

**After Hiroshima Transcript**  
**Brenda Watkinson interview**

Interviewee: Brenda Watkinson (BW), born 26.07.1937

Interviewers: Visaly Muthusamy (VM) and Ruth Dewa (RD)

Date: 30<sup>th</sup> April 2015

*VM: Would you be able to give me your full name, date of birth, and the place you were born, please?*

BW: I'm Brenda Watkinson. Born 26<sup>th</sup> July 1937.

*VM: Brilliant. And where were you born?*

Brenda: I was born here, 11 Raymouth Road, Bermondsey.

*VM: And I'm interviewing you – Visaly Muthusamy – very long name – and today is Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> April, and we're here in your home, which is 13 Millstream House, Jamaica Road, Bermondsey.*

BW: Actually, this flat was bombed, this block, and we used to walk by after the war, before we were rehoused, we used to look up here, all this corner which used to be this flat, was bombed out, and my mother used to look at this flat and say I would like to live there, they are lovely flats, and in the end we did. Basically this has been rebuilt – like newbuild sort of thing. There we are. That's that. Question number two.

*VM: Before we go into it, you may notice that we're not saying very much, because for the recording, we'll just be nodding, and smiling, so please don't be put off by that, we're really interested in everything you have to say, particularly any stories that you can remember, or any events that particularly spring to mind. Wonderful. Thank you ever so much, Brenda. Are we ready to start? Okay.*

[2:30]

*VM: Could you tell me a little bit about what you were doing at the end of the war?*

BW: Yes, going to school. Living in a condemned house, which we shouldn't have been in, but most of Bermondsey was flattened. You've only got to look at the age of the buildings you see around you to realise it's been mostly rebuilt. This is one of the original buildings, 1930s. But when we moved in, all of that was bombsite and everywhere else was bombsite and we had lost our home at the end of the war, 1944. We got through the Blitz, but at the end of the war, 1944, the V1s got us. Very very – is this is relevant? I'm sorry. It is. We're very lucky – do you know Rayners Road? Do you know it? Oh, right. It's at the other end of the park. Down the road, there's this bit, it's on the left, opposite the Shell garage. Shell petrol station. If you were walking from the Shell petrol station down southwards, you would come to one side turning only – this side was houses, this side is railway arches. And that's where we sheltered a lot during the War, for companionship and extra warmth. When it was too late at night to get over there, we'd go into the Anderson shelter in the back garden. This first turning is called Aspinden Road - still there, same shape, it goes round to where we did

Blackbirds, Dilston Grove, disused church at the end of the park. The bomb took out the entire block from Aspinden Road down to Rotherhithe New Road. We were four doors along and only those houses stood up. We were blasted inside out and had no home. We were in the Anderson shelter. So we were saved but we came out and there was no home. The building stood up; the inside was demolished. [04:45]

And so we were split up – I can vaguely recall – I was six and all I know there was three generations of us in that house. There was me, and my brother, my parents on the ground floor, and the upper loft was Nan and Granddad. Like the Eastern Europeans do that there are coming over here, and the Asians, they keep together with the previous generation, we still did that then, nowadays the English don't do that anymore, they shove them into a home. So we came out from this house and we were sent by the authorities – my mother and I – I guess we were split up into genders, I don't know... my brother was seventeen and he was working for the general steam navigation company who ran the paddle steamers up and down the river to the coast and they had just reinstalled their staff down at Beckenham in Kent. Somehow or the other the authorities linked him up and he was taken straight down there. I never saw him again for years.

It was horrible, really. I mean, there was no time to say, like evacuees, to arrange in advance time to say goodbye. Just... [mimes explosion] It was like the atom bomb, actually.

Grandparents went I knew not where. My father wasn't with us because he was a full time fireman and they used to stay for 48 hours at the fire brigade headquarters at Lambeth Embankment. So he actually wasn't with us. And they were able to give him sleeping arrangements up there full time. So it was just mum and I, and we were taken to a place called Credon Road, that's C-R-E-D-O-N, to a rest centre, where we stayed for seven days on the floor. Just, like, you know, the refugees now, really. Refugees in our own area. Just what we stood up in. I don't know what on earth mum took with her in the case, I have no idea. Anyway, that was the first seven days. I don't know where you want me to go with this. I don't know how relevant this is to what you're looking for.

VM: This is really relevant, thank you.

BW: Well I can tell you the next. Then we were sent down to a place called Woking, in Surrey, where they found us a home run by the American air force. Very nice home, but horrible, horrible experience because we arrived at night. Everything seemed to happen at night in those days, very strange, everything was night-time. And, as a six year old child, we went into this property. Looking back, I think it must have been like a grand country home, you know, where you pay to go in, because there was this beautiful house and there was kind of parkland between that and between where we, the children, were, there was only me with my mum. And I think that must have been like the servants' lodge. I don't even know what the place was called!

Anyway, the horror of it for me was that, at night-time, I'd been through the bombing, I'd lost my home, I'd lost my family. Mum disappeared, I knew not where. They took her away from me. And then these blasted strangers proceeded to undress me in the dark, in a strange place. You would never do that to children, even in those days, if you had an ounce of humanity, you'd leave Mum there at least. And that has scarred me. Even now. It really affects me because I remember it as if it were yesterday, because I was kicking and screaming, and you know, shouting and bawling. They were taking off my underclothes, and my mother had always kept the liberty bodice which don't exist anymore, it was like a warm fleecy undergarment for children, because we had no heating in those days, still haven't here, actually, still haven't got heating. Houses were damp in this area and working class mothers

used to dress us with this little liberty bodices, and especially in these damp shelters, that was very good to have. And I was never to take it off, except when my mother gave me a bath, and there were these blasted people, I have a vague recollection they might have been nuns or they might have been nursing – I don't know. I can't picture them, I've just got a vague recollection of these two women taking my clothes off and putting me in a sort of cot I think it was.

And, I was absolutely terrified. And this was worse than being bombed. At least we were still a family unit, suddenly, where's mum, where's mum? And they said, oh she's going to live over there in that house, and you can see her on Wednesday afternoons for two hours. What do Wednesday afternoons mean to a six year old child who has no conception of what means? And that's what it was. When I woke up next morning, I was in a large room, like a little dormitory, and there was all these other children in the cots. And one of these women came in and said "Oh hello everybody, we have a new girl here, a big girl, a big girl, she can look after you." I was six! And that's what I had to do. And trying to explaining to what these troubled little children, all of them had been bombed out, many of whom had lost a member of the family, worse than me actually, had to be pulled out of the rubble, that sort of thing, and I can see looking back that this was a home where only mothers with children would go, or some sort of female relative, because those women, including my mum, stayed in this big house.

And it was dreadful, it was a dreadful situation, and I've written the story and I'll give you a copy to go home with, because I wrote my story on the BBC website when they did a special project called The People's War. They wanted to know citizens who could remember the war to tell their angle of it and so I've written it on there and I've subtitled one of the pieces The Care of Bombed Out Children, which is very important because I wanted people who might have some medical background to read my story because I think this is what affects children. Because I know now that what happens to you in the first 18 years of your life, the brain absorbs and can lead to mental problems later on, which it has for me, I suffer from depression, off and on for quite a while. So here's my story, I've got some spare copies here- I keep doing photocopies because people like to read it. This is how our lives were saved, by the cat. Right, this should be.... It's not very long, yes. That's Part One. And I've cross-referenced it for people who didn't want to read what I consider to be a mental health issue, care of bombed out children. So the two go together and you can read a more detailed account of what I'm telling you if that's of any interest to you. If it isn't, you can always return it to me, which would be useful. So, that's what happened there.

It was so awful, my mother got us out of there because they were being half-starved. This was the black side of the war. The funds were being provided by the Americans, very generous. And the food was being denied to the mums in the house. I say that because my mother who could never have had any sense of direction wandered down the wrong passageway one day and saw the cupboard door open and my mum had been a butcher. She knew what she was looking at. And there were these beautiful York hams and things like that, which they'd never seen. So the staff was filtering it off, probably selling it on the black market, who knows. But it was a bad scene for parents, and mums, as well as me.

So she got us out. She found us a billet that the Government held, that was equally bad. We only stopped there a matter of weeks. I was abused there by a teenage boy who was a bit... not quite all there. And that was my first sexual abuse. Not the last, sadly. And in the meantime, Dad was of course out of his mind with worry, obviously, we were all separated. And no telephones, just letters. But he managed to write to an elderly uncle who had his own land as well as his house in Dis in Norfolk, and asked if he would take us in, because he was widowed by then, there was room for us in the house. So Mum and I stayed nearly a year, and

came, and obviously you want to be back together – it was very nice there, they were very kind to us. But completely unusual environment when you'd been brought up in Bermondsey and you suddenly find yourself in the heart of the country, and anyway ... managed to find a school there and had a bit of teaching.

Dad had been pulling strings while we were away and he managed to find us a condemned house to put our furniture in, the furniture he had been able to salvage which included that piano and when you go you can see all the shrapnel marks from where the glass flew across the room because that's what happens with glass damage. The house stands, but it blows the glass inside and outside and thank God my mother managed to get my brother up, because he was seventeen, just, and I was coming up towards seven, ten years between us. And he wouldn't get out of bed; she more or less dragged him out of the bed, cos other people at the end of the war were not bothering to get up, saying 'oh, we'll stay here, it'll be all right'.

Thank God he did, because the wardrobe in his room flew right across the room and landed flat on his bed. He would have been killed outright. So it was all rather dramatic.

Dad managed to get some furniture out – basic few bits and pieces, and store it in a condemned house, which was not fit for habitation. But because Mum was getting so distressed at being apart from Dad for such a long time – nearly a year – and also the feeling you're imposing on your relatives, you know what I mean, you feel- although they were kind – you feel they've had enough of you. So she managed to persuade Dad, persuade the Council, to let us to move into this condemned house which was pretty horrible. But nevertheless at least we were back together again. And that was in the street which I'm going to show you a photo of. And we stayed there; Mum pulled every string she could to persuade the council to get us out because it was horrible. Half the street was bombed, it was just, a bit left at the end. There were very rough people. My parents weren't like that. She didn't like it at all. But we managed to finally persuade the Council to put us in here. And that's where we ended up, in 1948. And that's why the idea of having to get out with my knee is just horrendous. Because this is my life, my whole life is here.

So to bring us up to what you're looking at, which is the end of the war, there we are.

[Brenda shows photo] I've just had these photocopied. I don't know who took this photo. There's the street we moved into. That's the VE day street party which people had. And I'm peeping out – one, two – I'm the third one right there, if you can see me. Blondie. Peeping out. And you can see that half of the street is bombed. Little interesting note: the pig bin which the Government issued which is strapped to the lamp posts because we were exhorted to save all our peelings because there were no plastic bags then. We used to put them in there. Everybody who could had pigs, or chickens. And we helped to feed the pigs. So I've done a few photocopies of that, because recently other people have been interested, and if you wanted it, I don't know whether this would be of any use to you at all.

*RD: Yes, definitely.*

BW: Oh, it would. This is coming from that period. This is 1945. So we're coming up to the period of Hiroshima.

*RD: Do you have any specific memories of this day yourself?*

BW: Not of that particular day so much. What I remember is VE night – fantastic. Because my mum's sister and her family had visited us from Bellingham. We were out, I don't know where, we came home to a house which was in darkness, the meter had run out. So, one of us must have had a lighter, my dad I suppose, because my brother was, at this time, in the army,

and I never really saw my brother, he first went down there to Bellingham and then was called up. I remember it was, "Oh, what's happened, we've got no light" and when we got a light it was like something out of a movie. My elder cousin had put a lipstick message across the mirror, saying 'Street bonfires, we're in so and so street, come round' and that was the first we knew that the war had ended. We hadn't heard the news, where'd we'd been I've got no news, perhaps a hospital or some sort of appointment or something. But I know I was with mum and somebody else with us – must have been dad, I suppose - anyway, we ran like mad and every street – that is my recollection – was bringing out every wooden, surplus wood they could find and lighting bonfires, so we in the dark, still in the dark, we, managed to find the street where my cousin and my aunt were, and there was this huge bonfires and everybody was singing and dancing, it was just incredible. I will never forget that – I can see it in my mind's eye now – going into that dark house, oh Lord, the meter's run out, who's got any pennies – and there's this message! [laughs] The war is over! We're in so and so street, there's a bonfire, come round! [laugh] So that is a really important memory. [20:50] I can just about vaguely remember having this and there were a number of parties given for children as well, after that. I can remember going to another party and being given a rattle which I was very pleased about – walked up and down the street with my new rattle and being told off by the new neighbours for making a noise! [laughs] If you look at that photo you can see how the rest of that street was bombed – and here, if you were to walk past this pole, that's complete bombsite there- so everywhere you looked, it was bombsites really. That's the main thing I can tell you about the end of the war. And then, later on, we heard that the war in the Pacific, as we called it – the forgotten army, they were called – that was our troops out in Burma where Japan had invaded and they were in the jungle and they were forgotten, because everyone was celebrating the end of the war, and only people who were related to the troops who were out there really knew that this was not the end of the war. And of course, Japan had brought themselves into the war voluntarily by bombing Pearl Harbour. They weren't even in the war to begin with, they went out and bombed America's Pearl Harbour, got themselves into the war, and then were very, very slow to get out. And just went on fighting. Something in the Japanese psyche tells them they got to fight to the end. Why? They could have surrendered there and then.

And that brings me round to the Hiroshima thing. Because as far as I'm concerned, it was their own fault. If they had surrendered, their people would have been saved. So I object to the atmosphere sort of that's coming around towards us – I've noticed there's a feeling in the media and that, that somehow the West are villains. No, we weren't. Of course, it's true that we invented, or rather, that the German scientists had invented this fantastic weapon and no doubt America was quite keen in a way to try it out, but it would not have happened if they'd had the sense to surrender.

And I'm afraid I – from my point of view, I will never forgive the Japanese the prisoners of war because there were rules about prisoners of war, and I saw our prisoners of war when I was in Dis. They were walking home in the evening in their brown suits and they also had huts in Peckham Rye, the last one's still at Peckham Rye Common. And we put them to work in the fields. They were supposed to work, but properly work, and properly fed. I mean the Japanese just starved our men, worked them to death, and tortured them into the bargain. And then when they died they just left them where they are. Busy building their blasted railway, which is depicted in the film *The Bridge on The River Kwai*. Has anybody seen it? No. Of course not. Young people... have never.... you should see that film. David Lean film with Alec Guinness as the star. And it's a very good depiction of what happened out in the Far East. And they treated our – well, they were just evil to our troops – our Allied troops, all together.

I mean to torture them, to starve them, work them whilst they were starving, until they just dropped down dead.

It took until Tony Blair was in office and finally, that's one of the things I admired about him, although I'm not a Labour supporter, he did at least get them to come forward and apologise, not the Emperor, because he doesn't exist anymore, the Head of State actually – I can't remember if it happened in this country, I think it did happen in this country – so we're talking about in Tony Blair's period. Can't quite think which year that was, but you can look it up. And they actually, finally, apologised for the appalling treatment of his previous generation's people.

So, you know, I said when I met the Japanese at the first meeting we had at the Bubble. Of course, they asked me what I felt, of course, very very sorry for the people who died, obviously, because they were innocent citizens, but so were we. You know, we didn't start the damned war, we were innocent - thousands and thousands – millions died over here. We were very lucky to escape with our lives. So, you know, one hand you feel very sorry for innocent people whose appalling deaths, in a way, the best thing was those who died straight away because the effects lingered on in all sorts of deformities and what have you. And, personally I still, I still agree with us having nuclear weapons. My view is that it has kept the peace after the Cold War but that's just my personal opinion, and I see the tide of opinion is changing somewhat latterly and some of the political parties are wanting to get rid of Trident and that, but I think no, look how Russia's going, with Putin. He's not behaving well, we should keep our weapon, but would it do any good now – God knows. That's my feeling about keeping the weaponry, so, that's a sort of background to what you want to know and about as much as I can tell you, really. I don't know if there's anything else you want to know.

*VM: You said a lot of really interesting things. So how did the people around you, how did they feel about the Japanese?*

BW: They all cheered like mad, naturally! We had endured six years of intensive war, especially the Blitz. 76 nights on the run! We endured the bombing. And if you read, I'll show it to you, before you go, I've got a copy, a photocopy only, of a book which is now out of print which is called Bermondsey in War and it's a marvellous book and when you, the first 30 pages, it's only a little book, written by the librarian at the time, the Head Librarian, and when you read the first raid that happened just down the road in Dockland, where they bombed as madly as they could and then bombed the river, they had a flare path and then came back hour after hour, and re-bombed the poor people who were trying to do the rescuing.

I've read those first 30 pages and I just cried and cried because I could not – I was too young to have realised the Blitz started in 1940, and I was only three – and if Dad talked about it to Mum, I would not have heard. I had no idea of what – it was unbelievable, even now, I can hardly believe the mayhem of people trying to get in what was a narrow part of the landscape to rescue people, to man the gas, the water, while they were still being bombed over and over again – it's just incredible.

So you have to balance those experiences against our response to the atom bomb because for us, at last, the war was over. And the poor troops, those who survived, most of them were so shell-shocked they wouldn't even talk about their experiences when they got back. Many times I've seen their families interviewed on television. they say, did they talk about what went on, and no, they can't talk about it. But at least, if those that were still alive got back, there's another film in more recent times called Goodnight Mr Lawrence with David Bowie

in, and that's also set in the Japanese concentration camps. Because that's what they were, really, they were no better than Nazis really, except they weren't gassing them, they just put them to work instead and starved them to death. Pretty horrendous. Very mixed feelings from my point of view about the bombing in Japan.

But you can see why, I think, if you see the background, because six years is a long time and that Blitz, 76 nights on the run we were bombed incessantly. I mean, everlasting in the middle of the night, running – if it was early in the evening, we would go across – or late evening – we'd go across to the railway arches, which are still there, and you can see exactly where we were sheltering and the authorities brought in some hot drink and cocoa used to come in, and.. they used to come in with a big urn of cocoa and if it was later in the night, as it was on the night we were bombed out, then we would go down to the Anderson shelter. So, as I said, the war went on afterwards but that was intensive. Because Hitler turned his attentions elsewhere after he didn't – after he found he didn't quite get London as he'd hoped to.

Of course it was all against the rules of war, because he had an agreement with Churchill that he would not bomb civilians. But they did. And it's only these last twelve months, even this week I was reading in the Peckham Society, I didn't know that these planes that were coming back from their bombing, were firing weaponry on the children in the streets! In Southwark. I never knew that. It didn't happen to me. But they were firing, firearms, from the planes to children. My sister-in-law was fired upon, my old school chum told me she was too, in Peckham, with her sister coming over from lunchtime, coming home for lunch in the those days from school. And both of those girls escaped by jumping over a garden wall and then in the Peckham Society Newsletter quarterly magazine, I read just last week that they did the same thing in Peckham, and when went on and fired on children in Lewisham. Killed about thirty. Something evil. This is nothing to do with war. This is something wrong with the psyche, to fire on innocent citizens, and they were children. That's... I mean, I've just found that out. So it's pretty horrendous when you got to balance the scene of what's going on with us and the Germans. And then there were our troops out in the Pacific, against what happened to finish off the war. It was a bad way to finish it, but what – it would have gone on forever, I think, otherwise. So, anything else you'd like to ask me?

*VM: I wondered whether – I know you were very young when the bombs dropped –*

*BW: Six when I was bombed out.*

*VM: Did your friends, family or parents talk about how it was reported in the press, or what the Government said about it?*

*BW: No. No. There was very little media concentration in those days. You used to have paper, the Daily Mirror – I mean, we weren't in that sort of social category of people who read a lot of newspapers. I mean we were working class people, and so, we only had the wireless as it was called, to listen to. And of course the newsreel. When we went to the cinema, the newsreel would – but that was all we were told about. You mean – actually what happened in Bermondsey being reported, or you mean in general?*

*VM: In general, or the bombs dropping. [33:00]*

*BW: Well, we were kept informed of course by the newsreel because in those days people went to the cinema every week. And we did a story in Old Kent Road – that was our*

particular thing, if you excuse me one moment, I need to record the Archers [brief pause whilst Brenda records a programme]. Next question please.

*VM: Thank you, Brenda. You mentioned your views about nuclear disarmament now. But as you grew older, what as you grew older, what did you think about the protest movement?*

BW: I joined. I joined CND. And it was the result of a film. I was mad on film, always have been, since I was eight. I was already writing to Culver City in America, the film studios, enquiring about their films and asking for photos. And that's of course what I've ended up with, still doing it— next month, June, I'll be doing a presentation about Jerry Epstein, with my friend Frank from America who is – he's a professor at Arkansas University, concentrating with film. I'll always be involved with film, it's just my life, it always has been, but theatre as well.

Now what was your question? Having a senior moment, forgotten what you said. Oh yes – protest movement. I went to see a film – must have been late 50s or very early 60s, I think it was late 50s in Lewisham Odeon, Lewisham Gold- that's right, right on the roundabout there, and it was called – The Day The Earth Caught Fire. Occasionally it pops up on television and it was filmed in the Daily Express offices, the offices of the newspaper the Daily Express (35:30) and it was showing the results, fictional thing of course, but nevertheless very very good film, and it showed the results of letting off atomic weaponry. It threw the Earth off its axis – I think – I can't remember, it was so long ago – and I think there was more than one explosion. People were having tests across the globe and it led up to something you may or may not have heard of, I think it was in the 60s, round about the time that Khrushchev and Kennedy were around, and we ended up with something called the Test Ban Treaty because we had to save the planet, and I mean although it was fictional, I assumed it could have happened and we were spinning out of control, spinning towards the sun.

Marvellous film, I can remember it now. Of course it gave extra heat to England, and at first people were delighted, oh nice and warm, having a heatwave, lovely and it showed you all the jollification that was going on, people lying out on the lawn and sunbathing and all of that, until they realised that the water supply was drying up, and gradually it was descending into mayhem and it brought the nations together. It took this disaster to bring them to conference table and they decided the only thing that might save the planet was an experiment, of course, to let off another explosion in a particular angle that would shoot it away from the Sun.

I can't remember if the film had a happy ending or not, I can't remember if it was open-ended, if you didn't know if it worked, I really can't remember that. What I do remember is coming out, and CND being outside the cinema with their, and this is quite important, because I don't think many other people will tell you this, and they were recruiting people. And we were actually hyper having seen this dreadful, dreadful film, which all seemed quite feasible and we signed up. I never went on any marches, but yes, certainly signed up and you know, and sort of, until – it's disappeared now, hasn't it CND, kind of, I don't know if it exists any more. Do you know if it exists? Does it, does it still, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament?

*RD: I think they'll be more prevalent in the news with this focus on whether or not to renew Trident.*



BW: That is the big issue at the moment, isn't it? Of course, it's a very old model. I don't know whether they, the Government, the next Government, whoever they might be, will update it. So yes, I did that, that was all I did.

*VM: Brenda, could we just go back a little bit to when you were being recruited. When they recruited you, could you tell me a little bit more about that, how old you were?*

BW: Late 50s, 1947, '57, early 20s. Very early twenties. About 21, 22. I had a Welsh boyfriend at that time. We both signed up. I remember that. He came from Colwyn Bay yes, so. I remember that happening, as a result of the film you see. Because that's how things can work you know, for some good. Films that have a good message and are very well produced. If you ever see it come up early in the day on television, although it might be very late at night, it was on just a few years ago, and it's called, with all your computers and everything you can probably find it anyway, called *The Day The Earth Caught Fire*; very, very good film. Excellent. And that was in the Daily Express office. Because it was all about how they were reporting it, you see. Leo McKern starred in it and someone called Edward Judd. Very good actors. Yes. Yeah.

*VM: And could you tell me a bit about your activities as part of this movement?*

BW: Nothing. I didn't do anything.

*VM: Could you tell me a little bit more about why that was? Why did you feel that way?*

BW: Because I was doing all the things I've already mentioned to you, all those other activities as well as going to work. So I wasn't an activist in that way, but I supported the cause, yes. Well, anybody would, wouldn't they?

*RD: Before you saw this film, what was your opinion of the CND?*

BW: Well, I mean I can remember seeing these marches on the newsreel regularly, and I thought, is there any point really? I didn't deplore it, didn't support it particularly. Nothing. Just noted it, and thought, you know, is there any point? Because most of these activists don't usually get what they want. I mean, look at the huge march about anti- Iraq and the Government ignored them, didn't they? Nothing usually happens as a result of these protests. People protest year after year. Nothing happened. But what didn't happen was good. Because we didn't have any more nuclear wars. So as far as I'm concerned, there's some good here, but at least I could see that the best way was to disarm rather than to frighten each other to death, which is what the situation was. If you do that to us, we'll do that to you – like that, you know. Eyeball to eyeball. And my hope was that the CND would win and we wouldn't have a complete disaster. All that we got in the end – Macmillan government – we got the Test Ban Treaty, which at least was something. Now of course India is testing nuclear weaponry underground in recent years, and of course our big fear is Iran may well follow suit. So we still got the threat hanging over us. So it's still a dangerous world, very much so.

*VM: Could you tell me a little bit more about how you felt about the Test Ban Treaty at the time, what were your feelings about it?*

BW: Well, we were waiting with baited breath to see if it would happen. Cos this is where the, what was it, the Kennedy and Khrushchev together when they were eyeball to eyeball in the early 60s, and there was nearly a final battle there – I keep thinking the Bay of Pigs, but the Bay of Pigs was Kennedy's own war, oh dear.... It was when they were trying to, can't remember the detail, I'm getting old... you must know the history. The American history. Khrushchev. You must know about it, surely. Or don't you?

*RD: The name's just slipped from my mind. I've been talking about it all week.*

BW: You know the situation, bringing the – Cuba!

*RD and VM: Cuban Missile Crisis.*

BW: Cuban Missile Crisis. That political thing has finished, I should start this recording. Recording the Archers, yes, that's ok. Yes, Cuba. Yes. And of course, that was very, very focused in on that. We were all frightened out of our lives, you know. Khrushchev backed down eventually, thank God. So I think we'll have this again with Iran ere long. I can see it happening. But this is what happens, and of course Putin is really throwing his weight around in Europe and causing mayhem in Ukraine. And doesn't show any signs of mellowing, so I think we're in for – we could be in for more problems in that area. I don't think he would care two hoots about throwing a few bombs around.

*RD: Speaking of the Cuban Missile crisis, can you explain how this fear would manifest itself day to day? Was it something that was always in the back of your mind?*

BW: Well yes, because the Government had already installed various documentary programmes shown in cinemas and that, and pamphlets came round about reinforcing, how to save your life, should there be a nuclear attack. Right through the Cold War, we were always fearing a nuclear attack. And nothing happened round here, I mean in some parts of the country, they did build their nuclear shelters in the back garden and you were told - actually funnily enough, the most recent time I've seen any reference to that is in the recent, very good series, called Call The Midwife. Heard of it? Excellent. Period piece, and when it came towards the end of that six episodes, you came into the 50s, and then you saw some of the adverts and the wardens who were going round and informing people what to do about protecting themselves, and I thought oh God yes, I remember, I remember that, yeah... and there were these films shown, that sort of thing. So, although we'd got through the main war we were terrified all the time - they called it the Four Minute Warning that's right, that's all we would have, is four minutes to get to these bunkers which actually didn't exist, certainly not round here. They'd had them in other parts of the country, but not here, so we had nowhere to go. We were very, very frightened, going about our business but worrying all the time, will this four minute warning happen? They were awful times. That was the early 60s, late 50s, early 60s, until we finally got the Test Ban Treaty, and things seemed to calm down after that. So that was a bad time, yeah.

*RD: Were you satisfied with this advice the Government was dishing out about how to survive a nuclear war?*

BW: We would have been satisfied if it had appeared on our doorstep, yes! I mean there was nothing to go to. Supposed to be building bunkers. Perhaps they did. We never saw any. So

no, we weren't satisfied. We were terrified. As you would be. Four minutes... where are you going to go in four minutes? The only thing we had was the remainder of the shelters that were still in our garden from the previous war, so we had that to go to. But I don't think it would have been any use at all for nuclear and anyway, everything would be poisoned. You wouldn't be able to eat or drink water, it would be at best, a slow death. Probably better to be killed outright. So yeah. Not nice.

*RD: Was this fear something you spoke about with your friends and family, or was it kind of internalised?*

BW: I think we did what we did in the Blitz, we just got on with our lives. Every time there was a mention of it on the news, because we had television by then of course, any mention of it and you just got frightened again and tried to just wipe it out of your mind and carry on, perhaps it might never happen, and it didn't, it didn't happen. I mean, I was at that age where I was busy enjoying myself. I was 20 – early 20s – and your focus on that time of your life is going out, although I still as I said was working in a political way, I've always done something interesting, that's serious, but, and, doing my acting as well, and of course having boyfriends, obviously, and that's where your focus lies. But it's at the back of your mind, at the time.

*VM: How did that affect your political activity?*

BW: I just carried on with what I was doing. I've always been more to the right than to the left, and I detested the Labour in those days because they still had Clause Four, which was communism. And that was one of the features of the Left; we used to have discussion groups, very civilised, with the young socialists, we were the young Conservatives, and they used to come and have these meetings. I mean, the men were much – they were very very clued up, they had good education, the chaps down there – grammar school like myself, and they knew what they were talking about. And I always remember that was what it came down to – and I remember one of them saying once, it doesn't matter whether you go through the East End over Tower Bridge or through the tunnel, you end up in the same place. And that is Clause 4. It doesn't matter what you call it, it's communism. And the first thing that Tony Blair did, I knew that would happen, cos I'm interested in astrology and I could see that he would be the rebel, it's in his chart, I wonder what he'll rebel against, and the very first conference he had before he actually became Prime Minister, he deleted Clause Four. That was his first ... I thought good, good for you. You've done something so that they can have freedom of speech and not be sat on by the unions. Because they were running the show.

*RD: And when you say you were so against this communism Clause 4, was that because it was linked in your mind with the Russians?*

BW: Yeah! Course. I've always been for free speech. That's why I'm so interested in what Farage has got to say, but I'm not a racist. I'm the only English person here, I get on fabulously with my neighbours, and they come from all across the globe. I've always had foreign friends but the sheer quantity of numbers are invading the housing market, there's no question of it, and what you've got to remember and people have only just started talking about it, I thought about it three or four years ago, not the numbers that are coming in, but how many children they will produce. The numbers are irrelevant; it's the numbers down the line that will make the difference. And we have precious little space and money to build

enough houses even for our own people, without being absolutely swamped with numbers. Tony Blair's –worst thing he ever did at the end of his blinking brain was the open door policy, he had no idea of how many going to come here, they got the numbers completely wrong, they admit it now, it's too late.

And only last week I read that 80%, no that's housing, not at the time, about three years ago, the biggest number of births in this country was Polish. These are the figures. This is not emotional claptrap. These are the hard facts. They're outnumbering us and just a few days ago, there was another piece in the newspaper, an official body – I can't remember, it wasn't a political thing – an official body – 80% of the new houses for newcomers, 80% are for immigrants. That's too much. We haven't got enough money for this awful mess that Labour left us in when they finally finished office. We haven't got enough money to build fast enough to accommodate all the people who are coming here. The numbers have got to be reduced. But at least Farage has put a squib up the backside of the politicians who are in power, to make them worried that this man might get in! Finally they're going to look into it. But it might just be political claptrap, they might never do anything about it, I don't know. I don't know if they've got the will. And I think what he says is right, whilst we stay in the EU, we've lost control of the borders. We've not only got the people we're letting in, we've got the others who are coming in illegally. So I think the outlook is grim.

And this is the sort of fuel that fuels race riots. And in the end, people turn on each other. If they are short of space, and facilities, and opportunities for work and housing and all of that, it causes tensions. And this could lead to some very nasty situations whereas if you keep the numbers reasonable, people absorb nicely. As they should be. So, I think we're in for a difficult time in the years ahead, unless they can sort us out, but I've got no faith in the politicians sorting this out.

*VM: This is more of a big general question. So, looking on back on your life, what do you think the significance of the bombs dropping has been, from your perspective now?*

BW: Which bombs are we talking about?

*VM: The ones on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.*

BW: Well, as I say, I just feel very sorry for the people who had to suffer the ongoing symptoms for many, many years. I mean, in one way of looking at it, the lucky people were those who died instantly. But there were dreadful tumours, and cancers, and shocking outfall, and of course, one regretted that very badly. But there's nothing we could do about it. It was done. So, that's the sort of feeling it left me with, was that not so much regret but sympathy, really. But as I say, always in my mind will be what they did to quote, "deserve" it, if you like. And that's hard to overcome, because that's a negative emotion, you know, if you think, you bloomin' well deserved it, that's a very bad way to think, and I don't even like to go to that angle. My feeling is sympathy and let that be the overriding emotion. Just jolly glad at last they apologised but too late. And of course, it should be a warning to the Governments of what can happen if things get out of hand.

*RD: And do you think it's important or not to commemorate the atomic bomb within Britain?*

BW: I don't know. I really don't – depends how they do it, I suppose. Do you know what they're going to do? New information perhaps?

*RD: I think they're very low-key gatherings.*

BW: Because of people like me who've gone through the misery that led up to it, do you think? That might be the answer.

*RD: One of the questions that I have is –*

BW: What nationality are you, by the way?

*RD: Indonesian.*

*RD: What do you think that the commemorative events we have now are appropriate. I think, recently, the Battersea Peace Pagoda just does a quiet remembrance, and there's a cherry blossom tree on Tavistock Square where people do readings and get together to just –*

BW: About what subject?

*RD: Hiroshima bombs. Just so that it doesn't go out of memory, so that people remembers the devastation of what this weapon can cause.*

BW: Yes, so they don't do it again! You know, people like me, we don't want to ever see a bomb dropped anywhere else. I'd like to think that no one else would be trying them out, but I know that's not true. India have been doing it, and there's been great condemnation of them. I don't know whether they're still doing it, but certainly, up until about ten years ago, they were still doing it. So, the commemorations, I don't really know anything about the commemorations. I don't even know anything about the VE day, what they're doing about that. Do you know what they're doing about VE day. It's this week, isn't it? May, isn't it?

*RD: I'm not sure. But now that you've mentioned it, it was something I wanted to ask you about before actually. You've got this very strong memory of VE day, I was wondering how that compared to VJ day?*

BW: Well, it was just an ordinary day you know, at school, it was just the news... I can't remember any commemorations like we did with all the big march past for VE and all of that. And I was appalled again just to read, just again last week, in the Peckham Society, Stephen Bourne, you may know Stephen Bourne, he writes books about the black issue in our history. He's made films... he's got another book coming out, called Black Poppies, and I'm reading last winter's – I'm always behind reading these newsletters – and I was really appalled to read the history of the Commonwealth involvement in our wars, that they didn't have, I mean they signed up, it was King George V apparently, who asked for them to be given their own regiment, but when it came to the victory parade for the First World War, they weren't allowed in. I think that it is appalling, that the black Commonwealth people who'd fought alongside the mother country were not allowed to take part in the victory parade. But my recollection is that they took part in the victory parade in Second World War. But when I read this, just two pages in the book, I was appalled.

So, if you want to read it, it's called Black Poppies called Stephen Bourne, and I think I might well buy it, because I feel very strongly about the way black people have been treated who have come over here, but not in vast numbers by any means, I mean, we were so ignorant, there were these signs up after the first influx with the Windrush ship that brought

them, they tried to get lodgings, you had these signs, no Irish, no dogs, no blacks. There you are. And again, you see, this is the sort of thing that's badly handled, you get race riots. Got to handle immigration properly. Allow people to integrate properly. And again, you see, it was lack of housing. There hadn't been enough houses built after the war – so slow. And so, people were in boarding houses, they didn't want any extra people coming in, and people had not been used to seeing black people, they were a bit frightened of them, I think.

My family are different – my granddad who was a builder in Bermondsey, because I'm three generations of Bermondsey people in – he had a black friend, close friend, must have been a West Indian or African who come over here for the building trade. That was very rare, for a working class man to have a black friend! Quite a novelty, I should think. So it just shows you that if people integrated slowly, it can work, but not if they do what silly old Blair did with the open door policy, just allow floods and floods and millions of people to come, many of whom are very well-trained in their work, as my Lithuanian friends are upstairs, marvellous engineer, great friend to me, helps me tremendously, but they're not all skilled and this will always cause problems on the job market, as well as on the housing market.

No, I don't know what they're doing for VE day. I've been so swamped with my own problems; I've not taken a great deal of notice. I certainly don't know what they're doing about VJ day. They showed you, this week, something that I knew about, when the Queen as Princess Elizabeth with her sister, went out into the celebration hordes that were outside the palace, all in central London, and they slid out the palace, that's the only time she's ever been with the people – the nation – and in her uniform, obviously with friends, soldiers, the guards, and I didn't realise how far they went then, it was on two nights ago, called the Queen's big night out – what was I going to say? I've forgotten the point I was going to make.

Well, all I would say is that the pictures from that time were tremendous, a huge, numbers of people in central London. Going crazy and getting drunk and singing and shouting and dancing and what have you. Something – oh yes, I know what I was going to say. Right at the end, when it showed you what happened to the Queen – obviously she became Queen, and that was the end of the last, one night of freedom she had – and I have got the tape recording of her being interviewed about that, I've got a cassette of it, I tend to do quite a lot of recording, and she said that was the most memorable night of her life, you think she'd been crowned Queen, got married and had children – she still reckons that was one of the most memorable nights of her life! And it said at the end, what happened to Margaret, she really deteriorated, she abused her health and she had quite an early death.

And it mentioned about the war ending, and one elderly lady was interviewed, and all the presenter says in reference to the Japanese, of course the war went on for some months afterwards. I thought, oh yes, hello! Someone's woken up. And he just has an elderly lady on there, she says, a lot of people were not even aware, only the people who had the relatives, as I said earlier, who were out there, like she did, and were hoping to God they'd finish that end of the war and come back home. But he didn't make any mention of VJ day, or how long it took to have it. They've kept awfully quiet about it, the media. You must have noticed it yourself. I mean, they're swamped with this talk of VE day, but when will they ever put a programme on? I don't know why they're so quiet about it. Possibly because they feel uncomfortable about the way it ended. That's all I can think. But what I recommend to people, is, if you want to see the truth, see those two films I mentioned to you, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, that's K-W-A-I, they made those poor prisoners of war build the railway, Burma to something – I've forgotten the name of it now. But that film is a feature film, and *Goodnight Mister Lawrence* was also very good, it was on a more personal angle, regarding his relationship with his captors. David Bowie was very good in it, people don't realise

Bowie was an actor as well as a pop star. He was a good actor. So, I can't mention anything more about VJ day because I don't know any more than you do what's going to happen.

*RD: Thank you very much. It's been very interesting talking to you.*

BW: Has it?

*VM: Absolutely! It's been really great.*