

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Mary Naylor – interview transcript

Interviewer: Sue Barbour

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Singer and Musician, Variety. American artistes; The Band Wagon; Black and White Minstrel Show; Sam Browne; costumes; cruise ship entertainment; digs; ENSA; Henry Hall; Lena Horne; Jack Hylton; Nat Jackley; Jack Kodell; London Palladium; Archibald McIndoe's burns patients (World War Two); Brian Micky; George Moon; Eric Morcambe; Theatre Royal, Nottingham; Tessie O'Shea; pantomime; radio; Royal Command Performance; salary; television; touring; Tommy Trinder; Ernie Wise; World War Two and theatre; Youth Takes a Bow.

SB: This is Sue Barbour with the University of Sheffield and the British Library Theatre Project, interviewing Mary Naylor. First of all, Mary, I'd like to ask if you are in agreement for this interview to be used for the British Library Theatre Project and for future generations to learn about Variety Theatre?

MN: I certainly am. I think it's a privilege because I learned all I know – basics – from this marvellous profession, variety.

SB: Right. First of all, I'd like to ask you... where were you born? And also, did you come from a show-business family?

MN: OK. I was born in Nottingham and my address was Robin Hood Terrace, Robin Hood House, Sherwood, Nottingham.

SB: Wow!

MN: Which is not bad because when I played Robin Hood in Manchester, they said, 'Oh, come on, Mary, you've gotta be kidding!' and so, there you go...

SB: So, were your family in show-business? Or, how did you come to be in show-business?

MN: No, they weren't in show-business in the front of the house but they were very involved at the back. At the turn of the century, when my Grandmother was having her

babies, she had three sons, of which one was my father, Cyril, the youngest, and she had two daughters after my dad. And along with my Grandfather, of course, - my Grandfather was the House Manager for the bars at the Empire Theatre and the Theatre Royal (Nottingham), and then when he died, my Grandmother took over. But, in the meantime, during his life, all of the family were either Call Boys or Page Boys – of which, my father was one... and my eldest uncle, Uncle Tom, to the day when he died, was the Stage Doorman of the Nottingham Empire. He had been there since he was quite a little boy. So, my Grandfather, when he died... my Grandmother took over and when I got onto the stage, I said, 'I think it would be wonderful if I could star at the Empire', so that the Naylor family had been in every position there was... [both laugh] from starring to being the Call Boy and the Stage Doorman and it happened!

SB: That's fantastic, isn't it?

MN: Yes.

SB: So, you were telling me, a bit earlier, about how your uncle, that was the Stage Doorman, had spoken to Jack Hylton...

MN: Jack Hylton, yes.

SB: Can you tell me that?

MN: Well, he was wonderful because my uncle was so biased [SB laughs] that he thought that I was a better piano player than the very best of the best, and of course, he was badly biased but there you go... That's what an uncle is for! And one day, Jack Hylton said, 'Tommy, do you know any young talent? Because I've got an idea to do a talent show called, Youth Takes A Bow of all kids that could have the potential of being the future stars of our country'. And my uncle – knowing only my uncle, as sincere as he was and as misguided as he was – said, 'Oh, my gosh, do I know talent! My little niece is so good at the piano... you know, she's better than Charlie Coons!'. [SB laughs] and of course, with this, Mr. Hylton, being a very mature man, didn't bat an eyelid, he said, 'Really?' and he says, 'Oh yes, she can do a run on that piano so fast... her hands are like little worms!'. And he says, 'Right, I must see this little kid with hands like little worms. When can I see her?'. He said, 'Friday, after school'. So, here am I, little Mary Naylor, running after school in my Scotch kilt, white blouse, Scotch tie – which was my uniform – with little navy blue gym knickers underneath all this stuff, with a little pocket that held the handkerchief – and I walked on to that stage and it's embarrassing now, but at the time, Mr. Hylton was sitting in the stalls and all the musicians were sitting in the stalls beside him and I walked out there with an accordion – a 124 base - bigger than myself and I said, very shyly, 'Good afternoon, Mr. Hylton' and he said, 'Good afternoon, Miss Mary. What would you like to do for us?' and I said, before I could even start, '“Hot Fingers”, Sir' and I started to play “Hot Fingers” on the accordion and when I was through he said, 'That was very nice, my dear. What else can you do?' and I said, 'Well, I'm going to do [as I whipped off my accordion, by the way] a piano classical version that I have of “The Umbrella Man” of which [and I now decide to show him the musical knowledge that I had, of what I was going to do with this piece of music]. 'I am

now going to start with a chromatic run from the treble down to the bass, which is lightening and then, I am going to give a minor C chord down in the bass, for thunder' and I proceeded with all this, not knowing that Mr. Jack Hylton was one of the best musicians in the business! [Both laugh]. And he laughed and said, 'OK, carry on'. And I was so keen to get to that grand piano because I was only used to a little upright at home and I put my little bottom on the edge of the piano stool so that I could reach the keyboard and I started and I must admit, the people in the stalls were very, very beautifully attentive, and when I was finished he said, 'That was lovely, my dear'. That was Friday and on the Monday I was opening up at the Woolwich Empire with his orchestra in front of 64 pieces and I played my rendition [both laugh] of my classical version of "The Umbrella Man"! [SB laughs]. Many years later, he said, 'Oh, Mary, my dear', he said, 'I only wish the audience would have known and seen this, you were so whimsical and so sincere in your describing this marvellous thing that you had invented... this classical version of The Umbrella Man'... he said, 'If only the audience could have seen it', he said, 'We were absolutely spellbound. You were so winsome but not precocious. And you were delightful'.

SB: Oh, that's lovely. So, how old were you then?

MN: Twelve.

SB: Gosh! That's amazing.

MN: Yes. And I arrived at his first show, which was at the Woolwich... I think... it was a cinema.... I think, it was the Woolwich Granada or it could be the Odeon, I don't really remember, but it was Woolwich.

SB: Mmm.

MN: And I met, for the first time, the rest of the people... who were going to consist of Youth Takes A Bow.... One was Dickie Henderson, who was 16 [years old] and fabulous and his twin sisters, Winnie and Tris, who were 18, little Ernie Wise, who was six months older than me, at 13, and The Potter Sisters, from Ireland. Irene Potter and Maureen Potter were from Ireland and they were dancers... So, we all started and Brian Micky... In those days – I forgot to tell you this – we had to be in school until we were fourteen, whether we were on the road or not, and we had matinées because we played between the cinema pictures. And as luck would have it, Brian Micky, who was the compere of this part called Youth Takes A Bow, was an ex-school teacher, so, Ernie Wise, Maureen Potter and Maureen Flannigan and myself, were all under fourteen, so Mr. Micky gave us our schooling in the dressing room, and of course the poor man didn't have a chance because we were not interested in King Henry and his thousands of wives and all that nonsense, we were only interested in learning the "Time Step"! [SB laughs]. So, after about a week of this, poor old Mr. Micky not being of good sound, good English blood, said, 'I quit! I surrender! I cannot teach these children.'. And he never did, from that day on. [SB laughs].

SB: So, you missed your schooling?

MN: And I missed my schooling. Yes.

SB: Right. So, you toured with Youth Takes A Bow?

MN: Yes. No, from there on we went to the Palladium and on the fourth day of the Palladium, Mr. Hylton says to me, 'Can you sing, love?' and I was so afraid he would send me home if I said, 'No', that I said, 'Oh yes, of course'. I could do anything. Such is the value of a youngster. And he said, 'What do you know?' And I only knew one... "It's A Sin To Tell A Lie"...I sang it. I sang it that night. I 'stopped the show'! And I've sung ever since, thanks to Mr. Hylton.

SB: Right, that's great. So, when you were touring with these shows and you were so young, where did you stay? Did you stay in digs?

MN: Yes, we stayed in digs and my father – up to now, Eric Bartholomew had not shown up – who was later known as Eric Morecambe – and my father took care of little Ernie Wise and myself. But, later on, when Eric came – and it's funny, because Eric came the week we were playing the Nottingham Empire and it was wonderful, because that was the week of my fourteenth birthday so I was privileged to go to my own school for the last week of my schooling because in those days in Britain school age was fourteen and Eric was going to be fourteen, two weeks from then, so he cheated for two weeks but I used to go to school wherever we were and I was the last one that was still in school. And I must tell you... in Middlesborough – that was the big shipbuilding town of the time – and West Hartlepool both, I got lost from going back from school so little Ernie Wise, being the gallant kid that he was... from then on until I left school... he was always there to be seen, half an hour before I came out, at the school yard waiting for me to come home, so I wouldn't get lost! [SB laughs]. And in the mean time, that little pocket I was telling you about in my little knickers – my navy blue gym knickers - my father gave me a handkerchief with a knot in it and inside the knot was a sixpence in case I ever got lost again, I would have a taxi to get home to the digs and many years later when Eric came on the scene and we were probably a year ahead the boys would always insist that I would go with them to the movie houses in the afternoon because we used to go in and – what they called 'on the card', which meant that we'd give our card to the cashier and when she saw that we were 'pros' and we were playing the theatre of that town, they would let us in – but just in case they didn't, the two boys always knew that I had sixpence in my pocket... enough to get the three of us in to the movie house!

SB: [laughs] Really?

MN: Yes. So, I never understood... later on, I wondered. Did they really insist that I went with them because they loved me or... because of the lousy sixpence I had in my pocket, in my gym knickers?

SB: Right! So, your dad sort of chaperoned, did he?

MN: Yes, well he did until Auntie Sadie, who happened to be Eric Bartholomew's mother... she came on the scene with us... and of course, Mummy couldn't come because she had two children at home. So, Dad became the Manager of the show. He got the tickets for the trains for the future weeks and all that stuff.

SB: Mmm.

MN: And the thing is that we thought that if Auntie Sadie and I shared a bedroom and Dad and the two boys, Ernie and Eric, shared a bedroom, we'd only need two bedrooms together, saving 7/6d each week which we all shared... 7/6d! Because Eric was earning... Let me think. Eric was earning £5. 10s per week and Ernie was earning £7 per week and I don't know how it happened but I was earning £7.10s per week. Now Daddy worked for nothing! He never got a pay check and he was doing dressing – he was dressing Brian Micky and he was doing his laundry -

SB: Gosh!

MN: – he did all these things and Mr. Brian Micky would always say, 'Cyril, you are a jewel', but 'jewel' is not going to give you an extra dollar in your purse, and in the meantime that £7.10s that we earned... I had to send £3.10s home to Mum and the two children and Daddy and I lived on £3 per week on the road.

SB: Really?

MN: Mmm. And I don't know what Ernie did with his money because he didn't have mother or father on the road, but when he went back home after the War and Jack Hylton begged my mother to take him, after the War, at the Palladium, because we had to get all the kids out of London. Mother did not feel that she could cope with – being so young – with three children. Father an invalid – her husband an invalid – me, the breadwinner of the family – how long would it be before I could work again? – and she didn't feel that she could take on another child so against her better judgement she had to refuse Hylton, to take that lovely boy, Ernie, home with her. So, in desperation, he said, 'Well, this man said he can't come home because he can't afford him'. So, he finished up taking him home himself for the first few weeks of the war.

SB: Oh, did he?

MN: Mmm. And Ernie often said that he came home one night to count his money and I want to say – I wish I could remember... it was a suburb outside London. The same suburb that the great George Black lived in, where I was privileged to be with him on a few weekends when the Blitz was so bad. It's Great... something and I can't remember, but I might later on... Anyway, Ernest and I, eventually, were told that we had to go

back because now we are free to tour England in Youth Takes A Bow in all the Moss Empires, which we did. And we met marvellous people and that's when Daddy was told he couldn't drive a taxi any more because he had asthma very badly. But, before that, I should really tell you of an incident that has nothing to do with show business but it did influence my wanting to get out of that predicament and make something of myself, even at so young an age. Because I didn't want to live the life my Daddy and Mother lived. And this is what happened... Daddy was a Hawker and he had an open stall – fruit and vegetable – at Newark, Ollerton and a few other little provincial towns in and around Nottingham. My mother was very pregnant with her third and last child, a son, Ernest and their only son, Ernest. And Daddy having asthma as badly as he did, she could not cope with having the two children and Daddy to take care of at the markets. So, they decided on that last market day that Dad would go alone and mother would stay at home with the two little girls waiting for the birth of their only son. So, the very first time out to Ollerton, Daddy had just got a full load of fruit, vegetables, flowers – and there was something else, I don't remember – but, he was driving along the road in the very early hours of the morning, on a very lonely country road, and he passes, on the same side of the road, a policeman on his bicycle. They waved and off he went and of course, he was really putting his foot down – all of thirty five miles an hour, in those days – and right out of the blue, as soon as he passed the policeman, a horseman on horse-back was riding a runaway galloping horse out of a forest and as he got nearer, my father recognised this great gent and he was so emphatic that he must not hurt this man that he swerved to clear him and went into the side of the road ditch and of course, the lorry caught on fire...

SB: Oh, no!

MN: And by this time, thank God, the policeman on his bicycle had caught up with him, pulled him from the lorry and as soon as he pulled him... there was an explosion and everything went up in flames! So, the man really did save Dad's life, except that his hands and his face were thoroughly burned. The galloping horseman never looked back to see if he was all right. Off he went. And it finished up with Papa in hospital with therapy and skin grafts for two years and eventually he was able to hug his, almost two year old, baby son, for the first time. Now, you may ask, who was this very, very, very irresponsible man on horse-back who would not turn around to see if he was all right. It turned out to be the Prince of Wales, who later became the Duke of Windsor. But, in the meantime Daddy had lost everything because he was insured by Prudential and a man called Mr. – and I'm not going to mention his name because it's not fair to his family, it's too long ago – but he was put in prison because he did not send his dues to the Prudential. He stole it. Not only my father's but all of the neighbours and everyone else's. He was put in prison, but the Prudential would have nothing to do with father's claim because they said they did not receive the money and Daddy said, 'Owing to the fact that...' - or his lawyers said, 'Owing to the fact that this man was working for Prudential...' But regardless, he didn't get anything. And neither did this wonderful Prince of Wales acknowledge the fact.

So, after two years... I don't know what we would have done, had not my Uncle Tom, who would come in on Sunday mornings to my mother and put a 10 shilling note underneath a brass ashtray - which was 10 shillings which was the rent for the week - and my Uncle Ernest, the second son, would come early in the afternoon and give us the fish and the fruit and the flowers that was over from his weekend. And that is how we lived for two and a half years. That is why, I think... in the mean-time I went to piano

school every day from my seventh birthday on and I think that was the driving force – wanting to get out of this and never being in it before, relying on two wonderful uncles for our survival. I think that was the big thing that drove me on and said 'you've got to give as well as take' and thank God, my two uncles, I was able to repay them later on in life. I always made sure that my Uncle Tom, the eldest, who was a strict teetotaler... married to a lovely Belgian lady from Gent – G e n t – pronounced Gent. And she was a wonderful wife. He lost her because she suddenly found on a Sunday dinner that she needed some brown gravy and ran to buy it and was killed by a car on the way to buy it and that was the end of Uncle Tom's beautiful life with his lovely wife

SB: Oh, that's a shame.

MN: So, I made sure, that while I was in America this teetotaler, who was told by his doctor that he thinks that two teaspoonfuls of Scotch Whiskey in his first cup of tea and his last cup of tea at night kept him going, so I made sure that he had two bottles of Scotch every month for the rest of his life.

SB: Ah, that's wonderful.

MN: Yes.

SB: So, obviously your family all rallied round...

MN: Yes.

SB: And supported the family.

MN: Oh they did, yes. Without them, I don't know what I would have done.

SB: And so, when you – in the touring days – you were a child performer –

MN: Yes.

SB: And you, obviously, started to do really well...

MN: Yes.

SB: Did you always travel by train in those days?

MN: Oh yes, there was nothing else.

SB: Or car?

MN: Occasionally, I would be privileged – there was a lovely, lovely performer, the best in the world, called Tessie O’Shea.

SB: Oh yes!

MN: She was... I shouldn’t say she was... I was, according to her, the daughter she never had. And I had this wonderful relationship with my Aunt Tess to the end of her days and it seemed that we were in parallel all through life. When we did our first Command [Royal Command Performance], she was on the same bill as me. When we did this... when I came to America, here she is. When I came to Orlando, she’s in Leesburg, thirty miles from me. We spoke to each other, at least three or four times a day.

Lovely thing I’d love to tell you about Aunt Tess. I am now about to be about fourteen and like - in those days, still going on twelve - so, the night that I had my birthday, still in Youth Takes A Bow, I walked out on the stage and instead of them playing my signature tune, they played “Happy Birthday” and all of the little Youth Takes A Bow kids came out on stage, as did Aunt Tess and the Conductor gave me a doll – the replica of myself in my dress, with my ringlets, and it was so beautiful for my fourteenth birthday. And if that wasn’t enough, the next week we were going from Manchester to Cardiff and we were on this lovely train and you know, to be in a dining car, that was only what the wealthy, oh and the glamorous and the film stars did – and we were lucky if we got a cold glass of water on our fourteen hour journeys. [both laugh] And my Daddy bought us - all of us kids - a 5/6d pale blue gramophone record player that had four records, of which, one was The Peterson Sisters singing [MN sings:] Ain’t What You Do, its The Way Hut You Do It and we thought we were so hep, because instead of saying ‘that’ they said ‘hut’ so, here we are: ‘hut you do it’! And Daddy taught us, through the corridor trains, how to dance – ballroom and foxtrots and things – with these same four. And there was another recording called [MN sings] If I Could Be With You One Hour Tonight and we always wondered, what they were going to do with that one hour, we kids. [SB laughs] So, you can imagine where we were coming from... and we did all these marvellous things but this one day, Aunt Tess came through our corridor and she said, ‘OK kids, lunch time – for Mary’s birthday’. And she took us all in to the Dining Car for a 2 [shilling and] 6 penny lunch.

SB: Oh, my goodness.

MN: And we were ecstatic. We thought we were film stars. It was so wonderful. We had white cloths on the table. We had little white doilyettes where you put our heads on the back of the [seat] and we had white napkins and it was wonderful. And they all said, ‘Oh, thank you, Aunt Tess’ and she said, ‘Don’t thank me, thank Mary, it’s her birthday’. And you know what? I said at the time: ‘I don’t think Princess Elizabeth’, who was fourteen at the same time, ‘could have had a better or a more... posher birthday than I had’.

SB: Right. That must have been fantastic.

MN: It was wonderful.

SB: So, you, as a group, toured and travelled on the train?

MN: Yes, we lived on those trains.

SB: Did you ever meet people from other shows?

MN: Oh, yes. There was a marvellous, marvellous station called Crewe and everybody on earth - no matter where you were coming from - had to change at Crewe. Now, I happened to love railway trains. I loved the rides, so did Ernie. So did all of us but Eric. Eric Bartholomew - who became famous as Eric Morecambe - hated, despised train rides and he would say, like only he could, 'These bum lumbing, bloomin' numbing bumb rides are hell, I hate 'em' and we used to say, 'Funny, we love them'. [SB laughs] 'That's because you're bloomin' well crazy!'. And then he'd get a slap on the face because he used the word 'bloomin'', and his mother said, 'No! No terrible slang or swear words should come from your mouth' and, believe me, he got many a smack for that. [both laugh]

SB: Oh, so you used to meet on the station at Crewe?

MN: Oh, we used to meet at Crewe. There was always porters and I don't think I ever remember going to Crewe unless it was peeing down with rain. Icy, icy, icy rain and there was a wonderful sadistic old man that would shout, 'All change, Crewe Station' and to make it worse he would hit all the doors to make sure we were all going to get out. It never failed to happen for years and we'd say, 'Here we are, at Crewe. All nice and warm in this nice snug place, getting out on this dreadful Crewe Station.' Of which, may I tell you. All the stations, there was no such thing as a warm or comforting Waiting Room. And when you see, in these old movies, where you could go into the Waiting Room and get a nice hot cup of tea - that may have been in one or two lovely ones in London - but, when you get out there, forget it. It was a cold, awful room with a fireplace that had obviously never been lit since God knows when...

SB: Really?

MN: Mmm. And crackling, windy, windy windows. It was just awful.

SB: Was it?

MN: Mmm. And we used to dread having to change trains.

SB: Really?

MN: Yes.

SB: Oh, and the other thing I wanted to ask you... you said you stayed in digs and you used to have two rooms... can you remember any of the digs?

MN: Oh, yes.

SB: And the landladies?

MN: Mrs. McCombe. 9, Daisy... either 9 or 19 Daisy Avenue, Manchester and she used to say things like, 'I don't care if Maxy Bigraves from the Paladdium was there or not, if he don't behave, it's out!' [SB laughs]. 'And I don't care if he's Maxy Bigraves or not, he's out'. And we used to get hysterical. But there were some wonderful, wonderful digs and some rotten ones. I met one once – it was a seaside place – and the man was obviously gay and adored his mother – never married – it was just he and his mother. And she was obviously in the gentry – what do you call it when you're a maid in the big places?

SB: Oh, yes...

MN: For the dukes and duchesses?

SB: In service.

MN: Yes, she was 'in service', there you go. Well, you had never seen so much silver, fine china, fine art that was in this house that was obviously knocked off. [SB laughs]. And this lady was dying at the time. She was not well. And this poor man cried the entire week. And as he was serving the soup and the stew and I was taking the place of Betty Driver, this marvellous... Henry Hall once said to me, 'Mary, darling, poor old Bet, she's not doing very well and she needs a little break. Would you, if you could afford the time, would you take it off to be with me and take Betty's place?' and I said, 'Well, I love Bet so much that... yes'. I have to tell you that Henry Hall was so wonderful to me, and I was still green as grass and still had a lot to learn over the etiquette and nicer things of life. I still had a lot to learn and I will never forget that we were at Newcastle and we were staying in the same hotel of which he, like Sam Browne – not that there was anything going to happen, but just in case people thought there was – he would never ever book or allow us to be on the same floor.

SB: Oh really.

MN: And this one night, we were having dinner and – don't forget we were all on rations – and if you went into a very nice hotel, occasionally, if you were with someone like Henry Hall, you had a little extra and this particular time it was a half of a grapefruit each with a little cherry in the middle. The first one that I had tasted, that I remember. Because I don't remember much before the war and it was wonderful. And I had my first spoon and I said, 'Oh, this is lovely', and he said, 'Yes, my dear but you know what? I think, if you put a little sugar and a little ginger on that grapefruit, you'll find it's a lot nicer', which I did. And you know what? To this day, I still use ginger and sugar on my grapefruit and I always think of darling, kind, dear, dear, dear, Mr. Henry Hall.

SB: Really?

MN: Mmm.

SB: Ah, that's lovely.

MN: He was lovely. What a lovely, lovely, lovely man and what a gentleman and he adored all of us and treated us all the same.

SB: Did he?

MN: Mmm.

SB: Now, I mean, rationing went on quite far into the fifties, didn't it?

MN: Mmm. Yes.

SB: And then after the war...

MN: I'll tell you a story about those rationings, which I say with a little... a slight resentment, because I don't think it was worthy of our Government to lie to us. There was one little spot... we went over - I'm now courting Jack - pushing ahead a long time now – but it is now in the early fifties. He came over to England in the fifties and there was nothing to eat, literally, nothing to eat. And they were telling us, 'If you think we're badly off, Europe is worse. Do you know they are eating black bread?' Well, we naturally think black bread is mildewed and maggoty and black through abuse, it being so old.

SB: Mmm.

MN: We didn't realise that black bread in Europe was that gorgeous rich pumpernickel.

SB: Mmm.

MN: And we were led to believe that this was awful bread and that they were far worse off. Now, 1950, I was lucky enough to be struck romantically with Jack Kodell and Jackie wanted me to go over most weekends, when I could afford the time to go. I would run off after the show on Saturday night, return on Monday ready for the Monday night show, that night. The first time I got to Paris, we were still on 10 ounces of meat a week, per person, very little butter, one egg a month, if you were lucky, and let's face it, we were still on war rations. Absolute war rations and we owed everybody and they were telling us, 'Please, buy British goods because we do not have the gold bullion to buy food'. The reason for the 10 ounces of meat a week was the fact that we bought our beef from Argentina. And Argentina wanted to be like America and insisted that we had gold bullion because America demanded our gold bullion. And it all went to Canada in case we lost, and it never got back to England. It turned up in Fort... whatever it is in America... but Mr. Dean Rusk of the Presidential Administration of that time – Roosevelt's Administration – said, in 1942, 'We are bankrupt, this is a farm country and there is nothing we can do about it, we are bankrupt'. 1945, which is only three years later, Fort Knox - that's the name! - was overrun with gold bullion but not one American thought to ask, 'Where did this gold bullion come from, in only three years?' And it was our British bullion. So, now our Brits are saying, 'Please do not buy foreign goods, because we do not have the gold bullion'. Our Middlesbrough ships had no orders from America after the war – we were the number one ship builders before the war – there was nothing coming in from America. They had turned to Japan, who had never built for other people – ships - so, and I saw this happening. I don't need books- I saw it happening. The Middlesbrough ship building yards started to close. Then the Clyde started to close. Then I would go to play a pantomime at the Palace, Manchester and all the lovely little guys and dolls that I knew there, were saying that they had no work: 'Our cotton mills are closed. Our velvet mills are closed. They are going to Japan for our cotton and they are going to Italy for our velvet'. Also, we were told that we had to be responsible for our British zone of Germany and the only thing we had a surplus of, was coal. So, we sold our coal to Germany for two and a half shillings a ton and eventually when we had no more coal to sell and not enough for ourselves, we had to buy it back from America for twelve and a half shillings a ton.

SB: Really.

MN: That is when our boys said, 'Enough is enough'. And to add insult to injury, when our boys started coming home from the war, they were saying to us, 'We are going to have all the warm country immigrants come in because they are going to go down our mines because our own boys won't go down unless they're going to get a liveable wage'. And they didn't go down the mines. They took all our people's jobs so that when the soldiers did come back they were saying to them, 'There's no work here. There's no room for homes. Everything's bombed so we are going to give you the money to go to Australia and open up there'.

SB: Oh, right. So, that was when the £10 assisted passage was done?

MN: That's right. That was a slap in the face, because our boys, very expensively – including lives – were killed and fought so that we could keep our nation free of foreigners like the Germans. Instead, the Government then gave it to the warm countries – third world countries – just as we are doing it today in America as well as Britain and the whole world has become a nation of immigrants – the whole world.

SB: Mmm.

MN: We are losing all of our cultures, our pride in what we do because even in the poorest country before the war, had something to buy and sell. And as Mr. Churchill once said about democracy, 'Democracy is fine because democracy gives the opportunity for someone to make something and sell it'. Without being able to make something and sell it, a country would go to hell.

SB: Mmm.

MN: Now with this in mind we have all become a nation of paper shufflers. And now, even America is getting rid of the paper shufflers because now we are going to India and even our social security checks are printed in India.

SB: Oh, yes. That's right.

MN: I mean, it's just ridiculous. If you've lived as long as I have, it's frightening to see where we're going and where we've been.

SB: Yes. I just want to go back about the war years. I believe you were known as two things to do with the war. You entertained the troops and...

MN: Oh, yes. I was known as the Pin-Up Girl of the Royal Air Force. The reason for that was that I was at the London Palladium with Tommy Trinder in '42, in a show called The Band Wagon and there was only the three of us: Nat Jackley, he [Tommy Trinder] and I that were Vaudevillian or Variety performers. People who could go solo and entertain, where the others were wonderful production performers.

SB: Yes.

MN: So, naturally – I haven't had my seventeenth birthday, yet – sixteen and maybe three months old – and so they grabbed me and said, 'Come on, you're coming with us. You're coming with us. We're going to work after the show'. The show at the Palladium

was down at 8.30 p.m. because they wanted everybody home before the bombing started.

SB: Oh, yes.

MN: But when we had somewhere to play, Tommy, Nat and I or just Tommy and I would go off together and do our thing. One night, we went to the East Grinstead hospital for burned airman and, as a rule, we'd get there and Tommy always cases the joint, just to see how it is, where the stage is and he came back this one night and he says, 'Mary, you are not going to work tonight'. And I said, 'Why?' and he says, 'I just don't want you to work tonight'. And I said, 'Why?'. And he said, 'Because the audience is too badly scared'. And I said, 'Well, I thought I was a 'Pro' and a professional who's not supposed to chose their audience'. I gave him such a bad time. He said, 'Well, you have to realise, Mary, if you wince you are going to do them more harm than if you ever went out there to try and make them happy'. So, at the time, there was a wonderful – terrible but wonderful for us – newsreel where Errol Flynn was accused – wrongly accused, it was proved in court – wrongly accused of raping a sixteen year old girl called Beverley somebody on a yacht. She was sixteen going on thirty two. She looked so old and I was sixteen going on twelve. You cannot say that Tommy Trinder was handsome, he was anything but, especially compared to this wonderful Errol Flynn. So, we had this marvellous sketch of Tommy being Errol Flynn and me being this girl [SB laughs] and I don't know what the heck they were laughing at because I didn't understand anything but they were getting great laughs so he said, 'All right, I'll let you go on but if you think you can't take it, give me a sign' which was always a wave from the back and I'll come on and do the Errol Flynn sketch. I said, 'Fine'. So, I walked out there and I must admit, as I walked out it was frightening because to see young, beautiful men with no faces... it was horrific but I think it was my youth that saved me because, you know, youth can do anything. I don't know whether I would be this well-equipped today as I was then, but these young boys had blue eyes and brown eyes and believe it or not the blue eyes were so scary because the nose was the first to go because it's cartilage, so we had this huge V hole and then the cheeks were very badly burned, the lips were always gone and all you saw was the teeth and they couldn't speak very well because they couldn't open their jaws, but miraculously we could always understand what they said. And I walked out there and I was OK, and towards the end I was able to sing love songs as near to them as nothing and even hold their little sheets – we were told not to touch them because it was too painful. And after the show was over this first night, one precocious kid said, "'ary you were luly an we wou like to ee you agen, you can gring Tommy Trinder back if you want to, so long as you come". And I thought that was wonderful and I said, 'I'll be back and I know Tommy will, because if he won't I'll blackmail him!'. I'll never forget saying that and Tommy looked at me and he says to the boys, 'Cheek! I'll smack her when she gets into the car, back home!' So, through all this, it was wonderful, and we went most Thursday nights for the next few times – for a few months and that's when they called me... 'You are our pin-up girl. You are The Pin-Up girl of the RAF Battle of Britain'.

SB: Lovely.

MN: Yes.

SB: So, what was your other one? Something else?

MN: And then I was the Sweetheart of the British Merchant Navy. That's a sad story because I did a show – a radio show – called Shipmates Ashore of which Doris Hare was the comic, and it's a sad thing to say but in all of World War 11, that was the only show dedicated to the Merchant Navy. And I thought it was terrible, because without the Merchant Navy bringing the little bit of food that we had, we couldn't have survived.

SB: Yes. Mmm.

MN: Because you can't survive on potato and bread. And they were so marvellous. And my job was to sing songs that the sweethearts of these boys had sent and I was going to sing songs for them. And they, in return, would give me a song for their girls. And we had the most beautiful relationship and the actual – there was one lovely night – there was an actual little theatre, like a Night Club sort of thing really, and all of this thing was full of Merchant Navy young kids – they were really young kids – and this one had loads and loads of acne – it was the worst case I'd ever seen of acne - and you could see these kids picking on him. And Debroy Summers was the orchestra leader of the show – he had the show – he was also our orchestra leader of the Palladium and I have to think that he was the reason that I was in the show because he suggested it – I think. He never admitted it but I think. And we both saw this thing happening and they kept nudging him to come and talk to me and eventually he did and he said, 'Do you want to come to the pictures with me tonight, Mary?' and Debroy looked at me and I looked at him and I said, 'I'm very sorry, I'd love to, but I'm working tonight at the Palladium'. And with this Mr. Debroy Summers chimed in and said, 'But I tell you what, Miss Mary would be very happy to have you and a friend come to see the show tonight'. Well, if you'd seen these kids, all of a sudden he's a hero... clamouring over this poor kid with this dreadful acne and I said, 'Yes, I'd be happy', and eventually this kid was then a hero so that made my day, it was wonderful.

SB: Ah, that's lovely. So, during the war did a lot of the theatres close down?

MN: Oh yes... Well, the Holborn Empire was the sad one because it had a direct hit and that was one of the nicest of all the theatres.

SB: Was it?

MN: Mmm. Unfortunately, I was too young to appreciate it, because I was in it before we had that three weeks at the Palladium, but an interesting thing happened after that. When we did those few weeks of Youth Takes A Bow with Hylton at the Palladium, and I've forgotten the name – because all I remember about it was Youth Takes A Bow but I don't think the name of the show was that - but it was when the war started. Anyway, the thing that was incredible was the fact that there was a big scene of Hylton's which was called The – something - of The Guards and there were two huge pillboxes with Guards standing outside and then they did a song called Off To The Blaydon Races

which was a Newcastle song and with this they had three jockeys on real race horses, high up in the ceiling, racing for this...

SB: Oh really?

MN: It was the most incredible production number you ever saw. It was incredible.

SB: Really?

MN: Mmm.

SB: And after the war, did theatres suddenly open up... that had been closed?

MN: I don't think there was any... I was not aware of any closing.

SB: Really?

MN: No. Although The Windmill did get... yes, I shouldn't have said that. At the beginning of the war, the Palladium and all the theatres in the West End closed for like two minutes...

SB: Oh.

MN: A couple of weeks or whatever.

SB: Mmm.

MN: Enough to get our foreign, our American people back to wherever they came from.

SB: Right.

MN: The one I didn't like was a man called Dick... Ah, George Moon and Dick... Dick was an Australian boy - can't remember his name... you will when you hear.... George Moon became an agent with Lew Grade. But at the time it was George Moon and Dick somebody... Australian.

SB: Right.

MN: And they had just 'made it', so they were going to appear at the Palladium, and without warning this guy said, 'I'm not going into any guns and stuff, I'm going home!' and he left George in the lurch. And there was an American boy called Bert... Bert... Brown... Bertram Brown and he said, 'Don't worry, George... I'll take his place' - I cannot remember this man's name... Dick somebody - and they did this marvellous double act, through the bombing and everything and eventually Bertram Brown went to work for the agency.

SB: Yes, he did.

MN: He did very well. But the thing that really upset me was, after the war this Dick came back and he got a job on the BBC where Bertram or George Moon could not get a job. This man walked straight into it with another Australian... girl called Joy somebody and they did Take It From Here a radio series and I thought 'how unfair' when they were the first to leave... and come back to all this glory and the poor kids that stayed here couldn't get a tumble... and that was not right.

SB: No. It isn't. So, what did you do after the war?

MN: After the war, I was now coming into my own. After the war I did my Command Performance. I was very lucky because I had four or five visits to Buckingham Palace...

SB: Did you?

MN: Yes, because I was told... after my first Command...

SB: What year was that?

MN: My first Command was the first one after the war: 1946.

SB: Oh really.

MN: And the Queen Mother, who was then Queen, graciously said I was a typical English rose.

SB: Oh!

MN: And I got all of the marvellous write-ups after the war. I don't know if I was worthy of it, but still I received them and I was very appreciative of them but it said, 'Nottingham Taxi Driver's daughter steals Command Performance' and then it was, 'The

Queen says Mary is a typical English rose'. It was all in the papers, and I didn't know this but in our day, you know, we did not meet The Royal Family after all these shows.

SB: Oh really?

MN: No, you didn't meet them at all. And then it was marvellous for me to be invited to Buckingham Palace to do a Christmas show for them all, which was nice. With Sam Browne and Arthur Askey, Tommy Trinder, a wonderful lady... I can't remember her name... Cecilia College?.. Cecilia... She did some remarkable stuff but she was more... she wasn't a variety act, she was cabaret.

SB: Was she?

MN: But... there was some fabulous talent in those days... fabulous and they worked so hard and got very little out of it but then when the Americans came over, starting off with Jack Benny wanting so much money... then, all of the Spesh Acts and Tap Dancers and the English Acts had to take cuts in order to pay these big prices to the Americans.

SB: Really?

MN: And that was rather sad and where it broke down so that a Spesh Act didn't have enough money over to keep replenishing their wardrobe, new props and the same with Singers and Comics, new material, new orchestrations, and it really did... so then, when you had people like Al – Right Monkey – Al

SB: Heath? [Read]

MN: Yes. And people... all the Comics. They wanted... they said, 'Well, if Jack Benny can get £5000 a week at the Palladium, then I can'. And you've got people like Tommy Trinder. You can't do more than fill a theatre to capacity and Tommy was doing this for years.

SB: No.

MN: And at the height of his career he got £250. And of course I was one of the highest paid. I got £125 at the time but it's nothing... I still had enough money to keep replenishing and keep updated, but when they started cutting you to £75 and you've got £25 worth of pianist and you can't do this... it's not fair.

SB: Yes.

MN: So, when people like Al... right monkey...

SB: Heath.

MN: He was demanding money when it was his first tour. He didn't know whether he could bring 'em in or whether he was acceptable to have the talent. He had the talent when on the air but was it going to be that much... so, Mrs. Williams would send me out with people like that and she used to say, 'Mary, I want to send you out because at least you will entertain them if they [the other artistes] flop. They'll get their money's worth' and I thought...

SB: And was that Cissie Williams?

MN: Cissie Williams and Ted Gollop.

SB: Right.

MN: They ran the place and it wasn't until I came back in '65 [1965] for a visit when we had two and a half thousand General Electric people from America... which we took a full half of the Palladium and then a full show for the Hippodrome which was then called Talk of the Town. And I was in the last show of the Hippodrome. There was a big argument because I didn't get the billing that my agents and managers thought was right. Nevertheless it didn't matter because I still stopped the show... so it didn't matter. So, we took all of the Hippodrome for General Electric and so that was something they'd never heard of, which was lovely – that we could do it.

SB: So when did you leave England to come to America?

MN: Well, I didn't know I was going to do this. I mean, I would never – because I was at the height of my career and I had this wonderful man who unfortunately was a heavy drinker but still brilliant and he always – he was the first one to give me the new word 'stretched'. 'You haven't stretched half of your talent; I've got to bring it out'. 'You've got to stretch, you've got to stretch'. And that was Ida Lupino's cousin, Barry Lupino.

SB: Oh. Right.

MN: He was absolutely brilliant for me. And a nice thing was Frankie Vaughan always said... and I couldn't believe it – still don't – that I gave him his first break and I said, 'Oh, come on Frankie'. He said, 'I mean it. You gave me my first TV show' and I had my show and I had a lovely song called "Mr. Wonderful" and I sung "Mr. Wonderful" and I was looking at a picture and then the camera dived in and it was Frankie and he became real.

SB: Oh really?

MN: And that was his introduction and he said, 'You made it so beautiful Mary, I could do no wrong, once you introduced me like that'.

SB: So, what year was your TV series?

MN: I had two or three. I would say '50 and '53 and then '57/'58.

SB: Mmm. So, how did you come to get your first TV series?

MN: I don't really know. I was doing a lot of guest spots.

SB: Yes?

MN: And a marvellous man... oh, I can't think of his name... he was so good to me... no, I'll have to come back to that.

SB: OK. But he gave you the opportunity?

MN: He said, 'Mary, I think you could do a spot...' and I had just done a scene at the London Hippodrome and I didn't get a chance to do what I wanted to do and it was one of those things with the tambourines.

SB: Oh yes.

MN: We were all on stage doing this tambourine thing. Black up. Minstrels and I liked it very much but I wanted to do a sad song instead of "See them shuffling along" ...and I wanted to do [MN sings] "Climb upon my knee, Sonny Boy", because I loved to do dramatic songs and I used to love to make 'em cry and that was... I loved that and I got all this "shu, shu, shu" stuff, all the jazzy stuff, but I wanted this banjo. I wanted a big banjo and I wanted the lid to open and we were all inside.

SB: Oh.

MN: I dreamed all that up. So, he said, 'OK, fine'. And there was a man, Wally... and he was married to a young starlet... I'll remember them and he was the head of television at the time and he said, 'That's good'. I'm the only one who is not blacked up. And they put this TV thing on and we had George Mitchell's choir and we put them all the black on and I did this white thing and he loved it and he said, 'We've gotta do this'. So I did

three of them, then I went to America, just for a little thing but that was when Gollop said, 'They want these green haired [boys] and the fringe'. And Jack says, 'I can see everything stopping, we've got to go in a new business'. So, in the mean-time, George Mitchell claimed it as his own: "George Mitchell Minstrels". That was mine.

SB: Really?

MN: Mmm. And he went to the Victoria Palace

SB: Yes, The Black and White Minstrels.

MN: Yes, that was me! And the white was me. I was the only one in the line. In fact, I wore that dress. [MN points to photograph].

SB: Oh yes.

MN: Now, this is funny. We'd only just arrived here and we met this man and he said, 'I'm George Mitchell' and I said, 'Of course, you wouldn't be the George Mitchell choir?' He says, 'Yes, I am'. I lived in Kissimmee and he came here and I said, 'Do you remember when I did the choir and the...' And he said, 'Oh, no, that was mine'. And if only I could remember this guy's name. And how did it happen... we'd only just arrived back from America. That was in '55 and it's now May of '57 and for some reason all these TV directors had adored Jack because he was very creative and we're all at the bar and he says, 'Got any ideas Mary and Jack?, Got any ideas Jack?' and he said, 'Yes, she wants to do a Minstrel Show'. 'Oh, Mary, that sounds wonderful'. I said, 'It's going to be nothing but music, songs, music. And get away from these guys who can't play and we'll get all the best banjo players and I want to do sad songs and let the others do the 'shuffling along's. I want to do the dramatic...' 'Wonderful' and all of a sudden he says, 'You're wrong, that's mine!' and he was in tears and I said, 'All right, George, it's yours'. And he made a fortune of that.

SB: Mmm.

MN: And you see I should have had all that done. You see, a lot of things we should have had done and I want you to remember this: If you think you've got an idea, license it!

SB: Mmm. Yes.

MN: Because if you realise... I'm going to shock you. We, Jack and I, were the first to have paid entertainment on a ship.

SB: Really?

MN: Yes. We did it like it was nothing. All you had on a ship the horse racing, Bingo and if you were lucky enough to have a celebrity on, they would do a show for an upgrade – so you paid the cheapest cabin – because you had to pay something to be on the insurance, in case you drowned – and then they would upgrade you. Lena Horne was in the South of France, working with Jack – she wouldn't work without him – and she says, 'Where are you going from here, honey?' And he says, 'Well, I'm going to go back to America'. She said, 'So am I'. 'I'm going to take my bride to meet my parents. We'd been married two or three years now and she's never met them'. 'How are you going?' 'Plane'. 'Ahh'. And all the time the Manager is giving him the 'yes' sign – go along with her, go along with her, you know. She says, 'I'll tell you what you do', she says, 'You tell me when you want to go, because we'll go at the same time. We'll go out of La Havre, you go out of Southampton and we'll meet you there, at Southampton. And all I want you to do is the Captain's Dinner' - Which was always, then, the night before you docked. Not the first night, the night before you docked – 'You go on first, like you've always done and then I'll follow you. That's all I want you to do. Get the cheapest ticket there is and I'll do the rest'. So, he did. And I've got... oh, all of London turned out to the station. I'd got flowers from everyone. Vi Riscoe was the Queen [Lady Ratling] at the time. Flowers... I was so laid down with flowers and the sad thing was... my Dad was in the hospital at the time and I didn't want to go but it was only for a few weeks and Jack was going to go over to do The Latin Quarter [New York].

SB: Oh, yes.

MN: And the Copacabana and eight weeks in Vegas. So we went on the ship and he did this thing and then we went and he had to have his birds quarantined which was no good, so instead of having seven weeks – Lena Horne got him seven days so that was OK.

SB: You were saying about entertaining...

MN: So, that was the only entertainment all through our entire cruise. So, now she has shown us how to do it and we come back and then we go back again and we'd got these French Lines and we'd just done The Latin Quarter and Jack says to Lou Walters, 'I'm going to get out of here, Lou. The business is going and I want to get out before it leaves me. You're OK because you can have these same people that they want. They don't want us today'. He says, 'When Lena Horne can't find work, and Frank Sinatra and Vic Damone' – because these were all people that he worked with – 'If they can't get work then I'm not working and I can't do these one-nighters because I've got my birds flying all over the place. I've got to have somewhere for at least six months'. 'OK'. So, he says, 'What do you want?'. He says, 'Well, I'm going into a thing called 'Incentive Travel'. Nobody even knew what the word incentive meant'. And he says, 'Well, let me tell you. I've got this ship and I've got General Electric and they can give me the amount of people – I'm going to need eight weeks and that will be eight back to back trips – Miami... a week... return and another bunch waiting to come on... Miami... eight trips and I need something... I can't do it with Bingo and all that. I want to get it out of the transportation business. I want to make it a floating holiday camp'. "Mmm". So he says,

'I'll tell you what... you're lucky... we are now going to re-decorate The Latin Quarter. My kids are going to be out of work for four weeks. You can have them with any costume you want'. So, Jack spoke to them all – had a meeting – and he says, 'Will you come for Equity minimum?'. So, they agreed and he could have all these things [the costumes etc.] so he had feathers, furs, sequins and all these gorgeous girls and he said, 'And I'm going to stick my neck out and you can bring two people each trip – two aunts, two parents. You'll have a chance to take two at a time but no boyfriends, just family and if you don't have a family, your best friends. OK?' So, brought Florian ZaBack who was very big on the violin – like Grappelli – and... I can't think of her name now but she was the one that did Fascination – Big, big stars... The Crosby Brothers. And they all got... Union Scale! There you go. Not minimum, Union Scale. And there was a boy from California called 'The last of the sick comics' and before he even got off the docks he was sicker than a dog and he was seasick all the way. 'The last of the sick comics'. And, I was still in the business to do my act. So we did mine too. Anyway, it was so successful and we had – Jack would do 'close up' [magic] and we had... every time we went to a new port... let's say it was Jamaica... that was British, so we'd have a British Bobby and we had – it's never been done the same since, because you couldn't afford it. But in those days it was reasonable, but we had this big ballroom and we would change it while they were having their first dinner, and the others that were in second dinners were getting ready for the evening, we were changing the entire ballroom to suit whatever it was. So, if we got to a French port, we had Gendarmes, we had stuffed - on every table – every women got a stuffed poodle and we had French Can Can... the girls would do the Can Can in all their gorgeous Can Can clothes. I mean, it had never been seen before – never been seen... and they couldn't believe it. Lena Horne came and worked for nothing, she just worked for scale just to help us. 'What do you want, Honey? You want to get out of the business? What can I do?' Jack says, 'Would you come?' So, she took thirteen people with her and it was marvellous and she said, 'Anytime you want me, I'm here, kid'. You know, it was marvellous. Marvellous.

SB: Really.

MN: So we got known for this, so we were constantly on the water with all the ships. Now, when they got off they were giving all these ideas to the staff that were getting on because we threw all the staff off: 'We don't do that!' we said, 'Well, we do... off!' and we brought our own staff on. So, now they are all starting to do this and the next thing you know they got a complete new environment and they're taken out of the transport business into... and we never got a dime because we didn't put one idea down with a pound. Now, I mean we could have had... with any ship going but we got nothing but when you think about what we did to put new venues, strong venues, for the performers that had nowhere else to play... when you think what we'd done...

SB: When did you start that?

MN: We started that in 1960.

SB: Really?

MN: 1960 and we were with it until about '75 [1975] and we still are really because... now... we used to have welcome parties and you see, everything on the ship was all paid for. But, you had to be a millionaire really to earn the trip because nobody had been anywhere. The war was just over and anybody that had any thing was a soldier so in the mean-time, you as a wife had never been anywhere except for your own back door – if you got to Florida, that was about as far as you'd got.

SB: Yes.

MN: So, here you are going to London. One trip... London, Paris and Rome. I'll never forget this one. This went on for years. London, Paris and Rome. We had welcome cocktail parties every night. Dinners, always five star, every night, Maxim's and all of them. We had the Folies Bergère, The Lido, and we had ringside seats and champagne dinners everywhere we went. All of that, if you can imagine... the cost of living, then - and it was just as expensive as it is today, really, because nobody had any money – three hundred and fifty dollars a head!

SB: Gosh! Really?

MN: It was like eleven days and as soon as those eleven days were over another ship-load would come in so we'd have all our people waiting at one end and we'd be getting them off at the other end and the winners were people like... who can I say?... people like Mr. Marks and Mr. Spencer. They would be trip winners. People that had a lot of ... chains... For instance: You've got television which was just coming out then... are you going to sell Zenith or are you going to sell General Electric? So, now, who's got the best deal? Now, 'Darling Wife, do you want to go to Israel? Pakistan?... or do you want to go to London, Paris and Rome?' 'Oh, I want go to London, Paris and Rome'... 'Well, that's General Electric, so I'm going to push General Electric. I want my bonuses to get my trip.' And why do you want it when you can afford to take it yourself? You want it because you want to be with other millionaires. And they all knew each other. There was one German ship. Let me tell you about that one. This is a little bit that I hurt when I tell you. The Hanseatic was a German ship and in the main lobby of this beautiful ship was the biggest photograph of the Princess of Glasgow and I couldn't understand it. I kept saying to Jack, 'Isn't that marvellous? They are so nice now; they want to make up to us so badly that they would put their sister ship, the Princess of Glasgow up there.' And I got to know the Captain very well and he was lovely... they were all lovely... Well, they had to be because they knew we had a lot of money coming in. And I said, 'You know, I do appreciate Cap – and I used to call them all Cap – the fact that you've got the Princess of Glasgow... but what is that doing on the wall?'. He said, 'Because this is the Princess of Glasgow!'. And I said, 'What do you mean, Captain, that this is the...?'. He said, 'Well, when the war was over, the British had sunk so many ships of ours that they had to replace them'. And I said, 'Great, who replaced ours?' I said, 'We were so damn broke we didn't know what day it was'. He said, 'I don't know, but that's what happens when you're the winners'. And he says, 'This is the Princess of Glasgow and this is in answer to their losing and bombing part of ours'.

SB: Oh, really.

MN: And to go back to that... when I first went to Paris and I talked about the black bread...

SB: Yes.

MN: I came out for the first time in my life, other than going to Belfast, I'd never been outside the UK and when I got to La Guardia – no, not La Guardia – Paris, Orly.

SB: De Gaulle?

MN: No, Orly. It was before... Right in the centre. I got off [the plane], I came out of a black depressing country still on rations, still with 10 ounces of meat a week, which my mother – I was hardly ever at home – but she used to save three weeks of five of us' rations to buy a half of a leg of lamb, and you know a leg of lamb is no bigger than a rabbit and half of that would take her three weeks of five people's rations to make it and that is up until 1954.

SB: Mmm.

MN: So, I come to Paris... we've still got bomb craters full of water with kids drowning in them. We have nothing. And I arrive in Orly... there's lights – we're still in darkness – there's lights everywhere and the hustle and bustle of happy sounds which I never realised sounded like that before I hit the bottom stair of that plane, I was in another world. I was in fantasyland. And everybody had smiles and lights and they were all in bright colours clothes – beautifully dressed – and I walked down the Champs Elysees a few hours later, with Jack and Freddie Kats - another wonderful Dutch Magician and his wife - every window was full of stuff. The sweetshops were unbelievable – there was one shop I'll never forget, with candied almonds, and they were white, pale blue and pale pink and with it there was what you give to people when you've had a boy or a girl...

SB: Oh yes.

MN: This was so elegantly done... now I'm used to going past the Galleries Lafayette on Regent's Street with one dress in the window, which is old and stale and been there for years because we've got nothing else to put in.

SB: Mmm.

MN: And I'm looking at all these marvellous things and I'm looking at motor car places with cars in the window and Irish linens with all this stuff... perfumes... and Jack gave

me my first veal, my first pork chop. I'm eating food that I'd never eaten before because all we'd ever had was a bit of this and a bit of that...

SB: Mmm.

MN: And you're lucky to get it. And I thought, 'God, and they never fired a shot!' There was not one bomb crater, there was not one bullet sound anywhere and there was no sign of ever, ever being in a war!

SB: Really!

MN: And it was like enchantment for me.

SB: Was Jack working in Paris?

MN: Yes, The Lido.

SB: Oh, right.

MN: And then he worked the Moulin Rouge and then back to The Lido. Then he worked the Nouvelle Eve. So, on and off he was five years, on and off. That was my saviour, because it was so depressing to see stuff that I'd never known I'd missed. And all I could think of when they said that Europe was worse off than us... I thought, 'A blatant lie!' and we had won the war and lost the peace!

SB: Mmm.

MN: Truly, it came to me and I thought, 'This is dreadful'. And the flowers were everywhere, blooming along the base of the Champs Elysees, the Arc de Triomphe. It was a mass of light and gaiety and people were triumphantly victorious! And they hadn't set a bullet to fire and here we are triumphantly depressed! We won the war. And we go to America... same thing! Full of everything. And it seemed to me as a young girl and very patriotic to my country... from what we'd been through and seeing... when you've been a kid in a war and you're allowed to be in a major city for one week of your life, every week different, you see it all – in a war.

SB: Yes.

MN: And when you see what we suffered and America was thriving, France was thriving. You could still get Vienna Schnitzels and whatever you like... When I went to Germany for ENSA, when we're eating in the Officer's Mess... Toad in the Hole - which

is horrible - and cold fish in a terrible grey sauce, and our German performer who was on the same bill with me - it was my bill – was in a German Hotel eating schnitzels and they would tell us what they were eating on our way to work. We couldn't believe it.

SB: Really?

MN: It was dreadful!

SB: Now, the ENSA bit... was that after the war?

MN: After. Oh, after the war. In fact, it was 1954 we went to ENSA.

SB: Really.

MN: And we were still in rations. And they were having... so I said to myself – I had no other thought but to say to myself, 'How is it that victory marches and the celebrations went all over the world came to us saying "isn't it wonderful?"'. England stopped the Nazi boot from the rest of the world and as soon as they left to go back home they forgot about us and left with the horse and heavy load.

SB: Mmm.

MN: And it just seems to me so unfair and nobody ever came to our welfare but we had to take care of everybody else. And I just felt... where were our politicians when everybody was carving the world up and we just sat back and let them?

SB: Mmm.

MN: And even to this day you ask any American kid, 'Do you know about the Battle of Britain?' 'Eh?' They haven't got a clue! They only think that it was America that was in World War II. Now, I'm not blaming them. I think we should follow suit – and if you look at Vietnam - they were the only ones in Vietnam, they were the only ones in Korea, and they lost so many young boys in Korea... We were the only ones that were in Desert Storm, few people know that we were in Iraq and I just think, 'When are we going to learn' – and I don't blame the Americans for this. I think we should do it too, and I think the idea of every public building like the Post Offices and the Palaces and the Mansions - we should do what they do. Put the flag out. Put our flag out. Start flying them, and when you go to a football game, let's start seeing the Union Jack again because all over here – and as I say, they are not wrong. We are not right - for not doing it. And here it's on every post box, it's everywhere. And I feel as passionate about my country - and it's wrong – as I do about this country [USA] and I feel that politicians throughout ages have ruined this world – not just one spot in it – all of it. And when I think of Mr. Bush Jnr. with his 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' and I could see through

him from day one and others couldn't. And I couldn't see why. And when I think of Bacon - the British Poet, Bacon [Sir Francis Bacon]- the British Poet who decades and centuries ago said, in verbatim, 'Beware of the politician, beware of the leader who provokes war, while he narrows the mind as he broadens the sword, all in the name of patriotism'. That's Bacon. And I add Shakespeare's, 'What fools we mortals are'. And nothing to me is as well said as that... for George Bush. And I've often thought, 'What would have happened if Gore - who was voted in and through the conniving of this man's brother [Jeb Bush, Governor of Florida], another terrible politician - I wonder what would have happened'. We would have been better off because we wouldn't have had a war, the world would not be in this state and this man is walking out like he's done wonderful things - it's beyond me.

SB: Yes... Anyway, I think we'll finish now as we've had quite a long interview.

MN: Is that still going - I forgot.

SB: Yes. Anyway, it's been a pleasure to talk to you.

MN: But it's not been too much show business, has it?

SB: No, but we can do that again later.

MN: Yes. But that's my heart anyway and I think it's because of show business that I feel the way I do.

SB: Yes.

MN: And I think it's made me so much more mature and I see people and I understand people a lot better because I was taught to know my audience.

SB: Yes... No, that's absolutely true. Anyway, thank you.

MN: And thank you, darling, for having the patience to listen to this garbage! [Both laugh].

SB: No, that's fine.

MN: Was it really all right?

SB: Yes. Yes.

MN: But it was not what we want is it? But it might be what they want?

SB: Oh... no, the whole thing...

MN: When it comes to World War II, they might take parts of that and say, 'Now, look at this'. And this is not read. This is lived.

SB: I wanted to ask you, Mary, about clothing. Because, obviously Mary, you were quite successful and you were telling me about the fact that, really, as a performer, you should wear things that people can't just get off the peg.

MN: Yes.

SB: So who actually designed your clothes?

MN: Yes, when it came to wardrobe, I was taught by the same Variety people that I learned my trade from that in respect to your audience you must look the best that you can and afford as much as you can and you must go to a proper Theatrical Costumer. Because your aunt or a member of the family can't make it because you'd still be wearing the little dress like the next door neighbour wore and it's not fair for them to be paying their five bob [five shillings] or whatever it is they've paid for a ticket...and see you coming on and wearing the same dress they're in. So it must be Theatrical Costumers. Well, I was lucky enough to spend the youngest part of my career at the Palladium [London Palladium] and I saw these marvellous wardrobes and not only that... the upkeep of them. We had a Miss Rosie who was the head Wardrobe Mistress at the Palladium... Brilliant seamstress herself... but she was able to take these wonderful pieces of art, that they called 'costumes' and kept them in a perfect condition. And we were also taught not to sit in your clothes backstage, regardless of how long it took and we had a cross – a wooden cross – that we put our arms across and lean on those rather than sit down because it caused creases under the bust and creases under the tummy. The same for the men. It caused creases on the crotch and it was not nice when we made our entrances. And at the Palladium in those days we were fined a shilling, and naturally we couldn't afford those shillings so we made sure we had no creases! And that was good for me because I never walked on stage with a crease, if I could help it.

I went to... First of all I had the Palladium people make the first load, and then for my first Command Performance in '46 – we were still badly rationed, and we really didn't have anything although the war had been over a year, we literally had nothing - so Alec Shanks took a worn out, silk, old parachute from the Royal Air Force and he was making clothes and beautiful art out of those. And my particular dress – I had a big production number called "Turn off the Rain, Turn on the Sunshine", and I had this lovely – and don't forget I was only – I was not quite... I was seventeen, so I couldn't look sexy or anything – so I looked very... they tried to make me look pretty. So I had this pure white silk dress and I was very happy to tell you it got a lot of write-ups about this gorgeous – and down the front of it he had dyed a big sash in all the colours of the rainbow and I

had a halo on my head of rainbow and on each accordion pleated colour of the rainbow – we had beads to match that colour so it lit up. And at the back of me I had God knows how many Showgirls that were - I mean all of me would have fit under one leg, [both laugh] they were so tall! - and each of them was dressed in one colour of the rainbow so my little white dress and me being so short really did help me to stop the show that night and, of course, the end result was 'Nottingham taxi driver's daughter steals Royal Command' which was very nice. And then, for Variety I used to take – I used to have three dresses a year made – and the last three from the year before I would wear to the theatres that I had not performed in that year and then rotate them and that's what we did, and so anybody who came in that saw us last year - we were always in a different costume.

SB: Oh right. And, presumably, they were expensive, were they?

MN: Very. I would say... well, I did compare myself once with my cousin. She worked in a bakery shop and she got 32 shillings a week, and at the end of her year she'd saved more than I had because what with train fares and hotels and the wear and tear of your clothes and all this stuff, it really took a lot, so whatever was over went on clothes. And I used to have four tailored suits and they were for radio shows, when you could not wear a theatrical costume, so all of this stuff... although I had a lot of costumes it was really my living, and I had to take good care of them because I couldn't afford to buy more than I had to, but it was very, very important that I looked as good as I could and it didn't matter how often I wore them, so long as I looked the best I could at that time.

SB: So, you did radio shows, did you?

MN: I did radio shows. I did lots and lots of Worker's Playtimes and Saturday Night Lives, In Town Tonights...

SB: And did you have to travel or were the radio shows at the same place?

MN: Yes, I practically lived on a train. In fact, I think that is why I lost my voice at an early age. I lost my voice in the middle of my thirties, towards the end of my thirties. I had two and a half octaves and they were getting slighter and slighter because... I'll give you an idea. I played Aladdin at the New Theatre in Oxford and I had fourteen changes of clothes and nineteen entrances, and the 'cave scene' was a killer and I learned to sing the screams rather than... but it was still hard, and I would go to bed Friday night and I would not see my bed until Monday night because I would go to bed Friday, do three shows Saturday, catch the train for London Saturday night after the show. Daddy was always meeting me with a car to take me across London to get on a train to Manchester. Travelled overnight alone, of course, because in those days you could, because it was a different area to what it is today. And so, I travelled alone, and no sleepers in those days – you were lucky to get a seat – and so you were up all night on the train – arrived 7.30 [a.m.] in Manchester, Sunday morning – arrive at the BBC Manchester and at 9 o'clock we're sitting down – we, I say 'we' Ernie [Wise] and Eric [Morecambe] and I and a young wonderful director – Oh, I wish I could remember his name.... Taylor... his name was Taylor.... Died very, very young, brilliant, and we had breakfast and our breakfast –

because it was in pantomime season - our breakfast was always, if you can imagine this, not eating since yesterday breakfast – Christmas Pudding – black as heck, the blacker the better – and instead of having custard on it, we'd drown it in vanilla ice cream – and that was all of our breakfasts' - we all loved it, so, can you imagine what our stomachs went through – and then we would rehearse all day – the radio show would start from 7 -8 pm for the following Thursday relayed on the air. And, then at 9.20 p.m. I am back on a train going back to London, overnight again – no sleep – and my Daddy would meet me again at 7 a.m. in London and he would take me home to my Mum and she would give me a jolly good breakfast, Monday morning. And it was a long time afterwards I was to learn that that was nearly all their weeks rations that they would give me for my breakfast and I never knew it, because they didn't have my book – I wasn't there – and I was in a little hotel in Oxford that had my ration book so I would arrive back in Oxford, Monday afternoon at twelve and I'm making my entrance just after two for my matinée so I didn't see my bed from Friday until Monday night and I did that for eighteen months – all over when we were doing Variety after I left the Panto - and I did it as long as the radio

SB: And what were the wages like for radio in those days? Was it well paid?

MN: Well, it's funny you're saying that because I don't know, for a reason. Dickie [Richard] Afton bought a home in Florida, and my brother had a home in Florida at the time, and my husband and I were enjoying the winters in my brother's home while his children were in school, up in the north of Chicago, and during one of our luncheons with Ernie Wise and his wife, and I think Pearl Carr and Teddy Johnson were with us too because they were my four best friends in all the world for years, and he [Richard Afton] came out with this old book and he said, 'Isn't this marvellous? I remember all of you' And I said, 'Well, you don't remember me because I never worked for you, Dick – I'd have liked to, but I never did your Saturday night "Big Show"', and he said, 'You must have, Mary' and he started looking through the book. and the boys said, 'Well, if it means anything, you didn't play for [book] us either'. 'Oh'. Well, it appears that as he was going through the book, he was giving us all the wages and I couldn't believe it. Gracie Fields = half an hour £30, Petula Clark, £15. I mean, big, good – everybody you can think of... Donald Peers, 15 guineas. And I said, 'Well, no wonder I didn't work for you then!'. He says, 'So what was your fee?' '£75 I got, for every broadcast. And I said, 'Well, how did I get so much money?' and he said 'It beats me, because I don't know anybody that earned that much money' and I showed him, I just happened to have one receipt and it was for my own show called My Name is Mary and it was £75 and he said, 'Well, maybe it was because you had to have a week of rehearsals' and I said, 'No, even on my Worker's Playtimes it was always £75'. And I don't know how I got it, because I'd had nothing to do with the pricing – because in those days they told you what you were going to get, you didn't tell them.

SB: Good gracious.

MN: Yes. So, that was – but I can't understand how I got – there was such a difference. When you've got Gracie Fields for £30. I was flabbergasted with that and I thought we weren't getting enough. I thought £75 for a great big fat broadcast. It's not really fair.

SB: Was television well paid to begin with?

MN: No, it was the same. Exactly the same. What you got in television, you got in radio.

SB: Oh, really?

MN: Mmm. It was the BBC. You worked for the firm. It was a firm. And even when ITV came out. I think, possibly, I'm sure, somebody like Dickie Valentine who was forever on the air and he had to stop his variety in order to do it. I think, possibly, he had the power, and ITV so new and they were competing with BBC. Possibly he did, and if he didn't he should have. Looking back now we see what we should have done, but there were lots of opportunities that we missed because we weren't trained to be... you weren't trained to say, 'I'm so important, I'm worth so much' because you were so busy saying, 'God! I hope they like me'. You make your entrance: 'Oh, I hope they like me' and your bare soul is hanging out on that stage to say, 'Like me, like me, I'll do anything to please you' and when you're trained with that, you cannot - I don't think, you can turn around and say, 'I'm the greatest, I'm worth so much' because it's instilled in you, rejection, you're expecting rejection all the time and 'I'm never good enough, I can be better'.

SB: And did the pros all used to talk about the different managements and that kind of thing?

MN: No. I don't ever remember anybody sitting in a long train ride and telling everybody what they earned. No.

SB: And what did you talk about on those massively long journeys?

MN: I met Donald Peers once, for instance, on the train and we talked about singing and music, 'It's amazing, Mary, how you know a score'. I said, 'Yes, because I was classically trained as a little girl'. 'When did you have the time? You started work when you were twelve'. I said, 'Yes, but at eleven I'd gone through all my Beethoven solos and I'd been to the Victoria College of Music and got my credentials and my certificates and I was eligible to be a teacher at that age' and I was - that was December - I was eleven and I was going to be twelve the following April.

SB: Wow!

MN: But, train journeys, we enjoyed. We made the best out of nothing and when we were kids, my Dad was rather a good dancer so he taught all of us, especially if we had a corridor train, he taught us all to dance and he bought us, it's funny, we were playing in Edinburgh, at the Empire - and I'm now going back to Youth Takes a Bow with Ernie and Eric, Arthur Worsley, Dickie Henderson, Jeannie Bamforth, a whole bunch of good, good kids- and he bought us a - for my birthday- a five and sixpenny pale blue

gramophone machine – a little square – which, you turned the handle and in this box were five records – all American – and one was by The Peterson Sisters and they sang a song, 'T'aint what you do, it's the way 'hut you do it. T'aint what you do.... And the fact that they would do 'hut' instead of 'that' you do it, we thought that we were really good Americans going around all day long imitating these three massive negro lovely workers and then there was another one – there was lots of Glen Miller – And a man sang, 'If I could be with you one hour, tonight' and we used to think, 'I wonder what we'd do with that hour?' And we learned from these five records up and down the aisle. And then, there was one, 'The Waiter, The Porter and The Upstairs Maid' Well, being in digs together, we did this - Eric and Ernie and I - did this, 'The Waiter, the Porter and the Upstairs Maid', 'til my Dad and Aunt Sadie, who was Eric's mother, must have gone blue in the face listening to us do this, we all thought we were American Movie talent and we'd go and see all those movies and we became them as we came out of the theatre, walking to our theatre, and God forbid if there was a brick wall somewhere because they'd all try to do the Donald O'Connor walk up the wall and over [laugh]...

SB: Oh, yes.

MN: and my Dad... Oh, this is funny! My Daddy had asthma, and those two boys, Ernie and Eric, who became as you know, the giants of all time in our country... My Dad had asthma, and the sirens had a scale and my Daddy's stomach would go up with the siren noise and of course he'd have an asthma attack. And these two kids, if you can imagine... Ernie was taller than Eric, Eric hadn't started to climb his... to beat poor old Ernie. Ernie was left with his short, little hairy legs, but at the time he was a giant next to little Eric, and the two of them grabbed my Dad under the shoulders - it was such a routine - and they'd literally drag him to the air raid shelters. And I always said without those two boys I don't know how my Dad would have ever made it.

SB: Oh, really?

MN: Mmm. It was fun because we all thought... whoever we saw that afternoon, whether it was Ingrid Bergman or Leslie Howard, we were all those people when we walked out. I think we lived an enchanted childhood, and when you hear all these uneducated people that say young children in show business, their parents were only after their money, or this is dreadful lives that these kids have, I have to tell you, my life was magnificent and I never ever finished learning and I've still got a hunger to this day to learn.

SB: Mmm. And talking about learning – When you said your dad taught you dancing – What sort of dances did he teach you up and down the country?

MN: Oh, my gosh! We were Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, all of us. We did the Foxtrot, the Tango – Oh, the Tango was funny! That was a good one. The traditional ones. We never got around to the Jitterbugging, because Daddy didn't know the Jitterbugging. You see, that came in the war, you see, the Yanks brought that over and it was fascinating. No, we did the Waltz, and we did the Tango, and the Foxtrot, and the

Quickstep and we did a little bit of the Jive, but it wasn't from him - we picked that up in the movies and it really was fun.

SB: And when you became older, in your twenties, did you still see each other when you were working?

MN: Oh, yes. We were family and we hurt... we needed to see each other. And my first pangs of ... it was painful to miss them because I left them to go to the West End and Nat Jackley, who I adored... they were all like my dads. I had so many dads and uncles it was ridiculous. He said, 'Mary...' - I was a laughing child - he said, 'Underneath all those giggles you're very lonely, aren't you? You miss your parents' and I said, 'Yes', I said, 'I always have', and he said, 'I don't think you'll be going back to Nottingham again, I think your work is down here. And I've got to take care of my wife' - because he had a lovely wife and some boys, you know, some sons. Marion Lincoln was not his first wife. And, in fact, she met him and broke that marriage up whilst I watched it, during the Palladium in 1942 and she was at the Prince of Wales in Strike a New Note. And he took me round the West End of London and he said, "We've got to be somewhere near the Palladium and we've got to be on a line that we can get to Oxford Circus - because that's where the Palladium was - so we walked around. He was looking for his wife and family to come down to London and we spotted this house: 47 Earls Court Square, just off Warwick Road, and it was magnificent. It was the ground floor and the bottom level floor and he said, 'If you won't have it Mary, I will'. And it was £7 a month and the reason it was £7 a month was because the Battle of Britain has just been, we were being bombed to death and everybody that had any money moved out.

SB: Really?

MN: So, the whole of the West End was empty. So these landlords would give anything for you to just be in there, to keep it nice. So, I said, 'OK'. So the Realtor [Estate Agent] said 'Sign' and Nat didn't sign, I signed, he said, 'You can't have a sixteen year old kid sign for a lease on an apartment!' and he said, 'Oh, yes you can. This one you can', said Nat. And he said, 'No, I can't do that' so, he said, 'I'll tell you what, I'll co-sign and if she can't pay the rent, I will', and we were there for thirty years.

SB: Really?

MN: Yes and I never had to go to Nat and I made sure that that rent was paid for all those years... in my career.

SB: And did your parents move down?

MN: Yes, I called them and I said - I didn't call them because we didn't have phones in those days and Daddy used to call me at a certain time every night and I said, 'By the way, Daddy, we're moving, we're going to go and live in London'. 'Oh, we are, are we?' I said, 'Yes, we've got 47, Earl's Court Square, and we'll have the keys in another

week'. 'Well! You mean you're moving us down?' and I said, 'Yes'. He said, 'Are you sure?' 'Yes, me and Nat Jackley went and we've got to be in by so and so', so off he came and he said 'the tenacity of this kid is unbelievable!' but I knew that it was a necessity and I was a terribly, terribly shy kid, but I was doing as I was told again because Nat Jackley and Tommy Trinder said, 'You've got to come down, Mary because you'll never see your family if you don't bring them down'.

SB: So your brothers and sisters moved down.

MN: I had one brother and one sister. I'm the eldest. My sister was three years younger and my brother was six years younger than me. So there was a little school opposite. It really was a Greek church and if you go to Earls Court Square today it's so ridiculous because the church has gone. That was bang opposite our house. And there's 45 and 47. 47 has now disappeared - that was my home - the number on my house is now 45 because they've hollowed out the two and they've made them into 32 bedrooms and what it was before were two, three floor flats and they were elegant and they were beautiful. But now, I don't know what's happened but across, instead of this elegant church - which was a school - you were not allowed to go to any school that was further than the one nearest to your home because of the bombing so they went over the road to the school which was Greek Orthodox on the weekends but a school for the kids on the weekdays. And my sister was in a little band called Madame Haynes Accordions, which I was, and she and a little boy were doing a double act in the show so she stayed in Nottingham to complete that one period of school and it was very hard for her to come down so she and the Wheetly family, which she adored, they did eventually come down and bring her down and she was very happy doing it.

SB: So, in the period after the war, was there more of a surge of entertainment after the war because people were celebrating or not?

MN: The way I saw it was it was rather a depressing, difficult time for all of us because we were told that we'd won the war and lost the peace and it was being dug into us because we didn't have any gold bullion left.

SB: No, but I mean entertainment-wise?

MN: Yes, well it hung over on the entertainment, it all stretched over, because now agents are saying, 'Oh, they're fed up of seeing the old faces, we'll have some new ones'. So these batches of Australians, Americans, and other people started coming in and the BBC in particular wanted fresh voices and fresh things. And it was very funny because there was a boy called Dick Bentley and he was the partner to George Moon - two double comics -

SB: Yes.

MN: Very funny. And they were with us for the first years of Youth Takes A Bow, then the war came and Dick Bentley wanted the first plane or the first ship out of the place. He wanted to get back home to Australia. He was Australian. And no way was he going to tolerate a bomb or a suggestion of being in trouble so he left George Moon high and dry but Burton Brown, an American boy took his place. And I've always admired that boy because he could have gone home too, but he decided to stick it out. After the war, George Moon and Burton Brown couldn't get any work and Dick Bentley came over once it was safe again and got straight into the BBC series called Take It From Here and he became a big star with no effort at all and I thought, 'How unfair' because he really did leave everybody in the lurch.

SB: So what did you do after the war? Did you still tour?

MN: Well, I was lucky because I was still young and fresh. I was still only nineteen or twenty and that was the height of my career because the Royal Family liked me and the Queen Mother said I was a typical English Rose and twice they invited me to Buckingham Palace to work. And then I went with Sam Browne just for a twelve-month period and we just hit it lucky because wherever we went we just took – we had our own bill – the write-ups were magnificent. In fact one was silly but lovely. It said - it was the Glasgow Empire, which was tough, you know. But this wonderful man... Sinatra had made a big success with "I Couldn't Sleep A Wink Last Night", and this man wrote, 'It's very rare...' – and this was my first week with Sam Browne. It was Glasgow Empire, Nottingham Empire – and he said, 'I very rarely go to see a show twice in one week, but I had to do so in the case of Mary Naylor. She's something so unusual, charisma like you would not believe and after hearing her, somebody should tell Mr. Frank Sinatra how to really sing "I Couldn't Sleep A Wink Last Night".' 'Well!', I thought 'Now, I'm better than Frank Sinatra!' [both laugh] That's marvellous, isn't it?

SB: Yes.

MN: And the other lovely thing that I was rewarded with when everybody was in this surge for new faces after the war... it came to my attention, years later, that there was a fabulous Jewish restaurant, at the side of an alleyway by the Hippodrome, I think it was called Isaac's but I don't know... No, I think I'm wrong. It was just a fish place and most of our giants of the business would go there for lunch and this particular day there was Stanley Black, George Black, Charles Henry, Val Parnell and one more... I don't remember. Oh, yes... and Sam Harbour who was the manager of the Coliseum, Harry's father...

SB: Oh!

MN: ... and they were all talking about these wonderful American acts that were coming over – we had them all and they were marvellous. We had all these Hollywood big fat orchestrations with lots of change of keys and modulations. Oh, they were fabulous - and everyone was saying how great they were and everybody listened and this Sam Harbour said, 'Well, I'll tell you... you can have all your American high pressured production performers but' ... and they talked about how great Judy Garland was and

about how there was nothing she can't do ... and he says, 'You can have them all, including Judy Garland but you put one piano, forget the orchestra and those fancy arrangements.... Put one piano and put Judy Garland and Mary Naylor on the same stage and Mary Naylor will outshine Garland with the audience'. 'Well!' I said, 'He didn't!' and this guy said, 'Yes, and Charlie Henry said, 'That's the first time you've ever made sense, Sam Harbour, I agree with you'. And they all started to go around the table, 'I agree with you'. Isn't that marvellous?

SB: Yes!

MN: Well, I told that, a few weeks ago, to... the girl in Miami... I was talking to her about show business.

SB: Eileen Kaye?

MN: Yes. And I said to her – she's been calling me, at least once a month to see if I'm all right – so good as a Ratling [Lady Ratling] – and I told her, the best thing ever said to me was... and I said, 'What do you think to that?' and there was a long, long pause and I thought, 'Oh, crickey, oh...' and she said, 'I'll agree with that'. And I said, 'How do you know?' and she said, 'I know everything you did'. And she told me every song I ever sang – and I've known this girl for years – at the North Pier, Blackpool and she told me, she said, 'And the way you did "Memories of You" and the way you would scale up to those heavens and come down with such ease, I used to be so envious, Mary, you'll never know how great you were'. I couldn't believe it.

SB: That's lovely.

MN: Isn't it lovely? And she's tough. She knows them all and has seen them all and when I got that long pause I thought, 'Oh...'.
 MN: Yes, it is. But, I have to say that variety is the greatest education for actors... I'll finish with this... John Mills is another famous actor – nearly all of the good actors... and I wish I had thought about this.... Wendy Hillier... all of them – the majority of them started in variety, and I think it's because you're out there all by yourself, you've got the floor... do something with it! And, I think, God bless variety for me because it taught me so much and I'm just so sorry that I can't pass it on.

SB: Well, I think that's a really good time to finish.

SB: Well, you are passing it on.

MN: Yes... to get these lovely people... it's all in the timing, isn't it?

SB: Yes. Thank you very much.

MN: And thank you for letting us do this.