

Interviewee: Anne Lubin

Interviewer: Malin Lundin

Date: 04.05.2011

Interviewer: It should be recording now. So this is an interview with Anne Lubin and the date is the 4th of May 2010 and the interviewer is Malin Lundin. Ok. So would you be able to tell me your date of birth?

Anne: My date of birth is July 1919.

Interviewer: So how old were you when the war started?

Anne: I would say I was about 21.

Interviewer: And what are your first memories of the war? When war broke out?

Anne: Well, I knew that we were building up to the war because in London all the buildings were being sandbagged and people were preparing for blackouts but although it wasn't confirm it was not until September the 3rd, it was a Sunday morning, that it was officially said on the radio by Neville Chamberlain, who was the Prime Minister then, that war had broken out. See I worked in a hotel at the time and the host had got all the staff gathered together to listen to the broadcast and when I heard it I was absolutely terrified. I was shaking and I was expecting bombs to be dropped right there and then. Anyway, the host told us afterwards to carry on normally and that's what we did. So I went upstairs and I was getting ready to go out and I'd stripped off and no sooner had I done that then the siren went and I was so scared I just run out of the room absolutely naked. I run out into the corridor, fortunately there was no one there so I ran back into the room picked up a coat and by that time the all-clear had gone. So after that I was shaken and went out and then other memories that I have I used to go to London and meet my sister there and – can I stop?

Interviewer: Yeah.

[Recorder paused]

Anne: And coming back from London I used to always get a very late train and going – walking to the hotel there was a line of soldiers – guards and one stepped forward and asked me to advance and be recognised so I showed him my passport and then he said, 'Well, I'll walk you to your hotel to see you safely there'. So we got to the hotel and I was going to go in through the door he just started giving me a hard time, pulling me about, trying to fondle my breasts and I was telling him to get off and leave me alone and he just wouldn't so I just told him, to get away from him, I said, 'I'm going to have an accident here. I need to go to the toilet'. So then he let me go. Another time I walked home late from the station to the hotel a man jumped on my back and knocked me down to the ground and before I could say anything a German plane went overhead and dropped a bomb not far away and the man had just jumped on my back and dragged me to – near to the wall, he said it would have been safer

there just to save me in case a bomb dropped for which I was very grateful to him. In the hotel people from the West End of London used to come or even from the East End to have a few nights rest because we didn't get bombs as much as they did in the – in London.

Interviewer: So whereabouts was this hotel?

Anne: Hmm?

Interviewer: Whereabouts was the hotel?

Anne: Oh, the¹ hotel was in Epping, which isn't far from London and it was more like a roadhouse thing we used to get a lot of noted people. One was Kay Hammond who starred Neville – Noel Coward's play *Blythe Spirit*. She was very nice person. Another was James Robertson Justice – do I say about him kissing - ? He was very popular with the people who came into the hotel, the other customers, although he was nearly always broke and he – he would come with a falcon on his arm and the customers always treated him to drinks and one lunchtime I was clearing tables away in the dining room and he came into the dining room and chased me round trying to kiss me. Then another time he came and he asked me – he said he was an editor of a health and beauty magazine and would I pose for him butt he said I didn't need to pose in the nude or anything. I said, 'Oh no, thank you', I wasn't interested. So – and also we had young airmen from North Weald Aerodrome (?) which was nearby and they used to always sing the song about, 'Do you know the muffin man' and of course the last – they had to put bear on their head at the end of the little verse and whoever dropped the bear had to stand everyone else a drink. Then there were the Hussars, they came in, singing all the rugby songs and it was quite interesting and very jolly and we were content because we didn't – we didn't have the bombs like they did over in the East End of London and West End.

Interviewer: So how long did you stay at the hotel? How long did you work there for?

Anne: I worked there for about eighteen months and I left there because I joined – I had to do war work and I went to Birmingham and the job I had in Birmingham was in a tool room and it was – the tool room was noted to be a man's holy of holies. They never had a woman working in the tool room and I think I was one of the first persons to work – do tool room work but the men objected and I was put to a machine in the stores away from the tool room and a man used to come from there and train me a tool and cutter grinder and after about six/nine months or something I was told that I could do the job on my own without anyone showing me and I had to read blueprints and I quite liked the job and I knew I was given a pint of milk to drink. There was no masks to work, you know, even though the powder from the metal was flying all around. But I survived and – do I tell them about my - ? I don't want to tell them I was dumped.

Interviewer: Why don't you – yeah, you can tell us about your sister's wedding?

¹ 5 min

Anne: The wedding, yes, that happened when I was in Birmingham. Yes, there was – oh, when I first started working at the factory I was told that I needed some tools and one would be, oh dear, what do you call these things that level²? A spirit level. That I would need a bubble for a spirit level and that I would have to the stores and get one, when I went there I was told that they didn't have them and I was passed on to somebody else and this went on a couple of times and I realised that I – that the men were just having me on. It was just a trick so and then another time they told me to get a left-handed spanner and I realised what they were doing and I just never had any of it but I got through the job fine and when the siren went we still had to carry on working and it was only when a special hooter went in the factory that we realised that the enemy was overhead and we all had to run down into shelters. The shelters, I think, were men – there were little rooms, each separate room, and they were used years ago, I think, for – from Stevenson when they invented the steam engine. Anyway, that's a bit of history. But when we were sitting there we could hear a lot of noise overhead when the raids were on and one particular night it was very, very bad and the people – firewatchers running around doing jobs and we were told that the canteen was on fire and we were sitting there. Earlier on we were chatting but when the bombs were dropping no one was talking, we were just sitting there thinking our own thoughts and I was thinking about my brother. He was blown to pieces and I just thought, 'Is this going to happen to me?'. But in the end and, oh, someone came and said that the factory was in the middle of fires. There was fires blazing all around us. In the end we got out about 5 o'clock in the morning and the manager said that we didn't need to – we usually used to finish at 7 o'clock in the morning but he told us to go home which we were thankful to do. That was one of the experiences though. But other things happened and then I was made redundant from Averys when the contract finished for the war work. Oh, while I was there that was my daughter – my sister got married and that was a funny thing really. It was on a bank holiday and John, the husband to be, he was in the Dutch Navy, and he came to Middlesbrough, where we lived, on the evening before the wedding and it was late mor – night – late night and he couldn't – didn't know what do so he put up in a B&B and while he slept someone broke into his room and stole the wedding ring and – and the presents that he was going to give to the bridesmaids. Fortunately, John, was his name, had his wallet and passport under the pillow so whoever broke in didn't get anything there. Next morning John went to see the best man told him what had happened and the best man suggested that they³ should go to Darlington where there was a market and the shops were open on bank holiday. They got a train to Darlington, in the meantime, Middlesbrough had an air raid and the station was bombed and the cathedral where my sister was getting married that suffered damage and the cathedral was roped off. My – the best man and John got a wedding ring at Darlington and gifts for the bridesmaid and returned back to Middlesbrough. About a mile or so from the station the train was stopped and they were told they could not go any further but alternative transport would be found. However, the best man decided the best thing to do would be to run so they got off the train and ran to Middlesbrough. When they got to Middlesbrough they found out or – my or some friend had already found out that they cathedral had been roped off and no one was allowed to enter. The best man found out about

² 10 min

³ 15 min

this and he and John went to the police station explained about John being on leave from the Dutch Navy and my sister on leave from the ATS and they were there to get married so the policeman allowed just the immediate family to – and the best man to go into the church. When the bomb dropped my father was stretched out on the seethe and deposited on the floor. In the scullery my mother was preparing food and the oven – the door of the oven was blown off and some of the food went up in the air and that had to be sorted out afterwards. I was sitting in the toilet, a big toilet, out in the yard and I was lifted up of the seat [laughs].

Interviewer: No? [Laughs]

Anne: My sister was up in the bedroom and she was crying and saying that she wasn't going to get married, she wasn't going to get married, it's all bad things happening. Anyway, we managed to persuade her to get dressed and went to the – walked to the cathedral because it wasn't far from the house we lived in and we got the – they got married fine and the people who were – had been invited they were all outside and everything – everyone was quite happy that it had happened and all the people invited walked to the house and – where the reception was held. People had been bringing food and because it was war and stuff was rationed they were bringing food to help out and people bringing drink as well and there seemed to be plenty of that because everyone was very jolly, singing and dancing. They finished up singing a song about tiptoe through the debris and the dust to the song about tiptoe through the tulips with my Old Dutch. So after the wedding I went back⁴ to Birmingham because I was on dayshift then and after about a month there I was made redundant because the contract for war work had finished and I finished up in Coventry. I had several jobs to start off with because with my experience that I'd had in Birmingham they didn't have any work for tool room person so I was on filing, progress chasing and one or two other things and I was not happy and then I finished up on a lathe and that was ok. So I was there for about eighteen months and we had quite – we had bombs dropping nearby because the Germans were passing over us to go to Coventry which was badly bombed and there was one night there that we were severely bombed. We had bombs dropped near us and the strange thing is it was the canteen that also caught fire and once again we were all sitting there not talking, not speaking. I suppose we were just thinking our own thoughts wondering what was going to happen. After another horrid night of shivering and shaking and being afraid we came out quite well. No one was hurt and then, oh, I was billeted in a hostel. It was quite a big hostel and I knew – I had single room which I was pleased with and I think I was the first one in that room and I think the hostel now is taken over by training policemen. But – but the hostel we had – they laid on concerts and dances for us and there was a little shop there and sometimes we were able to get a lipstick or some kind of toiletry which we couldn't get in town when we went into Coventry. There were always queues and queues of people waiting for bread and – or whatever they could get a hold off. But we were fortunate that in the hostel there was always food there for us. So after a stint of Coventry, eighteen months, I was made redundant again and then this time I was sent – I was given a job of being a signal woman on the railway. I had to go to Darlington for training and this

⁴ 20 min

happened, I was there for a few weeks and there was about twenty other girls as well. Do I tell them about this inspector? While I was training an inspector had to check – examine us to see if we knew what we had to do. So this inspector he was quite tall, long legs and we were sitting at a small card table. He was on one side and I was on the other and consequently his long legs always kept nudging mine so I moved away. I turned around on my side and then I had to stand up in front of a board and he was pointing things out and I had answering – to me while he was standing next to me and one arm was round my shoulders and⁵ I answered the question. I didn't think anything of it. However, I think the same things happened to another girl and she complained to her parents and they complained to the inspector of the station, whoever was in charge, and I was asked if I, you know, this had happened to me – anything happened? I told the inspector, I said, 'Well', I said, 'He had long legs and I didn't think anything of it', and I said, 'When he put his arm round me I thought he was just reassuring me. Giving me some support to answer the questions, you know, in case I was nervous, which I was'. So anyway, I passed the test and I was given a box at Hutton Gate which was a very nice country place but I never saw anything of that. I just saw the station, went there and then went back home, well, to Stockton where I was in digs. I had – cos I had to be up at five in the morning to open the box and I finished at 1 o'clock and then the afternoon shift was from 1 o'clock until 9 o'clock. But because of the war some trains were held there and I could be there until 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning and in fact once when I was on nightshift, no, dayshift, the inspector came at night to wake me up to open the box because he couldn't get anyone else to do it. Anyway, I went and did that but before that before I was able to work on the – in the signal box on my own I had to take a test that I was capable of doing it so an inspector was coming to check me out and on this day I noticed a man walking along the road – tracks and I thought, 'Oh dear, it's the inspector coming to give me this exam', and I was feeling a bit nervous but I was confident and as he came up to the box I recognised him. It was the inspector, the man who had examined me before. When he came into the box I was a bag of nerves, I was absolutely shaking and he stood there and told me to carry on as if he wasn't there and when the trains came by I was pulling the levers across and ringing the bells and doing the necessary but whatever I was doing I was just making mistakes all the time. I was ringing the wrong bells and pulling the wrong lever. I just – I was in such a state doing it I just didn't know what I was doing. So anyway, when he'd finished watching me he just told me to be careful and think what I was doing and he left the box and, anyway, he passed me. I was there until war finished and as soon as war – peace was declared I was made redundant again. Unfortunately the jobs that I had during the war were of no help to me in civilian life so then I trained to become a secretary.

Interviewer: So what did you think about the work that you were doing during the war?

Anne: Well, the work I did – when I first went into the factory I was overhauled over the noise and the people all just working there. I couldn't believe it, I'd never been into a factory before and I just stood there not knowing what I was going to do and the fact is. I was quite naive⁶ and I was really on the

⁵ 25 min

⁶ 30 min

innocent side and all the remarks that the men made just went over my head. When I was training for the job I had to go down to the tool room to speak to the foreman about something or other, pick up a chart – a ma – jobs to do and when I went into the tool room it was just men. It must have been about a hundred of them and they all started whistling, wolf whistles, and I got very embarrassed and actually one thing that springs to my mind which embarrassed me was that when I was down there one of the apprentices came up to me and said, 'Oh, Anne, open your hands and close your eyes. I've got a present for you'. So I told me to bamush (??), we used to say that then, or, anyway, I told him to get lost and he said, 'No, really. Close your eyes', and I didn't and what he had in his hand he threw at me and I was wearing those men's overalls with big pockets and this thing, I just quickly saw, was a mouse as it dropped into my pocket and I screamed and I took the overall off and all I had on underneath the overall, it was summer and hot, was a pair of French knickers and a bra and I stood the jumping around and all the men starting gathering around watching me. He foreman came wanting to know what was going on and the boy the apprentice was stood there frozen, didn't know what to do, and the foreman kicked the overall up and told me to put it on and he told the men to get back to their – to their jobs [laughs]. You didn't know that, did you? So anyway, that's the way things were at Birmingham, you know, with these men that I didn't know what they were – the things that they used to say and when I was on nightshift they were very, very kind to me. In fact during the day when – they used to make tea on a special jet, they brought tea with them. They always give me tea if they made it and then at night time there were these lockers, the tall lockers that they used to put the coats in and behind the lockers there was a wall, a gap, and they used to put the coats down and let me have a sleep and one would do my work for me and also when it was quiet there was a manager, well, he was an overseer, really, he'd walk round the factory to check out that all the men were working, that everything was as it should be and the men in the tool room some of them would start making toys for the children or doing all sorts of things that they shouldn't have been doing. When they were doing that there was always one person that would be on the lookout and this man, his name was Walters, and when he was coming they all – this man started singing 'Walter, Walter' and of course everyone got the hint and they started working with what they should be doing, the real work. So funny things used to happen in these factories, well, that was my experience of Averys. It was very in – with the work I did – did it alright and I got paid the⁷ man's wage because the men wouldn't allow a woman in the tool room unless we got paid the same as they did. So I – where the people – in the other parts of the factory only got paid so much for the work they did. I got paid whether I did the work or not. It depended on whether the work had come in for me to do. So – and the digs I had were quite pleasant, the couple – the man worked in the tool room – the original digs were where I used to share a bed with two other girls and we worked alternate shifts. They were on days, I was night etc. and the bed was never aired, not until the weekend when the three of us would be together. Even when I went into the other digs I had to share the bed with the couple's, who owned the house, the – with their daughter, which I didn't really like. So when I got to Coventry and got a room on my own I was over the moon about it and on the other side there was a Scots girl and I got friendly with her and she took me up to Scotland to visit her parents which was very interesting. So

⁷ 35 min

went to a show there, variety show, there was one man, he was signing, David Wallis, he was singing the song about the barrage balloons. 'I'm a barrage balloon blower-upper. I'm a blower-upper barrage balloons. I huff and I puff when I do my stuff'. Anyway, that was quite good –

Interviewer: How –

Anne: We went to the Locarno, we went dancing there and I quite enjoyed it and then that all finished when I went on to the railway. There was nothing there I – I liked working on my own on the railway. The – the box, station box, was – the station was about two miles away and that's where the station master was so he came only once a week to give me my wages and I was, oh, nearby there was two cottages by the railway and the two women who lived in the cottages always gave me stuff to take home when I went home on a long weekend. They gave it to me from their gardens, there was cauliflowers and carrots, occasionally, which the – I know was – they shouldn't have done they gave me an egg or two. They were rationed one egg a week but because the one woman had hens and a goat she had goats milk and she would make me a cake – make cakes and bring me cake over and in fact after the war every Christmas and my birthday she would make me a cake and when I married she wrote to me, wished me the best of luck and said now that I'm married I can make my own cakes [laughs]. So what else?

Interviewer: How – how often did you get a chance to see your family?

Anne: My family – when I worked in Birmingham we did have long weekend and that was, my goodness, it was quite a lot of people used to travel. There were other factories there⁸ in Birmingham and we had to get a train from that New Station, I think it was called, and it was difficult getting on the train and I knew that on occasions I'd my case with me and soldiers that were standing around one would get my case threw it in through a window and then hoist me into the train and they managed – struggled to get themselves in. But coming back was quite – wasn't so bad but I used to – when in Birmingham I probably go home about once a month and it was just a quick visit. My father died – it was on a bank holiday Monday, his funeral was on a bank holiday Monday and I think that was the year after my sister got married so I used to visit – like to visit my mother and it was much the same with Coventry. It was always the performance of trying to get onto a train but whatever, no matter how packed it was, I always managed to get on but it was either standing or sitting in the corridor. It was not much chance of a seat. When I was in – on the station, signal woman, the digs I was in it was – I had to walk two miles to the main road to get a United Bus to Stockton and then get a bus from Stockton to Middlesbrough and I know that, yes, I used to go home on – when I was on nightshift, no, on dayshift I'd finish at 1 o'clock and then I had to come back on Monday at – for the dayshift, you know, one or the other, the nightshift, and I had a long weekend. So I used to always manage to get home quite often and it was on one of these weekends I remember, it comes to my mind now, that when I went home my father he had been suffering from asthma. He'd been very ill and this particular day he was feeling good and he was out in the yard, he was stripped having a good wash and

⁸ 40 min

chatting away to me and when it came for my time to leave, I said, 'I must go now'. He said, 'Oh, why don't you stay and talk?' and my mother had gone out because he said he fancied an orange and she went out if she could get him one because they were very hard to come by. Anyway, I told him I had to go and I left him, kissed him goodbye and left him. It was that very afternoon that I got a phone call from the station master telling me that my father had died and a relief would be sent for me to go home and apparently my father had dropped dead in the yard while my mother had come home with an orange. So that was rather sad. There you are, these things are coming back to me now. Anything else?

Interviewer: Did you feel that the experience that you had during the war that that changed you as a person at all?

Anne: Yes, it did⁹. It changed me because when I was a child I went to an elementary school and I was considered rather clever. I was, without boasting, I was almost top of academic subjects. I was no good at singing and no good at drawing, painting. Any – no good at sports either but at academic subjects I was always top and when I left school the only jobs open to me were domestic service, going into a factory or behind a counter in a shop. Well, even to get a job at a shop like Boots or Marks & Spencers, WHSmiths, you needed elementary – secondary school education. With elementary you finished at fourteen and that was it. The first job I had was at a girls boarding school in Eastbourne, now, when you think of children fourteen years old, they're still children and yet I was a child and I had to fend for myself. I worked and I was at that job, in a school, for about nine months and I was in a menial job. All the girls were young ladies, they were Miss this and Miss that and whatever they wanted you had to do for them and I tried reading some of their books but never got much of a chance. From there I got a job in Cambridge, in Dry Drayton, Cambridge and that was for a house to do general work. That was very pleasant, it was on a farm and the people round about they were all very friendly and I was always asked to join in for things. However, it was – in the winter it was very lonely and I left there and as time went on I finished up with the job in Epping and all the jobs I had I knew I could do better and after the war I decided I would do something better. I'd been saving money and I'd paid for myself to take a business course and then I got a job as a shorthand typist for Appleyards at Middlesbrough and I stayed there for some time. From there I had an invite to go and stay with a cousin in America with a view to living. I stayed this cousin for six months and what I didn't like was they were quite wealthy. They had a Cadillac, they had a farm, they had a business and when I went to America I wasn't allowed to take any money at all. However, I went on American ship and I managed to change some English money into dollars. But my cousin would give me money each week when I used to do a bit of washing up and dusting just to help out. We used to – we used to go to bingo practically every free night of the week because she loved bingo and she'd win. She used to win a lot – quite a bit of money, 20 dollars, 50 dollars, in fact, once she won 300 dollars and me I think the best I ever won was a share of 10 dollars between three of us. Anyway, I used to¹⁰ always – I felt disappointed that not winning and I used to say, 'It's a waste of time me coming', and

⁹ 45 min

¹⁰ 50 min

she said, 'No, you're keeping me company and that's the thing'. But, anyway, after six months she wanted me to go to Canada so that I could come in on the quota which would get me into America quicker than coming back to England and I said, 'No, I rather go home and stay home'. I just could not face having her dishing out money. She was – they were very, very good to me, I must say, very generous. They would buy me things, even got a blouse now that I wear that she bought for me. They were very generous, very good. But I had pride. I did try to get a job but I was told that because I wasn't living there I couldn't on a visitor's visa I couldn't get work. So I came back home and then I got the – did the training and I got a job and I finished up as a secretary to a man in the maps department at the Automobile Association in Leicester Square and I stayed there until I got married so.

Interviewer: Did you ever want to join one of the services during the war?

Anne: No, I didn't. I wasn't regimentated, I liked being on my own. I was – all through life I think I was a bit of a loner. I liked my own company, I could go anywhere on my own. In fact I went on three world cruises on my own. I've been to all sorts of countries. I went to Russia years before – people said I was brave to go to Russia but going back then Russia was a beautiful country and we were told we could go out and it was safe to go out in the daytime, safe to go out at night and I enjoyed being in Russia. It was quite an experience and I do remember we were travelling I think from Norway or Sweden to get to Russia and went through the country there, the forest, and we had to stop on the way, you know, because – more – more for comfort stops and I remember that with these comfort stops, you know, you may need to spend a penny but the men and the women – because we were on one side of the road we all used to go to the one side and I got embarrassed, you know, you never get, oh, bush stops they were called. That's right. I got embarrassed because you get behind a bush and you never know who was walking around so I said to the courier but why not tell the men to go on the other side of the road and the women on this side of the road. 'Oh', he said, 'never thought of the' [laughs]. So, you know, that was one thing but that was quite – I've been travelled around quite a bit and I had – did really enjoy my cruises. Been all over these different countries, welcomed everywhere, really, in fact, I think it was in Cape Town I went into a little shop there and the owner he chatted to me and he even asked me if I had tea with the queen [laughs]. Oh dear.

Interviewer: You said that your parents were from Latvia or Lithuania –

Anne: Oh, don't – don't mention them.

Interviewer: No.

Anne: No.

Interviewer: Ok. If you could summary your war experience in a few sentences, how would you summarise it?

Anne: With my war experience it did bring something out in me. It made me more daring¹¹, even though I had to face life when I first started work to be independent the war made me face up to people. While I used to be intimidated by authority I could question this authority and especially when I had children. People know with children that you stand up for them before the war I would never have thought of doing that but then afterwards I did. I used to see what other people do, what you had to face up to, the terror and you think, well, why shrink away from it. You face up to it and that is one thing I did learn to face up and I did read a poem and it always stuck in my mind. The words – a couple of lines ‘Under the bludgeoning of chance my head is bloody but unbowed’ and then the ending, ‘I am master of my feet’ and that was it. I used to think my head is bloody but it’s not going to be unbowed so that was the end of that.

Interviewer: Excellent. Thank you very much.

End of Interview.

¹¹ 55 min