

Jan Ziliacus
Tape 1 Side A

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Tape 1 Side A.

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A few words for level.

Yes, you mean just to just, yes how I talk. [Coughs]

Okay I think that's enough, it's...

Can you hear me now?

Yes. Right, could you just tell me where you were born?

Yes I was, I was born in 1912 in New York and I came over to England in... Well, I was eleven months old actually. My father was the first American director to be sent to England and he came over to work in the old Walton on Thames studios.

Oh. What was his name?

Larry Trimble.

Larry Trimble?

And he, he was really the first person that I think that put animals in movies and made stars of them in movies, made them the chief character. People used animals but they didn't make them the chief characters before that.

That's when, what year was this?

I suppose this was, must have been about what? Nineteen..., Nineteen..., it was started with Jean, the Vitagraph Dog. That was where I kind of began and that was our farm collie who became Jean, the Vitagraph Dog. And that must have been... Hold on just a second. I suppose that must have been about 1910 or '11.

Yes.

Because when I was born she was fully grown, you know she wasn't a puppy or anything. And then that was in New York, and the old studios in New York, Flatbush Studios in New York. And then Larry, my father was sent to England and, as I've said, the first American director to be sent over here to the Walton on Thames studio, who at that time, I believe I'm right in saying, Cecil Hepworth had something to do with them.

Yes, there was a plaque outside there.

Was there?

Yes.

Ah, well my memory's doing alright in that case. And he was tremendous friends with, with Hepworth and he made a whole lot of films over here. Mm, I don't know how many but of course, they were short films in those days little, little tiny ones, you know. But he had an actor called John Bunny and Flora Finch also he made comedies with them. But this is really going back to 1910/11/12 sort of thing. Anyway mm... Let's see. Then he went, well he made these films here and then in 1916 in the middle of the war, my mother was an opera singer, and my father and mother did not get along. Oh, she didn't like children for one thing and my father was annoyed about this. [Laughter] His idea was to have six boys and all he got was a miserable girl like me, you know. She didn't like children at all, and she was a very, a very successful opera singer, children were just a nuisance to her, they were in the way, you know. And...

So what was, what was her name, did she use her...?

Yes, Louise Trenton.

Who?

Louise Trenton. And she sang for him, well with, they had a wonderful crew of the people, this group that she sang with in the war, in The First World War, was composed of people like Chaliapin and [Laughter] all sorts of interesting pros. Anyway she stayed. My father took me back to America at the age of three. They broke up because she was up in Scotland and my father came back from America, and it took a long time in those days by ship, but he got back just in time to find me absolutely, the nurse had run away and I was unconscious, I'd had a burst appendix aged three, and in those days that was all considered practically fatal I think, and I was one of the first people who'd had a burst appendix and who survived it. Anyway I was rushed in to this little hospital near where we lived in Walton on Thames and, and I survived. Well my father telegraphed my mother in Scotland and said that I was very ill she should come immediately, and she wired him back to say that she was very busy but she'd be down in a fortnight. And that, my father was extremely wrath about that and soon as I was better he sort of picked me up, tucked me under his arm and took me off to America with him. And so I didn't see my mother until I was nineteen years of age later, that, that long time.

[05:47]

Anyway he... At that time he was working for a little while in New York, again in the old Flatbush Studios, and then Holywood was just opening up, well at least for him it was, I don't think it had been going very long before that. But anyhow next thing is we are in Holywood where I grew up.

And it was a lovely time to be there, actually I couldn't have, if I'd chosen a time to be there that was probably the best one because I knew for, and for instance there was a character, a movie character called Rudolph Valentino which I don't know if anybody remembers any more but, but he was very prominent in those days. And he was so different from the ordinary American hero [Laughter] all the girls were crazy about him I believe. But anyhow I grew up knowing people like Rudolph Valentino, and of course, this was early days for Mary Pickford and people like that.

Yes, Charlie Chaplin?

And Charlie Chaplin indeed. I have some wonderful Chaplin stories. But he was a very funny and amusing person. But I used to, Brody [ph 07:06] was, was a special friend of mine because he was a, he liked music very much, and he wasn't just a kind of a sort of dago or anything he, was very aristocratic Italian really, I mean he knew enormous about, enormously about music and things. He used to take me to concerts anyway and I liked that. And also he was, he was, there was this girl that used to tote him round and she brought him to our ranch, my father's ranch which was called The Diamond Bar and we had sort of 10,000 acres, and it was a working ranch, you know, 4,000 steer on it to bring them for market, to bring them for my goodness. And we used to have Spring and Fall roundups which were... We had three ranches. We had, there was Larry's in the middle and there was, mm, I think the Valentino ranch just nearby. And there was Kellogg's, W K Kellogg, the man who makes corn flakes anyway, he had a huge ranch. They all sort of fitted around each other right up to the foothills.

And, mm, well we had a, we had great fun growing up because I didn't go to school, I've tried to catch up ever since. But I had tutors, I didn't have, mm, properly going to school, I was always on location for instance. The reason I was on location was that I grew quite fast when I was young and by the age of nine I was almost as big as I am now, you know. And if there was anybody had to be chased by the wolves in Larry's pictures, he was doing a lot of Jack London pictures, and he had to have wolves, you know.

Mm.

So I grew up with sixty wolves and if anybody had to be chased by wolves it would be me in the heroine's costume in the long shots you see being chased by the wolves. Only trouble was that the wolves do me, the wolves are very much maligned, they're very friendly really when they get to know you, they're just merely very shy. I mean, and the first time we, the whole thing had to be, wait for another fall of snow so that there, there weren't tracks. And first time it happened they caught up at the, I came rushing out of the wood onto this lake, frozen lake, and then they let the wolves out. The wolves chased after me across the, the snow and when they caught up to me they

hunkered around and wagged their tails and loved it [Laughter] and my father was absolutely furious, he said nobody in their right mind would believe these were wolves. [Laughter] Just, just huskies or dogs of some kind. So that's, we had to wait for another fall of snow. And the way he did it he was, he was a bit naughty because he, he didn't feed them for one day and so they were peckish and, and well when, well when they chased me he made me very interesting to them because he, underneath my mackinaws and my breeches he put all, laced all this horse meat, sort of and folded me in horse meats, thin, thin slices of horse meat all over me and it looked wonderfully... They got me down, do you know I didn't have a single bruise, it was incredible.

[10:33]

[Laughter]

It didn't hurt me at all, they'd got the horse meat out and it looked great from the film, from the film's point of view but these, didn't do one thing, didn't even nip me. [Laughter] They were really nice my, our wolves were really nice.

Anyway I didn't go school properly you see, I had these tutors so to speak and, but, you know, I had this really lovely growing up because I was on location most of the time and, or else in the studio. Mm...

Well did you do any acting yourself?

No I never was terribly interested in acting.

Mm.

I, if it is was some sort of athletic thing I liked that, you know, I liked, I liked being chased by the wolves, you know, and things like that. But I was never, I never had any ambition to be an actress.

No.

Now don't chew, ah, get down cat. [Laughter] I don't want to have her going in to your tea.

Anyway let's think what else is there. Oh this, this went on and on, well all my growing up life really.

Well is this still in the silent era?

Yes. And, when, do you know my, my stubborn father he didn't think sound, he didn't think that was going to be any good at all. [Laughter]

Perhaps he's right.

And so he, he thought that silent films were the best things, you know. And so in, in, when we came to sound, which I think was something like 1928 or '29, something

like this, he did, he fulfilled his life's ambition, which was do, he did, started this thing called the Seeing-Eye Dog for the Blind, and that was fitting the dogs to the people and, you know, who...

The guide dogs?

Yes, the guide dogs. And he enjoyed that enormously, which he did until he died actually. And, but he really enjoyed that and he believed very much in it because he thought it was giving blind people independence.

Mm.

It was a good thing. But, mm, let's think, what, what else? Oh yes, well I, you know, in 1929 we had a, there was an enormous, terrible depression overnight.

Mm.

I think twenty-ninth of October 1929 the Stock Market went 'vroom', and everybody was busted. [Laughter] Really and true I don't remember us, anybody we knew that wasn't absolutely broke. Well, at, my father, although you see my father was a New Englander and whereas he of course, naturally worked in Hollywood he, he never really, didn't like all that sunshine all the time he liked weather because he came from Maine. And so he got a hold of one of these islands, a thousand islands just where Lake Ontario becomes the St Lawrence River and he, it was sort of something like sixty acres or something, it was, the proper name was McDonald Island but it was, he called it Hog Island, I don't know why he did but that was, everybody knew it as Hog Island. [Laughter] Ah dear! Anyway he would go there as often as possible, and it was really beautiful there, absolutely incredibly beautiful, those islands, wonderful. And of course, at that time totally unspoilt, now I believe that a lot of people live on them but in those days they were just, well just, just islands and very beautiful.

Mm.

Anyway 1929 we are on the island, and the nearest mainland where we got our groceries and where we could buy stores and things was a little, little town called Gananoque, nice Indian word, means water running over stones, and only about 2,000 people I suppose. I don't know how big it is now but in those days that was about how big it was.

[15:12]

And well, anyhow the Stock Market crashed and really and truly we were more or less, well just overnight we sort of owned the clothes we stood in sort of thing, and a car and the island, that's more or less what we had just like that. And so about, I was very happy about that because I loved being on the island. Anyway there was, you see the river was your roadway and in the wintertime very cold, you get these nice snappy cold winters and the ice, I mean the, the river would freeze to sort of a couple of feet, you know, of ice underneath you. And I wanted to, I don't know why I wanted to go to the mainland but I did, I think it was probably to get some shopping or something.

And the only place that I was told 'Now look just keep well up from this island that's in between our island and the mainland, just keep well up to the right of it'. That was fine but I'd, how much to the right? The point was I went through the ice. I'm one apparently, I've been back since and discovered that I was one of three people who ever got, got out of that situation, mostly you were found some three or four miles down river in the Spring, you know, underneath, you'd go underneath the ice and that was the end of you until Spring when you were found. Well anyway I sort of kicked, I had these skates on which were like anchors on me, they were big, they were sort of speed skates, they were sort of tubular heavy things and it was very hard. And I was also wearing gloves that were, you know, chamois, when it's wet it's very slippery stuff and every time I'd get my hands on the ice my hands would just slide off I couldn't hold. [Laughter] But anyhow I kicked a very large space, I was going so fast that I got right out in to the thin part in the channel you see, I was trying to sort of fight my way back to some hard ice. And some, somebody, a young man was walking along on the banks in the, on the mainland had just seen what he thought was a dog that had fallen through the ice and so he remembered that he'd turned a plank down which had a big nail sticking up in it and he'd turned it over because in the snow and... Oh, in, in those days, I don't suppose they do anymore but we used to wear two pairs of good woollen socks and moccasins, because moccasins were, were very, your feet could move in they, they kept much warmer in moccasins than ordinary shoes or boots.

And anyway he turned this plank down a few days before that with this nail sticking up in case anybody came along with their moccasins and stepped on it in the snow, you wouldn't see it. So he saw this dog, he liked animals very much this young man, and he tore down the bank, you know, and went and found this long plank of wood with the nail in it and went out on the ice to see if he could rescue this what he thought was a dog, and was very surprised to find it was not a dog at all but a human being fighting like mad to keep afloat and keep, keep up, you know. And of course, this was in the channel so he would, quite a lot of water pushing you. You know, it was, you would, would keep, keep fighting your way not to be swept under. And there were two fellows coming up from the right hand side of the river, way down you could just see them in the distance two speed skaters, and they were coming up a quite a pace and he signalled them with it, and as he, as he was coming across the ice to, with this plank to see if he could rescue this dog, and they saw him and they came. Anyhow what they did was they made a chain, one holding on to the other's ankles and pushing this plank out with the nail in it. I had a, by the way I had a leather coat on and they hooked it into that leather coat just by my neck and then they sort of rolled out on this plank which somehow held. I don't know why it did but it did and they sort of pulled me out.

[20:06]

And I proceeded to freeze almost as stiff as a board when I got, when they got me out and they just pushed me on in front of them, they didn't know who I was, I was one of those island people, summer island people and these were local, local guys, you know, in town. And, and they pushed me into... There, there were a whole bunch of boathouses on the, one the mainland and they were known as 'river rats', those guys that lived in these boathouses. And they would build a fire, I found out of course, because they took me there to one of them, pushed me along ahead of them

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[Laughter] practically a block of ice myself in that keen wind, it was something like sixteen below zero I suppose at that temperature at that time, and just pushed me in to one of these boathouses. And these, these old boys they were... The pain was incredible incidentally when the frost came, was coming out of my hands and, and feet and so on, it was really, that was a terrific pain. [Laughter] Which it jolly well hurts and when you warm up you see.

And, anyway well they didn't know who I was and so one of them took me to his auntie's house and I kept saying I lived on Hog, you know, the island, and nobody knew anything about us, we were just summer people and mainlanders didn't know anything about us really. And, well we got a message to my father and so on.

But anyhow because this young man rescued me I thought this was very dramatic, I was sixteen, I thought it was very, very wonderful you see to be rescued by somebody like that. And so I made the mistake of [Laughter] poor fellow marrying him later. [Laughter]

[Laughter]

Anyway that was that. What else do you want to know?

Did you actually work in film studios in, as any capacity at all?

Well no I didn't, I was around them a lot, I was enormously around but I didn't do anything myself, my father did everything.

Yes. So you didn't do any sort of stuff at all?

No I didn't do any, I didn't do any acting. I, I did doubling.

Doubling, mm?

You see I, I sort of, you know, I told you the thing about the chasing...

The wolves?

Long shots, it would be me.

Mm.

And, but anything that actresses didn't want to do if they do it with long shots I would be doing that instead.

Oh.

You see anything that was, was absolutely safe, you know.

Yes.

I was looking back, and I having children myself I think if I look back I really think my father took some tremendous chances. [Laughter] But it all came out fine and I had such a confidence in him if he'd told me, you know, 'Go up and touch that circular saw' I would be quite sure nothing could happen to me. Ridiculous! But everything always came off with him, how strange!

Yes. Did you do one of the sort of major films?

Mm. Yes, well yes, maybe. There was just silent films in those days, you know.

Ah yes, mm.

Well they were such successes these films that Larry was making, *The Silent Call*, *Brawn of the North*, and several Jack London ones and so on. And, you know, I, when I was there in New York I tried to find out if there were any copies or anything. But I was, it was explained to me, this chap in New York in the studio there explained to me that did I know that there'd been a tremendous fire, they had a sort of archive place and apparently he thinks that, as he didn't know about them he thinks that it might have just perished in that fire.

Yes, because they're very inflammable in those days weren't they?

Oh my goodness they were sort of celluloid, made of celluloid the film wasn't it?

Yes. Well I'll try the BFI Library they have a, if there are any copies in England they might have some.

They would be just, yeah that would be, that would be, yes, yes. Oh, I think they have got some actually.

Mm.

I'll tell you why I think that because I was, I remember [Pause] *Far from the Madding Crowd*, somebody made a talkie film of that and my father had made it as an old silent one way back and they put the two on together and they invited me to come.

Yes.

That was ages ago but so there must be some small record.

[25:00]

I think it was Kerry Weiss [ph 25:03] made it.

Oh really?

Mm. Kerry Rice [ph 25:07].

Yes.

I think he made, mm.

Ah.

Or was it Johnny Schlesinger? One, one of them did.

Ah, I've no idea.

Mm.

I wouldn't know about that.

It would be about thirty years since.

I can remember, yes. I should be able to remember but I, I... But I didn't sort of take it in. But it was very nice of them to invite me I thought, that was nice to see the old one. I'm amazed at how good the photography was in those days.

Oh yes.

Maybe we didn't have sound but the photography was good.

Mm, no because it was all black and white, it was in...

It was all black and white, yes.

They can do much more with black and white film than you can with colour film.

Yes I know. Yes, yes that's right.

Tell us all that happened when sound film came in, do you...?

Oh, well my idiotic father didn't think it had much of a future, [Laughter] it must have been incredible wasn't it? And he, then he, that was when he went on to doing this Seeing-Eye Dogs for the Blind and so on.

Ah yes.

He got very immersed in that, did that for the rest of his life.

Mm. He didn't do any more films?

No he didn't.

Oh I see.

He got so involved with this business for the blind people with fitting the dog to the person and so on, person to the dog. He just became quite, quite fascinated and delighted with it. I think he also felt he was doing a little bit of good or something, you know, it probably gave him some satisfaction or something.

Oh yes, mm. Oh yes that's, there wasn't the money in that though that there was in films.

No, no. But Larry was a strange fellow, it affected me pretty badly too, he, he didn't, he, money to him was just something useful.

Mm.

He didn't have what you'd call a good financial nose, you know, it just was useful.

And well, and then of course, I came over here, you know, to see my mother whom I hadn't seen since I was three. And she, she'd just retired and she was now teaching and oh dear, that was great fun I, I must say. [Laughter] But I was in charge of the [Inaudible 27:21] actually, she allowed me to sort of quietly, she, people didn't mind, sit in on some of her lessons and dear me! They were wonderful, some of them were very, very funny indeed. And she was one of the sort of three prominent, there was Madam Capiani and there was Louise, my mother, and another person whose name I can't remember, they were the sort of **the** three singing teachers.

Mm.

In the 1930, early 1930s, you know, that time '30/31/32 and so on. But...

Yes, so what happened after that, because you got married and then...?

I was married you see there and I, I thought I'd left my husband for good when I came over to my mother. Oh, it was interesting how she found me because, mm, somebody in China saw a small piece in the paper about Larry Trimble's daughter had married again in Gananoque. And they sent her a clipping, this clipping, and gosh it was long after I'd been married all this was happening, well about a year or something and, and she wrote on spec to me.

Mm.

That's how, and then she wanted me, to see me so she, so I came over to England and I've been here ever since.

Yes, mm, mm. Well going back to your film days are there any other sort of big film stars or directors or...?

Oh well, you know, I was a kid around the studios you had, I had sort of, know people like Gloria Swanson and Paola Negri, this was my era you see.

Yes.

And it was a wonderful era if I look back on it. And it, and, you know, Rudolph Valentino was my very special friend, and was so nice to me as, you know, I was only a child but, I mean young, nine, ten. And this sort of thing and I had a lovely time.

Yes because, because I, when I, when I was a boy I saw all these films and...

Oh yes.

[Inaudible passage 29:35]

I wouldn't have thought you were old enough but still. [Laughter]

Ah, mm, mm.

Well yes, those old, you remember these silent days then?

Yes, oh yes.

You saw some of those pictures?

Oh yes, yes. Although I can't remember a lot of them now.

No, no of course not.

There is only one I remember is a comedy called the 'Cohens and Kellys.

The which?

[30:00]

'Cohens and Kellys'.

Cohens and Kellys, oh. Oh yes, ah, ha. Sounds like something that...

They were, because they...

The hero would make or something.

They tickled me when I was young then.

Oh yes of course it did.

Mm, mm.

Yes I can see that. But...

As I say in those days did you meet P W Griffiths or any of them...?

Yes, mm, I, I did. He was, particularly one time because, you know, we had sort of sets then, and they were great big things with no roofs and the studio had a glass roof and it was so hot I remember. And I particularly remember there was one scene in a, in the set next to us there was one scene with a, with this butcher's, it was supposed to be in a butcher's shop and this guy was, had, there were a whole bunch of some wild animals or something and come down this little main street and chased in to his

butcher's shop. And he'd got in to the, where the girl with the cash register usually was and he sort of barricaded himself inside the cash register place which was a sort of thing with grills, you know, metal grill around it. [Laughter] And he was, I can still see his face, he looked absolutely in agony, and actually he was because it was so hot in there [Laughter] see that California sun beating down on the glass roof at the top it could get absolutely stifling in the studios in those days and we stifled.

Those big arc lights too?

Oh, and, and the arc lights which gave you klieg eyes I believe.

Klieg eyes, yes.

I don't suppose anybody has klieg eyes anymore do they?

I don't think so.

[Laughter] We used to get 'em in those days I remember. Ah dear. But for instance Chaplin, oh, the trouble is this is something you have to act out, it's no just for telling you on, telling you. But oh dear he was such a funny man. He, he did this... This is slightly rude. He, you know John Barrymore was an actor?

Mm.

Called John Barrymore, he had a very famous profile.

And his brother Lionel?

Yes, Lionel of course, was by far the best actor but John had this fantastic profile and was rather beautiful.

Yes.

And, and he fancied himself too.

Mm.

And, and everybody knew that he had a very unfortunate habit, no matter what was happening he was very often picking his nose, everybody knew it it became a sort of joke. And there was this party that we had in one of those Hollywood places with the sort of, with... There was a place there very near Grauman's Egyptian Theatre which had a sort of like a, a huge patio at the back with lots of tables, out of door restaurant, and sometimes they held parties there I remember. And I remember Chaplin in one of these parties getting up on a table, lots and lots of people, lots of tables, you know, and he said that he was going to do a take-off of John Barrymore, because he could take people off tremendously, everybody liked that. Oh dear, oh dear I will never forget that. He, he took off, took off Barrymore picking his nose, and it went on and on. Oh dear, he sort of chased this bogey from here to there and people were hysterical, they were absolutely falling about, falling off, just falling down practically they were laughing so much.

And I remember our table was just a couple away from this, where this was all going on and we were stood up on the table and did this show. And I remember we could hear this near enough Chaplin to be, mm, to John Barrymore to be kind of a good sport and nice and so on. He came over afterwards to Chaplin and he said 'Oh, Mr Chaplin, you know, that was really very funny and really very, very, very good' and so on and so on and complimented him highly. And then Chaplin said 'Well thank you so much, but of course, you would have done it so much better'. [Laughter] And I remember that. Oh dear, my father thought that was very funny, mm.

[35:06]

But anyway for instance Valentino, my very dear friend, I thought he was lovely, he used to take me to concerts, I told you. And he became to, how we came to know him, I can't remember this girl that sort of toted him around, there was a girl called Jenny or something that took him round, and this is when he was first there, you know. And he came out to learn to ride because, if my memory serves me properly he, he was a sort of hooper from New York, he wasn't a sort of nature boy at all. And he came, he came to our ranch and to learn to ride because he was, that was he was going to play the sheikh and then son of the sheikh and some pictures that you had to know how to ride in them you see, it wouldn't do not to. Oh always sheikhs were able to ride horses you see.

Mm.

And so he, that was how I got to know him, riding with him and so on when he was learning. Then we became, he was awfully nice. He was terribly nice to me because I was just a kid and he was just awfully nice to me.

You know, you were probably the envy of all the women in the world.

And I couldn't understand, I couldn't understand these women it was almost bated breath 'Well what's he really like'? And I said 'Well he was just a nice guy, what do you, what do you mean what's he like'? I couldn't understand their enormous interest in him [Laughter] at that age. Oh dear.

Yes. Did he ever do any filming in England when your father come over?

Well no because you see I was only very small when we went back, and that was just when Hollywood was opening up.

Oh dear, mm.

And he was sort of stuck in Hollywood, he never came back and worked in the old Walton on Thames studios or anything like that.

No.

He was stuck there making all those films with Jean and, and Strongheart. There was a dog called Strongheart which became a great sensation, it was a very, very beautiful German Shepherd.

Yes. Well he seems to be very friendly with dogs and wolves and guide dogs.

Oh my, my father, no my father was absolutely amazing with animals.

I suppose.

He was, it wasn't just dogs, do you know he, he was, he just had something that [clicks finger] I don't know. He worked with panthers, he'd worked with tigers, he worked with bears even, and anybody that can work with bears has certainly got something I want to tell you. If only I know why, that absolutely puzzles me to this day I just do not know what to do about bears.

Mm, mm.

I, I never know what they're thinking. They don't have any change of expression to my eyes. I never, and they always surprise me, I'm always surprised with what they do, they always catch me out.

Mm.

I just have no, nothing whatsoever with bears.

No because...

That I have with others.

Because they're...

All other animals.

I mean [Inaudible 38:15] is a great performing animals, they had dancing bears and circus bears and...

Oh I know, excepting that I'm not very keen on how many of them have been trained.

No, no.

I discovered about all this.

Oh yes.

And it's nice, you know, here in England because some years ago I wanted to write about the circus so I somehow, and they didn't allow it but we had a wonderful circus here called the Bertram Mills Circus.

Yes, at Olympia.

And it was, every winter they had about sixteen weeks of the Olympia season, otherwise they were on tenting tour you see, the other part.

Mm, yes.

Mostly on tenting tour. After the winter season in, in Olympia then everybody'd have a holiday, then of course, sort of end of March beginning of April out everybody would go on the road you see in the tenting tour. And nowadays I don't, I don't know whether they have any circuses left.

I think there are a few touring ones, small ones, but no, no big ones like Bertram Mills

No.

But the I don't think so...

Oh wait a minute. I think there's a reason for this though because I think that there, we passed some sort of law about animals and performing animals, importing animals in to this country. I think you have to have six months in quarantine and all sorts of things. Mm, there are difficulties anyway.

Oh yes, there's a big lobby against animals, performing animals.

Mm. Would you mind it I...

No I'll just have a pause...

Just shut me off for a sec.

[End of Tape 1 Side A 39:42]

NB: The time codes given here are estimates based on readings from the original cassette recording.

Tape 1 Side B.

This is the BECTU History Project Side 2 of the Jay Zilliacus interview. Would you like to continue where you, we left off?

Yes, I wonder where we left, where did I get to?

You'd got married.

Oh yes I got married. Yes, Larry, you know, in 1929 when the Stock Market crashed, everything crashed. And we were on the island when that happened and I dipped back to Hollywood. This island is right up there, it was 3,000 miles away from Hollywood, you know, I was hastening it back. And that was a strange experience alright because when we came back, and I remember, I remember a lot, we know, we knew an awful lot of people in New York, and the island is only overnight to New York, I mean it's only three or four hundred miles or something. And I remember he went back to New York and raced around stopping people jumping out of windows and things, it was really dramatic.

Oh I've read about that.

A horrible business.

Mm.

That's really true. Sort of bracing people up and saying 'Hi, you know, this isn't the end of the world, you know'.

Mm.

'It may be the end of the Stock Market but it isn't the end of the world'.

Yes, because there were a lot of songs about that time 'Brother Can You Spare a Dime' and...

Yes. That was really some crash.

Mm.

They made laws so it can't ever happen, banks can't go broke for instance, you know, they can't...

Have a run on it?

Mm. It was, no you can't, nothing like that can happen anymore, they've made it impossible for it to happen.

Mm. Because this coincided with the time of the changeover from silent films to sound films.

Exactly.

With Al Jolson and the rest.

Exactly, exactly, that's right. That first one was made by Al Jolson, you're quite right. What the heck was he name of it?

'The Jazz Singer'?

The Jazz Singer, that's it, yeah.

Mm, I remember that very...

And I remember thinking how wrong, first time finding that my father was wrong [Laughter] about something. Mostly he was right but he was sure wrong about that.

He didn't do any more films afterwards?

No you see he got into this business which he always...

Yes, with the guide dogs?

Seeing-Eye Dog for the Blind, you know, he set that one up and enjoyed it enormously.

Did you have any further connection with films at all or entertainment at all?

Mm, no, I'll tell you why I didn't because I, I hadn't seen my mother, I didn't remember her at all.

Mm.

And do you remember I told you that she, somebody wrote to her 'Could this be your daughter'? So she wrote to me on spec and I got that letter just when she was born, the very morn... She was born at six o'clock in the morning and this letter arrived in that first post, you know.

Ah, yes.

A letter from my mother, it was an exciting day for me. And then I...

Mm, and because she'd retired from singing then?

No, yes she was now teaching, she had just exactly retired when I came over. She sent me the fare and wanted to see me, and that was quite an exciting thing for me. I'll tell

you something she, she didn't like me any better when I was grown up than she did when I was little.

Yes. [Laughter]

When she flung me out. And I learnt a great deal about a lot of things.

Right. And you stayed in England?

Yes, I've been here ever since.

Ah. And what had you being doing?

Well yes. My husband sold up, I thought I had left him behind me because I just had my small year old daughter when I came here. But he sold up all the furniture and stuff that my father had given me for this house on this island. My father had this, another island called Hog Island, but when I married this chap the father of my two children... [Pause] He, he gave me an island called Forsyth Island and then he went back, as I told you, to, to California and there I was. And I know that was a very exciting time really. Because everything, I mean really everything came to an abrupt stop just at that time, it was extraordinary, I mean nobody had any work. And, and then, you know, we had prohibition in America at this time.

Mm.

[05:00]

And I'd, because, did a lot of rum running.

Mm. [Laughter]

I, I used to keep us, you know, from starving by mm... There was an island, quite a little bit away from my own island, which is opposite the mainland this village, this little village called Gananoque. But I managed to do this what I call rum running, it was taking liquor... [Laughter]

[Laughter]

There was an island, not very near my island but down river which was half on one side, it went right to the State Line, half of this island was on the Canadian side and the other half of the island was on the American side. And how I kept us going and not starving was going and getting liquor... There was a, I wasn't doing this on my own hook I, I got in to this quite by accident but it sure saved the day. There were people doing this rum running, that was beating the prohibition you see in America. And what I did was to take these great crates, and my golly they were heavy, and I'd collect the booze then I'd run in this boat, which was black by the way so it didn't show up too much at night, this always happened at night. And there was this island that was half American and half Canadian and I'd nose the boat up on to this little sandy cove. And I remember how heavy those crates were and I'd yank these crates out of the boat and put them in behind the bushes and trees just up, just up beyond the

sand, a little cove. They would come on the other side walk through and collect them you see. And for which I got paid you see so that was how I didn't starve. But, no that was a great help to me, really, really a great help. This was sort of connection between the Canadian and the American side, these, these people.

Oh yes, really.

They were, they were, they weren't very nice people I have to say, they were rather, well they weren't people that I, kind of people I ever knew before that.

I suppose it was similar to drug dealers nowadays.

Yes, they...

As soon as they're prohibited all those...

Exactly, exactly, exactly what happened. You've got it in one.

As if they, if there was legitimised in drugs they'd kill all the crime.

Exactly, exactly. And, but, you know, it was liquor then. I did, I never have had anything to do with drugs, but this was just booze.

Mm.

And the good Canadian whiskey which was of course, liked very much, it was quite good quality apparently, Americans liked it very much. And of course, it was so near New York it was, it was easy.

Yes.

Oh well. Well it kept us going, anyhow we as a result we didn't starve. [Laughter]

No. It was good. No we had those days don't come back again.

I don't think so, can't see how they could really. Do you?

No.

Not like that.

Yes, meanwhile...

It would be drugs now, it wouldn't be liquor, you know.

Well meaning I was thinking about the, the Depression, the slump.

Oh yes. Look they've made some kind of, they've taken precautions against that happening, now banks cannot go broke like that.

Mm, ah yes.

Apparently this, not in America anyway.

No.

I don't know, maybe they can here, I don't know but. But when we came over in, in Nineteen..., mm, in 1932 to England things were really in a pretty slow way here too.

Yes.

The Depression had sort of, it took a bit longer before it really happened here, I believe another year. We were ahead of the Depression, we started it and then it sort of went all over the world.

Yes repercussions. When you came to England what did you do then?

Well, well my, my, my, I came over because my mother...

Mother, mm, yes.

My, I brought my little year old baby with me and I stayed with her but she didn't really like that and she'd, being an opera singer maybe she didn't really like children you see. Mm, it was curiosity on her part more than anything. Well she's got a flowery hope. But then my husband sold everything up and came over here, this was enough for my mother thank you very much, out we were tossed. She got a pupil of hers to find a room I remember in Putney. And out we were on our own – todd from then on. And, oh that was wonderful, those marvellous things do happen in this world. It couldn't have happened, this certainly could not have happened at any other time of the year except Christmas Eve.

[10:24]

Mm.

And this room that she had, this pupil had found and she'd put me in, and, you know, my husband by this time was here and my small little child.

Mm.

And I was just across the street from the church here in Putney, just across the street. And how it happened it was just amazing, it was Christmas Eve and my rent was due, by which time I didn't have any more money to pay the rent with. And my, oh, and my husband had got a job, that's right, kind of carting marble mantelpieces up and down three stories.

Yes.

[Pause] Near Portland, Great Portland Street Station this place was, this fireplace shop. And anyway, I didn't have... I know why, I didn't have the rent. He got twenty-

seven shillings a week for his job and I think my little daughter had been ill and I'd had, I had to take her to the doctor's and he charged me eight shillings [Laughter] for this visit plus some medicine for her. And, and I didn't, I sort of used the rent money you see. And Miss, Mrs Sattisford [ph 12:01] was her name, she came to collect the rent, this was Christmas Eve, and I said to her 'I'm terribly sorry but I, my daughter's been ill and I had to pay the doctor and I haven't got it, I'm sure directly after Christmas I'll be able to pay it', you see. And this woman she didn't believe me so she pushed by me in the, it was standing in the door talking to her, she pushed by me and what she thought was, she was looking, she thought I'd spent the rent money on goodies for Christmas you see. And in this room my larder consisted of a, of an orange crate turned upside up and, you know, upside down with a shelf you see even vision and that was my larder. She pushed by me and she went straight over, and it was a sort of little curtain thing I'd put up like a tea towel or something in front of it, and she swept that aside. Oh my gosh she found out there was absolutely nothing in there and this was Christmas Eve.

It was one of those Christmas Eves that was a Friday then came the Saturday then came the Sunday then came the Monday, there were four days I know you know how it sometimes happens at Christmas?

Mm, yes.

And she realised that I was actually telling the truth and, as I say, she was a very stony-hearted lady but it, because it was Christmas Eve she said 'I see', then she went away. What she did was to go straight over to the vicarage across the road and tell the vicar that there was a family came over from Canada and they didn't have anything, and they really did not have anything and was there anything in the poor box that she'd... And the vicar wasn't very interested. He sent his niece over to investigate the situation, and the niece was very nice she saw the whole thing. And they had, the vicar, that was very useful, his son had come back, over from, funnily enough, from Canada and they had a baby the same age as mine and so from then on they used to sent over, they'd cook the meal for their baby and another one for my baby so it was very good.

Yes.

They didn't feed me but they fed my baby, that was the important thing.

Almost like Charles Dickens wasn't it?

[Laughter] It was a bit Dickensian really when I look back on it, yes it was. And that went on for a while. And then I got us out of it.

Mm. What, what did, what were you doing a that time?

Well I, I had met... You see the thing was my, my mother had given a pupil who came to her for singing lessons who had a studio on Wigmore Street and she taught dancing. This was long before I came over, the whole year before I came over to, to England. And she, this girl that had this dancing studio had only just started up and she didn't have enough money to pay for my mother's expensive singing lessons. So

my mother did a deal with her, she said 'Well I'll give you singing lessons and when my daughter comes over you can give her dancing lessons, they'll be good for her', mm, and that was how it all happened it was through the dancing teacher, there were a pupil there that I met a very, very wonderful woman who liked babies and things and liked young people and she rescued me really, she, she was tremendous. She moved me out of that room and she had a very large house in Hampstead and the people who were her relatives who had the basement garden flat in her house were away on a big cruise or something, they were away for about six months she moved me in to their vacant apartment, and that was very, very wonderful. [Laughter] Sraight from...

[16:18]

Mm.

Absolutely the slums [Laughter] in to this rather posh accommodation, you know. And also she liked, she liked young people and she liked babies and she adored my daughter so, you know, that was wonderful. And then she looked after her for me to get a job and I got a job. [Laughter] In those days you had, everybody that had, in those days everybody that was out of a job, and boy they were out a job, ooh! Mm, in the early '30s oh wow they were out of jobs. And everybody that sort of found themselves out of a job decided what they'd do was they'd, in the paper there were always advertisements about selling vacuum cleaners, salesmen. And [Laughter]...

That did brushes?

Yes, vacuum cleaners.

Vacuum cleaners?

Not, not brushes, actually vacuum cleaners.

Vacuum cleaners, yes.

Hoovers and Electrolux you see.

Mm, yes.

Anyway there was another one that had just come out exactly at this time called an Air-Way, a thing called an Air-Way which had two motors and you turned it upside down and it was, you could see it was visible cleaning, you could see when there was dirt stopped coming out of the carpet and stuff. And they were advertising for sales people. And I thought well I wonder if I could do that, saw this advertisement and she looked after my child while I went up for an interview. And that was very funny, they didn't have women it was men [Laughter] but I somehow, the managing director was a man called Irvine and he was an American from Texas, and this was this brand new thing which was a kind of combination of Electrolux and Hoover, and a very good thing it was too, splendid, two motors, V8 [ph 18:24] section and very mild beaters you see, very much better than, very good.

Oh yes.

And anyway I went up there to the, it was in Baker Street, that place with a tower on it in Baker Street.

Was it Abbey National?

That's it. And they had the top floor.

Mm.

That's right. And I was sitting there and I, it was nine o'clock in the morning. And I was sitting there and everybody was rushing round with what I thought looked like cellos or musical instruments and things and of course, it wasn't it was these cleaners in cases, and rushing out just when I was rushing in. [Laughter]

Mm.

And I saw the managing director and he was lovely, he was from Texas so he immediately felt friendly, a nice person you see and my American accent And he said 'Well we will try you, yes alright we could give you a try'. And they gave me, I, he didn't give me but they were put in charge, they had teams of people and they used to put me in this team with a man called Curtis who was working in Mayfair, [Laughter] which was supposed to be the graveyard of his officers, because first of all you had to get through the butler, then the secretary and if you were lucky you got to see the person who really lived there. And anyway I, they, I was the only woman, all the rest were guys doing this, and he said 'Well we'll try you'. And, oh dear that was so wonderful that first week I had a totally wonderful thing happened to me. I, I went to... Where was that? I, I went to a house and this man had not only his flat in, in London but he had two houses in the country and he booked three.

[20:42]

Mm.

He said 'What is this thing? Well bring it along and show it to me, where is it?' I said 'Well it's in Baker Street, would you like to see it?' 'Well yes I am, it sounds interesting'. So I, then he bought three. That was my first day so they thought they'd got onto something with me, you know, sort of an unusual thing to happen, it was, it was a lucky break for me, very, very lucky. And then I went on and I, I continued to do sort of quite well, much better than, much better than expected you see. Quite lucky, really lucky. And he then gave me, he told this man Curtis whose team I was in, who didn't want to do it at all because he couldn't understand why Irvine, why, why should he should have a sort of woman hanging around doing this.

Mm, mm.

Why should he work with a woman was difficult to understand. And, but I kept on doing so well you see and so it went on from there. And then I was sent with him to open up Devon and Cornwall, we had districts. And there again I was extremely, wonderful lucky things always kept happening as I look back on it, and my first call

we got down to, to, to Devon in Plymouth and it was, we'd had terrible, oh I was really deadly frightened of this guy by the way too, he was very abrupt, he'd been in the Foreign Legion and he was really tough this man and I was scared to death of it. But we got down to Devon, by this time, oh, and we had, the big end went or something in a place called Chard so we were held up, we didn't get down to Devon proper where he was making for Plymouth you see, we didn't get down there until about half past nine, ten at night. Of course, everybody had gone to bed they were asleep you couldn't start up. He was very energetic this man and he said 'Well I'm', I, I know I was so tired, I remember how tired I was because I'd walked from Hendon to Chelsea at four in the morning, because he said I was to be there and we were going to make an early start.

Yes, mm, mm.

Because he also didn't want to work with me you see. Irvine had said to him 'You go down to open up Devon and Cornwall' and so on. And they had a man he'd been an officer that he'd just set himself up in an office down there, in Plymouth I remember, and we were supposed to meet this man and go on from there, you know. And also this, they were supposed to engage a lot of salespeople down there and so on you see. And, well anyhow I had such a lucky thing happen to me there too. First call I made was he, we left Plymouth and he thought we'll go to this rich countryside. And somehow he'd settled on going to a place called Salcombe, and it was full of very nice houses and so on. And my first call [Laughter] the butler opened the door to me, it was a place called Landmark, just coming in to Salcombe on the, sort of on the beginning of the hill and you went down in to the bay, that's where the houses were all around but this was just right there, the very first house. 'Alright, try that one'. So I get out of the car and I go to the door and the butler opens the door to me and I said 'I'm, I'd like to speak to the lady of the house please', and the butler is saying to me 'There isn't any lady of the house', and a voice from some place at the back in the house said 'Show the lady in Martin', the butler, 'show the lady in'. And he'd just arrived and it was Paul Gallico.

Ah!

And I hadn't seen him since I was eight years of age and he knew my father and everything, you see what I mean by luck?

Oh yes.

[25:00]

And, oh my, that was the first person I'd met in all the time I'd been in England so far that I had any connection with my old life you see. And well anyway of course, he bought one but I was so overjoyed and delighted to meet him again, but I was irresistible I mean everybody in Salcombe had an Air-Way by the time in the next two or three weeks. I tell you it was just terrific. And, you know, it was, it was, I was very happy and, oh, just didn't think I'd, I just, oh, everything was great. [Laughter]

Mm.

Because that was really the first time that I'd met anybody from home, you know.

Oh yes.

And so on. And that was, it was, so I went on from there alright and managed to keep my two children and, you know, because I, I after all I had sort of kidnapped my children, you know, to get this job and had to pay for them and because I had a lot on my plate and I managed.

Yes, did you meet anyone else from your old days in time?

Mm.

You don't come across any of them?

Mm, I don't, I don't seem to remember anything very startling in that way, it's just that it seemed to me that I would sell one Air-Way in the morning and one in the afternoon.

Mm.

And I got five pounds. Now that doesn't sound anything today, but my God you see if I'd been a, if I had had shorthand and typing, well I'd never have got us out of the slums for one thing, but they were being paid wages like two pounds ten a week.

Per week?

And I mean this was something else in those days, you know.

My first job, my first job was seventeen and sixpence a week.

Exactly, that's what I mean. Well what, what year would this sort of be?

Well '36/37, something like that.

Yes, right, this was the same era, well a little bit ahead before that.

Yes, yes.

And that was just when we were just beginning to come out of the Depression.

Mm.

You know, first job, yes. Anyway it was, mm. But you see it is really true, do you not think that luck has a great deal to do with what happens to you in this world?

Mm.

It just does seem to me that is operating all the time.

Yes, yes, mm.

Either for good or bad, one of the two things. It can be both, it works both ways, it works both ways.

Because my theory is that you make your own luck.

I guess you do but, and I'll tell you something, it's also a question of...

Coincidence?

Yes, timing as well. I mean if you're just standing on that corner with that time when that happens and that sort of thing, you know?

Oh yes it's...

I mean bumping in to Gallico, my first call, you know.

Oh yes it's, and did you keep contact with him or was it just...?

Oh my goodness me. I had just the great sense to turn him down, he married seven times. [Laughter]

[Laughter]

Oh yes indeed.

Right.

Actually I turned him down because I had met Zilly. [Laughter]

Ah, yes.

And I do Zilly.

Yes. How did you meet Zilly or is that...?

Mm. Now wait a second, here we go. We're now just in the beginning of the war, the war's just there, just starting. And my mother had this house in St John's Wood and when war broke out she after all knew about the war because she'd been here when the First World War, right?

Mm.

And she just took off to America. And I, she wanted me also to, she wanted to park one child with some relatives and another child, the other child, my son with another relative, my daughter with one lot of relatives and my son with somebody, and I just didn't want to be split up from my kids you see and so I said 'No'. [Laughter] And everybody said 'But oh my goodness, I mean you should have thought of your children, it's just going to be dangerous, we're going to be bombed, we're going to be,

dear me why didn't you, why did you do that'? I said 'Well they'll just have to take their chance with me that's all, I'm not doing that, I'm not going to be split up as a family, take their chances'. And so she'd gone. Now she didn't want me to live in that house, she wanted the house shut up but our, our old family solicitor was not at all for that and also he was quite on my side, he thought I should have a place to live. And so he battled with her and allowed me to stay in her, this nice house in St John's Wood and I was rattling round in it like a pea, you know. I don't know why she needed, one woman with a maid and a cook, I don't know why she needed a huge house but there she lived, this was in Carlton Hill. And anyway I'm there, and the place afterwards became know as a mare, as 'the mare's nest', they named it but all sorts of people that I knew, people got bombed out came and stayed, in the end I was cooking for sixteen people .

[30:48]

Mm, oh.

Because of course, not having a British father and mother in those, during the war you wouldn't perhaps remember all this, you're not old enough to but you had to have a British father and mother and be...

Naturalised?

Nat..., yes you had to be really British you see.

You had to, mm.

And I was, didn't fit any of this and so I ran this, this place that they called, the people called 'the mare's nest', it was a wonderful community, we did everything together, we'd go to the pub together and all sorts of interesting people. And [Laughter] of course, the house must have been rocking with people, they were squeezed in, even, even, there was a study down in the basement was occupied by a couple. Oh dear, they were great days. I, it's a terrible thing to say to you but I did enjoy that war.

Mm.

It's an awful thing to say isn't it?

Well yes, mm.

But I was, it was so interesting all those people and everything. And of course...

Also the atmosphere was so different then.

Oh, and everybody was nice to each other and, oh, interested.

Yes people really...

Common danger you see.

Mm.

Probably it's the only time we humans are ever decent with each other.

Yes, I remember that, yes it's settled.

That's exactly it.

Mm.

And it grew and it grew and, as I tell you, it ended up with sixteen people, mm. And I would, I would cook them this evening meal, I didn't do breakfast for them, they did their own breakfasts. But oh my. And there's, gosh I mean people were sharing, and then we were sharing rooms, I mean it was absolutely amazing.

And sharing ration books in there.

And I had all those ration books. Oh, and rationing was no problem at all because near Carlton Hill there's a little place called Blenheim Terrace which is...

Mm, it's just round the corner here.

Yes, just up there. It, and my mother had been trading with this grocery shop in Blenheim Terrace was run by Mr and Mrs Woodman and they had all these rations. And lots of people had fled you see, you know, the mechanised emigration and, and it was very, we had no problems with rationing at all, I could have anything no matter, unlimited butter, unlimited sugar 'How much do you need? Fine, here it is', you know.

Oh.

And of course, everybody was doing a good war job of some kind, they were all very appreciative of my evening meals I tell you, it was really lovely. And we'd all go to the pub together and, or else we'd make music, because the place was, ha, we had, there was a lovely Bechstein grand and one of the lodgers was marvellous musician, one of 'the mares' as they called them. It was a splendid pianist and another one was a, Olga fabulous singing voice and so we had our own concerts and everything, yes great didn't we?

Oh yes it's...

So that was, that was that. And then one of the mares, so-called, said... Oh, she worked in The Ministry of Information, well two of them worked in The Ministry of Information, these were all people doing important war jobs that were staying with, you know, my mares so to speak. And this girl Grace, there's, she was sort of head of Scandinavian Section wasn't she in the, in The Ministry of Information.

Mm.

And she said 'Oh would you like to come along I've got to give a luncheon party and it's at the Café Royal, and would you like to come along and sort of make it up and you can talk to a couple of the journalists that I've got, you know, I'm giving this lunch to'. And 'Yeah, I'd love that'. So I go, and I was standing in the foyer of the Café Royal and... Oh, I have to go back a little bit. I had met a guy called George Stent [ph 35:24] this is before the war, just before the war, and I fell madly in love with George Stent [ph 35:28] and dear me if he doesn't go and leave me for a girl called Stella Zilliacus who is my husband's daughter.

[35:32]

Oh.

My future husband's daughter, of course, I didn't know anything about this. All I just know was he left me for somebody called Stella Zilliacus. So alright I'm going to lunch, standing in the foyer of the Café Royal and being introduced to your, introduced, everybody was being introduced to each other and I'm introduced to Konni Zilliacus. Zilliacus, my first words to him were 'By the way Mr Zilliacus have you got a daughter called Stella?' 'Yes I have, did you go to Oxford with her?' 'No I did not, I have a bone to pick with you', and we picked it for thirty something years. [Laughter] Anyhow it was really great.

And I was a, I was a very, a very keen Socialist.

Right.

And I beat all those beautiful dames that were flocking around after him because I knew what he was talking about.

Mm.

I was also interested in what was going on in the big world, you know. And that's how I won on that one.

Right, so it really pays to be a bit of a...

Yes, wasn't that lucky?

Mm, was he an MP at that time?

No, no.

Right, he was an MP though.

No, no. No, no, he was, he was the head of this, he was the head of the censorship. He, you know he had all those languages don't you?

Mm.

He had thirteen languages did my old man. And my God he's, he didn't think he did, he said 'No I've only really got nine'. And so I said 'Well why do you say that'? He said 'Well I never believe that I know a language unless I can dream in it.

Oh. [Laughter]

That was his, quite truly [Laughter] whether he really knew it or not. And, well anyhow we were, I meet him at this lunch and everybody goes off and he doesn't have to go on duty, he's, he doesn't have to go until he was doing the night shift. And he and a guy called Alan... Alan somebody or other ran this department. I think you've come off.

No, no, we've, no we've still got a little bit to go.

Still? Well anyway I'll finish this up.

Mm, mm.

But we had lunch and because I was a Socialist, keen Socialist, as a matter of fact I was a member of the Communist Party till they, I was expelled from it.

Oh.

Yeah. Do you know I was ex..., Harry Pollitt expelled me for jumping up from out of my seat and saying 'Comrades I feel the party line is wrong' [Laughter] on this whatever it was. And you see you didn't do that in those days, and certainly not to Harry you see. Anyway, anyway oh dear oh dear. Anyhow I knew what he was talking about, that's how I beat all those beautiful dames, you know, that were flocking round after him. It doesn't, he was, he'd just come in to his inheritance and he was very well off, which I didn't know about, certainly you'd never know it by looking at him because all those years in the House of Commons he held the record for the worst dressed man in the House of Commons. [Laughter] He just didn't have any interest in clothes at all.

Yes I remember because he was very active in the Peace Movement.

Oh entirely, yes that was, was his great thing. That's why he went in to the League of Nations because he believed in Peace.

Mm.

You know, that was his great, that's the thing he was very intent on. And of course, you see he was of this generation where in the war all his chums were killed and everything, you know.

Mm, oh yes.

And he didn't like wars.

Oh no.

No, no. Peace was his great thing and peace between nations. Yes, he died feeling the same way.

Yes I think we'd better reload now for when we...

Yes, well that's, thank you for a lovely...

[End of Tape 1 Side 2 39:48]

NB: The time codes given here are estimates based on readings from the original cassette recording.

Tape 2 Side A.

This is Side Two of the BECTU History Project interview with Jan Zilliacus Number 340.

Ah.

Okay?

Yeah.

[Short period of recorded noise – nothing significant missed]

That's right, it's stopped now, it must be something.

Okay.

It seems you've got interesting stories to tell about the, you know, the fight against appeasement and...

Mm. And, [Pause] and there was, and it was funny but I know that it's this sort of cliché but Zill and I looked at each other and liked each other just like that, it's very strange.

Ah, yes.

Very, very remarkable. After the lunch he wanted to go on talking but, do you know, there's no place in Lon..., he said 'Do you think we could get a cup of tea somewhere, go on talking'? And I said 'I, I don't think there is any place in Piccadilly you can just run around and get a cup of tea'. So couldn't seem to find anything and think of anything there and I said 'Well I can make you some tea if you're prepared to come to St John's Wood, as far as that, I can go and make you some tea at home if you would like'. He said 'I would like that very much', so we just went on talking.

Mm.

And that's how it all started, happened.

Yes, were you much, very much involved with him in his work?

Oh altogether.

Yes.

And oh yes, because I as, well I'd think you'd call me a political animal in those days I was very, very keen on [Laughter] Socialism, I didn't have a fear of Communism that most people had like remember.

Mm, mm.

And still so I think.

Mm.

Maybe it is still, probably not to the same extent.

Yes.

But people were very, very frightened of Communism my goodness me.

Oh, sort of there was a hysteria almost was there?

And that which we had we were gonna, we were gonna, yes exactly, that which we have we're gonna to hold on to, we didn't have anything like that happened to us, you know, any. But how, it was very exciting and the elections were very exciting.

Oh yes.

I enjoyed all that very much.

That's right, the 1945 election?

Yes, that was absolutely wonderful, I, I found it wonderful and, and because he was first of all elected for Gateshead, which is, you know, is up in the North East, the Geordies, I do like Geordies, I really have a great fondness for Geordies. [Laughter] I like them very much. And I hate to say this, and this is very confidential, but I never felt, I never felt quite the same about the Manchester folk, perhaps it was because, maybe it was timing or something but I just did like those people in Gateshead, oh gee I did like them.

Mm.

Still like Geordies. And they were so pro-Zilly too, that was lovely, really, it wasn't quite the same in Manchester. Maybe it was okay but, but there wasn't the enthusiasm really it was...

Because he was their MP was he I suppose?

Yes.

Mm.

You see, you know, they've expelled Zilly. Why do you expel Zilly?

I seem to remember that, that was Stafford Cripps time.

Absolutely.

And he was even better than them.

Yes, exactly. Well if it hadn't have been for Nye I don't think Zilly would ever have got back, they expelled Nye as well.

Yes, that's right.

And he and Zill, and, and there was somebody else... Somebody else, I can't think of the name. Anyway, anyway I think if it hadn't, if it hadn't have been for Nye I don't think Zill would have ever have got back either, I mean they'd have kept him well up. Because some of the, some of the leaders of the party in those days were very, very right wing, you know.

Oh yes, definitely Morrison.

They were, they were. Yes but they weren't so much.

Even worse than the ones we've got today.

They were intent on it, they were absolutely blue, it was very strange to be as, as against as they were, they really were. I mean they were all, more so than Tories, I mean much more so.

[05:09]

Oh yes certainly, Herbert Morrison.

I don't know if you remember that sort of feeling in the way things were in those days, do you remember any of that?

Well yes...

How anti-Communist they were, how anti-Real Socialist they were.

They wouldn't let the Communists affiliate.

No, no, no, no. And Zill thought that was such a great idea, he thought all Socialists should be together.

Mm, oh yes.

I mean he... [Laughter] Yeah.

Yes, although at that time Russia was our ally.

Yes, absolutely, you wouldn't have thought so the way people were behaving though.

Oh yes. Because at that time the Communist Party was very strong here, you now.

Mm.

Thirty-six, we even had three Communist councillors on the City of Westminster.

We did, we did. And we even had a Communist MP.

Yes, we had two.

What the heck was his name?

Piratin.

Mm?

Phil Piratin.

Piratin, Phil Piratin that's right, yes.

And Willie Gallacher of course.

And Willie Gallacher of course.

Mm.

Good, good old Willie.

Mm.

Never wielded a feather that one, he was great wasn't he?

Ah yes.

I remember him with great affection.

Mm, mm.

And I remember because, you know, Zill was, had all those languages and everything. I remember that the Tories kept on saying to me 'Are you really, you shouldn't be in the Labour Party, you ought to be one of us', you know, meaning he was the sort of, had the trappings of a gent. [Laughter] Oh dear, wasn't it funny? Mm, but it was such a nice, interesting life with him.

Yes.

I mean really, oh dear me. After the war, you know, we, I think I, I think I can really say I met every uncrowned head of Europe, Tito and, and Russia. Oh really interesting.

Oh yes it...

I can't remember all the names which is so bad of me. I mean that's because I'm getting old, you know.

[Laughter] Well I'm the same, I can't remember names.

It's very...

Mm.

It's a great shame.

Well of course at that time the atom bomb was hanging over everybody's...

Absolutely, yes.

And of course, Zilly was very firmly against.

Oh very.

Mm.

I remember we, do you remember by any chance that we had huge meetings there in, in the...

Trafalgar?

In the Trafalgar Square.

Mm, oh yes I was...

And those lions and I can remember, see him now standing up on that place there with the lions either side addressing a huge crowd.

Yes we had.

Enormous crowds we had.

Yes I was up on the platform filming it.

Were you?

Yes at that time.

Well done.

And filming the other bit in...

Yeah.

Because there were Aldermaston marches too.

Exactly, yeah, the good old Aldermaston marches, that's right.

Yes.

Zill couldn't do those because, you know, he, he only had half a foot.

Oh right, yes.

He wasn't very great on long walks, you know, it was rather tiring for him. But he, he, that's why he would only march a little bit of the way because he couldn't.

No, yes.

His foot was a handicap a bit. It didn't show very much, he'd learnt to walk so he didn't limp or anything but at the same time with just this half a foot here...

Ah yes it's a...

He'd lost it under a train believe it or not.

Mm.

And his brother Laurin was standing beside him and fainted. [Laughter] Oh dear. I don't know how that could have happened but he put his foot under a train. I suppose he was examining something and the thing started or...

Ah. Yes, because that would have been a clean cut.

Examining, absolutely right across there, no toes, mm.

Was that early, was that when he moved to this place or...?

Eh?

When did you move to this place here?

Oh well that was... Well 1960.

Ninety-five, that's quite some time, yes.

1960, wasn't it Dawnie? Yes, it was.

DH: Something around there.

Mm.

Yes, as I say, I remember Zilliacus, Konni a bit.

You do?

Yes. I remember hearing him speak, I didn't know him personally, the only time I met him was when we came here to, you know, interview him for the GDR.

[10:00]

That's right, yes that's right. Were you in the union before then?

Oh at that time...

Dou you still...?

Yes it was the... How's it going? The GDR, German Democratic Republic.

Oh yes.

And they weren't recognised actually, they weren't recognised at that time.

That's right, that's right.

And we had to do, we were, we had to do the filming for them here and we had to send it via Stockholm.

Ah, of course, you would have.

Yes so...

Oh wow, wasn't there a tremendous, those dirty German Communists, those, ooh...
The shootings were tremendous about it.

What we was, actually it caused an international thing for that and that is a, so that it was the Foreign Secretary, what was his name, hyphenated name?

Phil Noel-Baker.

Noel-Baker, yes. Yes, well they asked me to get a film of him speaking and he was speaking somewhere up at Leyton.

Ah.

And I took the camera and the lights and I got a close-up of him giving his speech. I sent it off to them and when they put it out on their television they said it was an interview with him.

Oh.

And thatt caused such a row.

I can believe you.

Oh dear.

Oh yes.

And he got his trowls [ph 11:15] and he didn't earn it. But it all blew over.

Right. You know Philip Noel-Baker somehow he was in the League with Zilly, League of Nations, they were great old chums.

Mm, did, did...?

But he went sort of right wing.

Very right wing, yes.

Afterwards, and then he just cut Zilly off with a shilling and really had a row with him.

Oh.

Mm, he became very respectable.

Mm, well he became Foreign Secretary.

Yes quite, yes.

I don't think he lasted long after that interview really.

No, he didn't.

No.

Mm.

Was there anybody else that you were sort of friendly with in those days?

My goodness. See there was so many people.

So there's Michael Foot Chris Ewers [ph 12:15].

Oh yes, and I'm...

It was so disappointing when he became leader of...

Do you know something that Zilly and Michael Foot, this is confidential again, I mean, you know, not for general publication.

No it's just for archive purposes.

That's right. But, but Foot didn't approve of Zilly, you know, not really.

Right.

Mm. He wasn't really friendly at all, no way, mm.

Yes, because I was so surprised how he had changed because before, I mean again before the war those huge galas...

Well you'd never have believed that.

Those marvellous speeches he made.

Tremendous.

But as soon as he became leader he became tamed I expect, I don't know how he did it.

I believe he just moved smartly to the right, that's what happened to him.

Mm. Ah yes it's, and that's how he lost the election for us.

He did indeed.

Mm.

He did indeed.

If only he'd had he old fire it would have been so different.

Oh boy.

I don't think he would have got the job.

I don't know. He was, he was tremendously liked, tremendously liked.

Yes, mm.

And revered almost in the party. Did you ever belong to the Labour Party?

I was in the Labour League of Youth before I joined the YCL.

Mm, mm.

And then I was in the, we went in to the party and actually I didn't leave the party but the party left me.

Right.

You think you know what I mean?

Yes indeed, I'm quite sure you do.

I still get 'Morning Star'.

I was expelled from the Communist Party.

Yes, you were saying it was Harry Pollitt.

Yes but, you know, you, you did not disagree with the party line.

No.

That wasn't done, that wasn't done, absolutely not.

No, no that was it.

Really not.

Mm, yes there was no sort of latitude otherwise, that's how the party split because...

I know, and that was the end of it doing it that way too. Yes that really...

Oh yes it's... Oh well so then we've got to think, worry about the future.

Mm. Well I'd give a, I've been to Russia many times with Zill and I'd really like to know what's going on over there now, I get such conflicting reports from various things I hear, people I've met and so on.

Oh it's, it's very bad news.

It's just it's, I mean it's really depressing the sort of things I've been hearing.

[15:00]

Mm, yes because I've been hoping that this was, this is only a temporally phase, two steps forward one step back.

Yep.

Mm.

I'm wondering how that's gonna work out in fact.

I don't know. I can't, I can't see Yeltsin lasting very much longer.

I don't really like Yeltsin.

And I don't know who's going to take over from him, I hope it's us.

Yes. I don't really, yes I don't really, I don't really have much time for Yeltsin you know.

No. Well I knew from the beginning he's such a phoney, you could smell it.

Absolutely. And do you know also he smells a bit like some people of the old gang in a funny kind of way, it's like a kind of hangover or something you can get.

Mm. Oh yes it's...

Mm.

We live in interesting times.

Yes I guess we do.

As they say.

You know it's funny to think that now I wouldn't be welcome there, I would not be welcome there.

No, I don't suppose I'd be welcome in GDR so, because I used to go there quite a lot.

Probably not. No I'm, you very well might not be.

Mm.

Strange isn't it?

Yes it's...

Mm.

Well that's... No I think, have you had enough or was, have you got anything else you'd like to say about yourself, about life? About films, about entertainment, opera?

You know, this is not for publication, this is just confidential.

Yes.

But I must say that I did enjoy being in the Communist Party much more than I enjoyed being in the Labour Party, I have to confess this to you.

Mm, oh yes it's... I remember I had great fun because I was, you know, in the YCM we had all sorts of, lots of social things.

Yes, right.

Things like rambles and companionship et cetera.

Yes, exactly but also we would have in those days interesting discussions and...

Mm, oh yes.

Do you know what I mean? Somehow it was...

Yes. Also they had a better education policy then because I mean the thing which changed my life was when we had a series of talks on dialectical materialism with Jessie.

Right.

It opened up everything.

Exactly.

Still got it.

Exactly. Have, have you, have you any, any connections now with the Party so to speak? You see...

Not really, no.

I mean, look Bill Rust said to me 'Now look Jan, this is where you don't. Now all that will happen is that they'll use you as a stick to beat Zilly with in the House' – this was way back.

Ah.

'So you're not going to be a card carrying member of our party anymore, you're gonna, it doesn't matter at all but you're not gonna do that because they'll use it against Zill'.

Oh yes of course they would. You know, as they use Hilary Clinton with, you know, yes.

Yeah.

Well anything where there are vettings.

Just let me think. I, there's so many things and I haven't got a phone with me today I'm not, not being very bright.

Well I think you've had a very, very interesting interview so far, in the...

I have the local Labour Party group, you know, here.

Yes.

And I get speakers to come and speak to us and, but it's...

Because we haven't got any councillors now in, remember David Abowsi [ph 19:00] who lives opposite me?

Oh yeah, he's, oh he's fine.

He is, he's very good.

I think he's a great guy.

A lovely person.

I like him so much.

He'd made a lovely councillor and...

Oh he was beautiful.

Couldn't get back again.

But he's not in now is he?

He's not a councillor now.

Not any more.

No, no he'd been voted out then.

That's right.

I think there was a fiddle on the boundaries and things.

I bet you it was.

Oh yes.

Oh hell, they wouldn't, no. Oh dear I liked those old days better.

Oh yes it's...

I really do. It's so tame and then no.

Because we've got so much to do and so on.

Again.

Well seeming they're bound to collapse sooner or later I mean.

Well...

Eventually, it's going to take a long job.

I think, I, I would like it to happen in my lifetime but I don't quite see that happening because I'm eighty-three now you see, and well, mm, I'd enjoy that if I couldn't, I could be present.

[20:06]

Okay, well shall we call it a day there?

Yes.

Okay. Thank you very much.

Hopefully there's sort of a little bit of interest anyway to you.

Oh there is quite a lot.

Yes.

Quite good.

[End of Tape 2 Side A 20:24]

BECTU History Project
Interview no: 340
Interviewee: Jan Zilliacus [Second Interview]
Interviewer: Stanley Forman
No of tapes: 1
Duration: 1:23:45

MY: This is a BECTU History Project Interview Number 340 Jan Zilliacus, this is the second interview. The date is the twenty-third of May 1995, the interviewer is Stanley Forman. Okay.

Right, we can begin talking.

MY: Yes.

Yes.

Okay, so really if you could tell me Yan, I can call you Yan it helps?

Yes you can do.

Yan, it's Yan and not Jan.

It is Jan actually.

Jan, right I'll call you Jan.

Thank you.

Even better. Jan can you tell us a wee bit about your origins, where you were born, and the background and childhood.

Oh yes, oh yes. Well I was born in New York.

Yeah.

But when I was eleven months old my father was the first, I believe he was the very first director, American director to be sent to work in England.

Film director?

In the old Hepworth Studios.

Yeah.

And in Walton on Thames.

Ah, ha.

And so we came over here when I was eleven months old.

What was his name?

Lawrence Trimble.

Lawrence Trimble?

Mm, he wanted... Would you like to get that book for me I'll refresh my memory on this one? And he was the first person to put animals in movies.

Pardon, animals?

First person with animals in, in films.

Ah, ha. Ah, ha.

And it started off with Jean the Vitagraph Dog.

Oh yes. [Laughter] This was before Rin Tin Tin had been thought about?

Oh yes, long before. He was a copy of out Strongheart.

Ah, thank you.

He was a very beautiful German Shepherd, there's a picture of him there. And he made some very, very good films with him, in the High Sierras and places like this.

And you were then based in Britain?

No you see I wasn't. I, I was here until I was not quite four.

Ah, ha.

And then Holywood was opening up.

Yes.

And I don't know, I think he was sent for. Anyway he went to Holywood and made films in Holywood from then on.

Got it.

And I went, grew up there.

You went with him?

Oh yes.

Your family went with him?

No mamma, he'd kidnapped me. [Laughter]

Kidnapped you?

Yes. My mother was an opera singer who didn't really like children, I was entirely and totally my father's idea.

Betrothed? {Laughter}

No, no she, she was always off and he took me, in 1916 he took me to America.

Yes. During the war, during the war?

Yes, yes we spent quite a deal of time, which I thought was very exciting and I can still remember a bit of that excitement of being up on deck because of dodging mines and submarines and things, German.

Yes.

This was in the First World War of course.

Yes. So you ended up in Hollywood then, a very little girl.

Yes I grew up, yes and grew up there and then I came back, I came, went very, got went to Canada.

And Mum the opera singer, was she...?

No she wasn't, she didn't like me at all.

Oh dear.

And she didn't have any use for children, I really was my father's idea entirely. And then how I came back...

Were you alone, were there brothers and sisters?

No, no I was the only one.

Ah, ha.

I was very jealous of, of other children having brothers and sisters, oh yes.

Yes.

[Coughs]

So there we are. So you're at school presumably?

So I, yes, but I didn't go to school properly.

Ah.

I was usually on location you see.

Oh yes.

If there was anybody had to be chased by the wolves, we had a pack of six..., a group of, a pack of sixty wolves, very nice they are, much maligned.

Yes. There's been a dirty campaign against the wolf.

And so I... Yes, I, I fight that whenever I can.

Yes.

Just shy. And so I, I, I used to double. You see anybody had to be chased by the wolves it would be me in the long shots in the heroine's costume, you know.

Yes, got you, yes. Good Lord

So I had a very nice interesting growing up life.

You had an intriguing childhood didn't you?

Yes indeed I surely did.

Ah you had to learn something, I mean English Literature, Grammar, Shakespeare all that stuff?

Yes, well then afterwards, afterwards yes, I did it all much too late really.

Yes well. And this went on for a long period?

Mm, it did until...

Say from was it 1916 until the...?

Nineteen..., till talkies, talkies.

Till the talkies came?

Yes, 1928 it was that plus.

Now your real role in a sense was a sort of assistant to your Dad, to your father.

Yes, I would, he used to hoik me along with him.

Yes.

And so I, I had a really nice interesting life really.

Yes, I'll bet you did.

I didn't learn very much mark you, the tutors...

[05:00]

Fascinating.

My father I think he hired them more because of they, their attitude to animals.

[Laughter]

Yes, I see. If they like animals they were in were they?

Yes, that's right, they had the right approach to them.

They didn't have to be, they didn't have great dramatic talent.

You know, when Larry stopped making films...

Yes.

He did which he had, which he had always in his mind to do and he was the one who started the Seeing Eye Dogs for the Blind.

Really?

In America, in America.

Good Lord.

And he always had this in his mind to do and so he did that and very successfully.

That presumably is the, was the American variant on Guide Dogs for the Blind?

Yes, that capped, they were here later, yes.

So he began it?

Yes, I'm very proud of him for that.

You should be quite proud of that.

I am, yes.

Very good, very good indeed. And so this went on until the sound era?

Yes.

And then was it a cataclysmic...?

No, well the slump remember.

Slump, yes, 1920..., we're up to 1929.

Twenty-ninth of October 1929.

Yes indeed.

And it happened overnight, it was an incredible time. I don't think there's ever been anything like it before or since.

No, it was a very special slump.

Oh that was.

That slump was. And then, of course I don't have to tell you, it had world-wide effects and it sent tremors all over the show.

Yes. It came, it came to England the, about a year later.

Yes, about '30, yes.

It really travelled, you know.

Yes.

But it was something else.

That was a slump and a half.

And it just, it really, really did, I've never known anything that happened so fast as that - overnight.

Yes, yes. So there we are, the silent... Well we must go back a bit to the silent era because you knew incredible, incredibly famous - to use a horrible word...

Oh yes. Well of course, you know...

Silent stars didn't you?

Absolutely. Because I was a child and people were very nice to me you see and there were, you know, in the studios you have these lots and I would always be huffing around in to other people's lots watching things happening and so on.

Yes, yes. Who made... Are there a number of individual actors, actresses that stand out?

Mm.

I mean other than Valentino of course, who's a rather special customer.

Yes, right. There are a lot of people, gosh an awful lot of people. If I had that book I could sort of just remember, yes. But, mm...

Sorry.

I don't really anyhow.

It doesn't matter.

Yes, I just knew an awful, bound to have done you see.

So that you were really just pushed in among the actors and...?

Yes, I just, my father sort of wherever he went he took me with him and, and he was sort of knowing these people so of course, I did.

Yes, wonderful.

And that was nice,

Wonderful. Were you in any sense sort of as a young woman, because by the time as this, by 1929 you were already a grown up lady, a young woman?

Yes, yes.

Were you, as it were, socially aware?

Mm, no.

I mean speaking of pure politics?

No, do you know something? That's the strangest thing, it was like another world, it really was like another world because I didn't come in to contact with, with the real world really. I was sort of...

Sealed off?

Yes, I was in this rarefied funny world, you know.

A sort of vacuum?

Yes, it was, well it was an interesting vacuum.

Of course it was.

But it was.

Yes.

And, and I didn't, I really did not become politically aware, I'm very ashamed to say this, until the Spanish Civil War.

Thirty-six?

Yes. Imagine that.

Yes, well I'm of the generation...

I was, I was a slow developer.

That's different stay no, no I mean obviously the people arrive at the political understanding of the world at different times for different reasons...

I'm ashamed that I didn't...

It's not a sin that you never discovered Karl Marx as an eight year old in...

Yes, but I didn't analyse the situation.

Oh.

I just sort of took it as if it were a *fait accompli*, you know, mm.

Yes. So let's pursue the thing beyond, let's sort of take your life through chronologically?

Mm.

So there was the Wall Street Crash, which affected everything.

Indeed.

And what happened to your Dad after that?

Well he was absolutely broke.

Yes, so of course.

But in the meantime I had married.

Ah.

Mm, it was like this. We had an island in the middle of the St Lawrence River because you see my father was a New Englander.

Yes.

And he didn't like this constant California sunshine and he used to like to come back to the New England to his roots, you know, he was like that. So he had this island, he bought this island in the St Lawrence River opposite a little place called Gananoque, it was on the Canadian side of the river and that, we were there on this island when the slump happened.

[10:09]

You didn't have to sell it because of the slump?

No, no, I don't think anybody would have bought it.

No.

I think the slump would hit everybody.

No.

And so on. But anyhow he went back to, he went back to California.

Yes.

To see what he could do.

Yes.

And we lost the ranch, we lost the house in Hollywood, we lost just everything, just overnight, 'whoom', just like everybody else did. And, and I remember there was kind of difficulties about all those steers, and there were a lot of, well there were about 4,000 head of steer on it.

Good Lord.

In this ranch, it was 10,000 acres.

Your father lived alone or had he another partner by then?

Oh yes, and that was one of the troubles you see.

For you?

Yes. Because she didn't like me.

Oh dear.

And her name was Helen but he called her 'Troy', and she didn't... I, she hadn't bargained for a sixteen year old.

Girl more than a child, yes?

Yes, roving around with him you see.

Rolling around, yes.

And she was, when the slump happened Larry lost Larry lost everything but her alimony, which was enormous, went on until she had all the money.

My God.

And I felt that very much, I didn't like that, didn't like being saying, have to say 'thank you' and anyhow I knew I was in the way and a nuisance you see.

It must have been a difficult patch for you in some respects.

Yes it was. Well and there wasn't any way for me to get out of it really and so I, I took the way out this way out. I married a chap called Alex, Alexander Harris.

Mm, mm.

He was twenty-three.

Yes.

And he worked on an adjoining island.

Yes.

And father of my daughter there.

[Laughter] Daddy's daughter yes.

Yes that was your Daddy.

Dawn's Dad.

That's it.

Was he a film chap or not at all?

Not at all, he was the bailiff of an island, a bailiff.

A Canadian or an American?

A Canadian.

Ah, ha.

And he, he ran a very big island, much larger than ours.

Yes.

Ours was only seventy-five acres his was a really big huge one. And he married, for, there was a newspaper man from, from Texas? No, anyway down south.

Yes.

He had this summer place and he was a sort of bailiff for that island, Hay Island. And, well he was a nice young man and I thought he was very nice, you know, and he used to, I used to go skating with him. And I didn't have any, I was pretty lonely because we were staying there instead of going back to California you see, it's where all my friends were and so on.

Dawn was very, very little of course.

Dawn hadn't been born yet because I hadn't married.

Oh.

Because I know even though I was very young, I was sixteen when I married.

Oh God.

I think, wait a minute, I think I was just seventeen, seventeen.

Pretty young even so.

Young. But I did that, I, I really had to because Troy, my father's Troy...

Yes, Helen of.

Helen of, yes, she really didn't, she didn't want me around and I didn't, I felt terribly in the way, you know.

Yes.

And I had to do something and with the crash there were no jobs beside which I hadn't been trained for anything by the age of sixteen.

For anything, no how could you?

I just hadn't, I hadn't been, I hadn't been apprenticed to anything.

No, what happened?

Jan Zilliacus
Tape 3 Side A

I, well I lived there, I had Dawn and had a, went through the ice and all sorts of adventures and I had, but it was all very interesting because I'd never really lived in the wintertime in, in life, this was really living it up, you know, this wasn't just playing.

Yes, yes, I see.

And so I... And then one day when she, the day she was born, I had a letter arrive from England.

Ah.

Now I haven't seen my mother since I was three and a half and...

The opera singer?

Yeah, here in London.

Ah, ha.

And somebody sent her from China, if you please, somebody she used to sing with, saw a little advertisement in the newspaper, a little notice, saying that Larry Trimble's daughter had married and so on and so on and in Gananoque et cetera, and just a notice of my marriage, a little tiny notice. And she wrote on spec to me.

[15:00]

Just like that?

Yes, and I got it the day she was born. And so she said, that's why I came to England, she wanted to see me after all that.

Yes, this was curious.

Yes. I wish I could say that she was delighted with me, she wasn't, she flung me out in six weeks.

Oh dear oh dear.

She didn't like me at all. [Laughter]

Well you had a raw deal my dear.

[Laughter] Well until I...

Was she a great, was she a good singer?

She sure was.

Yes?

And moreover she was a wonderful teacher, he name was Louise Trenton.

Yes. Louise?

Trenton.

Trenton.

That was her teaching name.

Where did she perform, for the Carl Rosa Opera Company or...?

No.

Covent Garden or...?

Wait a minute. No she started out with that Savoy crowd, wait a second.

Oh yes, Gilbert and Sullivan?

DH: The D'Oyly Carte?

Gilbert and Sullivan, mm.

DH: The D'Oyly Carte?

The D'Oyly Carte.

The D'Oyly Carte, yes. The D'Oyly Carte.

Gilbert and Sullivan, The D'Oyly Carte, that's it.

Yes, yes, got it, got it.

Yum. And then she went on from there and sang. And then of course, with this she was terribly clever, she was very brilliant my Ma, she had a great nose for what was the thing to do. And she, at the height of her of her fame, I mean she was really doing very well she sort of said 'No I'm going to teach'.

Ah.

So she used her good reputation.

Mm, mm.

Set herself up to teach and she had enormous amount of pupils. I mean she was giving something like fifty-eight to sixty lessons a week and had a studio in Wigmore Hall, you know, place...

Yes, oh serious stuff.

Oh yes, and at home as well.

Yes, yes. So we're now in the '30s more or less?

Mm, '32 now.

Yeah. So Mum...

We came to England in '32.

Yes, Mum wasn't very supportive – to put it politely.

Well she helped me, she helped me you see and sent me...

Yes, yes.

For, took my papoose and came over and well that was... And then of course, something rather unfortunate happened. I have to say this because otherwise it's illogical, I have to say why. She had a, a beau, a boyfriend.

A bloke.

Yeah, a lover, [Laughter] about six years it had been going on. And well I was terribly happy when I came over, and, you know, when you're happy you're attractive when you're happy.

Yeah.

You know, people, happy people are attractive.

Yes, yes, true.

And it... Now all that happened was that she accused him of being bored whenever I went out of the room and so that was why she'd thrown me out. And also...

Dawn?

Dawn's father sold everything up on the island so that my father had it all sent up from California, the furniture and everything from, for that island and he came over.

Oh he came, then he came over?

Then he came over. And then she said that was just too much so she just went 'wheee'.

Out?

And she got a pupil of hers to find a room in Putney, plonked us in the room and said 'I hope it keeps fine for you, don't contact me'.

Oh well.

Yes. So, it wasn't totally farewell because six years later she wanted to see me.

Ah, ha.

Well anyhow.

Yes, spasms of interest?

Yes, mm.

But widely spread spasms?

Yes indeed. But anyhow that was, was that. But also this was in the time of Spain and so on and I, oh my goodness she was the most reactionary person I've ever met in my life.

Mum?

Mum.

Mother, mother?

Oh golly was she a Tory.

So she would naturally have supported Franco?

She was, oh yes.

Oh God.

Absolutely.

Oh God.

Oh these wretched Communists, you know.

A Neo-fascist mother sort of thing?

Absolutely. And you see we just didn't get along on any point.

Yes.

Did we? And also she was terribly upset that I wasn't talented in this way, she used to apologise for me in front of her friends. You know, 'My daughter had a very nice disposition even though she's not very clever', you know. [Laughter]

Oh that stuff.

[Laughter]

Not very funny.

I thought it was very funny.

Not very maternal at any level, yes.

I thought it was terrible, no, no she wasn't maternal.

Oh dear oh dear.

Oh dear oh dear.

So Spain and all that that means?

Mm, and of course, I, I mean, well the only thing to do at time was to join the Communist Party.

Of course.

Definitely. [Telephone interruption]

Are you with us?

Mm.

Right off we go then. The year is 1936 or seven? Spain had been on a year or so or just at the beginning, Jan?

Mm, hold on. No, at the beginning.

The beginning?

Wait a minute, well wait a second, I'm not sure about that. Thirty-five, Thirty-six, look.

July '36?

[20:00]

Yes, that's it, thank you. Then it was '36, that's right.

Thirty-six. Where did you join the Communist Party?

Well I joined it, I think that it was that branch in Camden Town if you remember it.

Oh yes?

And I was highly enthusiastic, oh dear I must have been a pain in the neck. And not only that, I thought, I thought I was, I was like a missionary.

Yes?

I got full on holy zeal, I really must have bored everybody to death.

And you were selling 'The Daily Worker' on the streets?

Yes, oh yes, oh yes.

Like my wife, yes?

Absolutely. And, and we, I was sudden... I'll tell you what it was. Do you know Notting Hill Gate?

Yes, of course [Inaudible 20:45].

Well there are two stations.

Yes.

Yes two stations.

Yes.

One across the road from each other.

I know them intimately.

Oh wow, really?

I've been there 100,000 times.

Exactly. Well this one on this side where there were a lot of fruit machines and everything else, the other side was inhabited by the Fascists and they had a newspaper what the heck was it called?

It was called 'Action'.

'Action'. And they used to come over and rough me up.

Oh no.

And take my papers and things.

Did you tear theirs?

No I wasn't there it's...

You should have done.

At, at the opposite side...

[Inaudible 21:15]

When did the worker trains start? I was there for the very first, in the morning from half past five.

Yes, early.

Very, very early to be sure to get the, the people going to work.

You were a Bolshevik martyr getting up at that time.

Well, I thought so.

Selling papers at half past five in the morning. [Laughter]

Oh yes, *The Daily Worker*, I had to get that out, yes, all the people rushing for trains and things. And I was very enthusiastic.

And, and the Fascists roughed you up a bit, yes?

They used to come over, and I complained, I complained.

I should hope so.

To the Party.

You had very little police protection?

Oh boy, and then they... Oh I didn't have any.

Zero?

Nothing. But what they used to do was, I'd have mine to sell and they'd come and scatter them all and rough, you know, rough me up, but they'd scatter all my papers and that wasn't going down very well with the Party either. And so they said well you go ahead the next, tomorrow morning you go right ahead and just as usual and don't worry we'll be behind you. [Laughter]

Yes.

And that was Bill Rust who told me, do you remember Bill Rust?

Oh yes, I know Bill Rust very well.

Do you remember him?

Of course.

He was a very nice guy wasn't he? I loved him.

Yes.

Anyway he said 'Don't you worry we'll, don't you worry'. And they were all hid behind those fruit machines, my boys, and oh dear was there... And we were all... Oh yes and I remember rolling in the gutter with a policemen's helmet, there was a tremendous [Inaudible 22:30] we all got fighting together, the Fascists, us, the police, it was really great. [Laughter] And also I suppose, that was the first time I was ever in the cooler, the first and only time I was in jail.

They put you inside did they?

Yes, in jail.

Were you sentenced?

Mm.

Or just overnight?

I was overnight. But we all got, I remember we all lied our heads off when we went to court the next day.

Yes, of course.

Oh dear, we all told fibs, you know, I hadn't had, I wasn't selling papers, you know, I wasn't doing anything it was a pure mistake. [Laughter]

Heart justified survived.

Absolutely. I, unjustly, unjustly, oh dear.

Good. So you're in the Party and active, and highly active in the Party as well?

Yes.

A lively branch.

Mm.

Would this be in the period when Ted Bramley was in charge of the London Party or, or didn't they, didn't he impinge on you?

I know his, I don't think he was there then, I think he must have come later or before me.

Ernie Cant, C-a-n-t, Ernie Cant was the London Secretary.

Yes, that's right.

Of the Party.

Yes.

And you got to know Bill Rust?

Oh very well.

And did you, did you meet Harry Pollitt?

Oh yes. Yes, and I, yes and...

Neil Byrne?

All these...

Willie Gallagher?

Absolutely, yes.

All heroes of the Party of the '30s.

And I was very lucky because I did get to meet them all. Well Bill Rust took a shine to me, he liked me so I was, I met all these people you see because of him.

Bill's, one on Bill's wives...

Yes.

Not Tamara.

No, I knew her.

Lady Milford, who's still alive.

Yes.

And the War Museum rang, want to show her in a film or something, they, they wanted to see her, they rang me yesterday about Tamara Rust.

Ah, I knew her, are you seeing her?

And Kathleen... Yes. I don't see her regularly but I've seen her.

She probably won't remember me.

Oh she'll remember Zilliacus's wife.

No she won't. No, but I wasn't Zilly then.

Ah, but I wasn't Zilliacus then?

I hadn't met Zilly yet.

Ah, ha.

I was just Jan Harris.

Jan Harris. Anyway the intriguing thing...

Jan Trimble Harris.

The intriguing thing about it all...

But I wonder how she is.

Yes, she's okay .

Good.

She had a bad blow when her husband died.

Yes I'm sure she did.

Lord Milford.

That's right.

She was Lady, she's Lady Milford.

I know.

MY: Yes, Wogan Phillips.

Wogan, same thing, same thing.

Yes.

Wogan Phillips equals Lord Milford.

Yes, that's right.

And he married a titled lady too before...

[25:06]

I want a ciggy from you darling.

And, well this is all very bewitching because his...

Isn't that fun...

Bill Rust's wife worked for me for...

I'm so pleased to meet somebody who remembers something about it, most of everybody I know doesn't remember a thing they just...

Just names that I remember it all dear. And I'll tell you another reason why I remember Bill Rust because not only did he teach me at Marx House...

Oh did he?

Yes, things like the history of the Soviet Union and the CPSU. But Kathleen Taylor was Kathleen Rust...

Yes.

And her daughter was Rosa Rust, he daughter by Bill Rust.

Yes.

Who ended up alas in, in Kazakhstan in the Soviet Union.

Oh did she?

Many years, but she came out of it, she's okay.

Is she back here now?

Yes, she did a lovely radio interview a few days ago.

Oh dear I haven't heard it.

On one of these, well one of these local radio stations.

Oh I see.

And Kathleen Taylor's a larger than life lady who worked for, literally for me when I was General Secretary of the British Soviet Friendship Society.

Ah.

Kathleen Taylor was our pen friends department.

Wonderful.

With all these pen friends...

From all over the world.

Exactly.

I should think.

But mainly the Soviet Union of course, she ran the pen friends department in Devonshire Street in this posh house that we occupied.

I must say it's a jolly good address

Now she's still alive, and now she's in Ireland and she's had a number of articles, there was one big thing in 'The Observer' one Sunday about Kathleen Taylor a couple of years ago.

Oh what a shame, I didn't see it.

And she's alright, and her Rosa was on the radio, they're all okay, of course, Bill died suddenly of a heart attack.

Yes I know.

At a Political Bureau meeting in King Street, at sixteen King Street. But he was a remarkably interesting bloke.

Oh yes.

He was one of the British Party's representatives on the Comintern, on the Communist International.

Oh yes, yum.

And had an incredible career and was a... And they, of course, they named the premises, I, don't want to monopolise our chat because you were, you arrived...

No but it's very, oh it's so interesting.

But, but they named the building in Farringdon Road, seven, William Rust House.

That's right.

William Rust House.

I was very pleased about that, dear Bill.

Yes, when they launched the new 'Daily Worker' which became 'The Morning Star'.

Dear Bill.

And poor Bill died suddenly at a pretty early age, he was 56/57.

He wasn't, he wasn't old.

He was under sixty.

He had a heart attack or something.

Yes, yes, just a massive heart attack at a meeting and just as quickly as that.

Mm, mm. I was very fond of him.

Yes. Tamara carried on, mm, and is still carrying on although she's not able to do much now, she's a bit fragile inevitably, the death of Lord Milford, Wogan, Wogan Phillips knocked her for six really it did.

Yes, yes.

So we've got you as an activist...

Do you remember Claud Cockburn?

Of course, Frank...

Yes, that's right.

And I knew, I knew him and I knew his daughter.

He was writing in *The Times*... Did you?

Yes, very well because...

Did you know his wife, Pat, Patricia?

Was she the one who worked in the Peace Movement?

Oh she did everything, yes.

I knew someone called Jean Cockburn.

Oh.

That was another wife.

That was before her wasn't it?

Probably. She was lovely and she was the original lady in the famous Berlin, you know...

Oh wait a minute. I do but wait a minute.

[Inaudible 28:27]

I'll tell you it was, yes...

Sally Bowles.

Sally Bowles.

Jean was Sally Bowles.

That's right, that's right. And she's a Scot isn't she?

Yes, she died alas, but she was lovely. And I managed, I used to see a lot of her because I was acting...

Oh isn't this wonderful?

In to something that Zilly was involved with called the BPC, the British Peace Committee.

Yes, yes.

And, you know, after a meeting she'd say, 'Oh take me somewhere nice', and we'd go and see ballet or film, opera or something.

Something, yes.

Well I was very close with Jean Cockburn.

Oh good.

Jean was a sweet lady.

Ah.

And no one would believe, you know, that it was almost a, not a joke but you couldn't, she was a charming elderly lady and to sort of symposise this woman with Sally Bowles of 'Cabaret' with Liza Minnelli and all sorts was impossible.

Yes, yes, but, you know, it was stupid of them to put Liza Minnelli in that part.

Yes, yes.

It's much better as the play.

Of course.

Do you remember that girl that was, that we liked so much, that actress she was the Sally Bowles in the play and much, much better when they did it on the stage, theatre here, I loved it.

Right. So you knew Claud?

Oh sure did I.

'The Week', were you involved with 'The Week'?

I only, yes I was indeed, I was his sort of co-worker if you like.

Gosh!

I used to rush round with *The Week* to various people who didn't want it sent through the mail, oh boy those were the days, oh yes, oh yes.

Yes, well that's a remarkable publication of course.

But wasn't it?

You know, I mean if there's...

But Claud was so clever, here he was writing, I loved it, writing as Claud Cockburn in *The Times* and as Frank Pitcairn in the *The Daily Worker*.

Pitcairn in 'The Daily Worker'.

I thought it was great. And he was deny..., in, Frank Pitcairn was denying what Claud Cockburn said [Laughter] and I thought it was wonderful.

[30:07]

No, he was a remarkable chap.

Mm.

Very colourful and...

Lovely sense of humour.

Yes, brilliant.

Mm.

And his daughter was a lawyer.

Yes.

Is a lawyer, Sarah.

Are they living in Ireland?

I don't know where they are now.

Still...

But Claud died of course.

Yes I do know, and Patricia died too.

Yes. And Jean Cockburn died too.

Yes.

It was one of the earlier wives that... They were lovely people.

That's right. But Patricia...

More than lovely, they were very special people.

But Patricia and I were sort of girlhood friends. Yes they were.

Yes.

And I had such wonderful times with them.

Were you working in those days?

Yes I was, I... Oh yes, and this is before I met Zilly even.

Yes. What job were you, do you...?

Oh, if I told you you'd laugh your head off, I'm the only woman that did it.

What was that?

I sold vacuum cleaners. I, you see I picked up my children, I kidnapped my children, picked them up under my arm and left home.

How many kids were there - two?

Two.

Ah, ha.

And, you know, they had to be, eat, you know.

Of course they had to eat, please do go on.

And well in those days, and I wasn't trained for anything so I answered a job which I had thought had to do with aeroplanes but instead it turned out to be a vacuum, new vacuum cleaner from America called the Air-way.

I see, nothing to do with Hoover?

No.

Mainly your rivals?

I used to take 'em out all the time.

Yes. [Laughter]

Oh yes. And, and I made such money, if I had known how to type and shorthand I'd have made three pounds a week.

Yes?

Instead, instead of which I was selling one vacuum cleaner in the morning and one in the afternoon, it was like taking candy away from babies.

Yes.

It was within the countryside not in London.

Not in London?

I had, I mean the lovely director of the company gave me Devonshire and Cornwall and Dorset as my territory, and nobody else could work without my permission.

And how did you get around then, a truck or on a bike or?

Oh he, he really gave me a car and a chauffeur.

Oh!!

But I went out, I joined the thing thinking it was something to do with aeroplanes. I went up to Baker Street where we had, that place with the tower in Baker Street, we had the top floor at that time – Air-way Company, just, just came over here from America and this wonderful machine you could see, what you were cleaning you could see when all the dirt came out, and oh God it had two motors. Very much more expensive than anything else but, you know, because it was so much better that it was just...

And it sold?

I sold one in the morning, one in the afternoon.

Just like that, you got commission?

I got five pounds, five pounds commission.

Each time?

I was doing ten pounds a day. Now that doesn't sound anything today.

No, that was big money.

But let me tell you, I want to tell you I was very well off.

You were a very good woman a...

And I was able to, I was able to keep my children and everything, it was just wonderful.

And you were earning twice the average wage a day.

I, if I'd have known now that shorthand typing I'd have been earning two pounds ten, two pounds fifteen, three pounds a week, that's what they were doing.

With luck, yes.

That's wages and that. Isn't it amazing that that was the wages in that time, extraordinary.

So Jan you're selling vacuum cleaners? How long did you...?

Yes, and I beat all the international records.

Yes, and this seems wonderful and...

And, and I was so pleased and I did that for five years.

Until the war?

Yes. And then it finished in the war because they didn't send any more over and everything. It was a very good machine actually.

Yes, right.

But anyhow that was what happened.

Had you met...?

And then I met Zilly.

Ah, before the war or?

Yes, just, just, just.

Just on the edge of the war?

Exactly. And, and we, I was invited to a lunch party.

Mm.

And, by two friends of mine because the Ministry of Information used to be the, what, it's now the...

The COI, I know the Central Office of Information.

Yes, but it's...

Brendan Bracken's lot.

That's right. And, and that place there in Gower Street, the end of Gower Street, that big place.

DH: The White House?

No.

DH: No?

No, it's a huge thing. Anyhow I was invited to a lunch and Zilly was invited to the same lunch, and several people, and they, we sort of started talking and politically got on to politics, and everybody else left in the afternoon, you know, they had things to do, and Zill was on night duty so he had all the time in the world. And we just went on talking until they wanted to make, waiters started putting up the chairs and...

Yes of course.

And Zilly said 'Well oh dear, well we'll have to leave here, you know', and I said 'Well would you like a cup of tea, I can make you a cup of tea'? And we were talking and talking and that's how it all happened. And that's how I beat all those pretty girls because I knew what he was talking about.

Yes, exactly.

And I'd read his books.

Yes, ah.

So of course.

When did he become a, an MP for the first time?

In the beginning of, you know, 1945.

Yes, just after the war?

For Gateshead.

Forty-five election?

Gateshead.

What?

Gateshead.

Yes, that's it.

Up in the North.

Gateshead.

Lovely. Loved them, the Geordies.

[35:00]

That's it.

Liked them better than the other ones.

And before the war on the, what was Zilly, was he writing as a journalist?

Well he'd just come over from Geneva.

Yes, oh yes.

Where he was, assuming not very long before that.

Yes.

And of course, then he, with his languages, he was put in charge of the Information Section, you know. And every thing, what his, his job was, he was like a censor, well he was he was the head of it because of his languages.

Yes.

Because if nobody was going to get, was it journalists were not going to get information that would help the enemy, you know, all these journalists.

Got it.

Mm, some of those journalists were damned fascists, you know.

Of course.

Absolutely they were, they really, really were.

They was very little to divide people who ran 'The Daily Mail', like Lord Rothermere and certain others...

Exactly.

From, from Mosley and company.

Exactly, you're right.

The same, the same stuff.

Totally right.

Same stuff. So what sort of a war did you have?

Wonderful. Excuse me.

Yes, you're allowed to say 'wonderful' if it was.

May I say I had a wonderful war. First of all I was with Zill whom I just adored, you can, I just loved him so much I was just crazy about him I thought he was the greatest thing. I'd read his books so he was a sort of a, a famous person from my point of view if you see what I mean, a very famous person because I was a very idealistic comrade.

Yes, yes I bet you were.

You see I was very enthusiastic, maddeningly so. [Laughter] Oh dear.

Well that's great.

Mm.

And where were the children - with you?

Well no, not, no not during the war.

Ah, were they evacuated?

Yes they were, mm. Mm, mm.

DH: [Inaudible 36:54]

And then, and then.

DH: In Berkshire.

In Berkshire?

The minute that, you know, then Zilly didn't like that and he had them... What did we do with you and Larry? Sent you to Dartington of course.

DH: That's right.

Immediately he sent them to Dartington. And, you know, Zilly was lovely, you'd think that a woman with two children for goodness sake would be a handicap, but it wasn't a handicap for him, it was an absolute added plus thing to have two children, he loved children, Zilly, so that was great, you know.

Got it.

Wasn't that interesting?

Mm.

I was very lucky wasn't I?

You were, you were.

Oh gosh I was so lucky, oh I was so lucky.

What about Dawn, what's she, who is the other child?

Well he's just died.

Oh I'm sorry.

Larry, he was four months, years younger than Dawnie. But I have another child with Zilly, I have Linden who's our child, Zill's and mine, and she lives in Kentish Town.

I see. And she's flourishing?

Mm.

Yes?

Mm.

Good.

Oh yes indeed.

Good. So the war. So you, you were working at what during the war when Zilly was all, in all this?

Well I'll tell you. You see because I have, because, you know, they were very sticky in the war. You see both my parents were American, I was born in America and to get any kind of really decent job you had to have mother and father they'd be English.

Yes, indeed.

And right back two or three generations if possible, you know.

Got you.

So what I did was I had, my mother, my opera singing mother...

Yes, we're back to her yes?

Left, yes, she's come, she's important because she had this house in St Johns Wood.

Ah, she was quite well off? Well heeled maybe, not really...

Terribly mean, mean and very rich.

Mean and rich?

Yes.

It, it sometimes goes together, in fact it always goes together. [Laughter]

I think it does, I think it does.

Come to think of it, it always does.

It seems to me it does.

That's why they've got it.

Exactly.

So, where, what did Mummy do then?

She fled to America.

Ah, to avoid the bombs?

And, yes, she, she'd been through one war here, the First World War, she wasn't having that so she fled to America and had thought she'd locked the house up she didn't want me to have it.

Ah.

The lawyer said, her lawyer said 'That's ridiculous, you know the house mustn't be left standing, and you'll have to have a place no, no, no, no'. He rode straight over her, said I could have...

The house?

And the house became for anyone that got bombed out and all sorts of people...

A refuge?

Yes. And I had, the family ended up there was something like sixteen people I was cooking for.

Good Lord.

And they were all doing proper jobs, you know, important jobs, worthwhile jobs, and so I looked after them all and good gracious me, yes.

In St Johns Wood, a large posh house in St Johns Wood?

In Carlton Hill, that's right.

I say, good Lord. That went on till the war ended did it?

And I had, and that, and they named it 'the mares nest'.

The what, the mares' nest?

That's what they named it – the people. We, the mares named it the mares' nest.

Zilly presumably lived there as well?

And he, he thought it was hilarious, he'd never known anything like it in his life – a community like that.

[35:06]

Oh yes.

And I only had one rule, and that was that I wouldn't allow people to fight with each other. You know how they, people do when in groups. I said 'If you, anybody who wants to fight has to fight through me with this person'.

How did you recruit your lodgers?

Mm, it...

Accident or not really?

Well...

Did you advertise?

No I didn't need to, sort of, I sort of got a reputation, it came from one person to another.

Ah, ha. Word of mouth sort of thing?

Yes, that's right, mm.

Got it, got it.

And oh dear me. And do you know something we had a spy?

A what, a Soviet spy or a British spy, an MI5 man?

We had... No, we had the other way round, we had a Nazi spy living in our house, his name was Leon Basel [ph 40:52], he said he was Hungarian but he wasn't. He did happen to be born in Hungary but he was a, a fascist.

Working for the Germans or the British?

Absolutely, and he used to take this pan I've got in here, it's a, I've got a big sort of aluminium pan he used to, when the raids were on he, he was signalling. And we had a big garden at the back...

Really?

Yes, I didn't know that. And he put this pan over his head because there was a lot of shrapnel and stuff coming down from our, our own planes even and so on.

Yes.

And, and he, he was, yes. And do you know it was so miraculous, I had a quarrel with his wife and booted them out, and my God, two weeks later he was caught.

How was he caught? Oh he was caught?

And I was so glad it didn't happen in my house.

Yes indeed, mm.

Because I had the police and people coming round because they knew it was some place around there, there were messages. Now how they knew I don't know but they knew that something was happening. And he, he used to put this saucepan over his head, and now how was he doing it with a little machine or what? And there was a small room attached to their room in this big, my mother's big house and he, nobody was allowed in there and he said it was papers and they were very important, he didn't want anybody messing around with.

Well was he radioing or something?

He was doing some kind of signalling to these planes, always during the raid he did it.

Oh dear. And they would be gaoled or what?

Well they, he had two weeks after he left me.

Ah, ha.

They caught him in the next place.

Ah, ha.

But I had a whole bunch of policemen coming round.

I can imagine.

Saying 'I want to know about the people who live here' and so on and so forth. And, you know, I really, he was so convincing because I really believed that everybody was okay that they didn't catch him at my house they caught him in the next place. And that was all because I didn't, I quarrelled with his wife. Well she was being naughty with somebody else so I, I wouldn't have them, I kicked them out. My God wasn't it good that it didn't happen in my house?

It was indeed.

I'm very glad because that would have put us a little bit of a bad mark on me I think.

So the war is over?

Yes, yes.

And you go up to Gateshead for the election?

And then come the wonderful election.

The election, the General Election of 1945?

Wonderful, exciting, very exciting.

And Zilly had been selected as the Labour candidate?

And Zilly had been, yes.

MY: Can we just pause there because we...?

[End of Tape 3 Side A 43:30]

Jan Zilliacus
Tape 3 Side B

NB: The time codes given here are estimates based on readings from the original cassette recording.

Tape 1 Side B.

...as the mares, you know, in the mares' nest.

MY: Okay I'm running now.

I had a wonderful time, I had, I have to say to you I did.

Well good.

In the war, I shouldn't have been so happy because there was so many bad things. I, and I wasn't unfeeling about them but just...

But you must have known, as a comrade you would have known about the Nazi atrocities and the concentration camps?

Of course, of course I did. Oh that stuff you did... But not only that I could imagine, yes and not only that but imagine how much Zilly knew as well.

Yes, he would have known a great deal.

But the only reason I captured Zilly, if you like to put it this way, if you don't mind me putting it that way I mean, was because I knew what he was talking about. Maybe these beautiful girls, all after him, because Zill was very well off, I didn't know that. Because, you know, for all the years he, he never, nobody ever beat it. He had the, he was the worst dressed man in London, he hated clothes and he liked his old clothes. And he really was, and in the house too the same, couldn't do anything with him. And his mother, when he was little, from the time he was little, he used to when she said 'I want to take you shopping and buy you something for school', he'd get under the bed and didn't want any new clothes, from the tiniest tiny, no he didn't like, no he didn't like new ones either, no, liked his old ones.

So off we go, we're in, we can go to Gateshead or...

Oh yes, boy that was very exciting.

And you were by then the, the wife of the candidate.

Yes, I never married him, you know.

No, why should you?

Well I didn't, wasn't able to because he was married to Eugenia but he hadn't really lived with her for seven years before he met me. She lived down in the country in a place called Shere near... Shere, it's near Guildford, that's right, thank you.

And did Dawn's Daddy divorce?

No, I divorced him.

You divorced him?

Yes, and I believe I'm the first person to do my own divorce under the Poor Law or something.

[Laughter]

I didn't pay anything, I did it all myself.

You didn't pay solicitors and lawyers?

And he was very nice that judge, he, I thought, discovered he was a little bit deaf because he kept asking me to speak up and when I wouldn't, didn't speak up he had me come and sit beside him so I was able to talk straight into his ear. And I, he gave me a divorce.

Good for you, good for you.

Well actually it was, it was, it wasn't just a nasty thing I mean because I liked Zilly or something, it was because he, he had an alcohol problem and that's why I really left him.

Oh dear, yes.

Took the children.

Yes.

Because we'd have been in the gutter for ever, you know, couldn't keep up with that.

Right.

He's dead now.

Yes. So we're now into the first Labour Government aren't we?

Oh yes.

Forty-five and on? Had Zilly already got a reputation?

Mm.

He must have done.

Well, you know, all those Victor, you know old uncle Victor Gollancz?

Yes, of course.

All those books Zilly wrote.

The Left Book Club?

Exactly, The Left Book Club, you remember that don't you?

John Strachey and several others.

That's right, exactly, that was the gap, that was it. And Bill Rust and...

And John Lewis, my friend Dr John Lewis.

Yes.

Who was the secretary.

That's right he was, mm, mm. Oh gee, oh I loved those days, I really did.

The heady days of Gollancz and The Left Book Club.

Oh yes but I liked all that. I liked it all, I liked all that. Because there's...

Trying...

It seems very tame today in comparison.

Yes, it's a bit different from what I've called the Blair syndrome.

Yes, yes.

Very different.

What do you think about Tony Blair?

Well I'm not bewitched.

Neither am I.

[Laughter]

Are you?

I've got to face life and it's trying to find, it's like trying to find someone who voted for Ronald Reagan.

Yes.

Jan Zilliacus
Tape 3 Side B

The people I meet never voted for the reactionary sod but, you know, I'm trying to find someone who actually likes Tony Blair.

Oh well do let me know if you hear.

And I had two votes in the election... Are we alright?

[Discussion on microphone problems]

I'm talking a lot of nonsense, probably nothing you want to hear.

No, no, no it's human.

Mm, mm.

Everything...

But they were great days.

[Discussion on microphone problems]

So those were the days? Those were the days of the first Labour Government.

Oh yes, yes.

Aneurin Bevan and The National Health Service and nationalisation of the coal mines.

Absolutely.

And all that. And it's Gateshead, it's a coal-ish area isn't it?

[05:00]

Oh it was wonderful.

Yes.

Oh I loved Gateshead, I liked it, excuse me, better than Manchester. The Geordies were more... The Manchester people were very correct.

Yes.

The Geordies weren't.

Yes.

It was very lively up there.

More flamboyant?

That's right.

Yes.

And full of opinions.

Yes, yes, good. Did you commute, did you have a London place and a Tyneside place?

Mm, yes. But I didn't, we didn't have a, we stayed in a hotel, a little, little hotel, one of the party people had a hotel. And we stayed there because there was a housing problem.

Yes.

And it wouldn't have looked very good if Zill had been having a house up there and one in London would it?

Yes, yes indeed. You had a house up there?

No we didn't, we stayed in this hotel.

Oh up there?

It belonged to one of the comrades and it was great, you know, just wonderful, and pay, very, very good. Anyway.

And then Zilly of course, became the centre really of the left opposition to the right wing in the Labour, in the Labour party.

Well yes he did. And there were, and there was, you know, there was a gang of them, John Platts-Mills and Zill, oh I can't remember them all.

Yes of course. Did he get through many telegrams, remember that?

Oh don't I?

John's just finishing his autobiography, he's a, I see a lot of John Platts-Mills.

Oh do you? Good.

Although he's in his nineties he is still the President of the SCR and he keeps turning up to meetings every once in a while.

That's lovely, I'm delighted.

And he insists on driving, he's got a Rolls, or his son is in cars and so he keeps driving me home in a Rolls-Royce.

Oh lovely.

And St Georges Avenue has never seen a Rolls-Royce drive up before and they must wonder what, what's happened.

[Laughter]

But John is lovely.

Yes.

Yes. Did you know D N Pritt QC?

Didn't I just.

Yes.

I certainly did know him.

Molly is still alive and well.

Mm, oh really?

Tucked away somewhere, mm, in a rest home I think.

Mm.

Pritt was very good to us.

Because I suppose you see that's the trouble. I was very sad the other day because I seem to be outliving a whole bunch of my chums.

Well one does.

You know, do I?

Only Manny. You know, even I, you know, even a seventy year old, and I'm seventy-three...

Do you too? You don't grow old do you?

What love – I don't what?

Do the, really at your age?

At my age, believe me, there is barely a month that passes without my losing... Remember I know a hell of a lot of people.

Of course you do.

I've been in jobs...

Of course.

Political jobs.

Absolutely.

Where you know hundreds and hundreds of comrades and of course, they're now all slowly but very surely dying off, you know. There is barely a week or a fortnight that passes.

Mm.

MY: The ones that are left join our History Project.

Yes.

Ah.

In the film business everybody.

Ah.

But we've still got Sidney Cole, he's the last of the film comrades.

Ah wonderful.

Of the triumvirate of Ivor Montague, Ralph Bond and Sidney Cole, and Sid's the one that's left.

That's right, yes.

MY: And he's still very active.

And he's very active.

Oh good.

And he's interested, he's as bright, you know, as a button.

MY: And in his eighties, eighty-six or eighty-seven.

Yes, in his mid eighties, yes.

Mm.

It's wonderful when people reach any sort of serious age and are dead lucid.

Yes, I suppose so. And also do you think eighty-four's a good age to be?

Jan Zilliacus
Tape 3 Side B

A wonderful age. Oh and there's quite a few women of eighty-four you know.

Mm.

Not just you.

Mm, no.

No there's no...

But I, I don't, it doesn't, sometimes...

Well you're not senile, you're not doddering, you're a lively young woman.

Oh, yes.

You just happen to be eighty-four.

Still curious about every, everything still.

Of course.

I want to know about everything.

MY: Because Sid Cole and I did an interview with Carmen Dillon.

Oh yes.

MY: Do you remember Carmen, she was the Art Director of the, all the Lawrence Olivier Shakespeares?

Yes.

MY: She's eighty-four but she's in an old people's home now.

Oh dear.

MY: And she wanders a bit.

Oh no! That's probably because she's in that old lady's home.

MY: Yes, ah yes.

I'm not for that at all.

No, no.

That's a terrible thing to happen to you.

Of course, that's tragic.

Because you don't have any, because sometimes you have people older than you and don't have exciting talks and things, you know.

Yes.

Well I suppose you could have.

MY: Because when Sid Cole and her were talking together I thought I was the young boy, a young man.

I'm sure, yes.

A young baby of seventy-five.

Yes.

Years.

Yes. Well yeah you are. They're quite right.

And they're your elders from an earlier decade, previous. Mm, so you really were part of all Zilly's political activities really?

Oh yes. I was right there and I enjoyed it so much.

And the constituents and all the campaigns and all. But Zilly had...

And sometimes, you know, when Zilly had gout and sometimes very painful gout and sometimes I even was able to go up and take...

[10:00]

The surgeries?

The surgeries at the weekend, you know, it was in...

Yes, because he was Manchester Gorton as well wasn't he?

That's right yes, Gorton.

Then terrible things, well terrible, yes, it must have been terrible for you, falsely accused of being a spy in the Slansky trial.

God that was...

That was awful.

That Slansky trial business.

Jan Zilliacus
Tape 3 Side B

How did that grab you? Because we have a friend who is Marian Slingova who is the wife, a British woman who married Otto Sling, a wonderful Czechoslovak comrade, and he was executed.

I know.

He was tortured and executed.

Oh.

And she came back to Britain and of course, Slansky wasn't, wasn't a perfect General Secretary.

No, we know that.

But the way they raked up these, like these tissues of lies.

Oh, and so convincing they were.

All invented by Lavrentiy Beria.

Exactly, exactly.

And they were all, they were just mouthing what the Russian, the KGB were telling them to say.

Precisely, exactly.

And it's awful because they all had rehearsed confessions.

I know, oh dear me, that was a very, very bad time.

And Zilly, it was a very hard time for Zilly.

Oh God, awful. And he minded because he knew the truth and he knew how, he knew exactly.

Yes, yes. I thought he behaved with great dignity during that period. It must have been hard on you.

Well, mm, Zilly...

Were the reporters driving you mad?

I remember Zilly saying to me, 'Now listen, it's gonna be tough from here on'.

Yeah.

Jan Zilliacus
Tape 3 Side B

'Just in case you haven't got the idea, it's gonna be very tough. So don't take anything for granted and don't take any people, friends for granted, wait for it because you may get some surprises'.

Yes.

And he prepared me not to get unhappy about it. He said 'It'll all be fine in the end but just go through this just confidently, just keep your, keep your peace within yourself, it'll be alright, and don't mind what happens with other people for the time being'. He was very clever was our Zill.

Wasn't he just?

He knew it would come out alright .

Well of course.

In the end.

He happened to be innocent. [Laughter]

Absolutely, I know.

And good with it.

Yes but...

He was innocent innocent but innocent and a good chap.

Mm.

Utterly on our side.

Wasn't he, mm?

Yes.

Two hundred percent.

Yes.

Oh, wait a minute. They used to call him a, a Communist fellow traveller..

Yes, yes.

And when he'd smoke 'em out and he'd say 'No, no, I'm not their fellow traveller they're...'

They're my travellers?

'They're my fellow travellers', yes.

No he was lovely, a lovely chap.

Mm. He didn't have any malice in him.

No. Was he sick for a long time before he died?

He, well he had leukaemia you see.

Ah.

And, but he went on, just the doctors couldn't believe it but he, he was just, he had still things he wanted to do you see so he didn't want to die, and so he didn't.

Yes.

He went on and on and on. And it was very great, you know, it was discovered that he had leukaemia when we were in Russia.

Oh really?

Well it was because I had, I had a cold and I was coughing, so they sent us to this...
Oh it's a kind of a...

Sanatorium?

No, it's a kind of a place where you go over people...

Clinic?

Clinic, it's a kind of, a very special kind of clinic where you, and they decide whether you should go to Sochi, which is like Florida, or up to... Mm, not the other part which is like California where we were sent, it was because of me actually and they thought it would be a better climate. Where was it that we went to darling, do you remember the name of it?

North Georgia, Caucasus?

No up, further up. Wait a second, I'll think of it in a second.

It doesn't matter.

It was gorgeous, we went several times so we knew everybody and...

Yes.

And it did Zill the world of good because he was able to swim three and four miles a day and, you know, great. He was a long distance swimmer.

Lovely.

It was very good for him.

Yes.

Exercise without weight.

Yes.

And do you know it was, Zilly loved his food and all these doctors said 'If you diet your man, if you don't diet him you're going to lose him you know'. And I couldn't, I simply couldn't diet him, he loved food and he loved everything that goes with food.
[Laughter]

Yes, yes.

And entertaining he adored that.

So when did Zilly die?

Mm, 1967.

Fifty-seven?

Sixty-seven.

Sixty-seven, of course.

Sixty-seven.

Sixty-seven.

Yes.

So it's coming up to almost thirty years?

I know, and it doesn't feel like it to me, isn't that strange?

So you've kept him alive...

Yes.

In your consciousness.

[15:00]

Now he was... You know he was, he wasn't just a, a purely political animal you know...

No way.

He was interested in everything. He loved animals and he was interested in everything.

He was one of the most exciting Members of Parliament in the Labour Party that have ever existed, honestly.

Yes, I think so.

I don't say that because I'm sitting here it happens to be true.

No I know that. I think you're right actually.

The only one...

A lot of people said that.

That you might compare him with is Tony Benn.

Oh yes, dear Tony.

He's a sweetie pie.

Oh what has...

And an intelligent sweetie pie.

Oh what a lovely thing happened with him. We had, we went out, we were only out with Tony for a while, because Tony's the most honest person in the world and he wasn't always thoroughly on the left, you know.

No, no, he moved, he moved gradually but firmly to the left.

But when he discovered that that was right, over he came you see.

Unquestionably, yes.

Really, most honest person he is. And I went to a meeting and afterwards I was waiting to speak to Mikardo, remember Mikardo?

Ian Mik, yes knew him very well.

Dear old Mik.

Because of GDR Trade, because he handled all the trade stuff with East Germany.

Yes I know, yes he did.

And we got to, because my wife...

And his secretary...

Hilda my wife was the General Secretary, well Secretary of the Friendship Society with the GDR.

Was she? Ah.

That's how she got to know Zilly as a left MP.

Right, yes.

So yes, yes.

Mm.

And...

Oh yes.

Have you done a lot since Zilly's death? Personally, do you sort of just take things fairly easily or have you got involved with things?

No I haven't, not, lately?

Yes.

But here I had committee room for nine years.

Labour Party Committee Room?

Yes. For, we had somebody I thought was good and worked really hard to get in an Arthur...

DH: Latham?

MY: Arthur Latham?

Arthur Latham, remember him?

Oh yes.

And he was a good left winger.

Yes.

In those days, I don't know, I don't think he's in anything now, he's working in Transport House or something.

MY: I think he's a councillor in somewhere in the West – East End I think.

Yes, Mall, just Mall.

Oh is he? Oh good. Because I can't see him not doing anything but for nine years I had him...

[Inaudible 17:09] ... Mall.

MY: Newens.

Oh Newens, Sid Newens.

MY: No...

Stan Newens.

Stan?

Yes, yes.

MY: Arthur Latham, and the borough of Newham I think.

Yes.

Yes, that's right, yes.

DH: The MP here is, the ex...

MY: Sir John?

DH: Yes.

Who?

DH: Wheeler?

MY: Sir John Wheeler.

God Almighty! A rabid Tory by the way.

Yes of course.

He really is.

Of course, of course.

MY: At one time he was fairly human.

Yes, but he's got the...

And what's this constituency called, Paddington something or other?

DH: Paddington North.

Paddington North?

Yes.

DH: It keeps changing its name.

No, no it is Paddington, I think it is Paddington North.

DH: Yes.

Yes.

Yes, I think so.

So you do all the local donkey work for the party?

So I did. And I had, yes in those days with Arthur. This was the Committee Room so everybody used to pile in here for, you know, and I'd sort of put everything down for him and, you know, but it was great, you know, I liked doing it. For nine years that was so it was okay. But now I'm...

A very worthy and worthwhile cause. Now let's talk about now.

I'm, now I'm not very happy because I'm not into things like, you know, just at the moment I am not.

Yes, you're not involved with the 'New' in quotes organised Labour Party?

And I have to find out. No, that's right. And, and I mean I wish I could say...

But even our union, those who voted against Clause Four. I mean we, I was part of the minority that voted for Clause Four.

Oh right.

But of course, you know.

Oh well.

But we lost didn't we Manny about two to one, we lost by about two to one.

That's right.

MY: Yes, they were the BBC people I suppose.

Mm, yes.

Yes, the BBC people.

Yes.

Yes.

They're bound to.

There is a problem. So how do you feel about the future? Are you gloomy about the future?

No.

Speaking purely politically?

No I'm not.

Not only personal but political.

Politically? No I'm not. Because I think we'll, and I don't think, I don't think people will really go behind this little fellow.

Who Tony? Oh I hope...

And surely we're not going to put up with that.

[Inaudible 19:30] ...because certainly I'm fairly confident that we're going to win the next election, that is...

True.

That is, I think it would have to be a miracle or an earthquake of cataclysmic proportion for them to get the Tories back in to power in two years time.

So do I think, I think so. Quite, that's right.

I just cannot see anything on the horizon that would bring Major back.

But I don't want... No right, I'm sure not. But, but I don't want just a social democrat I want a proper good, left wing Labour.

Yes, yes, but you want Socialism but to some people it's a dirty word.

[20:00]

That's what I want, yes. I know.

It's a rude word.

I do know.

Jan Zilliacus
Tape 3 Side B

It's a rude word love, and that's our dilemma, it's our problem and it's going to be very hard to focus, because I'm in the Labour Party.

Of course you are, I'm sure. I am too.

But it's going to be a very hard and quite a bitter struggle to really get anywhere.

MY: Which ward are you in, Little Venice, Venice or?

Yes, Little Venice.

Well that's Blomfield Road isn't it, up there, yes?

That's, yes, this, it finishes on this side of the road, that becomes something else over there, across the road.

MY: Yes because I went to one of their meetings the other day at their church hall.

Oh yes.

Yes.

MY: They asked me to join, yes. I'm thinking about it.

Are you in London, I'm not trying to recruit you Manny.

I wish you would.

You don't have to join the Labour Party but you could only do it good by having another comrade in the Labour Party.

Absolutely, please come in.

Yes.

We need you. [Laughter]

MY: I'll fill in the forms then now.

See if you can think about it.

Because I'm in the something the Democratic... When the Communist Party shut up shop in '91, which is about four years ago now, they, it formed this rather curious amorphous all things to all men organisation.

Mm, mm.

All very, you couldn't disagree with anything anywhere.

Oh dear!

Mm, it had, it chopped itself in to segments or what they called work – not workshops, something or other, bits, bits and pieces.

Yes.

And I'm in the bit called The Green Socialist Network, that's the word I was looking for.

Oh good, that sounds great.

And it's a good, it's really a good bunch of people, it's a handful, Monty Johns, people that may even have known from your party days, wonderful people.

Oh good!

Roger Simon, the man who runs the Labour Research Department.

Yes, right. Oh wonderful

Brother Brian Simon, you know, who was in Cambridge.

Oh gosh that's simply great!

With James Klugmann and all, that lovely, gorgeous Margot Heinemann.

Oh really? Yes, oh wow, yes indeed I do.

Beautiful, beautiful person. So that's my bit. But of course there's no Communists but there are other, and here is tiny Trotskyist segments who are called this, that and the other. But there's dear old Vanessa Redgrave and Corin Redgrave her mum bit.

Yes, that's right, yes.

And someone else runs another bit, and then of course, there's Paul Foot's SWP, Socialist Workers' Party.

Yes.

And so on. But The Green Socialist bit...

What do you think about the Socialist Workers' Party, have you been in to that really?

Well I, I, no never, I've never been in to it, I've bought their stuff occasionally outside railway stations. I admire the fact that they've got the youth, they've got youngsters.

So do I.

Who are prepared to go on the streets and sell the stuff.

I think that's splendid.

But of course, it's, I don't think there's much mileage in it and I think they turn over a lot of human beings in the course of a, of a month or two.

Ah.

MY: Because one, I've got against them is that they're too romantic.

Yes.

MY: They're just...

And that means that there's no staying power.

Yes it does.

If you know what I mean.

MY: They live in a fantasy er...

[Discussion/search re Jan's lost lighter]

So I think we've got...

Oh God, it's so nice to talk to you people, something I should really tell you for coming, I just, I needed you to come to talk about people I know and everything.

What do you want to do Manny?

MY: Actually there was one thing we wanted to perhaps expand it is when you went back to America a short while ago.

Oh yes, boy that was a triumph wasn't it? You know I was prohibited, do you, do you realise, do you remember I, I was...?

MY: Can you expand on your prohibition and why and all that?

Yes. And I, they, they gave a huge party in New York for me., why I can't tell you. It was in that very big place called the Sheraton is it?

Sheraton?

There's a huge ballroom and they had all these people to come as, and it was wonderful.

Who was 'they' who gave the party for you?

Jan Zilliacus
Tape 3 Side B

Oh, it was the mm... Hold on, wait, I'll think of it in a minute, I'll think of it in a minute. But...

MY: But why were you proscribed in the first place, and who did it and how?

Oh yes.

Because of Zilly?

No, no before that. Mm, I, because I, I was a Communist.

But you were a British Communist not an American Communist.

And yes, no. But it went round and I was blackballed and blacklisted and everything else and not allowed...

And we're talking about the McCarthy period, the '50s.

Yes. But do you know they've, yes but do you know that everybody has been honoured again.

Yes.

All that McCarthy stuff had just been dumped, nothing ever counts, they've outlawed it.

Yes I know.

And it doesn't... And, and people have been re...

Unfortunately, yes it came also too late for the, for many.

Yes.

People who suffered.

[25:00]

I know.

Well people like Joe Losey, well not just Joe Losey a whole batch of good people who have suffered.

Mm, mm. No. I most sorry that Paul Robeson isn't alive to know about this.

Yes. I brought Paul Robeson back to Britain from his hospital in the GDR, in East Germany.

That's right.

He was sick.

That's right. And then he went to...

He had a flat with Eslanda Robeson who died before him actually.

I know.

Eslanda and he, and I was asked if I would look after, because I just happened to be going back, because I'm going, in those, those, in that period I'm going backwards and forwards to Berlin very frequently.

Yes.

And Renata Mielka [ph 25:42] who looked after Paul from the Peace... Do you know he was the guest, always of the Peace Committee in Berlin, GDR?

Yes.

And she said 'Would you take care we're sending Robeson home', because he'd had his cure as they call it in the hospital there.

I remember.

I don't think they really found...

They didn't quite...

They never really coped with the depression and things.

No, and they didn't in, and they didn't in Russia either because...

No, no one...

We were very, I remember you see this funny thing. I knew Paul...

Yes.

Did come, Paul dipped straight out of it, I knew him when I was a small girl, he was a friend of my father's.

Really?

So it was a kind of old home week.

Was he a young actor?

Yes, mm.

Or baseball player?

Oh he was splendid, by God he was great.

Yes terribly.

And Columbia he was their prize pupil, you know.

Yes, yes indeed.

Student of the Year and all that.

Indeed

And he was lovely.

Yes. So we had this very nice plane journey and Paul, Eslanda did all the talking and she was, she took a shine to me and Paul was very friendly, but he was very quite, he was already a little withdrawn, you know.

Was he?

Yes. And then he went to Philadelphia where his son was living.

Oh yes, that's right, that's right.

And that's where he died.

I know.

And this is some years before his death but he was, he was quite sick.

Yes I remember.

And he had a, and he had a very raw deal, you know.

God, didn't he?

Passport taken away, well you know the story.

It was just horrible. You know he was under sort of like, it sounded to me as if he was sort of like for years before we got him over here, Zill had quite a lot to do with that incidentally.

Yes, I know.

He was like under kind of something like a house arrest there.

Yes, yes he was.

Jan Zilliacus
Tape 3 Side B

And he, they, everywhere he, he, they tagged after him everywhere he went and, and they didn't really allow him to go very far.

We did a film...

It's awful.

Joris Ivens' 'Song of the Rivers'.

Oh yes.

A wonderful, Joris's film 'Song of the Rivers', sponsored by the WFTU, the World Federation of Trade Unionists. And we had, Picasso did artwork, Shostakovich did the music.

Yes, that's right.

Bertolt Brecht did the poems.

Oh wow!

And we wanted Paul Robeson to sing it. And we couldn't get him over, we had to record it in a hotel room in New York, he was really a prisoner.

I know.

In that bloody room.

He really was.

You know, yes.

And there was such a...

And he did it and it was, it was a decent recording, it wasn't very, it wasn't, it wasn't as good as the stuff you get Manny.

And I was, I, one of the greatest happinesses that I remember was going in buying at auction furniture for his flat.

Yes, the one in, in Marble Arch?

Yes.

Yes.

And we found that, and I was, it was wonderful.

And of course, Eslanda was a very talented woman in her own right.

Yes.

Remarkable.

Yes she was.

Very talented lady.

Mm.

So you went back to America? Let's go back to that.

Yes.

When was, when was that?

Mm...

MY: About there it is.

Yes. But you now what to do is give you that one, title.

DH: Yes.

Yes. Wait a minute. Well which, which time am I going back to America now?

Manny, you must know this, I don't.

MY: Mm.

Which, which...

DH: Put that back.

Which, which, which return, which return from the States are you after?

MY: This was when I first tried to ring you for to make an appointment for this interview. Actually Steve Peat asked us to get in touch with you.

Oh yes, that's right.

Yes.

He's a nice man isn't he?

MY: And I rang and I think that, I think Dawn answered and she said you were in America, in New York

Ah, ha. That was a triumph.

When was that – last year?

And yes, and do you know there was Sir Jimmy Joicey because everybody seemed to know about this, everybody seemed to know about me being blackballed, not able to go to America so they all made a great fuss of me because I was able to come, you know.

Yes.

They were very pleased about that.

Did you have to fill in a form to say you'd never been a Communist and all that stuff?

No I couldn't do that because I've already said I was.

Yes exactly so...

I have it, and it's no good because look if you tell lies then people find you out don't they?

Yes, of course they will.

And then it's not very good, you know, it's better to, whichever way it goes it's better to be...

Let them do their damndest.

[30:00]

Yes, I think so.

You've never had anything you need to be ashamed of.

No indeed.

On the contrary.

Indeed, mm.

So it was a great trip was it?

Oh yes, and it was really lovely because I mean even people I, I just know as names, you know, I just know as names, there was this huge party, you know. And...

Who looked after you?

Well I was staying with, you know Corliss do you, you heard of Corliss Lamont?

Corliss Lamont?

He's just died.

Yes indeed he has.

He's my oldest friend.

Ah.

And I was staying with Corliss.

Ah, ha.

And Beth. And, well she's terribly unhappy because he's just died you see.

She must be.

On the twenty-sixth.

I know his obituary was in the press quite recently.

Mm, yes, I did it.

That he, weeks... You did it, yes? Weeks ago or what, about a month ago?

He died just two weeks ago.

Yes.

He died on the twenty-sixth.

Yes.

But I didn't know about it for three days.

Ah.

Oh dear!

Oh dear!

Corliss was a great fighter you know.

He was a remarkable bloke.

I mean who, how many millionaires do you know that behave like Corliss? I don't know any.

Well I only know one and that was Eva, Eva Reckitt of Reckitt's Blue, Reckitt and Colman, yes.

Oh really?

Yes. She was a millionairess Communist lesbian.

Yes, lovely.

And a wonderful woman.

I'm sure she was.

And was a founder of, one of the founders of our company.

Good.

Plato Films, she gave us 500 quid. And when we had a terrible libel action with a Nazi general, it's a long story I won't go in to it...

Because it sounds fascinating.

Yes, yes. When we had this libel action it was Ava, we had, I had to sell the bit of my home to my wife, it was one these juggling things and Ava gave us the money to do it.

Good.

Without interest, and we paid that back over a period. But that's the only millionairess I've known who was in the Communist Party.

Yes.

And she's, her money lives on because she formed a trust which gives money to worthy causes like the ANC and South African Communist Party.

Oh good. Good, good, wonderful.

And they get their money fairly regularly from the Ava Reckitt Trust.

Ah.

Yes. But Corliss Lamont, I read his book of, on Russia, on relations with the Soviet Union, a remarkable bloke.

Mm, he was and I knew him for so, well he really I think...

I didn't know him personally.

He really was my oldest friend, you know, but now he's dead.

Well that's a devil, that's a sod isn't it?

Mm.

That was bad news.

Now he was a, he was an extraordinary person alright.

But the best thing I think that's happened to us, all of us this century is South Africa.

Mm.

And Mandella.

Well I was just going to talk to you about South Africa a moment or so ago. Yes isn't that, oh wow!

Well there's nothing else that we've really won out and held on to.

At, least, at least.

We've got that.

That we have.

We've ended Apartheid. We, a lot of us have ended Apartheid.

Mm.

Although they're not out of the wood economically, they've got terrible, terrifying problems.

Oh I know. But listen it's such a rich country.

Yes.

And they will come out in the end, you know, won't they?

Of course they will.

It's a not thing and...

It may take a decade or two.

It hasn't been totally exploited.

No, no way. Quite nice, quite good.

Well what do you see in the future? You see I'm not very...

It's very cloudy. There's a wonderful book...

This Blair fellow, I don't know.

Well I'm not, I wouldn't...

I know.

I'm not a gambling man but even if I were I wouldn't like to put my money on a happy future for Britain under the Prime Ministership of Tony Blair quite honestly.

Neither would I. And neither would I.

I'd, I would have done on his predecessor who died so tragically.

Oh that was sad.

He was a good guy.

Yes.

And although he wasn't a left winger he was a centrist who held both bits of the party together.

True, yes.

And...

DH: I agree with you.

Yes, and had their affection. You know, he had the affection of the Tony Benns and Dennis Skinners...

That's right, that's right.

As well as the Peter Shores and all the rest of them.

You know Tony Benn is such an honest person.

Yes, sweetie pie even.

And I want to tell you that for, we had a kind of a... Well Tony wasn't exactly a left winger it's...

No, I know that.

Earlier on, you know, and I went to a do, and did I tell you this? I don't think I did. I went to a do, a sort of a speech, a meeting. And there was Mikardo and there was Tony and so on, and I, I wanted to speak to Mikardo because I didn't think Tony would, still would speak to me, you know. And I'm waiting back to...

In the wings, yes.

Jan Zilliacus
Tape 3 Side B

Back, two people in front of me to speak to, met Mik. And he saw me and he's crouched down, it was on the stage and I'm down here on this little stage, and to my absolute astonishment he said 'Janny how very good to see you, I want to tell you something. Zilly was completely right and I was totally wrong in those days'. What about that?

[35:09]

Lovely.

Wasn't that an amazing thing for somebody to do?

MY: Yes, I believe he's quite religious isn't he Tony?

Yes, yes he is.

You mean he...

He doesn't smoke he doesn't drink, he's kind of mm...

MY: A churchman is he?

A little bit.

He's a bit like Bruce Kent, sort of a Christian morals.

Yes, yes, that's it.

But a very good guy.

Oh he is, he is.

A good guy.

He really is.

Very good. Tell us about your meeting with Stalin please?

Well I...

When was it?

Well I'll tell you. Oh dear that's the trouble with me. Just a minute, it's after the war.

Forty...

Forty-seven.

Sort of between '45 and what?

I think it was '47.

Forty-seven?

It seems to me. Mm, I think it was. It was either at the end of '46 or sometime early in '47. And Zilly took a whole bunch of MPs.

Yes, a delegation, the Labour Party delegation.

Yes. He did, organised it and he did it and I went along and that's when I met Stalin. And I want to tell you something, now this is a strange thing. The thing I remember most about him was his eyes, he had the most coldest grey eyes I have ever seen in my life.

Really?

Just, and that isn't politically speaking it was just the way I felt when I met him, you know, you know how you get that first impression?

Was this in a big room or in a small room, in a large...

Mm, quite big.

A lot of you were there?

A lot of people, yes. And then, well there were all those MPs as well, you know.

Yes, of course, yes.

I mean, yes and a whole bunch of other people – Russians.

Yes, of course.

I do love the Russians, don't you like the Russians?

MY: Oh yes, they're good people.

They're so warm and expansive and I like that.

Oh yes, but they're having a hell of a time at the moment.

I know.

DH: Yes.

I, I really love them.

But Khrushchev was a different kettle of fish wasn't he?

Well I liked him terribly much.

Yes.

Well you see we spent was it six weeks holiday with him.

Yeah?

Down in, not Sochi the other place, ah!

So warm was it?

DH: Orianda? [ph 37:20]

Mugeni Orianda [ph 37:23] was the name of the place but that's next to, ah!

Anyway, in the Caucasus probably, mainly.

It was on the Black Sea.

Sea?

MY: *Not Odessa?*

No, Odessa's further down that way, I'll think of this name in a minute. Excuse me, I think this is old age, you know that, I'm very sorry about it.

It's allowed, at eighty-four it's allowed.

I can't just get my tongue around the name of that place, and it was lovely.

What the hell?

It was great. And...

So that was your Stalin meeting and that was your Khrushchev meeting.

And it was Stalin, and then you see it was nice that we went there, that Khrushchev invited us because his place was just through a, it was a sort a fence with the bushes like that that separated these two properties and there was a gate in the middle and there was of course, a guard there and I used to hop through the gate, go over in the mornings and then we'd go down and swim with him and things like that, nice, because his family.

Yeah. I've met the family.

Mm.

Putting flowers on... Well I did this thing with him, it was a sort of mad thing where wherever Khrushchev and Bulganin, who...

Oh yes, yes, yes.

When they went all over the show, to India, to Burma, to all over the world.

That's right, yum.

Including Britain when Anthony Eden was Prime Minister.

That's right, that's right.

And we were asked to help do the British end of the film productions.

Oh good, yum!

And the Russians they'd sent over camera people, you know, they'd sent over a vast crew as you can imagine.

Yes, yes.

And of course, it was a very formalistic thing. You know, there were meetings, they visited Lenin's room in Marx House where Lenin edited Iskra.

I know, of course, that's right, oh yes.

And they laid wreaths on the Marx grave in Highgate Cemetery and, and there were meetings, all formal stuff and speeches. So it's, we've got the film, it's not a great film but it's a record of the visit.

Oh. Do you show it sometimes?

Yes. Never but you can borrow it.

If you, if you ever are could I, could you, could you remember me?

If I ever get around...

Thank you.

To plucking up courage enough to show it...

Oh no wonderful, I wish you would.

I'll invite you.

I'd love it, I'd thank you, I would really like to see this, mm.

Mm, yeah, and there we were. But it's very intriguing all this reminiscence stuff.

Oh.

Because things bob up, you know.

Yes, yes.

When you're chatting.

Mm.

In this way. Manny how are we now for space?

MY: Well you, well you've got another few minutes before you run out of space.

What about my Dawnie here?

What about Dawn?

DH: Don't mind about me.

Oh yes.

DH: You carry on.

No, we do mind about you.

We certainly do my Poo.

Can we do a bit with Dawn then please?

MY: Yes, if you're ready.

Yes, of course she is.

I just want to empty this.

Dawn's turn.

[End of Tape 3 Side B 40:15]

Transcript Queries – Jan Zilliacus

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3 07:06	<i>'Brody'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – friend of Jan.</i>
8 25:03	<i>'Kerry Weiss'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – director of 'Far From the Madding Crowd'.</i>
8 25:07	<i>'Kerry Rice'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – director of 'Far From the Madding Crowd'.</i>
10 27:21	<i>... of the... [Inaudible] ...actually...</i>

**Jan Zilliacus
Tape 3 Side B**

11 29:35	<i>Inaudible passage – Manny Yospa</i>
14 38:15	<i>... I mean... [Inaudible] ...is a...</i>
Tape 1 Side B	
21 12:01	<i>Mrs 'Settiesford'? Spelling/Doubtful Word –Jan's Putney landlady.</i>
22 18:24	<i>'V8'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – in description of Air-Way vacuum cleaner.</i>
29 35:24	<i>George 'Stent'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – boyfriend lost to Stella Zilliacus.</i>
29 35:28	<i>George 'Stent'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – boyfriend lost to Stella Zilliacus.</i>
Tape 2 Side A	
39 11:15	<i>'trowls'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – uncertain context.</i>
39 12:15	<i>Chris 'Ewers'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Labour politician.</i>
44 19:00	<i>David 'Abowsi'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Labour councillor..</i>
Tape 3 Side A	
62 20:45	<i>... of course... [Inaudible]</i>
63 21:15	<i>Inaudible question.</i>
64 22:30	<i>...a tremendous... [Inaudible] ...we all...</i>
70 28:27	<i>Inaudible question.</i>
77 36:54	<i>Inaudible contribution by Dawn Harris.</i>
81 40:52	<i>Leon 'Basel'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – spy – resident in St Johns Wood house.</i>
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98 17:09	<i>Inaudible question.</i>
100 19:30	<i>[Inaudible] ...because...</i>
105 25:42	<i>Renata 'Mielka'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – E German who looked after Paul Robeson.</i>
116 37:20	<i>'Orianda'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Black Sea resort.</i>
116 37:23	<i>'Mugeni Orianda'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Black Sea resort.</i>