Martina Moss 19 April 2024

Interviewed by Imogen Radford and Ronan Devlin

**Summary**

Born 1959, Brandon. Father – Mervyn Kent, born Weeting, worked at Fengate farm, poacher from an early age, using punt and dogs, familiar with the river, took Martina for walks and she felt part of ecology, strong memory of the wildlife and landscape, later took her for trips in a canoe to Santon Downham. Other family stories. Swimming at the Looge, Staunch/Girl Guides. Trips to Tanners Well pit. Father managed Lynford Hall, early memories of statues being pulled out of the pond, rowing on the lake. River key to life of Martina and of her family.

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Key:

**I1 = Interviewer 1 = Imogen Radford**

***I2 = Interviewer 2 =* Ronan Devlin**

R = Respondent = Martina Moss

[00:00:00]

**I1: We're here from the Tales From the River Project. My name is Imogen Radford from the project, and this is Ronan Devlinhere as well from the project. I'm here talking to Martina Moss. Just start by you saying your name again for us, please.**

R: Martina Moss.

**I1: Would you mind telling us the year of your birth, or your birthday as you prefer?**

R: 15th of August 1959.

**I1: What's your occupation now or previously?**

R: Previously...I'm trying to choose one. Working here at Brandon Country Park, where I did a lot of different roles. I think my job title was Kitchen Assistant, but I never actually did that. I did ranging, all sorts of other things. Admin, that kind of thing.

**I1: And just a few sort of factual things about your family. Because I know from what Ronan said, you were talking about various different members in your family, so it's nice to get a bit of background.**

R: Yeah. Okay.

**I1: So, your father and mother, what did they do?**

R: My father, who is the one most of these stories go with, his name was Mervyn Kent. He was born 1930. He was born in Weeting in Thatched Row. He also did a wide variety of jobs, and more interesting than mine. In the 60s he managed Lynford Hall. What else did he do? Where the Lingwood Works Factory was, which is now Tesco's, he then managed that. They had Guest tractors and then they had something called Dutra tractors, which came over from Hungary. And that was really interesting 'cause that was during the years of the Iron Curtain, so yeah, that was fun. The last job he did was as groundsman at the playing fields. You know, the recreation fields next to where I live. My mum, Ann, her surname is Moore, M-O-O-R-E, she was born in Thetford in the nursing home there, but she lived and brought up in Brandon. Most of her working life, she managed the shop in the High Street. They both did that.

**I1: And I think you were gonna talk about your grandfather a bit more as well, aren't you, maybe? What was his...**

***I2: Did you mention your grandfather when we were chatting in the car?***

R: I don't know that I did. I mean, he did...

***I2: It might come up, but yeah, sorry.***

R: He might make a guest appearance.

***I2: We'll leave room for him.***

R: Yes.

[00:02:40]

**I1: So, Ronan, do you want ask Martina some things we've been talking about?**

***I2: Bear with me 'cause this is the first time I've done...***

R: Fine.

***I2: We had a nice conversation in the car with my mother and father a couple weeks ago, and you mentioned to me about your father poaching, and how he used the river then to either access those hunting grounds or distribute...***

R: Or make a quick getaway.

***I2: Or make a quick getaway. So, obviously I was fascinated and that's why we're here today. Would you like to tell me a bit about that...***

R: Yeah. Okay.

***I2: ...and explain how that happened? I know you've got some notes with you.***

[00:03:25]

R: That's fine. Well, I'll use those to reference if I need to prompt my memory. Well, my dad, Mervyn as he was known, he was, like I said, born in Weeting and his mother's family worked on Fengate Farm, so this does come into it. First of all, he lived in School Lane right next to the school, which made it really hard to play truant, but he still managed. He had to really put effort into in those days.

***I2: Very creative.***

R: And then he lived down Coronation. So, he was born in 1930. Obviously, war broke out in '39, so he was about nine. He said his dad was gone before the War, because he'd been in the Army so he got called up early and he came back quite a bit after the war as well. So there is my grandmother, and my dad, and his three siblings. Especially in those days, being sort of the young males in the family, I think providing for the family was part of what they did. He always used to say, a private in the Army didn't get a great deal of money, so anything you could do to help family along you did. One of the things that he did was poaching mostly rabbits. Obviously, there was a lot of rabbits in pre-myxomatosis years. He did that from, I don't know, at the youngest age, probably from nine or 10. I know when he was 10, his grandfather, Robert Kent, who was born in 1876, he was a gamekeeper and he gave him a shotgun. I know the irony of it.

So, he had his own shotgun, and I know he went out and about at night because his grandfather said, "You can go where you want, but you don't go on my land." Meaning where he was a gamekeeper. And my dad said he was out one night with the gun, and next time he saw his granddad, he said, "Oh, I know where you were last night." And he said, "Where was I?" I think 'cause he didn't know, he said, "I was so close I could have reached out and touched you." And he told him exactly where he was. So, he had a lot of freedom. Lots of freedom. By the time he was about 10 years old, he had a punt, which he used to keep tied up down the river, and he had three terriers, Pip, Jip, and Rip and they lived in half-bowed kennels in the back garden. He told me about you made the pole, the punting pole, he called it a spritzer. A spritzer pole.

[00:05:57]

***I2: A spritzer pole?***

R: Yeah. I don't know how some of these words are spelled 'cause I never...

***I2: Yeah.***

R: I'd have to imagine how they were spelt. He said you'd find a pole from, say a hazel or something, good, long, straight pole and you'd cut that down and that's what you would use as your punting pole. Another one of his words was the flegger, because you could hide in the flegger and that was the reeds. And I've hunted through accounts of Norfolk dialect and things, and I've never come across it, and I would puzzle over that. I went to a talk that Robert McFarlane once gave, and he was going around the country collecting dialect words, and that was one of the things when I walked away, I thought, oh, I could have asked him.

***I2: Oh no.***

R: Yeah. But I was reading something within the last year, and it talked about Fleggburgh, and it said the 'Flegg' part means marsh. So, I can only assume flegger has something to do with marshiness, and so that's the reeds. So, what he used to do, he used to usually go very early in the morning. Lots of the housing that's in Brandon, like Queens Road area, if you imagine you're going from Coronation, do you know where that is, just off London Road?

***I2: Yeah.***

R: And walking down to the river, you mostly will have been going across meadows and fields in those days. So, he'd go down there and he said he'd take one dog, and I always wondered if the other two used to raise hell because they were left behind, which the neighbours would've loved. He'd take one dog and go down to where his punt was tied up. And he usually, not always, but he usually went downstream to the sort of Weeting-Hockwold area, and he'd use the dogs. Obviously, the dog, whichever one was lucky to catch the rabbits. And he said he'd always gut them while he was out and just throw the innards into the river, so probably a swarm of pike, "Here he comes, lads." You know, waiting for their feeding times. He told me that whenever he used to walk up, probably not every time, but when he walked up and down Coronation, what he called the old women, which I've worked out they're probably about 25 at the time or something like that, but they'd say, "Can you get us a rabbit, Merv?" And he would get them a rabbit. I don't know if any money ever changed hands, he just enjoyed being out early in the morning.

So, often he was in conflict with the landowners. Strangely enough, they didn't really want young lads poaching on their fields. I remember him telling me one time, he'd got a friend with him. I think I know who it was, but I won't mention his name just in case his family wouldn't like it. They'd gone quite a long way downstream where it's more fenny, like the Hockwold area, and the farmer caught them on his land so they raced back and got in their punt. And he was determined to catch them. So, he was kind of trying to run along beside the river, and the other boy was saying, "He's gonna get us. He's gonna get us." And dad just said, "Just keep quiet. Keep punting." 'Cause he knew it was so marshy, the poor guy kept falling into ponds and all the rest of it. And in the end he had to give up and sort of shake his fist at their retreating backs. A lot of the time, he was in conflict with Norman Parrott who owned Fengate. His family still do own Fengate.

By the time I was a child, dad wasn't going out poaching rabbits and dad and Norman used to see each other in the High Street and you know, hostilities had been called off by that time and they got on quite well. And it sounded like it was often the kind of game of cops and robbers, and each side knew what the rules were, and on the whole they stuck to them. One time the other lad had his gun confiscated by Norm, and he gave him a date. I think he kept it for a month. And my dad said he turned up at like daybreak like three in the morning, "Where's my gun?" And got his gun back. He told me one time, 'cause the winters were a lot harder then, he said one particular winter he went out and it was really thick ice, but the water level had receded so there was space underneath, and so his dog would be going under there and coming out with rabbits. He had very successful day doing that.

[00:10:15]

***I2: Under the ice on the river?***

R: Under the ice? No, on the fields. The fields had flooded, and it had frozen really hard, and then the water had receded but the ice still stayed where it was so there was a terrier-sized gap under there that the dogs could go under and catch the rabbits. So, like I said, he had a very successful day that day. He did have a man who lived in Coronation who asked him if he would take him along and teach him how to do it because he obviously thought this was a sort of very successful thing. He said he felt really sorry for him 'cause he just couldn't get the hang of it all and he had to give up in the end. So, obviously catching rabbits with dogs is a bit more complicated I think perhaps than...

***I2: And he was happy to teach the other person?***

R: Oh, yeah. Yeah. There was plenty of rabbits, so he wasn't worried about that. Let me just have a look and see something else I wanted to talk about.

**I1: Do you remember any...at the time, you said there was lots of rabbits about. Were they no longer collecting them for fur?**

R: I'm sure they were, because I can remember as a child there were two fur factories, one in George Street and one in bottom of Thetford Row, and you'd see little bits of fur floating in the air. I mean, that's very early 60s, so obviously they would've still been doing it then.

***I2: Is that as you walked around the town, would that be near the factories?***

R: Oh, near the factories in the road I can remember that happening. So, that would be when I was pretty small. Well, I'm still fairly small now, but, you know?

**I1: But the impression was there was definitely enough rabbits to go around.**

R: There was enough. Yes, I think there was enough to go around. But next thing you know, he might be carting off one of your cows if you don't sort of stand up to him. The police never seemed to get involved.

**I1: They left it to the landowner to...**

R: Unsuccessfully, to defend their fields, yeah. That's right, yeah. And I think...I don't know. I was gonna say, I think maybe they just knew it was sort of feeding hungry families, but I don't think they actually cared about that. Now, let me have a look. What else was I going to say? How do you pronounce this word? It's bad handwriting. S-T-A...

[00:12:25]

***I2: Staunch.***

R: And you say Staunch.

**I1: You can say "Staunch" or "stanch", it doesn't really matter.**

R: When I worked for Breaking New Ground, we had a talk by Rik the Archaeologist. He worked for Suffolk then, and he talked about Staunch and the Staunch Meadow. It was funny. He's really educated, and he doesn't know how to pronounce it. And then we had another, somebody come along and they said it too, and I had a good think about, of course, Staunch as in Staunching the flow. But people around here, I did a test in the park. I went around and asked members of staff, the ones who grew up here and the ones who didn't, "How do you pronounce this word?" And discovered that it it's like with a Norfolk accent really, isn't it? Stanch.

**I1: Stanch, yeah.**

***I2: So, you say "stanch"?***

R: I say "stanch". That's what we always said.

**I1: Yeah. It's also spelled stanch by earlier authors like W.G. Clarke.**

R: It's what?

**I1: Spelt without a U...**

R: Oh, that’s interesting.

**I1: ...in earlier books, so maybe the U came in later.**

R: Yeah, because my friend always teases me that I put like seven A's in it or something when I say it. So anyway, the little woodland opposite the Staunch...when I say opposite, I mean obviously opposite to where I live. Everything's in relation to my house. I don't know if you've ever been there, it's very, very flooded at the moment, but I remember at my mother's funeral, we had the wake thing afterwards at the Bowls Club and he was talking to a couple of people and they were reminiscing about the good poaching there was in that bit of woodland, which of course is Fengate Farms as well.

***I2: Which bit of woodland are we talking about?***

R: Just opposite. When you cross the Staunch, and then there's a bit woodland right there, isn't there?

***I2: Oh, yeah. Okay.***

R: It's kind of fenced off, but the fences aren't very well kept. A tree fell on them and it's never been fixed.

**I1: And that's part of Fengate Farm, is it?**

[00:14:15]

R: And that, again, is part of Fengate Farm, yeah. So, some other things that happen to do with the river, whereas naturally if you have a river, people fall in it. Where the fishing lake is now, next to the Staunch, that used to be called something called Girl Guides when I was growing up, and it wasn't a little separate lake, the actual river kind of went around. They must have used that to fill the...I don't know how they engineered that, it was called Girl Guides. Apparently, my dad's older sister Mary fell in there when she was a small child, and Jimmy, who was the oldest brother, he managed to rescue her 'cause she had very long hair and he just managed to reach the hair and pull her out and save her from drowning. And another rescue story I've forgot, was one that my dad did.

And I'll tell you his version of it and then I'll tell you what I discovered later. He said this was sometime during the War, and he was walking down the High Street going over the bridge and he noticed there was quite a lot of people on the bridge and they were kind of shouting in distress. And when he got there, it turned out some child had fallen into the river and no one was going in. And I've puzzled over this, and I think maybe most of the sort of men would be away at war and that time, so maybe it was mostly women who didn't swim in the river, I don't know. But anyway, he saw the, and they were saying, "Look, there he goes, there he goes." The little child was being swept away by the river. So my dad jumped in, 'cause he was always in the river, he could swim well, and rescued this child and got him out and he was taken back home. And then he said he went home himself to Coronation. Of course, he was soaked and his mum just said, "Oh, you've been in the river, boy, have you? Quite used to this, and he got changed. And then that night the child's mother came round and she was sobbing and she just kept sobbing saying, "You saved my boy. You saved my boy."

And sometime in the 70s, I remember he told this story, but I didn't know any of the details. In the 70s we had a visitor, and it was the boy and he'd moved away, but he'd come back to visit his family and he'd brought his wife to meet my dad, "This is a man who rescued me from the river when I was a boy." He'd grown up to be a policeman, but I think my dad forgave him for that. So, he was pleased he'd sort of come and looked him up. Well anyway, my dad died in 2015, and you know, when you're not a church goer, sometimes the funeral for somebody who isn't a church goer can be a bit odd, and he wasn't particularly religious. But anyway, this was at the St. Peter's church, and the minister who was giving the service suddenly started up with this story. And he said, the night before he'd been phoned up by the family that the child belonged to. It was the Ashleys, which was something I didn't know. He'd been phoned up by one of them, and they told him this story, and they said when they heard my dad had died, somebody called them and told them, they immediately all phoned around each other and said, "Mervyn's died."

They contacted the brother who was still living away, and he was about to fly out of the country so he couldn't go to the funeral. But they put a bit more, what they said in the story, and then what they told me afterwards, apparently a man was holding this little boy who was about four on the parapet of the bridge and he kept saying, "I'm gonna drop you in. I'm gonna drop you in." And he dropped him. Not deliberately. Some raggedy child was bloody terrified and he fell into the river, and so I always think my dad saved two people now that day. Because I think the consequences of sort of fooling around and dropping a four-year-old into the river would've been quite high. But they just had never forgotten that, and so there was a representation from the Ashley family at my dad's funeral 'cause they still...I mean, how many years later is that? He was 83. It was probably like 70 years or more later. They always had this kind gratitude, Mervyn Kent, who was one of the bad boys in the town had rescued their little brother out of the river. That was another story that ended up with more detail.

**I1: How old was your dad when that happened?**

[00:18:27]

R: From what he said, he was probably very early teens, I should imagine. Something like that.

***I2: And he didn't mention anything to his mum when he got in? Interesting.***

R: No, he didn't. He was just wet and she said, "Oh, you've been in the river, boy?" She was kind of used to it. I don't know how she coped with her husband and sons, but there we go, she did. And so, he just got changed and she goes, "Oh, now I've got to hand-wash all this wiggly stuff. *[laughter]* So, she didn't know until the mum came around.

**I1: The person that dropped him, he was never named and got away with it?**

R: I think so. I don't know who it was.

***I2: I suppose his role was washed away in all the drama.***

R: Yes, he probably..."Just go on, lad."

***I2: Phew. Yeah. It was quite a...***

R: "And we're never going near that family again." If he had any sense. So, I've got no idea who that was. Well, let me see what else I've got to say about the river. Another thing which isn't anyone being chased or being drowned, like I told you, my dad, his grandmother was in service at Fengate Farm, and so he'd often go with his mum and they'd visit. And they'd go for picnics. And when they went for a picnic they'd take a bunch of children down to the river. So, they'd walk from Fengate, there's like a stream that goes along. You can sometimes see it from Fengate Grove. And it comes out near New Bridge. New bridge is what we call...I realise it's my generation and older, because it was a new bridge once when it was built in Victorian times. So, they go down to New Bridge, you know, the railway bridge across the river?

***I2: Mm-hmm.***

R: And there'd always be watercress growing in the streams at the right times of year. So, their picnic would be they'd take bread and butter and they'd make watercress sandwiches, and they'd take ginger beer because I don't know what this was, but he said his grandmother had a ginger beer plant in a barrel outside the back door. So they'd have homemade ginger beer and watercress sandwiches. And as far as I know, none of them ever got liver fluke either.

***I2: Say again, sorry.***

R: I said as far as I know, none of them ever had liver fluke from watercress. Put me off, having it again.

**I1: Did they talk about it, the liver fluke, as a possible risk?**

R: I don't think they did to him. I learned about it when I was at school in my teens when I did the life cycle of the liver fluke. So, I'd eaten plenty of it myself by that time.

***I2: By that time, yeah.***

R: Yeah. I can keel over with liver fluke anytime now. So, let me see.

**I1: Is that straight down from Fengate? Straight away down from the farm to the river there, is it?**

R: Well, if you're going across their land, yes. You can't get to it now. He grazes fierce cows on there, and also it's not a public footpath. Dad always wandered across there anyway, and also because, you know, the family relationship there as well.

**I1: So, general members of the public wouldn't have gone across that way in those days?**

R: I don't know. They probably wouldn't now on the whole. Some people do. My neighbour, who is one of my cousins, he has wandered across there, and he said he saw the farmer. He just sort of...well, he didn't say anything but he thought, another Kent on my land. I'm going back to tell dad they're still doing it. But like I said, I don't think the public, probably just wouldn't even think to do it these days. Where the Fengate Drove comes down from the farmhouses, and then turns and heads towards the railway line, at that corner you would have gone straight across, and that's where the bridge is and where this little stream, which is still there, and of course you can access it if you walk along from the Staunch. You can get there like that.

**I1: Did they, or you ever go on the other side of the river at all around there?**

[00:22:17]

R: Oh yeah, we did. We used to just use the railway bridge. My dad always used to take us. Well, me. He always took me for long walks from the youngest age, and we'd often be on his old stomping ground. That's some of my earliest memories, actually, is walking on there and he'd point out different plants and birds, trees, animals, all kinds of things. And strange thing about it is, I've often thought about this in regards to here and elsewhere and how we walk in landscape these days, you felt you were really in the landscape. You were part of the landscape. You weren't a tourist. I'm not dissing tourists, I've walked in plenty places and that's the only reason I've come to do, but it was like you were as much a part of that landscape as the rabbits were, or the waterfowls or anything else. You weren't...I don't know if I'm putting this, do you understand what I'm saying?

***I2: I do understand. If you were… dad’s sort of teaching you about all the things that are accessible, "These are the different types of plants, this is how we got nourishment from the land." He's teaching you about that whole, or passing that onto you. I can completely understand.***

R: Yeah, yeah. Like I say, you're part of it. It's not a separate thing. It's not, "Oh, look. There's ecology over there. Let's go take a look at it." You know, you were just part of that ecology. And I think that's something in lots of ways we don't have in the same way anymore.

***I2: Yeah. Well, I don't feel like I have that kind of relationship. I've never really thought about it until you've mentioned it there, but I do feel like a tourist going out, walking, going, "Oh, they're nice plants over there." So, to have that experience of having a parent pass on generational knowledge to the next person, "This is how we survived and this is what the land would provide for us." That must have been amazing.***

R: Yeah. Because what you grow up with, you think everyone else is doing it. I always think living in Brandon at that time, when I was a child there was lots of Polish people, refugees from after the War, and of course lots of Americans, and you just thought every small village or town, you drove through to three forest, because that's what you did here, and that there were lots of people speaking Polish on the market and lots of Americans with their chocolate and silk stockings if you were very lucky. But, yeah, because when my first few years, I lived in Weeting in Cromwell Road. On one side there was a Polish family, and on the other side there were rotating American families. Now I think that's so Post-War England, isn't it? NATO forces and so on. But they were wonderful walks, and you just think that's what it is. When I got older, we first had a, we called it a canoe, and then he had another boat, and we'd just go up and down. We didn't get rabbits then, but we'd do that as well. And that was...

[00:25:35]

***I2: Did you do any...sorry to talk over you. Did you ever do any poaching with your dad?***

R: No, no. The nearest we got, I remember my mum would come for a walk with us and got her foot in a snare. She was nice about it. By that time, we used to get lots of game. We'd come home and there'd be pheasants or something hanging on the back door. I'm not too sure.

***I2: How they got there.***

R: Yeah.

**I1: He wasn't talking?**

R: In pairs, yes. But that might have all been perfectly legal, or not. I have no idea. So, that was always a part of my life as well. And like you said, both sides of the river, which some of it is not so accessible, and of course the housing's all crept a lot closer. Which I understand people need somewhere to live, obviously.

**I1: Tell us a bit more about the canoe you were just mentioning.**

R: Okay. It was just a two-man canoe that he suddenly came home with one day. And it was always me and him. My mother didn't want to go in it, nor did my sister. I had a younger sister. We would normally go up, not always, but we'd normally go upstream. So we'd go up to Santon Downham and beyond. We'd go there. And of course, you probably know, skimming along in a canoe, it's really quiet so you see lots of wildlife. And I was able to paddle it. I don't know if I can manage it now. It didn't take too much muscle to just be paddling along in a canoe with an adult in there. So, we'd just do that. If he had time off work, he'd back it down, you know that slipway next to Brandon House Hotel?

***I2: Yes.***

R: That's usually where he put it in. We'd go there and then we'd go maybe as far as Santon Downham or a bit further. And occasionally, we'd put it in the other side and go down the other way, but we didn't do that as much.

**I1: And roughly how old were you then?**

R: I should say seven. Did that for seven years, yeah.

**I1: And did that sort of have similar memories to what you were just saying about walking?**

R: Oh, yes, very much.

**I1: Being a part of the river?**

R: Yeah.

[00:27:55]

**I1: Did you catch anything? Did you fish for anything?**

R: No, actually we never did any fishing. I didn't actually do fishing until I had a boyfriend in my teens and we'd go fishing, which I didn't particularly like very much. And I know my dad did. Another riverbanks tale was, he told me he was with some other boy from the town and they were fishing in one of the deep dykes in the fens, he did tell me which one or I can't remember which one, and he said the sky was suddenly black with aircraft going over, and it was D-Day. And of course, they didn't know. Naturally, they didn't. "Oh, they’re invading." And he said they sat there on the riverbank watching as wave after wave after wave, it was giving me goosebumps, of these aeroplanes going over from obviously the American bases as well as the English ones. And they were going over. And they both had fathers out there, so he just knew something really big was happening.

***I2: He had no idea what it was.***

R: No. Can you imagine what that must have been like? It was extraordinary.

**I1: Did he find out later, presumably, what it was?**

R: Yeah. Yeah, he did. And his dad was in the REME, you know, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, and he had very proudly in his house on the wall, he had a commendation from the War Office for the work that he'd done on the landing craft 'cause he was an engineer. But my granddad, Frank Kent, who was born in 1901, well, it was a batch of rogues really, weren't they? That's why I loved them so much. But he was a great poacher. At his funeral, his brother said to me they were talking about the poaching days, when they all did. And they were great pains to say that their father was not a poacher, and he wasn't one of those gamekeepers that turned the blind eye to it. You had to go do your poaching somewhere else. But anyway, my granddad was with the British expeditionary force, so obviously he was at Dunkirk, but he wasn't evacuated. And so the family were told that he was missing, presumed dead. And then a few weeks later he turned up on the coast of the south of England and him and another man from Brandon had made their way through France and then crossed the channel with a fishing boat, so had to travel by night. And I always thought those years of being a poacher, it was probably damn good training for trying to evade the Nazis.

***I2: Yeah.***

R: And then of course, they always had boats, though I can't imagine the English Channel has much resemblance to the Little Ouse, but you never know.

***I2: It's the stuff, isn't it?***

R: Yeah. So, they're transferable skills, being a poacher, and so there he turned up and there he was still alive and lived till he was 86.

[00:31:03]

***I2: You mentioned that the poachers and the gamekeepers seemed to have made some kind of distinction between, "Oh, he wasn't one of those types of poachers." Or "He wasn't one of those..."***

R: No. He wasn't one of those kind of gamekeepers.

***I2: Right.***

R: Yeah. Because obviously some gamekeepers either turned a blind eye to it, or I don't know if they paid them off or whatever, probably in kind. But they were great pains to say that their father was not one of those kind of gamekeepers. He was straight up gay.

***I2: He was upright.***

R: He was an upright man.

***I2: Right, okay.***

R: And interestingly, he did try very hard. He was born into this family in Brandon. This hasn't got too much to do with the river. Is it alright for me to tell you about this?

**I1: Yeah. Fine.**

R: Okay. His father was another Robert Kent, and he was a wild man, shall we say. I found out later, my granddad told me a story about him, that he had been sent to Norwich Prison for several years because he had tried to kill his wife. I could never find any trace of it anywhere, so I thought, lots of family stories have absolutely no basis in truth at all. But then they put the newspaper archives online so I thought, I'll just search his name. And sure enough, he had and it was reported in British papers the length and breadth of the country. So, what had happened was, this happened I think in the 1890s, and he worked at Mounts Lime Pit. You know where Mounts Pit Lane is?

***I2: Oh, where the new houses are now?***

R: Yes, that's right. When I was younger, in fact they didn't fill it in until I was probably in my late twenties. It was a massive lime pit.

***I2: We used to play in there.***

R: Oh, you did? It was huge, wasn't it? And crested newts at the bottom, wasn't there?

***I2: Yeah. And there used to be an old lime burning chimney over there as well, wasn't there?***

R: Yeah. And it had loads of lovely mature trees as well.

***I2: I was sad to see it go.***

[00:33:00]

R: Yeah, me too. Anyway, so he worked there, and this happened in November, so he might been working outside all day and he was cold and wet. He got home, and had an argument with his wife, I think her name was Emma, because she hadn't lit the fire. So, he sort of went out to the woodshed very angry about this, and unwisely, she carried the argument with her into the woodshed where he was armed with an axe, and so he lost his temper and went for her with the axe. So when you read the report, there's a letter supposedly from his wife saying, you know, we were equally to blame. The defence was bringing up trying to get him off. So, I don't know if they were exactly equally to blame because one had far better weaponry than the other.

***I2: Yeah. And we might have moved on some from...***

R: Didn't make any difference, he spent time in Norwich Prison. And then when he came out, he lived with one of his brothers on Thetford Road just down the road from where she lived. So, must have been nice for her. But anyway, I carried on looking through the archives for stories of the family, and they did quite often pop up. And if you were very poor, you're not usually in the newspapers because, "Woman miraculously feeds 12 children on a poached rabbit." It's other kinds of stories. For example, I think my great-great grandmother, she was up before the magistrates in Mildenhall, for inciting a riot in the Tumbledown Dick, which was a beer house in Brandon. And what happened was one of her sons was wanted by the police, and he was in the Tumbledown Dick with his friend and the police came in there looking for him. And so, somehow she incited this riot. I imagine, tables, if there were any, being overturned, and people fighting. And in the melee he escaped into the night and they still hadn't found him at the time she was before the beak.

And the magistrate, he looked at it, he said, "There's a lawless element in Brandon." And I always imagine him peering over his glasses disapprovingly my great-great grandmother, who was in court quite often for things, but that was the one I remember. So then when Robert came along, the one who was the gamekeeper, and he fought in the Boer War. He was in the signallers there. And so, he was in the newspaper because he'd sent his mother home the tin of chocolates that Queen Victoria sent them, though he had eaten two of them. And he tried really hard to get the family on the straight and narrow. He was a real disciplinarian at mealtimes and things. And I would've thought he succeeded quite well, but recently one of my daughters told me how a few years ago she was taking her boys to football training, they were just kids, and somebody there was talking to her and asking about her family and she said, "My granddad was a Kent." He said, "Kent? They’re a bunch of ruffians." So, Robert Kent laboured in vain, frankly.

**I1: So, the family's reputation was not just Brandon, but went beyond as well?**

R: Yeah, exactly.

**I1: You mentioned Mildenhall, the riot.**

R: Well, the riot took place in the Tumbledown Dick in Brandon, the magistrate's court was in Mildenhall.

**I1: I see. They stayed fairly close to home most of the time.**

R: Yeah, people did really, because they didn't have much chance of traveling, did they? It was usually within a day's walk.

**I1: Or boat.**

R: Yeah. The boats helped a lot.

***I2: I guess your dad could get quite far in a boat, didn't he really? It gave them access to quite a wider area.***

R: Yeah, it did, yeah.

**I1: How far did he go, do you remember? Did he mainly go down to Hockwold...**

R: Yeah, he mainly went down into the Fenny area.

**I1: Did he go any further down?**

R: I don't know. I would imagine he did, because you know if you keep going to the same field every few days, they're gonna be waiting for you, so you have to vary your routine. Not, I've done this myself, but you understand.

**I1: Picked up a bit of information.**

R: Yes. Common sense, really.

**I1: And when you were walking round with your father, did he tell you sort of actual stories about the poaching, or was he concentrating on what animals and plants there were?**

R: That's interesting. I think he more was concentrating on where we were, and poaching stories probably came out after a beer or two or around Sunday dinnertime and that kind of thing.

**I1: He wasn't training you up then?**

R: No, no. I think he would've liked a son. My sister and I were both adopted. I've never incited a riot. He did himself in Birmingham, actually, but it doesn't need to be part our story. And so, they adopted me first, then he really wanted a son, but my mum insisted on having another girl and so he didn't have a son to train up. But then they got a real handful with my sister anyway.

[00:38:20]

**I1: Can I ask a bit more, just going back a bit, is that alright?**

R: Mm-hmm, yeah.

**I1: And you were talking about the punt that he had. Where did he keep it? Did he keep it tied up somewhere on the river?**

R: Yeah. See, it wasn't on the main part of the river. You know, the little inlets and little streams and things you get down there? It was on one of those. There was that tiny one right near the Staunch, but I'm thinking from what he said, it was probably the next one down, which isn't a great walk away.

**I1: Is it a bit downstream?**

R: Yeah. But that would be a good place to just kind of tuck it out of the way, wouldn't it? So, yeah.

**I1: And was he always punting? He was always using the punting pole to do that?**

R: From what he said, yeah. Because when they were making a swift-ish getaway from the farm on the marshy land, it was probably just the marshiness that stopped him being able to catch up with him. Mind you, then they were in the middle of a river, so they were still okay.

**I1: And do you have any idea how long the pole was? That's a silly question, isn't it?**

R: No, I've got absolutely no idea at all.

**I1: It was interesting earlier on you were describing how they would go out and cut a certain pole and...**

R: Yeah.

**I1: I guess it depends how deep the river was, isn't it?**

R: Yeah, that's true. Actually I think it wasn't a spritzer. It might’ve been a...was it spritz or spritzer?

**I1: Spridd, was it?**

R: Well, he said it as if it had a Z.

**I1: A “Z”, a spritz.**

R: Yeah. But like I said, these words weren't written down, so I wouldn't know how to spell.

**I1: Yes. I've heard a similar word from somebody else in Lakenheath,I've forgotten. I mean, again, he didn't know how to spell it. It was just a name that’s a bit more like "sprid", but maybe there's a slight regional difference between...**

R: Lakenheath is a foreign part.

***I2: Because it certainly is, isn't it?***

R: Yeah. So, it could be that. And we're really getting into the fens there, so yeah.

**I1: So that's an interesting point, actually. Did he call it the fen? He called it the fens, where he went?**

R: No, he didn't when he talked about going downriver. He said when he was sitting on the riverbank when the planes were going over, he said they were on a 10-mile bank or somewhere in the fens.

**I1: So it's quite a distinction between the Brandon river area and the fens further away when he was...**

R: Yeah. Yeah, I think so.

**I1: But it was certainly marshy in the...**

R: Yeah. I mean, probably years now actually, but yes, it was definitely marshy so this poor farmer didn't have a chance.

**I1: Another thing I was really interested to hear from you was about the Girl Guides. So, what you understand, is this from your father?**

R: It was just a family thing.

**I1: It was family thing?**

R: Yeah. I don't know, other people probably did as well and I've got no idea why it was called that.

**I1: And that was where the pond is now?**

R: Yeah. That's where there was a bit of the river went round the Staunch.

**I1: Did it do that in your day that you think about?**

R: Yeah.

**I1: It wasn't a pond, it was a bit a river that went around?**

R: Yeah. I'm not sure when they put the pond in. Probably...

***I2: Early 80s.***

R: 70s, early 80s, I would say. Because I remember my dad saying, that must've been when he was a groundsman and when the Eastern Europeans came over, of course they're very sensible, if they caught fish they'd be taking it home to eat. And he thought that was amusing 'cause he'd known like Poles and then the Hungarians when he ran the Dutra factory, so he knew well about their wave life, and also he thought it was highly sensible himself, but apparently the fish bailiff or whatever it was called wasn't amused by that.

**I1: So, was there stories of people doing that? Of Polish or Eastern European people taking the fish?**

R: Well, dad said he'd see that. Like I said, he wasn't disapproving. He probably saw a fellow spirit there. So, I don't know if anyone else ever said anything. Most people will say anything about someone who comes from the lake he's gone further afield, don't they?

[00:42:27]

**I1: And do people swim at the Girl Guides?**

R: The place we mostly used to swim, if you've been doing this you've probably heard of it, was called...again, I have no idea how to say it. It was called the Looge, which was at the bottom of a small fen, and it was a lovely place to swim. It's all reedy and stuff now, and you can't get into it. It was just a big sandy-bottomed swimming hole, really. And I see it talked about sometimes on Brandon Forum, everyone's got their slightly different version of the word, and it probably varied as the years went by and things, but we used to call it the Looge and you'd go down. Smallfen Lane was more accessible then as well to get all the way to the river, and we'd go down there. It was lovely.

**I1: Was there rope swings, and...**

R: Yeah, yeah. It was nice. I used to go.

**I1: People would go down there all day or just go down...**

R: I remember we'd go there all day. Yeah, definitely. People swim a lot around the Staunch now, but that was less common when I was growing up. It seemed more dangerous. I don't know if it actually was, and of course people did drown there. But now you see people leaping off it, including one of my own sons apparently when he is reminiscing about his childhood. I don't know if I even want to know this.

**I1: When you talk about sitting at the Staunch or the Girl Guides, was that considered sort of different places? I know that they're close to each other, but was it considered safer at the Girl Guides?**

R: Yeah. I'm wondering if the Girl Guides was just that bit, or if it was...you know where the boathouse is falling into the river?

***I2: Mm-hmm.***

R: If it was that whole stretch down there. I'm not sure of that.

**I1: I've heard it mentioned by people, but so far nobody seems to have really pinned it down. It seems to have gone back quite a long way, earlier memories than you of people we've spoken to. The name has come down and nobody seems to know why, but I found it anyway.**

R: It's interesting isn't it?

**I1: It is, yeah.**

R: Because maybe that's where the Girl Guides did their kayaking, but I mean, when the Girl Guiding start? It sounds like the name was far earlier than the actual organisation.

***I2: Yeah. It's an unusual combination linked together as well without specific of these other Girl Guides.***

R: Yeah, yeah.

**I1: I have heard stories, but again, you never know for sure what exactly. Nobody's been absolutely very definite about it yet, but we may find out, or we may not, of course. So, those are the main places – the Staunch, but not many people went, the Girl Guides which might be there or up a bit, and your version is the Looge.**

R: The Looge, yeah.

**I1: Looge. Again, as you say, there are lots of versions of that.**

R: Yeah.

**I1: Were those the main places?**

R: Yeah, probably because they were more easily accessible. Because if you try and go further down, you'd probably not be able to even reach the river. So, they were the more accessible places to go. I'm thinking now, I think when I was in my teens, somebody drowned at the Staunch and that might be what's giving me the impression. 'Cause that did put people, they weren't swimming. It was just, "Well, obviously there's gonna be an accident." Somebody fell in and drowned there and that kind of put everybody off going there 'cause it was so tragic at the time. And of course, the landing stage didn't used to be there and the lock wasn't there either. Where I see kids swimming now, they tend to be on that...you know the grassy bit next to the lock?

**I2: Yeah.**

R: It tends to be places like that or the landing stage, and they weren't there.

[00:46:22]

***I2: It's interesting you say about somebody drowning at the Staunch, because I can remember that happening in Thetford, and somebody from our school bus drowned at the Staunch. And I always had a terrible fear of those kind of, I think I still have it now really, to be next to that large sort of industrial thing in the river.***

**I1: Was it as big an industrial when you were...**

R: Yeah. The bit that was there, obviously the lock wasn't there. There was no bridge across the river. So, there was just the Staunch and the...well, you know where they put the fish ladder in?

***I2: Mm-hmm.***

R: Because they used to be the thing with rollers there. It wasn't a fish ladder, but people theoretically could get boats up and down there but I never saw anyone do it. So, that used to be a great place for eeling as well, which is never something I did, but I know of what was usually men who did used to go there and get a lot of eels out of the river at the right time. There'd be loads, hundreds of elvers as well, and goodness knows what else on there.

**I1: So, there's no bridge across right now, but could you get across the Staunch?**

R: Depends how brave you were. Most of us didn't.

**I1: It was like quite narrow, was it, or?**

R: Well, it was like if you take away the bridge, and so you've got the gate that goes up and down. It was basically just that.

***I2: So you were sort of clambering across?***

R: Yeah. I wasn't, but I had sort seen people doing it, particularly in that really hot summer in the late 70s when the river level was low and some people would do it. And there's always someone who will skip and go across, isn't there?

**I1: Was the river very deep?**

R: There?

**I1: Mm-hmm.**

R: I always assumed so. I was always strictly forbidden to go down there because it was the first place you hit it when you left the house, wasn't it? My closest friend lived in Santon Downham, and our parents would go, "Don't go down to the river." So, that draws you down there, doesn't it? But yeah, I didn't ever really. I know I was like you, I didn't think the Staunch was a safe place to be playing around. And it isn't. That force of water, people underestimate, I think, how much force there is in there.

**I1: So, that same thing about not going to the river, was your friend in Santon Downham?**

R: Yeah.

**I1: Were they saying it about Santon Downham or were they saying it about Brandon?**

R: Well, saying it about Santon Downham. I used to go over and spend the day there from when I was about six, seven years old, upwards 'til about 10. So we used to just go down there anyway.

***I2: So that was just parental advice from everyone...***

R: Yes.

***I2: ...to stay away from...***

R: Oh, if my dad found out I'd been down there, he'd be furious. So you just had to be careful he didn't know you'd been down there.

***I2: And was this after your walks and trips with him?***

R: Yeah, yeah. It's alright to go down with him.

***I2: In his company?***

R: Yeah. I mean obviously, we were two very small girls and we were both tiny for our age. We probably looked about four, but we just still headed down there. It's lovely, isn't it? Fascinating. Lots of wildlife and ditches full of king cups and that kind of thing.

**I1: Did he ever take you down the river there, or?**

R: Oh, yeah.

**I1: As well?**

R: Yes, we used to swim there. There used to be a little landing stage not far from where the footbridge is across there now, and we used to go down there and swim. They used to hang their towels on the side and sit down swimming, and then my mum and dad and a big group of their friends, me and my sister, and we'd swim in the river there.

**I1: Where was the platform?**

R: I think it was upstream from the footbridge. I would imagine it was between the footbridge and, you know that little path that goes through the pine trees to the church? Somewhere between there, but there's nothing left. It was just a wooden landing stage.

**I1: And did you see the remains of the Staunch there? Is that something in your memory? At Santon Downham?**

R: I can't really remember that now, no.

**I1: That might have gone longer ago, actually.**

R: Yeah. No.

**I1: But that was the place you went with your dad, but he didn’t want you little girls going down there on your own?**

R: No, no. I mean, it's quite sensible isn't it?

***I2: Mm-hmm.***

[00:50:47]

R: Especially as he fished a small child out of the river, so he was well aware of the danger of it. Yeah. But we would go there for picnics or we'd go down to what we call Tanner's Well Pit and we'd have them there, and go down to the stream there and that kind of thing as well.

***I2: Tanner's Well Pit. Whereabouts is that?***

R: That's in Helen's Well.

***I2: Okay.***

R: It's what we called it, was Tanner's Well.

***I2: So, under the railway bridge?***

R: Yeah. And we always used to be able to drive up to there. And I don't know if they didn't have forestry barriers, or my dad had a magic key, I don't know what it was. But not so many people had cars then, so it probably wasn't thought necessary to have lockable barriers across there.

**I1: So you'd drive up there with your picnic?**

R: Yes, that's right.

**I1: You went down into the pit there?**

R: Yeah. Go down into there and just play in the forest generally around there.

**I1: Was there water in there?**

R: Yeah.

**I1: Was it quite deep?**

R: No, probably about as deep as it is now. We'd go down and you'd see where the springs are coming out of the ground, so we probably drink it there.

**I1: Did you drink the water?**

R: Yeah, yeah.

**I1: Did you get watercress?**

R: I don't remember getting watercress. Might have done that. I don't remember that. But my parents and their friends would come and they'd act like a bunch of overgrown children having games of hide and seek and things, and it was fantastic. It was absolutely wonderful.

***I2: When you go in there now, it's quite overgrown. Lots of trees a bit quite young. So, was it a lot clearer? Was it more open?***

R: I don't remember it being quite as overgrown. It might have been.

***I2: And you said you drove up there. Did you come through Santon Downham and come from there?***

R: Yeah. In fact, I was really surprised in the last few years when I came from the Thetford end and came across it and I'm here. And it is like my mental map of where I was had to be rapidly changed. I had no idea it was so close to Thetford. It was a real shock.

**I1: When you went under the bridge, did you go down to the river, the main river?**

R: No.

**I1: Could you, and you just didn't?**

R: No, we just didn't for some reason. 'Cause I've done it since when I've gone down there with my dog who discovered one winter he could apparently walk on water because it was frozen really hard and he loved it. He was going round and sniffing at it and all the rest of things. Obviously, he thought this is marvellous. And the next day we went for walk along the main river, he thought he could still walk on it. So he leapt into the river and disappeared under it, and the shocked little face came up. Where he'd chosen to leap in the riverbank was really steep so I ended up having to lay down full length and haul him out by his collar because he couldn't, in fact, walk on water. So, I guess not just my dad's early poaching days, but the river was always a real big thing in our lives. I did my school project on the river when I was like nine or 10 years old, and just used to see so much more wildlife, even if it was just great diving beetles and those kind of things. You just don't see as much of that.

**I1: Sounds like you're still doing quite a bit of walking by the river.**

R: Well, I live very close to it. It's only two fields away. And because now the dog is very old, he can manage to walk down over back. Until he became very old, we'd go down and cross the Staunch, then head up towards Hockwold, and that's lovely 'cause there's lots and lots of birds in the weeds and things and see the barn owl be quarter in the field. You know where you go through that gate as you're heading towards New Bridge? That's where I'd often see a barn owl. Sort of if it was a bit dusky. And of course, there's the king fisher that goes up and down there as well, and lots of other things too. I've only ever seen an otter once though, to my sorrow. But, yeah, it's absolutely glorious.

**I1: Yeah. It sounds like the river's been very important throughout not only your life, but your family's life.**

[00:55:12]

R: Yeah, going back generations. Yeah, definitely. I remember my dad saying, it must have been after the war 'cause his dad was there and I think they'd been in the Flintknappers having a round, possibly having a few pints, and they decided to take the boat out on the river and him and his brother Jimmy and his dad, and they managed to turn it over, and my granddad used to mend people's watches and clocks. That was just a sort of sideline. It was his side hustle in the 50s, and so he'd got watches up his arms. He was trying to keep his arms out was the water and get to the bank. Not successfully.

**I1: Why would he have watches on his arms?**

R: Just to check how they were running.

***I2: So he'd prepared them, or...***

R: Yeah.

***I2: ...fix them for people, and then he was...to see how they work on the body?***

R: Yeah, exactly.

**I1: They weren't waterproof in those days.**

R: No, they weren't, which is why it was a bit of a disaster. And he probably wouldn't have gotten a boat in the first place if he hadn't had a gallon of beer beforehand. And then dad said their kitchen walls would be covered with clocks that he was also fixing. So if you'd been taking an oral history now, you've never heard a word of anything, would you?

[00:56:39]

**I1: You mentioned earlier somebody, and I've forgotten who, sorry, but he was the manager of Lynford Hall?**

R: That was my dad.

**I1: That was your dad? Alright. When was that?**

R: Again, it was the early 60s.

**I1: How did that come about?**

R: I'm not sure how he got the job. He was in the Navy for a few years, and then he did a bit of this in a bit of that, and the Forestry Commission owned Lynford Hall and after the war it was taken over by a group of men from the East End who just took it over. Just was squatting there. And they used to put on events and do all kinds of things. It had been used to billet officers during the war, and then these men were doing it. I remember the name one of them was Jimmy, but I don't remember the names of the others. And then the Forestry Commission decided it was too much trouble and so they sold it off to somebody who was called Lord Hare. He used to also have what was called caravan service, which is where Omar's and things are now. And it's basically a trailer park. My dad used to manage that as well, and that was for American servicemen. So, I don't know if he bought Lyford, I don't know if that came first and then Lyford, I really don't know. So, dad managed that for him. But first of all, they had to get these men out and nobody wanted to do the court. They'd gone to the high court to get an eviction order, but the high court bailiffs refused to go because they were frightened of these people, you see.

My dad was never frightened of things like that so he said, "I'll do it then." So they gave him the writs and he just went round early in the morning and surprised them. And he said the gang leader said to him, "One of these days, Mr Kent, when you're going round those cellars down there, I'm gonna shove a knife between your ribs." And he just said, "Go on then." And they just went off to do their deeds elsewhere so his ribs remained unmolested. And so then he managed it, but it was in quite a bad state. And I've got a memory, he used to take me to work with him, and I have a memory where they found all these statues in the ponds. Because the gardens were much like they are now, and they'd been put in there to protect them during the war. So they, where could we hide these? And they'd put them in these ponds. So, my dad and his men were getting in the ponds and tying ropes around these things, and it was like magic when you were a child, all these statues were coming out of the ponds. There was just lots of work needed to be done. There still is. They've got like a whole wing that's almost derelict, don't they?

But he used to take me and I was sort of released into the wild, and he'd say, "Don't go any of the ponds or the lake." And for some reason, I was a lot younger then. I was really young. I was about three or four and I didn't used to do that. He trusted me, didn't he?

**I1: Was that in that lake that's in bottom of the garden of the hotel?**

R: Yeah.

**I1: Where the statues were?**

R: No, they were in the ponds. They had ornamental ponds and they were in there. Goodness knows what might be in the lake if they dredged it. I can remember him taking me on a rowing boat out on the lake and it was just like a massive flowering water lilies and he rode me out there so we could sort of just enjoy the sight. It was lovely.

***I2: So the ponds, if you are looking down towards the ornamental lake at the front, were they on the right-hand side going off down?***

R: I don't know, I can't remember. I was really young. I was like three, four, five years old. But that is a really vivid memory of seeing this happening.

***I2: Was it like a water garden or something?***

R: No, I don't think so. I remember them as big, round, ornamental ponds with treasures hidden within them.

***I2: Yeah.***

R: The rose garden, oh, it's not there, is it? They built on it. As you come down to the Hall, on the right-hand side there was a rose garden which also had some statuary in there. I remember wandering around there among roses when they were there, and that strange bull fighting one. Is it...

***I2: Oh, yes.***

R: The man wrestling. I can't remember.

***I2: I think it is, isn't it? Yeah. A bull and a man.***

R: That's it. I can remember looking at that and being a bit concerned the bull might get off the...it never did, in case you're wondering.

***I2: It's remained steadfast.***

R: It has, yeah. It's obviously been stuck on there quite well. But yeah, that used to sort of alarm me a bit as a child.

**I1: I think I'd be quite alarmed to see these statues coming out of the pond, but it sounds like it was just a wonderful experience.**

R: Yeah, yeah. It was quite amazing.

**I1: So, was that main sort of interaction with the ponds and the lakes? Sort of keep away from the lakes, and you saw the statues?**

R: Yeah. The statues were coming out. I'm guessing they must've been keeping an eye on me somehow or other. I'd go down the other drive, which probably was nothing like it is now, but I did stay away from where I was told, fortunately. Yeah.

**I1: And that was quite a short period he was working there, was it?**

R: I don't know. Maybe about five years, then Lord Hare died of a heart attack. My dad, they offered to sell it to him, the Hall and the land and the two lodge houses, and the bank was prepared to lend him money, and my mum wouldn't take the risk. And he never forgave. I mean, he would just bring up the case. He didn't rant at her or anything, but I know he really regretted doing it, especially for the amount of money it was. Because he said that it was £20,000, and they'd just put 20 because there was a small trailer park there as well and they just put 20 new trailers on there and they were 1,000 each. He said that covered them and everything else was profit. But she just didn't wanna take the risk.

**I1: Interesting.**

R: But they remained happily married despite that.

**I1: Okay. So, anything else occur to you in relation to the...**

R: No.

[01:03:12]

**I1: You've told us a lot of really interesting stories.**

R: Is that? Good, I hope so. I'll just have a look if there is...

**I1: And given a sense of how important it was in your life.**

R: Yeah. I'll have a quick look, but I think I've got everything. When my dad was growing up, they were really, really poor and he'd sometimes say to me, "I only had two toys when I was growing up." It was a sort of, I think, a sort of soft toy and a football. And then as he told me more stories, I thought, oh, when you were 10 you had three dogs, a boat and a shotgun. That's better than a scalectric set really, isn't it?

***I2: You don't realise at the time, do you?***

R: No, you don't. No.

**I1: Did he speak with sadness about the two toys?**

R: No, I don't believe it was sadness, I think it was more kind of you know, kids today don't know they're born kind of thing. I mean, it's not like we just had two toys when we were growing up. Didn't have a gun either. We do have his gun now. I wouldn't know how to use it.

**I1: No, it's an interesting contrast, isn't it?**

R: Yeah, yeah. I mean really, ask the average 10 or 11-year-old, which would you rather have? A lot of them would go for his lifestyle. It's the freedom of it that is amazing to me. He always said, a boy became a man when he was 14, because that's when they left school. And I could see from his way of life, that is when he took on those sort of adult male responsibilities.

**I1: And I suppose he'd been providing for the family already since he was what? Nine or 10.**

R: Yeah, he did. He'd worked all of his life because his mum used to do stone picking on Fengate, and he would help doing that. From what he remembered, he had a good early memory and he could remember sort of toddling around picking up these stones as well.

***I2: Stone picking? What was stone picking?***

R: Stone picking. That's what they used to do, picking the stones off the fields, you know, just to clear the...

***I2: Oh, okay.***

R: ...probably big lumps of flint and that kind of thing. And then when he was five he used to have a bird scare. He did bird scaring. And these was on the fields where they have the Steam Engine Rally now. And so, he'd have one of those wooden rattles to scare the birds, and he'd say that was a lonely old job as because was out there for hours trying to keep pigeons off the food. And then when they lived in School Lane, so he was sort of how old? Seven, eight years old maybe. Maybe not so much. He had a Saturday morning job in the house...you know if you go down School Lane, you've got school on one side, and there's a large house on the other side, and they've got a courtyard of square cobbles, and he used to weed those with a kitchen life. And any money, he gave to his mum, because they didn't have much money coming in. And then he just gradually accumulated. He said before he left school he was earning more than his brother did who had left school and was in a full time job. So, quite an entrepreneurial.

**I1: Okay. Well, thank you very much.**

R: You're welcome.

**I1: Really interesting. We appreciate your time.**

***I2: It was fascinating.***

**I1: Fascinating stories, and you filled in some gaps for me, and bits and pieces...**

R: Oh, good.

**I1: ...if other people have said so that was very interesting too.**

R: Yeah. Good.

[01:06:41][End]