Trans 40

RIB DAVIS INTERVIEWING JOE SCALA

15.3.95

Rib Davis: Just so we've got a context for all this, will you tell us first of all where you were born and when?

Joe Scala: I was born in 1922, in number 10 Tower Bridge Road, which was over Old Joe's fish and chip shop, and Old Joe was my grandfather.

RD: Oh really, and was your father in the same trade?

JS: My father was also in that trade. I must tell you that my grandfather and grandmother came here from Italy at the turn of the last century, and my father also came over early this century, at the age of 10, to work. He went up to Stanford in Lincolnshire, and worked there and then he eventually came back to London, met my mother, worked for my grandfather, got married. Went off to the 1914 war, came back and that was it.

RD: What date did you say?

JS: The 27th July 1922.

RD: So you were about 15 or 17 when the war broke out...

JS: I was 17.

RD: So what were you doing then, before the war broke out?

JS: I was working in my father's fish and chip shop, also called Old Joe's, and that was round the corner in Old Kent Road.

RD: Were you all called Joe!?

JS: No, my grandfather was called Joe and I was named after him, because I was the first grandchild. Actually, I was named after him, I was named after my Italian grandfather. Guiseppe Augusto Antonio Loretto Mario Scala, that's me! With a cockney accent!

RD: So you were working in a fish and chip shop at the start of the war. And do you remember when war broke out?

JS: I do indeed, yeah. Yeah, we were working in the shop and someone just came in and said 'war's been declared on the radio', and that was it, that was how we knew we were at war.

RD: I suppose you were expecting it?

JS: We were expecting it, it was in the air. I had an aunt who kept on saying to me 'oh, there's going to be a war, there's going to be a war!', and I said, 'No, there won't be a war, because he wouldn't warn someone if he was going to have a war, and Hitler keeps saying "If you don't let me do this, I'll do that!", but he wouldn't be warning us, he'd just strike', but I was wrong. So was Mr Chamberlain!

RD: So what was the first impact of it upon you?

JS: Well I think we were all very sad, because only a short while before that, Mr Chamberlain came back and said it wasn't going to be a war, and everone was very happy at the words. And then suddenly was a war, and war in the past had meant such tragedies for people. My old grandmother, my maternal grandmother, her first son, who was born when she came to this country, joined the territorial army and he went off and he didn't come back, he was killed in action, in Belgium in 1914. And my old granny for the rest of her life, wore black. So, you know, she was praying for everyone, every morning, every day, every evening, every afternoon. My granny was always praying for somebody's soul, and it made her very sad and it made me sad.

RD: So were you called up?

JS: I volunteered actually, not because I'm heroic! I volunteered because I thought, if I don't volunteer I'll get stuck in the army and just have to march about! But if I volunteered, I could join the airforce which sounded very nice and glamourous, so I went along. Would you like me to tell you how I volunteered? (RD: yes, go on) I went to - I don't know how I got the contact, but I went to this recruiting office in Euston, almost facing Euston station. There was a drill hall and I lined up there with lots of others lined up there, and we eventually got in to this big hall, and there was a long, long table with officers in airforce uniform with wings, sitting behind the table all along, and we had to go in one at a time and be interviewed.

And it came my turn, and he said 'What would you like to do? Why do you want to join the airforce?', I said 'well I've always wanted to join the airforce'. And then he said, 'Well, what do you want to do?'. I said, 'well, to tell you the truth, I want to do something for the war, but I never want to kill anyone!'. So he said 'Well, cook!', so I said 'you've never tasted my cooking!'. I'm 18 and a half, 19, remember and I'm talking to this man with all this gold braid on him, and he says, 'Well, general duties', I said 'what does that entail?', he said, 'well, sweeping and ??'.

Well I said, 'No, that's not what I want. I want something exciting!', and behind him on the wall, there was this beautiful, magnificent motorboat jumping out of the sea, and it was an RAF rescue launch, and I said 'Actually, that's what I wanted to do, I've always wanted to do that'. So he said, 'Well, that's very difficult. It's a very, very small unit, and there's only a few scattered here and there these boats, it's not like big airdromes of them, you just live in a house and put the boats out and put them to sea'. So I said, 'that's what I really want to do'. 'Well, you seem very keen, he said, 'but I must tell you that in this section, the marine ? section, are these sons of millionaires who've been brought up on yachts all their life and know everything about it, all these young fellas, or stevedores off the river Thames, the barger/es?, who have served five years apprentice and can handle boats'. He said 'I can see you are eager, so couldn't you just tell me, are you in anyway loosely connected with the sea? Just loosely, you

know, I'm just trying to help you, just loosely!'. So I said 'Yes I am', he said 'What's that then?', I said, 'Well my dad's got a fish and chip shop!'. (laughter)
So he took his cap off and mopped his forehead, and looked at the officer next to him, and he said 'What do you think?'. And this other officer said to him, 'He sounds like ideal material to me!'. So that's how I joined the airforce.

RD: Amazing, what did they put you into?

JS: Oh, the air sea rescue, yeah. And it was really marvellous, you know, four and a half years I was on the sea, exciting action all the time.

RD: Did you go into training first?

JS: Yeah, I think we went to Cardington. The old hangers up there for the R101 airship, do you remember?

RD: Is that, near Bedford? - they're still there.

JS: Are they really? Enormous hangers, enormous. Well we went there, and we were there for about a week or a fortnight I think, just getting uniforms and messing about in general, and parading, on parade and everything. And I was a bit, not a rebel, but I just didn't like really being told all the time to do things and they said, 'you know, everytime you go out on parade, you've got to have all your full uniform on, and your napsack on your back, and your overcoat. And the Air Vice Marshall somebody's coming tomorrow to inspect you all, so I want you all dressed nice and smart!'. So we all went out on parade, and I can't wear clothes and ties and things like that. So I went out on parade with my hat on and my overcoat and rucksack, and a rifle I think we had. And we lined up, it must have been about 2000 of us, and this Air Vice Marshall, marshalled down the line and then he said alright, and then the sergeant in charge said, 'right, off with your packs. Put your packs on the ground in front of you, like you've been ordered to do. Put your rifles down. Right, overcoats off!', so I took my overcoat off, and there was about 2000 men there wearing uniform, but I had a shirt on with no collar, with the sleeves rolled up! So I got told off for that obviously. I think I had to do some duties that night or something, gaurd duty or something!
Anyway, from there we went to Skegness. Skegness, we did have training, and it was the usual thing - all rookies?? all wanted to prove something, all trying to be better that the others, you know. And we were on parade there, we used to do these drills, and of course we all went through the experience of being the only man in step, when the other thousand were all out of step! I had that once. But it was nice, exciting and lovely, and it was always the feeling thing of going away, we're going to go away, you know. So that was that, and from there when I passed out, I was posted to Portsmouth, Gospel?? actually in the harbout at Portsmouth - there was a very small Air Sea Rescue base there. I think we had about four high-speed launchers. They could do 30 knots, which was very fast in those days, jumping out of water and that. Three 1000 horsepower Rolls Royce engines. High octane petrol. And then we had about four Pinnaces with lifting gear on, dereks...

RD: What's a Pinnace?

JS: A Pinnace was a sort of boat with a big hold in the back and a crane on board. Only small, only 50 feet long. And with that we used to go round - sometimes we were on that, sometimes we were on the launchers. And with the Pinnaces we used to go round Stokes Bay which was just around the coast from Portsmouth, between Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, and we used to do torpedo recovery there. We used to have RAF pilots that had learnt to fly, then they had these old swordfish?? that did 100 miles and hour, these planes, with a torpedo tied up underneath them somehow. And honestly, it was like a bus coming along, very slow, and there was a big old barge walled up, right out in the solem?? with a post on it, and they had to come in, and it was a dummy torpedo, they had to come in and drop the torpedo, and it would leave a wake behind it, and we'd see if it would have hit the boat. It was too low in the water to hit the boat, it just made a trail. And that's how they trained. And then we had to go and pick that up afterwards, which was very hard - they were great big things. God knows what they weighed, several tonnes, I think. I don't know. And big heavy things swinging like that in the sea, swinging like that, and you had to get boathooks, and hook them onto rings, and watch out you didn't get your head knocked off, and then winch it up out of the water, put it on board, and take it back where it belonged for someone else to have a go at it!

RD: So when did your training finish?

JS: Within a month or two, I mean we'd done all that stuff at Skegness, all the marching and everything, within a month or two we were alotted a boat each. I was on a pinnace for a couple of months, then I went on to an Air Sea Rescue launches and we were out to sea.

RD: And was it true what the bloke said, that it was full of people who'd been...

JS: It was. We had some...but what a wonderful lot, really, we had a fella there, his son was lord somebody and the other one was right honourable somebody, and they grew walrus moustaches, you know like, in keeping, one had a big ginger walrus moustache. Another one was an artist, he'd painted all his room. We commandeered this old pub in Gosport?? harbour on a bit of beach there called Prittis Hard?? that they used to use for boat building and repairs during peace-time. And there was an old pub there called Moby House, a really old, mock-tudor sort of pub, and it was absolutely deserted because when the tide came up, the cellar filled up with sea water, so it was deserted, and that was our billet and they stuck us in there. In emergencies, we had to run downstairs, run along the long wooden pier we had there onto our boats, and out to sea. And we learnt our thing as we went along. We had lessons during the day time - we learnt semophore and morse-code, signalling with an aldous lamp, and guns, machine guns. And when we went to sea at first on those boats - they were rescue barges, boats - four with rescue pervis???, whether they be German, Polish, Canadians, English, and we fished 'em out. But because we were rescue boats, we had no guns, we had no arms at all. And then they started getting shot up, some of these boats, you know, quite a few of them got shot up all round the coast everywhere, they weren't difficult to target, going just 30 miles an hour - that's like standing still, for an aeroplane. And they let us take our rifles on board with us! If you could imagine, this

boat jumping out the water at 30 knots and trying.... well anyway, from that we progressed, and they let us have a little stand?? gun when they were invented, those little machine gun things.

RD: Were they any use to you?

JS: They were nice little guns, yeah. I mean what fired off a few bursts in anger but not with them, because from then, then we went on to Lewis machine guns, little light machine guns that were on a tripod, and then by the end we had gun turrets on there, the same as on an aeroplane, and then we had good guns in there because, you know...

RD: Were you attacked while you were at sea?

JS: We were never attacked. We went out on rescues. We saw them come over several times. It wasn't that they were kind to us, it's just they had something else to do - they were on their way to bomb somewhere else. But we did acquire a few pick-ups. I didn't pick them up, but between us, the crew, we picked up 27 people. We picked up Germans, Polish, Canadians, English, American, picked up one with no head?? on him, so I don't know what he was. Some had been in the sea for days.

RD: Had these people all died?

JS: Oh no, the majority were alive. Because over the sea, they'd parachute out and you know just splash into the water. You blew your Mae West up on reaching the ground.

RD: So it was mostly those rather than the ships which had gone down?

JS: Oh no, we never touched the ships in those days. The Air Sea rescue was for air sea. Anyway, when we knew someone was going over, we'd go out and stand there, like miles off shore, we'd be standing in the middle there, you know, not too near France, because it was occupied.

RD: Did you feel as if you were in a lot of danger?

JS: No, you didn't feel in danger, you felt excited. But don't forget we were 20 years old, you know, it was what we wanted to be doing - and that fellow had wanted to make me a cook!

Another job we used to do - we used to go to the Isle of Wight sometimes, with a pinnace, pick up a fella called Uffa? Fox. Did you ever hear of him? He was the man who taught the Duke of Edinburgh to sail a yaught, and also the Prince of Wales, and he lived on the Isle of Wight, and he used to invent lots of things - he had been involved in lots of things like delayed-action bombs. I mean sometime we had to go and stand there on the back of the Isle of Wight, and just stand there, and see them come over and drop a bomb, and it would sink and then explode. And our job then was to go in with the pinnace as quick as we could, with these great big long poles with nets on the bottom, and we had to fish out anything that was floating, any debris.

RD: What was your first experience of actually going to sea?

JS: Oh, I was really worried about being sea-sick. I thought I was going to be sea-sick, but I wasn't, and these boats were only about 8 or 10 feet across, and 50 - 55 - 58 foot long, you know. They got bigger as the years went by, they got bigger. No, it was great for me - it was what's going to happen next all of the time.

RD: So did you do that for the whole of the war?

JS: No, I went abroad - I was on Air Sea Rescue all the time, I didn't do anything else, but I went abroad, I went to West Africa.

RD: Were you sent there or was it voluntary?

JS: No, I'll tell you. You see, I was, as I say, my parents were Italian, you see, so I was a dual-national, and until you were 21 years of age in those days, you could do what you liked, you could chose what you wanted to be - you had to chose by the time you were 21, but by the time I was 19 I was in the airforce. But they didn't send dual-nationals abroad, and it was very funny because, you know, I wasn't a tearaway, but I've been around in London, you know, the way kids grow up - never any villany, but we were alive to the street, you know. And when we got there we used to get up to all tricks and jokes, you know, more that anything else, pranks. And we had a warrant officer there - Warrant Officer Osborne - he was tiny little man, and he had the wings on his chest to show he was the oldest serving Warrant Officer in the Royal Air Force. But also he'd been a pilot in the Royal Flying Core in the 1914 war. A bustling little man he was, busy little man, he was - always threatening you he was, but jolly - 'Come on you little sod, get up there or I'll have you sent overseas, I'll have him sent over seas', and he always used to be that way. Anyway, when I thought the time had come - I wanted to go abroad, I volunteered, and he spent two weeks trying to talk me out of it! But he didn't, and I went overseas, and the last thing I did before I left was take all his garden gnomes out of his front garden and put them all up his road - because he lived there, he actually lived in Gosport in peacetime. He was a good man, I learnt a lot from him.

RD: How was it that they let you go overseas if you were a dual-national?

JS: Well, I volunteered.

RD: Was there any problem, with your Italian connection?

JS: With my Italian connection, no, except that whenever Italy had a bad day out in the desert, they'd say, 'here, your lot's copped it again', you know, and I'd say, 'oh yeah, really!'. But no, nothing nasty. I can tell you, before I went off to the war, there were Italian prisoners of war in England, you know, Peckham on the Rye, down Spa Road. Well our fish and chip shop was round the corner and of course in no time at all they found out there was an Italian fella working in the fish shop over the road, and these Italians, you never seen anything like it, these prisoners, they come out and go to the picture. No barbed wire or locks on doors for Italian prisoners - there were for

Germans - but they would come out and they'd always been in our shop. My granny, because she lost a son in the war, she'd take them upstairs and feed them all, so naturally, the crowds got bigger and bigger. And our customers were English and when you think of it, they had their sons being killed, you know, in the desert and places like that, but they didn't in any way hold out against us, you know. And when my grandfather died, these prisoners of war, they asked if they could carry his coffin out to put in the hearse which they did, and it was an amazing sight. I'm get a bit emotional now...It was an amazing sight because there were those people, those English people on the pavements, their sons were overseas dying in Japanese prison camps, and there was these Italian prisoners of war, carrying my grandfather out to his grave. And all these old people that looked round at us - some old people had been in the 1914 war - they all stood to attention and there was never any...there was nothing like that. And when I grew up, I always used to hear about when the First World War was on that lots of shops belonging to German people were smashed, so naturally we thought that when the war came we'd be...but it never did, and people were very, very nice to us.

I remember my father was interned during the war, because he never got naturalised, my father was a beautiful, gentle man, and he had his principles, and his principles were that although he came here when he was ten, he said, 'England has been very good to us', he used to always tell me how England had been good to us and was never going to have anything against them??? And as soon as the war came, Italy came into the war you see, later, and I remember this day very well; one afternoon the bell rang, the day after Italy came into the war, I think - maybe a day or two - the bell rang, I opened the door, and there was this young man with red hair, very smart, navy blue, serge suit on, the sort of a policeman or some low officer somewhere??. 'Mr Scala, I want to see Mr Scala', I said come in, didn't know who he was, and he came into the kitchen and my dad was there reading the paper, and my mother was there, and he said, 'I'm sorry Mr Scala, but I've got to take you away to be interned, you see, under 18b act', because my father, all his life people had said to him 'get in, get naturalised, it only costs a fiver!', and all these Italian visitors that we knew, they were all getting naturalised left, right and centre, for a fiver, but my dad said you cannot do that, you cannot give a man five pounds, and he gives you a bit of paper and says you're English, he said 'I am English. They'll never hurt me these people here, because they know me, they live with me, and I keep the law and I love England and that's it.

But they did, they came and took him away - they took all Italians away who weren't naturalised, you see, but as I say, all my father had done all his life was work and bring us up, and then the tragedy was that there were lots of young Italian boys that I knew who had got taken away as well, because their parents, like my father, came over, and when their sons were born here, they used to register their son in Italy, which made them an Italian subject, and my father never did that, he never registered me, he said 'you were born here, you're English'. So they came, they were all taken away, lots of boys that I knew, that I used to be around the streets with, you know, and unfortunately, a few days later, many, many - some thousands- were put a boat called the Arandora? Star, did you ever hear of that? (RD: yes I have) Well that was to be sent to Canada, and, contrary to the Geneva conventions of couse, they put barbed wire all over it, so they couldn't get off, which was against the Geneva Convention at the time, and it was no sooner in the Irish sea, than a German U-boat came along and

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torpedoed it, and it went down, and they lost the majority of people. And I had to go you know I was 17 then - I'm not sure if it was the Argentina embassy or the Portuguese embassy, I'd go there everyday, because they were handling all of Italy's affairs and they put up the list of bodies that were being found all the time. We had to read it everyday for about 3 weeks, my father wasn't on it, wasn't on it, wasn't on it, and we'd go home crying. And then, after about a month, we had a letter to say he was on the Isle of Mann prison camp.

RD: And all that time you thought he'd be on the ship?

JS: We didn't know where he was, we thought he might be on it, but no one knew who was on it, they just kept putting up lists of survivors, you know, and we just didn't know where he was - we didn't hear anything, we didn't hear anything. And he was there for 18 months, and they let him out, said 'you're alright, we looked into you and you're alright, you can go home now!'. He came back with white hair.

RD: How did he get the???

JS: Gentle man, my father. But that's what they had to do, that's what they did.

RD: There was no resentment?

JS: Never, it never entered into our heads, that you had to resent it - that was the law, that was the way we had been brought up. I remember - I'll give you an example -, all my life I've payed the income tax, National Health stamp, you know, 1 and 6, 1 and 9 pence, 2 shillings, ends up...I don't know what it is now. And I remember complaining one day, because they almost doubled it, because Beveridge had brought up the National Health, and I said 'Bloody cheek! I was paying one and nine, now I've got to pay 3 and 6!', and my dad said, 'you must never say that! I mean, England is a good country', he said, 'where else would you be able to go and get everything for nothing?'. In a way I'm glad he's dead now, so he can't see what we have to pay! But he would never have, he'd say, 'No, no, they've been good to us. If you're taken care of when you're ill, it's marvellous', he said. And so that was that.

RD: What about the end of the war? What happened at the end of the war for you?

JS: The end of the war, I was very excited, VJ day, that was the day I deserted!

RD: What?!?

JS: I deserted for the day. I was up in Norwich, or somewhere - Gorseland, up near Yarmouth. I was up there on Air Sea Rescue, I'd been to Africa and come back, and now I was stuck up there, all nice and brown and I was freezing. Anyway, and there was going to be this big celebration on VE day, so I said...

RD: Is this VE day, or VJ day?

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JS: VE day, I think...yeah it was VE day, because that was it. And really we thought the war was over. And I just came out on the train, down to London, I went to Whitehall and joined in the festivities - everyone dancing, old Churchill being propped up by a fella on each side of him, in case he fell off the back of the big open car that he was on, saluting everbody. And the next day I went back. No one knew I'd been gone, I told a couple of fellas that were there with me. I was on two days off, off duty, on shore, you see, and that was it. And I served my time, and the time came round to go, they sent me home.

RD: Now you fire away without me asking questions.

JS: Yeah, cos you can take this as you want, can't you? Is it on? Right, gas masks. Now we had, my little brother had just been born, so my young brother had just been born on the 13th of September. And war was declared on the 3rd wasn't it, or was it the other way round? That's right. And of course we had to have a gas mask for him - we all had gas masks, I mean it was terrible. We had this thing like a shoe box on a bit of string and you had it on and you had to take out with you and all that. And, did you ever see a child's or a baby's gas mask did you? Well, it was like an iron lung, what you put people in now to recussitate them, you know, it was a big thing like that with a pump and you had to pump it, and you had to pump them up, and you had to take that for the baby. But you couldn't be seen out without one, everyone would say 'Where's your gasmask, where's your gas mask?', you know. And we used to go out, when we were kids, 17, and wander the streets when these raids were on. I mean there wasn't a lot of villany in kids in those days, I don't care what anyone says. I mean we came from a rough neighbourhood, a rough school and everything, but we never went out to make trouble. I can remember picking up a tin of beans once that had blown out of a shop window, and we standed it up on the pavement so that no one would fall over it! And now today, they pull the front out and take the till and the computer out of the back room and...anyway that's the way things were. And we used to go out at night and it was quite an adventure for us, when they started dropping those fire bombs, I mean we absolutely went out. I had a tin helmet, I wasn't in the forces or anything in those days, but I had a tin helmet that I'd bought years before in an army surplus store. They had army surplus stores from the 1914 war, still selling surplus stuff off, you know when I was a kid. And we had one in Tower Bridge Road, and I went down there one day and bought a German forest?? cap.

RD: A German one?!

JS: Yeah, and I was about 10, I suppose, and my mum said to me, 'now, how much are they?', I said 'they're a penny each'. So I can remember I said 'they're a penny each if they're second hand, twopence if they're new', so she said 'well get a new one, because it might have been on a dead soldier in the 1914 war!', so that was the sort of reasoning people had in those days, you know. And as I got older I bought a tin hat, a tin helmet, for about a shilling I suppose - an English one - and that came out and did duty during the war , because we used to go out in the nights when the raids were on, and we used to go round and see what we could do - anything to help, you know. My uncle was in the Auxilliary fire service, and I mean actually we made a game of when a fire bomb dropped, to get there and put it out, because that was the game, you know.

You had to get there within ten seconds, you had to get on your hands and knees, crawl, put a dustbin lid in front of it, get there within 10 seconds, put a sandbag on it and run away. And then if it exploded, that would kill the explosion...

RD: Did you actually manage to do that?

JS: I done that twice, twice I did that. And I'll never forget, I cut a very heroic figure once, because Bermondsey in those days, you could smell Bermondsey, when you got near Bermondsey, there was 3 smells in Bermondsey, you could smell Hartley's jam factory during the day time - beautiful, oh, this beautiful strawberry jam being made! - and a biscuit factory - Huntley and Palmers? biscuit factory. But all day long, the pervading smell of leather, it was an area where leather was being tanned, and the other smell was vinegar. Up, near Tower Bridge there was a big vinegar distillery, Sarsons I think, yeah, and you could smell that. And we used to go out at night and we used to have these adventures, and dash about and do all these things; and one night there was a couple of girls with us, and I thought 'right now, this is my big chance!', and I charged off to do something brave in Bermondsey! And it was all dark - there was no lights on except fires burning, and then I ran across the road, and as I ran, I suddenly disappeared, and I put my foot in a thing where the firemen got the water from to put the fires out - the hydrant thing. And I put my foot down there, and I had a wellington on and it got all full up with water and it ruined my night!

RD: Was this you being heroic?!

JS: Yeah, that was it! But everyone was laughing, so I had to try something else, and then....but...

RD: What about relationships, between men and women? Were they very different because of the war?

JS: Are we talking about elder men and women?

RD: No, people of your age.

JS: My age, no we always had that excitement about us. And we were always, like we had that time we all went off to shelters, and I never went into a shelter in my life, I never went in one - I never saw one! But I know people who used to get their pram get all their kettle, and put a stove on a pram and push it up there every night, and we never did that. We had a beautiful shop in Tower Bridge Road, my grandfather built, it was called the Tower Bridge Palace. And it was a palace, it was a fish and chip shop - Old Joe's fish and chip shop - and he had people over from Italy to put his walls in, and the terraza on the floor and the big canopy over the pans??? with fishermen trailing?? their ship from the sea, and it was solid, he liked a big a solid house round him, my grandfather. And in his cellar, which was a big cellar, he barracaded it all up, and made a great big door which we put up, near the end, and sand-bagged it at night - we all went down there. And lots of our neighbours went down there, and people who lived nearby, and relatives up the road, we were all in our cellar, and we had all beds down in the cellar, all single beds, all made out along the wall. And we lived down

there, and in the morning we used to come out and have a look round, see what was missing; one day the house next door but one was gone, and we didn't hear it go in the night! I mean we heard these noises all night, crash, bang, wallop, but all you say is 'that's near' or 'that's far'.

But men and women, I think we were all pretty equal, well in my family, I mean, it's always been like that. In my family there was a matriarchal system, that was like dad earned the money, mum looked after the money, and everything went right and there was not much to row about you know, really. Except my old grandfather I remember him really going amuck one day, because he said 'We're ruined - we'll have to sell the shops, we're ruined!', and my grandmother laughed and said 'oh, what's the matter now?, you know. He said 'Potatoes have gone up, they've gone up!' which was potatoes - chips. They'd gone up to 2 and 6, I don't know it was a sloppy thing like...oh, 2 pound 10 a tonne, like 2 pound 10 a tonne of potatoes, we used to use two or three tonnes a week. And that was sharp? profit that, you see. But other than that nothing really worried us really.

I had an uncle who had a shop in Battersea - Scala's ice cream - parlour place, cafe, place in Battersea railways station. And he had built a similar shelter down in his cellar. He had a big house down Mockins?? Town Road, three or four stories high, and he built this enormous thing down there, and he had half of his road down there every night and he fed them and everything, you know, he had them all in there. And almost the last bomb to drop on London hit it, demolished the house right down to the ground. My uncle that time had been in Italy, because that was where he was when war was declared and that's where he got stuck, but his wife and daughter, and his daughter in law - they were killed in it. And when I heard, we heard early the next morning, someone said, 'd'you hear? there was big bombs', you know, and we got over there, and we all helped to dig and dig and dig there and we got my cousin out alive - he was a big fella, he was, nearly 20 stone, and we got him alive and got him to Battersea Hospital. And he survived to a ripe old age, and died just a few years ago. But...these tragedies happened, you know...and then we heard this one had died, and that one had died, you know.

RD: What about your shop, or ~~your grandparents~~' shop, was that ever...

JS: Once, once we had...as I say, we never had bricks through our windows, but we did have our windows blown out one day. We got round the corner one day and both the windows were gone, and we had to have boards put up for a day or two, while they made...

RD: You went out there actually while the raids were going on?

JS: Yeah.

RD: But weren't your parents worried about you?

JS: They were but...they really didn't want us to go out, but in our way, we had to go I suppose. I suppose we were afraid that the war was going by, going past us while we were living in the cellar, you know.

RD: Just going back to what I opened with, I mean did you have any girlfriends during the war years?

JS: Um, let me think. Yeah I did. No that was after the war...no, I wasn't with a girlfriend.

RD: Nothing during the war.

JS: No, no, no, no, no. While I was there...Yes we did. I was trying to think. About that time I belonged to a club in Bermondsey, called the Downside and Fisher Club, and it was an amazing club. It was run by two old, elderly gentlemen in a poor area, almost at the foot of Tower Bridge, this side. In a little street, in a big old warehouse up there, and on the roof they built a big cage, and we played football up there, get us off the streets. And these two old gentlemen; one was Captain Rogers, and he was a beautiful Englishman - little clipped? moustache, rosy-cheeked, beautiful jerseys he wore, a cravate tucked inside his shirt. And his wife was the same thing, tweedy woman, with a little tweed hat on, and they used to come there every night, open this club up, and they ran it for some society of some sort - Catholic society, because they were Catholics. And all us boys used to go there and we'd play snooker in there, one billiard table there, there was a library in there, darts, dominoes, and then before we went home he made us all kneel down and say a prayer. And round the corner was Dockhead Church - a beautiful big church there, the Dockhead Church - and that was bombed to the ground. And the priest in there was a priest called Father Arbutnot.

RD: I've heard about him. In fact he's still alive, living in Sussex.

JS: Is he really? He must be ninety! He was a beautiful young man...

RD: They tell me in his day, he was meant to be incredibly handsome.

JS: He was a beautiful young man, and he had a fair hair. And when he with us boys, he had a look of constant amazement on his face, that people like us could exist! Whenever, we said anything, he would shake his head and say to himself, 'How've I got here?!', he'd say to himself, 'what the hell am I doing here?'. And he was buried, he was buried under that church for 24 hours I think, and we got him out, and his brother was the man climbed Everest. Yes, and Captain Rogers, who ran our club, had another man running it with him called Mr Kirtpatrick, Fitzpatrick, and his brother, Ivon Fitzpatrick, or Ivon Kirkpatrick, was the man who was sent to Scotland to interview Hesse when he landed. So we were all famous at that club - we knew the fella who had gone up to Scotland to interview Hesse.

RD: That was leading to girlfriends...

JS: Oh yeah, what I was going to say was that all that happened in the Dockhead area, and there were girls there as well, and I met girls like that. And I had one girl, about a year before I was in the forces actually, right up to when I was in the forces.

RD: People say sometimes that because they felt that it was a dangerous time, that relationships started and got serious much quicker than they might have done at other times.

JS: No, I'm afraid we were very...we behaved ourselves!

RD: No I don't mean not behaving yourself, just whether things got very serious.

JS: I was serious with her, but I had no intention of marrying anyone at that time, you know, in those days. And we were all underage, we were all 17, 18, and there was a lot of Irish people in that area because of the docks, and Catholic church, and all these Irish families, and she was Irish. And all our friends that we met up there were all Irish, Marny, Joe-boy, Jibbo, Nolan, you know, and we all used to go into this pub at night, called the Swan and Sugarloaf, at Dockhead. And years later - it just shows you, these things keep cropping up, you past keeps coming back - I did a bit of film work. I did some work for quite a while after the war, and I was a professional wrestler, did you know? (RD: yes) Well, when I was wrestler, I used to do a lot of stunt work, and one day I got a job, and they phoned me up and said 'are you gonna come here, or are you gonna make your own way?', well I said, 'where is it?', they said Dockhead, and it was for 'London's Burning'. Because that fire station is at Dockhead, facing the church, down what they call the Blue Watch, or whatever it is. And I said, 'okay, so where've we got to meet', and so she said 'in the Swan and Sugarloaf'. Oh god, I'd not been there since I was 17! And then I went back.

And that's where we used wander about. Fellas and girls...but we were all a mixed lot really, we didn't really separate and say that's his girl and that's his girl, but I did have one that was my girl, and I was her fella. We wrote to each other early in the war, and then she asked me to marry her, and I said, 'Look, I'm not in for marriage. I've got things to do...', you know. So she married an American who came over there. And so she married an American, and went off to America. And her friend was a girl, an Italian girl, whose father had a barbershop in Long Lane. And many, many years later - I'm talking about 20 years ago - I had a mysterious phone-call one day, at home, and it was this girl, and she had come over. She had come over quite regularly, to see her mum, while she was alive, and I'd never seen her, because I was always about everywhere, busy. And, she'd got my address because the Italian girl, her son then worked in a club, and my cousin was in that club, and names get mentioned, and 'oh yes!...'.Anyway, she said, 'well, can't we see each other, just you know, all of us see each other. Because at that time I was working a lot abroad, and I was due to go abroad, and I said, 'no I can't. Perhaps another time', you know. But she told me she'd got married, got 3 kids...

RD: What about the election after the war? What were the feelings then about the election of the Labour Government?

JS: Well actually, you know, even today I'm not into politics; that's what my dad said, 'don't get involved in politics', he said, 'Politics is looking after your family!'. Now, I can never understand, myself, how Churchill did all that good for the country, I mean we know, now, we hear all the wicked things that he did as well like, you know. The victor writes the history, doesn't he, and if Hitler had won the war, Hitler

would have been a nice man, and Churchill would have been buried at sea, wouldn't he, with a tonne of rock on top of him. But he was a good figure, really, Churchill, a good leader, he was someone to cheer and look good with a machine gun tucked under his arm and a cigar, didn't he, so it always surprised me that they got rid of him. But when I saw him, on VE day, he looked a bit other, and I thought he'd been drinking, but he did get a bit senile in his old age, you know, and you have to recognise that. There are lots of people that suddenly disappear from general use, they're about somewhere, these great actors and great actresses, and they keep them undercover so that people don't see what they're like now.

RD: Lots of people that Churchill was a great leader for the war, but they didn't really want him...

JS: That's it, for peace.

RD: And they didn't want to go back to the 1930s and the unemployment. Was the National Health a big issue then?

JS: Oh yeah, and it was a good thing. I mean wouldn't it be lovely today, if we didn't pay for anything. I mean we'd be millionaires wouldn't we...so there you are. I thought quite recently, of phoning up one of those chat shows, saying 'I need your help urgently!', and when they said, 'what do you want?', I was going to say 'I've been conned - there was a man came up to me and he made me give him a lot of money, and I keep giving him money, and giving me money, and he said he'd look after me in my old age. And now he won't give it to me!'. I'd like to see what they say. The Government - I've never had a day out of work, I've never had a penny of dole money. All the time I've been working...I worked for the National Health, Social Services, all the time I worked there. I was there 12 years, I had two days of sick! And people used ot say to me, 'but you can have a month off with full pay', 'but I don't want to be ill!', and they'd say, 'but that 12 years with just 2 days off!!'. And I remember that one person said to me 'you've got another 28 days to come??', but I said, 'I don't want those 28 days! I don't want to be ill, I want to go in and work!'.

RD: But it was thought to be a great thing at the time wasn't it?

JS: Oh, it was a great thing. I mean I remember - because my family had been Italian - I can remember going to Italy. I didn't go to Italy until '48, but I can remember when I went there, they thought that everyone from England was a millionaire. They thought, you know...everyone's ambition was to go to England. And England was so respected, you know.. It changed a bit, but I think it's coming back a bit now, forget about football and things like that. But I can remember the early years that I was going to Italy, I mean the Germans were very pushy, and they took umbrage with that, the Italians, but we took a back seat then, English people, you know, because other people had the money to spend. I can remember, you were not allowed to take more that ten pounds out of the country with you, did you know that? I mean that was silly.

RD: When you were demobbed, what did you go into straight after the war?

JS: Well, when I was demobbed, I didn't do anything for about a year really, I just...I painted a lot, I started painting a lot, because I hadn't painted for four and a half years - I used to paint when I was young - and my grandmother was alone, so I moved into her house, the garret up the top, mad artist??, and my people lived round the corner. And I painted, and sold my paintings cheap - a fiver, four pounds, I mean that was a lot of money...

RD: Did you live off that?

JS: No, my family kept me. I wouldn't have been able to exist otherwise, and I worked in the shop, know what I mean. And I always painted, and that was my chance to paint. That was my father encouraging me, that made me paint - my father never painted. But that was at school...
I remember the day I started school, I was 3 years old. I remember my mum leaving me at the door of the classroom. And some other boys, when their mums left them they cried, and I didn't cry, so she said I was brave. And I went into the classroom and I sat down, and the teacher came round and said to me, 'what do you like doing?', and so I said, 'drawing'. So she gave me a cocoa tin, with some crayons in it, and I put it on the paper, and I drew it round, an orange line, and filled it in all orange. And then I put a black dot on it, where the stalk was, you see. And she came round and was amazed, she went 'Oh my God, an orange! Look at that!!', and she held it up to the class, and they went 'Oh, an orange!', and that was my first day at school. And when I took it home, my dad nearly did a backwards somersault, he said 'Oh, an orange!!', and he took me next door into the sweetshop - we lived in Browning? Street then, near East Street Market, he took me next door to this old lady, Mrs Green, an old Victorian lady. 'Mrs Green, look what my son's done, look!', and she went, 'An orange!', and we took it back to the shop and pinned it on the wall near the frying pans. And all my cousins were told 'you look at what he's doing and you'll be able to do more than an orange!'. This orange, as far as I know, I can never remember doing anything else for another nine years, but this orange - I lived on the reputation of that orange for about 8 years. I was always pointed out as the artist in the family and over the years, when it got a bit faded, I put it up a bit better, but eventually it fell off the wall, which made me say 'Whenever I paint, I'm not going to paint on paper anymore, because....???'. And then, when I was about nine, I'd gone for a walk to look at the town, I'd put my watch right by Big Ben - from Bermondsey I'd walked to Westminster - and I came back, and I passed an old oil shop and it had some tubes of paint in the window, and brushes, art material in one window. And I thought 'Oh, I'd like to paint in oils'.

RD: When was this?

JS: Well I was about nine, so I suppose around 1930ish, and I went in and I said 'I want one of those boards for painting on' and I remember that was about 5 pence, and the tubes of paint were about 3 pence each so I bought 3 of them. He said, have these 3 colours, because you mix them, they all make up other colours, you see, and two brushes. He said, 'you'll need some oil', I said, 'I've got some oil', and I thought, being Italian, and my father pumped it into me for 8 years that the great artists were Italian, and that Leonardo da Vinci painted on the ceilings of the Sistine Chapel in oil - gotta be olive oil innit! Because my grandfather, he used to get this olive oil sent

over from Italy in a big wooden crate, like 12 in a crate, like a gallon. So I thought 'Well, I've got plenty of that down in our cellar, I'll have some of that', so I got some of that and mixed the paint up, painted this little picture, I couldn't paint so it was about that big, 7 by 5, and I painted a sillhoette of the house. Just a silhoette, with the sky dark blue behind it and the house black with a yellow window in it, and a hill all black. And somewhere today, that painting is still drying! If you see it, bring it to me - I will pay you well for it, because it was really the first oil painting I ever did and I don't know where it ended up. But it never dried!

RD: Is that how you learnt...

JS: Well I went and asked the man, I said, 'it won't dry', he said, 'what're you using', he said 'olive oil - that's for frying, that's for cooking mate!', so he sold me this little bottle.

RD: You mentioned earlier the Irish living in the same area, did the Irish and the Italians get on very well?

JS: Oh yes, we did, we all got on well.

RD: Was the church very important...

JS: Oh yes, it was...all the priests everywhere you went. I mean my granny was always in church. She would walk two miles to church every morning of her life!

RD: And was that important during the war?

JS: She never missed it! And my granny, in fact the school I went to - the English Martyrs, the school of the English Martyrs, it was said that you had to be a martyr to go there! And I agree. And the English Martyrs' church - she bought that pulpit in there and gave it to the church with my uncle who was killed in the war, so it was always important. I remember the old priest there - father Eugene Cotter - he became a monseignor, and I remember him crying when he said mass to my grandmother at her funeral, I remember him crying. He said, we'll never see another one like her.

RD: Do you know any of those prisoners of war still? Are there any of them still around?

JS: I know one - where he is now I don't know. Not often, but maybe once, twice a year, or if there's a funeral, he'll come and see my sister, because he was one who married a girl of an Italian family.

RD: It would have to be an Italian family, would it?...

JS: It was an Italian prisoner of war and an Italian girl. As a matter of fact, he came back after the war and married her, no he came back to marry her, but they wouldn't let him into the country, because he didn't have no papers, they wouldn't let him

back, so he had to go to France, get her to go to France, and get married in France and come back. But a very nice man, a very gentle person.

I knew lots of prisoners of war when I was in the forces. I was in Africa and West Africa, when you'd been there a year, they gave you a fortnight off because it was not supposed to be good for you, the climate and all that. And you went round to a little place called Tarqua bay, and I always wanted to go round there because that I heard that an Italian prisoner of war ran the camp, the rest camp for the English Air Force's soldiers. And sure enough I went round there. Now, I didn't smoke, and I saved all my 50 cigarettes a week they gave us, I saved them up, I thought I'd take them to that fella, because he won't be getting any fags. So I went round and there was this little man, cauliflower ear - a nice little man, and - Edmondo his name was, Edmondo Achille - and I said I'm from an Italian family, so I said I've brought these for you. He said 'thankyou, thankyou very much', and he looked after us for a fortnight. And we did wresting, because I was interested in wrestling then, and he had been in European games, which was why he had a cauliflower ear, and we did wrestling on the beach. Had a lot of fun - lovely little man!

And the two weeks were up, and he said 'I want you to take a present. You brought me a present, I'm going to give you a present. Come with me'. Went into his little office - he had a little office because he was in charge of the island at Tarqua bay, outside Lagos. And he opened up the cupboards and they were all full up with cigarettes, and he put them in a bag - there must have been twenty or thirty tins of 50 fags, so I could take them back and sell them, see. And I used to go to church every Sunday, when I was in West Africa, because it was the same church the Italian prisoners of war used to go to. And I used to go in there, and they used to go, all smart - all with suits made to measure, they tailored their prison suits. Beautiful, all coming in with curls...and they liked me....and I used to get order, because they used to work in machine shops, they were very good engineers. And with any bits of scrap aluminum, they used to make cigarette cases, with carved palm trees on them, beautiful. You know, that's the kind of thing prisoners do, like in Napoleonic times. And I used to buy them, take them back to the airforce....(muffled), and every Sunday we used to sit next to each other in church...

RD: Was there much of a black market at home?

JS: Oh yes, there was. As a matter of fact, I did a little bit of myself. Everybody did, everyone gave someone a cube?? And one day somebody said to me - a fellow that I'd known in the Airforce (this was after the war) - he was a little old man with a broken nose, and he was in the airforce when I got in, and he was waiting to come out, becuase of age. And he turned up one day, because he lived in Camberwell or somewhere - I'd met his down at Portsmouth - and one day he turned up out of the blue, because if ever anyone turned up there, my dad would always give them money. My dad used to do funny things. People would shoo tramps away. My dad would be in his shop, and he'd see a fellow looking in his window, and he'd go (knocks with his knuckles 3 times) on the window. He put some salt and vinegar on some fish and chips, and My dad'd roll it up and say, 'here you are, take it home and eat it!'. But they never took the liberty, they'd never come back the next day and stand there again like that. But they would come back in a month or two and he'd....

Anyway, this old boy turns up, with a big shoebox full of clothing coupons. So he said 'want these?', for a tanner each or something, so I said alright I'll have them. Like I say, a shilling each, or something. So I did, we were all fiddling about you know. We did it. And anyway, I gave some to an aunt of mine, who was a very well respected lady, and she used to shop in very expensive shops like Holdrons?? and John Higgins, beautiful shops in those days, with the floor walker ?? in and mourning dress and everything. And she phoned me one day, and she said, 'Oh, could you come and see me,' she said, 'I've bought some curtains' or something, she said, 'and he says they're not real coupons at all'. Oh Christ, I thought. I said well, just tell her, look just tell her that somebody borrowed some coupons from her, when they were short of coupons, to get something, and when he had to pay her back, he'd paid her back with coupons and they were the coupons he'd paid her. But he was in the airforce and he's gone to see now and he's gone somewhere, so you know, they didn't worry. They got over that, but, you know, it went on all the time.

I can remember when I was in the airforce, we were right in Portsmouth harbour, and when we were on night duty ashore, we had to stand by the phone in case there was an emergency call to go out to sea - or anything. We had to stay awake, near the phone. And if anyone phoned up, you either rung the bell or you all went off to sea or you did whatever you had to do. Well, now and again, we would arrange it between myself and another fella that he would dodge off for the day, go and see his wife for a weekend in London. When he came back, on the other side of Portsmouth harbour, phone me up there - I'd be waiting around there, hanging about - told me that he's waiting there for the ferry, the ferry don't run at night, and I'd get the boat out, which was a little dingy, a little motor dingy, and I would go down there and pick him up to bring him back. And I would go, and then he would do something for me when it was my turn. So this particular night, I'd been to London, and people were excited about buying black market food - that ain't wrong, it's like Al Capone selling liquor , he was a beautiful man, what a beautiful man, you know so everybody bought black market.

So we used to go, when I was on leave, there used to be an old fellow up on Tower Bridge Road, up near Tower Bridge - he was a little Maltese fella - , he had a barber shop, but he'd got bombed out so he..?..his home - a dismal little flat in a old Victorian building - like a dungeon it was - and he went in there, and he had a little barber chair there and he cut your hair. But he got a lot black market stuff, you see. So he'd say 'Here, I've got something for you, I've got something for you!', I'd say 'what you got?', he'd say 'I've got these beautiful stockings - all the girls will come for you with these beautiful stockings'. So he's telling all us fellows this, so he got them out and he's got this old crate of woolen stockings that no one wanted you see! But me being in the Airforce, I thought 'Ah, Airforce girls wear them', and they were a bit smarter than the issue ones. They weren't nylon ones obvioulsly, but they were a bit smarter than the old football ones that they were wearing now. And I got them from him, and then I said to them, when I got back to camp, I said to all these girls round there - the cooks and all that - 'Hey, I've got some beautiful stockings, no coupons, and they're black market'. And got them all excitable - they had to have a pair, didn't matter if they didn't like them, they had to have a pair from the black market that they'd bought! So I used to come up to London again, and load up with this. I used to send my sister out with coupons that I'd bought to go and buy underclothes, and I'd take them back as well to sell them! And this particular night, I

phoned up this fellow, Paddy, I said 'Paddy, I'm back, come and get me', so he came and got me, and we got out to the middle of the harbour. And we were in the boat and the tide was going out to sea, there's a big - two destroyers up there out over across the mouth of the harbour so that no one gets out, and there's us like this! And we're getting the duckboards off the floor trying to paddle with them and we can't, and then eventually, we got on to a big coal barge moored up in the middle of the estuary there, and we got on that and I fished around and I found an oar. 'I've got an oar, quick!', and we tied on the back, and we skulled like that, you know, and we got back - dead - like that at four in the morning. But yeah, the black market, it was everywhere. Everywhere.

RD: And what about law and order in general during the war years? People say that, although everyone was meant to be behaving well, that actually, it went a bit heywire.

JS: Well, where we were, you see, we all knew each other. And we never bothered each other. I mean, there were local villains about, but that was nothing to do with the war - they were villains before the war, I mean, they just carried on in the normal manner. I don't think it was to do with the war. People may prove me wrong, but I found them very honest people.

RD: Was there a lot of looting?

JS: Looting, no that was very rare. As I say, I've known shops in Old Kent Road all get bombed all along the pavement, and people go and get it and put it against the wall! And just before I went into the forces, I wanted to do something a bit exciting, and I worked on demolition - knocking down the houses that had been bombed and were dangerous, so I worked on knocking them down, and if we found a ring or anything, we handed them all in. There was no, 'oh, that's nice!'. I mean, everybody did it - it wasn't just me, it was everybody. You'd never think of digging some old lady's wedding ring up and keeping it. And I wasn't special, we were all like that.

RD: Was there a big change in the mood of the country after the war?

JS: Well after the war, everyone thought everything was going to be marvellous now, you know, and it was for a little while after the war. You know, once we got over the end of the war it was marvellous, but the war, you see, it had its after-effects. I mean I can remember like people that lost their husband during the war and got over it, but years later I can remember them wandering about the pavement sort of mad, you know. And I wrote a poem once about a woman - she couldn't have been a lot older than me at the time I suppose. I suppose she was in her 20s because she got married to this fellow that used to be in Dockhead, and a bomb dropped, and he was killed right near her, and I wrote a poem about it, and I call it mad Hannah. She was only young - and I never saw it, because I was off to the war then as well - but years later I come home and I saw this old woman, and someone said to me, 'You know who that is don't you?', I said no, they said 'that's Hannah, do you remember Hannah?'. So I said, 'no, was that the one was...', and I remember she was pregnant, she was married, and he died. And in later years, when they told me who she was, she was one of those women that run about the pavement, like a bag-woman, run about and swear at you,

and run about and swear. But she was a beautiful young girl, and a beautiful young fella she was married to. Expecting a baby, she was all happy. But then he died the night the City was bombed. When they bombed the city, it burned for a week. I mean so a lot of things that happened after the war were because of the war. It was delayed shock, a lot of it.

RD: Did people's attitudes change? I mean you had to work together to a certain extend during the war...

JS: Oh yes. Well we always said it did. I mean we always say, 'what we need is another war', you know, like you all work together, and you do work together during the war, but don't forget, a lot of you are regimented in to work, and it's your life you're gambling with if you don't work with the other fella.

RD: Was that only in the services, or in the streets as well?

JS: No, I think they were such a good old lot, especially the old women, the women, you see, the women keep this country going all the time in the background. The women are always there saying what we want, and we want to do this and we want to do that. And 'We'll show 'em!', you know, and people are brave. You know, I think a lot of people got old before their time. I can remember, we used to hang about on the corner of a street called Massinger Street - it's just off the Old Kent Road - where the World Turned Upside Down Pub is, on the other side of the road was a street called Massinger Street, and we used to meet there every night and stand on the corner, look at all the girls go by. All what kids do, no harm in us, no robberies or breaking in or nothing like that. And I remember this particular night, my old granny said to me, 'Don't go out tonight, it's raining, and the planes will be over at seven o'clock on the dot', so I said, 'alright gran, I'll stay with you', so I stayed there. And the next morning when I got up, the first fella I saw, he was a mate of ours, and he said, 'Here, Ronnie, Ronnie Adams, bombed, killed him last night on the corner of Massinger Street', where I would've been, so I said 'Oh, Christ!', you know. Now I'm just telling you this the way people were old, and he had a sister, he was a very good friend of mine, my second-best friend, Ronnie Adams, always together, and he had a sister, maybe she was two years older than him, and I went round and said sorry to his mum and all that. But a couple of days later I went round to see him in his coffin, and no one was in except his sisters, I rung the bell, she opened the door. And I'm 17, she's only about 17. And she said 'Come in', and I've never seen such dignity in all my life, because she said, 'come in', and she took me to this little front room, where the coffin was. And she took the veil back, and she said, 'Look at that! Don't he look lovely, bless him!', and she kissed him. And she weren't a little kid like you see messing about on buses now, she was a little old woman, and she said 'I'll make you a cup of tea'. You know, there was a lot of dignity about in the war. People bore their troubles well I think.

RD: Do you think the war had aged her before her time?

JS: I don't think she was aged, she just seemed very dignified. She didn't seem different. I mean, he was dead, and she just said 'don't he look lovely?', kissed him,

put the veil over him. 'I'll leave you', she said, 'you wait here. I'll make you a cup of tea'. Now that's what you'd expect a granny to say, not a girl of 17, the same age as you.

One of the pleasures of coming home in the early hours of the morning was - wherever we'd been on our rambles - we'd get home - this was before I went into the forces, and the thing that kept us going, all us fellas and girls, was the American Forces programme! We all used to listen to that, and wait up until it signed off, and they used to play that lovely tune at the end, you know, lovely.

RD: Was it the variety programme???

JS: No, the all good American, Glenn Miller and all that sort of stuff, but it was a nice, a bit better than today I think.

**** <u>END OF INTERVIEW</u> ****

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Monologue A: I had a man living man next door to me, and he could only take dripping down the pit, because the butter and marge goes off doesn't it? So we used to do a swapping kind of thing, you know....

Monologue B is in audible!

PS: Let me just stop you here. We've started this all topsy turvy at the end of the war, because this lady has very kindly produced her VE day photograph, but that's alright - it suits me, because I'm very intrigued by VE day at the moment. We're going to be trying to write a play around the subject of the end of the war and how people felt about that. So tell me about what was happening to you around that time...

DP: Well my husband went up there to (quarry and to) do landscaping on the front, make a new frontage. Well then they were asked to go and re-service the aerodromes, so he spent the whole of the war re-servicing the aerodromes, to keep them going, you know. But when the war finished, we came back to London where he took another job, you see. Now I can tell you something very funny; that was my house, and of course we had the blackout, but I had to find some curtains, as the windows were rather large, and I had this sort of green silk, which was quite pretty. And one day, I washed it, and my neighbour who lived there, she came dashing in and she said 'have you looked at you curtains?'. Well, they'd actually split, all down in layers, you see, because I mean, you know what silk's like - it'd gone rotten. And I thought, 'what am I going to do?', and so I went into Nuneaton, and of course you couldn't get very much. But in one store, I queued, and I got butter muslin - it was 4 pence hapenny a yard, and I made these curtains, you see, stitched them top and bottom, and tied them in the middle with a bit of ribbon, and they looked very posh! And the other people that lived in the cul-de-sac came dashing over and said, 'wherever did you get your curtains!'. (laughs) Quite funny really, very funny.

PS: Yes. So you were evacuated to this area?

DP: No we weren't evacuated - my husband went up there and took a job, you see.

PS: Oh I see, and were you from this part of London originally?

DP: No, from Surrey.

PS: So you're not from this area?

DP: No, you see when the war finished, he took a job in London with Southwark council, you see, as a park superintendent. (interruption from troublesome man about noise levels). Well when my husband took this job as the park superintendent, with Camberwell as it was, and there were all cabbages growing on Camberwell Green, because they'd used it during the war for, you know, vegetable growing. So eventually, you know, the cabbages went!

PS: Who was it maintained by?