

**After Hiroshima Project**  
Jean Browne interview transcript

Interviewee: Jean Browne (JB), D.O.B. March 1929  
Interviewer: Ilias Pantazis (Ilias) and Ruth Dewa (RD)  
Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015

*Ilias: So, what can you tell me about the bomb? Do you remember it?*

JB: Yeah...I didn't see the thing happen, but I'd come in from work 'cause that was...years ago wasn't it. Watching the news, and they were saying about it, and you couldn't imagine it. As as I've put on there, the devastation of it was worse than all the earthquakes, floods 'n' landslide 'n' that all combined. Never seen anything like it. And the people weren't all dead. Was all skinned off and off, hobblin' along and legs, and for years and years and years there's been loads of them dying off of it, still from the effects of that bomb. And there wasn't a thing standing, you couldn't believe it, it was just...all gone. How they ever did it in the first...I mean they warned about it, but I mean how they ever let it happen. Can you imagine now? What happened now if they was to start that sort o' thing again, and now they're talking now about these missile things ain't they. So it is a bit worrying.

(1.37) As I said those poor people there. And now I, I must admit the Japs were terrible in the war, very vicious, but I mean you wouldn't wish that on anybody would you? I mean, that was only kids and women and old men and all that sorta thing. It wasn't actually the people that was causing the trouble. So do, it makes you wonder. But as I said, well, if you'd actually seen it happenin' on the telly, I don't think you could've believed your eyes. And now...not until recently, a few years back they were still telling you about these people, that were still dying off from the effects of that bomb. Yeah... and they was gonna do...I don't think they dropped the second one did they? They did the first one and they threatened to drop another one...and I think that's when they sort of surrendered and said no, that's enough. Which was enough, fancy if they'd dropped another one?

*RD: They, yeah, they dropped two.*

JB: They did drop two?

*RD: Yeah, they had ten planned, then dropped two, and that's when they surrendered.*

2.48 JB: Ohhhhh...I saw the first one, and I know they was threatening the second one, but I never saw that. Bloody good job too, one was enough, wasn't it? But um, and then you get all that, and all that agony there, and then that other lot in um, Vietnam, with that napalm bombs and that, oh, the state of those people. It was terrible what they did to 'em wa'n't it? Terrible. I dunno. And what happens now? There's five times as many people now. Five times...yeah... So. That. I couldn't do much more for ya, cos that's what I actually saw and what I actually heard.

*Ilias: Well, no, don't worry, I mean...*

JB: ...And the feeling you know

*Ilias: So you first saw it on television, I mean, you remember that?*

**3.44** JB: Mmm, yeah. It was an old black and white telly mind you, a little one.

*Ilias: Yeah*

JB: But they actually showed it to you

*Ilias: So, you saw photographs of the mushroom cloud and the people?*

JB: We did see the cloud, but then it didn't actually show you the full thing of it goin' on the telly. It was the devastation afterward that you saw most of, y'know. But, um, as I was saying, it wasn't a thing you'd rush home to see, let's put it that way. Mmm.

*Ilias: So did you feel happy when it happened because it ended the war? Or you felt really bad about it?*

JB: Really bad about it. It...it should never've happened. There must be other ways to do things like that, must be. But you dunno not to think about now do you? They reckon the Russians are putting planes over 'ere, there...there big boats going up the river, they watching everything. And they've got everything. Did you see those Russians on that telly last week or the week before? Millions of 'em, millions of 'em, all marching and everything...

*Ilias: In Moscow? In Moscow?*

JB: Mmm

Ilias: Yeah, yeah.

**(5.02)** JB: Yeah. So they're all there just the same. But um, well [chuckles] as I said, with the bombs, the first bomb, the doodlebugs thing, you 'eard it comin'. This...the first one of them that come over, I happened to be standing at the street door of the house, and my dad was there an' all for some reason. I said to him look, that plane's on fire, and we stood there watchin' it and all o' a sudden flame went out, and you got the big bang, and everythin' on our side of the road was flattened. And then, when this second bomb started, it never made a sound, you didn't hear it comin', you just suddenly heard this bang, and it'd knock a whole block of houses down in one bash. It's...what they can do is unbelievable innit really, it really is. If you're that way minded. But this is all experience for me, see, you've got all these memories [chuckles], that's like I was saying the other day, there's loads and loads of things that sorta come back to you from when you was a kid, but they're things, kids today are never going to see anything like that. None of the

kids today have got memories because all they've got is dot dot dot. They don't read, they don't play, they don't do anything do they, just sit with their damn computers. And especially now, they're even giving them to babies of a year old to keep 'em quiet. It's bad en't it.

**6.48** *Ilias: So how do you remember the Japanese? Do you remember them during the war, I mean...*

JB: Only, what I know that they did, and I had an uncle who was in that war with the Japs, in that jungle thing and that...and he suffered with that malaria, was it they called it? All the years of his life that he was left, even when he was old, he was always ill. He died eventually. But when you see him and others like that that suffered the same thing, and especially if they were prisoners and they was fed on rats and that sort of thing y'know. It was dire. They were...they were pigs those Japs. But then again, look how they got on, top of the world a little while ago, wern' they. See. Don't pay to be nice [laughs]. I'm too old in the tooth, really, en't I, we remember a lot of rotten things [laughs] as well as good things. I was saying to nurse the other day, because, when that war was in, we used to have an old tin shelter they gave you to put in the back garden, so it was only about as big as this table. And there was 1..2..there was six kids of us, and this sort of shelter, and we all had to lay on a mat on the floor in the shelter like. And there was a bunk there, and a bunk there, so that mother stayed there, my dad was in the army, and the oldest sister could sleep on the one that side, and all the rest was on the floor covered up with coats [chuckles]. Of course, you couldn't get out of the shelter to go to the loo or anything, so they had to have a little pot down there for the kids, and uh, suddenly we happened this night, the planes was over, the bombs was dropped and suddenly we could 'ear this tick tick tick, oh we thought it was a time bomb, so my mum had to get out that shelter and go and walk in the dark to find where this tick was comin' from and it was lucky it was water from the overflow dropping on a bit o' paper [laughs] in her panic she upset this pot and it went all over my coat [laughs]. So, the next day before I could go to school she had to get out, she had an Astrakhan coat, she had to cut it down so I could put it on to go to school in. Silly things like that, what keeps coming back y'know.

**(9.12)** But um, and I said, 9 o'clock you knew you had to go down that shelter [chuckles]. Then somebody gives you a tin box thing to go under the table, and uh but you'd be trapped, it would be like putting in a cage y'know. If a bomb fell you wouldn't move the thing, you wouldn't get out of it. And the babies used to go in a tunnel thing, and you used to pump. All funny stuff really, but it wasn't funny at the time I spose was it? Not for the grown ups, no... So you were going home feeling old so you would when you come in here. So yeah...

*Ilias: Where was this shelter you're talking about? Was it close to your home?*

JB: Yeah, you had a bit of a garden, and it had been buried in the middle of the garden bit, y'know. So you sort of come out the door and had a few steps to get into the...and uh there was no door, or anything, just had an old wooden door leaning over it like y'know. And about and there was about 8 inches of dirt over the top of it, and you could beautiful

radishes you could grow on that dirt on the top of that shelter, surprising ain't it?...I don't know....

**(10.40)** And before that, well, [laughs] before that war started, poverty was terrible [chuckles] but then, everybody was the same, you didn't notice any different, did you? Take your dad's shoes off Friday night and go and get them out Monday morning [laughs]. In the pawn shop. Pawn shops only take bloody good watches now don't they? They don't take junk [laughs]. It's all life, when you look back on it it was funny really. But um...I suppose you've grown up in luxury or t'other.

*RD: Relatively, yeah*

JB: Yeah, but look what you've missed [laughs]. Well, well I suppose I better go back, they won't know where I've been, I told them I've been at laundry.

*RD: Do you mind if we just ask you a few questions about the period after the war?*

JB: Yeah, what sort of questions?

*RD: I'll hand over to Ilias*

**11.43** *Ilias: Yeah, I was wondering if you remember the... the peace movement and the CND and the Ban the Bomb protests, this type of stuff?*

JB: Oh yeah, I remember, I remember 'em, but I don't remember seeing much about them, they used to be on the telly and that sort of thing didn't they, but uh, was never inclined to watch that sorta thing. No. And those different protests and that that they've had up there for different things, and that y'know. Some of them I say, yeah, but I mean, a lot of the things that happened there was because they um, that American bloke, and that bloke who had the [unclear], no can't remember the name, can't remember their names. But those two were prime ministers or summat like that, and they caused a hell of a lot of the trouble, a hell of a lot of the trouble. And they got away with it. And there was one, one, when they was goin'...wasn't it Iran or someone? And they said they was doing...making a bomb, and this scientist went out there and was inspecting, and they kept saying 'oh, no, no, no' and that scientist was only murdered, and they found him in the park, and they done that to keep him quiet, because, he'd seen things and they wouldn't admit it. So there's things like that have gone on a long time if you get to the nitty gritty of it. And then that thing's over here now in this election, I can't remember his name now, shouting the odds. And they were the worst ones we ever had in there. But there you are, that's the way it goes.

**(13:29)** But look at it hows it is now, couldn't believe this Labour caper, I felt so sorry for that Ed Balls, or what his name was...that one with the limp, he had a lisp didn't he? And he worked wonders between first time you saw him and heard him speak to when he actually tried to get the thing, he'd done very well, because he was speaking a lot clearer wasn't he? Yeah... and when they took the rise out of him because he couldn't eat that

bacon sandwich properly, I coulda killed them, I could – it's not right is it! No. And then he made that speech, and I suppose he got a bit excited or somethin', and there must have been a low step there and he'd forgotten, and he tripped a bit, and they started again, I coulda killed them [laughs]. I coulda killed them cos I felt so sorry for him because he had the guts to stand up there in the first place didn't he. So, I think they had no right to criticise him like that [chuckles].

(14.36) And this fella we've got now, I call, I've always called him 'the jelly baby' [laughs] because when he first started there he'd say 'so and so and so and so starting from tomorrow', yeah. He'd speak to the union, no, if you want to change it all everything he said he had to change within the first two weeks. And I said he's a jelly baby, and now when he starts about this immigration thing, you wait and see what happens. They'll tread him down like that, and he'll give in again. He's useless [laughs]. Yes... so there you are, you've learnt a few other little bits there that might make your discussions a little bit more extra [laughs].

(15.29) *RD: When you mentioned earlier the kind of apprehension with the Russians, and I was wondering if that is a kind of uh, a long term thing and post Second World War and the kind of Cold War period, was there a, was there a genuine, um, fear of the Russians?*

JB: No. A genuine annoyance, because instead of staying back until the others got into Berlin, they got in first, and they took their own ground and they built the wall, and they stuck with it. So, anyone what was behind that wall didn't have an earthly chance, I mean those that tried to come over it was all killed, so. When actually that wall come down, and they all mingled up together again it seemed to be alright, but uh, they was a terrible lot really, behind that wall they could do what they wanted. Mmm. So...as I say, they could rise again, there's so many of them, they got so much stuff, and to send their planes over here, and boats up the river, it's getting a bit far isn't it. You don't know...

*RD: And were you worried that they had an atom bomb?*

(16.45) JB: I wouldn't be surprised if they have got an atom bomb, I wouldn't be surprised at all, because they're that type, and they've got they, they've got the brains there, they've had the brains there all the time. So...I think if they was to push it they could take the world, but they don't want all this lots fighting out there. That is diabolical isn't it, all this... what'd they call them? Supposed to be religious... um... not Muslims... the whole lot of them are fighting out there, it's just murder isn't it, just sheer murder, and what's it all about? Religion. How can you say anything about believing in God when you've got all that going on that's supposed to be religion. It's a nightmare. And it's going on and it's getting worse innit, cos they're going...all these people are getting drowned in droves, and what happens? I mean, half of those people now they're gonna to send them over here 'cause there's nowhere else to put 'em. Italy, I don't know what they're doing, and Greece, well, Greece is borrowing right, left and centre, so they're not gonna want them are they? [laughs] It's a terrible thing, I dunno. There's too many people in the world, and to be perfectly honest I think it's on the way out. I really do. I think it's all gonna blow up before very long. So bad, can't go much worse.

**18.18 RD:** *And you use this term 'blow up'. What's your opinion on nuclear weapons nowadays.*

JB: That's probably is what's gonna do it, for one reason or the other, someone's gonna let go of one of them, and the whole lot'll go. There's got to. There's too many people anyway, they won't be able to live the way it keeps going. I mean, there's one baby born every minute I reckon, and that's white ones, with the coloured ones you might get about 20 every minute [chuckles]. And you see all them out there, all those ones on them boats, they've got babies and little kids and all that. Too many people. There won't be enough to feed them all, they're anything else, I mean, half of them living in tents aren't they. So. And all the buildings that are knocked down they're gonna have, they'll have to have a hell of a lot of money to replace them, which they never will do. So...I think we're on the way out, but it won't be soon, it'll take a bit more time, but I'm sure it'll end before very long. Not before I'm 90 in 4 years time, cos they've arranged a party [laughs]. So, well I better go, cos my old man's gonna say 'I thought you was in the laundrette'. I had to make out I was going in there to get out. I'm like a little prisoner [chuckles] only cos I can't walk [laughs]. I said a while ago, my daughter came up and she said 'oh well I've booked the holiday for August't, and he said, 'there's no more holidays for you, you're not going on anymore holidays', but it's already booked I'm going [laughs]. I have to take a trolley though, but um, she's brought a wheelchair, but I'm not going in a wheelchair, I'll just take the trolley and walk along with the trolley. So, I thoroughly enjoyed it last year, I saw everything I wanted to see. Mind you, I push the trolley, I'm bent over it, but at least I saw what I wanted to see, and done what I wanted to do. So, I'm looking forward to August [laughs]. If I could get up and down stairs or walk on me own, I'd go away very often, about every month for two weeks [laughs]. But I can't...I said to her...outside there, I said we'll have to go out and have a look cos I can't really tell you where it is, and we got out that far and I couldn't move so we had to go back.