



**Grace Notes
Scotland**
Handing on Tradition

The End of the Shift **An Oral History Project by Grace Notes Scotland**

Date: 18 July 2013
Informant (s): Jim Douglas
Fieldworker: Margaret Bennett (MB)
Subject: Mining in Fife
Place of Origin: Kelty, Fife

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MB: Jim, for all the year I've know you, I've never really asked you where you were born

JD: Well I was born in Kelty, Fife, which is a wee mining village.

MB: And were your people miners?

JD: Goin away back, my grandfather was a winding engineman at a wee place called Lassodie , which is about two miles from Kelty, an that's the man that sits an works the levers an lowers the cages down to the bottom and brings them up again of course, an also bringin up coal, other stuff like that.

MB: What a responsibility.

JD: So he was the winding engineman and eh it was an amazin thing followed on from that, that I was told when I wis doin some mining research that the original seat for the winding enginemen was over near Kirkcaldy. And they had transferred it to the Meedies, or the Medleys, as they call it, and it was waitin to be scrapped. And it was all sorts of wood, going away back to the original winding engineman's seat at the Mary Pit near Loch Ore, and I rescued it. I asked if I could take it away, and it sat in oor gairden for a while. It was a case of the joiner at the time, which would be early on in the century, last century, mibbie in the 20s or so, wid use bits of wood that wis lyin around, so it wis partly hard wood, likes o oak and that, and soft wood. It just looked like the garden seat, very heavy -- it took two men to lift it, you know. And so you had the backing, and the side bit, and the seat. And it looked just like the garden seat, as I wis sayin, an then I discovered it was a commode. Actually it was a commode! And you lifted the seat up and then there was another bit with the oval in it, and two wee doors underneath that you opened up, and you had a potty there, or whatever you had.

MB: A chanty

JD: A chanty or something, aye. And the thing was, that the winding engineman wasn't allowed to leave his seat for 6 hours. And of course, they couldnae, they wouldnae employ another man to relieve him or that. So he had to use it as a...he was in this room on his own, he had to use this as a commode. And I exhibited it at Kelty Library there, and it wis quite funny because I knew the librarian very well, Anne, and people would come in tae see an exhibition I had on mining, and they would say, 'Is there any toilets here?' and eh, Anne would say tae them, 'There's one at the back there, but it's a wee bit exposed,' you know. (Laughs) So that was my grandfather and my father was a stripper, he started off at Lassodie Pit when he was thirteen years of age. He went down the pit at thirteen to look after the pit ponies, and then as he got older he did heavier and heavier work, and he finished up doin the hardest job in the pit, which was a stripper. When I'm givin talks I say that was an honourable profession at one time. A stripper. You know? (laughs) And eh, see that wis the hardest job in the pit. And he moved tae Ketly and he met my mother, now my mother worked on the pit head, on the moving belts and it was mostly manned by women. An the belts came along, and they had tae pick oot the stone and throw oot the stones there, so it was jist the coal that wis coming down. So my mother did that, a 'Pitheid Lassie' as they would call it. So you couldnae get much more of a mining family than



your father a stripper and your mother a Pitheid Lassie.

MB: Well certainly you father's father was a miner. Were you mum's folks miners as well?

JD: No, it's a strange thing. My mother was called Jones, Annie Jones and he father was a Welshman, and he came to work on the old Forth Bridge, the Iron Bridge. He came there and he travelled all over the country working at various sites there. I never met my grandfather, I mean, he was dead before I was born. So she didn't have this mining background.

MB: Was your paternal grandfather alive when you were a boy?

JD: I only one, one granny, that was my father's mother. I didn't know any o the rest o 'em.

MB: So she was a miner's wife.

JD: My mother?

MB: Your granny

JD: O ma granny, yes aye she would be a miner's wife

MB: Did she ever talk about her days, you know, bringin up a family, with her husband down the mines, workin on shifts?

JD: I never remember much about that, you know? Ma father would of course talk about his experiences down the pit, but not ma granny. I remember, of course when you're young you've no ambition to sort eh register the past. And you'd be the same, it's only later on that you say that's worth recording, my parents, 'cause that's just your parents, just takin them for granted. But you never think about questioning them about their life. And if you'd done that when you were young, even in your teens, you would have had far more information about their life. You know?

MB: So when you were a boy, your Dad was goin out to work and he was goin out to the mines.

JD: He wis, yes, but I don't remember that because just I wis born in 1933 and it must have been about 1936 he had the typical miner's accident, where the roof came down. That was the thing they all feared. You know they had the props, the pit props, and every now and again the roof would collapse, and a lot of miners were injured that way. So my father had the typical miner's accident that the roof came down, and he broke his leg in six places, and he was in stookie for about two years. It wouldn't set very well, six places. So I jist remember him vaguely there an ma mother said that he would sit at the fireplace, lift up a poker and bend it, just wi nerves. And he was buried under it, as far as I remember it, for maybe a couple eh hours. A rescue team tried to come in but it was still falling, bits still falling so they couldnae come in right away. And of course my father was thinkin his time was up us, he could go any time, you know? So I brought this intae a song actually. It's about that, about walking along the Gairney, which is a lovely stream near Kelty, with my mother, and that's was I lay thinkin about, you know?

MB: And is that in your book Dugs, Doos and Dancin?

JD: Yes, that bit about walking along the Gairney with my mother, you know?

MB: Yes, I saw that but of course I don't know the tune. Do you fancy givin a wee...?

JD: Heather Innes recorded it, 'That I were where the Gairney gleams, the Gairney gleams...'

MB: Oh it's to the same tune, is it to the tune of 'Gin I were where the Gaudie Rins', no?

JD: Oh it's based on that but it's not the same tune.

MB: No it's not the same tune

JD: (Singing) That I were where the Gairney gleams,
The Gairney gleams, the Gairney gleams
O that I were near her bright streams
If only I was free

(Speaking) Should have had the book in front o me then I could do the whole song, you know?

MB: Yes, it's lovely. Ah well, we'll maybe do that another time. So that is a powerful memory, and your father would not have been an old man when that happened.

JD: He was born in 1900. So in 1936 he was 36 year old and then he couldn't go back to the pits so he went to Rosyth Dockyard. So that's what I remember, him coming back from Rosyth Dockyard every night.

MB: He was a docker

JD: Well, it was in the splicing department



MB: That's a tough job too

JD: Well, not at Rosyth, because everything was eh, there was so many people there, they employed so many people with injuries and that and there were a lot o stories about it. There was eh, they said 'If you're caught workin you'll get the sack.'

And the famous one that everyone knows in Fife is that the military police are there, the dockyard police are there at the gates and this man come out with a barrie full of sawdust and they wud rake through the sawdust and shavings an that, and nothing there. So he did this quite a lot, so in a pub one o his pals says, 'What are ye takin oot, Jimmy?' he says 'That's strange, you must be stealin some'hin'. He says, 'Yes. Barries!' Have you heard that before? [laughter]

MB: Yes, well I've heard a Glasgow version.

JD: Well it will be, all over the country. But this is one we were familiar with, you know.

MB: So this is with sawdust yes the one I heard was with straw...

JD: Aye, same thing. So you were brought up wi these things as a kid. A lot o wee stories about the characters

MB: But it is characters, and there was plenty characters. Yes.

JD: Well in Kelty there was a, I met him once, there wis a man called Jimmy Peely, which is a great name. That wasnae his real name, somebody told me his real name, I've forgotten it. An there was brickworks in the village itself. I mean, you know the houses, they were just yards away from the brickworks. And he used to sleep at night next to the kilns, because it was nice and warm and the people would let him do this. So he went in to the entrance of some of the kilns and eh, he was a character Jimmy Peely, and he went into hospital when he got very old, and my mother took me to see him. Because he was a great person, I went round to see him in Dunfermline. And I just remember this old man wi the white hair and the white beard in there, and I was in there once or twice wi ma mother. And he was one of the characters. And every village, I mean I could recite about a dozen characters, half a dozen that were known to everybody

MB: Why was he called Jimmy Peely?

JD: I don't know how he got the name, but somebody told me his correct name at one time. I shoulda written it down.

MB: Peely, how do you spell it?

JD: P, E, E, L, Y

MB: Who knows.

JD: And there were all these characters about the village of course

MB: And this is Kelty?

JD: This is Kelty. And everybody...I think it was five thousand inhabitants so ye knew nearly everyone in Kelty. An I knew more than most as a boy because eh I was an apprentice joiner an we did, wi the Co-Operative, so we did all the Co-Operative shops an that. And then ye did the council, the council houses. And we would do that and then the coal board houses. So I wis in nearly every hoose in Kelty at one point, as an apprentice joiner. So, see, you meet an awful lot of people, because you were a joiner there, you know

MB: Talking of housing, it wasn't common for people in those days to own houses. Where did most of the miners stay? Were they coal board houses?

JD: There were aye. Aye they talk about the miners' rows, and they were coal board houses

MB: Yes, and did you grow up in one of those houses?

JD: No, well ma mother, well ma granny, that was my Granny Jones. It was an interestin background, because it was sort eh the wicked stepmother. She had a stepmother and she was forced to leave home, or wanted to leave home, so she landed at Inverkeithing. And that's where she met my grandfather who I said was working on the Forth Bridge. And that's in my book, I Ran to the Rainbow. And he'd asked her to go out with him once or twice, and she did that, and then he asked her to go to the register office and as a witness to a pal gettin married. And, as I say, that's in my other book eh Run to the Rainbow. And my granny wondered why they were asking her so many questions and she asked him. An he said, 'We've to be married, Nell'. And she says, 'Whit! Marry a wee Welshman like you?' she says, you know? 'Never!' And



it's the way my mother describes it. And then they sat down and she thought, I've nobody in the world that's botherin about me, wi all ma stepmothers an that. Here's someone who really wants me. And they got married an had a lot eh children, there was about nine children or something.

MB: That's an interesting proposal. None of yir bended knee for him! Gosh, well they say that arranged marriages are equally successful as ones that are not. Who knows?

JD: Well he was a character I said, my Grandfather Jones who I never met. He was used to working all over the country, so the wander list, and every now and again he would take off without even tellin the family. Be away for a week or a fortnight and then come back again. I heard this eh travelling list. The people in Kelty would tell me the stories. The best known one is, they needed the paraffin for the lamps so he took a tin away with him and he was supposed to come back the same day with that but he didnae come back for a fortnight, and he had hid the can in a ditch an he'd seemly picked it up on the way back and come back a fortnight later as if nothing had happened. So he would do this, just disappear for a while, you know. And they were doon in Wales, because he was a wee Welshman. And he used to wear gold ear-rings which was unusual in these days. One in each ear.

MB: He had two yes, how interesting.

JD: And a special hat. I could show you a photiegraph of him. So he was known in Kelty as the Wee Welshman. Looked on as an eccentric of course, you know. So he was quite a character, seemingly, you know.

MB: He must have been. Did you have uncles who were miners?

JD: Oh, aye, uncles, a lot of them. And some had jobs, my uncle Jack Swinley for instance was assistant for Fife to the...he was second from the top, in the Coal Board. He was an engineer and he, one of the top jobs in Fife. And another one, a cousin, he was one of the top men in electrical engineerin. And they did the whole of Fife. And there were a lot of other miners but goin back to Lasoddie, there's a lot of photographs there I could show ye. My father was brought up, one of his brothers strayed on the railway when he was 6 year old. And the train came and cut off one arm and one leg. And eh the story was that nobody would touch him, he was there covered in blood and that, and my granny came up and she lifted him up and carried him to the house. I don't know how he survived it.

MB: Oh my word

JD: And he says, the story we got wis, 'Dinnae mind mum, they'll grow in again.' He was six year old. So in his photiegraphs, see there's one just in the hall there. He always hides behind someone and you never notice it. You just see this wee lad there but one arm and one leg is hidden behind someone else and you won't notice it.

MB: So it was his mother, that's your granny, who carried him up...

JD: That was my granny who carried him out. Aye, and he grew up and eh my father says he was an amazin man, he could jump over one o these gates, you know, the wooden gates. He'd jump over that, play football, use his crutch like a leg and that.

MB: Did he have an artificial leg?

JD: No, he scorned that. They just rolled it up and put a big pin in it.

MB: But he had a pin though, he had a pin that he could step on. [misunderstanding here, assuming it was a wooden pin, or peg leg.]

JD: No no, I'm saying, a safety pin. He'd just roll up the trouser and pin it. And that's what a lot of men in Kelty did. They didnae have artificial legs. They had the crutches, two crutches and the trousers rolled up like that.

MB: Oh, that's spirit.

JD: And that was my Uncle Jimmy.

MB: How would you do crutches with only one arm though, that's a difficulty.

JD: He would have one crutch I think, you're quite right. He would have one crutch, yeh, on the side where there should have been a leg. Nothing stopped him. He was a great fisherman and I used to go out wi him and my father, and he was putting a worm on, he would do it wi one hand and he would thread a hook no bother, puttin a worm onto it, just jamming it against his



shoulder.

MB: Because he practiced from the aged of six

JD: Oh aye

MB: So was it an opposite leg and arm he'd lost?

JD: No, no, same side

MB: Oh my word! What a fate.

JD: I was called up for national service, 1953. It was during that time that he died but he came from Perth to Kelty, which is 20 miles, on the back o a motorbike. And I thought, what courage there, and a pleasing day, you know? And my mother would ask him 'How are you getting on, Jimmy?' you know, when he arrived to see us anytime, and he'd throw the crutch into the air, you know like those chaps who go on parades, you know, and catch it again.

JD: Oh great. Never ever complained. And he fathered about nine children.

MB: To the same woman?

JD: To the same woman. Aye, about nine, you know? So he was one o my favourite uncles. But what a brave man he was.

MB: Yes. Did he work? Did he manage to work?

JD: He worked, He was in...My Uncle Billy, he owned Methven Castle. He was a scrap merchant still on the go yet, Holdings. And he bought Methven Castle and my father and I used tae stay overnight in the castle, because my cousin was an international boxer. Dougie Holden who was quite well known in the area. What was I goin to say about that? That was my Uncle Billy. Oh aye, that was my Uncle Billy. He worked for my Uncle Billy on the Shore Road, in the scrap business, and then he worked in something I don't know much about, Perth Records Office. And he worked there for a while, so he was always in work.

MB: Yes and bright, he sounded as if he was really bright

JD: Aye, he did some things at the night school, got qualifications wi the record office but I don't know quite what the records were, mibbie just the population or something like that, you know

MB: How old was he when he died? About...

JB: About 50. He was strainin his self all the time, you know

MB: He lived a full life

JB: Amazin man, ye know.

MB: What an amazing man, yes indeed

JD: So I said I had all these uncles and like my mother, some of the wives worked in the moving belts, you know.

MB: So these uncles, they were your mother's brothers mostly of them? Or your...

JD: Mother's brothers...eh, no. My mother's brothers, the oldest one went away tae America, my Uncle Willie. My mother's brothers, one was a grocer an one was a barber in Kelty and they moved down to Wales because they had this connection with Wales, an they both married Welsh wives, and one did the same thing, worked as a grocer, had their own business and one worked as a barber. So they werenae, none of them down the pits as far as I remember. It was my father's side, because I say my granny was a miner's wife and you know, all these things. And some of the research at one time, was years ago, and they were a bit disappointed goin away back, all the miners were either coal miners or stone miners. There wasnae a Duke or an Earl or... (laughs)

MB: Yes, something we seem to forget about now is stone miners. You read about, or I read about stone miners. And I think, I must confess that for years I never considered there were such a thing as a stone miner

JD: Aye, aye, I don't know much about that I say it was all coal miners that I knew about, you know. But I collected all these great stories because of this interest, years ago, just came about accidently I think. And eh you got these great anecdotes, which I collected, I wrote down. Briefly, there was, one was, they used an awful lot of wood down the pits. The pit props and other bits eh wood for makin up side bits, you know, an awful lot eh timber. An this man had went to see the manager, and he sayed he was wantin...he wasnae getting enough wood ye see, or wid as they wid call it. And he said tae the manager, 'We're needin more wid', ye know, and



the manager sayed, ‘Wid, wid, wid. Ye’re efter mair wid! It doesnae grow on trees ye know!’

MB: (Laughs) Oh that’s great!

JD: And the other story. One o the other one was. There was the pit heid men, worked at the top at the side and they had the wood yard there of course, you know. And one o them was asked to go and see if they could get more money, a shilling a day extra because it was often rainin and bad weather, and they were gona be getting soaked you know, and things like that. So the chap went tae see the manager again and he says, there tended to be a kind of love-hate relationship between the managers an the men. And he says, we should be getting a shillin extra fir water money. And he says, ‘O, ye cannae get that!’ he says, ‘A dinnae get a shillin aff ye when the sun shines,’ he says. ‘So I cannae give ye money when it rains!’

MB: Oh my word.

JD: And the one I like best was a great big chappy called Rouke and he was reckoned to be the strongest man in the pit. And again he went tae see the manager about some’hin or other and the manager says, ‘What ye wantin, what are ye wantin? I’m busy!’ And he put his hands, the miner put his hands on the table an leaned forward, ye know. And he said... ‘Civility.’

MB: Oh! (laughs)

JD: Jist the way it was described, you know.

MB: Yes, yes

JD: You know, the manager in a hurry, and he says ‘Civility’, ye know.

MB: Yes, almost like a, well maybe a role reversal in the way that the manager would have asked for that from the men. In a sense.

JD: That’s right. So they were great stories and I illustrated a lot o them which you know, writing maybe a poem about them and the incident and that, ye know

MB: It seems that mining, now you yourself didn’t follow mining but mining has followed you. You were an apprenticed joiner when you left school.

JD: Yes

MB: What made you choose that?

JD: Well my father never wanted me to go down the pit. A lot eh the other miners did. They wanted their sons to follow them. This was a great tradition. Because you’re goin back, their fathers would be down the pit, so a lot o them jist took for natural for their sons to go down. But my father never wanted me to do that. So I was lucky enough to get an apprenticeship with the Co-Operative. And going back to the Co-op, the Co-op had everything in Kelty. The Drapers shop, the butchery, the building department — that was the plumbers, all these people. Painters, fish, and all the shops and everything. And you got the famous Dividend, of course. The Divvy

MB: Yes, I remember

JD: You got the wee cheques.

MB: And your number, yes

JD: And ye always remember it. My mother’s cheque was 1271. It’s in your mind forever ‘cause we used to always go and get these things. So I was lucky getting an apprenticeship there, rather than go down the pits. But I’d always the association, it’s funny, jist seemed tae always follae me because when I worked as a physiotherapist down in Yorkshire, in Wakefield, I was sent to a miners’...no a hospital, a rehabilitation place, ye know? A lot eh miners, it was all miners there in Yorkshire, and when I came tae Bridge of Earn as a physiotherapist, about a third o these men would be miners, so apart from my own family, I had all these connection and stories from all these miners. Even down in Yorkshire.

MB: Of course... That’s huge leap from being a joiner to being a physiotherapist. How did that come about?

JD: Well as soon as I finished, they used to say that to you. I did 5 years from 15 to 20, and the men would say to you, ‘You’ll get one journeyman’s pay and you’re off the following week’. And it happened exactly to me. So when I was twenty, a week later, was called up for national service and that’s the story. I was in the RAF regiment and I was in Iraq for two years there. And it was supposed to be peacetime. But anyway, when I came back, I’d always done gymnastics for years and I was in a gymnastic club in Dunfermline, and I was walking to the bus one day (this shows



you how fate takes a hand) and a clerk of works that I knew, I passed his house and he was out in the garden. And he said, 'Do you ever think about doing gymnastics full-time?' I says, 'Oh it's what I wanted as a youngster but I've no educational qualifications, leaving school at 14. And he said he had a talk from the head gymnast at Bridge of Earn all about remedial gymnastics. And he said, 'You should write to him and find out when they train'. So I did that and got in touch with this head of department, who became my boss, and he told me all about the course at Pinderfields General Hospital, Wakefield. It was the only one in the world, the unique thing. It was the department of Recreational Therapy and Remedial Gymnastics, so it's the only one in the world. So it takes a long time to explain this, but at the end of the war, they had all these great P.E. instructors, physical education core instructors who were all sergeants and they didn't need so many sergeants when the war finished, so they were coming to Civvy Street. And this brigadier had the great idea: You're loosing all that talent therefore we'll give you a year's course as a remedial gymnast, because they were already qualified instructors. So when I went in, most of them were in the core, and they were terrific men. And of course I hadn't been in the core, I'd been in the forces but not in the core and I learned an awful lot after a year at Wakefield, and then you trained at Bridge of Earn Hospital. So that's how it came about the switch from Joiner work to that. And then of course I switched from that to Glasgow School of Art.

MB: You did! And we'll get there eventually. But when you were doing remedial gymnastics, we didn't get a chance to let you talk about your own career, as a runner, as a gymnast. You were obviously very athletic when you were young.

JD: Aye well, started off as a schoolboy, when I was ten year old, I think it'd be. And that time the Gala Days were terrific, all over Fife, that was the main day of the year and all the kids were turned out well. I mean, in spite of some poverty the kids had dresses on, they marched through the streets, a long precession. And then the sports were great – very, very popular. So I won the Morrell Trophy, and you had to run 100 yards, 220 and 440. And the Morrell Trophy was actually donated by my cousin's husband who was a very well-known accordion player in Fife; in fact he turned professional after a while so I won the famous trophy. Now in the village there were two schools of running, in a wee place of Kelty.

MB: The size of it!

JD: And they would have, I'd say, about six men and six boys. So then I went on to the senior trophy and I was second twice and then I won it twice there. So the school's champion at Kelty Primary and then at Beith High School. And just at the end of the war, a lot of the interscholastic sports had been closed during the war and opened up again. So the gym teacher at Beith High School took three of us, and I was one of them, to Westerlands in Glasgow to enter us into Interscholastic Sports. And unfortunately I didn't get a medal, I was forth, but I was in the final. And, as I mentioned to you earlier on I think, you either turn professional or give it up. So I turned professional and ran for about three seasons with Highland Games. And the only thing I won was about 3 pounds for running about 2 or 3 seasons. And funnily enough, at Glenfarg, I'd be 15 year old, and as I said, you were given a mark. You had the back marker, who was the fastest man in the field. Then I had six yards off the baton marker, as a boy. And it was a bit disheartening because there were men in front of men, men in their 20s and 30s and I was 15 year old. And you had no chance. But I ran. But I loved it and I ran week after week at the highland games and you had to pay to get in. Then you had to pay to get in for each event. I think it was 1/6 to get in, 1/6 for each event. So, I never won anything until we came to Glenfarg. And what happened, the handicapper had lost his marks and he says: 'I'm sorry about this but I'll just have to place you on the field'. And because I was obviously a young laddie he gave me a good mark. And I was third in the 200 metres, down here at the park. And that was a lot of money, I got three pound, and I mind I was earning about six pounds at the time, so that's quite a lot of money.

MB: Yes, isn't it.

JD: And I was so thrilled that I thought: 'Oh this is great, I'll try the pole vault'. And all the pole vaulters carried their pole vault with them. There was none down there and I had to use this pole (I think I mention this in the DVD) that I tried to get off the ground, and I only go off a wee



bit and my pole went over and broke the stick at the top, it just sticks at the top there. And I tried it again and broke another one, and the chieftain came to me and said: ‘I don’t think this is your event son’. (Laughs) So I lost my 1/6 but I had three pound. So for about two or three seasons, and then I switched to gymnastics after that. They had a great club in Dunfermline, and one of my best friends yet was John O’Brien. He was Scottish Champion for ten years running, except from one where he was injured. So you had the Scottish champion and the Scottish champion team all at Carnegie Club in Dunfermline. So I did that for three years, that would be from 17 to 20 and then I was called up. And when I came back again, I came back to gymnastics again.

MB: Did you use your...

JD: I’ve got one, I don’t think you’ve seen it; it’s up there somewhere. It was in the press, asking for memories of the cinema, and I had a lot of memories of that, the matinees and all these things. So I wrote away, and I put the poem in that I wrote, which is in Dugs, Doos and Dancing. It’s called ‘The Grand Circle’ and that’s where you jump up and grasp the horizontal bar and you swing up to 12 o’clock and then round again like that, and they called it ‘The Grand Circle’. So I put that in, and I was invited to go to the opening of the book, Going to the Movies I think. The Scottish Museum, you’ll have been there I think, there’s a wee place for films and I went there and it was great. The girls were dressed up -- the usherettes.

MB: The usherettes!

JD: So you saw a lot of the old films from Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, some news reels and that. And we got the book and it wasn’t until I got home that I realised he had used my experiences, with a lot of other people (maybe about 20 people giving experiences of the cinemas) but he also put the poem in, and he showed you Burt Lancaster and Gina Lollobrigida in Trapeze. So that was the illustration.

MB: You’ve got such an imagination!

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MB: It seems it is a pretty quick transition from physiotherapy to art school, but I know that’s where you eventually went. This is quite a career path from being a miner’s son to being an apprentice joiner and then in the RAF and then your physio and gymnastics. What made a change of path?

JD: Well, in the case of switching from joiner work, because when I came out the forces I did joiner work for three years, and it was grim at Christmas time and New Year because people didn’t want you in their houses. You’d often sit there, and you’d have a time sheet to fill in. And it was impossible; you couldn’t put in any hours. I used to put things in like selling sales material or clearing up the shop, or whatever, things like that, and it was soul destroying. So, it came to a time when I went in in the morning and the gaffer said to another man, ‘Come on we’ll go to the school and see what’s needed there’. And I’d no work to do, I could have cleaned up the shop and that so I said ‘No, I’m not gonnae do this’. I sat for on a bench for an hour and when the gaffer came back I says: ‘Geordie, I want my books’. ‘What’s wrong wi’ you?’ he says. I said: ‘This is hopeless’. That I had no work to do and trying to fill in these timesheets. So he said that it might come in again and he went and got the books. And I went to Beith and Dunfermline employment place and there was not one joiner’s job in Fife at all. So I went to the Forestry Commission, and I was in the Forestry Commission for a year. But I had applied to Wakefield and been accepted but I knew I had a year to go before I got on the next course. So that’s when I transferred to physiotherapy, at that stage.

MB: Oh, yes.

JD: And it was pure fate about this chap telling me about the head gymnast, purely fate. And when I was at Bridge of Earn hospital, I’d drawn since I was a boy and written poetry since I was a boy and I used to do posters for nurses’ dances and all these things. And then the medical photographer, Adam, who’s polish, Adam Stelinski. His dressing room was next to our dressing room, there were six of us, six instructors, and he used to do photographs of operations and that. So, he said to me, ‘Will you do some drawings?’ Of some of them you couldn’t photograph obviously. So he took me over to meet Mr Matheson, who was one of the top surgeons at the time in Bridge of Earn. And I did medical drawings, and...it would be showing you what had



happened in a particular operation. I had worked with Grey's Anatomy to make the drawing, and he would show me the changes that he wanted to show the operation. And some of these landed in the British Journal of Surgery. So I was doing art all the time: medical drawings, posters, and on my own time, doing landscapes mostly and portraits, I was always good at portraiture. So when the chance came, it was my sister I think who kept saying, 'Why don't you go to the School of Art?' And I applied and luckily enough I got a place.

MB: With a portfolio presumably?

JD: Aye well, I went to Edinburgh first of all. And what I noticed between Edinburgh and Glasgow was people are maist friendly there. Whether it's true or not I don't know. But, they just sent me an official letter, just to say you've got to hand in a portfolio and your educational qualification and so on. It didn't sound very hopeful and I didn't get in. And when I applied to Glasgow there was this Lennox Paterson, he received applications. And it was different altogether, he sent a personal letter saying that, 'We realised you are a mature student and therefore don't have what is required from schools'. But I was to send a portfolio of my work, just anything I could and I got a place.

MB: Fantastic. You'd be delighted. What year was that?

JD: That would be '65 to '70. Five years, four years at Art College and a year at Jordanhill.

MB: And did you live in Glasgow then?

JD: I lived in Glasgow with Cathy's brother for a year and travelled a weekend. And then she's come through and stay with her brother for about six months I think. Then I got a house at, our own house at St Vincent's – what's the name?

MB: Crescent?

JD: St Vincent Crescent, that's what it is. So we stayed there for about four years and now it's worth millions, half a million.

MB: Yes, I believe so

JD: Well we bought it for a thousand pounds in 1966 or so

MB: Yes you couldn't, these big flats -

JD: A thousand. And when they were being run down with multiple lettings, and it was a real cosmopolitan street and we loved it there. There were Pakistanis and Indians and Germans and that, all in this crescent. And of course the National Trust took an interest and renovated it and everything. And that's why they say it's worth a lot of money now.

MB: My word! Do you regret getting rid of it?

JD: In a way, but we thought we'd rent it out to students because I got a house in Perth, that was my first, Perth Academy. And I was supplied with a house because you were looked on as an essential worker. So we got a brand new house in Perth but I thought if I try and rent it out you'd maybe get complaints from neighbours that students make a lot of noise or maybe damaging the place so I thought I couldnae risk that really

MB: So you became a teacher, an art teacher at Perth Academy.

JD: After Jordanhill, aye, in Perth, that was my first job.

MB: Did you enjoy Jordanhill?

JD: Aye, I enjoyed it because the pressure was off of you. You had the degree, the diploma in art. A lot of people thought it was unnecessary and it wasnae run very well and all the rest of it. But it gave you- you were more relaxed.

MB: Well I'm glad to meet someone who enjoyed Jordanhill. I did too; I just felt that as a teacher, it taught me to teach.

JD: Well we had a Professor Mead who came from Sandy Valley or some place. I think it was California. And he was a visiting professor. I was working with a well-known artist called Dawson Murray, who's now in a wheelchair, I think he took MS, in Dundee. And we were partnered to go to Whitehill, where Lulu went to. She was an ex member o it – it was a great place. And I went to the annex wi these two artists. One o them was George Parsonage. And there's all sort o films been made aboot him and he's been in the Scots Magazine. Because his father was Ben Parsonage, the Humane Society. And when I was a boy, I knew this name, just reading the papers, because he'd always be rescuing someone from the Clyde. Well George



was a great character and he took over, eventually, from his father. But he was a teacher of art at Whitehill, and I was working with him. He was a great help to me because you had to do your shows on a topic, and I took the Indians as a topic. And we had the kids and he helped me greatly, running about wi tomahawks. We made tomahawks and painted faces and that, you know! We were running about the corridors and that. And George actually made a full size figure. Papier-mâché, and it was all painted and added lots o things, made wigwams with them and totem poles - all these things. And we had to put on a show at the end of your period at Jordanhill. And he put this Indian in the back o his car. And it was very lifelike. And he drove it fae Glasgow in the back seat, you know! So I enjoyed Jordanhill.

MB: It sounds like you were all set up for very enjoyable classes as well.

JD: And I was saying, this Professor Mead, he came to see us at Maryhill. The Primary school, was it- ??? And Dawson Murray and I were doing things like – we had the kids all sitting on the floor and started telling them a story. And when he got puffed out I would take over, and vice versa. And we just made it up as we went along. And it was all about a dinosaur that hatched out with a hen and gradually got bigger and bigger, fighting the bull and so on. And Mead said that this was tremendous, ‘I’ve never seen this done.’ And he says ‘I’m coming out wi a film crew’. The film crew came from Hamilton College of Education. And the first time we were fitted up wi mikes and that, we were to walk around this room and talking to the kids and the kids answering back. It was part of our teaching programme, going back a while, at Jordanhill. Seemingly he showed it to lots of students, this is how you do it, you know. (Laughs) I always seem to land in these sort of situations! Suppose as you say it’s your imagination. You always produce things, you know.

JD: I remember the stories that happened to me there and at Glasgow School of Art. The life classes and all these things I’ve been in which I haven’t mentioned really. Because when I started in the housing scheme, the men were all just back from the war. And a lot of them were, now they say they were suffering from, what is it again?

MB: Post Traumatic Stress

JD: Aye that. And one boy threw a hammer at me, because I was only 15. And I was quite cheeky because they were getting on to me all the time and I was eh -

MB: You were the boy!

JD: Aye. And they called you the nipper, apart from the joiner you were called the nipper and you had to go down for cigarettes. And you only got so many. You had to take maybe 200 Players, 200 Capstain and you got these Turkish cigarettes that no man liked. So I’d get into a lot of bother and that because they would say, ‘Where’s the Capstain?’ and that. ‘How do we get the Turkish?’ And you’d cheek them back and that. So this boy chased me out o house, and he didnae mean to hit me but he did. I was away fae here tae the window. He just drew his hammer out, and he threw it at me, and it struck me right in the back.

MB: Oh for goodness’ sake, you could have been permanently injured!

JD: Aye, but I was ok. But as I say a lot of these boys were like that, so you had a lot of stories like that. And there’s one, again it’s illustrated in my book. There’s a boy called Willie Creosote.

MB: Creosote!

JD: They called him Willie Creosote; his real name was Willie Cunningham. But they had all that timber, and he had to Creosote it. So he was just know as Willie Creosote and he was a wee bit – now we would say learning difficulties. And at one stage he had all that paper round him for...the stuff for the attics and that.

MB: Oh yes, the...

JD: The insulation

MB: Yes

JD: And he set fire to it, and his clothes were all covered wi Creosote. And the men had to come down and rescue him, you know.

MB: Oh my word

JD: And the worst thing it was, as an apprentice, you had the joiner labourers, and there were two of them, that grabbed a hold of Willie in one of the houses where they were just laying the



floors and they nailed him to the floor. And they put big 6 inch nails through his trousers, and bent it over. Drove nails through there, and they held him like that, and then they spat on him. And they just tormented him.

MB: Oh, that's awful!

JD: I know. But it always stuck in my mind and he went mad and he just tore his trousers and his shirt and he grabbed an axe and chased then out the building. And the general foreman got to hear of this, and he was given the sack actually.

MB: The poor wee guy. Willie Creosote was given the sack?

JD: Aye.

MB: Provoked out of all proportion

JD: I have a lot of other experiences; it depends on the various careers. As you say, a whole lot of anecdotes, you know.

MB: Oh! It's just, you know, you couldn't make it up.

JD: No you couldn't.

END OF RECORDING