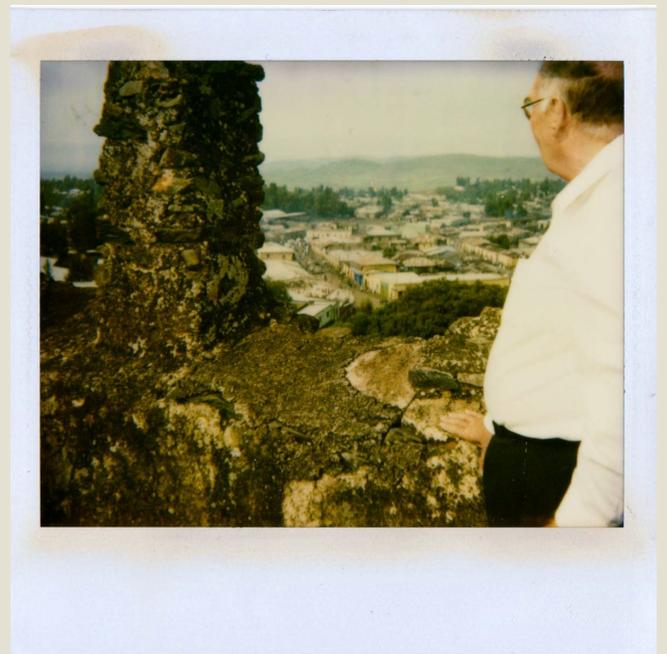




“So that’s a bit of my life”



**Stories, Conversation and
Reminiscence from O’Grady
Court**





LOTTERY FUNDED

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INTRODUCTION

O'Grady Court was thirty years old in 2014. We spent the year doing all sorts of activities, visiting new places and learning new skills.

Part of the year was spent in talking and reminiscing about the past.

I came to O'Grady Court and became part of the family! I listened to memories, recorded group discussions, looked at photographs and learned about the lives of O'Grady residents. This book is a record of the stories that I heard. I've transcribed and edited the stories and turned them into the book you are now holding.

These stories come from all over the world, from many different decades and from many different lives. They show what a wealth of experience lies inside O'Grady Court. I hope the book is a fitting record of a year of conversations, talk and storytelling, with so much laughter, sympathy and mutual understanding between those who took part.

Richard Neville

The project was managed by Birgit Huhn and Jaspal Ghai

With a huge thank you to all those who took part in the sessions.

LIFE STORIES

EILEEN

I was born in the East End of London so I'm a cockney. When I was four months old we moved to Kingsbury. I had a very happy childhood. We lived in a cul-de-sac and there weren't many cars around, so we played in the street. There was a shelter there from the war, after the war it was knocked down, but you could still see the brick marks. That was our magic castle, that was our crystal palace, that was our world.

My family used to go camping, all over England. We even slept under the stars at Stonehenge, right next to those enormous stones. We went to Dimchurch, we camped next to a river. We used to catch eels from the river and put them in a bucket of water overnight. Then early in the morning we'd pick wild mushrooms. My dad used cut the heads off the eals, skin them, then fry them over a primus stove. That was our fancy breakfast, wild mushrooms and eels.



My father got a job in Cape Town, and we moved over there. We went by boat. It took three weeks. We left Tillbury Docks and

stopped at St Helena, but for about ten days there was nothing but sea with no sight of land. My dad went onto the boat with a wind up gramophone and a huge pile of records, mainly dance records. We were in second class, and after the evening entertainment, my dad played his records, took them up onto the deck and we all danced. When we crossed the equator, we all had fancy dress. My mother had her Singer sewing machine with her, I can remember making clothes (out of crepe paper) for all the children.

My Dad used to organise a youth club in South Africa, called The Gloworms. He held regular monthly dances and he would put on his records and we all danced the night away.

He was a boxer and helped train boxers in the East End, and then when we went to South Africa, he coached African boys in a boxing club.

We arrived in Cape town and then we went by car to Durban. That was an adventure in itself. In those days there was one car a day on a road and a lot of the roads were dirt tracks. We took a tent, and we camped by the side of the road, or we stopped and put it up and had a cup of tea. We stopped at many interesting places so that the journey from Cape Town to Durban took two weeks.



We used to go everywhere with our dad, he was the explorer and the adventurer and he always took us on holidays that I have never forgotten. We used to have some food and a tent and we'd go driving, we'd stop and pitch the tent, sometimes at the side of the road. Our childhood was so happy, I can tell you every holiday was an adventure.

Friends have often said to me, I should write a book. I've had a very eventful life, I've had a ball. By the time I get to the stage when I can't walk out of this lounge I want to sit there with my box of photographs and my memories.

EMERALD

I was born in Grenada. Grenada is an island. The other islands are so close, you can pass from one to the other. They are like the fingers of one hand – Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Kitts, St. Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago.

I grew up speaking French Patois. My mother didn't like us speaking French. She wanted us to speak English. The French used to rule Grenada, and then the British came. And from then on everything was in English. But my mother talked French with her companions, and if she knew we were listening, she used to chase us away.

Grenada is a beautiful island. We used to play on the beaches, we went up into the mountains. We swam, we had parties on the beach, you can't imagine. And we used to go to the river and swim. Lots of boys and girls all together and the river was very large and we played regardless. Then we'd come out and we'd have a drink. I don't want to tell you! It was rum. We were twelve, thirteen years old. We were free. And when we went home, and our parents smelled rum on our breath, well, watch out!

I used to have to go to the river to get water. Put it in a pot and put it on my head. And fire wood, we needed fire wood all the time. But it started to run out in Grenada. And then they started to dig holes in the ground and look for coal. Used to dig deep holes and drag out the coal. And you shared it with your neighbour. If you had some and they didn't, then you gave some to them, and if you didn't have any, then they gave some

to you. That's how everybody was in those days, everybody helped each other, there was love, love , love.

I went to a village school, in the middle of the bush. We had to be there at 8.30, sitting quietly, so lessons could start at 9. And for that half an hour, the head would give us information about the world. We only found out the news from the radio. And there weren't any radios in the school, so every day the headmaster sent someone to go to the ministry, and a man from the government wrote down the news, that he had got from the radio. It told us what was happening, and then you came back, and gave the letter to the headmaster, and he read it out. And if you weren't listening, you got a hit from the stick, but everybody listened, to hear that news. I learned all about England that way. I heard of Birmingham and Preston. I'd never been to them. But I could imagine them.

In Grenada there were calypso bands. They were four people, with a quartet, which was a guitar with four strings, they slung it round their shoulders and walked around playing. You went out in the evening with your girlfriend, and went to a club, and they would be playing music in there and you danced. It was beautiful music. I remember some of the words, some of them were naughty words. Cricket was big then as well. It was the major thing that was going on then, the matches between the islands. That was our entertainment in those days. Grenada was rural, you know, it was rural everywhere. Chickens and goats and all sorts of animals. But the good thing was - no lions or tigers!

People left Grenada to look for work and some of them went to Venezuela. But one day it was announced by the British government that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth had opened the country and the people of Grenada could enter Britain with no interference from the law. I was on a boat for many weeks, stopping at different places. When we got to Europe we stopped in Italy, then in France at Calais. Then finally we arrived at Southampton. They announced on the ship that we had arrived in England. There were people there from all the islands, Trinidad and Jamaica and Grenada, they were all there thronging on the dock, and we went to immigration and they asked where we were going to in England. We had to fill out a form and sign our names. We were well protected, we had an officer with us, because if the people from the West Indies had been disturbed, then the Queen had to find out, because we

were there under her protection. And the forms would go back to the Queen, and she would sign them. And that's it, that's how I came to England.

GWENDA

I was born here in Ealing. We lived in South Ealing and in those days you never left your area, so I never went to Acton, I never went to Uxbridge . Now I have, but it just shows, you stayed where you were, didn't you?



I went to Grange School. Left when I was fifteen. I don't remember much about school, a couple of teachers maybe. What I do remember is that you never ever talked back, we just sat there, and listened to the teacher. Not like now. And my children were the same, when they were at school, always very well behaved, that's how we brought them up. I had four boys and one girl and they all did well, the boys became builders and roofers and my daughter worked in Boots.

I'll tell you the story of the last twenty years. In the early 90s we sold our council house and we moved to Norfolk. We bought an old farm house with my boys, and they rebuilt it, renovated it, put a new roof on it. They loved it, but to be honest I knew it was just too big. I went along with their plans, but I didn't think they would work. And sure enough, it all fell apart, and we lost it. It was during the property slump in the 90s. We were homeless.



I came back to Ealing with my husband and we found a rented flat, but I remember going into it for the first time and it was dirty, and there was a sink, and I turned the tap on and the water went straight through the sink and landed on my shoes. So we went down to Norfolk again and lived in the most beautiful cottage. But I wasn't happy, I couldn't settle, by now my family were all back in London.

Thankfully our son rescued us and he bought a café, with a flat above it, and we lived in that. And my other sons were still working. My husband was a worker too, always worked. My youngest son took over a pub in Ealing and my husband was painting it, helping to get it finished on time. That was the last

job he did. He was watching the TV one evening, and he just passed away. No illness, nothing, it was how he would have wanted it, because he hated hospitals. They named the bar in the pub after him the Billy Mallam bar.

But after that I was in the flat on my own, and I was very nervous, and that's how I ended up moving here.

I like a good laugh, that's what's always helped me. And my children are the same, they like sitting there having a good laugh, that's something we've all got in common.



So that's a bit of my life.

HELEN

I was born in Malaysia. My mother was Chinese. Her godfather was Japanese. We lived on an island called Penang. When I was born the only way to get there was by ferry.

My father was a businessman, I was too young to know what his business was, but we were rich. We each had a maid to look

after us. I had two sisters and one brother. The second child was given away to a relative. This happened because of superstition. We went to visit her sometimes.

Then the Second World War broke out and Japan invaded Malaysia. We were children, so we were safe, but my mother ran to hide. We survived because my mother's godfather was Japanese. We had to walk miles and we went to stay with him.

When we came back after the war, we found that my father had disappeared. We never knew where he went. A few years later, my sister needed a passport, and somehow they tracked him down, and they found out he had a lot of children with different women. One of the children came to see my mother, and she said 'it's not the child's fault' and this child stayed with us for a while. I used to walk through the streets with my sister and say 'you don't know, we could be passing by our brothers and sisters.' We didn't know if my father had children on the island.

After the war, we lost all our property. My mother had to go out to work, and we stayed with our grandmother. But grandmother was not nice to us, she beat us. So my mother took us to live with Aunty Elsie, her dearest friend from childhood. Then my mother remarried.

I never got on with my stepfather. I used to scream and shout and kick chairs. I was a Catholic and I went to see a priest. I said 'father, I'm not very happy at home, I want to go away, but I don't know where to go.' And he said 'OK, I will write to a convent in Singapore.' My mother saw that I was not happy at home, so she agreed that I could go. So I went to live there, the Good Shepherd Convent.

I met a very good friend called Zita. She also had problems with her father. The nuns liked us, and they educated us and spoilt us. Eventually we left the convent and Zita got married to a rich man, and I became a nurse. And one day one of the nuns said 'I've found a man for you...' I was really angry, I said 'it's none of your business, marry him yourself...'

I qualified as a nurse and I joined the union. Every meeting, I fight for our rights. And in my day off, I joined a modelling school and I became a model.



This was in the 1960s and there were lots of parties and socialising and drinking. I drank Babycham. But I always wanted to go to England. Every Sunday, I prayed to our Lady to take me to England.

Then I fell in love with a business man from Australia. He wanted to take me to Australia, but I said 'no, I want to go to England'. So he paid for my flight. But I'm clever, I'm not going to England to do nothing. So I applied for nursing jobs and I got a job in Dudley in Birmingham. I landed in England in 1970, and that's how I came to England.

JACKIE AND MUM

I'm a fourth generation South Actonian. My great nan was the first in my family to move to South Acton and she had twenty one children. She was in the Guinness Book of Records for it. So my dad had lots of aunties. And my dad said that they all used to come round to visit my nan on a Sunday morning. That was when the boys used to have their bath. They'd get the tin bath out in the kitchen while the aunts sat there in their hats chatting to my nan.



My granddad was on the dust for Acton Council. They used to tip for the posher side of Acton High street, but they couldn't empty the bins there, no, they had to carry them to the lower class end of the high street and empty them into the dust carts there. Those bins were heavy and the bin men used to have leather patches on their backs and carry them all that way. My dad told me that they used to go through the dust and separate out the rags, then there was a shop and they used to sell them.

It's only when I look back on it, I realise how important Class was when I was growing up. This area was middle class, that area was upper class, and so on. You just didn't go to certain parts of Acton, because that was lower class. Some people in my dad's time didn't even have gas in their house. So they were lower class, it was like that. You just stuck to what you knew, you just stayed in a few streets and you didn't go any further.

My mum was born in 1924 and there were seven people in her house, three children and four adults. She used to say that her parents told her that today's bread was bad for you and you had to eat yesterday's bread. There were a lot of mouths to feed and the kids were always hungry. So the way to keep them quiet was bread and jam, bread and dripping, all from stale bread.

Monday was wash day. We had tubs and wash sticks, dolly sticks, and my mum used to wash the washing up and down in the tub and scrub it on a washboard. I used to help her, she used to get me to turn the handle on the mangle, she used to say 'turn the handle Jacs....' There were 126 laundries in Acton and my nan worked in one of them, called Lavender laundries.

Everybody knew about everybody else. They all went to the pub, they all talked about their problems. That's why everyone was so nice to each other, because they all knew each other's problems. My mother was the darts captain, my granddad played cribbage, my dad played the accordion. Everybody in that pub would have been born in that area, generation after generation, everybody knew everybody.

My parents loved music. The records were 78s and they were three and sixpence each. There was Doris Day, Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra. I remember my dad got a song and played it over and over, it was My Yiddisher Mamma. My mum loved Dorris

Day and all the American singers, and she was always playing their records. But she's lost her memory now, so I'm the one who has to remind her now. I'm the one who reminds her of everything now.

JACOB

I started in 1990 and left my area and came to the UK. I was born in Sri Lanka in a town called Palali. Our area has been under the army now for twenty four years. The army built a camp near my house and there is a zone for five miles around it where nobody can go. I can't go back to my house, perhaps it has been destroyed. I had many photos. I left them in my house. All our property is inside the military zone.

My father worked at Palali airport. He spoke English. My grandfather built a church in Palali. There are three Catholic churches in Palali and my grandfather built one called Palali South. No one can go to the churches now.

I worked in Saudi Arabia. I saw camel there. I ate camel meat. The camel is a very important animal, it can walk for a long time, just going to places, walking in the desert without drinking.

I like the sun, I like it very hot. Then I feel very relaxed. In the hottest months of the year in Sri Lanka we drank Balmoral Toddy, all the shops served it, just during those four months. And there was also Coconut Toddy, but they served that all year round. The toddy was a special mixture, it was made with tamarind and it was delicious.

I like to take photographs, can I take your photograph?

JOSIE

We lived in Wales, that's where I was born. My father and grandfather worked in the mines. My father died in a mining accident and then his brother died, and my grandfather said - 'Wales has taken too many of us, and it won't take any more, we're moving.' That's how we moved to Southall, where my other grandparents were.

But that's not the end of it because my brother joined the army to do his National Service, and he was drowned in an accident. It really affected my mother badly, but you can't mope or complain can you, you've got to get on with it.

My brother had got married before he died, and he had a son, and do you know, that son still comes to see me now. He's more close to me than to his mother, because his mother doesn't want to talk about his father at all. And he says to me 'you know granny, you know about the family much more than my mother, if I come to you, you can answer all my questions....' He's called Michael.

I met my husband through my brother – because they were both stunt riders. My husband worked on the railways, but what he really enjoyed was stunt riding. He had a motorbike, he did stunts with a team, he went all over the country. And he loved snooker. He used to go to the snooker club near here even when we were in Greenford.



We came here about twelve years ago, and we came to look at this flat. And when my husband looked through this window, he said – you know, I can see the snooker club from here. So that was a good sign. He used to go there a lot, and every time he was on his way back, he'd give me a phone call before he left.

Then I used to watch for him through this window, and when he went through the park, he knew I was watching, and he stood there and pulled his pockets out to show he'd lost all his money....but he hadn't really, he always won.



My husband died a few years ago. He went into hospital for a routine examination, and while he was there they found he had advanced cancer. He was dead in two days. He was such a lovely man, we never argued, not once...well, the only thing we argued over was because I was jealous, I could be very jealous. He didn't like dancing and I did, but he used to say to me 'you go and do it, you enjoy it, I'll be waiting for you.'

Whenever I was down or moping, he would always have a joke to make me laugh. He used to say to me 'what's up duck?' And that duck there, on the shelf, I saw that in a shop quite recently and when I saw it, I looked at the writing on it and it said 'what's up duck'. So I bought it and it reminds me of him. Yes, I've had a good life, I wouldn't change it. If I could go back in time, I wouldn't change it, what would be the point, there's no point in moping is there, you've got to get on with it.

LIDIYA

I am Russian but I married an Armenian guy and I lived in Armenia for thirty years. That's when Armenia was part of the Soviet Union. I speak Russian but I can speak the Armenian language as well.

I was born in Ukraine, then when I was three we moved to Rostov on Don, it's near the Black Sea. I grew up in Nakhichevan and there are many Armenian people living there. That is where I met my husband and that is how I ended up living in Armenia.

You ask me about Stalin, yes, I can remember Stalin's funeral. I was thirteen years old when Stalin died. Oh...everybody at school wore black armbands, I see people crying and everybody moody.

And we lived through the war. You know that twenty million people died in the Soviet Union during the World War. Every family lose someone. My father died. Two of my uncles died. Every family lose two or three people, a lot of people. It was bad during the war. In Ukraine there was a church, German soldiers put people in the church, and then they explode the church. In Ukraine it was terrible.

My aunty told me a story about the war. She lived in a village near Rostov. And German soldiers came to live there. They lived maybe three months, six months there. And I remember my aunty told me that there was one woman, maybe forty years old. She had a son and a daughter. Then the German soldiers stayed and later, when they had gone, this woman was pregnant. She had a boy, a very nice boy. He had fair hair and blue eyes.

When we went to school after the war, everybody knew how to speak German. I can't speak German now, but I remember, when I went to school, everyone was speaking German.

I remember the toys we had. There were wooden toys, a wooden horse, a wooden dog, and a doll, like that doll, we had them in Russia too.

Sorry for my English, I can't speak it well.

LISEBY

I come from Mauritius. We spoke French. It was so hot there everybody lived outside, they went to the beach. I remember there were outdoor films. My father took me to see a Charlie Chaplin film. It was a silent film with the piano playing. My father liked that film and we went to see it again and again.



There were lizards everywhere on Mauritius. They used to stay completely still on the wall of a house. They could come into the house as well and when they were standing they were always lifting their heads as though they were listening. People used to say that they knew if you were telling some gossip, and if it was true, they would make a movement with their heads.

They were supposed to know everything and to remember what they heard and pass it on. I remember at least one time when my grandmother would begin to say something, then she would see that a lizard was in the house listening to her and she would drop her voice and say 'shh...don't let the lizard hear.'

I left Mauritius after we got our independence, because we were told that we still had a few years when we could go to England. My husband went first in 1968 and then I came in 1971. Oh, it was hard, there was a lot of racism, there were skinheads, we were very afraid of them. And the only work we could find was in hotels. I worked in the Park Lane Hilton. My husband trained as an engineer in Mauritius, but he left a year before he finished the course. When he came to England he got a job working on the railways. He stayed there till 1994, and then he retired so he did well. But it was hard when we first came.

In life, it's best to be good, see good and do good...

BARBARA

My mother was from a very good family, she went to Switzerland to go to finishing school. And my dad was a farm worker, that's all he was really, he told her he had a farm, but he ran it for someone else. And when she married him, her family disowned her. Completely. I never met any of them.

I was born in Skipton, and we lived in a village called Earby. We lived on the farm next to the moors. We had sheep and cows and pigs and we had some goats and some chickens. I used to collect the chickens eggs, then put them in a bucket, then when dad came round, I used to swing the bucket round and round, and the eggs never fell out. And he used to shout 'just wait till those eggs break....' and he used to chase us, and we used to run away.

We never went on holiday. Our entertainment was to go into the barn, and to jump down on the hay from up high. And we used to help with the harvest. My dad had a scythe, and he cut the hay, then we went along and pulled the hay out and put it in a line. Then he went along and put the bundles into a barrow, and we took it back to the barn on a horse and cart and dried it so the animals would have fodder during the winter.

We used to find mice in the fields. And there was a ferret as well, that used to live wild. And one day my father said 'look at the way that ferret is going to take the chicken's eggs'. And he told me to watch, and I saw the ferret get into the chicken house and climb up to the place where they laid their eggs, and this ferret got hold of one egg, then he lay on his back and held the egg against his chest, then he inched back down to the ground again. It was amazing to watch that.

I used to milk a cow, straight into the churn, the milk all bubbling. And I used to drink it immediately, no worries about TB or anything, it was always so sweet. And my mother took the milk, and she put it in the milk churn and turned the handle and turned it into butter and cheese. I remember helping to cut the butter up into pats. And my father would take everything to the market – the butter, the cheese, the eggs, the meat. My mother could dress a chicken beautifully – pluck them, arrange their legs, and my father took them and sold them at the market.

It was a five mile walk to school over the fields and the moors and it was just a little village school anyway. When the snow fell, there was no way we could get to school, the snow was six or seven feet deep. So I used to help dad when he went looking for sheep that were trapped in the snow. They used to shelter by walls, and the snow would drift over them, and bury them, and the sheep were breathing and there was a little hole that they made with their breath, which meant they were still alive. And when my dad saw those holes, he used to take a pole and push it down, and find where the sheep was, and then we used to dig it out.

BETTE

I've come back to the land of my birth. I was born here but we went over to South Africa because my father thought 'the grass would be greener' on the other side of the world. And it was! But I was born just up the road in Wembley and now I've come full circle.

I was nearly born in the side car of a motorbike. My father had a motor bike and my mother travelled in the sidecar. One day when she was pregnant with me they were going to Dimchurch and she suddenly started to bang on the dome of the sidecar. Father said 'mother, I'm trying to drive'. But she was going into labour. So he changed direction and went home and that's

where I was born, at home in Kingsbury. I might have been born in the sidecar.

My first day at school in South Africa was fine and my second day was a shock. In South Africa, there was English and Afrikaans, and the school I went to had one day in English and the next in Afrikaans. It was English on the first day, but the next day I thought they had all gone crazy, I couldn't understand what they were all talking about. And I went running home crying to my mother.



There was no TV in South Africa until the 1970s. We only had radio, so we had to make our own entertainment. Father had a wind-up gramophone and a set of 78rpm records, which we all loved. He took it with us onto the ship, the Warwick Castle, on our way to Cape Town. We danced on deck and had a party and the other passengers joined in. The whole journey took three weeks in those days.

My mother came back to England in the early sixties and I came with her. I was seventeen and I got a job in Boots on Oxford Street in the Photographic department. I had a friend at work who was going steady with the drummer from a band. One day she invited me to come along and watch them. We went to a club and there was a table reserved for the two bands that were playing. While one band played, the other one sat at the table with all the friends from both the bands. We were sitting there, and when my friend's band went to play, the other band came to sit down. There were four of them. It was the Beatles. You've got to remember that this was 1962 and nobody knew who they were. My friend took some photos with them and I developed them for her and she said 'do you want any?' I said no. When I went back to South Africa and Beatlemania broke out, nobody believed I had sat at a table with them and chatted. To this day I regret saying no to those photos.

I loved to dance. There is a dance in South Africa called Saki-Saki. It's danced to any sort of music, but it's really a cross between a Two Step and a Polka. It's a fast dance, the whole room dancing it together. You Saki-Saki down the straight, then at the corners you turn in a circle then Saki-Saki down the straight again. The man and the woman hold their arms out straight with their hands twisted together, and when it got really fast it was an incredible sight.

I used to be able to dance those dances, but not any more, not now the arthritis has set in. It makes me laugh, when I look at these pictures and see how we dressed. Even when we went to the beach I was in a straight skirt with stockings and smart shoes.

BOB

My memory goes back to the 1930s, I was born in 1925. I grew up around Covent Garden and we were poor. You didn't have benefits in those days and if you were down you were down. We used to make some money selling winkles. But they were empty winkles. We got them from the dustbins on Sunday and cleaned them up, then went across the river and sold them. You think that was wrong? It was a matter of survival. It was a matter of pennies or halfpennies, but there was a lot you could do with a penny or a farthing in those days.

We used to play in the street. There were marbles and there was a spinning top. We got hours of entertainment pulling each other up and down in my mother's pram. The street lights were gas, and up at the top there was a little pole. We got some rope and hung it from the pole and made a swing out of it. I was swinging on it one day and I fell off and broke my arm. I remember going to the doctor's and he said he'd put a splint on it and I could go to hospital. He went outside to cut a piece of wood with an axe to use for the splint. When he came back, he was still holding the axe. I thought he wanted to cut off my arm!

I was a milkman and a postman. I was on the buses and I was on the barrows at Shepherds Bush market. I was in the army and I was in the navy. I've had a mixed life. I used to have a bread barrow and pull it through Southall. Knock on madam's door with the breadbasket, ask her what she wanted, give her a divvy number. Then go back to the barrow and it was delivered to her door.

I used to go to the British Museum before the war. Got the bus there with my friends. Used to like walking around there.

I was called up during the war. I could have gone down the mines, but I didn't want to so I went into the Merchant Navy. I can still remember my number, it's funny how that stays with you isn't it? Later on, I volunteered for the army as well. And after the war, I was stationed in Potsdam, and it was the Cold War, it was just beginning. The Russians were on the other side, and every day there was some standoff with them. But we didn't have any bullets in our guns. So all these times we were facing the Russians there were no bullets. We were used to fighting, that was what we were ready for, that was probably why they didn't give us ammunition. I remember there was a Displaced Persons camp, and there was an uprising, and an

officer came into our mess and said 'get a couple of tanks and go over there and stop it'. So we went over there, and there was a crowd of people, and when they saw us, they backed off. But they didn't know we didn't have any ammunition in our guns.

I married a German girl, just after the war. We got married in Germany and when we came back to England we had to get married again in England. I learned to speak German and we lived there until 1953 but I was not popular over there, no, because I was marrying one of theirs you see.

I used to dress up really smart, have a collar and tie, coat with a velvet collar, hat. Men were men, and when you met a lady you took off your hat and opened the door for her. These days, when I get on the bus, I have middle aged women offering their seat to me! And I'm thankful for it. That's how I know I'm old.

If you've got memories it's in the mind all the time. If you've lost a partner or something like that, you don't need to look at a photograph, it's in your mind. It's all there isn't it?

DEREK

When I left school I really wanted to be a chef. But my mother thought there were always fights in kitchens, so she said no. My first job was in Men's Wear with a gentleman's outfitter in Piccadilly. Then I opened up a Greengrocers in Paddington directly opposite St Mary's Hospital. After three years of that, I went abroad to live in Mallorca to run a country club for an English couple. This was around 1966, 1967. I was there for a year.

After Mallorca I came back to London. By then I knew what I was good at - I liked seeing people enjoying themselves and I had lots of energy. I read in the paper that the Odeon in St. Martin's Lane were looking for a male receptionist for front of house duties. I went along. I got the job. Within 2 months they made me chief of staff. After 6 months they made me an assistant manager. I went from wearing a uniform into a dinner jacket.

Then I got married to one of the girl's in the box office. She had to be transferred to Odeon Marble Arch because you cannot have such a close relationship in case she is in the box office and I am in the front of the house, we could be fiddling tickets.

We started off living with her parents, but after a couple of years our son Justin came along and we needed more money to live on and we wanted to buy our own place. We bought a small flat in Tottenham and I asked to be promoted to a senior assistant. I went off on a six week training course . After that I used to do a lot of managerial relief work, and that was how I did a fortnight as manager of the Odeon Northfields. That was the cinema I used to go to as a child every Saturday morning. I loved that cinema, the interior is out of this world. From there I went to the Odeon Uxbridge and then the Odeon in Acton, which is now a Morrisons. Then I was asked to go to the Odeon Woodgreen which was much nearer to Tottenham, I was happy about that.

At Woodgreen I always loved doing the children's' Saturday morning. I built up that Saturday morning from 60 children to 600. There were a couple of orphanages in the area and I let them come for nothing. And the children loved me. I used to go on the stage and say - good morning, boys and girls. And they would shout - good morning, uncle. I said- I am not your uncle, I am Mr Derek. Then I'd tell a few little jokes. And then I'd say- let's get on with the film and I signalled to the projection box and the film started. They would shout hurray and I would go off and have my cup of tea.

I didn't think I was going to get promoted so I resigned from that job. A month after I left the general manager took early retirement. I would have been manager in his place. Very impatient I am at times.

After that, I went to be the cash manager of Selfridges. Then I left to work at Liberty's in Regent street. Everything was about more money, because by now we had more children. My wife went back to work when the children were quite small. She is a career person.

I was in hospital for a little bit. It took me 3 years to make a recovery. After that I got my old job back as an assistant manager at Odeon Leicester Square. I escorted the stars whenever they came to see a film. Princess Margaret came when I was looking after the Odeon Haymarket. Her detective came in one afternoon and wanted 4 tickets for a film about Tchaikovsky. The film had a horrible scene when Glenda Jackson was in the madhouse and there were hands reaching up to her. I hated that. I didn't like Princess Margaret much either.

In the early 80s my wife's parents went to live back in Sri Lanka and we went with them. I had a minibus called Derek H King's Tours and Travel. Sri Lanka is a beautiful country. We lived in a bungalow near the beach and the driver lived just across the road. When I wanted him, I just rang a bell and he came running.

My wife and I separated within six months. She came back to the UK with the children. I saw them off at the airport in Colombo. We were all in tears. We never really agreed about anything. It took us 20 years to finally divorce. My wife finished up with an OBE working for the government. She also opened up 3 Chinese take aways and then she had a Chinese restaurant in the Docklands.

I've always enjoyed seeing people enjoy themselves. That's how it's been. That's my life.

DONALDA

I grew up in the Hebrides on the island of Harris. When I was younger there was nothing on the island, no electricity, no gas, nothing. We used to get water from a well, and we used to use paraffin lamps to provide light. And everything else came from fire and peat. We used to have a fire burning in the grate, and when it was dark, we lit the paraffin lamps. I had to walk two and a half miles to school, up and down the hills. I had to look out for the bull too, because that was his grazing patch!

We all spoke Gaelic, I started to speak broken English at school, but I didn't speak English till I left the island when I was sixteen, then I taught myself. Everything on the island was in Gaelic. Now I am forgetting how to speak it. If I returned to the island, and listened to people on a bus speaking it, then I would begin to pick it up again. But I don't speak it now, because who would I speak it to?

If you wanted to visit each other in the evening, you took a torch. We called the visits a Ceilidh, when you went to each other's houses, and had cups of tea and cake and talked and told ghost stories. And after that, I used to be scared to go home. And we used to meet on bridges and dance, people played the fiddle or the comb on a bit of paper.

We didn't go to the doctor. If there was something wrong with us, my mother had a row of bottles, with potions in them. I don't know what they were, but each one was a remedy for something.

I lived on the island until I was fifteen, and then I left to find work on the mainland. First city I saw was Perth, you can imagine the impression it made on me. I'd never seen a train, I'd never seen a picture house, till I left the island. And when I came back, I wore trousers and make-up and the old people talked about me, and said that I was such a show off! It seems so strange now, but in my time there was nothing on the island, no television nothing.

After Perth I went to Manchester, and I was a nanny with the Robertson Jam family. We lived in a big house, and it was hard to find a boyfriend because whenever I went out, the chauffeur took me and waited for me and then took me back home again. I remember going into Manchester for the first time on my own, I was seventeen years old, and I went to a department store and I saw an escalator for the first time.

My grandchildren ask me whether I had a computer in my room at home, they don't understand how different things were, and I have to tell them, I didn't even have a room of my own. I shared it with my two sisters, and we all slept together in the one bed.

I remember going down to Butlins. I worked there. In fact I was Miss Butlins one year. I might have some photos, but I won't show them to you.

During the war I used to see large ships sailing across the horizon, you could see them from the island. And I used to dream that one of those ships would come nearer and carry me away, and I would go to new places and see new things. That was my dream.

TONY

I've been lucky in life. The way I see it, you've only got one time in this crazy old world so you might as well join the bandwagon. I'm 87 and when I look at the kids today, they can't do what I did. I'm very lucky to do what I did.



Actually I was born here in England, but I grew up in Zimbabwe. My father was American, he used to be a promoter putting on concerts. He moved to Africa before the war and then in 1939 we came back to England. That's where I had my first business at the end of the war. I had a supply of stockings and I used to stand outside factory gates and sell them to the workers. I stayed in England till after the war, but they wanted me to do National Service and I didn't want to. So I went back to Africa. I ran around Africa for a few years after that. I was in a dance

band to begin with, played the piano and the guitar. But Carpal Tunnel Syndrome did for that. Then I worked as a barker for a Fair, I worked as a roofer in the mines in Zambia, I did a lot of things.

I think I've worked out that I've been in 64 countries. I've lived in the Far East, Africa, North America, Europe. The last job I had was in 1961, and since then I've always been in business, working for myself. I came back to England in 1985, and started some businesses here. I could tell you some stories about those. But what I'd like to tell you is the story of how I became a miner.

I'll give you a definition of Luck – it's when Preparation meets Opportunity. By that definition, I have always been lucky. Let me tell you what I mean.

In 1955 I came back to England from Africa. By then all my family were in North America. My mother was in Toronto, so I went over there. I used to do card tricks with a marked deck and when I was in Toronto I met a French Canadian who was rather impressed with me. He said that if we went up North to the rock iron mines we could play blackjack with the miners with a marked deck and we'd make a fortune. So we went up there, but the moment I saw the miners I said – are you mad, trying to play with a marked deck with that lot. So I had to find a job. The only thing I could do was dig ditches. The mines need drainage, so I dug ditches in the open air. After five weeks of that, I'd had enough and I went to Winnipeg. I started running around Canada and America selling African curios, but wherever I went, people said – if you want to make good money, you should become a miner.

So a while later I was in Vancouver and I started thumbing through a Yellow Pages and I see the address of the Mining Association. I went there and I said – I'm looking for a job in a mine. They said – we don't hire miners, we're just the welfare association for miners. Then they said – do you have a Masters Certificate? This is what I mean by luck. So I say – Yes. Bear in mind that all I've ever done in a mine is dig ditches. But the girl in the office liked me and she said – well, there's a job up in the Yukon, would you like to go up there? So I say – Yes. Then she gave me a form and I had to go to the hospital to get myself a health check. Then I came back to the Mining Association and

they gave me a chit and a plane ticket. And before I know it, I'm on a plane to the Yukon.

I arrived in the Yukon at three o'clock in the morning and it's broad daylight. I get a taxi about thirty odd miles to the mine, and I hand in my piece of paper. My name's already on the list, so they give me bedding and work clothes and the last thing I have to do is report to the mine captain. I got to his office and there's already a line of people standing there. Then the mine captain comes in. He looks around the room and he says – My name's Guy Laporte. I'm very busy, so I'll take the miners first. I didn't realise that some of them were mine labourers and some of them were miners. This is where luck comes into it. He started at the other end of the line to me and he says to the first man – What have you done? And the man says – I've done Raising, Stoking, Drifting...all these words. Finally he gets down to me, he says – And what have you done? And I say – Raising, Stoking, Drifting. So Guy Laporte nods and says – OK, report to the shift boss. There you have it – luck is when preparation meets opportunity.

So I go down into the mine and report to the shift boss and he looks at me and says – I'll call you Lofty and here's your helper. And here's another piece of luck. My helper is German and I can speak German, so of course he likes me. Then the shift boss says to me – They've blasted it but not shifted it, so put a pop in it and blow the shoot and take that piece of rock down, and then I'll be back. So of course I turn to my helper and say – Put a pop over there and blow the shoot and take it down. And he says – Ya. So I'm watching him and he takes a big blow pipe with a steel rod in it, and just at that moment the shift boss comes back. So I immediately take the blow pipe from him but I didn't realise that you're supposed to put it on a tripod, it's so heavy. And I'm standing there holding it, and the shift boss starts to laugh and he says – You crazy Swede, is that what they do in Sweden, and he starts to laugh. He evidently thought I was Swedish from my fair hair you see. So that's how I started as a miner. And the other piece of luck was that you had to go to a training meeting with a safety engineer, who happened to be Welsh. And he showed me some new books on dynamiting and he lent them to me and I read them and learned all about it. And after a while, I got good at it. It was 1956, I was twenty seven. Preparation meets opportunity. That is how I became a hard rock miner.

VARTAN

My great grandfather was a priest. He lived in Nakhichevan, which is between Iran and Azerbaijan. The people living there are all from Armenia. At that time there was a war between Turkey and Armenia, and my great granddad ran away from Nakhichevan and came to Iran. He was a priest, the head of the priests in his area, and he brought some gold with him and ran away to Iran. That is how my granddad came to live in Iran. We used to visit my granddad on his farm. He was a rich man with a big house. He had sixteen horses and he sold them to the people for transport. That was the only way to travel in those days, on horseback, and my granddad got rich selling his horses. I remember he had one horse that was completely white, and nobody was allowed to ride it except him. In Iran there is a summer holiday for three months when all the schools close. My mum used to take us to visit our granddad for those three months. I remember the village near to his house. And I remember the donkeys with baskets on each side, carrying tomatoes and potatoes, that sort of thing.

In my time in Iran about sixty years ago, we played something called Seven Stone. We put seven stones on each other, and from twenty metres away children throw another stone to try to knock all the stones down. There was no prize or anything, it was just the pride of winning. We used to gather outside the town to play Dodgeball. You need space to play. Children stand around, someone is in the middle, we threw the ball at them, and they tried to catch it or get out of the way. And we played Volleyball and also there is another game, you would call it Cricket. Two people throw pieces of wood into the air. The first person throws his up and the second person tries to hit it with his piece of wood. Other people wait around, just like in cricket.

But what happened, when we grew up we started to play cards. By then I was a teenager and I started to play backgammon and chess and bridge. But then something happened. If you got time, I'm trying to tell you very short:

When I left school, my father told me to go to get a job. I looked in the paper and I saw something advertised, in a place that I knew. I had to get a bus there, but I knew where it was, it wasn't too far. I got the bus and I went to the address, but the man had already given the job to someone else.

What could I do? I had a cup of tea, and then I turned round to go home. I didn't have so much money, so I walked some of the way, then I saw a bus going all the way back home. I was tired, and I decided to spend all my money on the ticket to get home. I got on and sat down, so tired. The bus kept stopping and people got on, and it was full. Then I realised that a woman with a baby was standing right next to me. I was so tired and disappointed, I didn't want to give up my seat to her. But I wanted to say something to her, so I said 'if you like, I'll hold the baby for you.' And she was so pleased and gave the baby to me. It was a happy baby, and I played with it and bounced it up and down and the baby made me feel happy too.

But then the old man next to me pulled my arm and said, look, she's leaving and I turned round, and the woman had gone. She'd left me with the baby. I started to panic. But I knew my only chance was to make a big noise, and I shouted and the bus stopped and people came to see what the matter was, and I said, stop that woman, she's trying to leave her baby with me. I kept on making a big noise and shouting and I showed the baby, and people could see that I was a young boy. Then the police came and they found the woman and brought her back to the bus. But she just denied it was her baby. I kept on insisting so much that eventually the police said we all had to go back to the police station to ask more questions. So we all went to the police station, and the policeman questioned me and questioned her, and she said it had nothing to do with her and that I was just trying to get rid of my own baby.

And then the policeman had an idea. He put the baby on the floor between us and told each of us to call to it. But the baby had been with me for two hours and I had been bouncing it and singing to it, so when I called it, it came to me. And now the policeman threatened me and told me I could go to jail for trying to say that it belonged to the woman, and I was crying and weeping and I didn't know what to do.

The situation was really terrible. I couldn't go home with another child, there were already twelve children in my family. But the policeman was threatening me, so I took the baby and I went to leave the police station. I was in a daze and I didn't know what to do. I started walking down the stairs and I was carrying the baby in my arms and I stepped onto the next step and there must have been some piece of food that had been dropped there, because I slipped on it and fell. I dropped the

baby and it hit its head on the stairs and there was a lot of blood that gushed out of its head, and now I was so upset, I just shouted 'HELP....' and I kept on shouting 'HELP...HELP...'
Then I woke up. I was wet with sweat. It was a terrible dream.
I made that story up myself.

WORK AND PLAY

TONY

There's a period of mine I'd completely forgotten about. Did you know for a short time I acted in TV programmes? I was in Japan for a while in the 1950s and I ended up selling encyclopedias there. That's another story. Anyway when I was in Japan they used to beg me to work in TV because in those days they couldn't find any actors to play European characters in their serials. I never did, but when I came to England, I ended up in Manchester. And one day I was walking past the Granada TV studios and suddenly I thought I'd go and talk to them. So I barged in and said I'm Anton Bernard – that was the first name that occurred to me - and said I was a big actor in Japan and now I'm back in England. So they said they'd keep me in mind. I didn't think anything of it, but when I got home there was a telegram, which said - if available for small speaking part, please phone. So I phoned and it turned out that just after I left, one of the actors called in sick. It was for a show called Walk on Water and they wondered if I could stand in for him. So I went along and they gave me a line to say. Then two weeks later, I was offered a part in The Plough and the Stars so I did that. Then in the next two weeks another part came up in The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd. But what I couldn't stand was all this silly nonsense between the actors - all the guys talking about how they did that, how good they were I couldn't be bothered with all that. So after the third one, I stopped and I never did any more.

HELEN

I came to England from Singapore in 1970. I came into Heathrow, I stayed with my cousin in London, then up to Birmingham. I remember, someone told me the price of something and they said 'it's two bob', and I thought 'why are you talking about bob, what has that got to do with money?' I came to England to do nursing. I was a recovery nurse, with the heart surgeons. I was good at the work but I got bored, I thought I'd try Scotland. The matron warned me that I would not understand them very well up there. But I went to Edinburgh, and when I got there I realised that she was right.

Even in Birmingham, I found it hard to understand what they were saying to me. And in Scotland I didn't understand at all. So then I came to London. I went to St. Bartholomew's, and I had a job there. And suddenly, I could understand what everybody was saying. Now I thought to myself, at last I am in England.

EILEEN

I used to do motivational speaking on a Monday, and there were about 150 women there, and my late husband would do the music for me. One Monday I was doing my motivational training and it was February the 14th, and my husband had an agenda. He was supposed to play all sorts of different records, but what he did was play Glen Miller, I'm in the Mood for Loving. That's all he played, all morning. Oh the things he used to do to me!

GWENDA

Ealing used to be full of factories. It was easy to get a job, you could leave one place in the morning and get a new job in the afternoon. I started off working for Jensen's. I sewed a seam on a swimming costume, that's all I did all day. I didn't do that for too long, because I got married when I was nineteen and then I had my children. It's funny how time passes isn't it?

BEN

You're right about Ealing. All the factories have gone. I was born in Kenya, in Nairobi. I came to England in 1964, when it was easy to come. I studied printing, and then I worked in Ealing and Southall and Shepherd's Bush. We used to print labels, tickets, cartons, all sorts of things. But all the companies I worked for in Ealing have gone now. J Lyon's, IAL, they've all gone now.

TONY

In 1958 I had some money in my pocket and I went by car with three other blokes, we went to San Francisco. And when I was there I saw a boat going to Fiji and the South Seas. So I just bought a ticket. And I ended up in Fiji. And there was a Scotsman there, called Bill Nimmo, a crazy Scotsman, and he was a bee keeper. And I went into business with him, we made honey. We got our hives, made them from boxes, and we ordered the trays with the wax in for the bees to make their honey combs, and we collected the bees, or at least Bill Nimmo did that. Because I couldn't stand the little devils. And then we

took them up to our piece of land where there were flowers in bloom all year round. We made quantities of the stuff, used to get big barrels and fill them with honey and ship it out. And I would have been a rich man, if it wasn't for one thing. Hurricanes. They come to that part of the world quite often, and one was brewing somewhere in the South Seas, and it came to our island and went straight over our apiary and we lost everything.

DEREK

When I was assistant manager at the Odeon Haymarket in the 1970s, I got a visit from a policeman. He showed me his official warrant card and said- I am Princess Margaret's personal body guard. She would like to see the film. It was a film about Tchaikovsky. He said - Will you be on duty? I said yes, I shall be here. Well the big rolls Royce came up and she was wearing her mink coat. I said - Good evening, royal highness. She nodded her head. She was with Lord Snowdon. They brought two people with them and they wanted to sit together. Well, we were sold out, so I needed to ask a couple if they would move to the seats behind. I said to the man - it's for Princess Margaret. Then he said something about her and said no I will not move. I said- look, you can have your tickets free, I'll refund you and I'll give you tickets for the next production. He said, I'll do it for you, but not for her. On their way out I let them use the lift and outside the big rolls Royce was already there and they got in. She did not even say thank you. But Lord Snowdon came back and shook my hand and said thank you very much. I gave them a wave good bye and thought I hope they won't come back again.

HOLIDAYS

DONALDA

When I was in the Hebrides our holidays were all on the island. In the summer you could see the Northern Lights and the sun hardly set. It was light for twenty three hours each day. So we played and played. We did things like jumping onto haystacks and pinching turnips from peoples' gardens. There was this man who loved his roses. He had a rose bush and we tried to pinch roses from it and he always hid behind the bush and tried to catch us pinching them....

But that was when I was a child. Do you want to listen to my Grand Canyon holiday story? I went with my daughter and son and the grandchildren. This was about fifteen years ago. I went everywhere in Las Vegas. I stayed at the Mandalay Bay hotel which has over a thousand bedrooms and six swimming pools/ But the best part of the holiday was a visit to the Grand Canyon. We did it in style. We took a limousine service to pick up the helicopter in the early morning and we flew towards the South Rim of the canyon as the sun came up. Then we landed



in the desert for a champagne breakfast served by the pilot. After that we went back to the airport and picked up a coach to the Colorado river and went sailing. Then another coach to the Hoover Dam, spent a couple of hours there. Then a limousine to the Stratosphere Tower Restaurant, known as the Top of the World because it's 800 feet high. The restaurant revolves 360 degrees every eighty minutes so you start your meal looking at one side of Las Vegas and you end it looking at the other.



Then back to the hotel to play the one armed bandits. We had tickets for a couple of shows, one for Madonna at the Hilton and one for Barry Manilow at the MGM. But I didn't go because I was too tired. That was one of the best holidays. I've had others, but that was the best because I was with my children and grandchildren.

GWENDA

I had a holiday I'll never forget. It was back in the sixties. I had five kids, my husband was a coal man, we had no money. So come the summer, my husband cleaned his lorry up and we all got in the lorry and we went off to Selsey Bill. Now my husband had brought a tent. It's just a bit of canvas with a few poles and he's never put up a tent before. He put it up and we were all standing there, and without warning – it all falls down again. We

laughed so much. Then the kids all say let's go fishing, so off they go with my husband who's never been fishing in his life. I've got a photo somewhere of him trying to do this fishing thing. We just never stopped laughing. That was the best time because we laughed so much. Even now, I reminisce about that holiday with my children. That was back in the early sixties, Selsey Bill. Never forget it.

BARBARA

When I was a child we never had any holidays, we just used to play all summer around the farm. But when I had young children of my own, we had a Bedford van, and my husband made seats in the back of the van and we went on camping holidays. We used to store all the food under the seats, and between the seats we used to store all the mattresses and the children went on top of the mattresses with the dog, and me and my husband in the front seats.

One day we were going along - you know you get these bumps



in the road – and we were going along and we didn't see the bumps and we literally took off and everyone fell down. We had

six boys, they all went up in the air and came down again on the mattresses. We never had a proper tent, it was just a piece of canvas. For furniture we had a wallpapering table and canvas chairs and a little gas cooker to put the dinners on. We went to Scotland mostly and once we went to Torquay but it rained all the time.

That was all the holiday I ever had until I was into my eighties when my son took me on holiday to a hotel. That was the very first time when I went on holiday and stayed in a lovely hotel.

VARTAN

I remember the holidays in Iran when I was young. In Iran in the summer time, people usually go to the sea. I remember so many holidays by the seaside with my family. We went to the Black Sea on the border with Russia. We went at summer and also on the Iranian New Year, the 21st of March. That is a big holiday in Iran. It's the first day of Spring. All the country closes everywhere for two weeks, all the shops all the offices. And nearly fifty, sixty percent of the people are going to a different town or seaside to see friends or family. The capital is empty and everyone is travelling on the road. Unfortunately the road is not very safe and secure, it's narrow and with so many cars there is a huge traffic jam . Three, four hours, half a day you are in the traffic jam. And it's hot. I remember that clearly.

PETS

BARBARA

I had an Alsatian dog and a cat called Ninja, my first cat. And they were friends. When the Alsatian had puppies Ninja sat in the kennel with them all the time, licking the puppies all the time, and she never left them. And they used to play games. Ninja, she'd chase the dogs and jump up with her paws on their chests. And they used to carry her in their mouths. They all slept together, they slept inside together at night. Those were beautiful dogs and a beautiful cat.



GWENDA

We had two goats. When we were down in Norfolk, we were living near Swafham. It's a big market town and they had a market every week. I'm sitting in the van with my kids and my husband gets out with my son in law, they said - well just have a look round. They walk off for a moment, then all of a sudden, the children say - oh mum, look, dad's got two goats. And he's

coming across the main road with two goats. I say - what have you got them goats for? He says - they'll eat all the grass. We called them Sue and Jenny because that was my friend and her daughter. They were nice goats. We did have some fun with them, trying to get them in at night. But they ate the grass.

VARTAN

35 years ago I went to Iran to see my mum. While I was there I met an Armenian pastor who's come from Iraq. And he told me a story. This is true, this is what he said. He said – six months ago, I was in a school, and the toilet was away from the building. I come out from the building and I want to go to the toilet. I start walking to it, but the first step, suddenly a pigeon comes and sits on my shoulder. So I stop. I think, why is he coming to sit on my shoulder, pigeons are looking for things to eat but I've got nothing for him, I ask myself why. So just I stand there and the pigeon stayed sitting on my shoulder, I looked at it out of my right eye and it didn't move and I didn't move. And after a while, I relax, I think that there's nothing strange, I start to walk forward and the pigeon fly away. Then five metres or ten metres before I arrive at the toilet, as I am walking towards it, all the toilet falls down.

This is the story that the man told me. He said that if that pigeon didn't come and sit on his shoulder, he would be standing in the toilet when it fell down, and he would have been killed.

BARBARA

In 1936 it was the King's Jubilee. George the Fifth, twenty five years after the coronation.

In Earby near where I lived in Yorkshire we had a procession. I was a child, I think I was supposed to be Little Bo Peep, and I had a sheep with me. This was Titch.

Earby is not a very big village, everybody knew everybody else. After the procession, Titch became famous in the village.

Everybody used to come to the farm and shout for Titch and he'd come running, everybody knew him you see. And they'd pet him and make a fuss of him and it got to the point that Titch was out of control. He was a male sheep you see, and as he got bigger he got fiercer. He used to run at me and butt me with his horns, he was a devil. And by that time he wouldn't mix with the other sheep on the farm. So my father tried to put him with the

herd on the next farm. But they found out in the village and they used to come down to that farm as well and shout for him. So in the end they slaughtered him. We were having dinner one day, and my brother said to me - do you know what we're having for dinner? And I say - yes, roast lamb. And he said - we're having our Titch.



EILEEN

Over the years in South Africa we had Minah birds. We've had three of them and they are amazing pets. None of them lived in a cage. The first one, the my daughters rescued it when it was washed out of its nest in a storm. It was a baby, and when they brought it in, it had no feathers. But we looked after it and it survived. The funniest thing ever was watching it learn how to fly. It used to climb up on the bedspread and stand on the edge of the bed. Then it lunged itself into space and landed on the floor. Then it picked itself up, back up the bedspread and try again. As it grew, it would run round the table when we ate and pick at the peas, it loved peas. But it never lived in a cage, it lived on the top of the kitchen dresser. We had another one – the dog got that one, we didn't talk to that dog for days, it was in total disgrace. And the third one, my husband was in the garage, and if flew in and landed on his shoulder, we never found out who lost it. So we decided to let it go. But it had its own ideas and it flew into the bathroom, perched on the shower rail and that was where it lived from then on. It used to fly around with the wild birds in the day, but when you went into the shower in the evening, it would give you hell. It

was a very friendly bird, it would sit on your shoulder when you went for a walk, and if you went too fast it would peck you on the ear. This one learned to talk and used to mimic my mother. Those were our minah birds.

GWENDA

We used to have a lot of fun with greyhounds. My husband Bill, he loved his greyhounds, used to walk miles with them. We took them to race as well, but they never used to win much. We used to go all over with them to the different tracks, all over the country. Those dogs were a lot better looked after than we were half the time.

BOB

The worst enemy to a milkman or a postman is a dog. And I've been a milkman and a postman. An animal is an animal, they're only protecting their territory, but you go in their gate, and they get you. When I was being trained as a postman I was told that you never put your hand in the letter box. The small ones were the worst, the little ones you couldn't see half the time, used to get under your ankles. You had your bag and everything and you just couldn't protect yourself. I was in the union, and it came to the point when some of our men had really nasty bites. We were taking legal action against the owners. I was lucky, I only ever had a few marks.

MEMORABLE DAYS

EILEEN

My memorable day was our trip to New York. It was me and my late husband. I remember getting off the plane and driving into New York in the early morning. Seeing that New York skyline I got quite choked up. How can I explain it - for years I'd always seen the skyline of New York in photos and films, and I couldn't believe that I was actually seeing it in real life. We went into a hotel, I'm so tired from the flight, but my husband says, you're not unpacking, let's go out, let's go and see New York. It was half past six in the morning and we went out into the New York streets. It was like a scene from the movies. Early morning and there's no traffic. Then there's the water cart that goes squirting all the water on the road. It was so early, the streets were empty and we ended up in a coffee shop and had coffee and doughnuts with the workers. And I really couldn't believe I was there. I've been to many other places in the world but that was quite something.

BARBARA

My memorable day was VE Day. That's Victory in Europe, the end of the war. I was in the army in Brussels on duty, because by that time I was in the military police. And we were riding along in a jeep, going on sentry duty probably. Everybody is out of their houses celebrating and they're all drinking. And the driver of our jeep was drunk too. The streets in Brussels are very wide but somehow he hit the bollards in the middle of the road. I was thrown out the back of the car, right across the side of the road.

I'm lying there with blood pouring out of my head and everybody's gathering round me, and they're all saying, give her cognac give her whiskey. Anyway somehow I ended up in Antwerp hospital, and when I got there the surgeon was drunk as well. I had to wait till the next day to get my head all stitched. I've still got a great big lump on my head. I'll never forget that.

EILEEN

I can remember when they had the Olympics in 1948. I remember going past Wembley Stadium on the 83 bus and seeing the Olympic Flags there. And all my life I've said – if they ever come back to England again I want to be there. I applied for tickets to the opening ceremony but didn't get them, but my sister Bette and me were given tickets one morning to the Olympic Stadium. We sat right in front of the podium where they presented the medals, watched many events, took part in the Mexican Wave. It was only a few hours but it's a day I'll never forget.

BETTE

A day I'll never forget was the day we went to the Olympic park. That's the day the Olympics really came alive for me. There was such a build up, we were watching all the preparations and then we got tickets to go into the stadium. We went all over the park, took photos with the stadium in the background. I thought - this is a once in a lifetime opportunity.

EILEEN

Hang on, hang on, that's not the end of the story. We also applied for tickets to the Party in the Park when the Olympic flame came to Ealing. And again, we didn't get them. But we decided we'd go down there anyway. So there we were with our Union Jack Stetsons, our flags and our Union Jack jackets, we're walking in the park and a young guy walked up to us and says – “you look as though you're enjoying yourself, are you going to the concert”? Nope, we didn't get tickets. So he said – here you are, here's two tickets and we got into the Party. Right in front of the big cauldron with the flame. We were very lucky.

JOSIE

One of my memorable days was when I went with my husband to see him do stunt riding. It was just after I'd met him and we weren't married at the time. My husband used to do stunt riding on motorbikes. He was in a team and they used to go all over the country. They were up to all tricks. The day I went with him, they were booked at Wembley. And when we got there we found that one of the team hadn't turned up. So guess who they put in there? Fortunately I could ride a motor bike, so I had to ride in their display. Then he said to me - I want you to lie down because I'm going to go over you...so I lie down...he says, no the other way, I said you'd be riding over my head, he said - that's the idea.



I had to lie down and they jumped over me on their bikes. My mother said to me – you're mad, one of these days you're going to get killed. Oh, he was up to all tricks my husband was.

EILEEN

I've thought of another memorable day. I got to be in a movie. I was working down in Durban near the docks and they were making a film there. I was with my friends from work and we went down to have a look. There were six of us girls in a car, and we're just being nosy, watching them making the film. And this young guy came over, he was the stand in for the action shots. He comes over, six girls, chat, chat, chat. And finally he said - do you want to meet Richard Todd? In those days Richard Todd was a big movie star – he was in Dam Busters and many other movies, he often played officer types. So Richard Todd came over to meet us. Well, he's Irish and one of the

girls was called Colleen and I'm Eileen and so he invited both of us to go and watch them film the next day out in the Valley of a Thousand Hills. He actually came to my flat and picked us up in his Volvo and took us there himself, we were the guests of honour. And you know on these film sets they each have canvas chairs with their names on. Well, Marianne Koch was the big female star but she wasn't there that day, she had dark hair. And the other female star, I can't remember her name, she wasn't there either, she had fair hair. So Colleen and I had their chairs with their names on. And Colleen had long dark hair and I had light hair and everybody who came to watch thought we were the stars.

They said they were looking for extras for the next day but we said we had to go back to work. Richard Todd drove us back to Durban and on the way it turned out that he and our boss were commandos in the war together. So he came back to our flat, phoned the boss, had a chat and got Colleen and me the day off. So we were walk-ins in a movie. When we went to see it in the cinema, there was a scene when Jeremy Lloyd is meeting Marianne Koch off the plane. And they stand there waiting to go through customs and I was standing behind them, and I was on the screen for quite a long time. And the whole row of friends at the cinema went –ooooohhhh!!!! The film is called Coast of Skeletons. It's on the TV from time to time. But it's not widescreen on the TV so you can only see my arm. What happy times!

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Happy birthday, and many returns to O'Grady
You're carpets are soft and your gardens are shady
You're thirty years old, that's the long and the short
And there's nowhere else better than O'Grady court

There's got to be bricks and there's got to be mortar
The heating must work and you need running water
But to make a real home you need one thing beside
You need people and memories to fill it inside

The people who live here are free as the breeze
They go anywhere and they do as they please
They travel by bus, coach, train, sail with the tide
And if all else fails - then they take Dial-a-Ride

Each life has begun in a different location
And each person followed a different vocation
The twists and the turns have all led at last
To stories and photos that speak of the past

So please read this book - it has one intention
To show you O'Grady Court's multi dimension
This book takes the stories that each person brought
All mixed together - that's O'Grady Court!

So to O'Grady Court, let's make a glad toast
There's nowhere else better, that's no idle boast
May O'Grady continue to bubble and fizz
May the people inside make this place what it is

