it's all the same now. You couldn't do that.

**VB:** Yeh.

**SM:** But when the war [referring to World War Two] started, eh, right away the cinemas shut down for a fortnight 'cause they said they were, you know, having a lot of people, and if the bombs. They thought they were going get bombed right away. So they shut the cinemas down. And the cinema owners started an outcry but it was only shut a fortnight and then they all opened again. So that was all that happened during the war for the cinemas. And they were very busy, you know? If anything more busy. The ones in the town anyway. You were getting all the different, eh, nationality soldiers going in, you know? Because they were all walking the streets and didn't know where else to go! And eh, I'd come out the cinema at eleven o'clock at night on Sauchiehall Street. Sauchiehall Street was what like I think Blytheswood Square is now: full of prostitutes. In Sauchiehall Street. It got a bad name. So I'm coming out at eleven o'clock at night. These Americans, they're all in the shop doorways, and [pause] thinking you're a prostitute. And to, honest, do you know it's a good job I didn't have emphysema then. You'd to run from when you came out the cinema, my bus, my tram, was a way down at Arnott Simpson's, so I had to run the whole length of Sauchiehall Street and the whole length of Renfield Street till I got onto the tram. Because you'd to [laughs] you'd to run the gauntlet more or less! [laughs]

**VB:** That's amazing, that's amazing.

**SM:** You'd to run the gauntlet! And I'm looking back and I'm saying, "Did I run that?" [laughs] That was every night! You just took it, you just took it for granted that's what you had to do! All the rest of the people went different ways, you know? So you'd nobody even to walk down the road with. That probably would have been worse anyway! [laughs] They'd have been sure.

**VB:** Goodness me! I mean did you, obviously working in a cinema people wouldn't think that of you, but did you, you.

**SM:** Mm. But I mean once you came out there at eleven o'clock at night and these chaps saw you at eleven o'clock at night in a street that got a bad name! [laughs]

**VB: Yes, obviously, yes. I was wondering as you were saying that as well, I mean obviously you know you were very nicely dressed and that.**

**SM: Mhm!**

**VB: Did you find that a lot of the customers tried to ask you out?**

**SM:** Aye, I was very, they didn't ask me out. I was very, there was one wee lassie, and I wouldn't have said she was good looking and on her night off, she'd say, "Oh, I'm going out with that bloke so and so, I'm going out with him. Saw him the other day." And she could get a date for every night in life! And there was only once, this chap come in, Canadian and, erm, my luck wasn't in, and he came in and, eh, and I didn't remember seeing him and obviously when he went out, it was a cinema. He went out and the next thing it was her. She must have noticed talent. He came in again and she said to him, "You were in here five minutes ago. You saw the film!" "Aw, I thought I was coming into a different hall. I don't know where I am and I was passing the time. Thought I was coming in to a different cinema." "Aw, well just sit there, you've seen it. I'll chat you up." So we all went round there, we seen him, and started chatting him up. So, when we were going home at night we were all chatting him up and he said to me, "Can I see you home?" So I said, well, it was two buses it was, what was it, a subway and a bus by that time, I said, "Naw. But you can walk me to the subway." So he walks me to the subway, and I says, it was a Tuesday night and I got off, and the next night was to be a Monday night, and I said, eh, he said, "Can I see you tomorrow night?" I says, eh, "Aye, all right, but I'll need to try and change my night, free somebody else" So here, I forgot all about it, and just when the boy didn't turn up and made a date, big Canadian in his uniform and everything, and the next thing nobody would change me that night, so I clean forgot about it. So when this same lassie's going out for her tea and who's standing waiting on me but this bloke! So what does she do but brings him in again! So he sits and sees the cinema again! [laughs] And eh, I said, "I'll try and get off at half nine." This was an early night, believe it or not, "I'll try and get off at half nine". So this other lassie, her sister, says, "I'll take him round to Green's Playhouse, the cinema, I'll take him round there till half nine and bring him back," So I went up with a tale about how my brother was coming home from the army, "Could I get off at half nine 'cause we're having a wee do?" And I don't know, this woman that was there, I got on very well with her, somebody must have gabbed that I was telling a lie, she wouldn't let me off. So the next thing, about half ten, air raids started. And the bombs were dropping everywhere. This was the night of Clydebank. And I came out the cinemas were shut early, that's what happened, as soon as the bombs started dropping, shut the cinema.



And of course, I don't know what happened to him. I never heard any more about it. By the time half nine came he was still there, I never heard any more. That was the one and only date I ever got out the cinema! [laughs] And it got all mucked up! [laughs]

**VB: Ah.**

**SM:** It all got mucked up.

**VB: Uh.**

**SM:** But she could do it. That lassie could do it. I just didn't have the gift! [laughs]

**VB: Probably just as well actually!**

**SM:** [inaudible: possibly 'had a baby', 'that've had been me'] [laughs]

**VB: Did they shut the cinemas a lot during the war then?**

**SM:** When the air raids came, uhuh, they would shut it. They would shut it, you know, in case people were bombed inside or anything.

**VB: Right.**

**SM:** So you all went home. It was about half ten that night and the air raid. So obviously, I went home, I didn't hang about. Nobody would hang about. And that was the night, I remember sitting with the projectionist, he stayed in Hillington, and I was sitting with him going home, he was married in Hillington, and eh, he's sitting saying, and the subway this was, we were going from Georges Cross to Govan Cross and then get the bus, and eh, he's sitting saying, "What if we get bombed? What if we get bombed and it's the Clyde?" You know, you go under the Clyde on the subway, "What if we get bombed?" And I'm sitting there and I'm saying, "What a big coward. What a big coward. You were young and you were stupid. He's a big coward him!" However as soon as we came off, the very last, we were the very last subway out, it was bombed. This is fact and you will find it. It was bombed and it out of operation for about six months. It was bombed. That was the night of Clydebank and all of that. It was.

**VB: Terrible. [pause]**

**SM: I've given you an awful lot of irrelevant! [laughs]**

**VB: No, it's interesting. I mean, cause I, I mean you never think how dangerous it must have been.**

**SM: Mhm, running about.**

**VB: Coming back.**

**SM: And bombs falling now and again! [laughs] You just, I tell you what I liked best, what I wanted to see most when the war was over. And that was the lights going on again because these were all dark streets. And I'm telling you, Sauchiehall Street and all that. No lights just wee things?**

**VB: Mm.**

**SM: And eh, what I wanted to see was all the lights going back to normal again. That was the most thing I wanted to see. Never mind the rations or anything else. You know? But, eh, that bit was horrible for five years and dark all the time, you know? [pause] So I hope you didn't have to live through any wars.**

**VB: I hope not.**

**SM: It's such a waste of time. It's such a waste of time and life and everything. That was twenty years after my father had been in the last one.**

**VB: Yes.**

**SM: Tricia's cleaning up. Well she doesn't want to [laughs], getting a lot of cleaning done the day!**

**VB: Oh dear! I mean, that reminds me, of something I was wanting to ask you earlier. I mean did your father go to the pictures or...?**

**SM:** Yes, yes. The whole family went actually as a family. We all went as a family and you went, until you get to the age to maybe leave them and go down to the front to where maybe your pals were, you know? There was one cinema my brother and I used to go to, the Crown Cinema in Crown Street. And eh, they used to put the kids in benches. That was the only benches in the front, maybe two or three benches. And you'd get in for a penny I suppose, and they were fourpence or something and you'd to sit like that [looking straight up] and the screen was like that [right in front of face indicated with hand]. And honest to, I'm not kidding you, you came out with stiff necks. And you were walking stiff. And you were to sit there for hours and you were quite happy to do that. 'Cause you got into the pictures. I think it was a bit cheaper than the other halls. So you were quite happy to sit on this bench seeing this.

**VB: Was that all on the one level then?**

**SM:** It was all on the one level and the screen was just in front of you, and you really had to sit like that to see the screen with your neck back. So this was them cramming more in, even though it was kids for a penny, you know?

**VB: That's amazing. I mean.**

**SM:** And that was the Crown Cinema in Crown Street. They called it the Crownie! [laughs]

**VB: I mean did they show a lot of pictures in, like, church halls or, em, you know, places that weren't actually cinemas?**

**SM:** No, no. Not to my knowledge. There was too many cinemas all about. I mean there must have been about ten, in the Gorbals alone. There must have been about ten. I could write them all down. Actually somebody's done that. I was surprised. My son-in-law, the history teacher, he brought a book in and there was all the cinemas in the Gorbals, and somebody they'd missed a few out, but they had most of them. They had most of them.

**VB: I wonder if that's the, em, I know there's quite a good book about growing up in the Gorbals or something.**

**SM:** Oh aye. That's another one. Aye, that's another. It was just a wee pamphlet he had.

**VB: Right.**

**SM:** And it was all about the cinemas in the Gorbals. And, eh, they had missed a couple but it was pretty good.

**VB: I'd like to see that actually.**

**SM:** I must ask him again about that. He gets me anything, you know, he got, I read that 'Growing up in the Gorbals'. I felt that wasn't very factual [laughs] He was a toff actually! [laughs] And there was one, 'Shadows on a Gorbals Wall'. It was just a wee writing club evidently, somewhere in the Gorbals. And that was good. This woman had written it. She was very factual, she was good. 'Shadows of the Gorbals'. He gets anything like that, you know? He got me one just recently. It's top of the paperbacks, 'Finding Peggy'. But I always look in the 'Times', and it was in the paperbacks Top Ten. And now it's at the top. Wasn't very good that one. I thought that jumped about too much. It really wasn't very good. [coughs]

**VB: Yeh. Were you a reader when you were younger? Did you read a lot?**

**SM:** Very much so. Very much so. Tricia was asking that just before you came in. She said, "Did you read books?" I said, "Aye". Some day when I was wee, you went anywhere you got in for nothing. So somebody said, "There's a library along there, and you get books for nothing." So somebody took me, it was quite a walk that time, it was North, they finally built a Gorbals library, which is now away actually, I remember it getting built when I was seventeen, and now it's away, but this was a wee place up MacNeil Street, at the Richmond Park. [coughs] And somebody, I was only about five or six, you went about yourself all the places when you were a wee tot. Somebody took me to this place and after I found that, that was me. It was books, books, books. My mother used to get really annoyed. I was the eldest and she expected me to work a lot. She wasn't a worker herself, and if I was sitting with a book she got really annoyed. And I was sitting with a book most of the time, you know? But, eh, I still read, I still do it.

**VB: It sounds like you'd read more or less anything you could get your hands on?**

**SM:** Absolutely everything and anything! [laughs] And I still do. They keep the Sunday papers. I buy 'The [Evening] Times' every night. They keep the Sunday papers. I read all their big Sunday papers. Their 'Glasgow Herald', 'cause I don't buy then! [laugh] And he brings me books. I've got two now, one about China, it's really good. [phone rings] Aw, maybe Tricia will answer it. Ah she has.

**TM:** [outside room] Hello? OK. Yes.

**SM:** It'll be her husband likely, he just works across there, across the road.

**VB:** I see. How about there, were there other types of entertainments you liked? You mentioned dancing and, I mean did you go to the [TM still faintly heard in background] theatre or...?

**SM:** Very seldom. There was what they called The Princess's [Theatre]. That's now The Citizens' [Theatre].

**VB:** Yeh.

**SM:** And eh, put on pantomimes and they put on revues and things like that and you had the, you'd go to that. That was about it.

**VB:** Aye.

**SM:** That was about it. Then the library and the dancing and the cinemas, that was your life. That was your life. [TM inaudible in background] And I suppose that, as I say, to go to a restaurant was a big thing. Now they go out and it's just a matter of course you know?

**VB:** Yeah.

**SM:** Tricia, come on in, we're finished almost, aren't we?

**VB:** Aye, more or less.

**SM:** We're finished Trish.

**VB: I mean how about the family. Did you have a lot of entertainment at home?**

**SM:** Yeh, when you did have a party everybody had their party piece. That was true. Everybody had their party piece. I wasn't very good! [laughs] There was some good singers but I wasn't very good. Everybody had, not in our family, we weren't very talented that way but quite a lot of them could play instruments. Quite a lot of them. But, eh, we always had our party piece. My father had learned some tap dancing and he would do that and things like that, you know? Anything they'd picked up somewhere. My mother was a singer, she was quite a nice singer. And my sister was a good singer. But I didn't. It didn't fall down to me. [TM peeps in door] We're now finished, almost, Trish!

**TM:** Do you want another cup of tea?

**VB: That would be lovely.**

**TM:** Because I'm just about to say that I would fancy a wee cup.

**SM:** Mmm.

**VB: Yes, thanks.**

**TM:** Give me the plates and that.

**SM:** There's a lot of plates and stuff on the table. [clearing of plates] They've heard it all before! That's why she's cleared out!

**TM:** Many times, many times!

[all laugh]

**SM:** My grandson, he gets fed up. When he does something, I'll say, "We didn't do that in our day!" [laughs] And, if they spend money wrong, I'll say, "Oh, when I think of what we!" [laughs] And when she brings it in, I'll say, "How much did you pay for that?" and "Too dear!" So half the time they'll not tell me what they paid for things!

**VB:** No, it's very good of you to give me your time and, you know, tell me all this.

**SM:** Well, as Tricia says, she likes helping and so does George, like to help, so it's the same thing really, you know?

**VB:** I mean it's really fascinating, you know, sitting listening to this, cause, erm, you know, your experiences and everything.

**SM:** Have you got a granny?

**VB:** I haven't. Both my grannies have gone.

**SM:** Ah. I was the same. I never knew my granny. Or my grandfather. I only knew one grandfather. And that was my grandmother and his wife had died and they had thirteen of a family.

**VB:** Yeh.

**SM:** And she died by childbed fever.

**VB:** Yeh.

**SM:** And I read a book, oh it was a marvellous book, where the doctors were carrying this childbed fever from one patient to another, they never wore overalls.

**VB:** Yeh.

**SM:** And they were going into houses and they were carrying this childbed, this disease into the next house. So she died, and she left thirteen of a family. [plate noises in background] He couldn't cope and he just took to the booze. But what I notice now still about doctors, if you watch, even in the films, and no matter what hospital you go to, they never button up their coats! The nurses are expected to be all buttoned up, but they have the suits, and when, since I've read that book it really bugs me! They never have their, you'll never see a doctor with his coat buttoned!

**VB:** Yeh.

**SM:** The first time I do, I'll give him five pounds, honest. You never see them. Why is that? And since I read that book, oh it was a marvellous book, Tricia might remember the name of it, but, really, some books just stay in your mind, and eh, eh, were carrying this particular kind of, and when she died they were carrying it about, it was everywhere and that was what somebody had given her, childbed fever, whatever disease it was that caused this childbed fever. She'd died and he just became an old boozier. And there was one elder son, two of the young family were put into a home, but one of the eldest son worked and got them out again and brought them home. It was a really sad family, it really was. And that was the Gorbals. That was the Gorbals Cross they stayed in.

**VB: Yeh.**

**SM:** We actually were of Irish descent. What happened was, eh, my grandfather, the old boozier, he came over from Ireland and I thought, I often said, "Well, why didn't he just go to America. It'd have been better". So, he was running away from the police and, I'd have love to have known what he did! It have been something simple. It was just a wee village and, so it'd have been something sim..., somebody said, "Aw, he was running away from the police, "I never found out why. So he came to the Gorbals, so then my father was born in the Gorbals, and he had thirteen as I'm telling you, and I was the third generation of the Gorbals. And my father, during the holiday, went back to this wee village and met my mother and brought her back. And I think one of his brothers did that too.

**VB: Right.**

**SM:** So we were really Irish, you know?

**VB: Yeh.**

**SM:** As the name O'Connor will tell you! [laughs]

**VB: That's right, I suppose it's obvious! [both laugh]**

**SM:** I think you've dredged me! I don't think there's anything! [laughs]

**VB: Well, thanks a lot.**



**SM:** At least you're listening! They'll not listen!

**VB:** Very much so.

**SM:** They'll not listen! [pause] That must be interesting all the same. Digging out about all the old films and...

**VB:** Very, very much so. It is really. And especially, you know, with your own knowledge of working in the cinemas. It's been really interesting.

**SM:** What sort of degree will you get. Or are you finished?

**VB:** I'm finished my studies now.

**SM:** When did you finish, quite recently?

**VB:** Yeh, quite recently.

**SM:** So what sort of a degree will you get with that? I don't mean that, I mean what were you studying for? How did you get into films, that's what I mean?

**VB:** Well, I studied Scottish Literature myself actually, and I've got a degree in history as well.

**SM:** Aye, Tricia did as well, well that was a part of it. But George has a degree in history. I forgot, her was English and Psychology. It's Glasgow University you're at, aye?

[TM enters]

**VB:** Actually I was at Edinburgh, and then I was in Canada, and then was at Glasgow, so.

**SM:** George was Edinburgh University.

**TM:** I was Glasgow. He does a lot of this, George, reminiscences about the war. He started doing it with the kids in the school, doing it for the, they know, history investigation and then he got so intrigued, you know, with some of the things the kids came in with that he started to do it himself. But at the time he thought of doing it just for primary sources for the kids, and then he thought maybe there was a book in it, but just at that time it was what the fiftieth anniversary so the thing was full.

**SM:** The market was flooded! [laughs]

**TM:** It was the wrong time to do it. But he certainly got some fascinating stuff.

**SM:** That's what I'm telling her. He sent one wee girl round here with a tape recorder, didn't he?

**TM:** Aye. I'm used to having transcribed so the kids come in with the stuff. Some of them still do it, you know.

**VB: I wish we'd had that at school.**

**TM:** They didn't have it in my day either, but they all do their standard grade investigation and he quite often sends them in for things like factory work: what it was like to work in the Rolls Royce.

**SM:** Oh yes, grandson, my grandson, her son, had to do a week across in the Hillington factory!

[discussion of work experience of fifteen-year-old grandson; hated it; will put him off factories, "that's a good thing"]

**TM:** So what exactly is the research you're doing? Is it purely on cinema or...?

**VB: Yes, it's purely on cinema. We're going to be spending about two years talking to people, like yourself, in Glasgow and we're also going to be talking to folk down South, in Manchester, and London.**

**SM:** And finding out the different?

**VB:** We're finding out the different things, eh, I'll be interested to see, for instance, what they thought of, made of, British films down there, because...

**SM:** But we were, I mean you can understand broad Glasgow people and then you get.

**VB:** Of course, yes.

**SM:** This very, we just hated, just.

**TM:** She's still the same, I mean, if British films come on the television, she goes, "Aw, it's an old British film, switch it off!"

**SM:** That's right, I hate them. I really can't stand them. There were one or two good ones, as I say, but they were really few and far between.

**VB:** Yeh.

**SM:** Few and far between.

**TM:** Which ones did you like then?

**SM:** There was one there she said, eh, what one, I said, "That's a good one"

**VB:** Was it the one, rem...

**TM:** Did you ever work with any of them?

**VB:** *Henry the VIII.*

**SM:** *Henry the VIII.* That was really good, that was Charles Laughton. He was good, you've got to give that. He was good. George Formby's stuff I didn't like.

**TM:** He's typically English, you didn't like him.

**SM:** Aw.

**TM:** Or Gracie Fields or anything like that.

**SM:** Gracie Fields. [TM and SM laugh] Deanna Durbin, she's got Deanna Durbin, we liked her, your dad liked her.

**TM:** What films sort of lasted the course when you were working with them? What were they?

**SM:** As I say, *Three Smart Girls*, that was Deanna Durbin, that was one of them. And *Mr Deeds Goes to Town*, these kind of things were great, and somebody else *Goes to Washington*! [laughs] I cannot remember what that was.

**TM:** What was the ones that lasted longest in the cinema?

**SM:** Well, they lasted, the, the main thing that if they were there for a week. But if they were extra good they kept them for the fortnight. So *Mr Deeds* was a fortnight. *Three Smart Girls* was a fortnight, that sort of thing. And there was queues all the time. *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* was a fortnight. [laughs]

**TM:** Who was in that?

**SM:** I think it was Gary [Cary] Grant. It was on the television a few weeks ago. *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*. Aye, it was on the television.

**TM:** [laughs] It comes to the stage now, I've seen them all on the telly as well as her! You know.

**SM:** That's what I'm saying to you now, Valentina. I'm sitting with you now, and I'm seeing all these old films 'cause I see them, and "That's great, I'm still doing the same as I was doing fifty, sixty years ago! [all laugh] Sitting watching films.

**TM:** I'll just see if the kettle...

**SM:** The only thing I have going for me now is I've got a better seat and I can go for a cup of tea! [laughs] and I've not got a boss! [laughs] But I always sit and watch the same stuff. [laughs]

**VB: Oh dear! The thing is they put them on quite late at night sometimes.**

**SM:** Aw, I don't stay up, I never stay up. I'm getting earlier and earlier to my bed. I started off ten o'clock, now it's half nine and, eh, I've got a tape recorder but I never bother using it. And, eh, it's an old Beta, it's the Beta one. But one lassie down the road there, she had Beta, and she's given me a whole load of tapes. I had a whole load of tape, I've got in there a lot of what you can 'keeps'. I call them keeps, and there's a lot of those old thirties films, off the television on the Beta. But nobody can play them unless they've got a Beta tape-recorder. So I've got a lot of them that I thought were good.

**VB: Aye.**

**SM:** That were taped by my husband and I. He died four years ago. I fairly miss him because we did everything together, you know? I was never on my own in my life. You know how it was, a big family in the Gorbals, and as I say, one good thing that came out the Gorbals was you were never lonely for companionship. Everybody was piled on top of each other that you just went out and you found a pal. You know, that kind of thing, that you were? So this business now of being on your own where you've always worked among people and were with people. That is difficult. That is difficult. That is difficult. But I'm learning to live with it. You get into a lot of your own wee ways and then you, Trish'll say, "Come up for the weekend" and then, I don't really want to. 'Cause her kids put on the telly and I've got to watch what they [laughs] and I don't really want! "I'll just stay here!" So they're very good. My daughters are very good. [pause]

**VB: I like your house very much, it's really...**

**SM:** Oh God, that's years since it was done. It's absolute years. You probably like it because it's away back in the old thirties art deco! [both laugh] [TM enters] My husband put up that wallpaper, it must have been about seven or eight years ago! [laughs]

**VB: I like your pictures very much.**

**SM:** Oh, they're real, they're real. Unfortunately the frames should have been better. That's a [Santella?]

**VB: Is it?**

**SM:** He's a marvellous painter. Aw, he is, it's a pity you hadn't seen his.

**VB: It's beautiful.**

**SM:** His son painted portraits and he made a big one of my daughter. This was the time she was going mad on him for a short time, but she didn't like him, and he made a big, lovely picture, didn't he? Full length. And this is a Mr Hart's.

**TM:** Would you like a bit of birthday cake?

**VB: Right enough.**

**SM:** Here's a tale about him. He married an English girl who was sent down here. You were posted down to your job. He married an English girl who was sent here to work during the war.

**VB: Yeh.**

**SM:** To Weirs [engineering firm]. He worked at Weirs. And when they got married, they had a wee single apartment at Thornliebank. And in the single apartment, so she tells me, there was two of a family and the other half of the single apartment was his workshop. So he made silverware, he's really very artistic. A wee silver business, he actually ended up with wee silver businesses Thornliebank. Wee factories. In his spare time he painted. These are two throw-outs I got. I should have put them in better frames.

**VB: That's amazing.**

**TM:** One's Czechoslovakian, isn't it?

**SM:** Oh yes, one's Czechoslovakian. This one is the River Endrick, actually it's quite good. We went to Russia quite a lot, we made friends with a Czechoslovakian woman. So I met her on the train from Moscow to Leningrad, and, they were handing out tickets for your bed, and they handed me a ticket and I found, I was in a room for four with three men and one wasn't my husband! So I said, "I'm not sleeping there!" So I went into this other place and I said "Is anybody sleeping in that bed there?" "No, these two are empty". So I went up to a bunk and it so happened it was this lady, I took her bed. Luckily there was another bed she could have. After that we came back she phoned us up, we got friendly and visited, and said "How would you like for your husband to be a co-driver, we're going back to Czechoslovakia." I don't know where she made this friend in Czechoslovakia. So we drove to Czechoslovakia, and that always reminded me, a lovely painting. There was a lovely chap, this man and his wife, in fact they say that's where St. Nicholas came from, or Santa Clause came from 'cause their presence on you, it was marvellous. It was marvellous. So that's a nice picture, I always remember. So that's the River Endrick! [Laughs]

**VB: It's not unlike Scotland, is it?**

**SM:** Her husband died last year, we write, and I said to come over and we'll give you a good holiday, as they were so kind. She never answered. I think she's just fading away.

**TM:** She was an underground fighter in the, a resistance fighter...

[End of Interview]