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NATIONAL LIFE STORIES

ARTISTS' LIVES

Diana Walford

Interviewed by Cathy Courtney

C466/81

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F6742 Side A

Interview with Mrs Walford on the 12th of January 1999 at her home in Gloucestershire.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

You were just telling me a little about New Year in Bibury.

Well it was one of the first new years I've had, because generally I go over to my family and we do it all together, but this year I decided I'd better perhaps have a quiet one, and I think it was one of the nicest ones I'd had, because I heard the New Year being rung in in Bibury church through the open window, and I actually, there are five of them, bell-ringers, and I know them all, and first of all they rang the old year out, and then there was two minutes where I think they all had a hot toddy, so I popped back to my electric blanket to warm up again, and then they started ringing the new year in, and it was a lovely night. And I watched the clouds going over the moon, and I listened to these bells, they went on for about quarter of an hour, and then I began to get cold so my blanket called me.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

When I do things like the answer machine I sound just like the Queen, it's awful.

It's quite useful.

Well...

I wondered, just so I've got it documented on the tape, if you could tell me... There's something odd about my microphone now. Your name now and the name you were born with, and where and when you were born, please.

Yes, yes. Well my name...are we switched on? Yes. My name now is Diana WOLFORD, and I was born Ralli, which is a Greek name, R-A-L-L-I. Fortunately it's the shortest Greek name there is, because some of them are terrible. And I was born at the end of the war in, I think it was Rutland Gate, which is Knightsbridge. My father was in the Army, and, of course I remember nothing of that. I suppose the first home I remember was in Surrey, a house called Woodlands, somewhere between Cobham and Oxshott, and that was a big, ugly house, but we had large nurseries, and one of the nice things about the nurseries, it had a sloping corridor down, so we could get on anything on wheels at the top and swoop into the nursery and round the kitchen table, scattering our nurse and nursemaid, but it was all great fun for us. And my brother started going to a little dame-school there, but I was too young to go to school there. But it was a lovely home. We started riding, kept ponies, and my father had a bit of a farm there.

Was your father a farmer?

No, he was a businessman, but, he was always interested in country life, so he had a farm foreman. It was a small farm, but it did mean we could ride where we liked.

So were you born in Rutland Gate because you also had a London house, or...?

I suppose I was born, I imagine I was in Rutland Gate because my father being away, and my mother had to be somewhere, I've no idea why they chose Rutland Gate actually.

But it was a nursing home rather than...?

No no no, no I think my mother had all her babies in their own homes. In those days you didn't go to nursing homes you see, and they had, she would have had a monthly nurse to look after me, and my brother would have been 2½. I do just remember going to the end of the road and seeing my father, it must have been the end of the war, seeing my father heading his contingent, his Royal Horse Artillery, that's the

only time I saw him in khaki. And then, if I was about two then, it must have been about 1920, and I suppose we went to Surrey after that.

And did he keep a London house as well, or not?

Yes I think we...I should say we always had a London house, because after that we went to a house in Upper Brook Street, 40 Upper Brook Street, and I hated being in London, being a country girl, but of course one had to put up with it, and we were there for a good many years. But he always, in Scotland, in the summer holidays he always took us to Scotland, where I was in my element, and we were allowed to fish. I didn't actually shoot grouse but I shot stags, we used to go stalking. And, oh I love Scotland, I still do, and I married someone in the Highland Regiment, so that was all very satisfactory.

And again, did you go to the same place in Scotland every summer, or was it...?

We went to three different places. The one place was very near the famous gardens of Poolewe, just beyond that, it belonged to the same people that owned it, and that was ideal for children, because none of the sport was very good, except the sea fishing possibly, but I didn't really like sea fishing. You fished for trout in the burns and in the little hill lochs, and I was always very keen on stalking, and that was quite good. And my father I think very unwisely said I could go stalking aged eleven, because it's a very tough sport, and I was going to be allowed to take the shot. And so we all trooped down to the target, it's one of my most shaming things, that, with this Boer War rifle that has a frightful kick to it, and we all lay, I lay down to shoot at this target, and I was so frightened I couldn't pull the trigger. But he wasn't cross, we just walked back, and he said, 'Perhaps another year,' and the next year when I was twelve I did it and I got a stag, which is quite young really to do it. And I've always loved stalking.

So were you treated exactly the same as...did you just have the one brother or...?

No no. My mother, I don't know how she arranged it, because it was war, and I don't suppose there was birth control, but she had boy, two-and-a-half years, girl, two years, boy, my brother Lucas, and two years, girl. So there were four of us, so we were self-contained really, we didn't honestly bother much with other children who came and played with us, because we all got on very well.

And by the sound of it, the girls were treated the same as the boys?

I was. My younger sister was very ill, and she was pretty well kept in the nursery, and...no, she didn't enter into things as much as I did.

What was the matter with her?

I don't know what it was then. I really don't know what it was. But she had a wonderful Great Ormond Street nurse who came and looked after her, and one funny little story, I remember hearing the nurse and our nurse discussing her, and, Pink as called the Great Ormond Street nurse, said, 'I think she's out of the wood now.' And I said, 'Well if you leave her in a wood she'll never get better.' Because children take everything so literally.

And she get better.

But she did get better. She was always...she was delicate though, and that's why I think she...she was delicate, she was also much cleverer than us, and she read very good books, whereas we always were doing rather wild things, and stuff, and she didn't join in with us so much. And now I'm devoted to her, and see quite a lot of her.

And, the first brother was Godfrey?

Godfrey, that's right. And really I suppose Godfrey and I paired off, because we were both very very keen on riding, and my younger brother wasn't very keen on riding, he was mad on anything to do with electrics, and he had his own radio station, and I

think I can remember his code number was G4, and he used to talk to people all over the world, and he shut himself in the house with this radio, and the first day of the war they came and confiscated it. But he then made skill of his radio knowledge and went into the Signals, and became, Wingate in Burma, his number one Signals Officer, and had some very hairy times. But he lived to tell the tale.

Mm. And how much do you think growing up in the aftermath of the First World War affected you, how much did it shadow your life, if at all?

Not a bit, not the First World War. As children we were really I think horribly spoilt. We had, it seems awful to say it now, but a house full of servants, and everything we wanted, and we didn't even think about the war, we were too young you see.

And so that suggests really that you parents hadn't come out of it with any great grief, personally?

Well, my father, it was amazing. No, he lost a brother, but the brother was very ill, so I think probably it was a blessing, but he went right through that war, which is quite amazing, and he had also been in the Boer War. He's much much older than my mother. But he didn't talk about the war a lot. The only thing that happened, once or twice he had terrible nightmares, and I remember once in Scotland, if my mother hadn't got the light on, he had got his hands round her neck and was trying to strangle her, and he thought she was a German. So inwardly he must have suffered, but he didn't talk about it.

He didn't tell you anything about the Boer War?

No. Well, did he say, the Boer War, it wasn't a gentleman's war, but he said it was the last gentleman's war, but it wasn't a gentleman's war for the Boers, definitely. But he got...well he got piles very badly there, and as you lived on a horse he was sent back to what was Sister Agnes's Hospital then, and I don't think he went back, I think he only had a limited time with them. But, no, he had quite an adventurous life, considering he wasn't a soldier.

And in civilian life, what was his business?

Well his business, he was the head of a firm called Ralli Brothers in the City, and they were really tea and jute, and, they were big merchants, mostly connected with India, and they had branches all over India.

And did you ever go to the City?

Oh, us women weren't allowed there, it was the holy of holies. My mother wasn't even allowed to ring up unless we were about to die. It was a completely different life, and the women weren't allowed there.

You never went?

I did go once, yes, because, rather later on when we were farming, I didn't know how to do pay-as-you-earn and that sort of thing, and I was doing the farm accounts, and so I was...I was, of course, I was much much older then, married with three children, and I was allowed to go to the office for one of their chaps to show me how to do it.

And what was it like?

Oh, it was so old-fashioned. Huge, big building in Finsbury Circus. Eventually they were taken over. And then my brothers kept on an investment trust business called, just called G. & L. Ralli Investment Trustee Company, but they've both retired from the City now.

And how do you come to have a Greek name, do you know?

My father was pure Greek, but he couldn't speak a word of it, and had never been to Greece, in fact I rather think he was born in America, but both my grandparents were Greek. You see, the Rallis came from the little island of Keos, which is nearly on the Turkish border, and they were raided, oh it's a terrible story, and slaughtered, and

some of the Ralli women managed to...they were very rich in those days, and they managed to put their jewels in their hair and plait up their hair, and they escaped to northern Italy or the south of France with their jewels in their hair.

Roughly when are we talking about?

That I would have to find out. I should know.

In the 19th century, probably.

Yes. I suppose so. I can't...I'm not...I could let you know. I started reading the book about it, but it was so horrific. The babies were tossed out of the window onto the spears of the Turks. I couldn't take it. So I have rather obliterated that from my mind. My daughter went over with her husband to see the island, but I have no wish to go. It was all so awful.

Do you think your father felt Greek at all?

I don't think he did. Of course he had...there was a terrific Greek lot of people living in London, a terrific lot, and he had to of course go along with that. But his biggest interest was racing I think, flat racing, and he used to breed his own mares, and my mother, although the horses ran in her colours, she wasn't the slightest bit interested, and so in my, before I went to boarding school I used to go with him up to Newmarket, or wherever the races were, and have a lovely time of course. And, well he must have thought himself as Greek, because he was christened into the Greek Orthodox Church, but when he went to the war they changed him to Church of England, or, yes Church of England, because they said they would have no one to bury him if he was killed, and so he just put C. of E. But then when we came to eventually bury him, there was terrible uproar, because he had been, put as his baptism you see as Greek Orthodox, and then this C.of E. had been slipped in, and the Greek Orthodox people said, well, we want to bury him. And all of us, who always thought of ourselves, except my sister, I think she thought of herself as Greek, we

wanted him buried in a British Church you see, and he was. So we got round that one.

And did you meet his parents, were they part of your life?

Oh yes, I remember...oh I think I've got a picture of Grandpa. Oh I can't move, can I?

Put into words for the tape.

Up there you'll see.

Can you describe it for the tape?

He was a really kindly person. He looked very Greek. You know the Greeks have big noses, and a very gentle person, and in the photograph he's sitting with two little pussycats in his lap. And we used to go to Sunday lunch with him and my grandmother, and punctuality was his thing, and the lunch was 1 o'clock, and if by 1 we weren't there, he would stand on the doorstep looking at his watch, and I was brought up to this terrific punctuality, because the reason being quite rightly, you mustn't keep the servants waiting. Whereas nowadays when we all do our own cooking it's so much easier, we have meals when we like.

And where did the grandparents live?

In Park Lane. No, Park Street, which is just off Park Lane. And as far as I remember the windows were sort of stained glass, it was a very old house, and my grandmother had the most beautiful collection of jade in a cabinet, and children in those days were seen and not heard, and we were sat down by the cabinet of jade and told we could look at it and not touch and not speak, which is what we did.

And were you enchanted with it, or...?

Oh yes, I did think it was lovely, simply lovely. I rather think, because my sister saw much more of my grandparents, because I begged to go to boarding school, and so I left, I suppose when I was twelve, to go to boarding school, because she never went to boarding school, she went to a school in London, and so she continued going on to my grandmother's, and think she's got a lot of that jade collection.

And what do you remember about the grandparents, what was their life like?

Well I don't know what their life was like. I can tell you one story. You can cut any stories out can't you?

Oh we wouldn't want to do that.

No, but you might this one. My grandfather I think got rather tired at times of my grandmother's terrific chat, she was a terrible talker, and he was rather a quiet man, so he used to go into the loo in the morning and take his books and sit and read. And the butler, who was called Douglas, was instructed by my grandmother an hour after he'd gone in to go and knock at the door and just say, 'The hour is up Sir Lucas,' and he was meant to come out, and he did come out. But we always thought it was really to have a little bit of peace.

And he was knighted was he?

Yes, he got a baronetcy during the war I think it was, because I was about, yes, it must have been during the war, and I think it was really, he did a lot for, I think they were French ambulances. Because he must have been brought up in France you see, because all those Greeks fled, went to France or Italy, and I think that's how he got his baronetcy, and he was the first one. And the thing I remember, being so proud when he died, wearing a black band on my arm. Yes I was at school by then, and I thought one could be very proud of someone with a black band on your arm.

And did he take an interest in you, was he good with children?

Hard to tell really. He probably discussed us with our parents. He was always very gentle with us. But I only really saw him on these Sunday lunches, and, it wasn't like it is now when children come. I had my three great-grandchildren here the other day and we had roaring games round the house; it wasn't a bit like that. No, you had to be pretty quiet.

It was very formal?

Very, very formal.

And were you frightened of him?

No I don't think I was frightened of him. No I wasn't frightened of him, because he was, he had this gentle side to him.

Did he tell you any stories, was he a story-teller?

I can't...no, I don't think he did. I can't remember any stories. My sister might, she saw so much more of them.

And what about your grandmother, what was she like?

She was sweet, Janie. I don't think she did much. I'm trying to think. I don't ever remember her doing embroidery or anything. I think they lived jolly dull lives actually.

And he presumably worked in the City?

Yes he worked in the City, yes.

And did you think your father was fond of him, had it been a happy childhood from his point of view?

I've no idea really; they were very very formal.

But do you think going to Sunday lunch was a duty?

Oh yes, oh definitely. We got a very good lunch. I mean, we as children didn't mind going there, but probably my parents would have rather gone off to Ranelagh or something like that. No no, for them it was a duty.

And what was Sunday lunch there?

I think it was always roast beef and two veg, and sometimes we had a wonderful ice-cream with what was called Grandpa's beard over it, which is spun sugar. It took hours to make, you have to get the sugar up to boiling point. I saw a cook doing it once. And then you get a wooden spoon and you get it, you can spin sugar very thinly, like, like hair. And having got the dome, she used to spin the sugar all over it, and then it got hard, and it was like Grandpa's beard. And we had to crack it you see. That was very exciting.

Sounds wonderful. Apart from the jade that you remember...

Yes.

What else did they have on their walls, what do you remember about the house?

Do you know, I can't...I can't. I'm a very unobservant person. I should say they had family portraits.

Paintings?

Paintings, yes, I should say. But, it was a dark house, because of these silly little windows. And I should say after lunch we went home pretty quickly, but, I don't remember.

And how would you have travelled to them?

We were walking distance I suppose, because Upper Brook Street down to them, I should say we probably walked on fine days. Though we, we had, we had a garage in the mews behind the house, and a chauffeur who lived over it, so I suppose on wet days we went down in the car.

And what about your mother's parents, did you know them?

Hardly knew them. She was much much younger than him, and my grandfather died before they married, and my grandmother died very soon after. So I really, they...her side of the family really didn't come into our life.

Do you know where she had grown up?

Somewhere...no, I don't actually know. Somewhere in the Midlands I think, I don't really know. We saw very little of them. I saw his...his sisters, as I say, my uncle died at the end of the war, the sisters used to come and visit us and inspect us at times, and they all lived in London.

This is your father's...?

My father's sisters, yes. One sister lived in Northamptonshire, and her daughter married Lord Cardigan's relation, you know, he was the one that led that terrible Charge of the Light Brigade, in a huge house called Deene Park, and it's very very seriously haunted, they had to have one room taken away. And I remember being taken there as a child, and there was the horse in the hall, I can't remember if its body, the head and the tail I think in glass cases. And, my brother and I did stay there when

we were older for a hunt ball, but they had lost all their money and all the panelling had been flogged, and the walls were lined with brown paper. There was no electricity, we were given candles, and we were taken up to our bedrooms and the wind got behind the wallpaper and de-de-de-de-de-de-de-de-de-de, and the candles were guttering like this, and we knew there were ghosts. Terrifying.

Had you encountered ghosts before?

We do as a family pick them up very easily. I actually haven't seen one, but there are a few more stories I can tell you about ghosts in the family. But I didn't see one at Deene, I'm not sure I slept a wink.

And what are the other ones that you...?

Well I suppose the one that is definitely real was at my, I can show you the picture, my home that I was married from was a place called Beaurepaire Park in Hampshire, only about six miles from Jack's home, and it was a lovely, very very old house, covered in Virginia creeper, it looks rather like a castle and it has a moat round it. And the story was that the people that had it before us you used to hear a carriage coming up in the night, I never did actually, they said it used to hear the carriage in the night, and the driver was drunk, and the carriage went down into the moat, and the driver got out and walked across to a certain tree, and, we'd often heard this story. Well, my mother and father were talking to the farm foreman, I suppose about, under a hundred yards in this tree, and my mother saw, she thought it was one of us, ragging her. Anyway she saw this coachman with his collars, you know, a proper coachman of the old days, walk about to this tree. So she thought she'd find out which one of us it was, so she left my father and the foreman and walked straight to the tree, never took her eyes off it, walked round the tree, and there was no one there. So she swears she saw him. And then I had one other experience with my sister. I'd been riding in a point-to-point, I suppose I was then about, I wasn't allowed to ride till I was 21 so I was 21, and we were coming back from it, and it was very very cold, and I think she was driving, I was the passenger, and she just said to me, 'Extraordinary that girl and a dog wearing summer clothes.' It was a long road, with very little traffic on it, and

trees both sides. And I said, 'What are you talking about?' And she said, 'Well...' turned round, and there was no dog, and no girl in her summer clothes, and she said, 'Of course I saw a girl and a dog,' and I'm sure she had. But we pick up things so quickly. And at my home that I was at before, where my son is, we had terrible trouble with a poltergeist, and...

What sort of thing?

Well, one of the things I can remember, because I used to grow the vegetables there, and it was the first crop of my new peas, Sunday lunch, and we had a hotplate, the same one I've got here, and we got the joint and my peas and my new potatoes, and all the family were there then, they were pretty well grown up. And we had had our first helping of all these lovely things, and gone back and started eating it, and with that the whole lot was swept onto the floor, and there was no one there. End of my peas. And that was one of the many many things, I mean pictures used to fall off walls, and I got shaken in my bed several times, it was as if a great vulture was over me and went de-de-de-de-de-de-de, de-de-de-de-de-de-de, pushing me down. And, I didn't make too much of it, because I didn't want to frighten everyone, but one day, much to my relief, my husband was in bed next door, and he was a person who didn't have these feelings at all, and he said, 'Oh darling, do put the light on, something horrid's happened to me.' And so I put the light on, and he said, 'I felt I was being pushed down into my bed, and there was something hovering over me.' And I said, 'Oh I've had that several times.' But it disappeared, and they say it's a teenage child, they say it's a sort of, unhappiness of a teenage child, and whether it was my teenage granddaughter, who was living with us at the time, she never appeared unhappy but her family had just split up, and you never know. But, as she grew up and we came down there, we've had no trouble there. And she now lives there you see, happily ever after.

And does she know these stories?

Oh yes, she, she's very aware of them; very frightened of them. But, it didn't stop her wanting to go back and live there.

And, going back again, do you know how your parents met?

No I don't honestly know how they met, or what... No, I honestly don't know. They didn't tell us their romantic story of their background. And we were all very uninquisitive I suppose.

Did you feel it was a good marriage, did you think they probably did...?

No, to be quite honest, although they never rowed or anything, I always felt they had very little in common. She had unfortunately very bad varicose veins, and so she couldn't join in. We were a rather sort of sporting family really, my brothers were good at cricket and we used to have coaches down... I think my father thought my younger brother, Luke, would get in in the Eton XI. And so, sport was our thing, and she couldn't do any of that, she was always lying with her legs up. So I suppose we thought she was rather wet really, although we loved her dearly, and once we started having children she was wonderful with grandchildren, but she didn't play an active part in our lives.

What do you think her life was, did you have an idea?

She loved the stage, she went to see everything. She was very interested in the Law Courts, she would often go and sit in, in London, to listen to the law. She read a book, but not actually very good books. I always felt she had very few interests really. We were her interests, she was devoted to us.

She didn't have many friends?

No she didn't, she was very shy. My father was shy too. And it wasn't...funnily enough, at Christmas time I got our old visitors' book of where I lived as a child, well from twelve on, and it's packed with people staying, but then when I look, they were all our friends, and they loved having our friends, and they were wonderful to our

friends. And I had my coming out dance there, and it couldn't have been more marvellous.

What was it like?

Oh it was fairytale, because, it was really the very early days of floodlighting, and they had floodlit all the trees up, and the rhododendrons and azaleas. And then the Good Lord thought there wasn't enough light I suppose so he created an enormous thunderstorm with fantastic lightening, and so the whole place was lit up. And it was... You know, I'd been to school by then, so I had made a lot of friends, and my brothers at Eton so they brought their friends. And my sister by then, although she didn't go to school, she had got a lot of friends.

And what made it a coming-out party rather than an ordinary party?

Oh in those days one was a debutante you see, and, if you had a dance, then you got to other people's dances. It wasn't really my scene, but I had to go along with it.

Where did you get the dress for it, do you remember that?

No, I cannot remember where I got the dress for it. In those days I wasn't really interested in clothes. My mother was terribly interested in clothes, she was always going off to these very smart places to have clothes made. I think, you see until I was about ten, when the boys went off to prep school, I wanted to be a boy, and really often wore my brothers' shorts with their lovely S belts, and my brother and I spent our time climbing the roofs, my parents didn't know, of the house, a very high house. But it was such fun. So I wasn't a nice little debutante girl really.

And, what do you remember being on the walls of your family home?

They were not the slightest bit artistic, not at all. And, they had, possibly they did have three good paintings, which I think my sister's got now, but, only...

And what were they?

Only... Oh they were, one was a French one, of a scene of a garden with a waterfall; I think one was Scotland. They were all landscapes. But they... really, culture didn't come into my young life at all.

And did they have any equivalent to the jade ornaments, I mean were there objects or furniture or anything?

Lovely furniture. They were both very, especially my mother, very knowledgeable about furniture, and they had beautiful walnut furniture. And the house was beautifully done up, because she didn't think she had the eye to do it herself and so she employed one of these people to do it.

Do you remember who it was?

I'm nearly sure it was Sloane Street, but I couldn't say for sure.

Are you thinking of the London house or the country house?

Both her houses were. She had no confidence in her eye for colour, so they were both done up by professionals, with their of course saying what they liked and what they didn't. But they were beautifully done up, and the furniture was beautiful.

And was your mother somebody who dressed formally on a normal day at home?

Oh yes she liked... Well no, I mean when we were at Beaurepaire, which was the country place, she probably dressed rather like I'm in, only she...

Can you just tell the tape what you're wearing?

Oh well I've got on a green, it isn't a tartan, green check skirt I suppose, and it's home-knitted jersey of green, and I think I've got a James Meade shirt on underneath.

Because I really dress for the country always, and I'm very often in trousers. She never wore trousers, she was very feminine, and she wouldn't have a shirt like me that just does up at the neck, she would have big bows, she always had big bows.

Was she beautiful?

Beautiful, absolutely beautiful. I can show you the de László painting of her in the hall; although it isn't the original it would give you a very good idea.

Why and when was that done?

I think it as 1923. I looked at it this morning, but my eyes aren't brilliant. I think it was the year after ours was done. And she took lots of beautiful dresses, thinking he'd have great difficulty choosing which dress, and he dressed her in her petticoat, showing her...she had lovely shoulders, just in her petticoat. And she always wore pearls, I think these were her pearls actually, but he wouldn't let her wear pearls, and she wore rather gypsy-looking-like beads, which she never would wear, and it was sort of very elegantly held up by her thumb. But the thing he got absolutely wrong, and if I had been my father I wouldn't have paid for the picture, she had blue eyes, and he painted them, I think they're rather brown. And, when my father said, 'But my wife's eyes are blue,' he said, 'They're not as...this is how I see them.' And Pop accepted that, I felt rather weak. And she had, he's made the hair, in here it's much, because it's a copy of it, she did have red-ish hair, but not auburn hair, and in the copy it's really come out auburn.

Who did the copy?

Well it was my granddaughter got it done. It's photographed on canvas, it's a fairly new thing they do, and she got an old frame, and it all to size and scale. And, I mean I know it's not the original, but one or two people who have come in and I've disillusioned them, they've said, 'That must be a de László.'

But the original, the hair is auburn?

My brother's got. No no no, the original, I went and looked at it a little time ago, and I should say he got it right. His only snag[??]... I don't put the picture light on it now because that makes it redder than it really is.

And do you feel, apart from this very important point about the eyes, do you feel he otherwise captured your mother's personality?

Oh yes, absolutely, because, she was so feminine, and she used her hands a lot. I always remember her trying to describe the traffic to my husband, and most people would say, well, was it going both sides of the road, or were you stuck going one way or something? And she said, 'Oh darling, it was so awful, you see the traffic was going that way and that way,' using, she had beautiful hands, and she used them, whereas I've got ghastly hands so I always hide them.

And would your parents have known de László socially, or were they going to him purely for the portraits?

I should think purely for the portrait.

So he wouldn't have known her otherwise?

I don't think so. But I think when he saw her, he realised she was very paintable.

So do you think perhaps he saw her delivering you two to him, or...?

Well she always sat with us you see, and read the dreaded *Black Sambo* till he got fed up with it.

But it might have been that he, neither she nor he had thought of her being painted at the beginning, and then it came through doing it...

I think without a doubt. I should say that's how it happened.

Right. And do you know how it came about that you two were to be painted [INAUDIBLE]?

Well it was very fashionable then wasn't it to have your children painted, before they lost their teeth or became awful, if you know, children go through rather awful stages, and I should say a lot of people had their children painted. We didn't think it was at all funny, we just thought it was a bore being so tidy.

And do you know other children who were painted by de László, was it part of your little group?

A lot...I should say a lot of the Greek children were.

Because of his own...?

I suppose so, yes. I should say that a lot of the Greek children were painted by him.

So do you have an idea of his reputation? I mean was he someone you...?

Oh he was famous, acknowledged, famous, at least that's what I've always been brought up to believe. And, I should say, I don't know how long...he used to get them in...I don't know, would it be the Portrait Gallery, or the National Gallery, but, you could always tell his paintings. Though of course the one criticism was that they were chocolate-boxy, and I suppose they were. But, people liked pretty things then, the war had ended, there had been so much, and the strikes and everything, we were due for a bit of good things. And I think he was chocolate-boxy.

And, have you any idea if your parents thought about any other portrait painter?

Yes, oh yes. They had disasters, because they had my younger brother and sister painted, and, was it by someone called James Orr? Anyway, it wasn't a success. And I remember he...my younger brother was very very good-looking as a boy, much

better-looking than us, but he told him that, 'You'll be here for an hour; look at that spot on the curtain, and don't move.' Well, my brother was fed up to the teeth of doing this, so he's got a very, although his profile was lovely, it's pretty fed up. And my sister, it wasn't good of her either. Well then, someone else did my mother, and she was stiff as could be, so they never hung her. But my father, have I got...I've got a copy of it next door, a brilliant one was done by James Gunn, whom you probably know, and it was done for the office actually, and hung there, so I really didn't see it much till after he retired. It was absolutely like him. And then when we got it home, before it went to the office, we realised he hadn't put any buttons on the sleeves, and I think Pop rang up James Orr and said, 'Do you know, you haven't given me any buttons.' He said, 'No trouble, I'll come and paint them in.' And Pop said, 'No, I'd like to have a James Orr without buttons.' And so we got a James Orr without buttons. But it's...I was going to hang it here, it isn't, again it's not the one, it's a photograph, my brother's got the one, it's a photograph of it, it's very very good. But it was just too wide for the space I've got, but I'll show it you after.

But it's Gunn, not Orr, this one?

My brother's got it, yes, yes.

But it's by Gunn?

It's by Gunn, yes. And my brother, he really loved good pictures, and he had, he collected mostly Dutch pictures, and he had them in London, and...but of course in London, the burglar alarms, because people knew he had this collection, and my sister-in-law, she's dead now, said, 'If one more, if one more alarm goes off, those pictures are going on the bonfire.' And they were very valuable. So, he sold them. I don't think he's got any left.

Is this Godfrey or Lucas?

Godfrey. Oh Lucas wouldn't know one picture from another, wouldn't be interested.

And so, was the picture of you and Godfrey the first of all these portraits?

Yes, that was a first. I think that was 1922, and then my mother was done the year after, and I'm sure it was from...because I don't think anyone ever took us except my mother, with *Little Black Sambo*.

And, why was it a double portrait, was there any discussion that it might just be one on your own and then another one?

We were just told to sit where we were told, and then, I think we did jib a bit about this holding hands. We were very good friends, but you know, children of that age don't hold hands. But he insisted, and that's why I think we were in awe of him.

End of F6742 Side A

F6742 Side B

And, I mean do you remember your parents telling you you were going to have your picture painted?

No, I can't remember any of that. I can't remember any pep talks before it. Absolute blank on that. It's only once I got in the studio, I could remember pretty well everything.

Can you remember where the house and studio were?

No, and I can't remember the front door. Funny that isn't it, that I can remember the studio so well.

And do you have any idea, did you go with your own clothes, that are then painted in the portrait, do you remember that part at all?

I think, I'm nearly certain I went taking lovely...there was a fashionable place for making children's clothes called Wendy, and wanting to be a boy I hated going to Wendy, because they were nearly always frills, and I'm sure I went there with lots of Wendy clothes, but again you see I think I'm done in my petticoat.

Where was Wendy?

In...now, Upper Brook Street's there. South Audley Street I think. And I know... Oh and we were horrid children. My sister, she didn't mind so much about this boy business, but I used to stand as stiffly as I could. I mean I was never rude to the people, but I wasn't co-operative, and then when they would say, 'Oh don't you think you look lovely,' I would say, 'Well, I don't know, I suppose so.' And you see, my father was most demoralising, because when I was a deb I was quite shy actually, and, my mother would say, 'Oh do go and show Pop...' I think we called...no we didn't call him Pop till I had a child, I suppose he was Daddy, 'Do go and show Daddy your dress.' And he would take one look and say, 'Him, well, you can't make a silk purse

out of a sow's ear.' And I was so naïve, I thought he really meant it, and so I thought, oh nobody will like me, you know. And, I really...partly all that, made me not enjoy my season, though I did sort of pick up a few friends. But I didn't...

And he had no idea that you had taken him so literally?

No, I don't think so. I was so silly wasn't I, I'd been to boarding school, I was used to teasing, but somehow with Pop it was different.

Because he didn't normally tease you?

No. He was...he did rather pull us down the whole time. And yet I was told afterwards that he was terribly proud of me, because I would have a go at anything, you know, but he never actually showed it, but, I only heard that when I was grown up and married.

Oh that's a shame.

It was a shame. No, I got to know him on his deathbed you know, not till then, and when he had sort of become, I suppose rather a humble person, I was able to do things for him, and he changed. It's very sad.

What did you find out about him at that stage?

Well, that he really wasn't frightening, and, he was much kinder than I thought he was. But of course he had been very kind in that he knew how we loved...well of course he loved Scotland too. I mean the day we broke up we were on the train to Scotland, and in those days you took all your staff up you see, and...

And how many people would that be?

Oh there would be two in the kitchen, two in the house, a wonderful odd-job man called Henry, and the butler, I suppose.

And were they your friends as children?

Oh yes, oh yes of course they were our friends. But we had, I remember once longing to tell...there was the odd-job man called Henry, because he, he was allowed to fish in the loch by the house, where he could have easily caught one, and I had seen one, and so I rushed into the servants' hall and said, 'Henry, Henry, come, I've seen a fish.' And the cook said, I think they called me Miss Diana, 'Miss Diana, when we are in here, we don't want interruptions.' So we were kept in our place with the staff. But of course we did love them.

And, going back to the de László portrait, what about Godfrey's clothes, do you remember when...?

Yes, he had an open-neck shirt like all little boys had, grey flannel shorts, it was almost a uniform, but the thing that he didn't mind what he was painted in, as long as he got the S-belt. Boys wore those serpent belts, and he was very proud of his S-belt, serpent belt, as long as that was painted properly he was quite satisfied.

And do you remember de László arranging you? Tell me everything you can remember.

Not much. I don't remember much except, as I say, he must have insisted on us holding hands, that's the only thing I can remember. I didn't even remember the doll, Godfrey told me the other day, 'Don't you remember, you started with that awful doll that he produced, and you were so sulky?' But I don't remember that. But I just remember once I had Diggy on my lap, I was all right.

Can you tell the story of that?

Of having Diggy? Well...

Do you want to read your piece?

Well, has it not been recorded?

No, we just did that in the kitchen.

Yes.

Did you want...read from the top, and then we'll elaborate round it.

Oh because you can cut out what you don't want, can't you. So should I read it through, and then there'll be the bits you can keep. Right. 'Being now over 80...' Will you be able to hear, don't I have to talk into it?

Yes, no it's fine.

'Being now over 80, my memory is not as good as it used to be, but there are still quite a lot I can remember about our portrait painted by Mr de László in 1922. We were really much younger than we looked, being four and six-and-a-half. I have heard that he always made his child sitters look older, and possibly his fashionable ladies look younger. I can remember his studio rather better than I can picture him. I think he was large, wore a smock, and had a great deal of not very tidy grey hair. We must have been in awe of him, because we would never have voluntarily held hands, we would have thought it soppy. I've forgotten, but my brother Godfrey told me that Mr de László produced a doll for me to hold, but I hated dolls, so put on a sulky face. Fortunately my mother had taken her Pekinese to the sitting, and that to my relief was given to me to hold, and I immediately became a nice co-operative little girl again. Godfrey was allowed off the dais to watch him paint Diggy the dog, and he was amazed that with so few strokes, that he could paint such a wonderful likeness. I have no idea how many sittings we had, but to keep us amused my mother used to read us our favourite book, telling the story of Little Black Sambo. Poor Little Black Sambo was chased by a tiger, round and round a palm tree I think it was; finally tiger got so hot that he melted into butter, so Little Black Sambo was saved. After hearing this story for the third time, Mr de László asked for another book as he could take no more

of Little Black Sambo. There's a rather wicked end to the story of the painting of the dear little Ralli children. As far as I can remember the portrait had not advanced very far, and we were due to go for a sitting the next day. Well the day before we were dressed and ready to go for a walk with our nurse, and Godfrey had a brilliant idea. Wouldn't it be fun to chop some of my hair off while waiting for the nurse? I quite agreed, and found some huge scissors. And without taking my awful, round, grey felt hat off, just had a go at random, in selective places, under the hat. All went well until the walk was over, and the nurse took off my hat. With that, half my hair fell to the nursery floor. Shrieks from the nurse. But much worse reaction from Mr de László when shown the urchin haircut the next day. He was so angry that he tied me by my long blue sash to one of the pillars in the studio for the rest of the sitting. When he did eventually paint in my hair, he made it much more attractive than it really was, and now people admiring the portrait say, "What dear little children they must have been."

And when you look at the portrait now, do you think of yourself and Godfrey as you were, or does it look like two children in fiction?

Oh no, it looks just like we were. No, just like we were.

So what do you feel when you look at it?

Well I don't see it often, because he lives in east Kent, and his wife for the last two years has been very very ill so I wasn't able to go. But I did go, after the funeral I did go and look at it, and I thought, what a really lovely portrait it was, and I just thought we did look rather too good to be true. But it is a lovely portrait, and I think it is beautifully painted. And someone said, especially the dog, he said it's the spitting image of the dog. But it was, I mean although I say his hair that he invented for me, it was as I had my hair done, but I think that he made it...mine was dead straight and I think he made it just curly, not curl but curvy and...

Can you put your finger on why it's so good of the dog, is there some feature of the dog that's particularly true?

Well the dog had a very alert look on its face, and I was surprised. I mean, he was a very sporting dog, although it was a Pekinese, and I was surprised that it would sit looking so alert, when I think actually it quite liked being in my lap, because I was very doggy. But, no, he was a very good sitter I should say. And according to Godfrey, he did it so quickly.

Mm. And so, unlike the one of your mother, there is no part of the painting that you think is untruthful particularly?

No, I should say it's exactly like we were.

And what do you remember of the studio?

Oh yes, the excellent light coming in from the right-hand side, skylight I think it was, and my mother sat underneath with *Little Black Sambo* and Diggy, until I had it. And then there were these pillars, certainly two pillars, marble I should say they were, or they looked marble to me, and I think there was a lot of marble on the floor. And then he stood, if we were up on this rather high thing here, I don't think he walked round us much, he stood just to my right, and I'm sure he had a palette. And, we didn't take an awful lot of notice of him, or he of us. I mean I don't remember him saying, 'Oh Diana, put your hand down,' or 'Move' or anything like that, I don't remember that at all. And I don't remember how long the sittings went on for; we had quite a lot of *Black Sambo* read to us.

And when you were tied to the pillar, how did you react?

I was rather surprised to start with, and then I got very bored. But I never really thought, how naughty I'd been. And the funny thing is, the nurse shrieked and ran to tell my parents, but I can't remember them coming storming in and telling me how naughty I was.

Well you didn't do it of course.

No, it was me that did it.

Oh you did it?

I did it. Godfrey's brilliant idea but, oh yes, I did it, under the hat you see, with long cutting-out scissors, there and there, 'Shall we have a bit there?' 'Yes!' And Godfrey said, 'You haven't done the bit at the back. So, I felt the scissors going in, gave them a good clunk. No I did it.

I thought he'd done it to you.

No no. It was his brilliant idea, but I did it, without a doubt.

And do you remember minding yourself when you saw what your hair looked like?

No, I wanted to be a boy you see, I looked much more boyish.

And did anyone tidy it up for you, or were you left...?

Do you know, again I can't remember, and I can't remember, because it was ragged, because they were great big scissors.

And do you think eventually you quite enjoyed being painted by de László, or was it something you just did out of obedience?

I think did it out of obedience. No, I don't think we ever looked forward to going there. I mean on the whole children of that age did do what they were told, and I should say, I don't think we minded too much, but we could have been doing much more exciting things.

And did your family and then you and you and your husband go on and have family portraits painted, the next generation, nor not?

My husband was done by the Harrows[??] Association, because they were having an exhibition, and any father who was the fifth generation to go there could be painted free by any artist he chose, and they were all R.A. artists, and then, after the exhibition was over he could buy the painting at a peppercorn price really. And I can show you that painting, it's excellent of him, absolutely excellent.

Who was that by?

Ah, now, I'd have to look. I am old you remember, my memory's not very good.

It's very good. And did you have your children done?

No, we only had miniatures done of them, which I've got here, and they were very good. The man was very tiresome though, and, poor chap he had a frightful sinus infection and he'd say he'd come and then he'd ring up and say, 'I'm sorry I can't.'

Who was that?

But the...again we'll have to have a little look. Nobody very well known I'm afraid.

Why did you not do an equivalent to the de László portrait, why did you go for a miniature?

Well you know it was only, I had my children during the war, yes, the last one was born about VJ time, and really one wasn't into... I mean for instance, when we were trying, when we were going to my family's old home, the only choice of paint was dark brown or yellow, everything was very...I mean one didn't go in for extravagances or things like that. And we were starting a farm, and much more important to get a muck-spreader than to have our children's portraits painted.

And do you think there's still a role in society for portrait painters?

Oh yes I'm sure there is. And I think it would be very sad if it stopped.

Why?

Because I think, I mean I've changed with the times in a big way, but I don't want everything to go of the past that I remember, and I think the last time I went to the portrait painters I saw William Foster's paintings, do you know them at all? I think he's one of the best portrait painters that are going now, and he gets whole families together and, you know, if you get perhaps four, five in a group, it's very hard to have good ones of them all, but apparently the people who commissioned him were all delighted. They were lovely pictures. And all the other, I do love portraits, all the other pictures, when I say the ones that looked like people, not the ones of, I can't bear modern art, I think are lovely, and lovely things to have. And when I go round houses, or take people round houses, as I sometimes do, it's always the pictures that interest me, much more than anything else. And my son you see, my younger son, is an art historian, and he's an expert on, well now he's having, he's in America, so he has to teach all forms of art, but he got, he studied in Holland, and then he got a, what is it you get to study in Cambridge, and he got his Ph.D. there. But he couldn't get a job in this country, professors are so badly paid, he was head-hunted really, and he's been out in America for about sixteen, seventeen years I suppose. So I go over there every year to see them all.

And, just to fill in a couple more details. Where were you educated then? You were taught first at home presumably, by a governess?

I had got no...I should say I hardly had education until I was twelve years old, it was awful. We had governesses. I was taught the Creed, Lucas and I were taught the Creed. We were hardly taught anything. How my parents... My father didn't want a blue-stocking; well he certainly did get one with me. I went to North Foreland Lodge, and I must have been the only girl that had to be crammed for a term to take the entrance exam, and they didn't get a very good governess called Miss Erwick[ph], and I mocked it up, I found it fascinating, I loved it, and I learnt more from Miss Erwick[ph] than I with all the other stupid uneducated people that tried to teach me.

And, I think if I'd gone on with Miss Erwick[ph] I would have learnt a lot more than I did at North Foreland Lodge[??], because sadly it was going from bad to worse, and because I was very good at games, and not so clever, and my father said he didn't want me to take exams at the end, I made sure I was top of the form, but I should have been in the form above.

And do you regret that?

Yes, now, enormously. Because I think I was very educateable, because the nanny... I was under a nanny really I suppose for the first four years, and I was reading fluently at four, I mean books like *The Water Babies* and really good books. And that, yes I was educated from when you can start until I was four or five, and then I had this awful period when I just wasn't educated. One term with a very good woman, and then hardly educated again, and I regret it enormously. But you see, you might say, well why didn't you go on when you were grown up? But the war had come by then, and I started having babies, and I had three children in the war, so there wasn't really...you couldn't do it. I was in the north of Scotland for a time, and we had no petrol, I was never...oh I was near Gretna Green. Never anywhere that I could get myself educated.

Was your husband in the Army just during the war, or...?

No no, he was a regular soldier. And, he actually, he was a Seaforth Highlander, and he had just come out of the Army, because there was a question he was going to...he hadn't proposed to me then, and he knew that there was someone else who was in the running, and he knew that if he went, he was going to go the Far East, and he knew that he wouldn't have much chance if he went off there, so he came out, took on a pack of hounds, which made him very glamorous in my eyes, and very quickly popped the question. And we were engaged before the war, but then the war came, and we had to get a special licence to be married straight away.

Had you met in Scotland?

No, we had met because he whipped into our local pack of hounds you see, this glamorous Major Wolford, and I was only about sixteen then. So I had known him for a little while, and I knew his parents, who were perfectly sweet. But to be honest I didn't know him all that well when we got married.

And was it a happy marriage?

It was a happy marriage. The war I must say did...he had an incredible war. He went out to Alamein. Well he went out to France the first time, very soon after we were married, he went on D-Day plus two I think, and with the Highland Division, who were all taken prisoner, which would have finished him off. But he had such...he'd been, well really blown up, and they evacuated him to St. Valery, and he was rescued by Peter Scott, the, you know, the wildlife painter. And Peter came to St. Valery at night and said, 'The 'British Navy's here; anyone ready for home?' And there were, I think he was the only officer, and there were about a hundred jocks as they called them, and he got the whole lot back. And he was in hospital at Netley, down in Southampton, for quite a time, and then they got him better. And so, afterwards he joined the 2nd 51st, and they went out to Alamein, and he commanded from Alamein right through Africa and right through Sicily, back again, re-grouped, right through France, and when they crossed the Rhine they said, we think this colonel's done enough, and sent him home. He had a magic war for a professional soldier, and the jocks said, they called him Colonel D'you See, because he used to say, 'D'you see' when he was explaining things. And when he got really bad, they tried, if he was wearing a kilt they would try and hold onto his kilt, because Colonel D'you See will never be killed. And was an occasion he was in a slit trench, and he had his radio operator and a chap with a machine-gun next to him, both killed, and there he was standing up in the middle. He took terrible risks, every, he had a great reputation for recceing every battle before so as not to lose more men than necessary, and he would be with his Jeep and a driver going out into the enemy lines to see what places he could shoot from, and, they never got him. But it did take so much out of him, because of this trying to save life life life the whole time, and when he came home he found it quite hard to make simple decisions, so, we had to do it between us, and

towards the end I was really having to do the decisions. He took to farming, and he loved farming.

So did he retire and then farm, or...?

Yes, he really, he retired, and then he went on a very short course which the Army sent him on, and farming wasn't so scientific as it is now, and he had always been brought up in the country.

When did you start to farm?

So, let's think, Johnny was born in '45. I suppose about 1947 we started to farm. And, we didn't have a big acreage, and we...I mean we did it all ourselves, I drove the tractors. Oh it was lovely. And the children all helped with the haymaking. Real old-fashioned farming. And, but now it's a different story altogether. We bred Hereford bulls, and showed them; well we bred Herefords altogether but we showed the bulls, and the extraordinary thing was, having got back from the war he was very nearly killed by one of his own bulls, got him down in a pen and one more bunt and that would have been the end of him. So, he was a very lucky man.

And, where was the farm, Hampshire?

In Hampshire, yes, a place called Wolverton, and that's where my...it had been the rectory, it's a...a very large house. I think they can now sleep seventeen there, and at times every bed's taken, because he, he only has a little bit, and then my sister and...

By 'he', this is your son?

My son, yes. He's the most wonderful son anyone could have. And then my daughter and her husband go down there quite a lot at weekends, and then my granddaughter lives in the big half with her husband and three children, and so, they...it's a full house there, it's lovely.

And you came to this house in Bibury when?

I came in, we came in 1972, because he had got a bad heart by then and farming was too much, and my son was a qualified, he'd been to the agricultural college, and he got his own farm fairly close by, and it made sense for him to take it over. So he took it over, and we came down here. And I'm not sure, although we lived together here for two years only, he had no responsibilities of the farm, I think they were our happiest two years, which was lovely; it was just sad that he didn't live longer.

And why did you choose Bibury?

Well, a great friend of ours... I'd been hunting round here as I think I told you, and a great friend of ours lived in the village here, and he said, I'll always remember, out hunting one day, he came up to me and said, 'There's a house in our village going on the market next month. Get in and get it.' And they asked us over for Sunday lunch, and they very wisely didn't bring us in by the front entrance so that we would realise that we were on a road, because we'd never lived in a village before, and they brought us in and down the drive, and you get a lovely view of the house, and you see the old mill beyond, and the rolling hills beyond that. It's most attractive, coming in that way. And certainly I fell in love with it. And he said, 'Oh but it's on a road. We can't have that.' And the people wanted us to buy it, because they were friends of our friends, and they thought we'd fit in with the village, so they said, 'Well if you're anxious about sleeping here, spend the night here tonight.' And so it must be almost unheard of, we'd never met these people before, but we made up the spare room beds, and they offered us a drink, and I said, 'Oh I'm not sure we ought to have a drink, because you've probably put something in it.' Anyway we slept like Tops, never heard the traffic.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Just thought, it's quite an interesting piece of social history. I said to you that because Bibury is a rather perfect village, I suspected property didn't come on the market very often.

Ah yes.

And you had a very interesting answer.

Yes. Well the answer is, I know a solicitor quite well, and he told me that he does a lot of work now because it's, people get divorced in this part of the world so frequently. It's one of these rather hunting parts, and you know, these hunting people can be rather naughty, and they know this part down here as Vice Valley, because nobody has kept their own wives. And then when they divorce, they sell the houses and he gets all the business. It's not as bad as it was now, I think they've all mellowed quite a bit, but when I first came here, it was quite shocking actually.

So is there much of a village spirit, and community, or not?

Yes, sadly it's getting less. When we first came here there were real village people living in the cottages, charming, we made friends with them all, you know. And then had things like the British Legion sale, and something for the church, and we all made... I used to make a cake almost every day of the week for something or other, and help with the coffee and all the rest of it, but now, that's a little bit dwindling, and it's the same old people that do all the same work, I think this happens in all villages, because now, because of the improved roads, it doesn't take all that long from London, and you can get to Swindon very easily, they're weekenders now. And that has changed the village enormously, because weekenders somewhat naturally when they've been working in London or wherever, when they come down to their little housie they don't want to do anything except their garden, and it has changed the village.

And if, say for instance when you were widowed, was there support within the village? Do people take care of each other?

Marvellous. Wonderful. Wonderful. And I mean this big drama we had the night before last, which I was telling you, we had a...

We'd better say what that was for the tape.

Mm?

Tell the tape what that was.

Well, it was a big drama really, because, I was sitting in here watching the end of that marvellous film *Kes* about the boy with...and he just found the dead bird in the dustbin, and I was thinking, oh, I'm all in a state anyway, and I thought, God! my television's exploded. It didn't just go off, all the lights went off, but the television was flashing on and off, on and off, on and off. So I rushed to turn it off, and then of course I couldn't think where the matches were or anything like that, so I went to the back door, and I thought, well there must be some hooligans out there throwing fireworks about. The whole place was alive, noise, splutterings and light everywhere, and all over the road. And so I went out to see that it was all down[??], and it was the main power cable had come down, all over the road. And it was real live wires. And my first thought was, my first thought was actually, shut the door so the dog doesn't get out onto the wires, because he's very precious, and then I found a torch, and I went to stop the traffic, because I think if any cars had come down into all that medley they would have gone up. Before...I think, the first car that was coming, I think they saw my torch, I think she had seen what it was anyway, and very sensible, I heard this morning that she had backed all the way up the road, and there's a telephone up there, and she rang the police, and stopped cars up there, because no more cars came down. And then a man shouted at me, 'Get into your house lady, it's not a bit safe where you are.' So I got into the house, and in no time we had fire engines; we had, I was told, three fire engines with us the whole night, because they thought there could be big explosions. And I was the nearest to them of course. But I went out in my nightie at 3 o'clock and it had just started to snow then, and they said, 'I think we're winning.' But I went back to bed and went to sleep.

But in normal circumstances, it's a fairly secure village?

No, very very bad for burglars, terrible, terrible. We have this Neighbourhood Watch thing, and I don't...there's one house that hasn't been done, and the owner's really quite upset that she hasn't been done, because every time she goes out to bridge her friends say, 'Oh I was done yesterday,' and she's never got a burglar story to tell. But, no, it's very very bad.

And has that been so ever since you've been here, or has it changed?

Well I was done soon after my husband died, and I'm quite sure what it was. I was having some, not local builders, putting up-and-over doors on the garage, and one of them asked to come in to go to the gents, and I noticed that his eyes were flicking all over the house as he went to the gents. And, I had some, a lot more bronzes up there, lovely, the other two bulls and a lot more really lovely...and family miniatures. And I believe he saw them, and thought, this is a house worth going into. And, oh it was rather frightening, because I came back from having my hair done, about 7 o'clock in the evening in January, it was pitch dark, and thought, funny, my bedroom curtains had been drawn shut, but I hadn't shut them, so I knew people were in the house. And you see coming down there, the headlights go straight into the rooms, and I couldn't see anyone in here, but, I was pretty certain they were. And I thought, well I'm not going to let them take my goodies. And, so I came in, and there I found bags of this and that littered everywhere. And they heard, they waited to see what I would do, and when I came in, they had got out of that window, and tried to get over my neighbour's wall, but there's a 20-foot drop, so they didn't fancy that. Meantime, I then had a young chap living next to me, and so, I thought I needed perhaps a bit of help, and they had taken all the telephone wires down, and I wanted a telephone. So I dashed to him. And I think they must have been trying to get over the wall as I was getting hold of him, and they ran back, dropping all sorts of goodies on the way. And they had parked their van down by the fish farm that you would have passed coming up, they've got a car park there, and fortunately the chap running the fish farm, because they're always getting poached, didn't like the look of this gang, and he took their car number. And to cut a long story short, they were caught, but by the time they were caught all my things had gone, I never got anything back. But they were

caught and they went to prison. But that, that was the first one that happened to me; and my neighbours have been done twice. I mean every house has been done.

But you sound as though you're very brave; you don't like awake at night wondering if there's burglar downstairs?

No, but you know when these things happen, the adrenaline runs and you really... You're sensible; I mean I did look to see that I wasn't walking on wires the other night. But, the adrenaline runs, and you're going to have a go, definitely. I mean certainly the next night when I...because the police said to me, 'We don't like telling people this, but if they leave things behind they often come back.' I wasn't brave, I didn't like going to bed, and no, I was very, I was definitely frightened, definitely. But the adrenaline had gone then. It's rather like having a very strong drink when adrenaline goes. I've had several occasions that I wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been for the adrenaline. And then you feel awful afterwards.

So it must have...

I felt awful, actually after, because I thought the house could catch fire, and also people would be killed with that, the night before last, and when I saw it was in hand and I couldn't do any more I found I was shaking, so I'm not brave really.

It sounds pretty brave to me.

No.

End of Interview