

Date:18 Jan 1985

Polbeth

TC (b. 1907)

MC (b. 1902)

SR Sara Randall

SR When were you born?

MC In 1902.

SR And you?

TC In 1907.

SR And were you born in West Calder?

MC No, it just so happened, we are from West Calder, but my father was in the coal mines in Townhill, near Dunfermline, and that's where I was born. And were back here again when I was about 8 or 9.

SR And then you've lived in West Calder since then, all your life?

MC Yes.

SR And how about you?

TC I was born in Tarbrax - a mining place.

SR Ah, I've been there! It's a lovely place, I think.

TC Is it? It was at one time, you know. There was, there would be about 300 houses in that place at one time - two picture houses....

SR In Tarbrax?

TC In Tarbrax. And in my opinion, what I can mind about it, it was the first place that ever I knew, even before West Calder, there were electric light up the road

SR Really?

TC There wurnae very many, you know, but they were....

MC That would be from the works.

SR And were there electric lights in the houses at the same time, or just on the street?

TC No, no, just on the road, from the works, you see. The power in the works, to put the lights on.

SR And that was, you remember that all through your childhood?

TC That was, I would be about what, I was ten years before I left. I would be only about six or seven years old at that time, when I can mind the lights being there.

SR How long did you live in Tarbrax?

TC Well, I'll tell you , I lived in Tarbrax for I was about eleven year old when we went away. We left Tarbrax and went to Rosewell.

SR Where's that?

MC East Lothian.

TC Worked there for four year, and then we come back to Tarbrax. And I was fourteen - between fourteen and fifteen - when we come back to Tarbrax again. That's where I started work.

SR And was your father a shale miner?

TC He was a shale miner practically all his days, from he left Ireland. He was an old Irishman, he was actually a tinsmith by trade, but he come over here.... A wild Irishman, a real wild Irishman, but He worked down Philpstoun, Linlithgow way, before he come up to Tarbrax, and I was born in Tarbrax.

SR And did he come here to get work?

TC Yes, he would come here he was hounded out of Ireland!

MC He tells everybody that!

TC But he worked all - most of his days, in the shale. But there were times, I suppose, when he went to the coal, and then back to the shale. I don't know very much about the years before my time, you know.

SR And at Rosewell?

TC That was coal.

SR And did he leave Tarbrax because there was no work there, or....?

TC He left Tarbrax let me see,now...

MC Was there no' a strike?

TC I don't know, there must have been a strike or something on.... It was before there was a strike back in '18.

MC Robert was born during a strike, that was 1921.

TC Oh, aye, that's when we left to come back to Tarbrax, 1921.

MC Well, I know there was a big strike in Tarbrax, and my father was up there, in charge, you know, of the place.

TC I think there must have been a strike in about 1916 or that... he maybe just fell out with the management, I don't know, and just went away.

C You wurnae working at that time.

TC Oh, no, I was at the school. I finished my education I didnae make a very good job of it!

SR So you left school at fourteen?

TC Aye.

SR And then what was your first job?

TC My first job, I started on a farm, and worked about three months, and then I went into the pits, as a pony driver.

SR At Tarbrax?

TC At Tarbrax. And I worked there up until I was doing pony driving, I started to work as a pony driver, and I was about sixteen years old when I went onto the drawing, the face work, you know what I mean? Man's work. And I was always big and ugly! And I left there when I'd have been about between eighteen and nineteen, and I came down here and worked in the shale mines here.

SR At Gavieside?

TC 26. And I was there up to 19 1936 I went to...

MC Burngrange.

TC And I worked in Burngrange for a while....

SR As a face man?

TC As a face worker. And then I took my certificates and became a deputy after that

SR That was what was called a fireman?

TC A mines' deputy, a safety officer, you know what I mean?

MC That was a fireman.

TC And I become a safety worker, a mines fireman, in 1940. I worked from 1940 to - when was it closed, about?

MC '56, June '56.

TC Anyway, I was 34 years, 34 years and a half actually, with the Scottish Oils, in the shale mines.... And I left there and I went to the coal, as a deputy and I worked the coal for sixteen year.

- SR Where was that, at Polkemmet?
- TC No, at Greenrigg, the other side of Polkemmet. And I would be there for about six or seven years, at Greenrigg. I was transferred to W.....? , and I was at W.....? for about nine years, was it?
- MC Till 1970.
- TC And then I was retired with back trouble....
- SR You must have been close to retirement age?
- TC I was coming on retirement, and I was off two or three times and the doctor said to me 'you'd be as well to finish up, because this is no' going to get any better.
- MC He wasn't getting healthier, he was getting maybe a wee bit bigger pension.
- TC Fair enough, so I packed it in. So that was my life's
- MC He hasn't a thing to show for the 34 years work with the Scottish Oils. Not a thing!
- SR Haven't you? Are you not on the Provident Fund?
- TC I've never got a halfpenny.
- SR I thought everyone who worked there after 1950 was on the Provident Fund.
- MC You see, when he left Burngrange, the notices were up, it was closing. And he got the chance of this job as deputy in the coal. And he spoke to the manager, and...
- TC And the manager says " That's good enough, Tarn" he says "if you've a chance to go, you've no job as a deputy in the shale". Because there were deputies going from our place down to Westwood, and there were a lot of deputies in Westwood. And so they were going to give us like a roadsman's job, a safety man. Wi' a drop in wages. And that's why I went.
- MC They say he left of his own accord.

- TC I applied for them to see if I could get the pension, and they told me I left of my own accord. And that was a lie. Because I wrote to them again and explained to them that I left because they couldnae employ me as a deputy. But nobody ever...
- SR You never got anything.
- MC Not even a gold watch!
- TC Not even the gold watch....
- MC And that was unbroken service.
- TC And there were men worked with me - oh, it wisnae more than twenty years - and got a pension. But I didn't. Just unfortunate.
- MC You don't know whether it was.... Mind you, when he went to the coal first, he lost 2 ½ stone, it was far different working.... it was hard work.
- TC In the shale it's about 10 feet high, well, 8 feet to 10 feet, you know....
- SR And you can walk around..
- TC You can walk around, and..... You know what I went into the coal? Two feet. Oh, and..... murder, it was just about murder! All the flesh just dropped off me. But, you see, what it was, I got a job, and they took me on as a deputy, and I was determined to.... they were determined to put me out because I was a shale miner, you understand, the safety officers, and I was determined to stick it! Although I was a shale miner, because I had all the qualifications You see, after that - well, I don't know if it was after that or before that, they brought out a new foreman' s certificate examination,you understand, and I had a brother in law who was an under-manager in the shale, and he told me, he says "That's the same examination I got to be an under-manager, and you're doing the same thing to be a deputy. Are you going to take another deputy's certificate, or what for do they want this thing?"
- MC At that age.... I always used to say that it was my prayers and will power because they used to go too fast when he went to the night school for him to take notes when he went to the night school. So he'd just try, with

hieroglyphics or something, and he'd get them out when he got home and I would decipher, and write the notes down.

- TC It was amazing all the same, because it must have been quite a stiff examination. Because when I went to the night school, there were 45 men all started at the night school with me, a big class. And at the finish there would be, oh, maybe ten of that dropped out
- SR Did they run the night school here in West Calder?
- TC I had to go to Bathgate, the Lindsay.... and as I said there was about thirty, I would say thirty finished the classes, and I was very friendly with the teacher, you know, and I says 'Give us a chance, I cannae keep up with you'. 'Oh, he says' you're far too slow'. Anyway, you know how after the examinations they print in the paper how many passes they've had in the High School ? How many do you think passed in that lot of lads? Just think, there would be thirty of them finished the class, whether they went in for the examination or not I don't know ...
- SR Twenty?
- TC Seven of us! We were only seven that passed, that time, they maybe passed other times.... And for me to stay in the coal, I had an ambulance certificate to take, a shot-firing certificate to take, and a ? certificate to take. So you'll know they didnae want me to be there! And I never liked it, from the day and hour that I went in. It was murder. And, I don't know, it must have been my face that they didn't like. I really enjoyed my time in the shale. You know, the time that I was a deputy in the shale was the best job I ever had. Best job I ever had.
- SR In terms of wages, working conditions, hours....?
- TC Oh, it was a good job. As a miner, like! You were underground, right enough, but it was a good job, a really good job.
- MC And they seemed to accommodate you, if you wanted time off for something, you never had much trouble about it. Go to a funeral or anything....
- TC Oh, you never had trouble. The only times was, the time when there was the disaster, you know.
- SR Burngrange, you mean? Were you there?

TC I was there. I was the deputy in charge when the men were taken out. I was the deputy in charge when the men were buried. And I was in the pit all the time. In fact I was the deputy in charge of getting these men out. You wouldnae have believed, the men came out of that place with faces just like they were sleeping their face colouring was all right, just rosy cheeks.... the face colouring was fine, but....

SR They were just asphyxiated, were they?

TC Aye.

MC It was the gas that was the thing that...

TC It was after damp, you see, the damp after the explosion. It was very ... deadly and (inaudible)

MC It apparently keeps them natural looking.

TC That's right, what they cry white damp. The black damp was more serious.

MC But he suffered, according to him they suffered a lot, with poverty, but then he blames his Dad for that.

TC Och, aye. My Dad was awful fond of his drink.

SR You'll have to say what it is, or it won't record on the machine!

TC Oh, I'm no' caring a damn for any of them! He was a bad old man.

SR Was he?

TC He was.

MC Ah, well.

TC Well, I suppose in these days, men drunk to excess, and.... He was a hard working man.

SR But he didn't give his wage to your mum?

TC Oh, no! He hardly give her a halfpenny.

SR So how did she keep you?

- TC Well, I had six brothers, there were five brothers and me myself.
- MC He was the youngest.
- TC I was the youngest.
- SR No sisters?
- TC One sister. And these fellows worked, and they kept us. And before that, I didn't know anything about it, but I remember a story - he came in one night and gave my mother a pound. And she says "Andy, what am I going to do with this?" And he says "I don't know what the hell you're going to do with it, but I'm not going to give you another!" Neither of my brothers could say anything to him - oh, no, no, you couldnae contradict him like that.... In fact I was the youngest and (inaudible) you didnae contradict your Daddy. He was sat in his big chair.... I can mind when we were in Rosewell, when we used to run up to the corner and gie him some money for his drink oh, a bad, bad, old man.
- SR So your mother kept you on the wages that your brothers gave her?
- TC Aye, that's how we lived, that's how we lived. And we didn't live very ... great, you know? But I can remember, I always tell them, when we went to Rosewell, we had nothing, absolutely nothing when we left Tarbrax, because they didnae gie us anything. But when we went to Rosewell, we started with nothing, and we left with nothing and I had a pair o' brown trousers, that I wore, you know. And I had no other pair o' trousers, I can tell you. And we were four year in Rosewell, and I wore these trousers for four years, they must have been good stuff! But Robert, my brother, older than I, went back, and some of the pals were there, and it was "Is Tam through there?" and he says "Aye, Tam's through", and this fellow says "Has he his brown breeks on?" So they were noticed.
- SR Did your Mum work at all?
- TC No, no, she looked after the house, with all that big family. Whether she worked in her younger days outside, I believe she would have....
- MC There was 19 years between him and his oldest brother, so there was a long time he wouldnae know much about.

- SR So your oldest brother had left home by the time you were....?
- TC My oldest brother, no, he didnae leave home, I would have been about, what? Seven or eight year old before he got married. He left the house to get married. My second brother, he got married about the same time. During the war - the First World War. And I think my third one got married during the First World War. And that left the three brothers and my sister in the house, and we just carried on from there.
- SR How big was your house?
- TC Er... two rooms. With the kitchen. There were beds in the what they cried... box beds. And Rosewell was a I would say Rosewell was the best house that we had, but there was no water in it.
- SR Did you have water at Tarbrax?
- TC Aye! There was everything at Tarbrax!
- SR Really?
- TC Aye! When we went to Rosewell, there was dry toilets at Rosewell, but there was flush toilets in Tarbrax.
- SR Really? So Tarbrax was really quite luxurious compared with West Calder and Gavieside?
- TC It was a real good place, Tarbrax. They were nae dry closets up in Tarbrax that I mind of. There would be maybe before my time. I mean, they were all toilets, in fact the way the houses were built, there were a toilet between two houses, you see, a flush toilet.
- SR Inside or outside?
- TC Outside. You had to go outside. And the new houses that were built, they all had inside toilets. No bathroom, but an inside toilet. They were great houses in Tarbrax, great houses, all blasted down now.
- SR So this isn't the houses that are there now?
- TC Some of the houses that are there now - see, the top ones, the ones that we termed the new ones, that was the last ones that was built. Well, we

stayed down on the bottom side of that, there were rows of houses down on the bottom, I would think about 300 houses altogether - that's quite a big amount of houses, you know, way out in the...

MC Why did they move to Woolfords?

TC When I left, Tarbrax closed down - I left just prior to the works closing down. But the Tarbrax men, a lot of them came down to West Mains to work, you see? And West Mains was a coal mine, it only produced coal for the shale industry, you know what I mean? And they come down there, two of my brothers come down there to work.

SR And did they commute each day from Tarbrax, or did they actually move?

TC No, they were - a very short time, from they moved, they went from Tarbrax to the mine, and then they shifted down to Woolfords, which was about maybe four mile

MC To Woolfords, do you know where that is?

SR Yes, there's that little row of cottages still there.

TC That's right, they stayed there. You know, just a row of houses.

MC By that time, you were living in West Calder.

TC I never went back to Tarbrax. Never went back. I think I stayed three months, and cycled to work in West Calder, and then I went back to digs.

SR So you were in digs in West Calder? What were the digs like, did you have a room to yourself?

TC Well, I had a room to myself in the no, no, I hadnae a room to myself. When I went to Gordons, it was a big family - that's where I went first, and they had a big family, and one of the sons and I, we had a room. And when I moved in here, I moved in with a brother, and he had a son, and it was a single room. You see, they actually took you in just to get the money, they didnae want you, don't kid yoursel' they want you, all they want was your money.

SR Did they feed you?

- TC Oh, aye, they fed me. And I could always tell Jessie, that if I was staying with my brother I could tell you what I got in the morning for my breakfast, from the day I went in with them to the day I left - a plate of porridge, a poached egg, and a slice of toast.. That was my breakfast every morning. (inaudible) that was the landlady, if you wurnae there for your tea you never got it. If you were late for anything, you never got it.
- SR When you were lodging in West Calder, did you still send your wages home to your Mum?
- TC Wages home to my mum? Oh, there were two brothers working in the house.
- SR So you just paid your way?
- TC I paid my way, and sometimes I went home and give her a couple of pounds, you know? I would pretty often always give her something before I left, but I had two brothers living at home.
- MC By the time I knew his father, he was a bit.... you know he was 92 when he died.
- TC A hearty old boy.
- MC And his sister Mary was quite well married, and always thought that she knew the life her mother had, and always it was that her mother would spend the last of her days with her, in peace. But it was the other way about. And he said that one morning she went in with his porridge, and he was in hard mood with something, and he took one spoonful and spat it right out, and said "Porridge!"he says "who telled you" (he never lost his Irish accent) "who telled you you could make porridge?"
- TC Aye, he wisnae a nice man. But, I'll tell you what he did, he made good men for other women. You know? All his sons was good men.
- SR When you went down to work with the pit ponies, then you were still living with your parents?
- TC Oh, aye, I was only

SR What sort of working conditions were there then?

TC There were fairly good working conditions there, but the money wisnae what you'd cry awfu good, you know what I mean? You'd work hard , very hard, for it, and I'd, when I started to produce shale like, I'd four and.... four shillings and fivepence or something, and that was my wages for driving the buggy. And when I left that, I went to work with an older "brother, he was a placeman, what they called placemen, and they paid you for what they thought you were worth, (inaudible) And after the place working I went down to work in the (inaudible) section, and I was alright for quite a long while, I was working, drawing, and getting from the men. And they were hard men to please, you know, they wouldnae pay you, you know? That was your working neighbours, you know what I mean, just ordinary men had places, you see, what you termed these places. And they were ashamed to look at you when they gave you your pay! They'd be talking away, and they'd pay you behind their back here, or over their shoulder there, and....

SR Could you ever complain that you didn't get enough?

TC You couldnae complain, you couldnae get a job! These were the times when you'd come up the pit, and there were five or six men standing and waiting and looking for your job. It was hard work. You couldnae leave, because if you left you were on the dole, and if you were on the dole you couldnae get off. We knew perfectly well, that the stuff we were producing, they men were making good money. You were paid your neat money, and if they didnae get on they took half a crown or three shillings off your pay Instead o' giving you it. And they did these things. And when they were really getting on, and you knew they were getting on, and they had enough to give you just your wages, and then "And there's five shillings for yourself". As if they couldnae give you it on your wages! I worked for my brother, and I was a better man than him. I was producing the stuff, and he was getting twice the wages I was getting. And they wouldnae allow me to run my own pin; that was when they went up the hill, and these hutches, the pins was on them, they were yours, you see? And I even went to the management and asked them for a pin, and they wouldnae let me. No!

SR Was that when you decided to train, to do the classes to become a deputy?

TC Well, it was after that. I became a miner, a place-man myself.

SR And then you did the same to everyone else?

- TC No, no, I didn't! I gave the man that worked with me plenty of good... we could make wages, good wages. But my brother, who was in the next place, all the time that I was with him, he couldn't make wages. Wouldn't make wages!
- MC They could never agree, anyhow. He always maintained that Jimmy had robbed him.
- TC Oh, aye, I maintained that he didn't do fair with me. He couldn't pick snow out of a snowdrift. In fact, I'll tell ye, there's miners and there's miners. And I had a big fellow that was working with me, when I had a place. And he was a real good hard worker. But nothing up here, you know? He had no idea. And we made good wages - as long as I was organising him. And I was off ill, I don't know, I was off with back trouble. And he came up "Oh, I'm packing up, Tarn, I'm packing up, I'm no' making wages here". This was a big man that could work, you know? I said "Aren't you, by Jove?" I says "Just wait till we start again, a wee while". And it looked up again. So I (inaudible) started looking for a lighter job, and I went up to Burngrange, that's when I went to Burngrange, as a roadsman....
- SR But what does a roadsman do?
- TC Laying in platforms, roads, changing platforms for going round turns, directions, you know.
- SR And then you get a fixed wage paid by the company?
- TC A fixed wage by the company. Which was, ten shillings or something. And then I fixed up places and I got eleven shillings. I went to a job, it was a repairers job, and they transferred me back from Burngrange to So I must have been not so stupid, to get transferred to do a job. And that's when I said I'm no' doing this for ten shillings, so they gave me eleven shillings.
- MC I always remember that, because it was during the Second World War, that you were a special constable. They asked him to take that. One of the officers, they asked us to take him, they didn't have a lot of room, and they were having a job to get places. So they asked him to be a special constable. So he went through the swearing-in, and he got ten shillings for the day as a special constable, and that was just the same as he made in the

- SR When you did your training to be a deputy, how long did that take, and how many evenings a week was it?
- TC Five or six weeks, five or six nights, for my first one. There was one evening in the week for the fireman's class, and one evening for the ambulance class. That was two, but just in the same week.
- SR Did you have to pay to take those classes?
- TC No, no. It was just a night school. Anyway, we went, all the lads went into Heriot Watt, to pass their exam. And I would be just about to come back, I was working on this big hauler, and the manager come up the stair, and he says; "Ye're long enough here, Tarn", he says "would you take a deputy's job?". Well, him and I.... you see, this manager, the time I was in ?.6, working in a place, this big Monty and I, we were only our two selves. So we went out this Monday, and it wasn't a very good on a Monday! And I says "Some on, Monty", I says "I'm no' working here", I says "there's gas in this place". We had lamps, you know? And we went away up the pit. Just as we landed on the surface, here's the .manager's car coming. "Hillo, hullo, hullo!" He kind of rushed over to us, you know. "Mr. Robertson" I says, "I'm no working down there, there's gas in the place". "You wait here at two o'clock", he says "I want to see you at two o'clock". So he dives into this lamp cupboard, and out with a safety lamp, and heats it, and sends for the under-manager, and down the pit he does shoot. So I come back - thinking wanting anything to shift me away, but I didn't - between 2 o'clock. And mind you, I was getting this fireman into trouble, because he should ha' known that the gas was in the place, and I shouldny ha' been in the place. But if it hadny have been there, I was for it. Out! So he says, just when I was in the door, he says "Now, Tarn", he says, "look, if you find gas in your place again, don't go home, sit down until the fireman comes". I says "Whae's going to pay me?" "I'll see you're paid", he says. So that was all .about it. Put there were two or three times after that, there were gas in the place, and I just sat and told them. And it was when I was packing up the place, you ken, wanting to go, he says "Yes, this is the same man, this is Tom", he says, "I'll give you a job up in West Mine as a fireman". I says "You'll give me a job as a fireman?" "Yes", he says. I says, "I thought you had to have a certificate to work as a fireman". "Have you no' got a certificate?" he says. It was me knowing the percentages on the lamps that had confused him, you see? "All right", he says, "I'll gle' you a job up in Burngrange if you take the certificate." So that's why I took the certificate....

- SR And what were the actual working conditions like? Like when you were on the pit ponies, what sort of hours did you work?
- TC It was seven and a half hours at that time. It changed to seven hours after I come down here.
- SR Was that six days a week or five?
- TC That was six days a week. And no holidays. You got two days at the New Year. They was idle days, no' holidays, you didn't get paid for them, mind, you had two days off. And you'd one day at the Sports. One day - it wasn't a holiday, just one day off work. You had six days.
- SR When did you first get paid holidays?
- TC Well, we'd paid holidays, a week's holidays, when was it, Mother? We'd a week's holidays on the Scottish Oils.
- MC I don't remember, because I only remember the Sports, it started on the Friday on the Sports, and the Saturday was all, when we was young.
- TC Did we not get a week's holiday with the Scottish Oils before I left? A week's paid holiday.
- SR And what were the actual physical conditions like, when you were working with the pit ponies? As a young lad going in, was it really difficult because it was wet or damp or dusty?
- TC you did almost as much as the man in the pit, because they were always running around the works playing with bogies, no' just hutches, doing actual things/what they did do in the pit, but something similar. • You ken? It wasn't strange in a way. The only strangeness was going down, but after you went there, see what I mean, you did practically all the things that they were doing in the pit, when we were just laddies, you know? You took your brother's or your father's lamp and you got it filled with carbide or paraffin wax, and you were outside, playing miners and that. You weren't strange in the pit, at least I never felt any strange.
- SR You felt that the working conditions weren't bad, particularly, until you went to work in the coal?
- TC The working conditions in the shale were great, it was airier work.

You see, the present time coal miners, they've a better job than I had when I first started. It was all hand work, and now it's conveyors and loaders and all that, things that shift their self, and.... But like I say at Tarbrax when I was a boy, they'd just say "Right, Tom, you can start at the big pit on Monday." And you got a , and a leather on the top of it, and then you got your lamp, it was a paraffin lamp, paraffin wax, and you put it on you, and there you were, a man. Then you went to your work, and you'd your to get, and I don't know what the was for.... It was string, what you call string, you'd to take hold of your trousers like that, you see, and you tied a bit of string down there. To keep the shale from going down into your boots, and maybe that's what it was, I d on t know. And you went away down, and when you got a pony, like. say, me,you had a pony, it was the greatest thing of all. Nice wee ponies they had. They had a hard time o' it, mind you .

MC My brother started with a pony in the - it was the one you don't hear of very much, because it's .been closed a long time - Alderstone. My father was the manager at Alderstone, and he got the job as pony driver.

SR Can I talk to you a bit about your life, to get your history of what you've done? So you were born in Dunfermline, and you came back here when you were about nine? And your father was a manager?

MC In.... he was the oversman when we were in the coal. And they opened West mains, they were opening West Mains here, and the general manager that was there, at Hill, wrote to my father, to see if he would come and take over. Because he had this experience in coal.

TC You see - excuse me butting in, but there was a fireman's certificate, and there was an under-manager's certificate, and there were a manager's certificate. And her Dad had a manager's certificate, and this is why he come back from the coal.

MC And we came back then to West Mains, and we lived in the place Newhall, which is - have you gone further out through West Calder, the road that goes to Ayr and the Lanarkshire road, well, there was a row of houses just a wee bit on the Ayr road that was called Newhall.

SR What sort of houses were they, how big were they?

MC Oh, they would just be ... because we had two, the end house and the one

next to it, so they would just be two apartments, I would think.

SR And did they have water?

MC No, no, you'd to go out to a well, and there were dry toilets there.

SR And so how many were there in your family?

MC Er, five. Five.

SR Five children?

MC Ahah. And because of the position at Alderstone, we got the two houses. The end ones were always double ends. There may ha' been, maybe the center ones were three apartments, I couldnae tell you right off how many apartments they were, but I know we had two houses.

SR So you got plenty of space, anyway?

MC We had plenty of space. But it was the pump in the street, you know, and, as I say, the toilets, well....

SR And how long did you live there? About?

MC Well

SR Where did you go afterwards?

MC We came to Rosebery Cottage - you know Oakbank Cottages? Down in Westwood?

There's a cottage on its own at the top of the hill, and that's where we came to then.

SR And was your father still managing Alderstone?

MC No, that's that's a point I'd have to work on!

SR Well, never mind!

MC That's probably when he went to Alderstone. Because Alderstone was down,

you know. New park and Quarry. And that was the same, it was a three - two rooms and a kitchen. It was a scullery. And then a dry toilet.

SR And a pump?

MC Yes, our water was in pails, we brought it in from the I think there was a pump at the wash house. And it was pails of water then, and that would be in I would be 10, I think, I would say we'd two years at..

SR So about 1912. Did you live there for a long time?

MC Yes, for.... seven or eight years, I think. And we moved from there to Gunns Green. My grandfather was in Gunns Green for 40 years.

SR Where's Gunns Green?

MC Oh, it's on that road just below Oakbank Cottages, it's on the side of the road, it was a nice.... It's not like that now, because it's been battered down, it was lovely broom and heather on the other side, but now it's chicken runs and what have you. I think that's really what made my father take Alderstone, because he was getting lodged at Gunns Green, and that was where he was from, of course.

SR So your father was from West Calder?

MC Yes.

SR And your mother?

MC My father always told us he was born at Waterloo, now that's just at - where was it they were moving you to from Greenrigg?

TC Overton.

MC Overton, it was just down there. Well, my grandfather had been 40 years in Gunns Green...

SR And your mother was from West Calder, was she?

MC Mid Calder. She was the dressmaker.

SR And did she work all the time when you were children?

MC No. Except for making our clothes.

SR But she worked until she got married?

MC Yes. It wasnae the done thing to work at that time, unless you worked on some of the farms that were round about.

TC You werenae bad, you wouldnae work either!

MC Och, away you go, I did so!

SR Anyway, did you leave school when you were fourteen?

MC Yes, but that was through illness. I was a year in splints, and maybe six months pushed in a chair.

SR What was that?

MC It was supposed to be joint disease. I always say that it was me on a seat when we lived in Newhall, that place that's no longer there. I remember sitting out in the green, we had a stool, but I was sitting on the grass, and I sat back away right flat back down on the grass, ground. And I did limp from that day, but I run wi' a girl that had a high boot, and my mother thought it was just sort o' mimicking her. But it was painful, you see, and I really think - it is still from time to time - I think it went into an arthritis or something like that.

SR So what did you do after that? Did you get a job after that?

MC No, I think, no, I didnae get a job until I was I was nineteen when I started work in Edinburgh.

SR What did you do in Edinburgh?

MC It was at a tobacconist's, a shop. In fact it was my sister that... I applied for jobs, I don't remember what happened, my sister took it, and she left it and I took it over. Oh, I was in Glasgow for a year, and my sister was with a grocer, and she was through in Glasgow, and my aunt sent for me to come through, and I think I went in it was during ... the year before the First War ended, 1917.

SR And did you lodge with your aunt?

MC Yes. At two shillings a week!

SR And did you give the rest to your parents, or?

MC No, no. No, I could keep it. It paid for my train fare, I was home every weekend! It was a newsagents I was in there, and the 'flu - the first of that bad 'flu - came, and I had a cold....

TC 1918, that bad 'flu.

MC and I came home then, and I was home a fortnight, and when I went back I was homesick, and I just didn't... I said that I wasnae coming back.

SR And then you went to work in Edinburgh?

MC Yes.

SR And In Edinburgh did you commute?

MC I travelled, yes. I was away with the quarter to eight train in the morning from West Calder and I was in at night, I came in at ten minutes to nine.

SR That was a long day.

MC You had to work till eight o'clock. And I got off early to get the ten minutes to eight train in the evening.

SR And did you pay your wages then to your mother, or did you keep them as well?

MC No! Oh, no, no. I had twenty five shillings at that time, and I'd my season ticket which wasnae very much in these days, about twelve shillings or something like that. Oh, no, my mother would get it. You hadn't any pocket money in these days, you never got your own pocket money, if you wanted anything you had to ask for it.

SR Even when you were earning, you still had to ask for it?

MC Yes.

SR Yes. And did you work there until you got married?

MC Oh, no, I worked there until till I went to the exchange, I think. I was on the dole for a wee while, though, and I was in a tobacconist's. And I got another job before that, and - I was an awful homesick person - another job and it was a dry salter's and Ironmongery, and it was an undertaker's that was underneath. And the smell of that shop when I went in - it was only just the bleach and things like that - but I didnae stick it one day. You know, I never went back.

SR Was that in West Calder?

MC No, that was in Edinburgh. One of the jobs I'd applied for, and I could have got them all... And I'd bought my season ticket. But my mother - they were very lenient with me, and there was no.... my sister, she was travelling, and they got it changed into her name.

SR Were you the youngest, or....?

MC No, no, there were three brothers under me.... but they're all gone now.

SR And when you were younger, you didn't have any money problems, because your father was high up?

MC Yes, we never I never knew, really, what it is to be hungry, to go without, and we always had coal and paraffin oil, it was lamps in these days, that was all free.

SR because your father was a manager?

MC Yes. We were five, and there was, you know, about a year and nine months between us.

SR And when did you get married?

MC 1930.

SR And where did you live then?

TC I lived in West Calder, and ...

SR But after you got married?

MC We stayed...

.... with your mother for a while, and then went to a wee house, down below, because by that time I was the operator and I did all the signing and... You see, when we went into the exchange it was 1925, and we were only in it two months when my father died. And it had to be advertised in public, and somebody had been after it, for someone else. Somebody who was quite high rank. And my father was friendly with the man who collected the rents; and the lease was coming up for renewal, and he could put it one way or the other. And we got it then. And so when my father died, it had to be advertised. And there wasn't many subscribers in those days, it was a wee magnetic board.... it didnae finish up like that, though. And I was the one that did all the signing the papers and things like that, and the dally tickets and things.

SR And did you carry on working there after you got married?

MC Yes. Yes, I did. Till, it was during the War, the last War, it had to be manned at night. It was only, if it rung, you'd to get up at night. And we split it up. And it was really quite a good time then, because we had some concerts, joining up with other exchanges, and ARP places where they had their accordions and what-not, you know, to break the night. And that was after I was married, and then it got big enough that you put in other boards and then they wanted a full-time operator. And I was the part-time operator then, because by this time I had a family.

SR But you still carried on working although you had a family? That was quite unusual, wasn't it?

MC Well, I don't know...

TC Aye, there werenae very many did that.

MC And then, when it was going automatic, and it was closing, they offered me a job, I'd have had to go into Edinburgh. But I was so fed up with it at that time, I thought 'Oh, dear!' and I decided no, I wouldnae. But I wasnae a month idle when I was wishing I had accepted!

SR When you were working there, and you had your children with you, was that OK?

MC Oh, aye, the school, I was just across from the school...

SR But when you had little children, which weren't at school?

MC Oh, yes, you know, that was alright, because I just took them up to my mother's. It was alright because somebody was in the house, you see?

SR Oh, I see. But you couldn't have done it if your mother hadn't been there?

MC No, oh, no.

SR You weren't condemned for working?

MC No, no. And then we moved across the road from my mother's, and we had been making such a fuss about getting another house, because we had only a room the first one we had after we were married had just a room and kitchen. And it had had the two beds, the bed recesses, but one of them been had/taken away and made into a sort of kitchen; we had a marble slab, sort of dressing table that we put in there, and you put a light in it. And then it was just the kitchen and the bedroom, and that was the scullery. And there was toilets

SR Flush toilets?

MC Ahah. Well, the one round the back was for the exchange, there was just my mother and the exchange was upstairs. And one of the ones that we got - there was four small ones under- and it was one of them, and the toilet round the back was for the exchange was for the house next door. We never used it.

SR When you had your children, did you go into hospital to have them?

MC No. Our first girl, Helen, I don't know whether it made any difference being in Hospital, but these days it wasn't so common - and she was born and they got the doctor and they put her.... and they went away, and they never told us till afterwards she had a lump on her back. And... I didn't

have a clue then, and our doctor was so sympathetic, he never ever told me...
..... until I know now, by the papers I read, and that's 50 years ago. It
was, er.... what?

TC Split spine.

SR Spina bifida?

MC And that's only the reading that I know now. She was 18 months.... and they said to keep her off her feet as much as possible.... So we kept her off her feet. And I took her in to.... it got to.... Tom was saying "they're doing nothing, they're doing nothing". And she was 8 months... and when she got to that age, and.... I got panicky. And it was Dr. H that had seen her, she was at Bruntsfield, I think, she'll "be retired now, and she had examined her. So I rang Dr. H's house, and the lady who answered said she was at a party, but she insisted on giving me her phone number and phoning her about it.... and when I think on it now and of course I phoned her and she said "Oh goodness gracious, I remember her well, and she should have been in here long ago". So she said to bring her on the Monday. And I went up to the doctor to tell him that I'd done this, to confess. And he gave me a letter then. And we went in on the Monday, and we were almost out again we never saw Dr. H, another doctor examined her, and I never remembered that I'd to drop the line for the doctor". So we were half way out, going up the stairs on to the street, when I said "Oh! I never gave the letter." And he says "Never mind" but I insisted on going back.... And that was on the Monday , and between the Wednesday night and the Thursday morning, my mother, she was shouting at the window "They're still here yet!", and they had phoned the police, and my mother in the middle of the night and she had died. And the doctor there said it was the change from the home life to the hospital life.... And they had given her a thorough examination on the Wednesday night, and passed her fit for the operation on the Thursday. And then she was cold, and he said her heart was just getting slower So that was the change from the home life to the hospital life...

TC Did they no' say it was an enlarged thymus gland?

MC Yes, they asked for her to have a post-mortem, and I wasnae for any post-mortem, and then they had a wee talk with me, and they said it would maybe not do her any good, but it'd might do somebody else So they says they want you to go in and see her, then, and I says, well, if it wasnae going to be any cutting about, you know? And they said it was an enlarged thymus gland, and she could have had a fright, she might have died at any

time.... But the thing that puzzles me now, is, we had a friend who had a thymus gland removed when it was the size of but this thymus gland is the life gland, and when you're a year old it starts shriveling, but for some reason which they didn't know then, hers didn't, and they couldnae touch that.

SR But you had other children, did you?

MC Yes, yes.

SR How many?

MC I had five, lost two. It was Ena, and then Drew, and it was Jessie that died. It was jaundice, this jaundice that gets babies, they called her a gold baby. And they tried, to hide these things too, because the doctor came in in the afternoon, and I saw the doctor pass. I was still in bed, and I saw him pass. And I said to the nurse "Did you send the doctor in?" And she says "Oh,no,no" And my sister came up, she was living in Bathgate, and she had her on her knee, and the tears so.... So they had seen it coming....

SR So she died when she was very new born?

MC Eight days old. And the doctor was away, and the night we sent for the doctor, it was a locum.... and he started to give her a blood transfusion - he took it from me - and at the end he says to the nurse "This should have been done long ago". If she had been in hospital, been born in hospital, they would have drained the blood. IVs quite a common thing to do, now, for that, to drain the blood.

SR So when you had your children at home, was there a doctor came actually during the childbirth?

MC Yes, because a doctor came, because I don't think I could ever have had a kid without having Dr. F , you see, that was his subject, you know, his main he was such a nice person. What other doctor would he was on night shift, and I went up and phoned the doctor, I didn't know what to do, and I said to him "It's no' true, it canny be true!" And he says "Oh, Jessie, I'm afraid they don't make mistakes about things like that. But I'll be down first thing in the morning". And he was down at 8 o'clock. But the doctors now, you'd have got a row for calling them

at that time, for nothing.

- TC She was the brawest wee 'un you ever see in your life. She was 2feet 9, the size of her....
- MC The undertaker was a friend of my aunt's, and he was telling her, he says he never saw a bigger child for her age.
- TC She had a beautiful set o' teeth she just used to smile at you....
- MC My grand-daughter is expecting a baby, and - she's in South Africa - and her mother says last night, I was speaking to her on the phone, she says we don't know, we think it may be the 18th, and I said that would be quite a nice day, though I didn't tell her, because that was the day that Helen died.
- SR When the oil works and all the shale mines were going, was there a lot of pollution around, like air pollution from the works?
- MC Well, there was that yellow bum, where did that yellow burn come from?
- TC Well, I'll tell you. Yellow bum was West Mains. If you lived near the works, you smelled the works, you know.... I canny explain the kind of smell it was....
- MC It was the retorts, wasn't it?
- TC It was from the retorts, that's what I mean, you smelled the works. I couldnae just explain what kind of smell it was, you know what I mean? Like at Tarbrax, it had its own oil works, the place was built round the oil works, you see what I mean? And you smelled the oil works, but it wasn't a bad smell in any way. But in Addiewell, that had its own oil works, and the places round about smelled the works, but when you come this way, you didnae smell the works - unless the West wind was coming over, and you sometimes got a bit of it.... But where there werenae an oil works, you didnae smell it.
- SR And was there any dust or smoke that came out?
- TC I wouldnae say it was dusty and smoky, but there was an oily smell about the place, you ken? Tarbrax, there wasn't much smoke, just the smell of the retorts.

- SR Do you think, looking back on it, that Tarbrax was a healthy place to live?
- TC A really good healthy place to live. Because it was way up on the.... you know, one way in and one way out. You had two miles to walk to the station, before you started traveling and you were bound to be healthy , because you were stuck away out on the hills, and you had to walk.
- SR Was it a sort of self-sufficient community, with shops and a school, and so on?
- TC Yes. There were two churches, well, there was a built church and a hall church. And there was two picture houses. One was a traveling picture house that came to Tarbrax and stayed there, and then there was one in the hall, you ken. The hall was what we called the Institute, you know what I mean? There "as "billiards and a reading room, all these things. The dance hall, and the picture house in one, you know. It was a really a good.... There were two chip shops.... aye! And then a co-operative, and then there were a big general grocer's shop, and the wee shops that you get.... a great wee place. A great wee place!
- SR Was your mother from round here, or was she from Ireland as well?
- TC My mother, no, she was born in Brandy Braes in West Calder, that's where my mother was born.
- SR So your father came over here to work and met your mother?
- TC No, he.... my mother, it must have been down in Linlithgow side that they met. I think my mother was a farm servant, you know what I mean? And I think that's where they met.
- SR Do you reckon, I'm talking about your childhood time, do you reckon that life was tougher for women or for men?
- TC Oh, it was a tough, tough life for a woman. You see, my mother, when you think of it, she was a big strong woman, but they had nae water in the houses, that was when she was a young woman -when they were up in Tarbrax, there was water in the house -but you'd to boil it in big boiler, there was a built-in boiler, and great big washing tubs, and looking after a family was tough going....
- MC But there was more in the family, I remember her say, there was some losses at birth.

SR Your mother lost some children at birth?

TC My mother? Aye, I think she did, maybe two or three. I didn't mind them, I was a young one.

SR Were there a lot of children died when you were a child? Did children get sick and die quite often?

TC Well, you see, you haven't very much memory, just like yourself for instance when you were young, you weren't paying very much attention to people that were dying. It's only when you become older that you pay much attention. Maybe if a school pal died, you remember that, but other than that.... children, you never gave it a thought.

SR Did you use to help your mother much in the house?

TC Well, we did help her a bit in the house. Like for getting in coal and filling the boilers at Rosewell, we had to fill the boiler for the wash and carry in water. And it was a beautiful house in Rosewell ...

SR Just no water?

TC It had no water the funniest built houses in the world. They'd wash boilers in the house, and no water, you'd to go and carry water. And they were beautiful houses, two rooms, a living room and a kitchen. And they're still there, down the main street at Rosewell. And dry toilets away at the back.

SR And did your father do anything to help in the house?

TC He didn't ... your father would ... if there was anybody sitting in his chair and he come in the door, they had to dive out. And he'd sit there, and "Give me my pipe over!" He was a great bold poacher, and he used to sit there by the fire and make snares, and tie flies - he had a shelf with all his flies and things on, you dare not touch them, my mother didn't dust them or nothing. He was clever as regards to that, making flies and that for fishing..... You see, I don't know, men in these days, my father wasn't just the only drunk, he had cronies that he went drinking with as well, you know what I mean? So, there must have been other boys just as bad as what we were.

- SR Did he ever beat your mother when he was drunk? Was he really?
- TC And she wouldny - she would not let anyone touch him.
- SR Touch him? To stop him attacking her?
- TC Mhm. And my brothers was all fighters, all boxers - we used to be called the Fighting Crillies! And you had tooh, no, that's your Dad, that's... and only one brother hit him and knocked him out cold, and "Oh, you've killed him, Willy, you've killed him!". But what can you do about it? It was just the way of life, I think.
- SR And did he beat you lot? The sons?
- TC Well, he never actually beat me. But they tell me that he leathered the older ones, one of the oldest ones, I think he leathered him and he used to take him - you see, in these days, then the sons become working age, they'd take them into the pit to work with them. And Sam had a tough time then. But no' me. Because I was always big, you see, and 'fear not no man', you know. And one time, I must have got in his way, and he done something, and I turned round to him, and he says "No bloody son of mine'll lift his hand to me in my house! Get out of this!" And I says "I'm not". When you look back on it, we had some times hard, but only when I was ill.
- MC Yes, there were these kind of times, it was every so often, every couple of years, we used to dread November coming round, because that was when the pain usually started. And he'd say "Doctor, you'll have to get me out of here, I'm going to work! And Doctor says "Tom " he says "I'll give you a line." But the parish...
- TC And that was a dreadful thing, to be on the parish.
- SR Because of
- MC The stigma
- TC Oh, they folks are on the parish! Oh, that was terrible. Now you're on Social Security, you're on top of the world.
- MC It was just that.... I was going up to the doctor's one night to get his weekly lines, and the doctor handed me a yellow envelope, and I felt my heart drop to my stomach, I thought he was giving me a line for the parish.

- SR Were you ever on the parish when you were kids?
- TC No, no! Oh, no. You wouldn't be on the parish if you were an able-bodied man at that time, it was only when you were destitute. The parish relief wasn't very much, you know. There was an old wife in Rosewell, that got parish, I think she got about seven shillings a week.
- MC You used to tell us about the management in Rosewell that owned everything, and they used to take the relief out of that....
- TC Aye, it was a nice place to stay in those days. The management owned the halls, they owned the co-operative, they built the chapel - they didn't belong to the Kirk - the pub, everything belonged to the White Hill Colliery. And when we went there first, the manager would be driving up in his car, and if there were papers lying about your door or that, and he seen them. he went up and notified the clerk in the works and he come down wi' a line - clean that up, or out! I'll give you an instance; this Bobby B he was up at Bonnyrigg, or at Dalkeith, and he was walking home - about maybe three miles from Rosewell - and this car come up, and Bobby asked him for a lift, you know. And "Who do you think you're asking for a lift? Drive on!" And Bobby asked him again. "Drive on!" and left him. And by the time he got home, his mother had a line To tell her that she had to move out of the home because of the insubordination of her son.

Transcript	TC
Industrial Information	I was born in Tarbrax in 1902. I was fourteen or fifteen when I started work in Tarbrax. My father was a shale miner in Tarbrax.
Pony Driver Drawing	My first job was as a pony driver at Tarbrax. At sixteen years old I went into the drawing at the face.
Burngrange Deputy Shale Mines	I then went to work in Burngrange, as a face worker. Then I took my certificates and became a deputy. That was a mines deputy, or a safety officer in the shale mines, because there were a lot of deputies going from our place to Westwood. And so they were going to give us like a roadsmans' job. The shale was about ten feet high, and you could walk around it. They took me on as a deputy. I don't know if that was after or before they brought out a new foreman's certificate. I had a brother-in-law who was undermanager in the shale mines, and he told me that was the same examination he took to be an undermanager. I was doing the same to i become a deputy.
Working Conditions	The working conditions were fairly good. When I was drawing I had to get the men to work harder because if you didn't it affected your pay. You

couldn't complain because that was the time there was five or six men standing and wanting to take your job.

Own Pin They wouldn't allow me to run my own pin, that was when they went up the hill, (the hutches), the pins were on them and they were yours. I even went to the management and asked them for my own pin but they would not give one.

Miner I became a miner, a place-man myself. I had a big fellow that was working with me, he had no idea. I had to organise him. That is when I went to Burngrange as a roadsman.

Roadsman Job This job involved laying in platforms, roads changing platforms for going round turns, and directions.

Wages I got a wage that was fixed by the Company, which was ten shillings or something. Then I fixed up places and then got eleven shillings.

Repairers Job I then went to a repairers job, and it was then they transferred me back to Burngrange.

Deputies Training My deputies training lasted five or six weeks, five or six nights a week. There was one evening in the week

Exams	for the foreman's class, and one evening for the ambulance class. We took the exams at Heriot Watt University.
Big Hauler	I was working as a big hauler at this time, and the Manager came up the stairs and said, 'Tam, would you like to take a deputies job?'
Strike	I know there was a big strike in 1916, at Tarbrax. My father was in charge then. I think he maybe just fell out with '-the management, I just don't know. I was not working then you see.
Parish	That was a dreadful thing to be on because of the stigma. You would not be on the parish if you were able-bodied, it was only when you were destitute. The parish was not very much you know.
Pension	There were men who worked with me, it wasn't more than twenty years and they got a pension, but I didn't.
Accident Burngrange Disaster	I was the deputy in charge when men were taken out. You would not believe, the men came out of that place with faces just like they were sleeping. Their faces were the right colour and and there cheeks were rosy.
Cause of Accident	It was caused by an explosion, and the white damp afterwards.

Domestic Life Housing	Our first house had two rooms and a kitchen and box beds.
Tarbrax Housing	The housing in Tarbrax was really good. We had outside toilets, and you shared one toilet between two houses. I think there was about three hundred houses altogether.
West Calder	At West Calder I didn't have a room to myself. I stayed with a family called the Gordon's.
Marriage	When I got married we stayed with my mother for a while.
Health	There was no real health problems, because looking back, Tarbrax was a healthy place to live. You were bound to be healthy, because you were stuck away in the hills.
Social Life Sports Day	I can only remember the sports. It started on Friday and the Saturday, when we were young.
Retirement	I retired with back trouble after the doctor said to me, 'You'd be as well to finish up.'

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