

*Pam Schweitzer interviewing Eileen O'Sullivan, Lil Murrell and Joan Pearce
12th August 2003*

- PS: It's Tuesday 12th August 2003, and I'm sitting here trying to keep cool with Lil, Joan and Eileen. And we're going to talk about some memories of the places where they grew up for our new show. So who'd like to start? Let's have Eileen!
- EO: I was born in Bermondsey.
- PS: Tell us a bit about the place you were born.
- EO: My mother and father both lived in Bermondsey all their lives, and I was also born in Bermondsey. My father worked on the river, and his father also.
- PS: What did he work as, Eileen?
- EO: He was a lighterman, and then later he became a docker. Because, you know, lightermen worked very stressful hours – they worked with the tide, and if it's an early tide, they had to be out with the tide. I never used to see him for a couple of days. And then later on I think he'd had enough of that type of thing, getting up and not coming home, so he was a docker, and that was more-or-less on a regular basis.
- PS: Yes, some dockers were on a regular basis weren't they, because the view you get is that they were all casual, but there were some who were guaranteed work, were they?
- EO: Yes. I can remember that, for a time, he was casual. And if there was work in the morning, and they would go down and queue up, and there would be a ganger, which my grandfather was. He'd have his own boats, and he'd pick out how many men in the group he wanted to work on the ship. Well that's what happened, and it was the strongest, or the men they knew, friends got picked. And they were the ones who got the day's work, or half a day's work sometimes.
- PS: So your father had done all the lighterage apprenticeship and everything?
- EO: Yes, yes.
- PS: And had his father done that before him, or was he more on the docking side?
- EO: No, he had his own boats. I say he had them – he managed them. Mostly, in those days, it was Holland butter, dairy produce, cheese... And I should imagine he must have had a contract. When the boats came over, he arranged where they were going to be unloaded, and also for the men to work.
- PS: Really? Did they bring those huge old complete cheeses over?

- EO: Oh yes. And they used to have a hook. I mean, they had cranes of course, but they had to unload them by hand, and they'd have a hook.
- PS: Because they were huge, weren't they? I've seen them in the markets – massive things like wagon wheels!
- EO: Yes, that's right. And it would all be done like in wax. And sugar.
- PS: And would they take them somewhere else to get them cut up then?
- EO: They would take them into the warehouse, and sell them on from there. We didn't have supermarkets. Was it Home of Colonial [???] stores? And they would buy them and sell them in their shop.
- PS: So it was butter and cheese...?
- EO: And cheese. And from the Far East there would be sugar, and flour, and fruit. Eggs from Poland! Polish eggs.
- PS: Really? What years are we talking about when they were importing Polish eggs?
- EO: About 1930. As far back as I can remember.
- PS: Why would people import eggs from Poland? Why would they import eggs at all?
- EO: I don't know. I suppose they were cheaper maybe.
- PS: So he would ship the stuff in? Was this always in the Surrey Docks area?
- EO: No, Surrey Docks was mostly timber. And then further down from Surrey Docks, you got Rotherhithe going up to London Bridge, and they didn't go any further than that because the water wasn't deep enough for the boats. They'd go to Tower Bridge and that was it. After that they couldn't go further.
- PS: And where was your grandfather's patch?
- EO: As far as I remember, I think it was in Tooley Street, which goes from Tower Bridge to London Bridge. That's the stretch, and all along the riverside were the big warehouses. And I think that was his area.
- PS: And your father was working on the river, and that's why you were living near the river?
- EO: That's right. Well, most of the men were working on the river.
- PS: What was the street you were born in, Eileen?

- EO: Well my mother had one room to start with, and that's where I was born. And then they moved from there, on the wheelbarrow! And I suppose I'd have been about three or four. And I can remember them putting all the furniture... well they didn't have much in one room. Bed was essential, probably a couple of chairs. And I was put on top on the chair, and wheeled along! Can you imagine? I'd die today if that happened! [laughter]
- PS: Was it just around the corner then?
- EO: Yes, it was.
- PS: What was the street? Do you remember the names of the streets then?
- EO: Alexa Street was where I was born, and we moved to Storks Road when I was about three. And it was one of these big Victorian houses and my mother had three rooms, so going for one room to three rooms – she had made it by then!
- PS: And were you the only child?
- EO: Yes. They never had more.
- PS: So they were really moving up then?
- EO: Oh they were, yes.
- PS: When they had just the one room, was that in one of their parents' houses, or not?
- EO: No, it was just a rented room. People rented out rooms. You had two rooms in a house, but you had to share the kitchen and the toilet and all the rest of the facilities.
- PS: Do you actually have any memory of that first house, or is the first memory of the actual move?
- EO: I can remember the one room. It would be like a front parlour. It wasn't a big house – it was two up and two down. And I can remember my mother used to do the washing, and I was helping, and I put my finger through the mangle! I've still got proof of that today! And instead of unwinding the mangle, they pulled it out!
- PS: Ooh! But you're one of millions, though, aren't you Eileen?
- EO: Oh yes. I mean, it happened didn't it. They pulled it out in a panic – I can remember that!
- PS: So there you are aged three, moving to a new place. What do you remember about the place? It was three rooms in somebody else's house?

- EO: That's right. We had a landlady, and she lived down in the basement, and she had two floors. She had four children. And as an only child I was included in their family. I used to go down there – her name was Mrs Wycher, and her husband had been gassed in the First World War. And they'd given him a wooden shed to sleep in, in the garden.
- PS: Why, because he was screaming?
- EO: Because he was gassed, and he had to have fresh air, so he had to sleep out of doors. I can remember seeing that wooden shed.
- PS: How extraordinary! I've never heard that before.
- EO: Yes.
- PS: Was it a physical requirement, or was he claustrophobic?
- EO: I can't remember him very much, Mr Wycher. They used to say, "Don't go down there, because that's where Mr Wycher lives!" So Mrs Wycher lived in the house, and Mr Wycher used to sleep in the shed.
- PS: And the three children, how old were they?
- EO: There was one my age, and I still hear from her.
- PS: Really?
- EO: Yes. She lives near Gatwick and she writes to me and we keep in touch. Lily was my age. Then there was Violet and Aida, and they had an elder brother, who was killed in the Second World War. And I would go down there, and my mother used to call out, "Eileen, come up! Your dinner's ready!", "Alright, mum, in a minute!"
- PS: So you'd play down there with them?
- EO: Yes, the whole time.
- PS: What do you remember playing?
- EO: We used to collect cards from penny bars of chocolate, and you made up an album. And I can see that album! We used to sit and look through it, and Lily would say, "I've got another one today. I'm going to swap this for another one that I haven't got". They were like cards. There'd be all different gardening plants, and places... there was a series, like with football you'd get the whole team. It was the same thing. They were from bars of Cadbury's chocolate. A penny bar of Cadbury's chocolate would have a card in it, and we used to collect them. That was in the winter we used to do that. In the summer, we'd play out in the street, skipping.
- PS: With lots of other children?

- EO: Oh yes, the whole street.
- PS: What sort of things did you play?
- EO: Skipping and marbles, that sort of thing. We'd go swimming in the summer down in the park.
- PS: Which park? Was that Southwark Park?
- EO: Yes, Southwark Park had an open-air swimming pool.
- PS: It's not still there now, is it?
- EO: No. But that would be the summer games.
- PS: Did you ever go down to the river?
- EO: No. That was a no-go area. Dangerous. During the summer there was always a child that got drowned in the river, always. You know, it was like the bush telegraph... somebody would say they'd lost their boy.
- PS: Because they'd been a bit foolhardy?
- EO: Well, what they would do is swim off the steps that led down into the river and swim, and because of the tide, they'd get trapped round the barges. And that's mostly how they drowned.
- PS: So you'd go off with the girls. Would your mum give you a picnic or something to take with you?
- EO: Oh yes, we'd go to the park with a bit of bread and jam, or something. A bottle of water, lemonade – you'd make the lemonade with lemonade powder – and you'd go off for the day.
- PS: So they were really a ready-made family for you?
- EO: Yes, they were.
- PS: And were you in that house for quite a long time? Was that where you grew up and went to school?
- EO: Oh yes, from when we moved there until up 'til the war. We were bombed out from that house.
- PS: Really? So was Mrs Wycher still alive when the war began?
- EO: I think they moved, because at that time factories in Bermondsey were beginning to move out. You know, it became expensive to have property. And

Lily's husband worked for Crosse and Blackwell's. And they moved out near Gatwick, and they got a house there.

PS: So did your family then have the whole house?

EO: No. What happened? No, I think that was sort of the beginning of the war. Somebody else moved in. I think her elder daughter took it over. The youngest one moved out with her husband, and Mrs Wycher went with the younger daughter.

PS: So you didn't suddenly get much more space?

EO: No, we still had three rooms.

PS: What about old Mr Wycher?

EO: He died. I don't know where he went. I think he must have gone to hospital or something, and then he died.

PS: Did you ever speak to him about the war?

EO: No. They didn't talk about that. I mean I can remember seeing someone on the corner singing. You'd get street singers with half a leg, but you wouldn't ask questions. Or you'd get someone maybe who'd been wounded, and they weren't employed, and they'd have a barrel organ. Things like that, just to get money.

PS: And you remember as a child, stopping and listening?

EO: Oh yes, as we went to the market.

PS: What about the markets that you remember as a child?

EO: Well, they were similar to markets today, like East Street, Walworth.

PS: Was East Street market there in those days?

EO: Yes, East Street market. That wouldn't have been our local market, but similar. You'd have the barrow. They sold the vegetables. And Saturday night everything would be sold cheap, because they had no refrigerators of course. And they would sell the meat off. And my mother used to go down on Saturday at about nine o'clock, and they'd have the big lamps. I can see those big gas lamps now. And then they'd go in the pub and that would be their Saturday night.

PS: Yes. Hilda was saying to me yesterday that she was always being sent off about ten times a day to do the shopping for her mum, "Go and get this, go and get that". Was your mum basically responsible for the shopping?

- EO: I would go with Lily and her mother. They didn't get any extra pay, because her husband was wounded, and her mother used to make paper bags.
- PS: At the paper bag factory on the Lower Road?
- EO: She did homework, and we used to have an old pushchair, and we'd go to this factory – it was only a small place – and they'd give her this fruit bag. And we'd get a pushchair full of brown paper bags and Mrs Wycher used to fan them out on the table, and paste them, and stick them, and then fan them out again when they were dry and knock them all up. And we'd have a big pramful, and she got about half a crown for that.
- PS: So they came as flat sheets and you had to fold them into bags and gum them?
- EO: Yes, that's right.
- PS: That must be where you learnt your envelope skills, Eileen!
- EO: Must have done! And I remember it was half a crown.
- PS: And you girls would deliver what she'd made?
- EO: We'd go to collect them, and take them back.
- PS: And get the money?
- EO: And get the half a crown. All the kids used to help her – her own children. We used to call it unsticking, because they were pasted and then you had to separate them and put them in dozens it would have been, in those days.
- PS: Did a lot of women do homework?
- EO: I can remember my grandmother used to sew buttons on cards.
- PS: You bought them by the card, didn't you?
- EO: Yes, they used to deliver her so many cards and the buttons, and she'd sew them onto the cards!
- PS: Really, just for a bit of extra money?
- EO: Yes, for extra money.
- PS: Was your mum up for that sort of thing, or was she a bit grand for that?
- EO: No, my mother wasn't grand. It was the grandmother who was very grand. My mother did office cleaning. She'd go out early in the morning to London Bridge or in the city. She'd get the tram and do whatever she did, and come home in time for me to go back to school at nine o'clock.

- PS: Really? She went out early enough to get back to make breakfast for you?
- EO: Yes. Five o'clock. If she wasn't home, I'd have to get myself off to school, or Mrs Wycher.
- PS: I wonder how much she got paid for that?
- EO: She got fifteen shillings. And she'd go back in the evening. And she would clean the fire grates out, because they never had no central heating. And she used to bring the cinders home to burn. I can remember a bag of cinders. They cleared the grate...
- PS: What would be the use of the cinders?
- EO: Well, they wouldn't be cinders as such. It would be a piece of coal that hadn't burnt through. And she'd bring them home for us.
- PS: So it was like a perk?
- EO: Yes, it was. They'd say, "We won't use that tomorrow, take it home!"
- PS: And was it her responsibility to keep the fires going?
- EO: Well, they had so many offices to each person. I don't know how many, and each office they'd have a big open fire. And that was part of the job, to clean the fire out and relay it for the people coming in, or light it even.
- PS: What about equipment and things, did she have to carry that?
- EO: No, I think that was all provided. They would only have brooms and dusters.
- PS: They wouldn't have vacuums or anything. They probably didn't even have sweepers?
- EO: No. They probably had a stick broom, like a yard broom, and dusters.
- PS: And wooden floors, mostly? People didn't have fitted carpets much in those days, did they?
- EO: No, I don't think so. Lino. And she used to have clean the brass on the door, and sweep the office steps.
- PS: And then when you went off to school, she was at home in the day cooking a dinner?
- EO: Yes, my father used to come home for 12 o'clock. All the dockers finished and would have an hour for dinner from twelve 'til one.
- PS: That's why they had to live near?

- EO: That's right.
- PS: And did you come home for dinner as well?
- EO: Yes, I came home from school.
- PS: So what would be the average lunch?
- EO: My mother knew... well I think they all knew how to cook. One had to. In the winter we'd have oxtail soup. I mean, the men worked hard and they'd need it. A meat pudding, casseroles... we didn't have, but boiled beef.
- PS: A substantial meal?
- EO: Oh yes. And we always had a pudding. God knows how she did it!
- PS: She must have been at it quite solidly from when she came back and got you ready for school until lunchtime?
- EO: I think she probably bought it home with her the day before.
- PS: On the way back?
- EO: Yes, on the way back, because it was always on the table at 12 o'clock.
- PS: And then you'd go back to school for the afternoon?
- EO: Go back, and then come home at four.
- PS: And did people bother with an evening meal?
- EO: Well they would have kippers or haddock, or something like that, because they'd had their midday meal.
- PS: Quite early in the evening?
- EO: Well they'd finish at five – between five and six.
- PS: I should think she was all in by that time, if she'd got up at five in the morning. They must have gone to bed quite early, didn't they?
- EO: Yes, I think so. Well, you had no television. Apart from Saturday night, they didn't really go out very much.
- PS: Saturday night would be the pub, would it?
- EO: Yes.
- PS: And would you be left at home or with the Wycher children?

- EO: Sometimes they would take me with them, and I hated it! I'd stand outside with an arrowroot biscuit. You weren't allowed in the pub.
- PS: With the other kids or on your own?
- EO: Sometimes with the other kids. You know, friends who my father worked with would have their children, and I hated it. I hated it! Even pubs now pub put me off, you know.
- PS: What was it like? Was it all noisy inside?
- EO: Well, you were sitting there doing nothing, you know. Every now and again, someone would come outside and say, "You alright? Here, have a biscuit!" and you'd already had a bit arrowroot biscuit like a dog's biscuit!
- PS: Did they have any singing? Did you ever hear any live singing in the pub?
- EO: They used to sing, but usually they'd go home to someone's house.
- PS: Was there anyone in Storcks Road who played the piano?
- EO: Yes, I think the eldest Wycher child played the piano, but they didn't have much, because Mrs Wycher didn't go out, because Mr Wycher was a sick man. She'd have a jug of beer indoors, and the girls would go and give her that. And she used to like to have a bet. We didn't have a betting shop, but she'd write out a bet for three-pence each way, on a bit of paper. And you'd have to slip it to one of the runners.
- PS: Were the runners sort of knocking around the streets then, or did you know where to go to find them?
- EO: You knew where to find them.
- PS: Where were they then?
- EO: They'd be, say, in a shop doorway, and they'd be there at a certain time, and you'd go up and slip it to him. With the money, wrapped in your bet.
- PS: Just any old scrap of paper?
- EO: A bit of notepaper. Because it was illegal – you weren't allowed betting. We didn't have betting shops, and if they were caught, they were fined. Not a lot, but...
- PS: So how did they know, just practically speaking? It had her name on, Mrs Wycher?
- EO: They all knew you. You all lived locally. Three-pence each way or two-pence each way for a bet.

- PS: And then if you won, would they come round?
- EO: Then the next day you'd go and get your winnings.
- PS: Were they honest?
- EO: Mostly. I mean occasionally you'd hear stories...
- PS: How would you know whether a horse that you'd put your money on had come in?
- EO: They had the results in the evening paper.
- PS: Was it like now, just the Evening Standard, or were there a variety of papers?
- EO: There was the Star. The Evening Star, wasn't there. The Evening News. There were a couple of evening papers, weren't there.
- PS: You didn't have a special racing paper, or anything? I suppose not.
- ?: You'd have people on bikes coming up the streets saying "Football results! Football results!"
- EO: That's right!
- PS: Did they do the pools as well, or was that later?
- EO: That came later. I can only remember horse betting.
- PS: Did they ever actually go to the races, your parents?
- EO: My grandmother did. Oh yes, she'd go to Epsom with all the hats. Because she was a publican, I mean they had a pub. The hat with the stuffed bird on top. I've got that. I've got the bird, the bird of paradise!
- PS: What, a feather?
- EO: No, the whole bird!
- PS: You're kidding? What, on top of her hat?
- EO: Yes, I've got it.
- PS: And that's what she wore to the Epsom Derby? What year would that be, then?
- EO: Late '20s, or the '30s.
- LM: People did often have dead birds and dead animals, like foxes and weasels...

- PS: You'd be pushed to carry a fox round on your hat!
- EO: But it was beautiful. I haven't looked at it for years now, but I know I've got it.
- PS: So what was the pub that your grandmother ran?
- EO: It was in Albion Street, which is near Rotherhithe Tunnel, and I think it was called the Albion. It's still there.
- PS: Is it? And did you ever go to that one?
- EO: No. My father was born there. And then they bought a house, which was unheard of in those days.
- PS: To buy one?
- EO: To buy a house.
- PS: And which street was that in?
- EO: St James' Road, where the ??? comes from. They bought the house.
- PS: Where you live today?
- EO: No, I don't. The council pulled the houses down. But my father was born in the pub, and then they bought the house which, as I say was unheard of... nobody bought property. They bought the house, and the family grew up in the house, and then my father met my mother and you see my mother came from a very poor family. And my father had been pampered. He'd been to a private school!
- PS: Had he really? Which one was that in those days, Eileen?
- EO: I don't know. It wasn't in London. I know he used to board there.
- PS: Really? So they must have made a pile out of the pub?
- EO: Well, they did. Also he was a lighterman. They probably got help in the pub.
- PS: This was the same grandfather who had the boats and everything?
- EO: Yes, he had the boats.
- PS: So he sent his son away to school?
- EO: Oh yes. My father should have been... You see my mother was the one... I wouldn't say she pulled him down, but she didn't encourage him. I mean, he had the brains and he could have gone a long way.

- PS: Really?
- EO: Oh yes. And as I've got older, I can see why my grandmother resented my mother. Because you can imagine your David marrying someone and thinking, "My god! He could have done better for himself!".
- PS: Yes!
- EO: But they were happy. I mean, they loved each other.
- PS: Yes. Gosh, fancy that! I'd love to know what school they sent him to.
- EO: I could find out, I suppose.
- PS: Was your dad somebody you spent a lot of time with and talked to, or was he away a lot?
- EO: Well, he was away, but he knew about things – he could talk about things. Whereas my mother, as long as you had a nice frock on and were dressed up and kept eating your food, it didn't matter about your education! Because she never had any herself, so as far as she was concerned, as long as you always had a new-ish dress, and food, it didn't matter about school. She actually used to say, "What you don't know now you'll learn when you leave school!". I mean, can you imagine? And when I had my children, I was so determined that they were going to...
- PS: Did he have ambitions for you, your dad. Did he have thoughts about...
- EO: He never got a say in it. My mother said what I had to do, and that was it.
- PS: Really? Straight to the envelope factory?
- EO: That was a good job, yes! Isn't it strange when you look back?
- PS: Did he have brothers, your father?
- EO: Yes, he had five brothers.
- PS: And were they all sent away to school, then?
- EO: I think two of them were.
- PS: Did you know those uncles?
- EO: Oh yes.
- PS: And what happened to them, then?
- EO: One went to Australia, and he was harbourmaster of Sydney harbour! I've got the letter to prove it! Because they'd had their education. He went to Australia.

He was a harbourmaster for so many years and settled out there. Another one went to America. They were all travellers.

PS: Yes. By sea, I suppose.

EO: Oh yes, of course.

JP: Is that the photograph in Grandmother's Footsteps of those boys?

EO: Yes! All dressed up in white collars with a bow. And my grandfather in his stiff collar, and my grandmother. I mean, there's nothing in my mother's family.

PS: Are you in touch with any of their children, any of your cousins?

EO: Yes, I am. I've got a cousin who lives in Shirley.

PS: Oh yes. So around Christmastime and so on, did all your father's family get together, or were you a little bit...

EO: Yes, we would go there, but my mother did all the hard work. She would cook their Sunday dinner. She was like a skivvy for them. Because my grandmother looked down on my mum. She was never an equal to her. My mother would cook the dinners, Christmas lunch, do the washing... my mother used to do all my grandmother's washing.

PS: And you used to deliver it back?

EO: I used to take it back. And she used to pay her 1'6 for this big pushchair of washing.

JP: Do you think your mother resented it?

EO: She did as she got older. But I don't think she realised. She didn't realise.

PS: And I suppose you, as a child, accepted things as they were?

EO: I just went along with it.

PS: It's only now that you're looking back...

EO: I can see. I can see why... I loved my mother, of course, and there was nothing she wouldn't do for me, but I can see my grandmother's point of view.

PS: Absolutely. But on the whole it sounds like it was quite a happy, easy-going childhood, was it?

EO: I was lonely, as you probably were, Joan. I'd go down and I'd be included in the family, but I was lonely really.

- PS: What about things like Christmas? Would they make a big fuss of you as the only child at Christmas?
- EO: Well, I would go to my grandmother's – Grandmother Hart, and my mother used to go and do the cooking. And there would be lots of presents, and she always bought me a new dress, in red velvet!
- PS: And they were already in the new house by this time, they'd left the pub?
- EO: Oh yes. They'd gone to live in St James' Road. Lovely houses!
- PS: It is quite interesting, taking the long view, that you moved right away from that area, and then back to it. Was it because you felt you belonged there?
- EO: Well, I went back to look after my father, really.
- PS: Oh, did you Eileen? I didn't know that.
- EO: Yes, because my mother died, and I used to go everyday. He was quite capable – he could do things for himself, but he had a couple of blackouts, and I used to go in, and I said to Bill, "I can't go home and leave him like this, not knowing how I'm going to find him tomorrow". He was a very independent man – he would always say, "No, I'll do that. I'll do my own washing. I don't want you to do that!". I used to get him his food, and he would cook it. But then in the end he wasn't bothering to look after himself, so I went back.
- PS: So did you move in then, for a while?
- EO: Well, we still kept the house in Welling. Bill used to come at weekends, and I stayed with my dad.
- PS: Really? And then what prompted the idea of actually moving back there?
- EO: Well, eventually dad died, and the house was up for sale. Well, he had bought the house – it was council. It's where I'm living now. And it was either stay down at Welling or sell the one in Bermondsey.
- PS: Was that compulsory redevelopment at that point? Did the council take over your parents' house?
- EO: The first one in St James' Road, they did.
- PS: I think I remember you mentioning that. And that was all demolished then?
- EO: Yes it was. Beautiful house.
- PS: We've got the picture of them at the gate, I think.

EO: Yes, that's right. Dreadful. And the council just took them... but the sad part is they've done nothing with it – they built these little tiny houses, no bigger than the ones they pulled down, so they haven't housed any more people.

PS: And is that where you are now?

EO: No, then mum and dad moved into the house that I'm in now. It was a fairly new house compared with the old one. The old one didn't have a bathroom, but I've got all central heating and all that already there. And then when you got the right to buy, dad bought the house, and I think he bought it for about £16,000. Unbelievable!

PS: And then you and Bill moved in?

EO: And then we had the choice between the houses. I was at Welling, and I would never settle there. I think the reason I wasn't settled there was that I spent so much time back, looking after him. So then I moved back, and we sold the house at Welling. I don't regret. I'm quite happy where I am.

PS: It's a nice house. And there's the wonderful story about the peach stone. Did that peach stone ever make it to Welling?

EO: No, it didn't Pam. It moved from St James' Road to the new house. Do you know, if I could get someone... I've got a garage in the garden – a little potting shed – and it's absolutely loaded with peaches! I can't get up there. Anyone could come and take them, because they're dropping off!

PS: Really? I forgot to take mine home last night. I'll have to remember them today. What great stories! It's funny how you say – "I've heard them all before", but there's loads of stories there I had never ever heard before. It's interesting isn't it, when the angle's slightly different. I love the story of the girls downstairs, playing together and going through the albums, because I'm sure that would ring lots of bells wouldn't it. And then in the summertime, playing in the street. Did you have board games as children?

EO: Ludo, and snakes and ladders.

LM: And playing cards, and drafts.

EO: And next door we had a lamplighter. [laughs] And outside the house was this big tall lamppost, like that, and he used to go round every night, lighting the lamps. And when he'd gone, we used to put a rope around the bar at the top.

PS: And do what?

EO: And swing round the lamppost.

LM: You'd hang a rope and then you'd swing around.

PS: Why do they have those bars sticking out like that?

- LM: It's for the ladder, when the chap climbs up.
- EO: Oh, yes, of course! And you see, what would happen, with the vibration of the swing, you used to break the mantle. And the gasman would go mad, because he had to put a new mantle in.
- LM: And then you didn't have a streetlamp!
- EO: That's right! And he used to knock on the door and tell Mrs Wycher, "They've been up that lamp!". And you couldn't say you hadn't!
- PS: No. Just thinking about Mr Wycher and his garden shed, did that fill the whole of the garden space, or just a part of it?
- EO: I think it must have done. It wasn't a big garden – I suppose about as big as your garden. And at the end was this – well, it wasn't a big shed. As far as I could remember, he could get a bed in it. I never went inside.
- PS: Did he spend his days in there as well, or did he go into the house?
- EO: I think he used to go into the house. And he also had her brother, Uncle Bill. He moved in as well. He was the one that was in the World War.
- PS: Well they both must have been, mustn't they?
- EO: No, Mr Wycher was in the First World War, but her brother, who was quite elderly, I think he was in the Boer War.
- PS: Oh really, at the turn of the century?
- EO: Yes, I think he was in the Boer War, Uncle Bill.
- PS: I'm interested in the idea of this child who is really nicely dressed... were you quite fat as a child?
- EO: I was, yes.
- PS: I was thinking about these amazing dinners. What was your hair like?
- EO: I had a fringe.
- PS: Blonde?
- EO: No, no. Brown.
- PS: And long hair, or short hair?
- EO: Short hair, up to your ears. You didn't have long hair unless...

LM: A bob?

EO: Yes.

PS: And what would your mum dress you in?

EO: Well, we never had school uniforms. Dresses, with a Peter Pan collar. With a white trim. And then she dressed me... There was a Jewish shop in our market, and they used to sell all this smocking dressing, like Shirley Temple. And she used to get me one of these.

PS: Over the bodice, like that? Criss-cross?

EO: Yes. That's it.

PS: And it would be more-or-less Gingham, would it, the material?

EO: Cotton or silk. But with the smocking, it used to be a silky kind of dress, really.

PS: So you were really very nicely dressed, Eileen?

EO: I was over-dressed, because I went to such a poor school. It was a Catholic school, and they were big families. Irish people had big families, and they were poorly dressed. And there's me turning up like a fairy! I was so embarrassed! And one of Mrs Wycher's daughters, Ada, she was a court dressmaker. She used to make dresses for Gracie Fields!

PS: Really?

EO: Oh yes, Ada.

PS: And did she make your dresses, then, Ada?

EO: Sometimes she did, yes. She was very busy. She had her own machine, and she would take in... Her day job was in Bond Street.

PS: And so, either you'd get them from the Jewish shop in the market, or...

EO: Or Ada would make them. And then I would go to this school, you know. When I think about it now... The same school as Max Bygraves! And he came from a family of about seven! I mean all their brothers and sisters all dressed the same – you wouldn't know boys from girls! They'd have jerseys.

PS: What about the shoes, Eileen?

EO: Oh, ankle straps. Black ankle straps.

PS: Like Peggy shoes?

- EO: Yes, I suppose so. Black patent.
- PS: Quite smart really, with white socks?
- EO: Yes.
- PS: And the other source of dresses was Ada herself, and she made dresses for who?
- EO: Well, for anyone. She made them for Gracie Fields, because she worked in Bond Street. She'd been to a tailoring...
- PS: She was the older sister, was she?
- EO: She was the older one. I didn't have so much contact with her, you know. I mean she would bring pieces of material home – you know, all these beautiful satins...
- PS: So that's how you came to have all these fancy materials?
- EO: I suppose so, but I don't think it would have been enough address – cuttings, you know.
- PS: So Ada Wycher was the older sister, and you were much smarter than the other little girls in the Wycher family, going to school?
- EO: Yes.
- PS: What would they go in, then?
- EO: They would just go in ordinary dresses, and they'd come home and wash it out, ready for the next day.
- PS: They just had a dress each?
- EO: Yes.
- PS: And the other schoolgirls were not so smartly dressed?
- EO: No.
- PS: Did you have a school bag?
- EO: No.
- PS: Low expectation school, really?
- EO: Never had homework, you know.
- LM: You didn't bring anything home from school in those days.

- EO: Oh, I did have a bag, from my grandmother, and I've still got it today. It's a leather satchel. I've got a leather satchel that my grandmother bought me.
- PS: With two straps, or one?
- EO: No, no. It's like a music case.
- PS: Oh, right.
- EO: Yes, I've still got that.
- PS: From Grandma Hart, the pub grandma?
- EO: Yes.
- PS: And there you are, quite a chubby little girl, with those big lunches?
- EO: Yes. And then I'd go round to Grandma Hart, and she'd fill me up! Can you imagine? Poor Bill – there was me in a bride's dress about eleven stone!
- LM: She said she was very fat as a little girl didn't you?
- PS: Well, it sounds like your mother's love was all about feeding you up?
- EO: That's right. I was the only granddaughter.
- PS: And she was a good cook?
- EO: My mother? Yes! I think, coming from a big family, she was used to cooking. She was the eldest, and when her mother had the children, she was always the one that looked after the family. She stayed home from school and looked after the babies, and all the rest of them. She had a hard life when I think of it. But education didn't mean anything. It was survival – that's all it was.
- PS: Now we're going to hear a bit from Lil, who came from the other side of the water! So Lil, tell us a bit about your childhood home.
- LM: I was born on the Isle of Dogs, on a little turning named Marsh Street. And it was about ten houses down each side of the street. And I remember, I went to school at three, and you actually learnt immediately. You didn't have playgroups, and nurseries, and things like that, so you actually went straight into class. In the morning I learnt to write with a slate and pencil. So you learnt the alphabet, and how to count, and in the afternoon they'd put you down on a camp bed to go to sleep for two hours. The school was right opposite where I lived, so my mum just took me to the gate. And my brother started at three as well – he's just thirteen months older than me.
- PS: Is it just the two of you?

LM: Four of us.

PS: Really? Are the others older or younger?

LM: Younger. And then my younger brother was born, and my mum – I don't know how she did it, but she went into hospital to have my younger brother, who is three years younger than me, and she'd run a sewing needle into her arm... a sewing needle, and it had turned to poison. And they took her off to hospital, and a couple across the road who were Catholic – and we weren't, because my dad always said, "Don't let me ever hear of you going into a Catholic Church! You are not Catholic!"... But, we called them over [break in tape]. We thought they were our relatives, but they weren't. Because everybody as children was told to respect our elders and everybody was called aunt and uncle. It wasn't until you got older that you realised that they weren't. But they took over and I can remember this lady coming in and getting us up in the morning, getting us dressed and washed. I was only three, that's right, and I was at school. And she used to come in and take us to school, and give us our dinner and everything. And you came home for dinner, as Eileen said – you didn't have any school meals or anything. And then my mum came home...

PS: How long had she been in the hospital for?

LM: I don't really know, but then she came home with this baby! So the baby was obviously born at the same time. And I'd got another little brother! And then, when I was six, my sister was born. And in between that – and I didn't know this at the time, but my sister also mentioned this, that we would have had another sister, who died when she was five months old. A little girl named Louise.

PS: Was that before?

LM: We don't know exactly that was, but it was between me and my brother and sister – the younger ones.

PS: You don't remember that?

LM: No. And it's the sort of thing that in those days, parents didn't tell children anything. You didn't ask questions, because you didn't get answers, so we didn't know what was going on. I only know that my mum came home, and there was a new baby with her! So I don't know where the other one...

PS: But with the school being in the street, your whole life was really in that street, was it?

LM: The house was on the corner, like that, and you just crossed diagonally. It was called Harbinger Road. I think in those days it was called British Street School, and it's now called ???

PS: And you knew all the children, or a lot of the children there?

- LM: Yes, the children in the street, and like Eileen said, we played out in the street. And because there was no traffic, and you could hear a horse and cart coming along, you just played in the road. We were allowed to chalk in the road, hopscotch, and all sorts of things. And draw a wicket on somebody's wall to play cricket with. So, yes, you just played in the street. There was no problem of traffic or anything, any danger.
- PS: And what about your mum, did she work?
- LM: No, my mum never went to work.
- PS: So did your father have regular money then?
- LM: No, my father was a stevedore in Millwall Docks, and it was casual labour in those days. So, like Eileen said, I might not see him for a couple of days, because when I got up for school he'd be gone. And maybe he'd come home if he didn't get picked for a ship, and maybe he wouldn't. If he didn't come home by the time we went to school, my mum knew that he'd got a job. And then they'd go back and unload the ship, and then reload. So it meant that you had to go again to get chosen, you see. And then he didn't come home at night, and we were in bed very, very early. And I mean very early – probably by six o'clock!
- PS: Really? When you say he didn't come home at night, he wouldn't be working all that time, would he?
- LM: No, but he didn't come home before we went to bed.
- PS: Oh, I see. Would he drop off at the pub? Was he a pub man?
- LM: No, it wasn't until we were much older that my dad used to go into the pub Saturday lunchtime for a drink, but he was always home in time for dinner. If my mum said dinner was at one, he would be back at one.
- PS: Did he talk about the sort of work he was doing? Do you remember hearing about that?
- LM: Yes, he used to tell us about unloading the ships. And he had the billhook???, like Eileen's dad. And my grandfather worked in Millwall Docks as well.
- PS: What did they load and unload in Millwall Docks? What was it noted for?
- LM: I don't know. I think sugar was one of the things, because Tate & Lyle's was just along the road, wasn't it? But he used to tell us about unloading, and things like that, and he always said to me... and he used to collect flags off the ships, so he used to have these silk flags of the countries of the world, and he used to bring them home and give them to me. I haven't got any now, but he always said, "If you want to know where the ship has come from, look at the flag at the back", and he would tell me...

- PS: Do you mean they had little versions of them, or...?
- LM: It was about as big as that, and it would be silk – the actual flag of the country where the ship had come from.
- PS: So how come he was allowed to take that? Didn't they have to display that all the time, or were they little versions of them?
- LM: No, I think they were sort of souvenirs, and he brought them home and gave them to me. The funnel of the ship would tell you what line it was, like P&O, or Cunard??, or whatever, and the flag at the back of the ship would tell you what country it had come from.
- PS: So do you have memories of being a child spending lots of time looking at the ships?
- LM: Yes, because I used to walk up to Millwall Docks, which had a swing-bridge, and I used to stand there just to watch the swing-bridge go round and let the ships through into the docks, or come out again.
- PS: And you would go with friends from the street, or with your brother?
- LM: No, usually with a girl who lived across the road. Two little girls, who were Catholics. I don't remember their names, though.
- PS: So was it quite an exciting place to live, as far as you were concerned?
- LM: I had a very happy childhood. There were no what I call restrictions... It wasn't, "You mustn't do that, and you mustn't do that!". The only thing was, as my dad said, because you're not Catholic you don't go into a Catholic church. And it was, "Don't go near the river"! And the river was across the road. You walked up to the main road, which was Westferry Road, and there were very few cars, and maybe a bus now and again, so you could cross the road quite easily. And you'd walk down the causeway, near the Vulcan public house. And naturally we'd walk down the causeway and stand as near as we dared for the tide coming in, without getting your feet wet! Because that was the telltale!
- PS: Oh, it was like one of those concrete things like a slipway, going down into the water?
- LM: That's right, a slipway. And you'd stand as near as you dared without getting your feet wet, because that was a tell-tale sign that you'd been to the river.
- PS: And you weren't really supposed to do that?
- LM: No. "Don't go near the river!"

- PS: I'm interested in the Catholic thing... Stevedores were often Irish-extraction Catholics, weren't they?
- LM: Yes.
- PS: Were there a lot of Catholic Churches in the area because of that?
- LM: No, St Edmund's, which has been demolished since then, was the Catholic Church. And I used to go to Sunday School with these two little girls, and I'd leave them at the Catholic Church, and I would walk to St. Paul's, across the Millwall Bridge. And it was a little Scottish Church, and I used to go to Sunday School in there.
- PS: There is quite an interesting story to tell there. I don't know if you remember that Eileen, but I think a lot of the families connected with stevedoring were Catholics, because there was an Irish link. Presumably that's true on Bill's side too, because of O'Sullivan.
- EO: You see, what happened is that the Irish labourers came over to build the railway, when they first ran from London Bridge down to Greenwich. I think that was the first one. And they settled in the area. And in Dockhead, that's our Parish Church, you'll find more Irish names than they've got in Ireland! I mean, not so much now, because the generation have moved out, but there were always Reillys, Flannaghans, O'Sullivan, Kennedys...
- PS: And they had all the Catholic special services there, didn't they? What was the thing that they used to have in the streets?
- EO: Oh yes, that was a big occasion. I've got photographs where I was all dressed up again in the Catholic outdoor procession. And the little girls would wear white – white shoes and socks and a white dress, like a bride?
- PS: What was it for?
- EO: Each Catholic Church had it's own special day. I think ours was some time in June, the school I went to. And it was a big event. The route that the procession took... the Catholics would have the altars out, the statues and the candles and the flowers.
- PS: Would they march them those the streets?
- EO: They would go through the streets. They would have a pipe band.
- PS: Would the statues be marched?
- EO: They did. They had some. I've got a photograph of Kevin carrying a statue of Mary. And then the priest would go round and bless the houses with the statue. And you'd go round again in the evening. It was like a festival!
- PS: Did you have that on your side of the water, Lil?

- EO: We used to go all over the borough. And over where there were the Italians, they made a big thing of it.
- PS: Where were they based?
- EO: They were over the Barbican area, round that area somewhere.
- PS: Of course, yes. So you'd find out there was going to be one and go and have a look, would you?
- EO: Well, you'd know. It was a yearly event, and you'd meet up. You'd meet up with people you hadn't seen – cousins lived over there, and the family would lay on tea. I mean, we used to go to Wapping, because there was a big Irish community there. But going back to what Lil said, I went to a club, and because I was a Catholic, they wouldn't let me... I could go certain times, but I couldn't go to their services. They would say, "You're a Catholic, you can't come". Or you had to say you weren't a Catholic to get into the club – the girl's club!
- PS: As a nice Jewish girl, I find that totally amazing!
- EO: It like race relations, now.
- LM: Do you remember when I came down to Pentonville???, and I said to you, instead of walking twenty minutes to the congregational church, I'll come with you to your church. And I was so surprised that there was very little difference between the two services. Now that's, what, ten years ago? But, as Eileen says, when you were children there was a big divide.
- PS: So would you as a child have seen these Catholic processions, then?
- LM: I'm not positive that I did see them. I think they did go on, but I can't honestly say that I saw.
- EO: I've got photographs of me walking in the procession.
- PS: I'd love to see them. But your memory, Lil, is of this very local area, and water just very close by, and a school across the road?
- LM: But, as Eileen said, in the summer you'd have a bottle of water or lemonade, jam sandwiches, and go off to Millwall Park, which was quite close.
- PS: And what did that have in it?
- LM: Nothing, it was just one big field! I don't remember there being swings or anything. I think it was just a big field that we used to play in. But I used to also play in a different park, which is now called Island Gardens, opposite the college, and it did have a recreation ground. It had swings and a roundabout and things like that, which has all gone now – it's all been landscaped. But we

used to go and play in there. But I was going to mention the fact that my mum was actually brought up in the Vulcan public house! I don't know if that's where my mum and dad met, but her gran brought her up... Well, I don't think she was her gran. Because there was a chap named Jarvis, who was a very famous boxer in Millwall, and I think he was her son. And she always called this lady Grandma Jarvis. And my mum, as an orphan, was brought up in the pub. She didn't have much schooling. She was very, very good at arithmetic, but she had hardly any schooling at all. And I think she was more like a skivvy – you know, she worked in the pub and did the laundry...

PS: What happened to her parents?

LM: I don't know. I've never been able to find out.

PS: Your grandparents you never came across?

LM: Not those, only my dad's parents. She was an orphan. So there was Uncle Harry, who moved to Slough when he got older. And he married, actually, in Millwall. I've got their marriage lines. And he was a very nice chap. He married a Catholic, and she insisted on the boys being brought up as Catholics, and she was very, very strict with them. But I suppose he didn't mind one way or the other. But as I say, my mum grew up in the pub. And whether that's where my dad met her... because he only lived in the next turning! My grandparents lived in the next turning to where we were – Care Street. And maybe that's where my dad met her. I don't know.

PS: And what about things like where your mum would get the clothes for you to wear. There was no uniform at your school either, presumably?

LM: No, not in that school, there wouldn't have been. But I would have worn the sort of things we've been saying, like cotton dresses and white socks...

PS: And would your mum make all of those for you?

LM: No. My mum was a very good knitter, and she crocheted some beautiful things, so she would crochet dresses and things like that, but not needlework. I can't remember my mum doing needlework.

PS: So would she just go and buy things in the local market?

LM: Yes, I think so. And she used to walk from Marsh Street in the Isle of Dogs, through to Poplar, which is quite a long way – I wouldn't like to do that now – pushing the pram, and maybe we'd be walking beside. And she'd walk to Crisp Street Market. And Crisp Street market is still there. It isn't as big.

PS: Did she do those trips because she needed to get the cut prices?

LM: I think so, because there were very few shops on Millwall. There was the corner shop. I remember that there was a butchers at the top of the road. And I suppose further along there was a paper shop, but it was all factories.

PS: It was dominated by trade on the river, and the docks?

LM: Yes, everything was huge factories. And when later on, many years ago, in '55, I went to work for J. Stone and Company, and they actually had the manganese factory in Millwall, which I didn't know about. Then there was Westwood, who were engineers, and the Coopers, who made barrels. But the whole of that Westferry Road was industry, so I can't remember many shops. I think going along to where the Island History Office was originally, there were some shops there. And my own gran – my great gran, because I didn't know my mum's parents – she lived in Stevendale Road for a while, and she died when she was eighty. Stevendale, and then she moved to Bilsen Street, and that's where she died. On the Isle of Dogs. So her mum, I think, came from Hackney, but everybody else lived on the Isle of Dogs – my grandparents, everybody.

PS: Do you feel nostalgic for north or the river, or not really?

LM: I go over that way quite often, but I don't think so. Last year my brother said he came up from Thorpe Bay and drove the whole of the way around the Isle of Dogs, and he said he hardly recognised anything. My school is still there. The church isn't – well, the building is still there. It was only a little tiny... I don't suppose it was much bigger than this room – a little Scottish Church. The last time I went over there it was being used as an art gallery. And Island Gardens. Well, the foot tunnel is still there. I actually walked through there a few weeks ago, just to see. It's not renovated as such, because the tiles are still here, but they've got cameras, and lighting. It's very bright in there. But the only thing I'd forgotten is that because you're going under water, you go down, and when you get to the other end it was quite a walk! I walked from the top, from the heath all through Greenwich Park, right down to the Cutty Sark. And then I decided I'd walk through the tunnel. Well of course, when I got to the other end, I'd forgotten you'd got to come up again! So I didn't walk back again. I got on the Docklands railway to the Cutty Sark! It was great! It's unbelievable when you realise there's no driver on the train! And I didn't run up and down the stairs as I would have done as a kid – I took the lift!

PS: So Lil, my abiding image from all that, was you and your chum – what was her name?

LM: I can't remember what the girl's names were, but I know they were Catholic and we weren't!

PS: And they were two sisters?

LM: Two little girls, yes. One was about my age, and one was a few years older, but there wasn't much between them.

PS: So you'd go down together and stand on the slipway?

- LM: Yes, but I remember later on when we moved to Greenwich... and I've always lived near the Thames. My brother would walk down Morden Wharf, which is not far from the tunnel, and collect the driftwood off the beach, from the boats and things. Because we were very, very poor. But I will say I was always well fed and well clothed.
- PS: So he'd carry driftwood home to put on the fire?
- LM: Yes, and the first thing my mum would say was, "You've been down to the river, haven't you?", but he was really doing her a favour. By then, I suppose he was about twelve or thirteen.
- PS: So you'd stand there waiting, and you'd be pointing out what lines they were...?
- LM: Yes, we just watched the ships. I mean, the river was just full of ships, wasn't it. Barges, pilot boats... When my grandfather retired, they had moved next door to the police station, which I don't think is there now, which was not far from Island Gardens. And they used to sit in that little park opposite the college, and just watch what was going along on the river.
- PS: Yes. I liked the story you told about all the different funnels and the flags and things...
- LM: I wish I'd kept some of those flags. I must have left them at home when I got married, I suppose. And I've also got... Eileen was talking about chocolate she bought to get the little cards. We bought Bridgewater's Wafers. Something like a Kit Kat, but no chocolate on. There was a chocolate filling inside. They were tuppence each, and inside each one you got a film star! And they were like an oval shape. And I've got the album. There's one missing – because I'm looking for things for Annie.
- PS: And that was a chocolate bar, was it?
- LM: A chocolate bar, for tuppence. And, like Eileen said, you swapped the cards. If you had two of something, you'd swap with somebody else. And I kept that album.
- PS: And what was in the album?
- LM: Film stars.
- EO: They had different series didn't they?
- LM: Yes. They were oval shape. I was going to bring it in to show it to Annie, because we were looking for Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. And of course the cigarette cards.
- PS: What was it your mother said, you had to not get your feet wet?

LM: No. "Don't go near the river!". You weren't even allowed to go down there. But you only just crossed the road, the main road, but all that you'd see was a bus, and maybe a horse and cart – very few cars. In fact there were so few cars on the road at one time that we would have this notebook, and you could take down every car number as it went by. You couldn't do that today! And I remember filling up... you know the Woolworth's little red notebooks? Well, I can remember filling them up, and you'd line them up, and so you'd have three lines on each page. I don't know what happened to it, but I can remember that I actually filled one up, because you could take every car number down as it went by! Of course, they'd just have one or two letters with four numbers, wasn't it, in those days.

PS: Well, that's not a very full portrait, Lil, but there you are – that's all my art's up to! [laughter]

EO: I just wanted to ask Lil, do you find that the river attracts you?

LM: Yes, because I grew up by the Thames.

EO: Because I feel... you know, I go to church, and I go down the river, down the road where I park the car. And there's the old public house, which is a tourist attraction now, and I've got to go to the edge and look down at the river.

LM: I go to Kingston and Richmond on my bus pass, or Twickenham even. But each time I go, I get off the bus, and I have to walk down the river. I walk over the bridges. And I told Eileen some years ago, after I retired, I used to go out on the bus, and I'd go to, say, the first bridge, Tower Bridge. I'd walk over Tower Bridge, go to London Bridge and then walk over the other way, and then go to Waterloo... And I'd go out for the day, and I'd see how many bridges I could go over across the Thames. So you can go over Kingston and then come down Putney Bridge...

EO: Strange, isn't it?

PS: Doing a sort of zig-zag?

LM: Seeing how many bridges I could go over. And I suppose because I was born so near the Thames that it does attract to me. I go to Tower Bridge, and instead of staying on the bus, I get off the bus this side, and walk over the bridge.

PS: There's a little pub that you probably remember, Eileen. I think it's called The Angel.

EO: That's the one, yes! By Paradise Street. It's beautiful.

LM: I go down to the Cutty Sark just to walk along the towpath! And I could add something to that. When we moved to Millwall, and I'd started to work, if we hadn't got any money left until payday, we'd walk down to Blackwall Tunnel, walk down the side of tunnel, and you'd walk all the way round the towpath as far as Greenwich Pier. The Cutty Sark wasn't there. And then you'd walk all

the way round the main road, because you hadn't got any money. And we always used to stop where Joan was talking about – the Trinity Hospital. By the power station, and we'd stand there in the evenings, during the summer and we'd watch the sun go down on the river. And we'd always stop there, because if the sun was going down, we'd stop there just to watch the sun going down on the river. And that was just an evening's walk, because you hadn't got any money to spend so you'd go for a walk.

PS: That's from the south bank, you're talking about there?

LM: Yes, from Blackwall Tunnel to the College. And my school friend, who was with me, Georgina – she died last year from cancer – but we used to do that if we hadn't got any money to spend. We'd just go for a walk!

EO: The first thing you'd look at was the tide – “Ooh, it's high tide!”, or “The tide's out”.

LM: That's right, yes.

PS: Just say a little bit about the move, if you would, Lil.

LM: Well, they decided to pull that street down, so this is Harbinger Road, and there's the school, and our turning was there. So I lived on a corner house. Marsh Street was about twenty houses – about ten houses on each side. And I don't know why, but they decided to pull the houses down. And opposite the school they pulled those down as well, and they built flats. So they built shops underneath, and blocks of flats, and we were re-housed in Greenwich, which meant that my father had to go back to walking through the tunnel.

PS: Which street was that in Greenwich?

LM: That was in Tunnel Avenue, which goes down to the Blackwall Tunnel. And we actually lived in what was called ??? Cottages, which are not there now because of the M2. And we moved into a fairly modern house, LCC – London County Council. And it was three floors high, so my sister and I had the back bedroom. The attic went right across the whole of the house, so there was no door – you went up the stairs and it went straight into the room, and my brother slept up there. And I can always remember, my mum had a portmanteau – a massive big wooden chest, and it was full of books. I don't know where they came from, and I used to take them out – I loved reading – and I used to borrow the books and put them back in. And I wish now that I'd kept some of those books.

PS: What were they, classics?

LM: Classics. They were just reading books, not library books.

PS: Do you know how she came by them?

LM: I don't know. They were hardback reading books, and I used to borrow them and put them back, and when I was fifteen I joined the public library. But I don't know what happened to them. Probably my mum discarded them when they moved out of the house.

PS: So they were in the house in Marsh Street?

LM: Yes.

PS: And did she take them across the water with her?

LM: Yes, she must have brought them with her. And then of course, you did have an outside toilet, and no hot water, like the other house. And my dad built a lean-to, across from the back door to the toilet, so that if it was wet... and of course, I was terrified of spiders and I still am. And there was a little window in the toilet, and he'd put a little night light on the windowsill when it was dark, which would burn during the night.

PS: So you weren't so scared! I'm just going to go to Joan, now. So Joan, what can you tell us about the house that you grew up in? The first one?

JP: It's not very exciting. Yours are far more interesting, really! I was born in a house in Charlton. 128 East Street, and it was next door to the Crown pub. Now that Crown pub was the centre, which you'd now call the community centre. Everything went on – there were boxing matches, dancing classes, weddings were held in the same hall. Anything that was involving the community would be held in the pub next door called the Crown. And I went to dancing lessons there. And it was the time of Shirley Temple – I went to tap dancing! We were aiming to put on a little show. And when we weren't at the dancing lessons, outside the pub was a wooden board where the barrels used to be delivered down into the cellar. And my friends, Jean and June, we used to put our own little shows on, on this wooden platform. Now over the road there was a boy, and he was called Patrick Plum. And his house was the house where he put on shoes. We used to sit up the stairs... you went in the front door, and facing you were stairs. And he allowed us to go up the stairs and pay a sweet or something, and when you sat on the stairs and you turned round, there was a curtain across the front door, which was the curtain for the show! Now he was supposed to be a magician, and he was always doing all these tricks, and he also sang. He was the most extraordinary looking boy thinking about it. He was quite plump and he had these big horn-rimmed glasses, but he thought he was a real MC doing the shows. I wish I knew... I bet he's a millionaire somewhere, because he was a very, very pushy boy!

PS: What sort of songs did he sing?

JP: Well it was probably like George Formby songs – *When I'm Cleaning Windows*, or something like that – something of the time. It wasn't ballads, it would have been comedy. Probably like *Sally*, by Gracie Fields, and things like that. But I know we used to put on our little shows when we weren't doing our dancing lessons at the back. Now I was with my mum and dad in

128 Eastmore Street, but I feel my baby years, when I was a baby, that's when my grandmother might have moved out to just over the road. Because by the time I was aware of it, it was just mum and dad and I. Now, mum went back to work about a fortnight after she'd had me. She went straight back to work! Oh yes!

PS: Who looked after you, then, Joan?

JP: My grandmother. My grandmother brought me up from birth, practically. And my father – he was in the house, but he was also doing night work.

PS: What did he do?

JP: He was a cable hand. We were in a sort of oasis, because around us were the big tall brick buildings of Seaman's. It was what you would now call an industrial estate. At the bottom of the road... we were here, the pub was there, and along there was Johnson's and Jorgensen's [???], the great big wall of Seaman's. And then there was this place where you walked up to the river there, and that was Seaman's there. And if I'd go into my garden here, Seaman's was there. We were surrounded by factories. And most of the people were employed there. Although mum went back to her Johnson's and Jorgensen's glass-cutting job, and my nan brought me up. It was a strange mixture of poor and rich. I was an only child, and I feel, like Eileen, as though I was the showpiece. I had the green velvets, I had the little Juliet cap, I had chiffon dresses...

PS: What's a Juliet cap?

JP: Like a Jewish skullcap.

PS: I've never heard of that!

JP: Yes. A Juliet cap. Green velvet coat, chiffon dresses, white socks, doe-skinned shoes, black patent strap shoes...

PS: Doe-skinned shoes?

JP: Yes, white deer. White kid! And yet, my mother was at work, my dad was at work. So we were more or less okay. I had these gorgeous clothes, dressed up to the nines going to school. Really OTT! But, when I was my nan's fetcher and carrier, I used to go to the corner shop. There was always a little sweetshop, the pub, the vegetable shop. The little sweetshop was where you got your papers. And then on the corner was where I went to Sunday school. And then if I went to the top of the hill, that's the park – Marion Park. And there was a little cut-through, where you went to school, called Marion Park School, which is still there! But when I was with my nan, most of the time, she used to send me round to Mrs Stride to ask if she had sixpence she could let me have. It was such a mixture. And also to the pawn shop. I used to do that. To borrow sixpence. And I used to go round, and she used to go tut, tut, tut. And out would come her book, and she'd copy it down.

- PS: She didn't charge interest, did she?
- EO: Oh, they would have done.
- JP: Yes, she would have done, a ha'penny or a penny on top of that.
- PS: And the pawn shop as well. Was that gran or mum who would send you there?
- JP: It would have been my gran. My mum was at work, and I feel as though we were okay, so I might have been sent on my gran's behalf.
- PS: What sort of things would she send you to pawn?
- JP: It would be small things. A pair of shoes, anything. A pair of sheets.
- PS: And was there a pawn shop nearby?
- JP: Yes, it was just at the top of the road. It was funny, there was North Street, East Street, West Street... It's now called Eastmore Street and Westmore Street. North Street has changed to something else, I believe.
- PS: Is it towards the Woolwich end of Charlton?
- JP: Down the lower road... because Seaman's is still there, obviously! Hardman's Manor Way???... And that's where the Thames Barrier is.
- PS: So was your house part of a terrace?
- JP: Yes. Just like that, except that the pub was at the end of it. And like Eileen, of a Saturday night, they liked to go and have a drink. And the pianist – I think he only had one finger missing there, but it was fascinating to watch him play! And I used to sit outside, with the arrowroot! And I hated it!
- PS: But you were only next door?
- JP: That's right!
- PS: Were you made to stand outside, although you could have been indoors next door, because they wouldn't leave you on your own?
- JP: Well, they did use to leave me on my own. They put me to bed, up in my room, and I had a nice little wooden suite, you know. I had a dressing table, a wardrobe, but the lights from the pub coming into my bedroom terrified me – the shadows on the wall. And I think I might have crept down and called, "Mum!" And then I'd sit there with my arrowroot! Or they did have a little porch, I must say. You know, you went in there and there was the door to go into the pub. So I might have sat in that little porch if I wasn't dancing on the wooden bit.

- PS: And what were the names of your friends, Joan and Jean?
- JP: No, Jean and June. In fact, funnily enough, we were only children. June was an only child, and so was Jean. But then later – I suppose we must have been six years old – a baby was born with June’s family, and that was the first time I’d seen a dead baby. It died, at a year old. And they said, “Would you like to come and see...?” I forget the name of the child. And it was in the parlour, in a little white coffin. And it was a boy, it was a brother. But you did – you went into the parlour and saw.
- PS: Did you cry?
- JP: I didn’t think it was real. I’m sure I thought it was a doll. But all I knew was that it was no more. That there was no brother.
- PS: So was that a tradition, then, that you’d go and see a dead child?
- EO: Oh yes.
- PS: Was that a Catholic tradition, or would anyone do that?
- JP: No, we didn’t have any particular religion. I know we were sort of protestant, but we didn’t go to church, although I was sent to Sunday School on Sunday afternoons. They always sent us out of the house on Sunday afternoons! And I remember that well, because if you didn’t go to Sunday School, you didn’t get to go out on a Sunday outing, and that was a real Christmas party! Going back to religion, there was the Salvation Army. I loved that Salvation Army! They came round the corner with their band, and played the tambourine, and rattled their boxes. I thought it was fascinating!
- PS: Was that by the pub?
- JP: Yes, because that’s where they’d get the money, you know. They used to do it outside the pub. They used to go round and rattle their boxes and put some money in. They weren’t anti- and they weren’t for. They just didn’t bother with church.
- PS: So did you go off to school with the other two girls who were your chums?
- JP: Oh, I’m sure I would. I was three when I went into the little school. And we had the green canvas bed, to go to sleep.
- PS: Were they the ones along the tables? The upside-down tables?
- JP: No, they were on the floor. Proper little beds.
- PS: Like camp beds?
- JP: That’s right. And we didn’t have any satchels, or anything like that. I think we just had a hanky tucked in our knickers and that was about it!

- LM: A hanky?
- JP: Well, probably not. Probably just a bit of rag.
- PS: Well, Joan probably had a hanky!
- JP: Yes, of course! Because my grandmother was wonderful at crocheting and sewing, but she never made my things. She did crochet and she did knit some things, but there was a dressmaker. There was a dressmaker around the corner, and I can remember being fitted up with these clothes.
- PS: So your mum would take you round, and say I'd like it like this?
- JP: Yes, that's right.
- EO: You'd have pattern books, wouldn't you?
- JP: Yes, you'd look through. And for school, I can remember gingham, or whatever it was, but I had black and white squares, not the red and white – I had black and white!
- PS: Would you have any say in what you wore, or was it mum deciding?
- JP: No, I never had any say. No, no! She just dressed me up like a princess! It was incredible.
- EO: Do you know, I used to have three vests. I'd have a flannel vest, I'd have a cotton vest and a liberty bodice.
- LM: I don't remember having two vests...
- EO: A petticoat.
- LM: A cotton vest, liberty bodice, and then the petticoat – flannelette probably. That's right, I can remember that.
- EO: And I'd got a bad chest! They sent me to convent, and the first thing they did was take all these clothes off!
- LM: I've just thought of something that Joan reminded me of, and what Eileen was saying about standing outside the pub... When we moved to Greenwich, my dad used to go for a drink, but he was always home in time for lunch. And my Aunt Louie, his sister went out to Bexleyheath when they started building the new LCC Estates. And so when he was going to see her on a Sunday, he would always take me with him. I don't remember him taking the others, but he'd take me with him, and we'd get on the bus, go through the tunnel. And we'd get on a bus at the other side and go to this council estate. Uncle Bill and Aunt Louie, and the daughter's name was Eileen, but he always called her Elana.

EO: I think that must be Irish, because my grandmother used to call me Elana.

LM: He always called her Elana. I can't remember her brother's name. Anyway, on the way back, if my dad was going for a pint, he would go in the Volunteer on the other side of the water, outside the tunnel. And I'd say, "I'm not standing outside the pub on my own!", even though he'd offer me arrowroot and lemonade. And he'd give me a penny to get on the bus and come through tunnel. And I'd walk home from the tunnel, and my mum would say, "Where's your father?", and he'd gone for a drink! But if we came through this side, I'd come through the tunnel with my dad, on the bus, and then he'd go in the pub, The Star in the East. I think it's a factory now, but there was a pub on that side – on the Poplar side – and a pub on this side. So I'd say, "I'm not standing outside the pub!". "Do you want a lemonade?" I never used to take the lemonade, but he used to go and get me an arrowroot biscuit. They used to be about that big, weren't they?

EO: Yes, they were horrible!

LM: I liked them actually.

EO: I like them now!

LM: Anyway, I wouldn't stand outside the pub, so he'd give me the penny to get on the bus through the tunnel and come home.

PS: Joan, I don't know if we're going to cover this bit, but what age were you at the time of your evacuation?

JP: Nine.

PS: So really, most of your growing up years were in this house in East Street?

JP: That's right. It was in East Street, because the first bombing, that's where it copped, right on top of the... because it was Seaman's, you see. Didn't see it any more after I left. When I was met on the playground at Marion Park School. I didn't see it any more after that. And I still go on about it – what happened to all those toys that a young girl had? I never saw them again. I wish I knew what had happened. I was spoiled with toys at Christmas – I had everything, and I never saw them again.

PS: The house was bombed, wasn't it?

JP: Well, it wasn't flattened, because they could go in and take the furniture out. I mean, the piano was all dotted with glass, and some other stuff was all dotted with glass, but it wasn't flattened.

PS: Who played the piano?

JP: My grandmother. All by ear. Not like Olive. A lot of people played by ear, actually.

PS: Was she quite good?

JP: Yes, she was. It was a thump-thump-thump on the bass, but she certainly got the tune out in the front! And I used to play, *Does your mother come from Ireland* and *God Save the Queen*, I think. And she actually said to me, "Would you prefer to go to dancing lessons, or music lessons. You can only go one or the other". And I chose the dancing lessons which, of course, I regret now really, because nothing came of that, but piano would have been forever. But going back to the area where I lived, and Seaman's was there, and there was this yard where the lines went across....

END OF CASSETTE TAPE