

Nuclear Culture Project

Interview with Vera Jeffers Transcript – 11/4/2011:

Sarah: I will just press the buttons, there we are I think we are good to go. That should all be ok.

Vera: Yes that's fine.

Sarah: Brilliant. So... I don't want to make this too formal but you know, it's all just a chat but if you want to just tell me a little bit about yourself, so... your name is Vera and if you just like to say, just kind of.... If just tell me a little bit about yourself.

Vera: So you want me to tell you about me?

Sarah: Yes...just about you.

Vera: I was born in Anfield in Liverpool and erm I had a brother then, he was born four years afterwards, it was only the two of us. My father had been discharged from the army in 1916, he had been badly gassed and couldn't continue so they discharged him and he was always in and out of hospital and of course in those days it was hard to find a job so he was mostly unemployed. He would get a job, try and get a job, and he would be in it for a few months and then he would be in hospital so they would sack him and take someone else on. That's the way he was. And he would get very down I believe. My mother always said to me that my politics followed what happened to my father. He became very bitter with the way he was treated when he came out the forces. Anyway he died when I was six and my brother was two. My mother was a widow then and we had a pretty tough time because there was no benefits like there is now. My mother got ten shillings a week for herself, five shillings for me and three shillings for my brother and I remember one of the houses we lived in, the rent was twelve and nine pence and she had to take that out of the eighteen shillings that she got. And only for the family, my grandmother, my aunts and uncles, I don't know how we would have managed, how my mother would have managed, we were quite stretched when it came to buying anything but fortunately my grandmother and my aunt and my uncle were very kind to us, very good to us. I will tell you a funny thing, the parish man used to come round and he came round to see every now and then to see if you bought anything, or done anything and if you have he would ask you where you got the money from.

Sarah: Really?

Vera: Yeah. And sometimes... he told us we had to...mother had bought a gramophone and paid a shilling a week for it on the hire purchase. And she had to sell it; he said you don't need one of those. He says you can sell it. We got no money for a few weeks and we had to live on the proceeds.

Sarah: Really?

Vera: Yeah. It was like that. These days you see young girls who have had babies and insist in having a new pram and they are just given to them. We couldn't have done that in those days. So we had a pretty tough time and then my mum married again when I was ten. She married a

man with five children but she didn't know he had five children until the week before they got married.

Sarah: Oh my.

Vera: She thought he just had two. And a few weeks before the wedding he'd brought the two oldest to introduce them to my mother but he didn't say anything about the others.

[Both Laugh]

Vera: As it happens at that time it was....there was a bad case of diphtheria going around Liverpool. An epidemic you know. A lot of children were dying. I got it and I was in the fever hospital and had been in. It was winter when I went, I can't exactly say when, but I know it was very dark when I went in and it was only round tea time, I went in the ambulance to the hospital. I was in ages and ages and I was supposed to come home and then they discovered there was another girl in the ward who had scarlet fever so we all had to stay in quarantine for another three weeks.

Sarah: Oh my goodness.

Vera: Yes. And then the day came and they came and said to me your going home today and your mum will be here for you and oh I was delighted ... because we didn't have visitors in fever hospitals in those days. They could look through the window at you but they could go into see you. So I had not seen my mother at all and my mother said she had been but she didn't let me see her because she knew I would cry. I was nine then, I was ten before I came out of hospital and the day I came out, a stranger came for me.... and I was...{ thinking} where is she taking me because we were going in a different direction to what I lived, but eventually we got to a new corporation house that my mother had moved into. And it was the day she was getting married. She got married and all the guests, the wedding was being held in the house, and I wanted know who they all were, all these strangers you know. They were mostly my step father's family because he was one of fifteen children.

Sarah: One of fifteen?

Vera: He was the oldest of fifteen children. And they had children some of them and he had five. So I was introduced to my step brothers and sisters I had two step brothers and three step sisters then. And we had to wait for all the grown-ups to sit down and have their meal and in then end all the children sat down. It was very strange I didn't know them, you know nobody had introduced us or said anything. Children in those days, it was true, you were seen and not heard you know. And you daren't say anything. And the next thing this lady came back again, her name was Mrs {Bloomy} and... oh as soon as I saw her I thought oh gosh what's happening and she come in with my coat and that and I said 'where are we going are you taking me back?' She said no you're going to convalescence. She took me to Freshfield to a convalescence place. I was there for a fortnight and I really felt that nobody wanted me. I felt as though I was in the way. And I didn't know... it hurt me that the brothers and sisters were all staying and I was being sent away again. It was an awful feeling. And anyways that was my childhood and my main things. When I was about...how old? About nineteen and just not long had my son when my stepfather died. We lived at home because there was a

shortage of housing just after the war. And after a while we were allocated a {prefer?} on East Lancashire Road. Oh it was lovely. We were made up with that. It was really nice. And Pat had been in Navy during the war. He came home from the navy.

Sarah: Pat sorry is that your....?

Vera: Pat was my husband. He was in the navy but he was on merchant ships. He was a gunner. And the merchant ships when they went out in convoys.....what had you know erm guns on you know also the ar ar is it the ones who were soldiers as well?

Sarah: Oh right yeah

[Laughs]

Vera: They were on as well. He had some awful experiences with that because he was mostly on foreign ships. He said the food was terrible. You know he would go and join the queue in the galley and we would get something and just the look of it would turn you off. He said we'd go to the side and tip it over. [Laughs] It was terrible. But anyway he came out the navy and er with what money he got when he came back, he and his friend decided to open a butchers shop.

Sarah: Oh right.

Vera: So they did. And we still rationed of course. And the very first week it opened the quantity of meat they got was fifteen pound in money. And it was rationed by erm...you know you got a six pence on your ration book, six pence worth of meat or something like that. Well the very first week we opened the ration was reduced to six penny worth of meat. So that mean it went down to seven pound ten.

Sarah: Oh my.

Vera: We had seven pound tens worth of meat to give to about thirty forty customers, to share it out. We did without because we were so in need you know some people only were only getting one {chop} so we had that. And sausages you couldn't buy them, they were not on the ration. So when the butcher had sausages there was a queue a mile long and he would only give them to his regular customers. But you didn't have very few .You would just get six or seven sausages standing in a queue for an hour or so. And... but there was nothing else only tinned soups and things like that.

Sarah: So what type of dates was this?

Vera: This was erm....Pat came out the army..{it was early 1946 47}, That's the year I had my son he was born in 1947. And...erm what happened then? We eventually got the {?} flat and that was lovely. But Pat had to travel to work. It was over the water on the Wirral the shop. And the rationing was bad. Pat was borrowing other people's ration books to try and get a bit more. They were letting him do that, he was paying them. Black market it was. {?} But in the end the fridge broke and we needed two hundred pound to repair it, and we just didn't have any money, so we just packed it in. He gave it up and he went to one of the colleges and started to learn welding. He became a welder then. He went to work in one of the factories

as a welder and he did that for the rest of his life. So erm.. after a while I became ill. I got T.B and I was in hospital for sixteen months.

Sarah: My Goodness.

Vera: And my mother had to have John. And John was just...he was about eleven months old when I went to hospital.

Sarah: Yeah.

Vera: And I was in for sixteen months. He couldn't come into see me but my mother used to bring him to the railings and when I was allowed up on a few hours a day, I could go down to the railings and see him through them. But he didn't know me after a while, he didn't know who I was. He would cry for my mother to pick him up and go home. It was an awful miserable thing. But eventually got this job. I stayed home until John went to school and then I went and got a job as {...?} clerk. To begin with my job when I first went to work. I was fourteen when I left school. I was a window dresser in a lovely shop in Bold Street. Countess of Mayo it was called. And it was the Countess of Mayo. She sold her name to Mr Hughes to use in the shop. It was lovely the outside of the shop. It had a {coronet} it was all cream and gold you know a gold coronet and Margret Countess of Mayo was the name of the shop. And we sold beautiful things. Most of the stuff came from France. Yeah.

Sarah: That was when you were fourteen you said?

Vera: That was in Bold Street, number 76 Bold Street. But erm what happened? Mr Hughes died soon after I left. I got called up then when I was seventeen. Seventeen and a half. I got called up and I had to give up the shop and I went to work on... they offered me the trams, to be on the tram cars. The only place they had in the forces was in the NAFFY, they didn't have any other things. One of my friends who had been called up just before me, She'd gone in the NAFFY thinking it would be like the army, you know nice. And all she did was scrub out canteens all day and all night. She said she'd would no sooner be finishing and as soon as the suits would come in they would make a muck everywhere and you would have to do it all again. She was very lady like and had lovely hands and nails, and her hands were terrible. She said don't do that. So I had the choice of munitions, doing that, or going into the NAFFY, or going on to war works so I choice war works munitions.

Sarah: Oh right ok.

Vera: We went to a training centre for about three months and then I went to the, it was automatic telephone exchange then, we went there but it had been taken over to make weapons and things for the army, for all the forces. At the end of the war ...it was towards the end of the war when I got called up you see.

Sarah: Yep.

Vera: It was erm... I was seventeen, it was 1925 when I was born. Are you any good at maths?

Sarah: I'm rubbish at maths I have got to say.

Vera: It must have been about 1943 or something like that. 1944. 1945 the war ended in Europe.
And I had John when I was nineteen.

Sarah: And what year was that?

Vera: Pardon.

Sarah: And what year did you have your son sorry?

Vera: 1947.

Sarah: 1947.

Vera: I was just coming onto twenty I think then. And what happened then? I was in hospital, I came out eventually. Pat had gone to college to do welding and went to work in a factory then and of course when John was five I got a job as well because we needed the money. We had no savings or anything like that. I stayed there for..... about 32 years.

Sarah: Oh really.

Vera: Yeah. What happened then? I was made redundant. The {Englishlict?} was closing down. It became GEC for a while and then it packed up all together. And.. one of our friends had said to us in the factory long before this she said are you in the paid pension, and we said no, and she said well you better start paying it. And we used to pay the smallest stamp for national insurance you know for married women and this girl was down with us and she said, pay your full amount, she said, because you might get made redundant, she said start now, start this week. So we started, and she said, if you last for another twelve months you will get the doll when you leave, while you find something to do, or you won't get anything. So we did that of course I was made redundant. So I went in to....I thought well although I had worked in an office, I had never typed and I thought well I won't get a job unless I can type. So I went to sight and sound and learned to type. [Laughs] And I was signing on this day and there was this girl {more about this girl} and she said to me and she said can you type? And I said yes but with no speed, and she said but you know the keyboard and I said oh yes and so she said would you like a job? It will only be a temporary job but would you like to have a go? So I said oh yeah. I said well what will I be doing? Typing? She said no she said you will be doing the punch operation, you know when they all come to sign on.

Sarah: Yep

Vera: You sign the thing and it goes through to you when you get a packet punch, type on the punching table....it goes onto Livingstone then and then they get the doll.

Sarah: Oh right ok.

Vera: So I did that and I ended up doing that for six years. But I had to leave for four weeks in the year because they couldn't employ me as a clerk because I didn't have any qualifications. But my boss used to say to me now don't get another job Vera because you will be back in four weeks. [Laughs] Don't get another job, he said I don't know why you haven't got any GCSE's, I said well I just didn't have the opportunity. I just went to work every day come

home and did my ironing and washing and every thing [laughs.]And anyway I lasted on that... but through that I thought well all these girls have GCSE's and I know as much as them. So I thought well I'm going to do something about this.

Sarah: [Interrupting] So that's when you joined.....

Vera: So I went to college then to second chance to learn and I have never looked back since then. I think I have done more since I was fifty than I have done all my life. And as I was telling you before we they get you here [talking about the care village which she lives in] to try and do things and keep going, try things you have never done before, which I did. Well you kept this log of what you did and they had to sign it. Somebody had to sign it from the staff and this was the first year I was here and guess what.

Sarah: What?

Vera: I won ...the going for gold.

Sarah: Oh did you?

Vera: And do you know what my prize was?

Sarah: What did you get?

Vera: A week in Las Vegas [Laughs]

Sarah: That's fantastic...wow.

Vera: Honest to God...yeah. And the year before, that was the first year this opened, the winners won a trip to the Olympics in Australia.

Sarah: Oh my goodness.

Vera: But all the villages take part in this and there is a winner in each village. So there was about twelve of us and we all met up down south. And then we joined... but we stayed a night in a hotel, then we joined a bus down to the airport and got on the plane. And we were all together then for the week. We had a marvellous time.

Sarah: That's fantastic, that really is.

Vera: Yeah.... So I have really had a good time since I have been here. Yeah.

Sarah: Going back to just....you know....

Vera: The war.....Oh sorry, sorry.

Sarah: No, no, no not at all...It's been lovely to hear.

Vera: Well you can cut that bit out.

Sarah: No, no don't worry about that honestly. It's been lovely to hear.

Vera: Well I will tell you about what I thought of the war work.

Sarah: Well...

Vera: [Continuing] it was very frightening. I was introduced to the...I went to the Government Trainee Centre first to learn reading micrometres, you know that's when you measure the things that make that, you are making to make sure they are up to the right part and that. And ...you had to set up a machine to make sure the oil was coming through and all that and to measure, use the instruments to measure the things to make sure the gauge was right and everything we were doing. The bosses used to come round and measure everything every so often. And if it was wrong you would have to stop, and reset the machine to match it to what they wanted you know. I was supposed to be learning to do that but they never got round to showing me. They were too busy. They want production. You couldn't stop. We did two weeks of days and two weeks of nights, when you were on nights you got a late pass once, for a fortnight and instead of being in for it, we had to be in at eight o'clock for and twelve hour shift. Eight o'clock at night until eight o'clock in the morning. And when you got the late pass you could come in at ten o'clock for one night only in the fortnight and then you worked until eight o'clock in the morning. And on days you worked the same, eight hours, we weren't off all day on Saturday we went half day. That was the only half-day we went and Sunday was treated as an ordinary day.

Sarah: Whatwhat type of date... was your involvement?

Vera: Well this was during, when I was... I was seventeen and a half when I registered, so when I was eighteen...so1925, 1935 I would be ten..., 1945 I would be twenty so it must be about 1943/ 1944.

Sarah: And you said your son was born in 1947?

Vera: Yes

Comment [S1]: BEGIN HERE!!!

Sarah: Because I was just thinking about ...you know when the atomic bomb went off in 1945. And how did you feel maybe in 1947 when you were having your son. Did that affect you in any way?

Vera: It worried me to death. I was terrified. I thought oh that's terrible. Soon after that there was another crisis started up over something. There was always crisis's at that time. There was trouble with...erm...Egypt. You know the people from Europe going to Egypt to live...the Jews. There was war going on there fighting or another, they sunk a ship didn't they with a lot of them on. A lot of refugees on. And once they dropped that bomb well I had the idea that that's what they were going to do in future. That would be what war would be about.

Sarah: And how did that make you feel then?

Vera: It made me very frightened and very fearful for the future and worried about my son.

Sarah: Did you feel worried when...

Vera: [Interrupts] oh yes, yes I did definitely. And I remember another crisis that worried me very much was the Suez Crisis. I mean I didn't know all the politics of it but I knew that the American's were supposed to be sending a ship with an atom bomb on it if they didn't sort out what they were arguing about. And I was saying my prayers all the time.

Sarah: Do you ever remember talking about it with your family or do you ever remember having discussions about it with anybody or neighbours?

Vera: No. My mother and father didn't get on. It wasn't a happy marriage. More often than not they were not speaking. My mother had a lot of cares and worries in life. The step children used to cause a lot of trouble. They resented my mother. I'm not just saying it because it's on my mother's side.

Sarah: No, No.

Vera: But they did. They used to go to their grandmothers and tell tales. The little girl, the youngest one, Sadie used to cry if my mother just looked at her she would start crying and she would jump up on her grandmother and say she had been picked on or something and it caused awful trouble. The only one of her step children who got on well with my mother was my step brother and he was killed during the war. He went down on the English Channel on a ship. He didn't go down... their ship was hit by a land mine. They hit a land mine rather. A lot of the bodies were missing but Billy's was washed up and there was about... I think there was about seventeen bodies washed up, but the rest were all missing. And he's buried in Penzance in a cemetery there, in a mass grave. I have got a picture of all the big stones you know. He must have been in a convoy at the time because...erm what was I saying? It was a merchant ship that he was on. So he must have been on a convoy with merchant ships in it. The grave next to his, I have never been to the grave but I have got a picture of it. The next stone to his is so and so the name of a boy, a cabin boy aged fourteen and a half.

Sarah: Oh my goodness...that's so sad.

Vera: Yes. So he must have been in the merchant navy on a merchant ship. Billy might not have been...Billy couldn't have been on a merchant ship because he was a mine sweeper and probably they were a bit ahead of the convoy and hit the mine first. Probably. The blast probably killed other people in the ranks as well. But I would like to go down and see that. I would like to go there to see it. We kept saying all through our lives that we would go down sometime but we never got there. No.

Sarah: Hmmm no...Do you ever remember speaking about it if not with family then neighbours about the bomb... or do you just remember hearing any stories or anything that you heard?

Vera: Well we were bombed out.

Sarah: No I mean the nuclear bomb.

Vera: What?

Sarah: I mean the nuclear bomb, you know... the nuclear bomb do you ever remember discussing... you were talking before about your fears and how you felt....

Vera: Oh you mean about the atom bomb?

Sarah: Yes.

Vera: And the funny thing was... I can't remember the name of it...but I read a book around about that time and it was about splitting the atom. This story of this book sort of inferred that if you split

the atom it would destroy the world. I had not long read that book so I thought that if we did the atom bomb again the whole world be destroyed.

Sarah: Do you remember the name of that book or?

Vera: I think it was something called....It was something to do with splitting the atom because that is what attracted it to me.

Sarah: So were you interested in these... in finding out about the atomic bomb?

Vera: Oh yes.

Sarah: Would you say it was quite a big...

Vera: Do you know what my husband used to do? He used to hide all the papers from me because I was so worried about it.

Sarah: Really?

Vera: Yes. Especially the Sunday papers because I'd sit there all day reading them up. He'd say look your worrying for nothing. What's worrying? Don't be worrying about it. Just forget about it. But you couldn't forget about it.

Sarah: So was it kind of...

Vera: I would look at John playing in the garden with his little friends and you'd think are they going to grow up to be in a war and get killed. The whole idea of war was gone.

Sarah: So did it change your ideas of war then?

Vera: Yeah

Sarah: From the war that you had known before and then after the atomic bomb. Did that kind of open up a new stage a new....

Vera: Yeah. It made me feel more certain that there would be more wars. And you know when you think of it I mean, I can't remember them all, but in my memory I don't think there has been a full peace. There had always been fighting and a war going on somewhere and we've always been partly involved in it in some way.

Sarah: Did you ever imagine...because you were talking about fear...Did you ever imagine the effects of an atomic attack? Did you ever think what would happen. how did that make you feel?

Vera: Yes I did. From time to time you would see pictures, especially when you went to the cinema, you'd see pictures of people like skeletons, you know deformed, burnt faces and burnt bodies walking around in Japan, you know they were survivors.

Sarah: And where would you have seen that? At the cinema? Was it a film or?

Vera: It was horrifying seeing them. And then afterwards you were show children who were born as a result of being caught in the atom bomb. And they would be deformed terribly deformed or they

would have cancer and they would die within a few months. It was horrifying, it really was and to think [post is delivered through the letter box]..Oh it's only the post. And to think that a human could do that to another human being. I think it was terrible.

Sarah: I know you said you read a book, do you ever remember reading any other books or watching any other films or how that made you feel?

Vera: No but we used to go to the cinema quite often and watch the news reel. And it was always soldiers marching, bombed buildings, generals talking and top men in the Navy and that. It used to worry you I would come out of the cinema worried to death about what was happening. I think in those days I don't fully understand it really.

Sarah: How did you find out the information you did know about the bomb?

Vera: Oh it was all in the papers.

Sarah: So it was mainly newspapers then.

Vera: Yes all the newspapers were full of it. I did save some; I also saved papers during the war with headlines on and that. And I remember I took them into school one day, not my school, to the college and I never got them back, they disappeared.

Sarah: What made you keep them? Why? Why did you do that?

Vera: I kept them because they were horrifying. So I would always remember that. You know it meant something. How can I explain? I couldn't really believe that they would do a thing like that and that was like a remembrance that they did do it. To keep it in your mind that they did do it. That it was possible.

Sarah: Did it make you think any different about Britain itself and how you viewed....

Vera: I did. I began... I began... I definitely became less...what do you call it? p.....

Sarah: Patriotic or less....?

Vera: yeah what do you call in when you pat... yeah it made me less patriotic. Actually I have given an interview to somebody else it was for somebody down south. I think it was radio Five about being patriotic and not feeling patriotic.

Sarah: But were you patriotic before? Did it change your...

Vera: I was patriotic before yes. I was so horrified that... I know there wasn't a lot of British people involved in doing the atom bomb they were mostly Americans weren't they, but there were a few British on board as well. And I'm so horrified that somebody from this country could go and kill people like that. I don't think it was...it's not right. But I imagine they say all is fair in war don't they? But I didn't think that was right to do that.

Sarah: Would you say then that is maybe changed your outlook on how....

Vera: Oh yes.

Sarah: If you had to gauge it between one and ten how would you say that is has changed you outlook towards kind of life in general?

Vera: I just couldn't stand another war. I feel as though I couldn't stand another war. My son now is sixty two and I thank God, I often say to my son this thank god if there was another war they couldn't take him. But then again I have got young grandchildren now. Simon's thirty two he'd go. He'd go right away at that age group. And erm and these [points to a picture of her great grandchildren] they are growing up so quickly another four year and they would be called up. You were called up at eighteen, seventeen and a half, eighteen and erm... it's just a horrifying thought that they would be taken away. The men in erm now....fighting in erm in where is it?

Sarah: Iraq/ Afghanistan?

Vera: Iraq and the other place? Afghanistan. You know some of them are only eighteen or nineteen and you see them come up and been killed. It's not right, it's not fair. I know they volunteered to do it but they shouldn't accept them when they are so young. Twenty five that's when they would be more aware of what they are doing then. At seventeen or eighteen they still think it's all glory and you're going come out of it and its going to be... going to be a hero or something don't you. Images like that of yourself. They don't ...well i suppose they do think but they think it can't happen to them don't they of.

Sarah: Do you think as well, with regards to how you felt about the bomb that you were scared of it, obviously you kept you newspapers and you know you had this fear of it do you think many people felt the same as you or do you think you were different, that you were were more scared than anyone else, how would you gauge that...

Vera: I'm sorry I didn't catch that.

Sarah: Oh sorry, I was saying that if you felt scared about the atomic bomb do you think that other people felt that as well?

Vera: Oh Yes. I know other people used to feel like that because we used to talk about it with friends you know and they all felt the same, all women felt the same as me.

Sarah: What did they say? What would you talk about with your friends?

Vera: They would say it's a horrifying thought like just like what I thought as well and they dreaded the thought of another war because they felt that would happen, it would be the atom bomb. We felt certain that if another war started that it would be the atom bomb as we had done it once they would do it again, because wars cost money don't they and they would want to finish it as soon as possible...and they must have had it stocked up. I don't know how true this is or whether this is true or not but somebody told me, you know where the American's were, just outside Warrington here they had a big base there, the Americans and if you know It's never been built on that area from the war, that's over seventy years ago it's still a big vast empty space and it had those huts on, but I think they have just removed the huts now. But I was told that there were atom bombs stored there as well, now whether it's true or not I don't know but it makes you think when it's been empty all these years.

Sarah: And how did that make you feel then, thinking that...

Vera: (Interrupts) Frightened, yeah and only recently when I came to live here it's not far from there and I thought to myself then, I wonder if they have cleared those atom bombs. I think they have done now I think they have now because they are talking about building houses or something there so they must have moved them. But I don't know really. And I don't know for certain that they were there but it makes me think that they were there that they have left such a vast amount of land with nothing on and the huts have not long been taken down so it makes you think that there was some truth in that.

Sarah: And you know you said you spoke with your friends as well do you remember speaking about it with your husband, you said that the women felt the same, how did the men feel?

Vera: Well I know my husband was very much against it, but he used to tell me off because I worried about it so much and he used to hide the newspapers, he said 'well your depressing yourself, it might never happen don't be worrying about it, just accept what's coming'. And you know you would watch the children playing in the garden and you would think to yourself are they going to grow up and have a future? Because you worried about it.

Sarah: Are these quite vivid memories? Do you remember specific times where...

Vera: Yeah and I think what would I do if John got called up, oh I couldn't live if he got called up you know, all those depressing types of feelings about it.

Sarah: Do you remember the first time you found out about the atomic bomb, do you remember where you were or

Vera: Well reading that book, I don't know what it was but I'm sure you could find it.

Sarah: When was that?

Vera: That was just before the war started and I thought oh isn't that terrible. It gave you the impression that this one little thing that just split and the whole world would be destroyed. And I think there was a love story in it as well you know and they were working against it to try and stop it being done, I can't remember it all, but I know it played on my mind a lot and when the atom bomb was dropped I immediately thought of that book and that the whole world could be destroyed you know.

Pause

Sarah: Sorry I'm just writing some notes.

Vera: I'll tell you another thing that sickened me. The refugees from the concentration camps, oh that was awful that. One of our relations, he was in the army, he was one of the first to go into the concentration camps. It was terrible terrible, it stank he said, these people were just like human skeletons some of them couldn't stand up but they were alive. And you saw that on the pictures, when you went to the pictures.

Sarah: When you say you went to the cinema these were just news reels and you got to see images and that. And did you ever get to see pictures of the mushroom cloud itself?

Vera: Yes.

Sarah: And how did that

Vera: Well I have seen that since on the films.

Sarah: And what films is that?

Vera: There was television but I don't think we had one then, we couldn't afford one you know, but I know I have seen it on film. I don't know whether it was on the television or if it was on the cinema but that was after it had been dropped.

Sarah: Do you ever remember, obviously you quite horrified by the bomb, do you ever remember any anti bomb movements like the CND?

Vera: Oh yes. I longed to go in it but I couldn't because John was small and I had been in hospital and my husband wouldn't let me move because I took ill again. But I would have been there like a shot if given a chance and you know like Phil, well you've heard about Phil, she died and she went on all the marches. She went on the last march against the war in Iraq, she went with her son Colin to London and we were worrying about her because she was very frail then and when they came back, when we next met the following week, we said 'how did you get on Phil?' She said 'I stood there for three hours in Hyde park and when they all started to move I couldn't move my legs.' [Laughs] She said 'I had taken root'. I mean she was ninety four then wasn't she. Ninety four, ninety three, something like that and she was frailer than Doris you know.

Sarah: Do you ever remember anyone being involved in the CND or did you know people..

Vera: Well I knew Phil.

Sarah: Yeah. But I mean

Vera: She used to sit out at the bomb place. She used to sit out where they cut the American wire with scissors and I think they got two days jail. She said 'hes got a bloody cheek that feller we made him a lovely cake'. I said how did you make a cake there? She said 'We had a tin box, a biscuits box and we mixed a cake up and put it in the oven'. She said 'we gave him a piece and then he comes and picks us up and take the scissors off us'. She said 'we couldn't get through it with scissors but we were doing our best to bend it.' She sat there for weeks. I'll tell you what else she did as well when the coal mines strike was on. She would go and sit at the top of the mines, oh yeah.

Sarah: When did you meet Phil then?

Vera: I met her twenty years ago when I joined the group.

Sarah: Did you ever know anyone let's say further back, in the sixties or anyone involved then?

Vera: No I saw a lot of it on the news and I backed them up. Yeah I did back them up but I couldn't go because of home and having a son and also by that time my mother needed help as well.

Sarah: How did you feel about the people who did join? Did you

Vera: I admire them very much.

Sarah: But did you think that it was a specific type of people, were they a small minority or...did you have any perceptions of the types of members?

Vera: There were a lot of people against them you know and they used to throw things at them when they were marching. There were a lot of people who didn't agree with what they were doing. They were saying you should be patriotic and stand up for your country. But I don't think that it should be used a bomb like that, that kills so many people and especially when it was killing civilians and children. I mean a war; men join the army and the navy and that to fight and to protect the country so it should be left to them to do it in the normal way, not throwing a bomb like that, or exploding it and knowing that they are going to kill everything that is there. Not only kill the people but destroy all the plants and the area.

Sarah: Did knowing that we had the bomb make you think any different politically then, did you view politicians in a different way?

Vera: I'm all for the politicians that are against war, I still am.

Sarah: But I mean at the time

Vera (Interrupts) I'm a staunch Labourite, some I don't like, but I have always been Labour. I'm Labour because of my memories and my childhood. We got no help and many a time I'd come home and see my mother crying, worrying about how we were going to cope, what we were going to do. I mean she didn't like having to depend on my mother and my sisters, she was an independent woman my mother.

Sarah: Even though you were a strong Labour supporter did it make you feel a bit worried about, maybe ideas of control and whether they had the bomb but it's not necessarily the public decision, did it make you feel different about the government in that way.

Vera: Yes. I think we shouldn't waste our money on ammunitions and things like that, especially bombs, there is other things that they could do with that money that would make people happier and contented and healthier. Far eastern countries are now involved with atom bombs aren't they? God knows where we will end up. Pakistan have got one and they are very high spirited people, I worked with a Pakistani man, he was a very nice man, he was an electrical engineer who worked in English electric and he said that about, he went home to visit the family and when he came back, he'd got sun burnt [laughs]. He said 'it was nice to see my family' he said 'especially my mother she is very old now I don't think she will last', he said 'but I'm glad to be back in England' and I said 'are you?' He said 'they are so hysterical', he said 'you are on the railway station and someone will shout, and they might just be shouting for joy or something and everyone panics and all start running around and waving there hands', he said, 'They don't know what for or what it's about, they are very hysterical'. And that's how trouble starts when people do things like that, when they don't stop to see what is the cause of the trouble. He said 'the least thing, even between two brothers, they would draw a knife on each other'. They don't think what the consequences would be they just do it.

Sarah: Just going back to the bomb, do you think, you were talking about people being hysterical then, do you think there was any hysteria here? Do you remember any stories, even from just reading in the newspapers, like people's reactions?

Vera: Well it was just reading the newspapers really, because I have never met anybody who was near enough to be involved in that. But it used to horrify me what I read and of course it would play on my mind a lot and I would even dream about it. And you would wake up all upset and worried about it.

Sarah: Have your attitudes changed now, where you used to feel fear there, how do you feel about it now?

Vera: Well just listening to what happened lately I get very worried about it, it's on my conscience. I pray that it doesn't happen, that they don't ever use that again. I do honestly pray for that, for peace. The very thought of that, I feel that if there was a possibility, and we knew that there was a definite possibility that we were at war again and that they would do that, I feel as though I would rather kill myself than live through it. You feel like that.

Sarah: So you feel that strongly?

Vera: Yeah, I feel for these little lads, I wouldn't like them to live through anything like that. Oh no.

Sarah: Have these attitudes changed at all or have you always felt like this?

Vera: I never thought about being against anything when I was young I didn't worry about anything like that when, but since the atom bomb, and different things since then, it's always on my mind. I hate the thought that it might happen. I'd rather be dead than living through that.

Sarah: Is it a daily fear, or a weekly, how often do you think about these things would you say?

Vera: I must admit, different events happen and that brings it back to you.

Sarah: Can you remember a...

Vera: (Interrupts) For instance now, the bombs going off recently, you know the Al Qaeda and the bombs exploding on the train, all that brings those things back. You feel as though the world is not as safe as it was. It's so easy now to get rid of a lot of people in one go, setting off a bomb something like that and I don't think it's right, people shouldn't think about doing things like that, what kinds of backgrounds have they got?

Sarah: Do you ever remember as well any civil defence programmes or did you ever make any preparations, maybe stock up on food or put things in a certain way or?

Vera: Go and look in my larder now, I always stock up in case of emergencies and every now and then I have to get all the tins out and see where all the sell by dates are, and I have had them for years.

Sarah: So why is it that you stock up?

Vera: Well it's just a habit in case you are going to be in need, or you are going to be short of stuff.

Sarah: Did you ever to that in the forties, fifties and sixties?

Vera: Oh well I couldn't before because we were rationed.

Sarah: Of course. But I mean did you ever put anything in place, like maybe cover the glass, like do you ever remember any civil defence brochures?

Vera: I can't say I have. But I have often thought you know when there was all this trouble about the women covering their faces now, I think to myself well maybe they are on the right lines you know if they dropped a bomb or something it would protect your face wouldn't it. [Laughs.]

Sarah: I have actually got a few

Vera: (Interrupts) But I don't actually agree with them covering their faces you now

Sarah: I have got a couple of things here that I can show you, just to hear your reaction to. This one is the front page of the Daily Express, and it says 'The Bomb That Has Changed The World'

Vera: It's true, yeah.

Sarah: How do you feel about that?

Vera: The bomb that has changed the world, well it certainly did that. It certainly did. [Reads article aloud]. I think it lasted longer than sixteen hours that, [referring to the smoke] it lasted weeks in fact. You'd see the news reels and it just looked like a bare waste, and there would be an odd straggly tree all torn to bits.

Sarah: It was like unnatural.

Vera: It was absolutely flat and not a sole in sight, it was terrible, it was like you know when you see these films on television now about the moon and some funny place and its all weird, well it was just like that. [Continues reading]. And the steel tower turned to vapour, well can you imagine what that did you human bodies. Your just a blob of grease.

Comment [S2]: Has to use film to describe, doesn't have the words to describe. Interesting.

Sarah: I have got as well, a couple of other things, this one is a Civil Defence, my copies aren't that brilliant, I had problems with my printer this morning. When I was talking to you before about Civil Defence, this is like an advertisement for people to join in, do you ever remember anything like that or how does that, does it make you feel anything?

Vera: Well I wouldn't know what to do to be quite honest with you. After the pictures I have seen and what we have learned about it, I wouldn't know what to do. There not safe to touch once they have been involved in an atomic attack. They can pass on the....

Sarah: Radiation.

Vera: Radiation yeah. And you think to yourself, especially if you have got a family, am I going to pass it on to your family as well. My children. That would prevent you from doing anything, I know there would be some people that would take a chance and do it but I don't think I would have the guts to. I would be too frightened.

Comment [S3]: Some confusion here about radiation. Also mirrored in Billy's account.

Sarah: There is also this one as well, going back to the CND before, again my copy's not brilliant. That's a picture of a protest, do you remember the big protests?

Vera: I remember Cannon Collins (?), he was very much against the bomb wasn't he. Aldermaston, I know that Phil walked in the Aldermaston march.

Sarah: I have also got this to see, looking at pictures like that[picture of a mushroom cloud], how does that make you feel?

Vera: Well it's just terrible isn't it. And I believe this thing sucked everything up, everybody up into the cloud and you just disappeared. You just melted away. Just imagine that.

Sarah: If you had to describe that image in a few words, what words would you use?

Vera: I would just say that it was horrific, you couldn't find a, you would like to find a worse word to say for it but I can't think of one. It's just horrific, horrendous. And you know there is nothing there, that is sucking everything up into that cloud, you just disappear. You just melt. You know perhaps they have relatives living some miles away, but they are just out of that limit, how are they going to feel about their relatives who have gone and they don't know where they are, what happened to them, there's no bodies or anything left.

Comment [S4]: Again this idea that our vocab can't explain. Hales uses this idea about how we had to find a way to make it comprehensible.

Sarah: I'm coming to the end but I have a few more just quick questions. I hope I haven't made you too upset or depressed with images of a mushroom cloud and things like that, and that it's not too much of a depressing topic. But I was just wondering as well do you ever think about nuclear power? How do you feel about nuclear power?

Vera: I am very much against nuclear power being used for electricity.

Sarah: Why is that?

Vera: I don't think it is safe. And when you look now after the earthquake in Japan, I mean I think they are trying to cover it up. But I bet there has been a lot of harm done there.

Sarah: Do you ever remember any other events when you think of nuclear power?

Vera: Well I think of the Chernobyl one, and those children are still suffering from that one aren't they. They come over here every year, well that just shows you how it goes on.

Sarah: Do you think of these effects then?

Vera: I think they should ban it. I don't think they should tamper with it at all. They should get rid of the whole lot of it, I mean another thing that they do which I think is very annoying is bury all the waste here. We allow them to come in and bring all the waste in, dig it down in the ground, I don't think that's right. I think we should protest about that. Are we getting paid to take that you know? If we are well they should be ashamed of themselves. To take money, for that, to dispose of it, well they mustn't have much thought for us must they.

Comment [S5]: I like this use of tamper, gives it like a mystical quality, but a negative one.

Comment [S6]: Notice here the switch between we and they, we meaning Britain, they, the government in control.

Sarah: Does it make you think about people any differently? Kind of when you think of who is allowing that to take place. How do you feel towards the people who do allow that.

Vera: well if it's any MP who is suggesting that, I think it should be down, we should know who is doing that, who is behind it. I would like to know who is behind it but we don't know do we.

Comment [S7]: Ideas of powerlessness.

Sarah: Do you feel that we are limited in what we know?

Vera: I think they know more than they are telling us. I distrust them.

Sarah: Who is it that you distrust? Is it science or who is it? Is it politicians or

Vera: Well the politicians mustn't they. [Section left out at participant's request, information not relevant to my study.]

Sarah: Well it think that's it I'm just going to have a quick read through my questions to make sure I have covered everything that I wanted to.

Vera: To me the world is a puzzle. I think it would be nice if, you know we were all going on about immigrants coming here, but we have gone all around the world haven't we, in the past and just taken up jobs there and opened up businesses and all that and I think the world would be better if we were all mixed together and there was no particular countries that we were just here on the world and there would be less wars and less fighting. I know there are problems with the, religious problems and that, but we should do our best to put that all behind us and try and all live together, to be kind to each other. Do you know before the war started we never met a foreign person but when the war started was the first time we met foreigners and people from other countries and all the people that I have met from other countries have all been quite nice and just the same as us. The same worries and doubts about things and then somebody said they are alright if you get them one at a time but if you get a mass number its trouble. [Laughs]

Sarah: Well I think that is most of my questions so thank you very much for you time.

Vera: Well I hope I have helped you.

Sarah: You defiantly have.

Vera: I don't feel I know that much about it but I'm just telling you what my feelings are.

Sarah: Yep. Well that's exactly what I need. Just as a quick last question. If you had to describe you level of knowledge of nuclear issues on a scale of one to ten how would you say.

Vera: I would say about seven.

Comment [S8]: This high level seems contradictory with her comment about not knowing that much.

Sarah; And How would you say, again on a one to ten basis, how would you say its effect your life.

Vera: I would say a nine. At least on that yeah. At times it made me feel very depressed as though not worth living if that's how everything is going to end up. It's an awful thing to say but you know all your loved ones and all your family and all what you have worked for and everything wouldn't mean a thing would it.

Comment [S9]: Idea that it can trivialise everything which is central to human life.

Comment [S10]: Consider the constant use of they, highlights this powerlessness. Also ideas of morality, what is "right". Although Vera's thoughts were disjointed and often linked to different problems it is interesting that she does link, or associate the idea of the bomb with her idealised view of peace more broadly.

Comments

