



The End of the Shift

An Oral History Project by Grace Notes Scotland

DATE: 28 May, 2014
PLACE RECORDED: Kinghorn, Fife
INFORMANT (S): Sheena Berry (SB) and Kenny Munro (KM)
SUBJECT: Mining, Poetry
FIELDWORKER: Margaret Bennett (MB)
ORIGINAL FORMAT: wav files, Digital mic, Edirol

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TRANSCRIBED BY: Sheena Berry
PUBLICATION: **In preparation**

TRACK 1 Intro

TRACK 2

MB: Well do you know it's such a rich area of tradition, history and everything else.

SB: Ehm, yeah, my dad uhm, I actually discovered when we did a little bit of family history. I discovered that his mother's family were miners, the Welshs', at Weymss way back into the 1600s and they would have been bonded.

MB: Oh my word!'

SB: Uhuh, they would have been bonded.' MB: Bonded, you don't even hear the word now.'

SB: Uhuh, and they would have...if they'd left, which they didn't because they remained there for 200 years. They would have had to wear a metal collar. And the children were bonded as well, of course, which is quite horrific! But I didn't know this because nobody spoke.'

MB: Are you born into bondage?'

SB: Uhuh.'

MB: And are you attached to the owners?'

SB: Yes, attached to the owners, and they were not allowed to leave, like slaves. Absolutely horrendous! When I discovered that I was really quite shocked! But my dad was already dead luckily because he would have just been like... fire out of his nostrils, you know!

MB: And so they would have been owned by the Weymss family?'

SB: The Weymss family, uhuh, they're still there. They own all the land and a big castle.'

MB: And the whole area is so beautiful. And they had Weymss Colliery and Weymss Brickworks.'

SB: Uhuh, and all these miners lived in cottages along at Weymss which are now owned by, you know, or bought by people. But other ones are still rented out. So they are still there. And I thought this is like a legacy, you know like, slavery abolished but slavery was here! I was really astonished.'

MB: Yes.'

SB: But he wouldn't know that, you see, of course, because he went into the mines when he was thirteen.'

MB: Yes.'

SB: Thirteen years old!'

MB: Do you know what year your dad was born?'

SB: Nineteen twenty-seven (1927). I've written it down.'

MB: When did he start work in the mines?'

SB: Nineteen forty, I think.'

MB: Yes, during the war. What was his name?'

SB: Charles Berry.'

MB: Name?'

SB: B. E. R. R. Y. . Berry, uhuh.'

MB: Yes, Berry that's an ...'

SB: An unusual name.'



MB: Charles Berry, for me it is anyway.'

SB: And his grandparents were Welshs and his mother was a Welsh so yeah, that was him nineteen twenty-seven. But he didn't work in the mines all his life. But he did, he told me lots of stories. Not at the time he was working in the mines because I would be quite young.'

MB: Yes.'

SB: But later on, you know, he would reminisce and start to speak to you about things. So he always, I always remember him telling me that it was a dangerous place to work and that he'd been down the mine and he said to me one day, "Do you know? People would be sitting having their piece and ehm, the next minute a stone would fall from the ceiling, and they would be killed." And, I thought, dyknow, I ehm, it's funny but do you know how tribes, in different places, tell stories and they go on and on and on. I now won't go near a rock if I think it's going to fall down!'

MB: Well you see, your imagination as a child, would run riot.'

SB: And you know, I have this image of it... I just thought it was awful, you know. Another thing was the rats.

MB: I was going to ask you about the rats. Did they tie the bottoms of their trouser legs?'

SB: Uhuh, and he said, I don't know if you know. I remember him sayin this tae mi, but he said it was seriously bad, 'You had tae keep yer tin shut and you had to keep your drink, whatever it was, with the lid on, because if you didn't and the rat urine got into it, you would have something called Weil's Disease? and it would kill you! And dyknow, when I was in Dublin, I was quite surprised because on the side of the Liffy wall, they've got a little brass plaque and it says; Please DO NOT GO INTO THE WATER OR DRINK IT or you will die from this disease! And I was like.... he wasn't telling a tale.... it was true. It was correct. Horrific! This was after he was out of the pits because obviously he wouldn't tell you stuff like that when you were really young.'

MB: Which village was he born in?'

SB: He was born in Dysart, ehm, well quite close to Dysart because Kirkcaldy and Dysart are quite close together. So his mother was born in Dysart. She was brought up there. His father was Kirkcaldy but born in Edinburgh and they then went to Glasgow and moved over here. And I was surprised when I discovered because my grandad said to me, He said: My mother who had a shop, disowned me and disinherited me because I married your grannie, because she was a mill girl. And she wasn't regarded as good enough.' And I went like, but what did your mother do? And he said, 'Well you know she had a shop.' 'I thought that was terrible!'

MB: No, gosh me.'

SB: So my dad was born in Fish Wynd in Kirkcaldy it's quite close to Dysart so they didn't move very far. But that was him. He was quite an outrageous wee boy by all accounts. But eh, he won a scholarship but couldn't take it up because they wanted him to go into the pit to make money.'

MB: To earn a wage for the house.'

SB: Which is awful. He was very bright, as he said a lot of the people who were in the mines were. He said he loved the camaraderie, he loved the wit, the humour. He said it was great so from that point of view I think it was actually good.'

MB: That was his university.'

SB: They discussed books they read, they did all sort of things and you know....they were Burns fans too, you know.'

MB: They were well read people. That's my impression--

SB: Very well read, and I discovered last year that miners quite often had a library in the villages so that people could go and get books. But he was great. He used to read to me. He would start a story, put the book down then leave it open and say: Oh well. I've got to go to work (or



whatever). And I would be like – I wanted to read the book. I would pick it up and read it.'

MB: Yes, yes. Did you become an avid reader?'

SB: Yes, because, you know, that was just the way he was. I remember him saying to me that education was the way out of this. This is what you need to do and I went to art college. But at that time everybody had a grant and the fees were all paid.'

MB: Yes, in your days. Yes, and mine.'

SB: Yes, but not now.'

MB: No, not at all. What did you do yourself?'

SB: I did printed textiles.'

MB: Did you? Oh interesting, yes, lovely.'

SB: And he was terribly proud. He just thought it was great because nobody in the family had ever been to a college before.'

MB: I think in our generation we probably were the first people to have. Because my mum was very bright at school and she didn't go to university there was no grants. There was no such thing. But she told me that when the grants came in she said: "You know I have a terrible confession. I don't like resentment and I don't like jealousy but I felt both because I hadn't had that opportunity. And I thought - now if only I had."

SB: My dad did as well. He went to night school but found it really difficult because he was in his forties. Uhuh.'

MB: Then they had such a lot – life to get on with - family.'

TRACK 3

SB: I have three poems in here, and I'm going to read them, which my dad wrote, which will give you an idea but you can take the book away with you.'

MB: I can?'

SB: I've marked them. I've listed them and marked them out for you.'

MB: Was he as far as you know, a lifelong writer?'

SB: Lifelong. These are collected over his life – ninety or so poems.'

MB: Who published it?'

SB: I did. I was away working in India for two years and when I came back he didn't tell me but he had developed cancer. And I thought ... I said to him when I came back so is there anything that you would like. It wasn't terminal at that point. I said: Is there anything you would like me to do? And he said: What I'd really like is for all my poems to be put together and published in a book so that I can give them to my grand- children. I said: Well, I think I'll just go away and do that for you. I'd never published anything before so I had to use the local – I lived in Orkney at the time so I had to use the local printer - Orcadian printer - and luckily the young man who had just got the job of ehm, you know, liaising, was somebody that I knew. So, it was great because every time he came, he would say, Okay, so you need to type them all up, then you need to number them. Then he would come back and say, Okay, if you page set them that'd be cheaper. I said, Okay. And I could do it a little bit at a time. Eh, and then he said, "So, what about some illustrations?" And I thought. I said, 'Oh, I hadn't really thought about that but you're right.' So, my daughter's illustration's on the front and I've got several wee bits inside. And my dad got it about four months before he died.'

MB: Oh how...'

SB: and he was absolutely thrilled to bits and nearly cried.'

MB: Yes, I'm sure.'

SB: And he said to me, 'This is a really good book.' 'And I went like, well, it should be because it's got everything in it.' 'Although we did have an argument a couple of times because he'd named.. titled things, the same poem with different titles.'

MB: Yes.'

SB: And he argued with me that that wasn't the case.' And I said, 'No, no, it's correct.'



SB: So, I think the first one.'

MB: Uhuh.'

SB: I've actually numbered the pages.' 'The first one is called, 'First Tow'.' 'When he first went down the pit, the first pull, his first job was to turn the bogies when they came down and, it was difficult for someone of his age. He was just thirteen!'

MB: Imagine a thirteen year old!'

SB: Can you imagine anyone doing that now? It would be just terrible!'

SB: First Tow'

From the dark depths of the shaft we come

Another night's work done,

Tired and aching, soak'd with sweat

And into the morning sun.

And oh! the morning air is sweet

As nectar in your mouth,

While in the blue-washed sky above

Wild geese are flying south.

And linties sing from every tree

And from the far-flung fields –

Moving thru' the Autumn corn

The whirring reaper steals.

Glorious! This bright new day

We are privileged to share,

Full of motion, light and song

And colour everywhere.

For are we just not newly come

From the prehistoric deep,

Where gleaned we fossil-stuff for fires

While the village lay asleep –

With senses finely strung and tuned

To the morning's sights and sounds,

After hours in Satan's galleries

Six hundred fathoms down.

MB: What a picture. Oh, of the power in that! Isn't it?

SB: Uhuh, beautiful.'

MB: Isn't it absolutely – you can almost feel yourself coming out into the light.'

SB: I don't think he wrote that when he was thirteen. He wrote this as a mature man thinking about it.'

MB: 'Oh, my word.'

SB: So they are quite useful because they do actually give you a feeling of the time and...'

MB: Yes.'

SB: The next one's actually, I'm not quite sure which pit it was because he worked in the 'Frances' and the 'Michael' pits when he was younger and then Bowhill which is Dundonald quite close to Cardenden ehm, as an older man. And, I think he must have stopped about 1965..ish because then he went into working for the council out doing gardens and things.'

MB: So you actually remember him going out to work?'

SB: Uhuh. I remember him cycling to work because we lived at the top end of Kirkcaldy. A place called Sauchenbush which was built of prefabricated houses, built for miners. So they were all .. a whole mining community. And he used to leave the house, cycle and then I would see him coming back in the morning when I went to school.'

MB: So he was on night duty?'

SB: Uhuh, he was on nightshift.'

MB: Yes.'



SB: Which is even more difficult.'

MB: Dark and darker. Going out in the dark and working in the dark.'

SB: I remember him always saying you had to make sure you had your light working, because that would make it more difficult for him to come and go. But that would save money as well.'

MB: Hm, gosh I suppose the.....

SB: I mean how else would he get to Dundonald unless they walked there and back? Which is quite a distance. Ah mean, we did it. He used to take us the walk and we used to visit friends of his in Dundonald. But, ehm, it was a long way! You wouldn't want to do that before you then went down and did some work.'

'This is another one about, I don't know which pit it is 'Section Twel'? Aye, he said this existed. And the poem is about this section, he used to make us laugh when he said, 'We used to think there were ghosts up there because it was so awful if you were, you know, given that section.' 'It's a good poem

'Section Twel'. Big Alfie's doon the East Side, an Frankie's ben the West.

Auld Rab an' Jeek's jist ow'r the Dook – thae twa aye get it best!

But me an' Billy Boosey, we work up 'Section Twel' –

Whaur the nearer ye climb tae Heav'n, the closer ye gan tae Hell!

Up there, thur's bluid oan every girder, an' sweat in every clamp.

An' the air's as foul as murder – ye c'n see it wi' yer lamp!

An' thur's great big rats – like pussycats, wad mak ye run pell-mell!

It's a Hell o' a place tae hunker doon an hae yer piece – up Twel!

Twel has a stygian blackness thit's peculiarly its ain –

It's a livin, elemental thing thit spears ye tae the bane.

An it maks ye think, when the Glennie blinks – an yer sittin there yrsel,

Thit if thur's ony ghosts about the pit – thae'll be up Section Twel!

Ye crawl yer wey thru Condies, wi yer backbane double-bent,

While thi damp seeks oot yer nostrils wi diabolical intent –

An the roof is always shiftin back an forrit - ye can tell

Fae the girders squeezed like cheesecake – aw thi wey up Section Twel!

A man died sairly there – wan nicht, an quit his mortal life,

Made orphans o' his bairns, an a widdy o' his wife,

When a monster stane – jist made fur pain, chose him when it fell –

Man, ye never ken when yer number's up, when ye work up Section Twel.

Aye, the pittance thit thae pey ye – an that's gien ye wi a grudge!

Jist isnae worth the taste o' daith, nor the misery o' drudge.

But the thocht o' wee anes left at hame – an a lovin wife, as well!

Wad move yer hert tae bite yer lip – an gan up Section Twel.

So, it's Alfie doon the East Side, an Frankie ben the West –

An Auld Rab an Jeek jist ower the Dook – an a holiday fur the rest!

But me an Billy Boosey – we hear the tollin o' thi bell!

When we lift oor graith, an wander up the brae – tae Section Twel.

SB: Powerful stuff!'

MB: Oh, isn't it just. It .. Oh, what a gift he had too..It's so evocative.'

SB: I know. You can almost imagine yourself there. Ehm, even though I've never been. And I don't like going underground maybe it's because of what he did. But, ehm, you know, I was a teacher and I used to have to go and take kids on camps. And part of that was going subterranean and I just used to have to really. I did it, but just because the kids had to see me doing it. But I didn't enjoy it at all. I hated it and I thought of him.

MB: Gosh, that was quite a poem 'Section Twel'. And all the other men who would just absolutely experience it.'

SB: Uhuh, they'd totally be aware of it. This is another one. This is something else that he did.



MB: I'll just put in another one.'

SB: There's eh, this poem on the pit bings which were the coal heaps where he used to go. This poem is called 'The Seacoal Man'. So he used to go and collect seacoal. That was when they got a ton of coal but I can't remember whether it was every month or once a year or how it worked but it was free. And ehm, everybody had coal fires and they had quite a stramash with the prefabricated houses. I think it was the Scottish Special Housing Association who owned them. They wanted to convert everybody to gas and he didn't want to have that because he said, What was the use of my getting coal?

MB: A ton of coal.'

SB: When I would have to pay for gas but I can't burn my coal. What's the point of that?'

MB: It was a coal fire you had?'

SB: Anyway, he had a big fight with them which made it very difficult.'

The Seacoal Man

When east wind gales roar up the Forth
An skep the 'Dubbie' bing,
Wi peltin spray an currents strang
That brings the sea-coal in.
Ye'll find me muffled tae the mooth,
An speirin ower the saunds –
Siftin oot the sea coal
Wi ma educatit haunds.

Oh, aye – ye need tae feel, an read
Wi frozein fing'r tips,
That whup like lichtnin ower the Braille,
Tae glean the choicest bits –
For thur's some folk – no sae talentit,
They jist dinnae hae the knack,
They'd grab a mussel, or a stane,
As lang as it wis black. Aye thur's a magic in the getting o't –
Though it's sair in getting hame,
But graund tae thaw yer frozen banes
In the warmth o' its flame.
For thur's nothing like a livin fire,
Wi livid lowes that lick –
An thur's a comfortin cacophony
In cracklin coals, an sticks. Man! Ah c'd never, ever understaund
Folk hingin ower a bar
O' muted electricity –
That's caulder than a star.
Me? Ah'll never help a coalman
Gain the fortune thit he seeks,
Ah'd rather scairt fur sea coal
Wi ma money in ma breeks. There's humour there as well!

MB: Totally, it's wonderful. ...and the crackle of the fire an....

SB: It's lovely, because it was lovely, and as children we loved it. Because he used to say look at ehm, on the back of the chimney there would be little light bits and he would say look it's like people and your imagination would make you see all sorts of things. Just lovely.'

MB: The whole setting of the gathering around the fire.'

SB: We made toast.'

MB: Yes, yes, indeed. Was it an open fire?

SB: And all sorts of other things, just together and the fire was an open fire. It wasn't



an old-fashioned one with a... because our prefabricated houses were built after the war.?

MB: Did it have a back boiler for water?

SB: No, I don't think it did but Ah'm not sure how the water was heated. I don't think we had hot water. I think we had to boil it. For baths and things. I'm not quite sure how that worked. Maybe we did have a back boiler?'

MB: 'Could you, on your open fire, could you do any cooking at all? Could you put a kettle on it?'

SB: No, you couldn't do that. It wasn't that kind of fire.'

MB: No?'

SB: Whereas my grannie had one like that but her house was much older. Maybe it was built in 1900? It was a much older house so she had a range, you know, bits that come out for pots to go on and a clique.

MB: Did she? Some of these even 1950s ones had a kind of wee trivet and it sort of move in towards the fire.'

SB: I think she had because I can remember sitting on a wee stool beside the fire and I used to get a little poke of dolly mixtures and I would heat them up and squish them together.'

MB: You didn't even have a wee trivet for the pots?'

SB: No, she ... it was just a stove. There was a wee bit at the side like a neuk. You could sit things on but I don't think , and she had an oven to one side.'

MB: Oh yes and that was your grannie?'

SB: But not my dad, no. We didn't have that method.'

MB: Gosh, if you took the coal fire away...it would be the heart of the.....

SB: Well, he fought really hard and eventually ehm, I think he ... My mother left which made it really difficult because he had five children so he had to stop working down the pit and had to get another job working with the council so he could be there with us.'

MB: So did he look after you?

SB: Uhuh.'

MB: An unusual event for a man.'

SB: It is unusual, but he fought like ... He fought, you have no idea, with the social work and with all sorts of people, just to keep us together. He thought it was more important to keep us as a family together than if we and we did go into care a couple of times when my mother was ill. But, I didn't like it at all. I would rather have been with him. And they wouldn't let him stay off his work. No, you have to go to work, even though it was costing more to keep us. It was ridiculous!'

MB: How many children?'

SB: Five of us.'

MB: And where were you in the five?'

SB: I was the eldest.'

MB: Were you? So you would have a certain responsibility?'

SB: So, I had to do a lot of cooking and washing and things. Well, I did as much as I could. I was only twelve at the time and so it was quite hard.'

MB: It would be hard and quite traumatic too.'

SB: Well, it is quite traumatic if your mother goes away and for him too. You know, she went off with his best friend.'

MB: What was that about your dad? Was it a novel or...?'

SB: No, it was just a short story. It was called the 'Moonrakers' and I found it under the table. He'd been writing it when he had time – still mining at this time because we were still in Sauchenbush. And I found it under the table, I must have been about maybe nine or ten so well able to read. And he used to write a few pages every now and again. I used to go under the table and read it. And he didn't discover till years later that I had done this. Because the whole story was lost during an eviction that we had. But he was quite astonished and said, 'Did you



read that story? And I said, ‘Yes, and I couldn’t wait for the new pages to appear. Sometimes you didn’t write for a week!’

MB: Was he handwriting or was....?’

SB: Handwritten. Uhuh.’

MB: Yes, yes.’

SB: It was a beautiful story and totally captivating. And I ehm, I admitted this, it must have been when he started to write for my daughter. He wrote little stories for her about all sorts of things. He just put all sorts of different people into it. He wrote for her cousin, he pretended that he had a ferret in his wardrobe and made noises and things. He wrote stories about this ferret for Rohan who lived in London at the time. That’s fired him up and he writes now as well. But, you know, he said to me once. He sat and he looked and said, “You know, you write very good letters yourself. You know, you should write poetry.”

MB: Did you?’

SB: And I went like, not while you’re writing such good stuff! No. But you see when he died....I just started.’

MB: Really ... ?

SB: It just flowed.’

MB: You took the mantle. It was obviously such a natural instinct. A natural ability he had. Did he read poetry?’

SB: Yes. Oh, everything. He could quote , do Burns offhand, quote Shelley, he kept telling me , you know, he kept on and on about Walt Whitman. Walt Whitman, you need to read Walt Whitman. And I would go like... Walt Whitman? That sounds like some weird person! But no, then I worked in India for two years. And went into a German woman’s bookshop, where you got tea and coffee, and it was quite a normal place to be rather than out in the heat and energy thing that was going on. And I put my hand on the bookshelf and I pulled out a paperback copy of Walt Whitman – ‘Leaves of Grass’ and I was just blown away by it.’ MB: So where would your dad get this? Was it in the library?

SB: I have no idea. But he must have got access to all of these things.’

MB: Was he a member?’

SB: And his father, ehm, he said when he was younger..... he was reading poetry when he was at school as well, that was up to the age of thirteen. He said his dad used to make fun of him and say that he was a ‘nancy’ for reading poetry. Can you imagine? I just thought it was outrageous! I said, You are joking! And he said, ‘No.’

MB: It’s difficult. My dad was very fond of poetry and his whole life read the Rubiyat of Omar Khayam’.

SB: It’s lovely.

MB: And you know, I think, where did he get this stuff?

SB: ‘ I know. Well where did my dad get Walt Whitman?’

MB: They were just such educated people.

SB: Beautiful stuff. You know... I couldn’t put it down all the way through...

MB: Wisdom.’

SB: And then I wrote to him. And I said, ‘I am astounded that I dismissed this out of hand just because of his name!’ And I said, ‘It’s amazing. I should have read it years ago. I then bought copies and I came home and gave one to my daughter, and one to my nephew, one to friends that I had and said you people need to read this.’

MB: What an all round education he had of the deepest kind and broadest way.’

SB: He would take us out. He used to make kites with brown wrapping paper and cane and string. And take us up the hill at the back of where we lived, still mining at this time so this was his free day. And he would have a great big ball of string zig- zagged round (a piece of wood). He would say to me. He would get the kite going and run and tie straw from the field onto the tail and say, ok, it’s going now so hold this..... (the string’s stick ends) it’s like an animal, it’s alive. Feel it, feel it tugging!’ And I would go like – whoa! ... and it would be away over Kirkcaldy you



- know. And I used to just think (now looking back), 'What an amazing thing!'
- MB: Yes, and how we wish parents would do that kind of thing with their children.'
- SB: It was amazing!'
- MB: Of course they....."
- SB: It fired your imagination! So, you know, I was like, it feels like a wild animal tugging on the string.'
- MB: Someone said to me recently.' "Children nowadays have everything and nothing." 'And they have nothing.'
- SB: They have nothing.'
- MB: I thought that too.'
- SB; 'They have nothing. He used to take us on walks. Eh, in the countryside and he would say ehm," This is such and such a tree look at the shape of the leaf, you know, this is such and such a flower and the berries.... you can eat these but you can't ... and look at the birds."
- MB: I remember this too.'
- SB: And I'm still like that. Wow, I've got goldfinches in my garden. I'm amazed you know.'
- MB: Yes, the sense of wonder is always there.'
- SB; 'Incredible.'
- MB: Yeah.'
- SB: Totally, ah mean his poems about.... He said to me, after we'd finished the book and I of course had read them all by that time. And he said, "Which ones do you like best?" And I said, 'I actually like your ones about the landscape and the environment that you love.' And he went, "I never had you down for a romantic!" And I said, 'Well there ye go. I am obviously but I have a hard shell because I've had to.'
- MB: I wonder why.'
- SB: So you know. But that was incredible. Another thing he said to me, "My daughter's – I don't understand it – they are all married to nice men. And he said, Ehm, "You just keep telling them that they're not doing things properly. Why can't you just stand back and let people do things and fix it yourself afterwards?" And I said, 'But you taught us to be equal to anyone and that no-one was better than you and that you had to treat everyone the same way. And I said, 'So you can't expect us to be subservient because we are just not like that. People just have to deal with it.'
- MB: And he would teach you things like if a job's worth doing, it's worth doing well?'
- SB: "Never go to an interview without your nails being clean because he was a miner and people look at your hands. And your shoes need to be polished as well, and the cuffs of your shirt have to be clean, he said, and your collar." And I thought he..... Dress up , be smart, present yourself well which he did because he used to have to. He was a union rep in some of the jobs and he would have to go and speak for people so he knew that if he was properly dressed. He was a bit of a dandy actually even although he was a miner. He was quite a dandy and he really liked, you know, wearing nice things. Ehm, he had a vast array of ties that he, uhm. He would work out, you know, if they would go with whatever. Maybe that's where my fashion thing came from because I did fashion and textiles when I was at art college. I would, you know, totally like colour to match. And he said that presentation was what people see and they will not stereotype you and think - miner – but think articulate person therefore has to be taken seriously. And they did.
- MB: I think they, the pit claes, on for the work, were a very separate thing from what was presented when you were sitting by the fire, so clean, from shirt and everything.'
- SB: Yes, that's right. He would come home and have a bath straight away and then they had the baths at the pit although I don't know when they came in. But for a while he did come home and wash in the house. But they must have had baths at the pit at some point in time when he was working because he cleaned up and came back home.'
- MB: Did you have fairly good facilities in the house?'
- SB: Yes, but, you know, it was a good house.



- MB: Yes because if they were prefabs they would be post-war.'
- SB: They were good houses.'
- SB: The only thing was - there was a sort of tin facade. I don't know what they've done - renovated them? Put bricks between?
- MB: Were they corrugated?'
- SB: No, it wasn't corrugated it was flat and it had some kind of... ehm, I remember it was some kind of pinkish grey and it had some kind of hard shell like stuff on it. You know, it was rough and it was put together with rivets.'
- MB: Yes, gosh. Are there any left? I wonder.'
- SB: Well they've renovated the ones that we lived in. They've now got, I think they put brick on the outside and they look completely different. Pitched roofs. They'll be the same inside because I used to play with balls on the walls.'
- MB: Yes, bouncing off the walls.'
- SB: I'd sing songs. I would throw the balls against the wall and it would go thump, thump, thump. And it was alright if nobody was in but it if somebody was in!'
- MB: It would resonate. That's funny. Gosh.'
- SB: No, it was great. It was a good house. It was a big house, it had three bedrooms.'
- MB: Indeed.'
- SB: Downstairs. Upstairs, three bedrooms, bathroom. Downstairs, big kitchen. I remember we had a mangle....
- MB: Yes, that was the era.'
- SB: And big deep sinks, a big washing sink and then there was a sink for doing like the tatties and things and the mangle was in between.'
- MB: I remember children getting bathed in the big sink.'
- SB: Uhuh, that's right.'
- MB: Coming from the garden into the big sink.'
- SB: To get cleaned up. They were great sinks though. Not like nowadays. Although, they are bringing them back again. I think you can still buy, what they call a Belfast sink, but it's really expensive! But they are good. I remember cleaning them. I really enjoyed cleaning them. It was good which is ridiculous because to clean a stainless steel one is completely different from an enamel sink. It was lovely.'
- MB: When he stopped working in the mine, when he was looking after you, did you have to move from the house?'
- SB: No, it was Scottish Special Housing Association house so therefore it was rented.
- MB: Yes.
- SB: Hmm, he didn't pay the rent for two weeks and I can't remember what happened ...we were evicted.'
- MB: Two weeks?
- SB: Two weeks rent.
- MB: Oh, that's hard.
- SB: But the fight about the gas central heating was on the go and he refused to have it, you see. But I remember him sending me up with the money. And I remember going up to the office where you paid it and they said they couldn't take it. And a great deal of whispering going on. I must have been fifteen, sixteen and they wouldn't take it. They just said, "We can't take this." So they must have already had it in notion. And they would be thinking, five children, this one's fifteen, sixteen they can just go into care, that's not a problem.'
- MB: And was that what had to happen?'
- SB: Uhuh, for about two years and then he got us back again.'
- MB: Oh, oh, how traumatic was that? How, and for you. So, into care?'
- SB: Yep.'



- MB: Here in Kirkcaldy?’
- SB: In Kirkcaldy, but we were fostered.’
- MB: And were you together?’
- SB: No. The girls were together but the boys were somewhere else. I can’t remember where. And of course my poor brother the youngest one, you know...’ However, my dad had an amazing sense of humour and he used to say to me, “No matter what life throws at me, traumatic things life throws at me.” He would turn it around into something very comical – “You have to laugh in adversity. Ye hiv tae see thi funny side! You just have to say, okay, so how am I going to deal with this and just move on?”
- MB: Did you say where he stayed when you were all in care?’
- SB: He stayed with his parents. He went back with them for two years. And of course we went to visit him and things but it wasn’t quite the same.’
- MB: No, it would not be. Gosh, how difficult would that be. What a journey.’
- SB: I know I should write it down.’
- MB: Yes, you should.’
- SB: I did write a poem about the eviction.’
- MB: It would be a wonderful story.’
- SB: And the group that I was in, said, “No, you should write this as prose. It should be written down”, you know.’
- MB: I’ll give you a copy of this.’
- SB: Of everything I’ve already said?’
- MB: Yes, you’ll be able to transcribe it.’
- SB: But, I mean, how amazing so you know, two teachers, my sister worked with old people in care and now works testing babies to make sure their development is okay, one brother is a bit of an entrepreneur. He lives part of the time in Finland and part of the time here and has made loads of money from selling orienteering’
- MB; ‘Oh my word.’
- SB: when that was on the go. And has a very happy bank account and a Finnish girlfriend. And the brother who had a liver transplant does drugs rehabilitation and counselling. He did a counselling course and got a degree in counselling.’
- MB: Fantastic.’
- SB: He used to phone me up and say, “This is supposed to be ehm, counselling (he says) but in fact it’s me doing therapy on myself before I can then do it on other people.”
- MB: Yes.’
- SB: “And I need to speak to you about such and such that happened.” So this happened and that happened?
- MB: I can switch this off if you like?’
- SB: No, that’s okay. And he said, “That’s great because I didn’t know what had actually happened.”
- MB: Because he couldn’t, he was too young.’
- SB: He said, “I didn’t know and had no understanding of it.” And it was great.’
- MB: This book – the Circle Line.’
- SB: It runs from Edinburgh, North Queensferry round...’
- MB: Markinch, Glenrothes.’
- SB: North Queensferry, Inverkeithing, Aberdour, Burntisland, Kinghorn, Kirkcaldy, Glenrothes with Thornton.’
- MB: It’s amazing this.’
- SB: Cardenden. And that’s where we discovered how wonderful, the spirit of the people in Cardenden is. Because we looked for somewhere to have a cup of tea, and there was pubs and things but we thought well, we can’t really go into pubs with all men. It’s that kind of place, you know, with mannie pubs. And ehm, we went into the local co-op and the women there were great. We don’t have a café they said, but what we’ll do is go to our staff room and we’ll make



you a cup of tea. And we went and sat in the little park which was on the road and they were lovely.’

MB: Did you retire from teaching?’

SB: Yes, four years ago. I taught primary. I loved it until the last five years and things became very different.’

MB: Yes, you’ve been very busy in your retirement.’

SB: Well, I’ve got lots to do, that was done last year. And we are still working on it. We’ve just had another launch in May and they’ve managed to put all of the posters up at Inverkeithing Station.’

MB: Fantastic.’

SB: Which was great.’

MB: Do you, would you mind reading this eh, Rothes Pit one?’

SB: Oh, no. I’ll need to put my specs on though.’

MB: You really need two people for this one.’

SB: There’s two people so Ah’ll hiv tae. That’s awright. Glenrothes with Thornton from Circle Line Conversations - Two old miners discuss the demise of the Rothes Pit. Spank and Davie are the two miners. Spank speaks first.

Aye, Davie how are ye min? No seen ye for a while. How are things?

Ah’m jist fine Spank. Daein a lot o gairdnin they days. No doon ony pits noo ye ken. An Ah’m heidin aff oan thi train tae thi Beath tae see the laudie, whaur are you goan?

Jist goan tae the Lang Toun tae hae a jar wi Jock Weir. How’s Jock keeping? Ah’ve no seen him fur must be a year or twa noo.

Aye, weel, he’s daein fine, jist fine. We were laughin up oor sleeves tho, ye’ll hiv heard the latest about the Rothes Pit, hiv ye?

Aw aye, the watter jist keeps oan comin in, does it no? Did we no aw tell them, wi their fancy qualifications and measuring tools, that the deil widnae keep that watter oot!

Aye, we were richt an aw. Auld Nick an aw his burning fires cudnae keep that pit dry. Faur ower deep! Jist a big hole lettin aw the watter seep intae it. A bairn oan the beach makin a saund castle wid ken that!

Aye, weel, they ken mair than we dae, we jist warked that faur doon, what dae we ken? Haw, haw, the laffs oan them, we telt them after aw.

They micht hae kent weel enough! What a waste o’ men, an money, an building a whole toon fur the sake o’ a couple o’ year’s wark. Jist the hicht o’ them! Gie yer laudie a nod fae me, how’s the family keepin?

Jist fine. A lot better than the Rothes Pit min, fur they kin aw swim an get their watter oot o’ a tap! See ye about, here’s yer train min.

MB: That’s lovely.’

SB: I think my dad must have told me that.’

KENNY MUNRO COMES IN – JOINS THE CONVERSATION

while Sheena goes to make tea

MB: So, Kenny you were saying you wish you’d been around...’

KM: I wish I’d been in Kinghorn back in the nineteen twenties. Ah, my great grannie and granddad used to live here. They used to look after the Church of Scotland home. But, the most significant thing for Kinghorn, as well as having its Linen Mills, it had a shipyard. And for about a hundred years it was producing a range of vessels some of which were transatlantic, some were going to Australia. The last one that was built, I think it was in nineteen twenty-two. It was so big they needed dynamite to actually get it down the slips into the water. There’s a whole list of vessels that were produced there. And there’s also photo- graphs. Uhm, the challenge that I’ve had is trying to stimulate interest in the local community now. And being a sculptor, the idea of some sort of feature outdoors with interpretation some- thing which would re-connect people with



that part of their history. But also Fife is very good now because it promotes all sorts of coastal walking. You can walk the whole length of the Fife Coast from North Queensferry right up to Dundee virtually. So that visitors could be encouraged to learn about things like that. You know, the most enthusiastic folk that I've ever met, who have got excited about it, are ex-pats that are based in Australia. And I don't know how best to explain it. You've already said Margaret, there's a lot of local people that are keen to talk. But it seems as if those that travel away from Scotland, they overcompensate, by wanting to be more vigorously some – how or other. And they want to try and make a difference. Ehm, so maybe it's a case of absence makes the heart grow fonder.'

SB: Well, I didn't realize, until I went tae India, just how Scottish I was. Because when people there say to you, "Oh, you're from England." And I surprised myself by saying, I'm sorry, I'm not. I'm from Scotland and I'm Scottish. And it made a big difference. I didn't realize that I would react like that. But I was really quite the women I worked with said, to people who came, "Don't whatever you do suggest that she is from London because she's not!"

MB: I wonder, if in fact, the reason I do what I do is because I spent nine years away from Scotland. And when I came back, I think I was tuned in – in a way and I appreciated more... It's the detail of the ordinary for me is the extraordinary. It's just the detail it's such an incredible... You look at it with fresh eyes and you listen with fresh ears. I think that's part of it.'

KM: And the curious thing is. I see having an interest in local culture, let's say partly forgotten culture, as being a perfectly normal thing. That ye would expect to be an intrinsic part of, for example, the primary school beside us here. You could easily build up projects like that. And Ah have done work with them. Ehm, you know, but I sometimes wonder, you know, if local community council people have their own agenda. They have their own objectives and I think it requires perseverance.'

MB: Totally.'

KM: Really, just to keep coming back and saying, "By the way or Whatever, would it not be significant to look at this part of the history of the town at least and refer to the facts and present them to people in a way now, say internet etcetera. Ehm, which at least puts it out there and is internationally available.'

MB: It's such a... sometimes they wait until it's too late and then they've lost the moment with them or the person's gone. It's made immaterial.'

KM: Well that very point, with the shipyard closing in nineteen twenty-two. With the best will in the world unless there was a laddie of about ten year old ehm...'

MB: Even then he's be.'

KM: Aye, then he'd really be very old. Trying to find a group of people who share enough interest in something – trigger a new response.'

MB: Or somebody who had a father or a grandfather who talked about working in the shipyard that might be the only thing.'

KM: Well, that's true.'

MB: That would be the big hope. It's like researching the First World War it's not really realistic now. Yet in our childhood we were all... Gosh me, you met folk who were at Gallipoli or..

KM: Well, that's right.

MB: And nobody recorded them because everybody had one in the family and suddenly they're gone.'

KM: I know.'

MB: Ehm, gosh.'

KM: Anyway, that's another wee project.'

MB: As if you needed projects Kenny.'

END OF RECORDING
