

**Joan France**Key:**I: Interviewer****R: Respondent****I: Okay. So just to kick off, Joan, if you could just tell me a little bit about yourself and where you were born.**

**R:** My name's Joan France, and I'm one of a family of three sisters, a brother, mother and father. We lived in 24 King Street, which is opposite St Paul's Road. Two up and two down... My father worked for his father, who was a market gardener in Prestbury, and my mother's family lived two streets down, which was Hereford Place, and we looked it up and they think they're from gypsy decent. I can remember when she used to put a shawl round her shoulders and a cap on her head and go to a pub at the end of Hereford Place to get half a pint of beer or something, one of those. She had a son called Reggie and he used... I can still remember, he used to put the bike with the wheel out in the kerb and put some seed down, and he used to put a piece of string on the wheel, hide inside, and it was pigeon for dinner. He did it regularly.

**I: So when is it you were born, Joan?**

**R:** I was born 29/9/29, September 1929, and I was born in King Street. My mother had three girls, and we had, I think, a small double bed, and we all three slept in that for all our lives till we got married. It's difficult to explain. We were never hungry and we were never without clothes or shoes, but we never had any money. There was no money about in those days. So you had new clothes twice a year, new shoes twice a year, and...

**I: So this is when you were a child, so before the war.**

**R:** Yes, over the road. Yes, well, I was 12 when the war was declared. But it's really strange, I never felt I was poor, never felt I was poor. I had lots of friends, always played in the streets of course. You never played in the house because there wasn't room. You had a job to sit down to eat; you couldn't sit and play. But it was a very self-centred little life. We all got on. My mother had very strong, very strong views, and it was... I did write some down. "Nobody's better than anybody, king or tramp. God made everybody" - she wasn't a religious lady - "God made everybody and you respect everybody, because their life is respected." That was one. Another one was, "Food on the table, roof over your head, fire in the grate: that's all you need. Everything else is extras, and they're wants. And you know what want did, he didn't get it." We never asked for anything. We always knew that if my mother could have afforded it, she would've given it to us. I got a whole thing full of them. You always respected everybody else. I'm not saying we didn't... You know where Brunswick Street is up here? Yeah, well Brunswick Street was the roughest, toughest area.

**I: Was it? Why's that?**

R: You never ran past... If you went past... in St George's Road, there's a big church. It's flats now. That was the Methodist church, St George's, and we used to go up there three times a day on Sunday to Sunday school, and we used to go to Brownies and clubs, but you always ran by the end of Brunswick Street. You never walked.

I: **Right. Were there some unsavoury people living there?**

R: They were all unsavoury to us. We were terrified of them, yeah. We used to just run by. Somebody said to me, "Somebody's bought a house down..." I said, "Brunswick Street?" Now it's all young couples. And Hereford Place where my grandmother lived, that was all slums, and they built the houses down the other side of St Margaret's Road, the other side. They rehoused; that was the first slum clearance of St Paul's, and they came from down the lower... and there. They were lovely houses, and we just walked past them.

I: **So your mother who had these wonderful sayings, that everyone's kind of the same, it doesn't matter... was your mother from the area as well?**

R: Yes, she was. Yeah, she was brought up here. Her sister lived next door, Auntie Nell, and she was better than us because she only had one child and my mum had three.

I: **They'd a bit more space.**

R: A bit more space, and they were a little bit better off with only one in there.

I: **Okay. And do you think... So when you were a child and your mother had this wonderful saying, I suppose looking back on it now you can say that... Because the part of the town that you grew up in, there's a distinct difference between that area and other parts of the town.**

R: You didn't tell anybody you lived in Lower Dockham. You never told people you lived there. You say, "I live by St Paul's, just by St Paul's." They'd really have to know you before you told them where you lived.

I: **So you were ashamed of saying it?**

R: Oh, you wouldn't... not only ashamed, they wouldn't give you a job. They'd say, "Oh, are you?" and they wouldn't speak to you again.

I: **Oh right, okay.**

R: No, you really were... But it didn't matter...

I: **Was that because the area was regarded as poor and rough?**

R: Yeah, really rough. I mean, I don't know if you know Grove... Have you heard anybody tell you about Grove Street in Lower Dockham?

I: **Well, I know where Grove Street is, and that's where the community centre is now.**

R: Is it? Well, in my day it was all the drunks and all the - my mother was very proud and she called them men of the road - tramps and drinkers. They all ended up there.

I: **On Grove Street.**

R: On Grove Street, and anybody... And I always had a terrible fear of people who were drunk, right from a child. I would go right round the block, and my mother used to say, well, you touched them, they'd fall over. But I always had a fear of them, so I didn't... But we had a member of parliament... Has anybody told you about Mr Lipson?

I: **No.**

R: Well, Mr Lipson was a Jewish gentleman, and he was an independent MP. As children we used to sing, "Vote, vote, vote for Mr Lipson. Who's that knocking at the door?" Because the Conservatives would bring a car taking you to vote for the Conservatives, but you got in the car and voted to Mr Lipson, you see, when you got there. But he was a wonderful gentleman, and he did a lot for Lower Dockham. And after him, Mr... I've written it down.

I: **So was he from the area or was he just somebody who was sympathetic?**

R: No, he was just somebody who had great, deep... how can I put it? Great, deep caring of other people. You always knew you went to him. Then we had a Mr Irving. Mr Irving was... He was a single gentleman, and he had a hotel up the Bath Road, and he was... He used to look after the people who had... all the drinking people and that, and he was the MP for years and years and years.

I: **Do you remember when that was, when Mr Lipson was the MP?**

R: When I was about 7 or 8, I should think, upwards.

I: **So during the 1930s?**

R: I would think so, yeah. He used to wear a posh hat and that. But then Mr, as I say, Irving, he's another man that... I don't know if you know, we Cheltonians are very proud. I'm a Cheltonian and we're a dying breed, you know, because there aren't any of us left. All you interlopers have all come in.

I: **Yeah, that's true.**

R: And we'd never, ever mix with Gloucester. We'd never go to Gloucester. Gloucester gets all the money, you see, because it's a city, and we have to make do with what we're given, you know. So we're very proud... We make sure we're not left out, you know? But Mr Irving, he helped a lot of people. Well, you won't know... When he died, he left his money. He's got two big houses for people coming out of prison and drinkers, and up out towards Prestbury. And that's how he left his money, and it runs ever so well. They come in, there's no problem, they come in, stay six months, get on their feet and get a job. So we've been very fortunate in Cheltenham, having some very caring people. Because you never have somebody that sticks up to you.

**I: So you referred to the area as Lower Dockham, and this is something I've learned about recently. Because some people... Yesterday I spoke to a lady whose father ran the cinema, the Essoldo. So she was 8 years old when her father was the manager. That was in the 1950s, but she'd never heard it called Lower Dockham.**

R: So she wasn't considered... she wasn't brought up in Lower Dockham.

**I: No. So what is Lower Dockham?**

R: Lower Dockham is from about the bowling green by St George's Street. That's... You know Cheltenham? When I was a child... Do you know Henrietta Street? You know the car park? Well, at the end, that was a big, big shop full of rope, rope and baskets. The old building with all the wooden things on. Now, that was the beginning of Lower Dockham, and where the car park... they knocked the old cottages down and put the car park. And you know where...? You won't know where Woolworths was.

**I: I've seen pictures of the old Woolworths.**

R: That was the top, and then just past the top of Cheltenham... now, that was Cheltenham. And then the people came from... They brought GCHQ after the war, and then built Hesters Way... When they got them in there, they built Benhall and all that for them to buy, and then they became council houses. So that was the biggest thing.

**I: So that meant that when they built all these new housing areas, people started moving out of the Lower High Street?**

R: That's right. They did some slum clearance, but you were labelled if you came from... I mean, I went to school and I learned only... I left school at 14. During the war we had one teacher between two classes sometimes, and they were just young people that were training to be teachers, you know? So you learned just to read and write.

**I: And that was that.**

R: That was enough. I went to Marks and Spencer, my sisters went to Marks and Spencer as well. I stayed there for 10 years, and I worked my way up to being... I left school at 14 and I was... It's called the welfare system, the manageress. I looked after the staff, all the timing and everything, and I had no schooling, whatever. But nowadays at Marks and Spencer you have to have a degree to go on...

**I: [Laughs]. These days, yeah. That might not be enough to get a job these days. So when you were growing up as a child on this area... There's so much I want to ask you. I just hope I remember to ask it all. So you said that it was quite a nice tight knit community in the area?**

R: Street-wise... you belong to King Street, and you belong to Milsom Street.

**I: So there were little neighbourhoods?**

R: Yes. The next road to us was Milsom Street, but there weren't many houses in there because there was... I think the building's still there, used for

something; it was a boy's school then. So there was only two people that came from there. But there was (unclear 00:12:33), Charlie Paulson, me, Beryl and Dickie Young, and we did everything together, for years and years and years. Funnily enough, I was the poorest of the five, because if there was a picture on, they would ask to go to the pictures and ask for a ha'penny for an ice cream, and they'd pay for me. And it was always done. I never realised without... I just expected it. "Oh, you can come Joan, because..." And I'd just open the door and shout, "Mum, I'm going to the pictures," and shut the door and I'd be gone. But we were a close knit... One time, we used to cycle to (p.h. Newnham 00:13:16) to pick the...

**I: That's quite far.**

R: All that way, and I used to have to borrow a bike. And it's a good way to Newnham. And one time we went, we went during the war and they'd taken all the signposts down. We weren't sure, but we got there. "Do we go left or right?" Yeah, we used to do that regularly.

**I: So I assume that your parents and everyone on the street had everything they needed on the Lower High Street; in terms of the shops, they had everything.**

R: Oh yes, yeah. Never went anywhere else. I mean, my mother didn't go on holiday until we went to work, and we went to Butlins with people from Marks, and we paid for my mother to come. My father didn't want to go because he was a gardener; he never wanted to be away from his garden, because he said, "When you come back you've got so many weeds to catch up with it's not worth going." And we went, and that was the first holiday my mother had ever had. Yeah, we were all grown up. It was never... Went for a walk after lunch on a Sunday, went to church, and then after lunch you went for a walk. We used to go down Swindon Village, round to Prestbury and walk back down. That was regular. And that was your outing, really.

**I: So what about during the Second World War, during the war period, how did that...? Do you remember? Because you were 12 then, so you were a little bit older.**

R: Yes, I was 12 when it started. I remember all the lorries, when the invasion was going on. All the lorries and things, you couldn't cross when they were all... So you were late for school. That was great. They'd go rumbling by for hours and hours and you couldn't cross the road or anything. Has anybody told you that we had a stick of bombs? We had the one bomb and we had a stick. One was in the Black & White bus station which is at the top of St Margaret's road. The next one went into Brunswick Street. The next one went into the back of the cinema, and my mother saw it go down. The other one went to Stoneville Street, and then the next... That was the stick. My mother said, "I know that there's a bomb in the back of the cinema." They went in. "No, it's not there," and she wouldn't give up. So they went back and it had fallen under the stage, so it could have gone off. They used to go over night after night after night. We used to go down to the allotment and stay down there.

**I: When you used to hear the raids?**

R: Yeah, get up, go down. First of all we used to go to the brewery. You know the big brewery at the corner of Henrietta Street? It's still there, some of it. We used to go down there, and then one day somebody said, "What's going to happen if it all falls on you? They'll never get you out." So we all started going down there... We used to sit on sacks down there, and then when the all clear came, you came up. I don't think we ever told you Queen Mary came and saw us when we had the bombing. Did you know that?

I: **No, no.**

R: Well, you know North Street? Well, she used to stay in those houses on the right, where there was a church. She used to stay there. So she was there when the bombs dropped, and so she came...

I: **That was during the war?**

R: Yeah. So she walked down... Oh, and the one dropped right outside the gates at St Paul's college. That's the other one. And the blast went up King Street and got out, so it didn't knock any of the houses down. The blast sort of went in the four corners. It was at the crossroads, and so all the blasts went... We had broken windows but not much. So about two days later Queen Mary came down, and... "They said Queen Mary's coming to see." There wasn't crowds or anything because nobody knew she was coming. She was a regal lady. She was a really regal lady. And she said, "Oh, you poor dears." And I looked at her and said, "Well, it's alright really." And she said, "Well, I just thought I'd come and see for myself," and then she just regally... And she walked then; she didn't have a car.

I: **So everyone spoke to her?**

R: Well, yes, she spoke to whoever was there, but it was only the people that were living there; there was no crowds or anything. It was just the people that just happened to be about.

I: **So isn't that strange that you get the Queen...?**

R: Queen... Yes, she was the Queen then, yeah.

I: **Talking to the people of Lower Dockham, so the people that other parts of Cheltenham would look down on.**

R: People wouldn't speak to, yeah. And she walked; she didn't come down by car either. She walked from North Street, which is at the top.

I: **So you wouldn't get that now, would you?**

R: No, you wouldn't. But anyway, let's see what else I've got here. Has anybody told you about the faggot and peas shop?

I: **No.**

R: Well, the faggot and peas shop was down the Lower High Street, just this side of the bridge. It was a normal house - it wasn't a shop - and they'd started a faggot and peas shop, and in the front there was a very posh table and two benches, and that was if you had faggots and peas. And you could

take a jug and take them home. And you know faggots are made from all the oddments from the animal, and they were good. But if you didn't had much money, like most of the people in Lower Dockham, you'd got a ha'penny, you went in the back room and had just peas and the gravy. And of course, the gravy had all the bits from that thing... So if you could get hold of a ha'penny, the kids used to go down there and take as long as possible to eat it. That was the faggot and peas shop, and that was really cheap. Anybody with a bit of money could afford it.

**I: I'm glad you mentioned that shop, because from other stories I've heard, all the people that ran the shops knew each other, and everyone knew... all the people that shopped in the area knew all the shop owners. Do you remember that?**

R: Yeah, oh, definitely. You couldn't misbehave... Because my mother used to say, "Do you know what a little bird told me?" And I said, "No." She said, "She saw you doing so-and-so and so-and-so." And I said, "Well..." And I didn't think I was doing wrong; it's just that she decided... I said, "Them birds want shooting." [Laughs]. "A little bird told me..." You wouldn't... and if a policeman caught... You know, you used to go scrogging, getting the conkers off the lawn in the college because of the beautiful conker trees. You used to get over the wall, grab some, and they'd say, "Clear out of there!" and you'd run. But they'd never... They'd just tell you. The policeman would just say, "Eh, do you know what they did?" Nobody destroyed anything. We thought we were... We got told off for standing on the corner of King St when we came back from the youth club, talking, because the people inside said they couldn't hear their television. It was as simple as that. Nobody broke anything or destroyed anything; you just didn't do it.

**I: So it sounds like it was quite a safe area.**

R: Oh, very safe. You could've gone out any time of night and never have closed up your door. Nobody ever locked their door.

**I: So why did other people from Cheltenham look down on the area so much? Was it just because the people were poorer?**

R: They were, they were poor. Well, they were the dredges. It was where people who had nothing... you know. But they were all very proud. I remember one lady, her husband didn't come back from the war and she had four boys. And they were little terrors, you know, because she had four boys on her own, and they went to Boys' Brigade, and when you went to Boys' Brigade you had to have clean shoes and you had to have clean nails. And all four of those boys grew up to have good jobs... And everybody would help each other. Another one of my mother's saying is, "Never a lender or a borrower be." If you're going to give it, give it with grace. Because nobody... they can't afford to give it back really, then you'd become bad friends. There would always be some... But you didn't... I can't explain. You didn't want anything. You didn't want a bike; you didn't want it. You just had...

**I: You had enough to get by.**

R: You were just given what you wear and that's all it was.

**I: After the war... By the end of the war you were a teenager.**

- R: We were working at Marks and Spencer then.
- I: **Okay, so you were already working but you still lived in...**
- R: Still lived at home. Nobody could afford to go anywhere, really.
- I: **So some of the other people I've spoken to have said that after the war all they can remember is the area being very busy, because... All the shops were busy, all along both sides, and they were all family run.**
- R: Yeah, the Greens and the...
- I: **Yeah, so you had the bakery, you had your butchers...**
- R: You had the fish place, Hiddles, the fish place on the corner of... yeah.
- I: **You had your clothes shop, your dress shops.**
- R: The clothes shop was Ms Broad. She had a big one on the corner of St Paul's Road, and her brother had one next to the sweet shop in the Lower High Street. Ms Broad was my Sunday school teacher as well. But she used to run a club... Now, you got 12 people or 15 people and they all paid a shilling each, and you all drew a number, and when you drew your number, you had that 15 shillings to go and buy...
- I: **So it was like a little lottery.**
- R: Well, no. You get what you pay in, but you might have to wait. Some people liked it at the beginning; my mother always waited until the end. And then you had a chitty for £15, say, and that's the only way you could get new clothes, because you didn't have enough money to go.
- I: **It's like saving up, yeah.**
- R: So we used to do that twice a year, and you paid your shilling, and then you would have your new underwear or your straw hat for the summer.
- I: **So all your neighbours and the people you grew up with, what were...? You've said that the area was poorer than other parts of the town. What kind of work did the people do? Did they live and work in the area?**
- R: No. Dickie Young's grandfather was a bus driver. We thought he was rich. He was rich. He was really well off. We used to wait at the end and if he had any spare seats he'd take us on the trips. But let me go from the bottom. There was (p.h. Sutch's 00:24:24), a little engineering works at the end. There's still something like that there now. So one or two worked there. Then my father worked on the land, because he was... but that was his full time job, and he also had a double-sized allotment as well, because we were never hungry, never ever. He used to sell the stuff, come up, and people used to queue up to get his beans and potatoes and stuff. One was a builder. Now, the builder was a nightmare when we were kids, because they didn't get paid if they didn't work. And if there'd been bad weather, you'd hear him go off... The family was Smith; it was John Smith and Patricia Smith, and I can't remember the youngest. You'd hear him with his boots go down, and the whole street



listened, because if they had no work he just came back, and you heard him dragging his feet to come back, because there was no other work. They just didn't have anything, nothing. Nothing. And so building was not the trade to be in. And then the next one... Three of them were decorators. The Whites were decorators, and Uncle Charlie was a decorator.

**I: So they were all very working class people, weren't they?**

R: Yeah. There was nobody who didn't work. There was nobody in the road that was unemployed inasmuch as they didn't hope to work if the work was there.

**I: Yeah. So they weren't unemployed on purpose.**

R: No. It's just that they couldn't work that day. And then there was one or two that were widows, the husbands didn't come back.

**I: Did the area change a lot after the war?**

R: Well, there was more money after the war. People started... I remember one of the men coming back from the war and he was very poorly, mentally sick, and they found him a council house. My husband was in the army. He was in the REME, and he was... And when I met him out of the forces, they had a council house. On the day we came out of the forces, the council house key came through the door. But they don't do it now, you see. Then we lived there... Well, we looked, because we'd saved for a house, because he worked. So as you had time... I think we were there about six months or a year, and then we bought a house up Leckhampton. But they used to really look after you in those days.

**I: So did you leave the area then, for a bit?**

R: I was the only one that left the area, that went with my husband all round the world. I was the only one that did. My sister and my brother... I had a younger brother that was born a lot later, and both my sisters never left the area. But I'd love to know... My sister and I are so different. I'd love to know... If you spoke to her and you spoke to me, it would be so different. Because she was such an unhappy person; she still is. You know, just as a person. Her cups are half full... mine's half full and hers is half empty. But I did think when my daughter said... "I'd love to see how she sees it." Because my young sister, from the day she got her first job, she said, "I will never, ever be poor again," and by gum she hasn't. She saved every penny and she still does. Her most important thing is her nice home and her money; that's how it affected her. But me, I never really felt I needed anything.

**I: So you left King Street when you got married. And when did you go back?**

R: I went back when I had my elder daughter. We came out of the army... my husband did 15 years, and then we came back. I wonder what year it was. Angela was about 5, so it'd be in the 50s, I think... 60s, early 60s. Then we came back. Gillian and Angela... we lived in Leckhampton, and they went to a good school there. They've both been to university. Angela's very gifted. Her mother things... She don't rather, but I think she's wonderfully gifted.

**I: She is. She is very gifted.**

- R: She is very gifted. But I always brought them up that what they have are gifts. They could both read before they went to school, and I said, "It's a gift. You're no better than anybody else." I think it might be because I drummed it into her. It is important that you accept your gifts, and also that you use your gifts. If you don't use them, you lose them.
- I: **So when you were about... you said you bought a house in Leckhampton. So obviously that was a very different area.**
- R: Oh yes, yes. My children went to a very good school.
- I: **Okay. So when you were still living in Lower Dockham, how did you feel about other parts of Cheltenham? Because obviously it sounds like Lower Dockham was a little town in itself.**
- R: Well, you just didn't associate with them. We went to church... And people from everywhere else came to church, but I never thought they were better than me, and I never... I think I must be a bit old. I never bothered that they had more than me. It just never bothered... I liked my life and... It makes me wonder sometimes how... But we had lots of friends, never hungry. We didn't... I'll tell you something, we had four bikes in our family: my mother and my father, my older sister and the little one; there wasn't room for mine. They couldn't get five in, so it was Joan that did without, but it didn't bother me. You know what I mean? Now somebody else would say, "I didn't get one."
- I: **Because other people have told me that, for instance... I don't know if you remember this at all, but the Promenade at one point used to have policemen or guards at either end to stop people who weren't proper.**
- R: You know the Clarence Square? You used to pay to go in Pittville.
- I: **You used to have to pay?**
- R: You'd pay to go into... You know Pittville, the boating lake? You were allowed in there with your parents, but the other part where the birds are, and Pittville pump room. You paid a penny to go in there.
- I: **You had to pay a penny?**
- R: Yes, to go into there. And you had to pay... You know Clarence Square, they've got.. You had to pay to go in all those places.
- I: **In the squares?**
- R: Yes, if you went in, you had to pay to go in.
- I: **And was it just because of who you were?**
- R: They didn't want... Well, no, if you couldn't afford the penny you didn't matter, did you?
- I: **That's right, yeah.**

R: It didn't matter where you lived if you didn't have a penny. Oh yes, you had to pay to go in there...

I: **And so people never went.**

R: Oh yes, . Do you know Milton Park? You couldn't walk through from... Because I lived... You know those cottages on the side? I did 41 years looking after those for nothing. It's a very old trust, and I stayed there, and I studied it. You could only walk through on sports day. They opened the gate into the back, and so you could only walk through on sports day. You couldn't go in there otherwise. No paying, but you weren't allowed in there.

I: **So obviously this must mean that people from other parts of Cheltenham never came to Lower Dockham, or did they?**

R: Oh, no, no. You wouldn't go down there. And we were terrified of the people in Brunswick Street, but probably they might chase you or they might go for you... But mind you, I'd have been up-and-at-em back if they'd have started on me. I always felt that if people bullied people, I would always stick up for them. My mother always used to say... "Somebody picked on Doreen," I said. "She's big enough now, dear, to look after herself." Wouldn't help them. But you know, somebody was being picked on, and if they saw me coming they'd run. I don't what I'd have done because there was more of them than me, but it was that fear, you see, that Joan wouldn't put up with them bullying them.

I: **So people with different areas of the down didn't mix very much?**

R: No, no.

I: **Apart from at church, perhaps.**

R: Yes, in the church. But there again, they were mainly from... You know Manser Street and Hudson Street? That's right next to the Pittville... It's near here. You go down past... Well, St Margaret's Road's only just over the road. Well, at the back of there there's a street called Hudson Street and Manser Street. I don't know if you know, but there's a very famous family called Johnson, and they're the biggest rogues that ever walked this earth. And they get away with it, they really are. But talk about look after their mother... their mother was the loveliest lady. They lived in the first house in Manser Street, and they were fine growing up, but they really are... Well, they are the bane of peaceful life. One of them went to hospital and had a drug overdose, and he went round everybody who was in there telling them how to get extra money out of the council. They had to put him in a room on his own. But his mother was a wonderful lady, and she brought up all these boys. They really were the... Well, they are still, because it's third generation right now. But they would never hurt you, and they would never steal from you. Somebody broke into my mother's house in King Street when we were all grown up and away, and took her money out of her gas meter box. The Whites, which is three doors down, came and knocked on the door and said, "Mrs Parker, it won't ever happen again. I told them, 'Don't think about it.' I can assure you they'll never do it again." So they knew whoever did it. But you just never... you never knocked your own. They would always see you were alright.

I: **I spoke to a policeman yesterday who... He didn't start working in the area till the 70s, but he said even then there were more people living**

**there than there are now, so there were always eyes on the street. So whenever anything happened, you had a lot of people who had seen it or heard about it.**

R: I'll tell you something. We lived in King Street and our friend lived in Margrett Road, over the other side of the college. And you know the back lane where the church goes onto? The policeman used to come and see her dad, and we used to come out of club at 9, and the next one, whoever changed, they told the next one. They used to be there. "Do you want to go home love?" Now, she could've gone down the street that's light, but of course you don't, do you? You want to go down the dark lane. And he used to come every night, every Friday night to walk her down. And then when the next policeman... for years. Yeah, they just came. If you were in trouble... there was a young lady who had a baby and wasn't married, and one person made all her clothes, and somebody else did everything else. They'd have done anything to get her to keep it, but she knew she couldn't. But, "I'll make all her clothes. I'll do this..." It was always somebody, and always somebody would do it, do something. It was a way of life. You never felt lonely. You were never, ever... I don't think I was ever on my own. I worked at Marks with all that staff, and then I went off with my husband. I managed. But it's a very... It's like big families; they're never hungry and they're never... But there's that closeness, isn't there, with people? But no, (unclear 00:36:56). That's that one. As I say, I wrote down all these sayings. I decided I would write... The first one I did was (unclear 00:37:13) but the second one I did was... Has anybody told you about how we did the street parties after the war?

I: **No.**

R: (Unclear 00:37:20). See, the war was over and the radio said... everyone said... come out of their houses. The war was over. And so the idea came from somewhere that they'd have a street party, and before you knew where you are, they were... their was going to be the best. Every street must be the best. So then I put that the attics were searched for everything. Old Mr Brown said it needs organising, and he took his pencil behind his ear... Mrs James was best at cakes; Jimmy Thomas called out, "What about the flags across the street?" and they said, "Well, we'll find some;" and then another lady said, "I've got some paper cut-offs." We used to have a paper place and even during the war you had the cut-offs, the paper. You could make flags out of it and colour it; it was white. So she chose that. Then they made the hats out of newspaper. The boys had sailor hats and you coloured them with crayons, and they all got cutting. Then what else did they do?

I: **So these were the parties to celebrate the end of the war.**

R: The end of the war, in the street. They would find the pasting tables, then they'd find a bench, and then they would find something else. Then somebody else... Literally only what I remember, somebody had a jelly and somebody had a tin of fruit a sailor had brought.

I: **So all the different streets were competing?**

R: Yeah. It had to be the best. And they had flags. (Unclear 00:39:02) found flags, big flags, that had been in there donkey's years. Yes, no, and everybody competed for the best party.

**I: And who had the best party?**

R: We did, of course [laughs].

**I: So I presume that everybody was involved in it.**

R: Every solitary person. Every child, every adult, yeah. Some are better organised than others, but they had (unclear 00:39:27). One man, and he would organise everything. "What about this? Well, you can do that." But they were really... very competitive, yeah. But I said, we didn't go up to see... You were telling me about the Promenade. Did you know that the ladies' college were only allowed out of their college and down the Promenade? They couldn't go farther at all, and they had to come back up.

**I: So it was only the promenade that they were allowed to walk on?**

R: That's it, yes. And now they're allowed down, you know. But yes, they were only allowed down the Promenade, escorted, and back up to the houses. And they certainly wouldn't speak to the likes of me.

**I: Not the Lower Dockham lot?**

R: No, they wouldn't even notice you. But no, it was... But Cheltenham was like that. I think a lot of places were, you know? The cottages I looked after, they were built in 1899, and they were built by somebody who came back from India, had built for the poor, and his wife built the children's hospital that was up in... Is now a children's hospital up - I'll think of it in a minute - and she bought that for Cheltenham. So many rich people came to Cheltenham when they came back from overseas. And do you know, people still come to Cheltenham from London. We get a lot of people; when they retire, they say, "There's so much going on here," and they've got plenty of money.

**I: It's a nice place to live.**

R: Plenty of money.

**I: I'm not one of those, unfortunately.**

R: Well, you wouldn't be if you're a teacher or a lecturer. You'd never get up on the list.

**I: Not much, no.**

R: But I've taken up doing U3A over in... you know, the U3A. And I do my writing with them. When I meet them, they said, "We came to Cheltenham because we knew we could retire, and plenty to do." I mean, our Cheltenham U3A, the book's out every three months and it's still only £10 to join, because so many thousands and thousands of people belong to it. So you can do absolutely anything. No, it's a nice place to live.

**I: So these street parties, did they happen only after the Second World War, or did they do them for other occasions?**

R: No. We waited for the main one. We didn't do it after Japan because Japan seemed so far away. We never really... Unless you had somebody out there,

you rather ignored that part, and Burma and that, and that was the worst part, really.

**I: So one of the other things that I've heard some other interviewees talk about is how the area began to change in the late 50s and early 60s, and how some of the family businesses began to close.**

R: Yes, because you couldn't get the food to sell, you see. During the war you could only have what came through, and so you weren't making much money. Gradually your savings and that goes. And of course, you get these multiples coming in, you know.

**I: So after you had Angela and you moved back to King Street, so we're talking late 50s, early 60s, how was the area different when you came back?**

R: Not much. Very little, except that everybody had more money.

**I: Ah, so people were much more well off.**

R: Well, nobody was... Nobody is really poor today. These people that say they're poor, they aren't poor. They waste their money and they don't use it on food on the table, roof over your head. If they did that, they would manage fine. I truly believe this and I've done it. I mean, I've lived on... My husband was a corporal, and I lived on a corporal's wage, which was about £3. But I never owed anybody a penny, and we were never hungry. People don't learn... Again, it's the want system. They want, want, want, and you can't explain to them that if you don't... If you do without... My son... five week month, when it's a five week month, drives him mad. But we used to put something in the cupboard. All you bought on the fifth week was milk and bread. You had enough... he had a big cupboard. But nobody learned how to manage. And I truly believe, anybody that... you can live. Live, not all the extras. You could live on what...

**I: Yeah, all the luxuries.**

R: You can live. And a lot of these people that are begging have the basics, and they're being paid for, and then they come to the extras.

**I: So when you came back and you said the area hadn't changed very much but people had a bit more money.**

R: The odd car and the odd... you know.

**I: So one of the other stories I heard that some of the shops began to close on the Lower High Street.**

R: Yes, they did. Because they couldn't... They hadn't been able to make much profit for a long time. And also, they were getting older, remember.

**I: Family businesses.**

R: Family business, nobody wants to take it on. I mean, I know the Greens. They sent their grandson to Cambridge at 16; he was bright. Well, he didn't want the business. That's it, you see. We were brought up with nothing, and we

weren't even allowed to read in the house, because reading's bad for you, you know? You used to sit in the loo and read, and mum'd say, "You making your will?" and you used to put it behind the thing. So we were all... you got education, yeah. But I mean, my granddaughter by my eldest daughter has got a philosophy doctorate from Cambridge, and Angela's daughter's got her degree, and they've all... I think that's what you do. When you're very poor, you make sure your children have more. You can get quite high before your children don't respect what is involved. My girls went to college and they never, ever asked for any money. They managed on what they were given. And the one that got the doctorate at Cambridge, she's got her own house. But it's all been helpful.

**I: So what's it been like living in that area over the years then?**

R: I wouldn't have lived anywhere else. We had lovely friends. As I say, there was three boys and two girls, and we did everything together, for years and years and years.

**I: And did they also stay in the area?**

R: Yes, yes. I'm the only one that went away.

**I: But you came back.**

R: Well, I couldn't wait to come back. There's no place on earth like Cheltenham. But you have to... I suppose really it's a matter of... Unless you write it down - as I say, I've sat and I've written it down - you think, "Oh yeah, now I remember that." My mother had all these sayings, so I wrote them down and I sort of made them into a bit of a story with my sisters. You'd say, "Look at that woman over there. She's done this, that..." And she'd say, "If you can't say something good about somebody, don't say anything." Funnily enough, the girls, the other two, didn't remember them as much as I did. And I never answered my mother back. I was in my 70s when she died. I'm not saying I might never if I'd have the chance. She'd say something and she'd say, "You can think what you like, but you don't say it." And even when she died, we were outside the church and I said, "Well, I can truthfully say you had your own way mother, (unclear 00:47:16)" She never had any money. When I was older I often thought, what she wouldn't have done to have a pound in her pocket. But she never complained, never wanted, and as I say, it was always somebody would tell her if you... But it was never like the kids are today. It was never destroying anything; it was just... When I had children I made a promise that I would never, ever tell them off the first time they did something. Because you're thinking, "Well, what's she grumbling about?" because I didn't know it was wrong. I always said, first time they did it, "That's alright. You didn't know."

**I: You know we talked earlier on about when you were growing up and you were a child, and you sometimes didn't want to tell people from the area because you'd be looked down upon? Do you think that's changed at all or it's still like that?**

R: No, it's still like that.

**I: It's never gone away?**

R: It'll never go away. If you say you live in St Paul's... "I live in St Paul's and Lower Dockham isn't..." Do you know St Paul's Street that's opposite the church? Well, that was considered alright. You were alright if you lived there. But if you lived in that road or that road, you were in Lower Dockham. They were built a bit later. Because I had a friend that lived there, and she wouldn't let her children come into the youth clubs at church because they were mixing with the wrong people.

I: **This is all about the class thing, isn't it?**

R: And it'll never go away; it'll never go away. My children, they travelled all over the world, and they have an international voice. I don't think I speak Gloucester, because I... But you can always hear it. "Aren't you from Gloucestershire?" you know.

I: **So the thing I... It seems like you grew up, then... you've lived here most of your life. The people from outside always imagine it to be more dangerous than it is.**

R: That's right, yeah. Well, that's life, isn't it?

I: **Yeah. But it's not when you're there.**

R: No, it's... as I say, Brunswick Street was... You would... And why run round the end? They probably weren't even out. But you always ran by.

I: **You go on what people tell you, don't you? Because the lady I spoke to last night, her father, the manager of when the cinema was the Essoldo, he was attacked outside the cinema in 1959 or 1960, and then he left.**

R: But he wasn't one of us, was he?

I: **You think that's why he...?**

R: Oh yes, he was fair game. He wasn't one of us.

I: **Right, I see. So even though everyone would've know him.**

R: Yeah, but he wasn't one of us, was he? He was an incomer.

I: **Okay. So there was an 'us and them'...**

R: Oh yes, yeah. You have to, don't you? But this church we went to, we used to go there nearly every night for something, Brownies or club or whatnot, and right up until I got married, I went to church and went to - and I still go to church - I went to church and we all went on trips together and save-ups. But we had a very, as I said... It's moral. My mother wasn't a churchgoer, but it was moral. You had your moral, basic. And if you went to tea for a party after the war, "Don't take the biggest cake. I'll feed you when you come home, but don't take the biggest cake." They were that proud that their children had... Nobody said their children didn't behave. It was just... And of course it stands you in good stead all your life. Because I'm 87 and I've never owed a penny in my life other than a mortgage.

I: **How do you feel now when you walk down the Lower High Street?**



R: Don't mind at all, don't mind at all. I don't feel I belong any more. No, I don't belong any more, do I?

I: **Why?**

R: Because I don't live there, you know. I've gone up a bit [laughs]. No, I wouldn't think... I would say that 99% of people that live there are now all... not working class, I think the next one up after Lower Dockham. And my children would think they're middle class, because they've all been to university, they've all got good jobs and their children have all done well. So you feel you're growing up. I think that's life, if somebody... My sister had a neighbour, both from Barnardo's, a boy and a girl. And they got a council house and they brought up three children, and they brought them up... never mixed with anybody, beautifully turned out, very clever, all went to university. They were going to make sure that they didn't go through what they went through. That's life.

I: **Do you ever remember when one of the shops closed, or a few of them closed, that you were really sad about? Were there any ones...?**

R: I'm trying to think. We had Whitings, which was the pork butcher, and then next to Marks and Spencer was Parsons, the... I'm trying to think. Not really, no. I can't think of... Because you didn't spend much. I remember queuing up during the war. The word would go round, "So-and-so and so-and-so's got something." "Hey Joan, go and stand down by Green's just in case it happens," and you were there. And I was in Marks during the war, so we had so many biscuits a day we could sell. I'll tell you a lovely story. We had a dozen carpets, right? And the manager says, "Come on Joan, you take..." 99 pence they were, these carpets, so he took the pound and I gave him the penny back, and this lady said, "I want my penny." I said, "You haven't paid." It was one of these Lower Dockhams. And she said, "Yes..." "No you haven't..." So Mr Broadly said, "Oh, give it her. At the end, if we check and she has done you, I won't be cross." But she got away with it because he said... You get somebody in Lower Dockham saying Marks and Spencer don't treat you right; you don't tell them you cheated in the beginning, but you get very bad publicity, so you would give her the carpet to avoid bad publicity [laughs]. I'll tell you another one. We had heating, you see, during the war. People had no coal or anything, so the old people used to come in and just walk round, just to keep warm. So you got to really know them. One day, they said Mr Simon Marks was coming, so we had to be all on our... I was on the counter, and this little man, little old man in a brown white striped suit came up and started chatting, and I chatted to him just like I would anybody else. I said, "Excuse me, I said, we're having a visitor today. Mr Broadly's going bonkers on the stairs. Come back later and we'll finish it." He said, "Thank you, my dear." And he had two bodyguards. They came through, and of course, we thought they were Marks; he was Marks. And he gave me 50 pence rise, which was a lot of money in them days, and he said, "That's the sort of person I want." What he did for his staff in the olden days... But it was really funny. You were a community in there. We used to go out together, all of us, you know. It's a good way of... a good life. But they don't seem to mix today. Everybody seems...

I: **It's a very different society these days, isn't it?**

R: Yes, it is.

I: **A lot of coming and going.**

R: And nobody's staying. You know somebody all your life. Well, we've had a long talk.

I: **Well, we have. And listen, we can stop it there if you like.**

R: Well, I'd better, because I've got a lunch appointment at one.

I: **Okay, that's fine. Thanks very much. I'll stop...**

(End of recording)