

**Interviewee: Miriam Dunham and Frederick Wayne**

**Interviewer: Bill Fairclough**

**Location: University of Greenwich**

**Date: 06.08.2010**

Interviewer: <sup>1</sup>This is a recording of Miriam Dunham and Frederick Wayne. My name is Bill Fairclough. Thank you. Miriam –

Miriam: My first recollection of the war is in September 1940 when we heard over the radio that war had been declared. And my mother was stringing beans at the time, home grown beans, and no sooner had that broadcast came we got the air raid warning. And she flew up out of her chair caught her foot in the basket of beans and the beans went everywhere and the colander went the other way and flew – we all flew down to the Anderson shelter down the bottom of the garden. And that was to be home for the next five years really.

Interviewer: And where were you living at this time?

Miriam: Camberwell

Interviewer: In Camberwell.

Miriam: Yes, and well gradually we got used to the sirens going didn't we? They were so frequent. I think at first we didn't respond but we had the army going around the streets with the guns so we lost all the windows for a start although at that time we hadn't got the blackouts all in place so these were firing really at anything they saw in the air. This was gun people, soldiers on guns.

Interviewer: And they blew all your windows out.

Miriam: Yes. So all the windows came out. And from then on we had material on frames that used to have to go in the window. Well we got the raid – the bad raid in September didn't we?

Frederick: They didn't start until September 1940.

Miriam: Yeah.

Frederick: I mean if I can –

Miriam: Yeah. You help me out.

Frederick: Outbreak of war I was a school child obviously. The schools were evacuated in late August of '39. I decided, and my parents agreed with me, not to go. I'd just passed what was then the 11 exam. I got a place in a trade school which was evacuated to Suss – Cornwall. I just didn't want to go.

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<sup>1</sup> 86:34 min

I had a fear frankly and I can still remember that fear. The fear of being left in Cornwall and me parents being killed. So I didn't want to go and I wanted to stay if whatever happened it happened to us all. For the first – and it is difficult to remember actually how many months that was but for the first several months there was no schooling but most of my friends had obviously gone so you was at lose end. I spent most of the time riding around the streets on my bicycle. The bombing started in September in earnest and from then on we were in an Anderson shelter every night<sup>2</sup>. We didn't have any nights out. We didn't go out of the Anderson shelter. We slept in it. We made our coffee or cocoa as it was in the evening on a mess stove. Camping mess stove. We sat there with candle light and you listened to the bombs falling, which was pretty often. During the day one of the things I used to do was to go around collecting shrapnel. Which for the few children that was around shrapnel collecting and swapping was the in-thing of the day. And you used to get a lot of shrapnel which was mainly shell bits and as Miriam said we did have the mobile Bofors guns around on the streets though they didn't last too long. I think they realised they were causing more damage than good. In late September of '40 my aunt and uncle who lived not too far away in Lothian Road were bombed. They had a big Victorian house, got a direct hit, absolutely flattened. They were in an Anderson shelter again at the bottom of the garden. It wasn't a particularly big garden. The people that were in the house next door were killed. It was just a pile of bricks. They came to us and they moved in with us. As was the thing in those days. You helped people out. Uncle Charlie and aunt Em and cousin Norah came to live with us and at first shared our shelter at night which was to say at least was a bit cramped cos it was head to foot and there was 6 – 5 adults and a child well and a young lad in there. And you were there all night as I say. Toilet arrangements were blow out the candle and pass the bucket around [laughs]. So things were quite primitive if you - we shared that shelter and after a time we managed to go and get uncle Charlie's shelter out but his had been concreted in and it became very difficult to get it out. So it took us quite some time. We got it out and we put it in our garden. Now just as luck would have it we had a very long garden in the road were we lived in, Denmark Road. And at the bottom of the garden it was banked some nearly 3 feet so our shelter was in that area which really wasn't below ground level to such an extent so the guys who was in the shelter next door drew all the water so we was all bone dry. Which was one of the things with Anderson shelters, they filled with water. That was the problem with them.

Miriam: We had [unclear] –

Frederick: During that period I don't think for the first two months we had any break at all. Raid after raid. Night after night. Some more severe than others. You could look out, you could see places burning. Other nights you said 'we had an easy night last night'. Unexploded bombs were a problem. You found that you couldn't get up certain turners because they shipped all the turners off. During that period we had bombs six doors down in the middle of the road. Huge crater. And also just after that we had a rather nasty disaster. 75 yards over the back of us, over the gardens, was an Anderson shelter. Almost everybody had Anderson shelters. Was a family, he was a local councillor actually, he

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<sup>2</sup> 90 min

made the fatal mistake of deciding to go up a make a cup of tea when he thought it was all over. His wife and his son were in the shelter, got a direct hit, both killed instantly. They were the sort of things that you wondered [Miriam: That was a terrible shock wasn't it?] about afterwards, terrible shock for you. I did for a short time, given I was quite young, I did do a paper round and one morning I went up Coldharbour Lane which was the main road in Camberwell at the time. And a bomb, a very large bomb had hit in the middle of the road, right in the middle of the tram tracks and you had a gas main spurting flames one way and a water main spurting water the other way. But neither put the other out, sort of thing. It was quite a picturesque situation. We were finally bombed out on the last night of the Blitz as it was which was 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> of May '41.

Miriam: The Docks – September – the September before the docks had set alight and Ethel and I was –

Frederick: We had no doings with that or knew anything about it but obviously the docks bombed earlier in the war in September. We had<sup>3</sup>, three gardens over, was a yard which was a parking lot for lorries by a company in the name of Newlands. And one of the things Newlands carried were large drums of oil. On the night we were bombed, we knew nothing about it, it was a normal night, at one point we heard the incendiaries. The incendiaries came down and made a plopping sound. And dad said 'Oh, incendiaries' and he got up and started to open the door of the Anderson shelter and there was an explosion. He fell back, he'd been hit in the face probably by the door, we're not sure what it was. Anyway we climbed out of the shelter to look to our right and some hundred yards away it was a giant tree which was blazing but it appeared to be an aircraft that was hanging from the tree. But as it turned out it was a lorry that had been blown into the tree. A landmine had landed in the top of the tree and apparently had been there for some time before it exploded. Now the result of that explosion was that the whole of that area wasn't totally flattened but it was totally destroyed in that it took all the roofs off, it took down walls, it stripped out all the windows and also some 200 odd houses all went the same way. We were very lucky again we were a hundred yards away from the centre of the explosion and apart from the fact that dad caught it in the face as a result of getting up to open the door we wouldn't know. He disappeared up the garden to see what the trouble was and we didn't see him again because he got out in the street and he was bleeding from the face and he didn't realise but he was bleeding from the face, the rescue people took one look at him and shoved him in an ambulance and took him to King College hospital and he didn't return until the next day. But when they got him to the hospital they realised he wasn't badly injured and he became a porter for the night carrying the injured. And in July 1941 I started work in Fleet Street –

Miriam: But Fred can I say that as a result of that we had to move.

Frederick: Oh, yes. We had to move.

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<sup>3</sup> 95 min

Miriam: We couldn't go back to that house and we had to take what we could find into another house. The council would put you in a house that was emptied, if somebody had gone away and left their house and you were desperate for accommodation they would put you in and fortunately they found a house for us to go in not that far from where we lived. And that's how, Norah, my cousin came with – no she didn't come with us did she?

Frederick: Yes, she did. They moved in to 17 Dovedale between us. They had the top and we had the bottom.

Miriam: They came with us because they were homeless then we were homeless because they came to us. Then we were bombed so we all went to this other house.

Interviewer: What was that like there? I mean in a way it worked out you could take I suppose a few things from your house to the other house but it must be quite upsetting to have to leave your house and see it wrecked.

Miriam: It was awful.

Frederick: In my uncle's case, the house was flattened it was just a big pile of bricks.

Miriam: Except the bomb had gone sort of down one side of it because that was all open where you had to climb up.

Frederick: No, no. I'm talking about Em's.

Miriam: Yes, I'm talking about Em's.

Frederick: No, Em's house was total, total –

Miriam: Well, Norah says here that she got up into there and - She got her dad's teeth out.

Frederick: Well, no, no. That must have been Denmark Road.

Miriam: Sorry, alright,

Frederick: No, Lothian Road was a big pile of rubble and I sorted over that rubble for days at end. I did – one of the things you did in the war was to put all of your best clothes and things you wanted to save in a suitcase. Because if, as in her case, the house was completely destroyed the chances were you'd find the suitcase, which we did, after a lot of digging I found the suitcase. So at least they had got a suit of clothes, dresses and what have you. I also found, they had a lodger at the top, she had a box with all her jewellery in it and after a lot of digging and searching we found that. We found bits and pieces but not a lot. We'd find the odd saucepan and that sort of thing that wasn't damaged. Whereas in our own house although the roof had gone and collapsed onto the top floor and the back

wall<sup>4</sup> had gone to a certain extent and the downstairs was a shell and we could get the stuff in the kitchen and did salvage quite a few bits and pieces.

Miriam: Our canary was killed.

Frederick: The canary was flattened.

Miriam: And our dog was hurt, wasn't she?

Frederick: There was some crazy things happened. It was an old Victorian house, the back bedroom which was downstairs, had shutters, wooden shutters, that pulled up and you put a bolt through them. Really secure pipe shutters. Then there was folding doors that divided the two rooms to the front room which had a Victorian bay window which had shutters that came across like concertinas and a bar that went over and locked it and blew - because these were used at the blackouts it blew the whole lot out the back on to the bed. Took the top of the bed of completely and smashed the doors open and the blast went straight through and out the other doors. On the right hand side was a piano and there were pictures on the piano and it never blew the pictures of the piano and that's the sort of crazy thing that blast did.

Interviewer: Yeah, unpredictable.

Frederick: I remember the morning after when we tidied we managed to gets some stuff out off the kitchen and we had a fire in the garden and we had a fry up basically for breakfast [laughs], which is the sort of thing you remember. And we went up to Dovedale Road and that was the start of intermittent bombing '42 - '43 you got a raid maybe once a week, maybe two a week. You just didn't know when they were coming. You didn't know what time they were coming. It wasn't like the Blitz, you couldn't say 'darkness oh, I'll be here till dawn'. But not so in '42-'43.

Interviewer: How was the sleeping when the bombing, when it began? When it was every night you were telling me. What was it like trying to sleep?

Miriam: In the shelter, we couldn't sleep really. Mother put a mattress down.

Frederick: We had - the floor of the Anderson shelter was boarded so were the sides about up to a foot and we had a feather bed on the wood and we slept on top of the feather bed covered with a blanket.

Miriam: But sometimes there was six of us. Three up the top and three at the bottom.

Interviewer: Were you able to go to sleep?

Miriam: Well, not a lot because of the noise.

Frederick: You got intimate in sleep obviously.

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<sup>4</sup> 100 min

Miriam: Mum was very nervous wasn't she? She used to scream every now and again.

Interviewer: For a long time though. A long time of this...

Miriam: Yes. Oh, it was. And dad used to – had to go out and make the tea on this little stove, didn't he, in the garden and the chickens was all running about. Oh, dear it was a nightmare.

Frederick: When we was – when we had these spasmodic raids and we were in East Dulwich, we used to use a brick shelter that was at the top of the road. But brick shelters were not used that often so when you went in the bunks were musty or mouldy and the places was damp. Really in the end you didn't want to use them because of the state they were in but we did use them occasionally. We were then moved next door to the house so that both families had got a bit more room and the house next door was vacant and we were put in there. And then when the bombings eased, as it did in '43, the people whose house it was wanted it back so they came back and moved us again around the corner basically into Colyton Road and we stayed there until 1960. In that time as I say I started work and I used to get the tram 8 o'clock in the morning to Blackfriars and I worked in Fleet Street during that time. The strange thing about it, you don't think about it at the time. We had of course early 44 started the V1s. You never thought about turning up late for work. The V1s weren't so much a problem in terms that you could see them coming if you were lucky but nobody took shelter with them as much as they did in the bombing. It became a spasmodic thing.

Miriam: It was the doodlebugs because you could hear them coming.

Frederick: You could hear them and at night you could see them coming, well you could see them during the day.

Miriam: You were alright until they cut out. The moment they cut out they exploded and you generally went with them anyway. But the V2s you couldn't hear them.

Frederick: The V2s weren't a problem because you couldn't hear them so there wasn't any point worrying about them.

Miriam: They just wiped you out completely. The things they - They covered a very much larger area<sup>5</sup>. If a V2 had exploded it cut out a whole street.

Frederick: Big explosions. I remember coming home one night on a 63 bus and we got to Peckham and a V1 lit the bus up. It was obviously pretty low and was passing overhead. I dived onto the floor and somebody dived on top of me and somebody dived on top of them. It was a three sandwich in the corridor on the bus.

Miriam: It was terrible.

Frederick: Instant things. You just did it.

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<sup>5</sup> 105 min

Miriam: You always wanted to get down. You know the first thing you thought - the lower you got the better. I think you were in a lot of cases because you didn't get glass injuries and things like that.

Frederick: The first night of the V1s we didn't know what they were. We had this very loud engine sound which we thought was aircraft obviously. We had no idea what V1s were. And then it would cut out and there was lots of gun fire and we thought 'engine cut out. Well, good one to us' and then you'd hear explosion and you didn't know what it was in any case. But near to where we lived in Dulwich, Dulwich Common, had two batteries of rocket guns and there was 32 guns in a battery. And on the first night of the V1 attacks they fired the two batteries together. And I think they did more damage than the V – the shrapnel came down like confetti and it was quite big lumps of fins of rocket and they never did it again. They only fired them that one time. After that they used to fire them in sort of blocks of 8 but that was just one of the incidents that you found. Another time I was in the Tower Cinema one afternoon, I used to have to work Saturday afternoons every other week.

Interviewer: What was your work in Fleet Street?

Frederick: I was working for a press photographers.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Frederick: I was working in the dark room, printing the pictures. Mainly of war stuff because we worked directed for the Ministry of Information. The Ministry of Information used to send us the pictures, we printed the pictures, distributed them to the papers and we also printed those pictures for distribution by the Ministry who had exhibitions in libraries, police stations and was happy to show the population what the war was doing, how the situation was. So we got - we had the pictures all the time and we were very busy all through the war. And in the latter part of the war we also worked for the Office of War Information which was the American part as well.

Interviewer: Interesting. You should be seeing a lot more than the average persons might have see before it got out. You would have seen a lot of things.

Frederick: So on one of my afternoons off, on a Wednesday, I was sitting in the cinema. Tower Cinema which was in Peckham Rye Lane, and a V1 came down which we didn't hear because of the – first we knew all the doors of the cinema were blown open. Daylight everywhere [laughs].

Interviewer: That was the first you knew that anything was wrong?

Frederick: That was just one of those other incidents that happened.

Miriam: Can I just say that the cinemas were not heated in wartime cos there was shortage of fuel. And my mum and dad when they went to the cinema, they still went because they closed it when the warning went they cleared the cinema because they thought too many people together might be killed. But they used to go and they both used to take a hot water bottle because it was so darn cold

in there. And they'd gaffed down the road clutching a hot water bottle to keep them warm in the cinema. That used to make me roar laugh in those days.

Frederick: While we're in Colyton Road we were working and my sister was – my other sister had come to live with us, she'd been bombed out in Bromley. Her and I used to go work together in the morning. My father worked different hours so often he wouldn't be there when we arrived home and we got bombed by V1s seven doors along which destroyed, it took a lot of slates of the roof but it certainly took all the glass out of the house. They used to replace the glass with tar paper, which was just nailed over the frame and one window had a white paper so you got a little bit of light in. If you had another explosion, could be quite distance away, you found that the airwaves would burst the window paper. And we used to come home at night together and the gentleman next door used to be at the door and say 'Aah broke your paper again today'<sup>6</sup>. The first two or three times it was ok because the first thing that you had to do was to nail all the windows up. When it was a week old you feel like you could strangle him.

Interviewer: Yes.

Frederick: Another occasion, two or three other things that stick out really was quite a clever thought by somebody they brought a lifeboat, a complete lifeboat, on a trailer in a procession down Fleet Street during the war and people threw money in it. Very good idea when you think of it, lifeboat and the amount of money that was in that lifeboat was quite amazing. Another thing they did was to have bombs and shells and people stamp – saving stamps – went and bought saving stamps so they stamped the stamps on the bottom of the shells. You'd get these bombs absolutely covered with two and six saving stamps. During the Christmas of '40, my father was a postman at the time and works out in a sorting office in Camberwell New Road right by the side of the railway. Several of his colleagues had been bombed out and had got actually nowhere to live. They were either single people or their wives had been evacuated so they lived in the sorting office. They actually slept in the air raid shelter and they actually lived in the sorting office. And on the Christmas of 1940 my father was aware that these, it was about 8 of them, and he said to my mother 'I think I'll go down and invite them up for Christmas evening'. Which he did and they all came up and as it was in those days you set round and somebody played the piano, you all had a singsong and they had a thoroughly good evening. And he was always very pleased because, I can't remember in terms of how long but it was only a matter of weeks afterwards the office was bombed and several of the guys were killed. And he always felt that at least they had a good last Christmas.

Interviewer: Yes.

Frederick: Another thing that I remember was the early part of the war was the men taking all the railings down. Our road had all along very high iron railings and they came and cut them all down and took them away and all the hedges fell out in the street [laughs]. Also I remember a huge pile of pots

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<sup>6</sup> 110 min

and pans. They'd called for people to their aluminium. And on the top of our road, you went to the right, there was a line of shops that had a big forecourt and there was one huge pile of pots, pans and anything that was aluminium was thrown on the pile. [Pause] As I say I worked in Fleet Street right through the war and we never thought of taking time off. We'd just get on with it as I think most people did.

Miriam: But it was awful they used to post the dead – the names of the dead on the wall didn't they, the local people. The air raid wardens –

Frederick: I think they did it in the Town Hall didn't they?

Miriam: Well, was it Town Hall. But if it was local because if you'd gone out in the morning you didn't know what had happened to your people so if they knew they were dead they'd put it on a blank wall. Or if they knew they'd been taken to the hospital they would just scrawl, I don't know whether it be the wardens or who did it but you could find – you could run down to see if your name or a name that you knew was up there. Yeah. Oh – it was devastating really.

Frederick: But you grew up very quickly [laughs]. You didn't have much option really. Travelling on trams, I used to travel up by tram a work man's tram on the mornings to work. No windows in the trams as such as all the glass had been taken out and it was boarded up apart from a strip about 4 inches deep and about nine inches long. So you could just about look out and see whereabouts you were otherwise you were sitting in a wooden box. Lighting at night on the tram was one very dim light one end each end. Just enough to see up the stairs.

Miriam: All lights were blue.

Frederick: On another occasion we did, I suppose it must have been after the first Christmas, my sister and my cousin and I<sup>7</sup> went to the cinema late afternoon. And sat after the air raid started, which was very brave of us and we shouldn't have done. Any rate we came out after the finish of the film into was what quite heavy gunfire and started to run home. My cousin was running behind crying and she couldn't catch us because she got the stitch and then suddenly shrapnel [Miriam: She had high heels on didn't she?] hit the lamppost and it rang and that was it. She could run then. We never ventured out again [laughs]. It was – it was an existence really more than anything. You weren't living you were existing. You were hoping you was gonna be there tomorrow.

Miriam: I can remember one day, my sister was living with us, along the Peckham Road, I think it was, and a German – I don't think he was a bomber – but I think he, well, he was machine guns anyway and he came ever so low along the road machine gunning just everybody and they told us to get in the gutter. We had to lay down in the gutter and he went right along, houses all the way along with a machinegun. And when he'd gone – they didn't catch him – our people didn't catch him and well for at least 30 years the marks was all the way along across the Town Hall because after the war I went

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<sup>7</sup> 115 min

there to live. We'd still got where he that day they left them there purposely for people to know. And right across the front of the town hall was this machineguns marks which was -. That was a terrible day that was we were so shaken.

Frederick: Occasionally they did get him low under the ballons and they took a chance cos you had barrage balloons at all times.

Miriam: Yes, we had barrage balloons up there but this one got through.

Frederick: We had a barrage balloon in the park opposite us.

Miriam: He came all along the Peckham Road and they think he was following the tram lines cos the trams was running.

Frederick: Another night we had one of these raids in '42 - '43 and they unloaded a lot of incendiary bombs and we lived opposite a park, opposite Peckham Rye Park and all these incendiaries came down and I should think 95 per cent of them came down in the park. And the field opposite the next morning was one mass of fins of incendiary bombs sticking out of the earth where they had gone in half way and hadn't ignited because they couldn't get the air. Several did go through the roofs of the houses but did no any damage of consequence.

Miriam: My sister's place, she lived in Siward Road in Bromley. It was the night that Bromley was caught on fire. They concentrated on incendiary bombs on Bromley itself. I went over because her husband was on fire watch, he was an older man and had gone up to fire watch, to accompany her. Well, anyway the raid was so bad that the house next door got on fire. The warden came down and he said 'fill the bath with water and then get out'. And I got a tin hat because at that time I was in the forces and my sister she got nothing to put on her head so she said 'what shall I put on my head?' and he said 'a cushion'. I thought how silly, what is that going to do with shrapnel? Anyway we had to go in next door because he wouldn't allow us outside. We went in and they had a Morrison shelter which was a different kind of shelter indoors with steel on top. We got under there, the people who were there, under there obviously, a young boy and a dog. Well, it was pitch black and we couldn't see where they bundled us in and gone in there. And all we heard all night was this masonry falling and of course my sister thought it was her house, well we both did. We never slept at all we just heard this terrible noise of crackling and all that. And the young boy there, at least we did laugh, there was a terrible crash and he said 'Oh, my heart. It nearly come off its hook then'. At least with all the drama going on it made us laugh and they got a big dog there, huge dog. We couldn't see it. We could only feel it because it was so black! Oh, that was a dreadful night. However, when we got out the next day, my sister's house was ok. The house next door was completely gone. There was nothing, was there Fred? Of her house - the house next door. With fire, it had just completely gone away. Yeah nothing

there left at all. And that was when Bromley was bombed. It was raids on Bromley<sup>8</sup> alone wasn't it that night? Incendiary bombs all the time.

Frederick: Well, I don't know if they picked out anything. I have never ever thought that they did anything thing else then indiscriminate bombings apart from on the docks which they could obviously see. But the bombing in certainly in the area where we lived.

Miriam: Was very spasmodic.

Frederick: The things that caught most was churches because churches weren't occupied so incendiary bombs set them on fire. And most of them in the area were burnt. Libraries the same. We had one night some very bad fires [unclear] which was a vinegar factory which was around the corner went up. And in fact the Fire Brigade were using vinegar because of a shortage of water. That was one of the big problems. You get a water main hit and although they had firemen and pumps they had no water. I mean my school, when I did eventually went back to school after the Christmas in '40, the bottom of the school which was a three storey building was the Fire Brigade so was the middle floor. The school was only the top floor. Fire brigade consisted of Auxiliary Fire Service people, with London taxis with pumps tying them, tying pumps, that was it. And I'll always remember that further on in the war when Plymouth got hit they took these guys and sent them down to Plymouth and when they came back 3 or 4 days later, I've never seen people so tired. They had driven all the way down to Plymouth in these ramshackle taxis. They fought fires in Plymouth and bring them back.

Interviewer: And took them back again.

Interviewer: We are coming to the end our time for today.

Frederick: Another interesting thing was how people passed on very quickly what was available. I mean sweets were a no no until they were rationed which wasn't until later in the war. So someone had said 'so and so got chocolate'. Or 'somebody or so has cigarettes' cos these were just as short. People'd sort of drop everything and go.

Miriam: There were queues always for food.

Frederick: All the women – somebody could say 'they got tinned meat' or 'they got fish' or. And it was all word to mouth really. There wasn't any –

Interviewer: Yeah, when some things were about.

Miriam: My cousin who came to live with us, as I said she was bombed out three times, she has written that. I don't know if that would be worth reading. You know, you don't need to read it now. If you would like to know about it.

Interviewer: Can we keep this piece?

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<sup>8</sup> 120 min

Miriam: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Miriam: I would like a copy of it. Is there a chance of a copy?

Interviewer: It might be better – yes, let me take that and we can do that before you go. We have sort of reached the end of our time today. I can stop this.

**End of Interview.<sup>9</sup>**

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<sup>9</sup> 123:11 min