

6.10.95

Rib Davis interviewing Lillian Burnett, Lil Murell, and Margeret Kippin.

RD: So the first thing is actually keeping warm in the house. How did you go about keeping warm in the house in winter?

MK: Well we didn't keep really warm. It was very cold. I mean, imagine getting out of bed in the morning and getting onto cold lino. We didn't have fires in our bedrooms. But it was coal fires, wasn't it. Great big coal fires. It was alright if you were sitting round the fire, but then you'd have a cold back.

LM: The rest of the room would be freezing.

MK: I think Larry Grayson? got the same from "Shut that door!", because... "Shut that door, and keep the draught out!". You'd have it bawled at you. And later on, when I had coal fires and my children were little, we said the same thing, "Shut the door".

RD: Did you have things to keep the draughts out?

MK: Heavy curtains. And chenille??, or a dog - a stuffed snake or something, or even a stocking filled with...

LM: You'd use any old rags to fill it up with and stick it along the bottom of the door.

MK: But talking about keeping the draughts out, my daughter told me, when she was quite old, she said, "You know mum, it used to frighten me", because she thought a draught was some big thing - dark person - that was going to come in the room. And it just shows how careful you have to be with...

RD: So when you said, "Keep the draught out"...

MK: ...She thought it was something awful that might come in to the room... or an animal. But she never told me as a child, you see.

RD: Could you always afford coal? Was there always a fire when you were a child?

MK: Well when I was a child, yes, coal was quite cheap actually. I can't remember us ever being without coal.

RD: But you only had the one fire?

MK: One fire only. You didn't have a fire in your bedroom. Even if you were ill, you'd be brought downstairs and put on a settee. Well, we were anyway.

LB?: Yes, in the room that had a fire.



LM: My sisters always used to say to me, "You've had your turn!", because we always used to have turns. "You've had your turn!", and I'd say, "No, I haven't!", I used to love it like mad.

MK: Did you fight over who had the crust?

LM: You would never throw the crust away.

(Everyone talking at once)

RD: So you'd cut the bread and then...?

LB: You know, with a bread knife that is serrated? Well most people did that. My mum was very fat, and she used to do it on her tummy. I'm not kidding and I used to say, "One of these days, she's going to slice her tummy!"

MK: But it was lovely and crusty bread, you see. The bread was lovely and crusty.

BR: There was a local, you know, the Coburg. And it used to have deep cuts in it, so of course, when it burst open in the cooking, you got four knots of crusty bread, and if you could manage it first, before your mum saw you, you used to pull off a notch.

MK: And how about the cottage loaves, too?

LM: Yes, you divided it into half.

MK: History does repeat itself, because when I was married with my daughter - we were living in a top flat, and she was about two or three, it was a privilege for her to go down to go to the baker. The baker used to make a fuss of her, you know. And by the time she got to the top of the stairs, a whole bit was nibbled off that edge!

RD: You mean used to do that?

LM: No, her daughter.

MK: But we used to do it, but she used to nibble these. And if you took her out to Lyons or somewhere, she wouldn't ask for a fancy cake or anything. She'd ask for a dry crusty roll - and she still likes dry crusty rolls. Mind you, of course she was brought up to like them.

BR: Even the tin loaf - a round tin, not a square one; not a sandwich tin. That used to be black. And the slices were quite tall, and if it was cut in half - you were being a bit extra dainty that day - you always wanted the top bit.

LB: The bit that was brown - the crusty bit.

LM: Oh yes.

RD: So what would you have for breakfast in the winter?

LM: Porridge.

LB: Porridge in the winter.

MK: Bacon and sausage.

BR: And fried bread. Fried bread and marmite.

LB: No, we didn't have marmite.

LM: You might have a boiled egg on Sunday, if you were lucky.

MK: Bacon or egg on a Sunday.

LM: My dad used to do the breakfast on Sunday morning, and we were all privileged to know what kind of egg.... One of my sisters wouldn't dare have anything if it run, the other one wouldn't have it unless it was firm, someone else wanted.... And do you know what, he used to make sure we all used to have what we wanted.

MK: She really was spoilt!

RD: What about the games you used to play, in the winter?

LB: What, outside?

RD: Yes.

LB: Skipping, and...

LM: Two balls up the wall.

LB: Yes. Rounders.

RD: Two balls up the wall - what was that?

LM: Oh yes. Two balls against the ball.

LB: Or you used to play rounders; you'd find a piece of wood - you'd never have anything as good as a cricket bat.

LM: Oh no!

LB: You'd just find a long piece of wood, and you'd use that as a bat.

MK: There were all sorts of games.

LM: We always had a lot of children in our street, so we were never short of people to, you know - you four can go there, and you four go there.

LB: The advantage being that we could play in the streets.

LM: No traffic!

BR: My father was the manager of a shoe shop that his father, my grandfather, owned. So of course there was an alleyway at the back for deliveries, and there was a fish shop, and of course I was friendly with the kids in the fish shop. And the fish came in these wooden packing boxes, and we used to get the packing boxes, and to make a cricket bat, you cut the corner. So you'd got a handle. And there were drains in this alleyway at the back, and you used to put sticks down the drain to...???(everyone at once).

LM: We used to chalk it on somebody's wall.

LB: Yes, we did.

MK: When we lived in Scotland, because we were a long way from anywhere, we had a lovely game called Jack Jack-show-your-light. And he's got a sweet..??? and so it only showed one side, and somebody would go off and hide, and we'd all shout out, "Jack, Jack, Show your light!". Then he had to show the light, and then he was allowed to disappear, and we had to try and find him. I mean it was a good game. The children of the day can't...

RD: The cricket one, would you play that in winter as well? Or was that just...?

ALL: Oh yes, all the time.

BR: The other thing was that, even when it bucketed with rain, then you played with things, and you had races down the gutters, to see whose piece of wood got down first.

LM: We were very inventive, weren't we, really.

BR: And the things that we did, kids would probably get told off for doing now. Like we used to have lumps of chalk, but they weren't real chalk. Somehow...

LM: You used to go down to the beach if you lived near the river, like I did. Get a piece of limestone, and draw on the pavement.

BR: These lumps of chalk, and we used to draw on the pavement.

LB: And no one told you off for it - we used to draw hopscotch on the pavement.

MK: But we didn't do graffiti...

# Slides

BR: No, it wasn't on walls, it was on the pavements. And we used to have arrows, and sort of little lines meant how many paces you'd got to go, and it was called tracking, even though you lived in London, it was still called tracking.

LM: We just made our own amusement, I suppose.

MK: Of course we did go to church functions, too, in the evenings. I mean, I used to go magic lantern shows, and guides...

RD: What were the magic lantern shows?

LM: You know when you put slides up on a screen.

MK: Still pictures. Still pictures, you see. We thought it was wonderful - we thought it was great. It was usually at the church.

LM: Because as a child, you didn't go to the cinema.

MK: And it was usually all the natives and things. My brother actually saved up, and got a small magic lantern, and he'd have his friends in. And you'd get all sorts of pictures, and put them in. Still pictures.

RD: What about when it snowed.

LB: That was fun.

LM: If you were allowed of course, that was fun!

BR: The only thing was, we always had woolly gloves, and they used to get all soggy.

MK: Because when I lived in London, we used to go up on Hilly Fields, and we didn't have toboggans, but we'd use anything.

LB: A tray.

MK: Yes a tray.

LM: That was quite good.

MK: Mind you, the boys used to get into trouble at school, because they used to make slides, and of course it was dangerous.

LB: Very slippery.

MK: And they were always getting told off, the boys at school. But we didn't mind - we still liked going on them! The boys would have to get told off!

LM: I must have been poorer than you two.

MK: Well we started off not too bad, but then we got poorer and poorer!

LB: I think myself that if you've got a big family, you're poor, in those days. I mean, I've got five sisters, and everytime we sat, there was eight at the table. It's a lot. And it was usually only one man. And someone said, "Didn't your mum go to work?", and I said, "With all those children?". And all that washing, and ironing, and cleaning - and by hand.

MK: A mother never went to work in those days. Mums were always there, and that was nice...

LB?: But that was their job.

LM: But they were always there when you came back from school.

MK: I was just going to say that. To come in from school, and have a big fire going.

LB: You came home dinner time from school - you didn't have school dinners, no. So you always had a hot meal at dinner time.

LM: Twelve till two.

RD: Was that the main meal of the day, or was that in the evening?

LB: That was the main meal.

LM: Yes, twelve till two. You had bread and jam, or something like that...

LB: Bread and jam, and cakes, if you were lucky.

LM: Cakes on Sundays.

LB: No, well we had cakes everyday in ours. But I'll tell you what, we used to have seven cakes for sixpence, it was.

LM: But sixpence was a lot of money.

LB: Seven for sixpence. And we used to have that each day, but we all had our own favourites. You know, one wanted a cream horn, and one wanted a tart. One wanted an eccles cake, and all that. Anyway, so we had all those. Well one day, I don't know why, but I happened to be sitting at the table, and I was a terrible one for reading - I used to love reading. And I had this book stuck up there, and all the other were out. And I don't know why - my mum was in another room somewhere. I think she was looking out of the window to see when the other kids were coming home. And I was reading this, and the rest of it, and suddenly I looked on that plate, and I'd eaten all those cakes! Seven! "Oo, you pig!". And I went up to mum and said, "Mum,

something terrible has happened - something awful!", "Whatever's the matter?". I said, "I've eaten all the cakes!", "Oh my God!", she said, "What are we going to do? I can't tell the others!"

"Here you are," she said, "Go quickly and get as many as you can. It doesn't matter what kind they are, as long as you get those cakes to put on that plate!". Now how about that.

LM: Wicked! Isn't she wicked!

LB: I never did it again, I'll tell you!

RD: What did your parents do? Or rather, what did your dad do, probably, for you to have money to buy cakes everyday?

LB: Well, first of all he was an army man, which he had, you know - quite a lot of... there was a bit of money going round with the army part, and then when that was all finished, and he'd finished with that, he was an electrician, you know, and that was quite something in those days. It was a real good trade, you know. So he did things like that. And also, he could also do jobs for people who couldn't do electric, so that enabled him to have the extra money. And we always had oranges indoors. I can't remember all the rest of the fruit, but we always... And because when my mum came back from shopping, we all knew that she had these oranges, one each, and we all had one each. I don't know what other fruit we had - I can't remember, but I can remember the oranges, always the oranges.

RD: Do any of you have any memories of being cold actually in the night, in bed?

ALL: Yes, definitely!

LM: As we didn't have electricity, there weren't electric blankets!

MK: You had the brick - when I used to go and stay with my granny in the country, she used to put the brick in the oven, and wrap it in flannel. And if you had a stone hot water bottle sometimes - ginger beer used to come in stone bottles, that was lovely when you got in to bed, but halfway through the night, it was freezing cold. And you'd suddenly hear, "bang, bang, bang!", people kicking there hot water bottles out of the bed!

LM: The only thing was that it only warmed up half of the bed, that little bit.

LB: And you used to keep kicking around the bed. But we did wear long...

MK: I was just going to say, we had long nightgowns.

LB: And you could tuck your feet inside.

LM: Buy you never had bedsocks or things like that...

# Clothing

MK: It used to cross over in the middle and tie round the middle.

LM: And gloves - of course the gloves would have been woollen too. Everything was wool.

LB: And the gloves kept on having holes in them, and you were always darning them.

LM: Or you could knit your own.

LB: But these gloves were always wearing out, and they'd always got these holes there.

RD: And would you darn them yourself or would your mum darn them?

LB: Well, your mum did at first, but after that...

LM: I learnt to darn when I was about 15. No, before that...

LB: Me too, because I was the eldest of a big family, so you can imagine - I had a lot of gloves to darn.

LM: And we would darn socks as well.

LB: And socks as well, yes. You always had holes in the back of your socks, didn't you.

MK?: Do you remember that so you wouldn't lose one glove - as you often did - they had tape on them that would go right through your sleeve.

LM: I think they do that to children now.

MK: Well if you lost a glove, well that was a tragedy, because...

LB: Because you were afraid to go home and tell your mum that you'd lost a glove.

LM: And also, I'll tell you what - if a kid got hold of your woolly hat, and aimed it, and it happened to go in some puddle.

LB: God, it was dreadful coming home and telling your mum!

MK: "Why did you let them?", "Mum, I couldn't stop it!"

LB: "He was much bigger than me!"

MK: Of course sometimes, if you were lucky, you had Wellingtons, didn't you, and they used to keep your legs warm.



# Clothing

MK: They were stronger, and they lasted longer. I mean they were probably handed down from my brother.

LB: That's right, they would have been, yes. And not only that - you could get a pair of boots that would last two or three children. They were good shoes - it was possible. But for boots, you know, they could put socks on them, you know...

MK: And of course we all wore liberty bodices, didn't we?

RD: Can you tell me what a liberty bodice is?

LB: It's like a waistcoat, and it's fleecy lined, made of some white flannelette material.

MK: And it's like a waistcoat. It had buttons down here.

LB?: But it was fleecy lined. And that's what it was really, it was like a waistcoat or something.

RD: Would it just go down to here, or...?

LB: Just to the waist, but it was almost like a waistcoat, really.

LM: But then we also wore flannelette petticoats.

LB: That's right! And what about fleecy lined draws!

LM: Navy blue knickers - they were fleecy lined. Something like the sweatshirts are today. And flannelette petticoats, and school uniform if you had it. The gymslips were quite thick so they kept you warm - that was in the winter, and in the summer you changed to cotton socks, and cotton dresses.

RD: What about winter coats.

ALL: Oh yes!

LM: You see we didn't have this man made fibre then at all.

MK: And of course you had a big scarf, didn't you - a huge scarf...

LB: A long woollen scarf.

MK: ... that you had tied round your neck and round your waist.

LB: That's right - go round here, and round there, and that's it.

LM: Like the footballers have - the very, very long ones.

Clothing

MK: It was green wasn't it?

LB: Something about the size of a nightlight. And you used that. You used it for coldsores and all sorts of things. Chapped hands.

MK: Talking about chapped hands, I was trying to think of the things. I remember the little boys didn't go into long trousers, did they? And I can remember them with their chapped knees.

LB?: And because your gymslip, if you wore school uniform - or even if you didn't -, your gymslip just came down to your knees. And so your legs got chapped, because your socks just came so far, and then you had that gap.

LM: And that's true - you had chapped hands and chapped knees.

MK: When I was very young, though, I had leggings.

LM?: Did you? Oh, I don't remember that.

LB?: She was richer than us.

MK: Mind you, that was when things were a bit better at home. And we had buttoned boots all the way up, with buttons. About twenty buttons - can you imagine? Rushing for school in the morning.

LB: I'll tell you what - those button boots were terrible. I was always the last one to get my plimsoles on, because I had all these darn buttons on!

LM: I never had anything like that. (ALL: Ahh!) I'm not going to say...??

LB?: You were younger than us.

LM: We had good leather shoes.

LB: Well, I'll tell you what - these what-it's-names were leather. They were leather.

LM: But I never wore boots.

MK: We always had leather, didn't we, in those days.

LB: But then plastic wasn't in. We didn't have plastic then. Not when I was a kid, no.

MK: But when we went up to Scotland, and things were pretty bad, then I used to wear boys boots, and I hated it. I mean, now all the girls wear them, don't they? But I hated it, I really hated it!

RD: Why did you wear boys boots?

# Chilblains

LM?: If you eat in the kitchen, then the cooker, or the kitchen range would have kept the kitchen fairly warm, so you wouldn't be... in fact I can say that the kitchen used to always be the warmest room in the house.

LB?: The only thing is, it did open onto the garden or yard, or whatever you had, and that meant that you let the cold in every time you opened the door. But I would have said that the kitchen, maybe, was a warmer place than the living room was.

RD: Can any of you remember any particular days - rather than in general - any particular days when you were cold?

LB?: I think when you're a child, you don't notice the weather so much as when you grow older.

LM?: I never felt warm in the winter - I was always cold.

MK: I spent early days in Scotland, when I was quite young, and it was very, very cold up there.

LM?: I suffered with chilblains. I don't now, but I suffered with chilblains on my toes.

MK: Oh yes. Most of us did. And we had some very odd treatments, didn't we!

RD: What were they then?

MK: You sat your feet in a potty!

RD: Really? And did it work?

MK: It took the sting out.

LM?: That's all it did - took the sting out.

RD: I presume you had to wash your feet afterwards...?

LM: Oh, of course!

LB: I think zambuk?? was the good old...??

MK: And snowfire... (interruptions)

LB: ...a little round tin. And they would be very good for feet, and for chilblains especially.

MK: And snowfire...

LB?: Nowadays, you use a chapstick for lips, but snowfire was a similar sort of thing, but it was in a round tub.

# ICE

LB: Well, we had socks, because my parents never believed in hot water bottles. I don't know if that was in case they get pushed when there was all of us. I mean, at one time, there was two in one bed, and three in another bed, and you'd all be pushing and shoving, I mean, let's face it. But we did have socks.

RD: And at least that kept you a bit warmer I suppose?

LB: That was the only way!

LM: Well yes, it was warmer when I slept with my sisters.

MK: But being an only girl, of course, I...

LM: Oh, you had to be on your own?

MK: Well, when I was very small, as you say, but when I got older, I had to have... I was a bit of a nuisance to my parents, because they always had to make sure that there was a bedroom for me, you see.

LM: We did have woollen blankets, and also you would have had a lovely eiderdown on the top.

LB: Feathers!

LM: That's right, everything was feathers. We didn't have the kind of mattresses we have now - pillows. Everything would have been filled with feathers.

RD: And were the bedrooms so cold that you'd get ?? from the windows?

ALL: Oh yes, absolutely!

LB: Yes, because I had a fireplace in the bedroom, but never a fire. Nobody lit fires in the bedrooms.

MK: Lovely to get up??? Lovely patterns, mind you - beautiful patterns!

LM: Oh yes, ice inside the windows, oh yes!

MK: But I can remember later on, when I went into the service, we used to have to break the ice in the jugs before we could have a wash in the morning.

LM: And just imagine, yes, and that's it! And can you wonder why half the kids had dirty necks and dirty ears, because it was so freezing cold!

MK: Oh, at home we had cold water - we used to boil a kettle up. But in service, because the room I had was right at the top of a building, and we had to get up very early in the morning, and so we had to break the ice on the top of the water jug, before you could wash!



RD: But you were washing in cold water at home?

LB: Quite often, yes because... ??? you had to heat it first.

LM: Yes, yes, and we did. And also if there was a lot of you, the first one had a bath.

LB: Yes, the first one had hot water, but by the time two or three of you had used that... I mean, it got cold and dirty and all the rest of it, but nevermind, it was wet!

LM: I think, as a child, I mean can't run around the streets now - they'd say, "look at that woman, she's gone crazy!", but as children, you can run around and keep warm.

LB: We did, we did.

LB: But, as you say, at home, indoors, or going to bed and getting up in the morning in cold lino - we didn't have any carpets or anything -, most of the house really was cold. We were cold. But we did wear warm clothes.

MK: My mum always got up early - well, it was my mum or my dad -, and lit the fire. When we got down in the morning, the fire was alight, which was nice.

LB: Yes, often we did, too. The fire was alight, but you were lucky if you got any warmth from it, because when there is a lot of you, you all want to get in there.

LM: And it was only a little bit like that, it was. You know what I mean, it wasn't much, you see.

LB: It does warm half the room, but the rest of the room would be cold.

\*\*

BREAK, in which Barbara Rowland joins the group.

RD: We were just talking about getting up early in the morning, and it being freezing cold, when these ladies were children. Was it the same experience for you?

BR: Yes, yes.

RD: Was it a lino floor?

BR: We had a lino floor, with just a matt to put your feet on when you got out of bed.

LM: That's right, yes.

BR: And a potty under your bed, because it was too cold to go to the loo!

LB: Because the loo was outside in the yard. Yes, and there was no way you were going to do that.

MK: One thing our mothers did do though - we always had good hot, nourishing meals. There wasn't a lot of us??. There was always a stock pot on the thing. You know what a stockpot is, don't you? Always black saucepan. And we did have good, nourishing meals. There were suet puddings, made with proper suet - not the stuff you get now.

RD: Can you describe the suet?

BR: Yes, you bought suet in a lump, and you bought it by the quarter or the half a pound, depending on what the weekly housekeeping was like... and then you did it on one of these tin scrapers, like you do cheese these days.

LM: It had the fat and all that...

BR: That's right, and all these little bits of gristle, and then you had to sort of take out the skinny bits.

RD: Excuse my awful ignorance, but is suet actually just animal fat?

ALL: Yes.

MK: It was in a lump. And the EEC have done away with that, and I think it's a damn shame because the suet puddings I make are not a bit like the ones my mother used to make.

LM: You got all the goodness in it when you bought it straight from the butcher.

MK: My mother didn't have a grater, she used to do it with a knife....

LM: I always had a grater.

MK: I remember seeing her doing it, and chopping it all up, and taking the skinny bits off.

BR: You know when you have a piece of sirloin, and it's got the yellow fat round it. Well they were bits round the rib, and they were sort of a lump...

LB: And that was it.

BR: And you pulled it up. You must have seen kidneys - I know if you buy kidneys. And they've got that. A bit of round fat first.

MK: Well it was like that only bigger. Of course bread and dripping too in those days. You got dripping.

LB: I know we're talking about a lot more more than money, but when, on Sunday, we always had a joint, there was always a basin with that much up in dripping. And if you left it a little while, that much at the bottom was jelly. And it was really good.

MK: You know, the meat you get now, you don't get dripping from it.

LB: People, we're all alive, 80ish. We're all alive - it couldn't have done us much harm.

LM: When I was a little girl, milk was delivered in a churn, straight from the farm. And you went out to the man with a jug.

LB: That's right, and he poured some in for you.

MK: I drank it warm from the kettle??

RD: What other things did you have, apart from the suet and the dripping? What other warm food did you have?

LB: Lovely rice puddings!

BR: And if you had a cold, I remember sitting up in bed, with a blanket round me, and a pudding basin, full of Allenbury's?? groats. With brown demerara sugar.

LM: Lovely.

BR: It's like porridge, but it's very, very fine.

MK: It's a gruel.

BR: And it had brown demerara sugar on the top, and you were told, the moment you'd finished it, "Now get into bed and sweat it out!".

LM: That's right.

MK: And of course, big soups. Stewing bones. But they put all the vegetables, and lentils...

LB: Dumplings...

MK: And of course Cocoa! We always had a cup of hot cocoa to go to bed at night. Not drinking chocolate, no - Cocoa. And there's iron in that cocoa.

RD: Is that made with water or milk?

MK: Water with a little drop of milk.

RD: And what about things like roly-polys, and those...?

ALL: Oh lovely, yes!

LB: Spotted dick.

MK: Jam roly-poly.

BR: Made in a cloth.

LM: You had a saucepan, and the thing was in a cloth, and you tied it up at the top like that. You rolled it up with a piece of cotton, and then you tied it up with string or with cotton, or whatever, and then you just put it in a saucepan of water. You didn't have a basin.

BR: The two ends were sort of soggy weren't they.

LM: Yes, you would shut the ends up, but as you say, when you took it out of the cloth, the outside would be sort of soggy, wouldn't it.

BR: Instead of a Yorkshire pudding with the roast beef, my father was rather partial to suet pudding. With the roast beef, instead of Yorkshire pudding. Because the youngest of the family was the one that always had the... you know when you carve the meat, and you get the red gravy - which you don't now so much - and the youngest in the family always...

LB: Was allowed. Was allowed to have that.

BR: Yes.

RD: Why was that?

BR: That was the iron.

LB: Well, I suppose that was the goodness.

BR: The other thing that we used to fight over - well I say fight, but we used to take it turns in the end; if you had a leg of lamb - well usually it was mutton, but mutton seems to have disappeared now - but then the joint that goes through had marrow in the middle, and we used to use the back end of a teaspoon....

LM: To get it out.

BR: And we used to - he had a go, and then I had a go - to dig out the marrow.

MK: It was the same too, wasn't it, when your mother cooked rice pudding... To get the skin on top!



BR: The other thing we had, I can remember, and I don't think you see them now; they were called cat-bangers, and they were two pieces of metal, with strings at the back.

ALL: Oh yes!

BR: And honestly, we used run along, and drop them behind old ladies, and they went bang!

LM: And these caps were little round things, with a little bit of explosive in.

LB: You know, like the kids have guns that...

RD: Was there a long string?

BR: Yes, but not in the cat banger. That was your gun, if it was a long piece. But a cat-banger, you had a tiny weeny box, like a pill box, and it had these little pink things with the black blobs in them. And you fitted them in...

MK: Like two pieces of metal, like a little tiny egg.

RD: Presumably, the little old ladies weren't all that happy?

(All deny this)

LB: I don't think they took any notice.

LM: I've never seen one of those since I grew up. I don't suppose you can get them now.

MK: One of our favourite games, of course, was knock down ginger.

(everyone talking at once most of the time)