

Date; 5 December 1984

Harburn Road,
West Calder.

JM JM (b. 1917)

SR Sara Randall

JM I was born in 1917 at Polbeth Farm, that's where the houses are now. There was no houses then. Father was a ploughman there. And there was a shale-mining village of Gavieside it's no longer there, it's demolished now. And all my friends were in Gavieside village, so I was brought up with shale-miners' children. And went to school with them, indeed, we were at Gavieside school, the school I attended

SR Oh, so there was a separate school for Gavieside? I hadn't realised that.

JM Oh, yes. There was a school there, for Gavieside and Moss End, which was another shale-mining village. So I did know quite a bit about the conditions in which they lived and so on, like that. I would say that it was a very close-knit community, there was a great community spirit among them, and that if one was hurt in any way they were all hurt, and if one was rejoicing, they were all rejoicing. It was good that way. There was a good deal of sickness among the children . I wouldn't think it was so much from hunger - it may be that they didn't get the right kind of food - rather than the conditions in which they lived. All the kinds of children's illnesses that they had at that time - measles, diphtheria, and chickenpox, all these kinds of things - seemed to be quite rampant. Now, oddly enough, probably because I was brought up on the farm, I seemed to escape all these things, although I was among children that either had had them, or were having them. And the homes in which they lived, they, I would say they just wouldn't be tolerated nowadays. They were very primitive. They were normally two-apartment houses, with box beds, you know, beds built into the wall. I think

because of the numbers who lived in them, they had to be that way, because that was the only kind of privacy they would get, if they drew the curtain, and that was it. And the sanitation, they had dry toilets outside, one between so many houses, behind the house. And there was a place where all the ashes and all the refuse was tipped, and these places at the end, the toilets. Sometimes they didn't have any doors on them, and the only thing - thinking on it now, you think, why wasn't there a plague on the place - was that there was lots of fresh air, there was plenty of ventilation in the houses, you know? And.... the people seemed to be contented, in spite of having so little. Community life, apart from just meeting each other in the street, was almost non-existent, apart from we had a separate co-operative society in Gavieside. Apart from the big West Calder one. Which had a board of miners to manage it, chiefly, and was very successful. And we had a mission hall, of which my father was the secretary, and which was the only kind of other thing which represented community. And he, among other things, he was a very godly man, he would go round every Sunday morning and visit every home, and give them a Gospel leaflet. And if there was sickness he would visit them, if there was death he would go in and pray with them, if they were rejoicing over a wedding or a birth, he would rejoice with them. And that was done over a long long period of years. So that was the kind of life that we had. And we had Sunday school, which was held in the school.

SR And your own life? What sort of house did you live in? Were you better off than the miners?

JM Financially we weren't, but we lived in better accommodation, put it that way. We lived in a, one, two, three, four apartment house, which was very unusual for the Gavieside people. But financially we weren't better off. I think my father would earn something like one pound 25 a week, to bring up a family. I was the youngest of the family, and I benefited in the

respect that my brother was working, and still at home, so I was kept on and allowed to go to High School and take my Highers. And I became a banker, actually, and finished up back in West Calder as manager, where I had started. So that it was because of the fact that brother didn't marry until he was in his thirties, I think, that I was given that opportunity.

SR How many of you were living at home? How many children were there?

JM Well, there were actually, there were four in the family. But sister Kate - there was gaps of five years between us - sister Kate had gone away to work in Edinburgh, so she wasn't staying at home, unless on holiday. Brother Alan, he came next, and then Sandy, my immediately older brother. I didn't know him, he had, there was an unfortunate accident when he was, just before he was three. Mother was in the wash place where she did her washing, in the court of the farm, and she had left Sandy with her mother, who was staying with us by this time, my Granny. And he ran away and followed Mother, and slipped and fell down to a pail of boiling water and burnt his arm. And in those days, of course - it was the only part that was burned - they hadn't the medicines that they have now to treat shock and things like that, so he died. So... he died at just three years of age, and I was born two years after that, so I was the youngest.

SR So you were quite unusual in that you were such a small family?

JM That's right. That's right, they were big families in those days. In the main they were big families, 7, 8, 9 in a family.

SR And did you have water and sanitation in the house, or?

JM No, well, we had sanitation in the house in the sense that it was a dry toilet. But the water we had to bring in from outside. And they had, too,

because in Gavieside they had periodically what we called a well. It was a kind of cast-iron thing, and they were able to go and turn on the handle. It was a good clean fresh water that they could get in that way. But they had nothing at all in the home. They had no bath facilities, the miners had to come home and the big zinc bath was brought out, and they had to wash in the room.

SR And where did they throw the water, down the gutter outside?

JM There was a gutter outside, that's right.

SR Just open?

JM Open gutter, that's right, just a brick like that, with a channel down it, you know, in a V shape, to run in» and there were a path between that gutter and the doorstep of the houses.

SR Was your brother a miner, the one who was working?

JM He, yes, at that time he was. He became the, kind of, supervisor at the pit head, for the miners coming up. So I learned a lot about the shale-mining industry from him. But later on, he, by dint of night school and by dint of correspondence courses, became an accountant, and he finished up as accountant with Smith, the wholesale chemists in Edinburgh, Before his retiral. He died last, February of this year.

SR And, you said that you stayed on and went to High School, was that very unusual? For people from Gavieside?

JM That's right. Brother Alan, he got the opportunity, because my brother,

he - I've got to say this without any false modesty - he had much more Intellectual ability than me, and he could have done well in all sorts of things. And the primary head teacher, he recognised this, and came and saw Father and tried to encourage him. And of course Father said 'Right, he can go to High School, and we'll manage.' But Alan didn't accept that, he left at fourteen, and of course regretted it probably, later on. But that was it, he started to work for the farm first of all, and then went, because there was more money in it, he went to work at the pit head. And eventually became pit head man.

SR But when you went to High School, you went in West Calder, then?

JM Yes, West Calder.

SR But the majority of people in Gavieside, the miners' children?

JM Finished at fourteen, and left school.

SR But because they needed the money, rather than ...

JM I would imagine so. Some of them had undoubted ability, I can think of quite a number who had really, given an opportunity, they could have done well in all sorts of spheres. But they didn't have the opportunity. You see, my intention, I would like to have been a doctor, strangely enough, that was the ambition. But recognising by this time, my brother had married just when I was about the Highers stage, recognising, although my father said that he would be prepared to do what they could to support me - because there were no grants in those days at all - if I went to University, I decided no, it would be unfair to them. So...

SR So what did you do then? You went to College?

JM I applied to the local bank here as an apprentice.

SR Oh, I see, and then you worked your way up?

JM That's right. Ann was just asking me, when did you have a bank account? she's got a bank account at 13. And when I started in the bank, I had one, but there wasn't anything in it, because I was paid £1. 15s per month - £30 a year - and how much pocket money did I get? I got a shilling a week. And I had a girl friend, and she was taken to the pictures once a month. Otherwise it was walks in the countryside!

SR And you carried on living at home? Till you got married?

JM No, I carried on living at home till the War came along, and I was away. I had over six years in the Army. So it was during the War that I got married. I had this girl friend of course at home, and we decided - our parents I think tried to suggest that we should wait till after the War was over, but we weren't prepared to wait, so they gave in eventually, and we got married.

SR And after the War you came back and went back to your old job?

JM Came back to West Calder. And then they moved me into Edinburgh, and then I was made accountant - after I'd been in numerous branches in Edinburgh - I was made accountant at Dalkeith, and then back as manager to West Calder. Which was unusual.

SR Did you choose to come back here?

JM Well, not really. But I was delighted, because that was my ambition. The height of my ambition! Maybe some people wouldn't think it was very high, but that was it. And when I did come back, I got the opportunity of being promoted to another branch, but I said would it be alright if I stayed on in West Calder, because I was involved in the community. And I wanted that. I'm still involved in the community in retirement.

SR Yes. When you first worked at West Calder, at the bank, did anybody, any ordinary people in the village, have anything to do with the bank?

JM Very, very seldom. That was the big change I saw between going away and coming back, that gradually we were getting people coming in. You see, even when I was young in the bank, some of the older men would come in and they'd doff their caps.

SR To you, as a young apprentice?

JM Coming into the bank! It was like going into a church, or a building of that kind. They took off their caps when they came in. And you spoke almost in hushed tones. You couldn't speak out in the bank. It changed a lot in my time. And it was good to see people coming that had known me. I used to recognise it, that if it was Gavieside, where I'd spent my early days, I was 'Johnny'; and if it was Breich, which was a coal-mining village, where my wife came from, it was 'Jock'; and if it was West Calder High, at that stage, it was 'John'. So I was able to say, well, if I don't recognise their face, I know where they ...

SR Where they knew you from?
Had there been a bank here for a long time?

JM Oh, yes. It was originally the City of Glasgow Bank, a bank that failed - I don't know if you knew that history or not - but the City of Glasgow Bank failed in 1886, and the Commercial Bank took over. And it was the same building, the one that I was in; not the one that's there now, that's a new one that was just on the move in my final years as manager. It became the Commercial and then the National Commercial and then the Royal, you know, by merger. But the big change, another thing that I notice there's a change, the shale-mining industry would come in for their wages to the bank; and it was mostly one pound notes in my young days, some five pound notes but not many, and then latterly it became that they needed mostly larger denominations, because of the inflation and that, but because they were getting better paid as well.

SR But they really were getting, the actual pay was - the standard of living was improving?

JM Relatively they were getting better paid after the War than before. By this time - my brother was still in the pits after the War - and he was pit head man at Bum Grange at the time of the disaster; you'll have heard about that or read about it? We've still got a number of widows, there's one of them across here still, of that disaster. She's an old lady in her eighties, I go across and visit regularly, she comes in here too. And so, he was there at that time, and he had been studying accountancy with an idea of getting away from the shale mining anyway. So it was at that stage that he was able to make the move.

SR But when, talking more about the period before the War than after, when people were hard up, did they ever think of coming to the bank to get a loan?

JM Oh, no, no. No.

SR So you were just dealing mainly with businesses rather than individuals?

JM Yes. And maybe farmers, and people like that, you know? But even they didn't tend to bother at that time. No, there was a very fierce sense of independence, maybe misplaced to some extent, but it was there. I mean, I can think of my own father's story, in training his children he would say this "When your mother and I got married" (and that was 1900), after the wedding, they'd had a tea, and then he went straight from that to the cabinet makers in West Calder, who made furniture in those days, he went and paid for the furniture for the house, and he went and paid for the mule that they'd had, and everything was clear. And I think there was £5 in the Co-operative book, and he handed that to Mother, and he said "Now you're at liberty to spend that ", he said "but never more than you have there". And they spent their whole life like that. He got an opportunity; the Scottish Oils gave up farming in 1928

SR Oh, it was a Scottish Oils farm, was it, that you were on?

JM Oh, yes! Polbeth and Langside Farms belonged to the Scottish Oils.

SR I hadn't realised that.

JM Oh, yes. I think the reason for that was they were largely undermining that particular ground.

SR so nobody else would farm it?

JM Right. And they thought, now, if we do that, then we can't have any claims against us, for pits and falling in. Because we had that during my time there, pieces of ground would suddenly slide in. Well, the Scottish Oils gave up farming, and the farm was up for lease. And Father was offered the lease

on Polbeth Farm, and the local bank manager, he was willing to support him...

SR You weren't working at the bank by this stage?

JM No! No, this is when I was still at the High School. At primary school. And he got that opportunity, and I had an uncle who was a compositor with the Glasgow Herald, in Glasgow, and rather better off because of that, he was prepared to give Dad an interest-free loan without date of repayment or anything, but Dad said no, that's debt, canna have it.

SR Really? So what did he go and do, then?

JM He continued to be a ploughman.

SR And somebody else took the lease of the farm?

JM That's right. But nevertheless, he was a happy and contented man. He loved the job he was doing, and he worked all sorts of hours - no overtime in those days, you were paid a basic wage - but he worked all sorts of hours happily, because he loved the job he was doing.

SR Did your mother work, or....?

JM No, she didn't, she was at home all the time. We always had Mother to come to at any time, she was there.

SR Were your parents from here?

JM Yes, my father; my grandfather, I didn't know him, Grandfather McCulloch, he came to West Calder as a young man, to be a candle-maker at Addiewell

Works. That brought him through from the West of Scotland. But his father had come down from the Highlands, from Oban, as a crofter there, to become a policeman in Glasgow, because it was better paid, and because of lack of opportunity up there. So Grandfather came through here to be a candle-maker, and he met his wife here, who was a local person, of farming stock. And the result is that I'm still connected to a lot of the farming folk. Indeed my present wife - my first wife died twelve, twelve and a half years ago - my present wife, she's of farming stock, and her people were already related to me before we married.

SR Would you say that in general the farming children were better off, were better fed and better clothed, then the others?

JM Yes, I think by nature of the fact that you were on a farm.

SR And you got free food and...?

JM That's right, there were certain perks that you got when you were on a farm. So I think that helped a bit. But, you know, even at my stage at school, boys and girls used to run bare-footed in the summer time, in the 20's, and of course I did it because I felt I was odd while I had boots on, you know? And I did it to join in with the others, to be the same.

SR But in fact you had the boots sitting at home?

JM That's right. And of course sometimes I'd even hidden them away on the way to school! Because Mother would turn us out that way, you see. But I wanted to be the same as the others. Not that she didn't recognise the dirty feet at the end of the day!

SR Do you remember the 1926 strike?

JM Yes.

SR Did that affect you in your family?

JM No. But I'll tell you, to show the -what would you say - the unreasonableness of children, I remember the boys and girls getting, at school, two slices of bread, no butter on them, and two oxo cubes. And I felt deprived, because I wasn't getting this! And they were going to what they called the soup kitchen, to get a bowl of soup. And I thought this was terrible. Of course I had a home to go to, and I was getting proper meals, but....

SR Was there real poverty in Gavieside at that time?

JM There was real poverty then, oh, yes. Oh, yes, during that time, it was a really hard time. Probably as a child you don't realise it so much, but looking back you see it. And you can see, well, we were all the same, of course, trousers were patched, you didn't kind of wear out a pair of trousers, there were a patch put on the seat of them.....

SR And that was the same for you as well? You weren't that much better off?

JM Oh,no, not that much better off, we were the same. You began to be a wee bit sensitive about it when you went to High School, because you were mixing then with boys and girls of different backgrounds, better off backgrounds, Ministers' children, doctors' children

SR But they presumably had been at primary school as well, hadn't they?

JM Ah, but not the Gavieside one, they had been at West Calder Primary School, so I hadn't really, I hadn't really met them until I came to secondary school..... I suppose there was an inferiority inevitable in that situation an Inferiority which maybe stemmed from my upbringing. Dad - he was a loving and kindly Dad, and, as I say, a godly man, but he was strict. And the theory was that little boys and little girls had to be seen and not heard. And when there were visitors to the home, you sat out until the visitors had had their tea. And then you got yours. And it was the few occasions when cakes were on the table, you see. And of course you had them all piled up, first choice, second choiceand they'd start disappearing! I can remember that very clearly! But, oh, no we really had - I look back with gratitude and thankfulness to the upbringing that we had.

SR And you would never have thought of going down the pits? If you had not, if your father hadn't given you the choice of staying on, would you have gone down the pits, or was it a sort of horror that you would have dreaded?

JM No, I don't think I would have dreaded that. Probably I would have tended to the farm rather than that, but maybe the increase, the fact that they in the pits were better paid, might have attracted me too....

SR So it wasn't a horror for those who were outside the industry?

JM No. And, you know, it was a dangerous life then. I mean, coal-mining, which is the one mining job we do nowadays, is not the dangers that were inherent in it long ago. I mean, it would almost be a weekly thing, that we would either have an accident in the coal mines or the shale mines. Sometimes fatal, sometimes But, you see, in the shale mines, the workings were something like 10 to 12 feet high, which was a bit higher than this ceiling. And if a small piece of shale fell from that height, it could

do - it's got a sharp edge, of course, the shale - it could do a lot of damage. Whereas the coal-miner, he worked in 18 Inches, sometimes, to 2 feet, and just crawled to his work. A coal miner was frightened to death in a shale mine, and a shale miner felt that he was going to be buried alive if he was in a coal mine. But in their own environment they were perfectly at home.

SR Was there any pollution from the oil works, from the refinery?

JM No, not that..... You see, in those days, although we had these slag heaps, at that time they didn't seem to ignite. That must have been over the years that that combustion took place, and they began to

SR These bings used to ignite, did they?

JM Oh, yes, we had them ... we had one down at Gavieside, a big shale bing, and the retorting methods at that time hadn't reached the stage of Addiewell, where they produced a red glaze. It was really still a slate, with a very shale colour in it. And there was still a bit of oil in it. So the pressure of this finally caused combustion. And of course, when the combustion got going, it was fed by the oil from the shale. It was retorting the shale in other words, you see, in the bing. And it was a danger.

SR There was a big fire, was there, at Gavieside?

JM Well, it burned, this bing, it smouldered and smouldered away. And they just kept an eye on things, and we were well warned as children to stay away, of course.

SR Did you never go and play on the bings?

JM Oh, yes, oh, inevitably!

SR Even when they were smouldering?

JM That's right. But we learned to stay clear of them, the bits, we recognised danger signals.

SR What sort of things did you do, slide down them, or...?

JM Oh, yes, things like that. We did all sorts of things. We, you know, the children in those days, the little girls, they made shops with little broken pieces of china for money, and..... They made their own entertainment like that, they didn't have many things in the way of toys. I think I was privileged there as well, because my sister and my brother bought me books and things, and I was an avid reader as a small boy.

SR You were almost an only child, weren't you?

JM That's right. I was - you see, my sister was sixteen when I was born, so she was a kind of second mother. I was particularly close to Kate, and she didn't marry, and in the fullness of time, just after my wife died - well, before my wife died, we knew that she had a terminal illness, a cancer, and after my wife died, I brought her into the bank's house with me, and looked after her for a year there. So I was able to do that. And now I'm looking after my first wife's mother there at Polbeth, she's dying of cancer, and she was ninety on Sunday

SR So there was no pollution, smoke and dust and so on, from the oil works at Addiewell?

JM No, no. One of the things that I remember on the farm particularly, which was a bit offensive if not disease-carrying, was these what they called middens between the toilets and the miners' rows. All the ashes from the fire and all the other filth and dirt was thrown in there....

SR Was that where the buckets were emptied from the dry toilets?

JM Aye, well the dry toilets ran into this, or just slid into it, it was just a sloping piece of cemented work

SR And it was open?

JM It was open, yes. It was pretty draughty, too, I can tell you! So all this was brought in wagons down to the farm and spread as manure for the ground, that was a form of manure. And the tins and things like that, there weren't so many tins and there was no plastic in those days, they were raked off, you see? And that was ploughed in. But some of the horses even objected to the smell of this thing. We had one horse that was perfectly placid otherwise, and we'd always to be very careful when it was on this job of carting the manure, it would tend to run away from it.

SR And were streams polluted from the oil works or anything?

JM No, no, these things were kept. And the people, they looked after their houses very well, such as they were. You know, their doorsteps, they could get white chalk to make it look attractive. And there was always a barrel, for the rainwater, catching the rainwater at the side of the door; and that was the soft water that they used to wash the clothes.

SR I see, so they didn't get that from the tap.

JM Not from the tap, because it was hard, you know; we've a very hard water here in West Calder, a good drinking water but not a good washing water. So this is what they did, with the rain barrels.

SR When was Gavieside knocked down?

JM Er, in the 1930's. And that's when Polbeth started. The people from Gavieside were moved to Polbeth.

SR Oh, yes, all the older houses on the right...?

JM That's right, what's now known as Polbeth my father and mother lived there for a time It's Polbeth I can't remember, but it was the first part of Polbeth to be built, before the houses were built down nearer the farm.

SR And did Gavieside have any improvements before it was knocked down? Was there water and electricity put in?

JM No, no. No. Paraffin oil lamps.

SR And it was still dry middens until the 30's?

JM That's right, until the 30's.

SR And how about your house, did you get water and electricity - you had water..?

JM We didn't have water inside. No, that was the same.

SR Until when? Until the War?

JM That's right. And then Father retired, and he retired to a house with mod. cons. as we'd call them. And..... but the people were remarkably contented with the way they lived. Certainly there was the 1926 strike; but I think if a strike had some justification, that one did.

SR Your father didn't strike, though?

JM Oh, no, he was on the land, you see?

SR Yes, but I wondered if, as he worked for the oil company, whether he'd come out in sympathy, or....?

JM No, no. I think that form of action would have been repulsive to his nature. He would have felt that that was inappropriate.

SR But he didn't condemn the miners for striking?

JM Oh, no, no. He was sympathetic and concerned for them, in the hard time.

SR Were there any miners or miners' children who got part-time jobs on the farm? During the strike, or any other time?

JM No, you see, farms in those days were quite employment productive. Because the machinery was, compared with modern days, very primitive. It was horse-drawn, and for a farmer that meant two ploughmen. And the two ploughmen had a pair of horse, the two horses that pulled the plough, and it was two horses that pulled the reaper. The only time that the Gavieside people came in, at harvest time the women folk came to bind up the grain. You see, they gathered the grain together and bound up sheaves like that. There was no machinery to do it.

SR And that was the women from the mining community?

JM The women from the village came to do that. And when there were turnips needing to be shod, that was to take the tops off them and the bottoms off them, they would come and do that sometimes. And potato lifting, they would do that.

SR Did the oil company sell the produce from the farm to the oil workers at a cheap price, or...

JM No they operated the farm just as a separate part of their business.

SR It was no sort of supplementary

JM No, no. This thing had taken various progressions. Originally the mining effort at Gavieside was known as Fells Rows, because that was the name of the oil company that had the works at Gavieside. But gradually, as James Young came along, he gradually got all these under his umbrella. And the works at Addiewell were known as the Youngs Paraffin Light and Mineral Oil Company. Which was a subsidiary of Scottish Oils.

SR But there was no works at Gavieside in recent - in later parts of the time?

JM No, no. It became - the pits gradually were worked out, and Number 26 mine was - you know where the filling station is at the, at Polbeth there? Just opposite that, there's a kind of community centre, now that was the winding engine house of No. 26 mine. And that was where my brother worked, just a short distance up from the farm.

SR And your brother thought it was a good job?

JM Oh, yes, he enjoyed it, except that he had this desire to improve himself.

SR Did he work very long hours?

JM Er, no. But he had three shifts, I think, if he hadn't three, he had two. There were three shifts working, there was a day shift, a back shift, and a night shift. And he certainly worked day shift and night shift. So he would start at 6 o'clock in the morning.

SR So it was eight hours?

JM Oh, it was longer than that. Oh, aye, I think, when would they finish? It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, I think. And then night shift, he would go out at night, and come home about 8 in the morning.

SR What did your family do for medical services? Because I know the men who worked in the mines or the works....

JM Paid a penny a week...

SR Yes, or sixpence a week. But what happened with your father?

JM We did the same.

SR But that was because you were oil company employees on the farm?

JM Yes. I wouldn't know what the other farm workers did, but they certainly did keep the doctor. You called it paying for the Doctor. And we'd a remarkable doctor called Dr. Young ...

SR Ah, yes! I was hearing about him earlier in this afternoon. He sounds like quite a character.

JM Oh, he was a character! But in a sense, he was a very strict old man in some ways, but he had a sense of community, and he served as a local councillor and so on..... You didn't get any pay for it, you just did it out of the goodness of your heart. And he was a director of the gas works when it was opened, the gas producing place, and took an interest in it. I remember him as a small boy, and he was quite abrupt in his manner; he wore a - not a top hat, but it was that type of hat - he would come straight in, no knocking at the door, or anything like that; and I had developed what was called ringworm, and we got it off the animals that were in the farms and it was circulating inside of both knees, it spread from one knee to the other. And the doctor was called in, and he just took his two hands like that and squeezed the pus out, and it was quite sore, but I was scared to cry, even though I was just about seven at the time. And my grandmother, who had done a bit of midwifery for him and was more familiar with him; "Doctor" she says "think of the bairn's feelings!" But you know, you've got to be cruel to be kind. So when he went out, he gave me a pat on the head and he gave me a threepenny piece; which was untold wealth in those days, a penny a week was our pocket money. But he was a great old case.

SR Was your grandmother trained as a midwife?

JM No, no. She just took that on. Widowed twice, lost her husband, both husbands, through the shale mining

SR Really? They were killed in the mines?

JM Yes. And she was left with seven sons and one daughter to bring up. And no they had a Poor Relief, I think, or something like that, which I think amounted to about sixpence or a shilling a week. And she went out and worked in the fields and did that and yet she lived until she was over eighty, in spite of the hard life.

SR And so, when she was a midwife, did that mean that there was no trained person who was attending to women, there was just her?

JM That's right, they just got people like that, who had been mothers themselves, and were able to help. And the doctor would train them a bit, in what he required of them.

SR And then, if things got bad, they would send someone off for the doctor quickly?

JM That's right. I suppose they would get a little pay for it, maybe that would be the reason she took it up.

SR And she came to live with you, did she?

JM That's right. Now, she had been, had had very little schooling in her early days, and she had taught herself to write, but she couldn't read very much. So I used to read to her, and then she would go away to bed about 7 o'clock; and I would read to her from Gulliver's Travels and Treasure Island, and all that kind of thing. And she would lie in bed.

SR Were there any pensions for old people in those days?

JM That's right, well, by that time there was, by the time I was aware of it. They got 10/- .

SR Was that from the parish, or from a central, the State pension?

JM No, I think that would begin about, just after the First World War, about 1928, 1919, it would start; but probably it was less than 10/- initially. But the old people thought that was a wonderful thing, to get 10/- a week, for doing nothing, they thought that was marvellous. And if it was a couple, of course, it was two 10/-. My mother thought, what a wonderful thing, where you got provision for your old age like that. Thankful for small mercies, you might say..... And then, as we got on, and were able to help, you know.... So when I went into the Army, I made an allowance to Father and Mother; and when I got married, my wife was in the ATS, and she insisted that I continue to pay that to my father and mother. And when - I was commissioned - and when I was discharged at the end of the War, she said, now we must continue to do something to support them; her father was still working; and she did that, not because I asked her, but she wanted to do that. And now I'm able to help her mother.

JM I've got a great sympathy for coal miners, because I've worked with the shale industry in my work; and then, in my parents-in-law's case, my father-in-law was a coal miner, so I got to know about that as well. But I think, what you're getting is probably not a reaction as to what happened then, as to what would happen now, if these conditions obtained. I would say that there's that.

SR I'm sure the conditions were just as bad for other people, say for your father, for a ploughman it was probably as bad compared with today's agricultural work ...

JM That's right. Now, the other thing about them, they had unions in those days too, of course, and what they did have, the men employed at each pit head what they called a justice man. He was employed by the miners them-

selves, to check my brother that he was giving them correct weight on the hutches coming up, and so on like that. So they had someone there to look after their interests, as it were.

SR And they paid him out of their own wages?

JM They paid that man out of their own wages. And then, if there was any complaint, he was the one who went to the management and took matters up on behalf of the miners.

SR And was he very important in the '26 strike? Perhaps you don't know.

JM The justice men? They would obviously be...

SR They were like the shop stewards?

JM That's right, that would be the equivalent. Alan used to say that - you know, sometimes they got carried away with things - they knew the kind of man my brother was, and they knew the life he led, that he was an absolutely honest man. And the justice men would accuse him sometimes of being a Company's man, you see. But the men themselves knew that he was honest.

SR Would he contribute himself to the justice man's wage, as well, or....?

JM No.

SR That was just the miners themselves?

JM You see, he would check that - for example, how they would recognise, they had a special thing for each producing miner - what they called facemen, who were responsible for a certain part, and then they had men that they

employed as drawers, to draw the hutches up, you see - and they had their special thing, and my brother would know that and would, recognise it. And sometimes some of them would try to steal hutches from other miners. Now you can imagine how ostracised you would be by your fellow miners if that was found out! So sometimes he would recognise that this hutch didn't really belong to them and generally of course they would let it go.

* * *

SR Do you know if there was any TB in the village. Was that a problem?

JM I would say that it wasn't one that was recognised. There may have been cases ...

SR But it wasn't one that was talked about?

JM Oh, no. You would have talked about consumption, that was the word they used in those days, but, no. You see, again, the air was not polluted, it was fresh air, and I think it must have been that that kept the people healthy, really, in spite of the deficiencies. They shouldn't have been healthy in the sanitary conditions they were living in, but...

* * *

And they would keep nice gardens, you know, vegetables as well as flower gardens.

SR They had gardens attached to the houses, did they?

JM Well, it was just a piece of waste ground that was open land, and they were allowed to have their gardens there. It was away from the houses. But those that were interested were able to get a piece of ground, and they dug it and developed it, and did very well indeed. And then, of course, one of the favourite pastimes was pigeons, the breeding of homing pigeons, and flying them. I suppose there was the betting on them as well! But that was one of their interests.

SR Was there an Institute at Gavieside?

JM No. No. Nothing like that at all. Just the Mission Hall, which was really two houses knocked into one.

SR And the Mission Hall, there was no Church as well, or was it just the Mission Hall?

JM No, no church.

SR And were there any Irish Catholics there, or was it all...

JM No, there were some Catholics, but they'd go up to the church in West Calder. But a lot of the.... they didn't have any church connection at all, but when they had a death occurred in some of the homes, they got Father to go and conduct the funeral service. He was able to do that; he wasn't able to marry, of course.

Transcript

JM

Birth Place

I was born at Polbeth Farm.

Industrial Life

There was a shale mining village at Gavieside but when this latter closed down, the pits were gradually worked out.

James Young

After the closure of Gavieside James "Paraffin" Young came along and he gradually got all these under his umbrella.

Works at Addiewell

The works at Addiewell were known as Young's Paraffin Light and Mineral Oil

Company which was a subsidiary of Scottish Oils.

Coal Mining

Coal mining is one of the mining jobs we do nowadays but it has not the dangers that were inherent in it a long time ago.

Shale Mines

The shale mines had workings of between ten and twelve feet high and if a small piece of shale fell from that height it could do a lot of damage.

Faceman

In the shale mines they had what they called a faceman who was responsible for a certain part of the mine. The faceman had what they called drawers who drew the hutches up to the haulage where the pit ponies would take over.

Wages

My Father would earn something like one pound twenty five a week to bring up a family.

When I started in the bank I was paid £1.15 per month or £30 per year.

1926 Strike

I can remember the 1926 strike and I can remember the boys and girls getting two slices of bread, no butter, and two oxo cubes and I felt deprived because I wasn't getting this.

Soup Kitchens

They were going to what we called the soup kitchen to get a bowl of soup. I had to go home to get a proper meal.

Poverty

It was real poverty during the strike. Probably being a child at that time I didn't realise it so much, but looking back I see it.

Domestic Life	There was four in our family but sister Kate had gone away to work in Edinburgh so she wasn't staying unless on holiday. Brother Allan came next and then Sandy came next. My immediately older brother I didn't know because he was killed in an unfortunate accident when he was three.
Housing	The housing was very primitive. They were normally two apartment houses with box beds built into the wall. The only kind of privacy we could get was if they drew the curtain.
Toilets	We had dry toilets outside behind the house. We shared one between so many houses. Sometimes they didn't have any doors on them.
My Own House	We lived in better accommodation to when we were small.
Four Apartment	I was in a four apartment house which was very unusual for the Gavieside people.
Sanitation	We had sanitation in the house in a sense. It was a dry toilet.
Water	We had to bring the water from outside. In Gavieside we had to go to the well which was a kind of cast iron thing. They were able to go and turn the handle. It was good clean fresh water.
Baths	There was no bathing facilities for the miners at the pit so the miners in those days had to come home and the big zinc bath was brought out and they had to

wash in the room.

Waste Water

We had to throw the waste water into an open gutter. It was made of brick with a channel down it in a V shape. There was a path between that gutter and the doorstep of the house.

War

I carried on living at home until the War came along. I had over six years in the army.

Marriage

I got married during the war. I had this girl friend of course at home and our parents tried to suggest that we should wait until after the War was over, but we weren't prepared to wait, so they gave in eventually and we got married.

Clothing

We were fed and clothed better than the average family.
At our school days boys and girls used to run bare-footed in the summer time. In the summertime in the 20's I had my boots on and this made me feel silly. I've even hidden them away on my way to school.

Gardens

we had a garden on a waste piece of ground. This was away from the house and those that were interested were able to get a piece of ground which they dug and developed.

Doctor

We had a penny a week for medical services.

Illness

I had developed what was called ringworm. I think I got it off the animals that were in the farm and it was circulating inside both knees. It had spread from one knee to the other.

The doctor was called in and he just took

his hands and squeezed the pus out.

T.B. I did not know of anybody that had T.B. in those days. There may have been cases though.

Pension I think the pension was started just after the First World War at about 1919, 1928. It was probably less than ten shillings initially. But the old people thought that this was a wonderful thing to get ten shillings a week for doing nothing. For a couple it was a pound that they got.

Pollution There was not much pollution from the oilworks and refinery. We had these slag heaps and they didn't seem to ignite so it must have been over the years that combustion took place. We had one down at Gavieside which hadn't reached the stage of Addiewell where they produced red glaze but the pressure of this finally caused combustion.

Social Life We had no Institute Hall at Gavieside,
Institute Hall just a mission hall which was really two houses knocked into one.

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