

BEHP 0100 T Barbara-Bimbi-Harris Transcript

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The date is 30 August 1989.

The interviewee is Barbara, known as Bimbi, Harris.

Interviewed by Roy Fowler, with John Hamilton

[NB: Recording of Bimbi Harris' voice a little reverberant which makes certain words difficult to make out, also people talk on top of one another]

Roy Fowler: When and where were you born

Bimbi Harris: I was born in London, in February 1918

Roy Fowler: Can you give an indication of the family background, because that is always interesting how people eventually came into the business

Bimbi Harris: I didn't come into him the business through my family at all. My parents were very strict vegetarians and I was brought up on a very strict regime of good health, good food and all that sort of thing, fitness absolutely throughout. And not a very exciting or unusual childhood. And when I got up to the age of 15, at 15 I started at school with two others, a redhead, a brunette and myself, a little dancing team. And we called ourselves Kleine Katzen. and we used to dance all over the place, never getting any money for it but going to different hospitals and things like that

Roy Fowler: Why the German influence

Bimbi Harris: I don't know, it was just before the War and nobody thought anything about it and, we just thought it was a nice name. And I went to one hospital, an ophthalmic hospital, where I met my husband

Roy Fowler: Was it the first manifestation of showbiz

Bimbi Harris: I suppose so

Roy Fowler: Because when it you were born, and growing up thereafter, girls generally were destined for the domestic sciences and home keeping, were they not,

Bimbi Harris: Possibly

Roy Fowler: Little mothers. Did it you have any early hankering for a professional career

Bimbi Harris: Not really only just going to dancing school and things like that, like dancing and ballet which most girls do

Roy Fowler: Where about was based, in the suburbs

Bimbi Harris: Yes, Streatham. And as I say it was almost a fatal thing for me because I met my future husband there and was bowled over

Roy Fowler: Before we get on to that, the family background, your father and your mother, what were their attitudes towards their child, did they just accept you as a female of the time or did they encourage you to do anything

Bimbi Harris: I don't think they particularly encouraged me. There was 2 of us, my sister and I, my sister is older than me, they ran a vegetarian hotel in Palace Gate Kensington and I think most of their time was so taken up on that that we just grew up

Roy Fowler: I grew up just around the corner from Palace Gate, which one was that

Bimbi Harris: Well they had three big houses there, 11, 13, and 15 which is the Park end which they converted into a vegetarian hotel which in those days was quite forward thinking and my father started the Vegetarian Society and he was always slightly ahead in thinking in that way

Roy Fowler: Is that where you were living, in Palace Gate

Bimbi Harris: Yes

Roy Fowler: I lived in Albert Court

Bimbi Harris: Memories of the park and taking the dog over there. When you're a child of course you know every tree stump in the park, every place you go

Roy Fowler: This is in the Thirties, the park was then an elegant place

Bimbi Harris: Very elegant, that's right. We had a rough fox terrier who used to chase all the elegant ladies little japs, little Pekinese, and they used to come knocking at the door, your dog has savaged my dog, those sorts of problems used to go on.

Roy Fowler: And nannies with their charges in their **bassinets**. Tell us about Kleine Katzen, did you get any professional bookings

Bimbi Harris: No, we just did wherever we were asked to go to do our little cabaret. But I did arrange all the music and, I arranged all the dancing, I made all the costumes, a one-man band, choreographer

Roy Fowler: So you were musically inclined

Bimbi Harris: Yes, I enjoyed it

Roy Fowler: Played an instrument

Bimbi Harris: No, I didn't

Roy Fowler: When you say you arranged the music

Bimbi Harris: Well I arranged the numbers and what we were going to do and how it was going to fit in with our little routines.

Roy Fowler: Parts

Bimbi Harris: No, I didn't write the parts. I conferred and they'd say we want so many bars of this that and the other.

John Hamilton: Eight bars of Painting The Clouds With Sunshine

Bimbi Harris: That's the sort of thing, and Our Little Hats and Smoke Gets In Your Eyes, with our long cigarette holders

Roy Fowler: Shortly thereafter you met your husband

Bimbi Harris: That's right, at the time he was twice my age and but I was absolutely bowled over, there were poems and flowers every day and to a young girl it just turns your head really, he was very romantic. But I also, of course this is much later discovered he needed the adulation of a young person and he had three wives, all 16 year olds and they all adored him

Roy Fowler: Simultaneously

Bimbi Harris: No, one after the other of course. But I know now if he needed that stimulus, he needed it, and as I say I was swept over

Roy Fowler: It's legal molestation in a way

Bimbi Harris: And at 16 I became pregnant, and being that day and age my parents insisted I should get married. In this day and age it wouldn't have happened. So I got married and that was domesticity for eight years. Nothing to do with a broadcasting career. It was staying at home and having a child and oh, he did start the Number One Jazz Club, Rex Harris, and I did used have to sit on the door and take the money and things like that, in 200 Oxford Street. So I suppose in that way I was slightly involved

John Hamilton: The Rhythm Club

Bimbi Harris: That's right, Number One Rhythm Club

Roy Fowler: Did you find that acceptable as a role or were you now hankering to expand your own horizons

Bimbi Harris: I was hankering a bit but I was very dominated and I was so much younger and had a child, and then war started in 1939 and the forces which I tried to get into offered me 10 shillings a week to keep my child. Where could you keep a child for 10 shillings. I just had to have a job. So I first started as a draughtsman in an aircraft firm and they told me, they paid me something like 30 shillings a week, and they told me when you're fully trained you'll get £3 a week which I thought was fabulous. So I plodded on with my little drawings. And when I found they were using my drawings I said well now I presume I'll get £3 a week. Oh no, they said and, it takes years before you get that and. I thought this is out, so I left there and then I heard the BBC wanted engineers. This is when I went to the library and studied OMS law. I knew at my interview I had to say something technical and I didn't know anything technical. So I went to for an interview at Broadcasting House, quoted my OMS law, passed a little test, in which I'm very pleased to say I'd got 100 out of 100 and they engaged me and I was a recording engineer from then onwards

Roy Fowler: Was it as easy as that

Bimbi Harris: Yes, they were desperate for staff of course. There were young boys who went in at 16 and were called up at 17, and then there were what we thought at the time were the old men, poor things they were only 50, but they were 50 and too old to be called up. And the rest of the staff were women and, and 90 % women running the BBC as you can imagine

John Hamilton: I'd misremembered Bimbi, I thought you were there ahead of me, I joined in 1940, August 1940, as a trainee recorded programmes assistant and I remember you, everybody knew you of course, at the window, at the recording channel next door, the disc cutting channel. I can remember all my bosses names, Brian George and people like that, but I don't remember any of that Engineering side, I can remember all the names like Jimmy Green and people like that who passed to the recording side in your day but I can't remember who the senior people were.

Bimbi Harris: I'm afraid I don't either. I must tell you about my first day of arrival. I arrived at Broadcasting House and there were these official soldiers with their guns out side and you had to go in and show your past. I was very nervous of course, first day there

John Hamilton: Sandbags

Bimbi Harris: Sandbags, and I dug in my bag and accidentally pulled out a tampax which rolled right across the hall and there was me scuttling after it, blushes up to here. Before I disappeared down the bowels of the earth to the recording studios. That was my entrance

Roy Fowler: Was the BBC male dominated at this stage

Bimbi Harris: No, no. As I say very few, it was all women down there, just the ones who were going to teach us.

Roy Fowler: So management was also female.

Bimbi Harris: Getting on that way, all those that could be called up were being called up you see, so the middle strata was just not there.

Roy Fowler: But the old guard was still in place

Bimbi Harris: The old guard was still in place and they used to show us round these racks and racks of equipment and they used to say now never touch that plug, and we'd go and pull out the plug, oh, no, that will take us off the air. We must have been an awful handful for them, we were absolute devils at times.

Roy Fowler: Would you have been employed do you think had it not been for the war

Bimbi Harris: Yes, because I was hankering for a job

Roy Fowler: I didn't mean you specifically but you as a representative of your sex, the war was opening up things for women.

Bimbi Harris: It was opening up things for women but also I was determined, I was getting fidgety

Roy Fowler: Tell us about the induction and the first work that you did there and the atmosphere generally within the Corporation in 1941.

Bimbi Harris: 1941 in the recording studios, which were really the old toilets downstairs and they still left in the toilets and just put a bit of wood over the seats, so that is how we operated in these little rooms.

Roy Fowler: For wartime reasons,

Bimbi Harris: Wartime instructions were that you should work until the water comes up to your knees and then you can vacate your post, which I think is a lovely instruction.

Roy Fowler: You weren't supposed to go down with Broadcasting House.

Bimbi Harris: No, but of course you see there was the shattering of the bombs which were all around Broadcasting House which were a bit frightening.

Roy Fowler: Were either one of you present when that bomb did hit

John Hamilton: I was based at BH then, yes

Bimbi Harris: I think I probably was.

John Hamilton: And Major Chilman, later, he didn't defuse it but he literally picked it up. It was only a 300 pound bomb, he picked it up and carried it down and outside until the bomb guys arrived. It wasn't bomb disposal as such, the Royal Artillery or somebody used to do it then

Roy Fowler: One went off on the air

John Hamilton: I was off duty the night it happened. The concert hall was hit on the same night which made a very nasty hole in the middle of the roof.

The recording rooms, I think it is relevant because the control room originally had been on the 8th floor of BH and it was moved down into the sub basement for safety reasons obviously, which meant the basement area, the loos, were converted in recording channels because disc recording really happened simultaneously with the war, that is why recorded programmes, my side of it, the programme side of it, was formed and I equally had the opportunities I related to get in as a 16 year old for the same reason. That is why geographically they were on the basement and lower ground floor, for security reasons

Bimbi Harris: They were 78s obviously in those days, those early days and it was quite an exciting time, particularly for a young girl because in offices there is always little romances and people write little billet doux to the opposite sex, but in recording when you came on duty, whichever shift there was always a disc on the turntable with a message recorded on it, sort of love and kisses on the disc. Which was rather nice to play as you arrived

Roy Fowler: Were any of those ever saved

Bimbi Harris: No, because you were using equipment, so we had to erase it, so nobody else, not particularly that the message was particularly secret, but they didn't want them to know we were using discs. I think the only disc I used illegally at the BBC was when they had that disc, you may remember John, Strange Fruit, which nobody could get and everybody said oh make me a copy, make me a copy. And I think that is the only time I've ever really made and stole copies

John Hamilton: A classic Billy Holiday recording of Strange Fruit

Bimbi Harris: And it was banned

John Hamilton: BBC Radio banned it but it got into the country from the States, we all had acetates of that

Bimbi Harris: I'm afraid so, guilty there, sorry BBC.

John Hamilton: Later on there were all sorts of trailers like music and movement thing, proliferated throughout the world and got itself on the blooper LPs

Roy Fowler: Like the videos of Deep Throat at the later time too.

John Hamilton: But I remember Bimbi at the same time, obviously you were working through your side of the window, and me on the other side playing grams that discs were tested weren't they. So invariably one side was better than the other so you'd record on the preliminary of the A Side, B Side syndrome, so if there were slight blisters or whatever in the coating of the acetate, they became reject, that side became a reject. And once the thing had been transmitted whatever it was they were unusable then until they went away to be recoated eventually, a money saver, but the private recordings then were made then on the slightly blistered side. I've still got some in the back room here, treasures of the past, and couple of 13 inch acetates. Nothing left to play them on in this day and age.

Bimbi Harris: We did little line ups always at the beginning of disc, checking it you know.

Roy Fowler: What was the material you were recording, was it totally diverse.

Bimbi Harris: Very

Roy Fowler: The output of the station.

Bimbi Harris: There were the reports from overseas of course, the Richard Dimblebys, I don't know why but the girls then always thought it was their duty to slightly flirt with the commentators to buck them up because they were over there and we were back safe here.

Roy Fowler: This was stuff coming down the line, the telephone line.

Bimbi Harris: Yes. And I used to apply to go on these sessions, but they never let me go. Never let the women go. I was always sad about that, I suppose I should be grateful now.

John Hamilton: Let me interrupt, that was that strange engineering rift, I mentioned this in my story between the programme side which I was on, the staff of the programme division, and the engineering side. And we were sent, idiot though I was in the trade then, to go to the outside studio and stand there and say hello recording room, we are going ahead in 10 seconds from now, because the producer was in the box anyway, the artists

weren't allowed to say it and somebody had to liaise on the floor, not that we were in touch with the actual recording engineer, but in your little hole

Bimbi Harris: We would hear that and start

John Hamilton: You were poised with the cutter ready to go plonk and then say after 5 or 6 seconds we are recording. And then we would cue the artist. It was a sort of floor manager /speak over microphone job as far as we were concerned and that is why ladies and gentlemen never got into the studios or met the artists face to face.

Roy Fowler: These are very stirring time that you are living through. Do you have any particular recollections of either individuals or events.

Bimbi Harris: There was a little studio in Portland Place which I was asked to run and it was lovely, I had it to myself. It was a modern block where they had the living room as the studio, the bedroom was the control room and there was the kitchen and bathroom of course. And if you put up the red light particularly after you'd done a day's work you could have parties work because no one dare come in with the red light on. Right across the road in Portland Place was AFN, and they used to come of course and bring the bottles and join the parties so we did have terrific parties there.

Roy Fowler: When did AFN start.

John Hamilton: After the Yanks came in, about 42, I'd gone off in the RAF by then.

Bimbi Harris: About 42 I should think. I used to also do very harrowing messages for mothers to record to send to their children abroad and I would have so many mothers lined up, maybe 50 and maybe had a couple of hours, and I knew I had to get them through and they used to come in one at a time and of course were very tearful and you couldn't hurry them, you had to sort of tactfully get them to one side and do another one and come back to them, and you knew you had to get the lot in

John Hamilton: Those were the evacuees

Bimbi Harris: Evacuees, that's right.

Roy Fowler: Was that stuff that went on the air or was it just a service that was being provided

Bimbi Harris: I think it was a service that was sent over, I don't know how it was sent to them

John Hamilton: Again, as an RPA again, we used to play them out.

Bimbi Harris: Did you, I never knew what happened to them.

John Hamilton: There was a service which was quite remarkable, yes, which was by short wave presumably then, where it was not only these kind of messages but messages for the folks back home from troops over here as well. I quoted Eagle Squadron programmes that Ben Lyon and Bebe Daniels produced collectively in 1940/41 when the Americans were still flying with the RAF, and then the Eagle Squadron itself was formed. We did a similar service then, and it was marvellous to talk to the guys at the receiving point, in Camden, New Jersey or something

Bimbi Harris: Of course, which I never did

John Hamilton: And they would say how is it over there and wowww on the short wave, and then you would say oh well there was another, we weren't supposed to talk about air raids and things, we had another rough night last night, and all's well, and they would then relay messages to whichever station they were going to for distribution in Canada particularly, a lot went to Canada, where again many of the evacuees went. It was a fascinating little process, it wasn't for broadcast purposes, it was a service. It meant nothing for the BBC, just to do it.

Bimbi Harris: Which the BBC were very good at in those days, there was no other means of doing it but they were very good. They used to have people like Tommy Handley there and they used to come and do their recording. It was my own studio you see, I had no one else there, it was just me

John Hamilton: It was 55 Portland Place

Bimbi Harris: That's right

John Hamilton: With the iron door, it's still there, the iron doorway is still there

Bimbi Harris: and I used to go in and do my own line up and my own discs and pack them all up and some body would collect them at the end of the day, it was lovely at that young age really having your own studio

Roy Fowler: You mentioned earlier that you would take material from the war correspondents, what do you remember of them as individuals. You mentioned Dimpleby who I thought was an all time creep

Bimbi Harris: He was a delightful man, I did lots of shows with him afterwards, the London shows and things, I loved him

Roy Fowler: That I'd differ on that. Who else

Bimbi Harris. There were so many, you probably remember them John, do you

John Hamilton: Frank Gillard, he was around

Roy Fowler. I was wondering if you had any particular anecdotes of them

Bimbi Harris: Not really

Roy Fowler : Did you encounter Ed Murrow at all or any of the American correspondents

Bimbi Harris: No, only the English ones which I presume were engaged by the BBC and sent out and they used to come back

John Hamilton: Yes. I worked with Ed quite a lot, because he used to come in and do his reports on the same system. It was relayed back to do the States and recorded Stateside, for CBS's own purposes, networking or whatever over there. He did not particularly run around with recording units, as the Canadians did for a example, and Gerry **Wilmott** and people, it Jacques **De Fayet**, to remember names from that era, for which we set up a mobile recording unit, did it you ever work mobile, Bimbi

Bimbi Harris: No, they wouldn't let me, this is what I kept asking for

John Hamilton: Because you were a lady

Bimbi Harris: Because I was a female, that right

John Hamilton: Yes, I don't remember ever working with any Ladies out side, except Phyllis Robinson as a producer, oddly enough

Bimbi Harris: I used to go to a Aeolian Hall, in fact I used to go to a Aeolian Hall and there would be these great and the variety shows, and huge queues outside, I'm not very tall, I'm only 5 ft 3, and I was quite a slip of a girl then. And I used to go to the front and the commissionaire said way, way back there. I said if you don't let me in all these people are wasting their time. I had to go right up, the recording was right at the top. But again, in fact they gave you quite a lot of responsibility when you look back because you had to open it up and check all the equipment, test it all, line it all up

Roy Fowler: That's the way it sounds, it also sounds as if you made very rapid progress. Were you unique in that sense or were you part of a trend

Bimbi Harris: Part of a team, there were about a dozen of us. But I think I was the only one given my own studio which was a nice compliment. Also, I don't know whether I'm jumping ahead to D day, and but D day, June 5th, I was sent home to have a good sleep, so I could record in the night. And of course when I came back they said it's cancelled for tomorrow. So I had to do a night's work and then go home and have a sleep and come

back, they didn't tell me exactly what it was but they said it's a very important night, you must get a good sleep and go home

Roy Fowler: It might be interesting and for the record and since we live now an era of such simple technology in effect to tell as actually what you had to do as a recording engineer

Bimbi Harris: My goodness, there were rows of racks of which I really didn't know the inside but you had an line up at certain levels and then test each equipment, because you probably had four recording units and you had to line them up and see that they were equal, for continuous

Roy Fowler: Four units with four turntables that you could put four blanks on

Bimbi Harris: That right, that you could do continuous recording

Bimbi Harris: But although I had my little OMS law and although we were tested from time to time, we had exams, about every year we had a little exam. But I'm afraid I really rather learnt them parrot wise

Oh, we did make our own little radios, everybody was all busy making, with a little valves, we all made our little radio sets

Roy Fowler: For what purpose

Bimbi Harris: For our use, there was a lot of time on night shift when it you got a bit bored and we did and so s, Morse, we all had to learn Morse and we had to sit for hours listening for Morse

John Hamilton xxx words a minute, you were classified as T A East, technical assistance, because there were grades 1, 2, and three or whatever

Roy Fowler: The Morse was for a specific purpose or was it just to test and

Bimbi Harris: No, we had to listen all night and

Roy Fowler: What were you listening to

Bimbi Harris: Interference mostly but if anything came in we thought was of value we would report it

Roy Fowler: Foreign stations

Bimbi Harris: English, always speaking English, I never had to do a foreign language

Mind you, I've recorded in foreign languages and when it you don't speak it, Arabic and things like this you had to keep your eyes glued to the page, you daren't leave it for a second because you would never find your place, again that was the absolute hell. Those sorts of things would go on

John Hamilton: That recalls Bimbi as well of course the number of foreign troops who were here, I remember we used to do an evening message which was good night to all the Czechs, and the Poles, I remember xxxxxxxxxxxx which is the only one I've ever remembered which is the Czech bit of the good night for the thing, and it was a complete montage of all languages, French and everything, an American voice saying goodnight fellows and sleep well and all that nonsense, which was a regular play out, but obviously you had to put up with more of that than we did on the operating side

Bimbi Harris: We did have the script you see, and as I say we had to follow it because you never knew where you were particularly if you were asked to put it out, to find it again, it was very difficult, however

John Hamilton: BH was servicing just the Home Service as it then was and the forces programme and of course a large amount until Oxford Street opened of the North American service, which is why Ed Murrow, an American correspondent and the Canadians passed through BH, and a lot of material passed through a B H out to those countries

Bimbi Harris: Then came the excitement when we had 33 and a third, great excitement because we'd been using 78 you see

Roy Fowler: How did that come about, was that American technology imported

Bimbi Harris: No, I think it was the English engineers who developed it, another little interesting side line, they did develop the, some of the engineers at BH what is now compact disc. And they had it, they had it working but they were engineers and they didn't know how to market it. And all the time I was there they tried to get someone interested, to market, to market, to market, and here 50 years later

done Hamilton: What the basic technology of laser

Bimbi Harris: The basic technology of laser was in the BBC in those years, when I was recording, the young boys were so enthusiastic about it because they got it working

John Hamilton Do you remember Bimbi in the basement, no it was on the ground floor actually, the huge Marconi steel tape recorder with the metal tape

Bimbi Harris: Yes

Roy Fowler: The Blattnerphone type thing

John Hamilton: Yes

Bimbi Harris: 28 pounds these tapes weighed and we used to have to stagger them down from the racks and get them in

John Hamilton: Because that was the first tape recording

Bimbi Harris: The first tape, and of course we had a little machine and we used rivet these tapes together, go pop, pop, pop, pop, riveting glasses on

Roy Fowler: To weld them

John Hamilton: A welded edit

Roy Fowler: What was the quality like

Bimbi Harris: Pretty poor

John Hamilton: Horrendous actually, it was full of snap, crackle and pop

Roy Fowler: What did the BBC use them for

Bimbi Harris: We used to record and replay because we, the engineers used to replay them, but I didn't know that you did John

John Hamilton: No, no, we didn't it was nothing to do with us

Bimbi Harris: All the engineers, we used to record all the Bangor light entertainments

John Hamilton: In fact we were hardly ever allowed to in there and, I only got a couple of sneak previews because some particular mate in recording, it was kept pretty much under drapes that machine, well there were two in there

Bimbi Harris: That's right. I wasn't conscious it was, but obviously you

John Hamilton: Do you remember how long the reels were, I couldn't remember in my reminiscences. I think they were about 26 minutes

Bimbi Harris: Something like that and then you had to do a change over

John Hamilton: And you got an hour's play

Roy Fowler: So they ran very fast indeed and

John Hamilton: Yes, relatively fast, about 40 miles an hour, about a metre in diameter they were

Roy Fowler: I remember in the early Fifties when everyone was looking forward to some kind of video recording it was always said it was absolutely impossible because of the speed at which the tape would have to travel and if it broke then it would take the engineers head off sort of thing

John Hamilton: Yes it would have like a xxx if it snapped

Bimbi Harris: I always remember recording, I had a friend who was very fond of dancing and we used to record some Henry Hall and Jack Hilton and all those early days, and in the middle of the night we would go up to this huge conference room on the 5th floor or something and it had a beautiful floor, we used to dance away to our heart's content, it must have been absolutely illegal, but it was lovely to do

Roy Fowler: Let me ask you about the atmosphere and ethos at the BBC in those days, Reith had left four or five years before but his presence still dominated, did it

Bimbi Harris: We had to have hat and gloves before we could go in, the women had to wear a hat and gloves

John Hamilton: Phyllis Robinson's hats

Roy Fowler: So all these wild parties across the street, at number 55, were strictly verboten

Bimbi Harris: Absolutely, they would have been horrified had they known.

Roy Fowler: Would they have fired you

Bimbi Harris: Probably.

Roy Fowler: But was it widespread in the sense there was the lip service paid to a certain kind of Reithian culture but everyone actually was raving it up

Bimbi Harris: You tended to, because on night duties I remember, you see you'd work say all day and if the engineer replacing you didn't come in, he had been bombed or something, or killed, you would go on and do another shift, and I've gone on and done a third shift because you just had to go on. By that time you were sort of slap happy and people used to line glasses up to keep you going because I just happen to have the knowledge of the recording and they had to keep me going, so there they were. Anyway

Roy Fowler: What was the booze in those days

Bimbi Harris: Usually wine

John Hamilton: The little bar in the canteen at BH sold beer mainly, because obviously spirits were very hard to come by, they had spirits occasionally

Bimbi Harris: I just seem to remember drinking wine mainly

John Hamilton: But nobody ever objected that I recall of you actually taking it into the studio

Bimbi Harris: None at all

John Hamilton: People would rush down to the bar, while the dec was playing in 2 and a half minutes, get back in time to do the changeover and go and grab a pint and back to the studio and keep yourself going.

Roy Fowler: What then is the explanation, is it the difference between the management culture and the operational culture, in other words people actually doing things

Bimbi Harris: They had to rely on us doing things, you see

John Hamilton: Management very rarely that I recall ever came near the studio, did they. Even the head of recorded programmes, Lxx Fletcher, loved him dearly, lovely man, but he very rarely came into the studio while you were actually operating

Roy Fowler: Lots of memos.

Bimbi Harris: No

John Hamilton: No. Your shift leader would drop in to see if all was well or whatever, or give you an amendment to your schedule for the next day, oh you're not doing that, you better do something else, whatever, but never the management people. They sort of let you get on with it, fortunately.

Roy Fowler: Was it a happy ship

Bimbi Harris: Yes, I think it was.

Roy Fowler: And a taut ship

Bimbi Harris: It was a happy ship. And I was glad to be working. It was a sad time in my personal life because I was wanting to get away and I was wanting a divorce and often I used to go into the little cubby holes and cry my eyes out because I'd had upheavals at home and then one really very sad night when I said I'm going to go, and he tried to kill me and I got up, we had a flat in Linden Gardens, it was a basement flat and I managed to

get up, he tried to lock me in and I got upstairs and I was screaming and people were opening the windows, and he covered my hand got me down, and when he finally went to sleep I ran out in just the clothes I had. And I had little high heel peep toe shoes and it was in the middle of winter and I had no change of clothes and I went into Broadcasting House, my feet and everything, I had to take my stockings off and dry them out and dry my shoes, and got knows how I lived for two or three days before I bunked in with a girl, but I had those same clothes and they used to come in drenched every day. It never occurred to me not to go into work, you just went in. But it was a very, very sad time for me

Roy Fowler; And that was the end of your marriage

Bimbi Harris: Yes, I had been married 8 years altogether and they were

Roy Fowler: Distressing to hear even at this removed

Bimbi Harris: It was, it was because he was, he liked to dominate and he didn't like to think anyone was getting out from under him, but I knew I had to get out sooner or later.

Roy Fowler: So from this time on you lived independently

Bimbi Harris: Independently. I shared with a girl friend, I don't know if I'd got into television days then but there was a little notice in the paper about a flat in Eton Square, very luxurious, and expensive flats, and this man wanted, he offered the end part of the flat, you had your own bedroom, living room, bathroom, in exchange for a little light dusting. And we thought this would suit us you see, Ursula, I don't know if you remember Ursula, anyhow we went along and we were interviewed and accepted, so we moved into this flat and it was great. He used to go away every Thursday to the country and not come back till Tuesday and he had his butler and his chauffeur and his cook and all the rest of it, so the weekend as well as doing our little dusting we used to always have parties there.

Roy Fowler: Who was this

Bimbi Harris: So my life was parties in those days.

John Hamilton: I remember going to a party with you Bimbi, a very early memory, a club in Knightsbridge, on the right hand side just by the barracks, wasn't it called the Guards Club

Bimbi Harris: I think it was called the Guards Club

John Hamilton: I remember going on a number of occasions and you were there.

Bimbi Harris: Those were good times and he had this country place, Reginald Fletcher, my goodness, he had a place down at Halesham which was entered in the doomsday book, and all this, he took us down obviously thinking he was going to get Ursula and I apart, and when we refused, because he had masses of bedrooms, he put us in a double bed, which even two women don't really like sharing a double bed. However, then we came back to London and I got flu, and he used to come in and play chess with me, and really that was the end of it because he then pestered me from then onwards and after that it was impossible so we had to leave. It was rather sad really, because it was a nice arrangement, if we could only have been friends, there you are, but he wanted more and I didn't.

Roy Fowler: What has subsequently become called sexual harassment

Bimbi Harris: It would be now. But it was a very informal arrangement you know, but it was rather sad because it was a nice little cushy number. A little light dusting.

Roy Fowler: We're still during the war period

Bimbi Harris: That's right

Roy Fowler: Let's move along through your career, anything that particularly that comes to mind

Bimbi Harris: I'm still doing radio, I'm still thinking of radio

John Hamilton: Still based at BH basically.

Bimbi Harris: Basically but I did go to 200 Oxford St, I did also sometimes go down to Aldwych, yes, but only as a sort of relief.

John Hamilton: We all did that didn't we, the English region at Bush House

Bimbi Harris: Bush House yes, but mainly it was Broadcasting House and as I say mainly my own nice little studio up there, and I was very happy in that little studio and met lots of nice people and had lots of fun and it worked, they were awfully sad days of course because the young boys were always being called up, we were always having farewell parties

John Hamilton: Yes, that gave rise to a lot of the parties actually

Bimbi Harris: Yes, and they would go and then of course you would have sad messages that so and so was killed, it happened so often, and they were such young boys, that was very, very sad. Of course there was the going home time when you went into the tubes and you stepped over all the bodies that were lying on the tubes there to get home, and a lot of the time I did walk home from Broadcasting House, that is when I moved to the flat

in the Strand. And I used to have shoes with metal heel clips, so I used to walk down the centre of Regent St, clip, clip, clip, because I didn't want the boys in the shop alcoves, and as you went across a junction of street, the tone would alter on your click, click, click, because there was no traffic, just walk down and it was about I suppose three quarters of an hour walk.

Roy Fowler: Was it dangerous for a woman to walk along the pavements in the dark

Bimbi Harris: Yes, it was, there was shrapnel about, you had your tin hat on, but there were always people who would pull you in a doorway, so you avoided that like the plague. I was

John Hamilton: Well soldiers on leave

Bimbi Harris: That's right, but usually a slap in the face and you were off, I was never more than just pulled and got away. And of course there were no reports in papers so you never had fear of rape of anything like that

John Hamilton: That is a good point actually

Bimbi Harris: It's not reported so you had no fear of it so you just strode on.

Roy Fowler: Work is of that sort throughout this period

Bimbi Harris: Yes, until 1946 when

Roy Fowler: I suppose we should note the end of the war, how that affected you if at all

Bimbi Harris: I've already told you about D Day and being specially called in to record it. We were just very busy I suppose, there were so many dispatches, so much was happening wasn't it,

John Hamilton: Do you recall doing any of the classic ones, around Arnheim or Stanley, the Canadian, and indeed Dimbleby and Frank Gillard. It was all beginning to build up by then.

Bimbi Harris: Yes, recorded a lot of those. And I remember recording George V

John Hamilton Stanley **Maxted**, when he dropped at Arnheim, classic report.

Bimbi Harris: That's right, one of our bosses was at Arnheim and had half his face blown away, but I remember George VI, and I recorded him and I think I spent about 3 days cutting out his stutter, on and on and on. All his bad stutters I had to cut out

Roy Fowler: Would he come in to do his recordings

Bimbi Harris: No, I didn't ever see him. Probably John saw him and it was fed down to me

John Hamilton: No, he did them either from the Palace or Sandringham or somewhere.

Bimbi Harris: No, I certainly didn't meet him.

Roy Fowler: How did you edit in those days

John Hamilton: With difficulty

Bimbi Harris: No. I don't think we really edited the material so much, as taking the stutters out, because it was a message to the nation

Roy Fowler: How did you take the stutters out, I would think that was editing

John Hamilton: The only way was jump cuts and pick up

Bimbi Harris: Jump cut onto this and jump cut and put it down

John Hamilton: Which we did anyway with any technical fault, like xxxx which you got quite a few anyway

Bimbi Harris: It was minute of course, it was half a word, it was ur ah, ur ah, all these little stutters, poor man

Roy Fowler: Just by eye and ear, you would do this

Bimbi Harris: That's right, nothing else, nothing technical, but it did take a long, long time

John Hamilton: Do you remember any of the Churchill speeches

Bimbi Harris: Yes, we recorded those, but he didn't stutter, he'd flumage about, but he didn't actually

John Hamilton: I remember listening to him, it was after I came back, so it was post war, but he was still in the seat and I think it was the Anglo American League or something, the Pilgrim's Society or whatever they call themselves, and before obviously the mikes were up before we actually started, he actually started his speech, and I was monitoring in the recording room because I was going to play it out to North American, and they'd given him a gold cigarette case as a gift, the society, and I heard him say to somebody it must be worth every penny of £400. Just the little bits one heard before the guy announced it, the mikes were up

SIDE 2, TAPE 1

Bimbi Harris: We've now passed the end of the war I should say, because that was a busy time. And we used to have to sleep in the concert hall on tiers, do you remember that John

John Hamilton: In the basement

Bimbi Harris: That's right, all sexes, boy, girl, boy, girl

John Hamilton: A little hanky panky went on, I recall

Bimbi Harris: You just collected a blanket, walked off, and then went back the next day. You were there long duties, really, two or three days

Roy Fowler: As a standard procedure, this was not during times of particular activity such as D day

Bimbi Harris: No, no

John Hamilton: We were three days on and three days off, you were on call all the time, you were shattered a day and a half after you finished

Bimbi Harris: Basically we did four day shifts: we did four days morning, four days afternoon, four days night and four days off. But of course the first day you were off you were sleeping. But you often stayed on because there was no one else. You never ever thought of things like hours and overtime, it was never mentioned, was it. The hours we put in, absolutely colossal

John Hamilton: And sleeping in those places, because the air conditioning was none existent, you were bog eyed when you got up, and staggered into the washroom or canteen. I walked down 200 Oxford Street so many times, the block, its beyond belief. In fact I did it for Memory Lane just a couple of days ago,

Bimbi Harris: Just to get fresh air

John Hamilton: Through the little alley away and round and up, C and A s or something, Peter Robinsons, it was the only way I could wake myself up ever, go out the back door and go round and round and round until you recovered and then back in the front door and down to the studios again.

Bimbi Harris: A very nice Kardomah near Broadcasting House where you could go and have coffee, you just paid for 1 and you could have as many as you liked and there were all the morning papers. And that was quite nice

John Hamilton: It became Quality Inn, it was opposite the news theatre, on the Polytechnic side

Roy Fowler: And how much was a cup of coffee at that stage

John Hamilton: Penny half penny, something like that

Bimbi Harris: I didn't say right at the beginning, when I went from the draughtsmanship I got £3 a week immediately with the BBC. £3 a week was quite a lot. But of course once I'd split with my husband I had to get my son to school, his school fees were £3 a week. So of course I had to earn some money. And there was a little dressmakers round the corner from BH and I was making xxx suits and every hour that I wasn't working for the BBC. I was at my treadle machine ,suits, suits, suits, and that was the money I lived on because the other went for my sense school fees

John Hamilton: Portland Street was always associated with the rag trade, wasn't it. I didn't realise it was then though.

Bimbi Harris: Very much so. My husband agreed and went to the school and agreed the first term and paid the first term and then he said he wasn't going to do it anymore. I couldn't disturb him from school, so I had to do it, you just did it

Roy Fowler: How old is the boy, is it prep school

Bimbi Harris: Prep-school, but it was in a very, very tough time because I was getting about four hours' sleep a night, which is probably the cause of my bad sleep to this very day. Fortunately when you're young you have the stamina, but older you couldn't cope with it, but it was a very tough time, just making ends meet

Roy Fowler: Did they keep you on £3 a week throughout your time in radio

Bimbi Harris: It went up. I think I ended on about £5 a week

John Hamilton: A lot of money in 1947

Roy Fowler: At what stage did one become a permanent member of the staff, was there a routine to that

Bimbi Harris: I always was a permanent member

Roy Fowler: Right from the beginning

Bimbi Harris: Yes

Roy Fowler: There was no probationary period

Bimbi Harris: No, once they interviewed you

John Hamilton: There was an age qualification on joining the pension scheme which for women, I can't remember it what it was, might have been something as late as 21 in the Beeb then, I was a way for four years of course

Bimbi Harris: When I left the Beeb, which was of course in 1955, so I had worked 14 years and they gave me the glorious sum of £150. I should have taken the pension I think it was a shilling a week, but I thought I can't be bothered with all that paperwork, I needed the money and I'll take the £150. But just to have caused them the bother almost of giving me the shilling a week. And of course it was indexed linked and I would have had a BBC pension, but however I didn't, I took the £150

John Hamilton: You took your share of the contribution Bimbi, as I did when I left the BBC, I did the same thing, you got 30 quid more than I did, I'd got £120 which bought the furniture for this room then

Bimbi Harris: But it is incredible how little it was for all those years of working, however, there you are, we had our ten year bonus, we had to go and see the DG and have £10 or something given to us

John Hamilton: Yes, the only time you ever met the DG officially

Roy Fowler: In those days if you wanted to join the BBC, it was regarded more or less as a job, a career for life

Bimbi Harris: Oh yes. If I certainly treated it as so, everybody thought so, I can't remember the delay on the pension, but there was a delay

Roy Fowler: Was the next thing into television

Bimbi Harris: Yes, into television. Television started in 1946 and I and a lot of the others applied to go over. And we were accepted and of course we went over before the studios opened. In those years we had two studios, A and B. One was Marconi and the other was Baird

Roy Fowler: Still in 1946

Bimbi Harris: Yes. We did a week in each studio

Roy Fowler: I must question this historically

Bimbi Harris: Well, I worked there and we used to do a week in each studio

Roy Fowler: Baird

John Hamilton: The Baird cameras, yes, with the inside down view finder, yes

Roy Fowler: No, I'm sorry, it's the Emitron, it's all electronic, I think if you say Baird people are still remembering the old Baird intermediate process which had gone in what 1935, 1936

Bimbi Harris: No, which was the one where you rushed into the next studio and you saw it a minute later if you were lucky, the artists used to rush,

Roy Fowler: That was the Baird system

Bimbi Harris: That is how it worked when I was there in 1946, we used to do a week in that studio and a week in the Marconi studio

Roy Fowler: Forgive me

John Hamilton: Ally Pally

Bimbi Harris: Ally Pally, that's right. So we used to have to learn both systems of course. And I did all the jobs. I used to go on sound, on the floor

John Hamilton: Were you the first to operate a camera

Bimbi Harris: I was the first to operate a camera and then it was upside down, and back to front, we were a very short of cameramen

Roy Fowler: They were the old Emitron cameras

Bimbi Harris: That's right, but I did every job. The BBC were very good to me because I was a vision mixer and I said after two years well I've learnt that, what can I do now. And then I was put onto sound, and the boys used to be devils and send you up the high ladders, to watch you go up, and things like this

Roy Fowler: So you went to be AP as a vision mixer

Bimbi Harris: That's right, and they were very, very early days

Roy Fowler: Tell us about the equipment and the techniques in 1946. You went there before the station went back on the air

Bimbi Harris: That's right and we had a little training period. The control room was up a very narrow little iron staircase, up to the first floor, and it was all open and there were racks below you. When you had, you had to always preview a button, preview a camera

so that racks could adjust it before you could take it. When you had very fast sequences, you used to call down to racks, coming up, four, three, two, one and they would know which order it was coming up, so they could preview it, because you were wanting to take it as soon as it was up, because the director wanted that particular picture up. But the directors then of course knew nothing about the technical side. People like George More O'Ferrall., if things went wrong he used to put his head down and burst into tears and then come up again and said it's still going on. Because we would be ploughing on with our script and the artists would be going on, and it would still go on. There was a lot of that. I can't remember the director who was one camera. He used to have all his artists come to one camera

Roy Fowler: A stationary camera you mean

Bimbi Harris: A stationary camera, and he would do a whole scene on one camera

Roy Fowler: George was very fond of long shots

Bimbi Harris: Yes, but this one would only use one camera, and all the artists would be rehearsed to come in like this. And there was another one, Harold, he used to have the same set whether it was a little suburban two up, two down or a grand palace, because the entrances and exits were same, therefore he knew his camera angles you see, it would just be if clad differently

Roy Fowler: What were the capabilities, as far as I remember there were three cameras in B and four in A, is that right

Bimbi Harris: Yes

Roy Fowler: What were the capabilities of the system, you could cut, could you dissolve

Bimbi Harris: No, not really, No we couldn't,

Roy Fowler: You could just fade out and fade in again

Bimbi Harris Yes

John Hamilton: You couldn't mix, one to another

Bimbi Harris No, not the very early days, it was a little while before we could mix, very frustrating

John Hamilton: I thought because of racks again, presumably your preview before you took

Bimbi Harris: Yes

John Hamilton: Was because they had to ride the camera with each individual shot

Bimbi Harris: That's right, and it held things up desperately, but there you are, that was the rules of the time, and a great big fog it used to get up there, all smoking in that gallery up there. Of course, one day we were doing an animal programme and a skunk got away and it got into the control room. For days we had this skunk

Roy Fowler: What was the personnel of the control room. We have the director who was called producer I think

Bimbi Harris: He was called the producer in those days, that's right and he had his secretary there, she wasn't called a PA

Roy Fowler: But essentially she was the PA, wasn't she

Bimbi Harris: Really

Roy Fowler: I can't remember, who was readying shots, was she doing that

Bimbi Harris No, I was, the vision mixer, you had a script and you readied the shots

John Hamilton: And TOMs, the technical operations manager, the equivalent these days of technical supervisor, X Eddie springs to mind, one of the great TOMs

Roy Fowler: Who was talking to the floor, I can't remember any of this, it is terrible. Were you the only one with talkback

Bimbi Harris: No, the **producer** used to the floor, but I was probably an awful nuisance but I used to shout across the producer's mike because producers tended to be a bit slow in those days, they may be artistically beautiful but on the techniques they had no idea you know, so to hurry up a cameraman I would shout over

Roy Fowler: Maybe you remember some of the producers or directors as we now would call them. We've mentioned George More O'Ferrall

John Hamilton: Rudi Cartier

Bimbi Harris: I did a play with Rudi Cartier and Peter Ustinov on the floor and we just started and the king pin went off one camera and of course they were very anxious in those days to go into breakdown, it was all live of course, so I said to the boys on the floor, are you with me and I'll guide you through. And they said we're with you, and the TOM shut up, we didn't go into breakdown and we did an hour's play with me reshuffling the cameras, I said take over so and so shot, take..., and I was having to talk them all the

way through an hour's show but we got through it. And Rudi Cartier proposed to me at the end of that.

John Hamilton: You refused him

Bimbi Harris: I refused him. It was quite a sweat, but anything to go into breakdown, because it was so annoying if you had to go into breakdown routine and it would probably be half an hour mending a king pin on a camera and getting it going again. But they were very good, the crews.

Roy Fowler: That phrase going into breakdown, expand on that

Bimbi Harris: Well they were always having technical breakdowns, particularly on a Sunday, because Sunday morning we used to have to go in and clean the equipment, and the girls in particular, we had little sort of dustettes, and we used to have to go and blow the dust out of the equipment. And we often came in nice clean blouses. And I thought I'm not going to get my blouse dirty, so I would take my blouse off, go up the racks in my bra and blow out the equipment. And of course once you'd done that there would be problems, so once you started on the air things would breakdown. Of course it was the main evening. There would be an opening announcement, a news and then the play and then the closedown, and that would be it.

Roy Fowler: Didn't it occur to someone to clean the equipment on a less important day

Bimbi Harris: Always Sunday morning.

Roy Fowler: Something very English about that.

What was the routine when a camera or piece of equipment went, I remember the panic caption because it was on the air half the time

Bimbi Harris: That's right, you'd go into breakdown and then the engineers would rush out, all in their long white coats and pull the camera to bits, they didn't have replacements, they had to mend them you see

Roy Fowler: There was a pre-recorded announcement too that always went on, did it not.

Bimbi Harris: And little films of course

John Hamilton: Were cameras wearing long white coats still then

Bimbi Harris: Yes, in those early days. But you see when I went on cameras, that was very resented, I was sent to Coventry.

Roy Fowler: Let's come to that in course, how long were you a vision mixer

Bimbi Harris: I was there about two years and then I went, I did sound but I think I only did sound for a short period

Roy Fowler: Sound was what, sound mixing in the booth

Bimbi Harris: No, I wasn't allowed to do that, I was a sound assistant on the floor with the long pole

Roy Fowler: There were booms weren't they, the Mole Richardson booms

Bimbi Harris: Fish poles -- that's right, remember Twitch on his boom, do you remember Twitch

John Hamilton: Yes

Bimbi Harris: Great big portly fellow with a big tum,

John Hamilton: Beer gut

Bimbi Harris: No, we were sent usually under furniture on our tummies trying to get a mike in some way. Scuffing around

Then I was sent to do telecine, but the boys so resented me they wouldn't tell me a thing.

Roy Fowler: It's difficult to analyse that now, because it's almost inconceivable that a woman would come up against this kind of opposition. Still in some areas, in some trades and professions

John Hamilton: Strangely enough still with cameras particularly

Bimbi Harris: Yes, it was very strong.

Roy Fowler: Tell us about this in detail.

Bimbi Harris: There were two boys doing telecine and they said alright if you're keen to do it, you go and do it. So the two boys went and I was left on my own. I had no idea how to thread it up, no one told me, I put it in upside down, inside out, every conceivably wrong way until I worked it out for myself, because nobody would tell me.

Roy Fowler: This is on the air

Bimbi Harris: Yes, but you see nobody would tell you anything

Roy Fowler: I'm very curious why management as we fondly call it, would permit a situation like this, were they aware of the situation and if so

Bimbi Harris: I think after I had done two or three faults they were aware of it, but by the time they came down, I said it's alright I've got it now.

Roy Fowler; But previously they had said right you can go to telecine, expecting it all to be very straight forward

Bimbi Harris: So there we are. There you are all the faults happened

Roy Fowler: Did you ever try to analyse the problems those poor lads had in their attitude, was it job fear, what was motivating them

Bimbi Harris: You see there were so few of them immediately and it was as they were coming back from the forces, they came back from the forces and found their jobs occupied by females so there was great resentment, they had been away to fight for their country and they wanted to come back to their jobs. I could understand the reason, it was very understandable.

Roy Fowler: So it wasn't really specifically against women as the people who had been there during the war and they happened to be women

Bimbi Harris: That's right.

Roy Fowler: But there must have been a component to it of anti female, anti women in jobs

Bimbi Harris: I think so, because there was a great feeling you should go home and look after the home, it never occurred to them that you had to earn a living to keep a child. But that was

John Hamilton: I remember feeling resentful when I came back from the RAF, I wanted to go back to Bush House, because I had been quite happy on the few occasions I'd been attached there, and strangely enough nearly all the SMs at Bush House were ladies, there were very few fellows there. And I couldn't get in there so I was posted out to Aldernant, Latin American service, and I had to move out to Edgware and live in digs and all sort of things. I loathed them. I could have strangled the bloody lot of them if I'd had the opportunity just to get back.

Bimbi Harris: I can understand it too.

Roy Fowler: Again was this a problem that was faced up to or was it just ignored, swept under the carpet, had to sort itself out, was there any policy attached to reintegration

John Hamilton: You could go and see **Mrs Killem-Roberts**, or Margaret **Room** or some of the lovely ladies in admin of the period, I can't remember any of the ridiculous titles and initials, certainly on my side of the fence, and argue with them, but invariably, they weren't necessarily taking the distaff side, but you were told that is the way it is and your talents are best in that area and you've got to go there.

Bimbi Harris: We accepted a lot

John Hamilton: The assistant to the admin assistant. But it was never that I recall your immediate boss or senior SM who said anything, they just accepted it, they just shoved your names down on a piece of paper in relation to shifts, said you were on next Monday on the late shift and that was the end of it, and there was nobody to complain to from the union point of view

Roy Fowler: Well there was no union

Bimbi Harris: Who controlled the programmes in those days, horn-rim glasses, I remember him

Roy Fowler: Cecil **McGivern**

Bimbi Harris: I remember one day, I had to have glasses for my script and I forgot my glasses and we were about to start, and I thought the only way is to go home. So I went up to Cecil McGivern's office, very nervously knocked at the door, could I please have your chauffeur driven car to take me home and collect my glasses and bring me back. He roared with laughter and said get on with you, yes take him. So I was chauffeur driven home, collected my glasses, I said they're waiting in the studio for me, they can't go ahead.

John Hamilton: There weren't many governors who would have done that

Roy Fowler: No, he was an outsider, wasn't he, he was a writer who had been brought in to radio and then went out again into movies and then came back, an interesting man.

Bimbi Harris: But then of course I did go onto cameras. And again the men didn't like it.

Roy Fowler: This is a surprise to me to some extent, how compartmentalised were the various jobs in those days

Bimbi Harris: Well, not a lot, but you were scheduled, if you were a cameraman you were scheduled in the camera

Roy Fowler: There is greater mobility than I realised, I was on the programme side so I wasn't aware of these things particularly, but I'm surprised they did this

Bimbi Harris: I pushed I think. I said I know that now, what else can I learn

John Hamilton: You pushed to have the attachments

Bimbi Harris: That's right

John Hamilton: It didn't happen in the normal course of events

Bimbi Harris: No, it didn't happen.

John Hamilton: They weren't interchangeable

Roy Fowler: And the way you describe it you were self taught in effect

Bimbi Harris: Oh yes. Absolutely,

Roy Fowler: And you got the same resistance when you went onto camera.

Bimbi Harris: The same, I think somebody did tell me how to line up, it was necessary for racks, for me to cooperate with racks, to line up so they had to give me a little bit of information

Roy Fowler: But they still gave you treatment

Bimbi Harris: Yes, in the canteen I had to sit on my own, they would never let me sit at their table

Roy Fowler: That's outrageous

Bimbi Harris: Yes, it was outrageous

Roy Fowler: Tell us about lining up those old Emitrons.

Bimbi Harris: Well you had the ground glass screen and you had your test card ahead and of course it was upside down and back to front, actually on line up

Roy Fowler: It was an optical system didn't it

Bimbi Harris: On line ups it didn't affect you but you always had to think about panning the opposite way and tipping the opposite way, titling, you always had to think opposite to your eye

Roy Fowler: But the cameraman's viewfinder was an optical system, not an electronic system

Bimbi Harris: No, ground glass

Roy Fowler: Was it reflex, was it through the lens or through another lens

Bimbi Harris: No, through the lens

Roy Fowler: Was there a separate lens

Bimbi Harris: No.

Roy Fowler: So there must have been a little prism or something.

Bimbi Harris: No confirmation, it was just odd. But after you had been say on a play and you had been working on it all day, when you came away you had to adjust your eyes because you were the wrong way round, and then you would see an artist and say I didn't realise you had that tie, because it had been at the bottom of a picture or something like that

Roy Fowler: How rudimentary was the equipment

Bimbi Harris: Very, I used to, when I did tracking, I used to track Friese-Greene who was rather a large gentleman and we had a crab, a three wheeler, electronic, and he used to do track in, and I'd go in, and then there would be the artist and my feet would hold onto the floor and stop it going, with all my weight, because there was no other way, I thought oh god we're going to crash into, it was quite terrifying actually. He would say faster, faster, faster, faster. And I knew you had to stop the thing.

John Hamilton: It was a good job you were born into a fitness aware family

Bimbi Harris: Yes, it was a good job. And then the TOM used to say at the top, shush, because I was making a noise, scraping along

Roy Fowler: The complement of cameras in studio A, there was that rather curious crablike, triangular dolly. One was a highly fixed pedestal camera, was it one or two.

Bimbi Harris: I think there were two pedestal, and then the one that went up and

Roy Fowler: And absolutely immovable on air weren't they, those

Bimbi Harris: Was it Ted Lloyd, he resented me like mad because he was an old film cameraman.

Roy Fowler: What was the remaining camera on, I can't remember, was it a dolly

John Hamilton: Debies were early weren't they, the Mole Richardson iron men were contemporary with, I remember seeing them at Lime Grove certainly

Bimbi Harris: They were very unwieldy and very heavy and difficult to manoeuvre,

Roy Fowler: One could only move them off air,

Bimbi Harris: It was great physical strength, enormous physical strength, which of course they warned me about, because I was a long time just clearing cables and tracking before I was ever allowed to get to a camera, that was your job, clearing cables, particularly when you used to go out into the garden to be rescrapped, Alexander Palace, to do the gardening show, do you remember old Fred, Fred Street, and of course it was my jobs to get the cables out there, miles of cables

Roy Fowler: Did you do more distant OBs.

Bimbi Harris: There weren't in those days, only really the length of the cable.

Roy Fowler: No, they had some trucks, they had them since the Coronation

John Hamilton: They did the Derby, the Cup Final

Bimbi Harris: I wasn't on them then, they used to take the cables down to the racing down below at Alexander Palace, but they were only the length of the cable

John Hamilton: And then fed them back to the studio, no OB unit

Roy Fowler: Let's go back to thumbnail sketches of some of the people that you remember, anything special to say about Cecil McGivern for example.

Bimbi Harris: No, they were all very friendly and easy and

John Hamilton: Cecil was still producing some

Bimbi Harris: He was still producing some, yes that's right and I used to meet them in the control rooms. I remember one very hot summer, I had a sun dress on with no shoulder straps and we were having visitors around, and a TOM said cover yourselves up because the equipment came to here and they couldn't see below so they thought perhaps I had nothing on underneath. It was a very harmless dress you know.

Roy Fowler: You said George would have his cries in the control room

Bimbi Harris: That's right.

Roy Fowler: He was a very enigmatic soul to me

Bimbi Harris: He was. I don't remember a lot about them.

Roy Fowler: Henry Caldwell,

Bimbi Harris: Yes, I did a lot for Henry, I did a great deal for Henry and I'm very sorry he had such a sad end

Roy Fowler: What was his end

Bimbi Harris: He died of cancer of the eyes. And Dickie Afton of course, Henry Caldwell used to do these Cafe Continentals, and they used to go on and on, overrunning was nothing, especially when you had Chevalier there

Roy Fowler: Half of it had never been blocked on camera had it

Bimbi Harris: Well he used to do it from the floor, so unless I was paying attention every second that was the only way I could write my script, because I had to write the script of course, put the shots in, because he was down on the floor, so that when he came up, he used to rely on the vision mixers entirely, because they had just done the artists really, directed the artists. The cameras had been following so I used to jot all that down.

Roy Fowler: I remember one Henry Hall special that was Anglo French, were you on that, when it overran about an hour and a half

Bimbi Harris: That's right, it went on and on and on. It's absolutely incredible.

Roy Fowler: I remember the Fratolini Brothers, I told them to go to make-up and they got absolutely upset, clowns, they thought they were going to make-up

Bimbi Harris: Of course in these very early days there was the strange make up with the green lipstick and the black powder, well not black powder but it was very strange make-up in those early days.

John Hamilton: Did you know Leslie Mitchell then

Bimbi Harris: Yes. Leslie Mitchell of course was very handsome and so was McDonald Hobley and every night they used to have flowers and crowds of women at the entrance to court them, and Mary Malcolm of course and Sylvia Peters

John Hamilton: Matinee idols weren't they

Roy Fowler: They were, for those who had sets anyway, there weren't that many sets around in 1946, were there

Bimbi Harris: And the little girl Jennifer, she used to do announcing, she was too tall for ballet I remember and she came in and did announcing, and I think I was doing sound at the time and she used to forget and she used to call out what's coming next.

Roy Fowler: Cecil Madden is another name that comes to mind. How do you remember Cecil

Bimbi Harris: Tall, thin and dignified.

Roy Fowler: But as a person, there is a voluble school of thought that he was a charlatan.

Bimbi Harris: It didn't affect me that way, we really only knew them on the surface, they were very friendly, they were very appreciative of all we did because they were powerless without us if you see what I mean.

Roy Fowler: A lot of people resent the fact he claimed to have directed or produced the very first show on television in the thirties, those who were there say no, this is nonsense

Bimbi Harris: I remember Dickie Afton, he had, in the studio he had a camera on every side and seemed surprised because one camera always saw the other camera and he couldn't understand how you couldn't not see the other camera.

Roy Fowler: I don't know where those people came from

Bimbi Harris: Extraordinary wasn't it

Roy Fowler: Another one was Walton Anderson, who again didn't really understand

Bimbi Harris: A gentle gentleman. And SE Reynolds, another gentle gentleman

Roy Fowler: He had a girlfriend in the chorus he always used

Bimbi Harris: That's right, Picture Parade

Roy Fowler: Then there were some better people like Royston Morley and

Bimbi Harris: Chris Simpson was marvellous on his music and he would have his head on the score the whole time, he never looked up at a camera ever, he would just say what instrument was coming up

Roy Fowler: Regardless of whether it was in the shot

Bimbi Harris: That's right. And that's how it worked

Roy Fowler: Desmond Davis

Bimbi Harris: That's right, because he did the original training, didn't he with the lenses, because it was all lenses in those days so we had to know about that

John Hamilton: And wrote the classic book of course, the production manual

Bimbi Harris: I think Desmond was more efficient than most of them because he understood the technicality, he had bothered to understand the technicalities

John Hamilton: He was more or less the first real one

Roy Fowler: He was the thinking man's producer.

Bimbi Harris: Most of the producers were naturally interested in their artists

Roy Fowler: In more ways than one

Bimbi Harris: I can't remember the girl who Rudi Cartier always used to have in every production but he always said you must never see the left profile, so we always used to have to get cameras around and always get one profile, this particular girl

John Hamilton: Did you ever work with our late colleague Tatania Lieven when she was an actress

Bimbi Harris: No, not as an actress

John Hamilton: Only later on when she became a director, she aged and left the stage. I've got some old books on television, and I've got one by a guy called Guy Swift about television, a very early one and some pictures of her, and she was absolutely beautiful, wonderful looking women

Bimbi Harris: I can imagine that, lovely bones

John Hamilton: And looking at the write ups for her, she was an excellent actress obviously, despite the accent.

Roy Fowler: Give me some of the classic programmes or plays from those days, what comes to mind. Were you on any of the ones that they write about.

Bimbi Harris: Yes, I used to work on a lot

Roy Fowler: Because it is quite extraordinary what people would tackle in those two studios.

Bimbi Harris: Enormous. And all live of course. A two hour play

Roy Fowler: Hamlet was done, I can't remember who played it. I remember I worked on a Shaw play Arms and the Man with a marvellous cast. I remember a very young, no that is another one, a Somerset Maughan play with a very young Bryan Forbes asking me about television and the cameras, already he had his eyes open

Bimbi Harris: We did Somerset Maughan a lot, really, didn't we

Roy Fowler: Yes, there was a lot of Maughan, well they were very tidy 3 act plays that lent themselves to television.

John Hamilton: How many vision mixers were there

Bimbi Harris: Five, I think, something like that.

John Hamilton: Was Audrey with you there

Bimbi Harris: Audrey came a little later, Audrey, Elsie Gray and Joan, they had been on transmitters in sound radio, so they came down a bit later, but they came down and joined in.

John Hamilton: It is nearly all women, it is interesting that women have carried through in vision mixing

Roy Fowler; I was about to ask that question John, do you think that the war and the predominance of available women led to the convention that women were vision mixers and PAs and such like

Bimbi Harris: If I could just skip ahead for a second, when commercial started and I was over as a senior vision mixer I had to engage all the vision mixers and I was so determined to get boys in, I wanted to get 50% because I knew our salaries would go up, so I had 50% boys and 50% girls, for the sole reason

Roy Fowler: And low and behold it worked that way

Bimbi Harris: It worked that way and has lasted ever since

Roy Fowler: It is an unfair world

Bimbi Harris: It is an unfair world, but that was the only way I could see to right it.

Roy Fowler: Good thinking.

Bimbi Harris: That was a little bit later. But still back at Ally Pally

Roy Fowler: Because Ally Pally is a fascinating period in British television

Bimbi Harris: Used to go to Broadcasting House and take the Green Line coach which used to take us up there,

John Hamilton: To the very door, just opposite

Bimbi Harris: And at that time I was trying to furnish a little flat I had in the Strand, and in the break I would go into Muswell Hill and pick up tables and chairs and things and take them back on this wretched Green Line bus, and they accepted that I should take my furniture back to Broadcasting House. I had to take a taxi from there to get it down to the Strand.

Roy Fowler: It was a cottage industry then, very quaint, rather archaic,

Bimbi Harris, Very quaint, very friendly

Roy Fowler: Did you have any inkling of the size that television would grow to, because I certainly didn't. The way it would take over the world

Bimbi Harris: It was very exciting of course, and in I think it was 1947, the great winter of the snow, it closed down, for a month it closed down. You couldn't believe that television could close down, it just closed down for a month.

John Hamilton: There was a huge problems with transmitters of course then, there was with radio

Roy Fowler: You mean during the winter

Bimbi Harris: It was a very bad winter and a lot of snow

Roy Fowler: I was in the army in Egypt, I missed all that

John Hamilton: It was a horrendous winter, I was in the middle of it, it took me days to get home, but it did effect broadcasting enormously, it affected enormously, it's the worst winter I could ever remember.

Bimbi Harris: I think things couldn't get up the hill I suppose at Alexandra Palace.

John Hamilton: It was largely food and stuff, I had two friends who worked on the northern transmitter then and they were snowed in, they didn't move for weeks on end and the food ran out, the water, they were melting snow out of the window to survive, ridiculous situation

Bimbi Harris: Actually the only time, you asked me about leaving the studio, I did leave the studio for the Olympic Games, that was 1948 but it was, there were no toilets for women and there were two of us and we used to have to go and stand guard while the other one went in, it was a bit chronic and stifling

Roy Fowler: They had taken the studio equipment out to wherever it was, was it Wembley

John Hamilton: No White City

Bimbi Harris: Yes

Roy Fowler: So they weren't using the OB units

Bimbi Harris: No, they built special shacks, I expect they wanted more than the original OB units

John Hamilton: We were all roped in, I was at Aldenant but I did some radio on a OB A8, just a feeder position along Wembley Way in fact, my first experience of Wembley in any way whatsoever

Roy Fowler: You were talking about the transmitters, I have a very hazy recollection, was there an enormous transmitter hall on the ground floor at AP or is that just my recollection

John Hamilton: No

Roy Fowler: Huge and like a Fritz Lang film set

Bimbi Harris: But these later women we were referring to, who came to us, Elsie and Audrey, they were on transmitters in Daventry or somewhere

Roy Fowler: What did they do on transmitters, transmitter maintenance was it

Bimbi Harris: I suppose so

Roy Fowler: So you had to know a little more than OMS law to do that

Bimbi Harris: We were trained, I was trained a little bit during those early days, but they said that the women out there, particularly the ones who had babies used to put the napkins on the line, they just to accept them with babies if they wanted them to work. Sorry I was jumping back

John Hamilton: When did Lime Grove open, '49 or '50. Children's and. Daphne went there in 1950

Bimbi Harris: I think it probably was about '50, it hadn't been open very long. I certainly went there when it opened.

John Hamilton: Did you move to Lime Grove

Bimbi Harris: Yes, I moved to Lime Grove, that little tiny slim studio, G, G was the skinny one, what was the others, I don't really remember, I can remember more about Alexandra Palace surprisingly than I do of Lime Grove, although I was a long time there and the long tube rides out to get there.

Roy Fowler: But what have we not talked about AP,

Bimbi Harris: It was a beautiful situation, these beautiful grounds, these beautiful grassy slopes and the lime trees of which the scent was absolutely heaven when it you used to go up there. A fascinating building, and a long corridor and the canteen at the end up.

John Hamilton: Doomed building. They're terribly in the red now, it was on the news last week. They've spent millions on rebuilding it since the second fire

Bimbi Harris: Doomed building, I hope they keep it going some way. I don't remember a lot more about it

John Hamilton: In radio days we used to use, there was a radio studio, the King George V suite with the organ in it and we used to go up there and do Music While You Works with Sandy McPherson and all the organists of the period, it was murder because the acoustic was dreadful, thoroughly dreadful. You couldn't get a balance out of anything in there. And Music While You Works and things we used to do there

Bimbi Harris: Which I, I believe I mentioned to you the other day which I messed up because nobody told me when I was recording that they specially balanced it toppy to go over the machinery and I thought this is coming much too toppy

John H of all Hamilton: And you put the bass in

Bimbi Harris: But it only needed a word to me to tell me and I wouldn't have done it, so there was I, I don't know what they're doing up there

Roy Fowler: Was that thoughtfulness or an attempt to sabotage you

Bimbi Harris: No, no, it was non-communication

John Hamilton: Nobody told the engineers

Bimbi Harris: It was meant to be toppy.

John Hamilton: With the old tannoy across the factory machinery in the factories and things

Bimbi Harris: Lack of communication, I think there must have a lot of lack of communication in those days, particularly because of the big divide between the engineers and the programme side

John Hamilton: It became murder, ridiculously so

It wasn't really solved until the period now you're talking about, 1949, 1950, when they combined to become studio management, on the radio side certainly, not so much in television, that broke down the barriers, people came in, programme engineers

Bimbi Harris: A little bit but I used to apply for every single job for director, or producer as they called it, they'd say what you again, and I'd say yes me again, and I used to go to every single one, every board for years

Roy Fowler: We'll come onto that if we can just analyse a moment those attitudes, those barriers, why do you think they existed

Bimbi Harris: I think they came from Reith's day when the engineers were very much working engineers

Roy Fowler: So they were the working class in effect

Bimbi Harris: They were very much the working class

Roy Fowler: And the programme people were the middle class

Bimbi Harris: They were in overalls, they were working class

Roy Fowler: It was a kind of microcosm of class

Bimbi Harris: Absolutely, absolutely, and I suppose it was the women who helped break it down, because the women used to talk in the canteen and drink in the bar with the programme side and we didn't really think about it only that

John Hamilton: Chatted up by the programme side

Bimbi Harris: Chatted up by the programme side, that's right

Roy Fowler; So who was responsible for it, were the programme people superior and looking down, patronising the engineers

Bimbi Harris: I don't think so,

Roy Fowler: Or was it the engineers being deferential

John Hamilton: There was the old boy bit, a lot of the programme people and the producers were ex university, whatever

Roy Fowler: Public school, knew each other

John Hamilton: xxx started coming in as well, above us. And it was ever thus

Bimbi Harris: I didn't feel it working, because you worked with the programme side. so I was never conscious of it, the feeling of being put down

Roy Fowler: But it was hierarchical,

Bimbi Harris: That's right, I couldn't get across, no way would they have an engineer to go on the programme side, however much knowledge you had and however long you'd worked on programmes

John Hamilton: And you'd never depart from the rules either, it was always hello recording room, now you would say hello Bimbi, because you recognise the voice on the other end, wouldn't you, and they'd say ok John, we're standing by, we'll do it. But it was never that at all, it was very formal, very formal

Roy Fowler: But the Corporation was, was it not, overall. The way you're telling it, on the one hand individuals were very much individuals, people were people, but on the other hand the ethos of the place was really stiff upper lip, very starchy

John Hamilton: Very class conscious

Bimbi Harris: It all came from Reith I'm sure, it's the way he thought it should be and that was the rules, wanted to keep to the rules

Roy Fowler: There is a book, a very long, thick book I suspect, on the influence that man has had on not just broadcasting but on society

Bimbi Harris: Well broadcasting affected society

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Bimbi Harris

SIDE 3, TAPE 2

Bimbi Harris: I was just going to tell you about Christmases at Lime Grove

Roy Fowler: Before we get on to Christmases let's talk about Lime Grove because we've made a jump from the AP to

Bimbi Harris: The studios. We all thought they were nice and clean and modern I suppose

Roy Fowler: Did you ask to go or were you just assigned

Bimbi Harris: I asked to go, anything new I asked for. It was always a challenge

Roy Fowler: You went there as what

Bimbi Harris: I went there as a vision mixer

Roy Fowler: Was there a mass exodus from AP or did they train in up a whole load of new people for it

Bimbi Harris: And there were new people coming in all the time but AP was grinding down to a standstill. I can't remember when it closed, can you

Roy Fowler: Only recently, it was used as a news place for a long time

John Hamilton It went on for, what 10, 12 years ago

Roy Fowler: On a very limited basis

Bimbi Harris: Very limited. That's right, when the news went out

John Hamilton: Yes, the news division was still there

Bimbi Harris: Yes, but there must have been a period when it closed before the news started up, wasn't there,

Roy Fowler: I don't know, I wasn't here

Bimbi Harris: I think there must have been a period when it closed down

John Hamilton: It must have been in the Sixties, I think, after ITV started

Bimbi Harris: That's right

Roy Fowler: Everything went to Lime Grove

Bimbi Harris: Everything went to Lime Grove

Roy Fowler: They were buying theatres too

Bimbi Harris: That's right, the one at Shepherd's Bush and the little one at Fulham

Roy Fowler: And Riverside at Hammersmith

John Hamilton: It has quite a history that studio

Bimbi Harris: I'm going to tell you about Christmases, for the sociological effect. We always had a party which the BBC put out Christmas night. Parties on the air are never successful

John Hamilton: Fatal

Bimbi Harris: I mean from a viewer's point of view it must have been hell but on that particular day we always changed jobs. So a cameraman did sound and a sound man did vision mixing, everybody changed jobs. So from the viewers point of view it must have been worse than it was normally. And we were all very happy, we had drinks around and the producers used to bring in bottles and keep us going. But we did all change jobs. It was quite traditional, Christmas Day you did a different job. You had no idea what you were going to do

John Hamilton: Everso anti-BBC that

Roy Fowler: Was it a very pissy occasion

Bimbi Harris: A little bit

Roy Fowler : Because by this time I'm in the States it was traditional there that if you were on the air on New Year's Eve you didn't draw a sober breath

Bimbi Harris: The artist used to have these funny games and sports and things that went on in the studio, and they were getting happy too. But it must have been awful for the viewers, it must have been death

John Hamilton: I remember watching them in the early Fifties merely for the disasters, the potential disasters

Bimbi Harris: Probably everything was in shot

John Hamilton: Right for It Will be Alright On the Right

Roy Fowler: What about the equipment, it when did that changed, did the **Emitrons** stay for the entire length of AP

Bimbi Harris: Yes it must have been going to Lime Grove, they began to get new equipment

Roy Fowler: And you opened there with Marconi cameras

Bimbi Harris: That's right and there was a more sophisticated Engineering Department, real Engineering not like I was, superficial, the cameras used to go in for maintenance a lot, there was a lot of maintenance. There was a big maintenance section, it was much more efficient and we didn't break down nearly so much

Roy Fowler: The cameras were more reliable probably

Bimbi Harris: The cameras were more reliable

John Hamilton: It was a specialised maintenance unit as well, whereas you did your own previously, programme engineers were suppose to be able to do their own maintenance,

Roy Fowler: With string and Scotch tape

Bimbi Harris: That's right and it became more professional. The viewers had increased of course. That is when it really started

Roy Fowler: The set count is really growing very, very rapidly in the late Forties and early Fifties

Bimbi Harris: That's right. You hear a lot of people now say I was in the beginning of the television but they mean 1955, they don't realise it had been going 10 years before they joined

Roy Fowler: The beginning of ITV

Roy Fowler: 20 years. was there any change in attitude, ethos programming at Lime Grove or was it pretty much still the AP tradition

Bimbi Harris: The AP tradition went on

The Roy Fowler: Do you remember how long each day the station was on the air, there are two stations now, right, they're transmitting from Birmingham, that was the second one or was it Manchester

John Hamilton: Birmingham was the first one in and then Manchester

Roy Fowler Is it still an evening thing

Bimbi Harris: No, it had begun to expand then. And I think about that time they did stop the King or the Queen at the end

John Hamilton: And yes, the Union Jack thing

Bimbi Harris: And I think it was about that time that it stopped wasn't it

John Hamilton: Yes

Bimbi Harris: Which was quite a relief because the films and were all old and cracked and the sound was awful

John Hamilton: And it could have been that a lot of people when we think of names, even our colleagues in ITV recently, Vic Gardiner for example, Don Gale, people like that who had come out of the services, **came out of** radio, I didn't do that, I stayed with radio until ITV started and, but many of them came back into radio and then moved into television, and became a cameramen, senior cameraman and so on

Bimbi Harris: But they were of course, they were very junior and camera men in those days. A lot of the junior cameraman

John Hamilton But the Stephen Wades and people were the seniors, the generation before

Roy Fowler: Is there any cross fertilisation, are engineers making the jump now into programming

Bimbi Harris: Not yet, not yet, no it had to wait until commercial started

John Hamilton: It didn't really happen until ITV came.

Bimbi Harris: There were lots of them who were young cameramen like Reg Watts and when I retired and went to visit my sister in New Zealand, there they were head of TV1, head of TV2, these young boys who were little camera men when I knew them. Good luck to them, they did very well

Roy Fowler: So really nothing much has changed

Bimbi Harris: Not from those days, no, I think you still worked as hard, you still worked all hours and there was never any mention of overtime, never any, all my years at the BBC there was never any mention of overtime and you worked colossal hours really

Roy Fowler: Is your recollection to that you were still working for a hierarchical masculine dominated organisation

Bimbi Harris: It felt less and less

John Hamilton: There were many more women, certainly in the Lime Grove era, Daphne was a typical example, production secretaries and duty officers and assistant and things

Roy Fowler: But always at a working level

John Hamilton: And then sideways into production. And there were a lot of women at Lime Grove

Bimbi Harris: There were a lot of women at Lime Grove

John Hamilton: A lot of women producers, an amazing number of them when you think about it, Dorothea Brooking, Pamela Brown, Hazel Wilkinson, Mary Adams

Roy Fowler: Grace Wyndham Goldie, Carol Doncaster

John Hamilton: Lime Grove when you think about it was a classic place, they ought to put a plaque on the wall, because of that aspect of it, equalisation of men and women, and of course the breeding ground of ITV, people like Lloyd Williams and Steven Wade and others who came in who were recruited from there, without which ITV wouldn't have happened

Bimbi Harris: I remember Carol Doncaster, she went to do a show in Russia and she came back with no sound, I think she was demoted or sacked after that and I thought poor woman, because she wasn't a technician, she was a producer, but she had no sound

Roy Fowler: What had gone wrong

Bimbi Harris: I don't know, but it didn't seem to me her fault but I remember the great sadness when she went, because of that

John Hamilton: What happened to Carol she went to India but then vanished

Roy Fowler: About two years ago we got an address for her living in the country somewhere, I wrote to her to say I would like to record her but there was no reply

Bimbi Harris: There was Grace Wyndham Goldie with her young men

John Hamilton: Young chaps

Bimbi Harris: She had an entourage of young men, and she used to come into the studio and book hours for rehearsal. She usually had one speaker and she would spend at least an hour fussing about, a flower leaf here, a tablecloth there, and you would think you can't do many more alterations, on and on and on and on. You would fade out and track in and you didn't see any more after that and. My goodness she was fussy about that, on and on

John Hamilton: Presumably all the young men were hanging over her shoulder watching

And Bimbi Harris: That's right, young Michael Peacock and Baverstock

Roy Fowler: This would have been when, the early Fifties

Bimbi Harris: I should think so, during the 50s any how

John Hamilton: 1953, the first few years before ITV started. I met Baverstock on a course which I related in my story, at a production course in Marylebone Rd

Bimbi Harris: Royston Morley ran that and also another man

John Hamilton: That's right, and Baverstock came in a few days after the course started, and became a total pain in the ear because every time it was coffee break time or lunch time or tea-time or whatever he would ask a question of the then lecturer. And everybody loathed him on sight, after the first two days we would all look because we knew the minute time came up, he would leap to his feet and ask a question, I'm sure he did it deliberately. He was always like that, Donald, anyway.

Bimbi Harris: He was, he did want to know everything

John Hamilton: He wanted to know everything but he wanted to make his own name by infuriating people as well, and he certainly did that. That was before Miss Goldie got her hands on him, that must have been about 1951 I think, I had just gone to Aeolian and went back on that course

Bimbi Harris: Brian Tesler was coming in, straight from university, and holding his hand through all the shows

John Hamilton: It helped being Ronnie Wall's nephew didn't it

Roy Fowler: There is still a degree of nepotism

John Hamilton: Yes. Not a great deal, I can't remember too many cases of nepotism in the BBC, far more in ITV in the course of the years

Bimbi Harris: I think one is conscious of it now because you see a name come up on credits and you think that must be so and so's niece or nephew or something

Roy Fowler: Well there are a lot of Magnusons around currently. What kind of shows are you working on, across the board on everything

Bimbi Harris: Across the board, you were just scheduled to do

Roy Fowler: Anything sticks in your memory as innovation that surprised you or shocked you or horrified you

Bimbi Harris: What horrified me was the awful wrestling they used to bring into the studio. I used to hate to see that, look out of the window and see them. But that was just personally me. There were a lot of animal and things in the studio which we never seemed to have before, people going around with little buckets cleaning up after them.

John Hamilton: George **Cansdale**, the zoo man.

Roy Fowler: What about big shows

John Hamilton: There were big plays, big varieties, and you'd take your turn on it

Roy Fowler: Was there an influx of new producers and directors or was it still the old AP contingent

Bimbi Harris: No, there were new, you see, as I say Brian Tesler arrived at that period,

Roy Fowler: He came in as a trainee

Bimbi Harris: They used to come straight from university and originally they used to go down on the floor for 6 months which was very good for them and then they would come into the control room, and then usually the staff would carry them for 6 months, it was almost an unwritten law but if after 6 months they didn't begin to know their job, help was withdrawn and let them get on with it

John Hamilton: Came deep end time

Bimbi Harris: It was never mentioned, but it just used to happen

Roy Fowler: Sink or swim

Bimbi Harris: That's right, but everyone was very willing to help them at the beginning because they had to be helped, they would never have got on the air, however bright their

idea was, they would never have got it on the air. And some of them of course fell by the wayside then, didn't they.

Roy Fowler: There was great professional pride in what one was doing, yes

Bimbi Harris: Very much so, however humble your job, it was important to you

John Hamilton: And it was always the show must go on. That is the awful ethos that has haunted us all in the course of the era, that is why there are so many layabouts in the industry, because they were carried by the crews

Bimbi Harris: That's right, they were carried

John Hamilton: But not just after a few months, at least that was a good idea, the principle of withdrawing the help, and seeing if they made it on their own.

Bimbi Harris: Some did of course, some did very well and some just never, never, never grasped it, could never cue in the control room, never, never, even to this day David, who was with us on the South Bank, David **Coulter**, he never says a word in the control room, never says a word

John Hamilton: Mute director

Bimbi Harris: How can people live all their lives and never say a word, because the crews carried them

Roy Fowler: It's astonishing that one survives in that situation

Bimbi Harris: He did have the backing of the union all the way through and he was a very nice fellow

Roy Fowler: Why would the union back him

John Hamilton: The union backed him for totally wrong reasons, for that very reason, he didn't do anything, he could have been a cardboard cut-out, ridiculous

Roy Fowler: How would you describe in a few words being at Lime Grove in those days in the 50s, pre ITV

Bimbi Harris: In a way we got lazier, in a way there were more staff and you came in and did your job and it was more mechanical, and you didn't have the enthusiasm you had in the AP days when you turned your hand to anything. That to me

John Hamilton: The equipment was better though

Bimbi Harris: The equipment was better and you did your job but I didn't feel there was the excitement of going in

John Hamilton: I think the equipment probably overtook the production staff, didn't it, that is probably why you got slightly bored, I think it happened in radio as well when you got condenser mikes, you could get a better sound out of things, but if the producers hadn't advanced and gave you the opportunity to use your vision mixing panel all over the place, or your faders all over the place, it got boring, it got very boring. Whereas with the primitive equipment you had to fight the equipment all the time

Bimbi Harris: That's probably what it was, John. They did ask me to design a vision mixing panel which I was quite flattered to be asked, and I did design one with a few extra mixers and things, not the old A, B one, which they used of course for years and years and years

John Hamilton: Were there any special effects done then, could you have split a screen

Bimbi Harris: No, we were just getting onto fancy mixes and all that kind of thing

John Hamilton: It was the RCA mixer, the RCA effects generator which first gave us that in ITV,

Bimbi Harris: And then a bit later on, when we had back projection, we used to have xxx pictures and I designed a box and to this day they call it the Bimbi box. And people in years time will wonder what on earth a Bimbi box is

Roy Fowler: Tell us about that in more detail

Bimbi Harris: It is only to put the slides up, because I think Michael **Yates**, head of design, said you're never going to get colour, it was when we were coming into colour

John Hamilton: This is much later, you've jumped a big lump

Bimbi Harris: Yes, I have, but he said you're never going to get colour and I refused to be defeated that I couldn't get colour so I had to have a box that was designed to pick up the colour, to throw the colour on the screen, yes it is a little bit out of time. But it is extraordinary that one man who is the head of design could dictate that you're never going to get colour. Oh yes, it was during the Lime Grove days that we were experimenting with colour of course, and I remember Sylvia Peters coming on with the flowers and we used to have to do all the colour, much too bright, much too obvious but the colour was strident in those days

Roy Fowler: What was the system, was it an all electronic system

Bimbi Harris: It must have been

John Hamilton: There were the EMI, the first 3 tube cameras,

Bimbi Harris: That's right and that was the great change really at Lime Grove, was colour coming. And then of course the States had started and they went into colour bang

Roy Fowler: No

Bimbi Harris: Well almost,

Roy Fowler: I was there and it was a long haul. There were first of all the two systems, that is why I asked about the all electronic system, because CBS, Peter Goldsmith had promoted an electro mechanical system which was daft actually, it was a spinning disc, which gave in the terms of those days an acceptable picture. And we were doing colour transmissions using this system out of **Liederkrantz** Hall, which was 55th St. But RCA, NBC, were working on an all electronic system which was not at that point as good but obviously was the future. And CBS, how I don't know, I'm sure there is a story there but they had their system adopted by the FCC as the American standard and then very rapidly thereafter it was stopped, it was cancelled and eventually, of course, the RCA system was the one that came in, so there was an enormous amount of experimentation

Bimbi Harris: I think there was at the BBC too at that time.

Roy Fowler: It went on the air about 1955, 1956, but the set cost was absolutely minimal. The sets were extremely expensive, I bought one and it was 800 dollars and 800 bucks in those days was a very sizeable sum.

John Hamilton: Very, very heavy

Roy Fowler; Extremely heavy and not only did the set cost you 800 bucks but the service contract each year was about 110, 120 just to make sure the thing stayed working. But I wish I had it now because it would be a fascinating piece of equipment

John Hamilton: I was telling Roy about your involvement, and I remember meeting you again at Highbury at HDF

Bimbi Harris: Yes, I used to be sent up there, with the flickering

John Hamilton: Moonlighting even went on in those days. That was slightly later, that was just before ITV happened, about 1953, 1954

Bimbi Harris: It was the days earlier of Arthur Askey and all those shows and he was such a good sport really, because I remember one show, he came one with a knapsack, and the boys had put stage weights in it for the take, and he had to pick this up and keep going and gagging, and it had these great stage weights in

John Hamilton: Stage weights had their uses.

Bimbi Harris: Didn't they. When the stage hands used to clear up at the end of the day, they used to find panties and all sorts of things behind the sets.

Roy Fowler: We're talking about where

Bimbi Harris: Lime Grove, Lime Grove days

John Hamilton: Arthur Askey had a very long running series

Bimbi Harris: It went on and on. Bill Ward used to do them. It came from the flat at the top of Broadcasting House

John Hamilton: Yes, the translation of the old Bandwagon show, the radio show, what was it called, I remembered reading a crit once saying Arthur was the first star really who actually fitted the medium

Bimbi Harris: He was. Was it Sabrina. That's right. She was the well endowed young lady, blond, a great walk on and always brought great, but then they were starting audiences then too, we didn't have audiences at AP but there were audiences at Lime Grove

John Hamilton: Before Your Very Eyes

Bimbi Harris: Before Your Very Eyes. That's it.

John Hamilton: And it became one of his catch phrases.

Bimbi Harris: But all these, they were such good troopers, they took a lot of flack, especially on rehearsals because you would go on and on to get it right

John Hamilton: That's presumably where Bill **Stewart** met Anthea and married her, Anthea Askey

Bimbi Harris: I suppose it was, yes.

John Hamilton: They were very good shows, variety shows, and Henry was

Bimbi Harris: Henry was still doing it, Henry Caldwell,

John Hamilton: With Lloyd Williams working with him, Lloyd was the connection into ITV, eventually for many of us. Who was the other director, did lots and lots of variety, also conducted an orchestra

Bimbi Harris: We used to have the Robinson programmes too,

John Hamilton: The Music Show, Eric Robinson Shows, well it was the guy who directed those

Bimbi Harris: They were very, very popular shows and Eric used to come on and I used to go down in the studio in those days and nearly always it was the same session boys and they used to play Hearts and Flowers to me when I went down there, it was very sweet, different name bands but the same boys, the same session boys, working so hard. You used to get to know them all of course

Roy Fowler: How long, your next move eventually you were

Bimbi Harris: Commercial

Roy Fowler: As long as that, you stayed a vision mixer at

Bimbi Harris: Yes all the little jobs there until 1955. As I said I was always applying, always applying

Roy Fowler: And what did they say, how did they treat you.

Bimbi Harris: Almost a joke, almost a joke, you again, you know you can't get across, you know you can't, we won't allow it.

Roy Fowler: These were boards, tell us about the BBC boards

Bimbi Harris: Well the BBC boards would always ask you your background, your educational qualifications, of which I had nil, and they would note all these down and they would say you don't stand an earthly, that was their attitude, you don't stand an earthly, you have applied, we have to see you. But don't expect to join, it was absolute cut off

Roy Fowler: Who sat on these boards

Bimbi Harris: People like Mary Adams and Grace Wyndham Goldie and those people and there must have been official men on them, but I don't really remember them, I remember the women more because I think I used to try to appeal to them, that I wanted to do it, desperately wanted to do it

Roy Fowler: I went to one and as I remember there were 3 people

Bimbi Harris: There were more than that

Roy Fowler: Maybe it varied but I thought there was a person from the programme department, a person from personnel and an admin character

Bimbi Harris: And there might have been somebody on the training courses who would come to see if I could be trained.

Roy Fowler: But it was just a flat negative

Bimbi Harris: Until commercial came, commercial came and of course I was courted by every company, the world was my oyster, I had the choice of it all which was absolutely fabulous.

Roy Fowler: How did they go about it, did they call you up, invite you out for lunch

Bimbi Harris: Call you up, invite you out for lunch and drinks and offered you money and you think I was earning about £400 a year there and it crept up and it crept up and then some one offered me £1000 a year and I thought I would never ever get £1000 a year

Roy Fowler: Your BBC was 400

Bimbi Harris: About 400. And I was offered this to train and select the vision mixers

Roy Fowler: How did people know about you, they had previously worked with you

Bimbi Harris: Of course. Yes

Roy Fowler: And they themselves had been wooed away

Bimbi Harris: Of course. I accepted and Rediffusion offered me a £1000 a year and I thought this was absolutely splendid and I went over

Roy Fowler: What was the reaction at the BBC

Bimbi Harris: **Dorian** Stevens immediately offered me a job, I had 3 producers jobs offered, but I said I'm sorry I've signed now, Mary Adams offered me a job, Grace Wyndham Goldie and Dorian Stevens all offered me producers jobs. And I said I'm sorry I've signed. And the only one I ever met afterwards was Mary Adams and she apologised. She said I know you tried all those years and I'm sorry we didn't give you the opportunity and that was the only one whose ever mentioned it. But within 6 months I was directing because in the early days they engaged a lot of B film directors, and this is commercial, and of course they had no idea about continuous takes and within 6 months they said would you like to direct. And of course I grabbed it. And it just went from then onwards.

Roy Fowler: We should talk a little more in detail about the transitional period. Getting Rediffusion on the air. How long before they went on the air did you join them

Bimbi Harris: I suppose 4 or 5 months maybe. We were in I think it was Stratford House in Piccadilly, they had offices there, certainly that is where I did all the interviewing, and of course when we had our salaries upped the BBC were terrified because so many people were going across, the people who were left behind said oh no we want security, BBC and all that, they immediately had their salaries upped. So we felt a bit deflated about that

Roy Fowler: Did they ever reach the commercial level

Bimbi Harris: Oh yes. It took a long time

Roy Fowler: The BBC union was then certainly very weak

Bimbi Harris: Yes, but they didn't want more people to go, they were losing left right and centre, they were losing people

Roy Fowler: The people that Rediffusion were recruiting were they all BBC

Bimbi Harris: Ex BBC except for the directors which, they were getting from the film business and they soon realised that they just could not cope with continuous takes

Roy Fowler: Were any people being trained up or not

Bimbi Harris: Gradually, that came later, but the ones they engaged, they had training sessions down at the studios in Fulham Broadway going on all the time there. They must have spent a lot of money training. I remember when I was interviewed I think it the Australian man who interviewed me, I can't remember, and he said how many shows had I done. And I said I reckoned I'd done 7,000 shows. So he said I don't think we need to train you. So that was the end of my training there and I was put on training other people of course. It went from there, we were busy training every body for every job really. It was almost like the beginning of Ally Pally because there was a great enthusiasm, great training going on and everybody was wanting to get into the act

Roy Fowler: I meant to ask you before: Did you go to AP in 46 before it went on the air

Bimbi Harris: Yes, about a month before, not very much

Roy Fowler: Coming back to Rediffusion did you have any input to the design of the control rooms

Bimbi Harris: No, strangely enough I was asked things like what colour decorating would I like, those sorts of question but the equipment I wasn't asked about

Roy Fowler: But not ergonomically how the panels should be designed

Bimbi Harris: No, and remember Michael Westmore was there and we had the old A B mixer which was very, very limited and they asked Michael Westmore what he thought should go there and Michael Westmore said the A B is fine. I did remonstrate a little bit and we did get the better equipment later on but it broke my heart that a director had said it was fine

Roy Fowler: That is extraordinary, I would have thought they would be sending people over to the States for example where equipment was really comparatively sophisticated by this time

Bimbi Harris: They didn't, it was the original A B mixers which were put in

Roy Fowler: Maybe they had a budget they had to conform to

Bimbi Harris: I expect so. They were busy getting the floors level and the place sound proofed and all that kind of thing

Roy Fowler: The start up costs must have been huge

Bimbi Harris: Absolutely enormous, but Rediffusion did make a lot of money and it was my bad luck I suppose that I did a lot of panel games, on and on and on.

Roy Fowler: Let's take it step by step. Anything to tell us about the warm-up period as the station approaches coming on the air

Bimbi Harris: Yes, there were a lot of trial programmes, people had their own ideas of what they wanted and they were allowed to do them. They weren't highly successful and you think somebody has been thinking about this for years probably and it didn't seem to gel.

Roy Fowler: Was there a great difference in attitude between the new bunch and BBC, was it noticeably so

Bimbi Harris: It was noticeably that we were all the same, programme and engineering, we were all going ahead, mixing together, although we did mix socially on the BBC side, but everybody mixed from any grade right the way down they all mixed together, all intermingled, all asking people questions of course, the engineering, my side of it, vision mixing were asking production questions, and production people were asking engineering questions, capabilities, what they thought we could do and how advanced we were. Of course we weren't much more advanced than the BBC really, but I think that we were willing to have a go at things, take more chances with things

Roy Fowler: Was recruiting any more open would you say, if a lad turned up from the East Ham would he stand a chance

Bimbi Harris: Well there was that lovely, Albert, that lovely Cockney floor manager they had, yes anybody who applied, if they had the capabilities, and a lot of them I suppose worked on small radio stations and things like that and they were all applying, it was wonderful. You see Rediffusion was the first, they were the pioneers and they had only been on the air I think 3 months and they realised that they couldn't go on with the staff they had, because they had to have trained staff, so they were falling more back onto the BBC people that had come over. And they were pulling the BBC people up to higher grades and we were just very lucky. I consider myself very lucky because I got in and I got there and then I was offered more work and it was a very lucky period, because they nearly went broke you know after the 3 months, the first 3 months, they lost so much money. I think in fact they even close down one studio and kept going on one studio because they only had a certain amount of money. It was a very scrimping time and they kept the nucleus of staff there, they got rid of all the ones they had got in from outside and this little nucleus, practically all BBC, ex BBC group. And there was one good thing about it because the BBC had a very high standard, very high standard then for their picture quality and their sound quality, at the end of the 50s and that high quality came over

Roy Fowler: Which rubbed off onto the ITA

Bimbi Harris: Rubbed off, because I always used to say in those early days the high quality is entirely due to the BBC trained staff and they all wanted to keep this high quality up which was very admirable really, you know that and it's kept up until I suppose this last 10 years really. A good thing

Roy Fowler: Had you asked for promotion or did they suddenly offer it to you

Bimbi Harris: They offered it to me

Roy Fowler; Which must have been very pleasant

Bimbi Harris: Very pleasant. But as I say I was mainly doing panel games. I was doing about 5 panel games a week

Roy Fowler: Winging them I suppose

Bimbi Harris: Well I had a production assistant and a secretary and they were about, I used to think there were about 800 and 1000 letter a week. And I think I used to try and read most of them but I used to stamp ABCD for replies on them and the girls would just get out the concrete letter for that. And in the end I couldn't even sign them, I had to have a rubber stamp for my signature because there was so much. And then I complained that I was doing so many shows and it was Peter Wills then, and he said yes, I will do something to help you, you can't go on like this, churning, churning them out. So he put above me Leslie Mitchell and Colonel **De Lisle**, Chris De Lisle, he put those two people above me and they had their secretaries. So not only was I doing 5 panel games a week I

was telling them what to do too. And it was absolutely ridiculous because they had no idea what they were put above.

Roy Fowler: These were night time shows were they

Bimbi Harris: Yes

Roy Fowler: Still no day time

Bimbi Harris: 7.30 to 8 popular quiz time shows.

Roy Fowler: What were some of the names, do you remember

Bimbi Harris: Yes. My goodness yes. I've got all the, here I've got all the pictures, This is a little note from Peter Wills saying yes, yes, I know, because I was doing What's it All About, Crossroads, Double Your Money, I've Got a Secret, The Unexplained, 123 Click - - I can't remember what that was -- that was all within a month I was doing all those shows

Roy Fowler: Were these across the board shows, were they on every night

Bimbi Harris: xxx times a week, about 3 times a week, **Maurice** xxx, he was doing a lot of the panel games, I can't remember all of them we were doing, John P xxx, but I was really churning them out, it was a strain for me, a strain for the staff, it was really impossible. No one should really work at that speed.

Roy Fowler: What sort of schedule did you have, how long a camera rehearsal would you have, any camera rehearsal

Bimbi Harris: About half an hour to line up the shots, voice level of the panel but not the guests

Roy Fowler: In front of an audience

Bimbi Harris: No

Roy Fowler: All studio

Bimbi Harris: The show had an audience but not the rehearsal

Roy Fowler That's what I mean

Bimbi Harris: Oh yes the show had an audience

Roy Fowler: In the studio or in a theatre

Bimbi Harris: No, in the studio, well we did a lot in the theatre, this Fulham Broadway Theatre

Roy Fowler: That was the Granville.

Bimbi Harris: That's it. The Granville. And then a lot in the studio of course, it was endless, absolutely endless. And then I got onto things like Cool for Cats

Roy Fowler: I'm curious about the demands on the director. On one of these shows

Bimbi Harris: You would do it all, you'd produce it really, but they never gave you a producers credit, it was always the head of department that had the credit

Roy Fowler: So the time you were on the air was the least of the burdens

Bimbi Harris: Almost, you had to get contestants, you had to get researchers, you had to get questions, it all had to be done

Roy Fowler: Do you remember what your budget was for a typical show

Bimbi Harris: I don't really remember those days, I remember the interim period when I went up to Scotland which I'll tell you about later, those budgets probably something like £500, £800, those sort of times, they were probably under a £1000 because you would pay a guest artist on the panel £20 or something like that. The compare you might pay £50.

Roy Fowler: That's above the line, did you have to also, out of that budget would you have to pay any notional charges

Bimbi Harris: Not in those days, you had to register them and fill in forms about them, but you weren't charged on them, so it was quite separate, but I think it was under 1000

Roy Fowler: Were they fixed or were they totally on the up and up

Bimbi Harris: I think they were fixed for the run, you'd do a 13 week run

Roy Fowler: What I meant was if money were involved, even very small sums, was it totally honest, because at this point in the States there was a lot of fixing of shows if you remember, but that was for big money

Bimbi Harris: No, there was never any big money, even the prizes you see didn't really have big money in those days. If Hughie Green and Michael Miles fixed things with the prizes, I didn't know about it. They may have done, I've no idea. But the prizes used to come in, great give-aways

Roy Fowler: How long did you spend on that kind of operation

Bimbi Harris: I think I probably spent a couple of years doing it

Roy Fowler: It must have been debilitating

Bimbi Harris: It was

Roy Fowler: What did you want to do

Bimbi Harris: I wanted to do musicals, then I got onto Cool for Cats which was a wonderful show to do. Kent Walton used to introduce them in those days, we had little studio 2, and my goodness the choreography and the designing and working it all in, it was very, very tight

Roy Fowler: John was on that too

Bimbi Harris: Yes

Roy Fowler: Were you alternating or working together in any way

Bimbi Harris: He may have been working, I don't really recollect, I remember Joan Kemp Welch did it for a little while and then I did it. They were lovely to do, absolutely lovely to do. The dancers were superb

Roy Fowler; Tell us about how typically one would get a show like that together, one

Bimbi Harris: I suppose first of all you had to get your choreographer, that was vital to a musical show, you had to get your musical director, unless it was all discs, Cool for Cats was all discs but later on you had to get musical directors. They were your basis and you had to get your researchers, and you had very little time. My memories with me, I was always preparing the next show when I was doing the last of the show before, I never had a gap between, I don't ever remember having a gap, so frantic last weeks of the show I was busy preparing the next show and so it went on I think all my working life, that went on. Other directors had gaps, and I thought my goodness there must be time for me to have a gap

Roy Fowler: It's a weekly show, is it

Bimbi Harris: Cool for Cats was weekly

Roy Fowler: Did you have to do one every week

Bimbi Harris: Five a week I was doing with the panel games

Roy Fowler: Yes, but I'm talking about Cool for Cats, are you alternating with another director

Bimbi Harris: I'm doing one every week,

Roy Fowler: Was it a standing set

Bimbi Harris: No, redesigned every set, and because it was so tiny the studio you had to dovetail them in, backwards and forwards, back to back sets, the mikes round

Roy Fowler: It's a complete little mini musical each week, with new costumes, new sets, new music

Bimbi Harris: New costumes, new sets. And this is where your technical training came in because you knew how to place the cameras and the mikes which other people got in tangles with, you see, so it was an enormous advantage because I could go straight in with the technical side of it.

And not often did I say it, but I remember once saying to a cameraman who said he couldn't get a shot, and I said would you like me to come down and show you. I think there was silence in the studio on that, but he got the shot

Roy Fowler: How long were you on Cool for Cats, how long did that extend

Bimbi Harris: I think that lasted a summer. Then other shows,

Roy Fowler: The trouble is there are all so many to remember

Bimbi Harris: Sunday Night at Eight. I did a show called That's Life, that is much before the That's Life now, that was with Max Wall. He was a handful, Max Wall if he didn't like anything he used to lock himself in the gents and I couldn't get at him

Roy Fowler: A tortured soul to work with

Bimbi Harris: Yes he was a very tortured soul, because he was going through divorces and young girls and things, a very, very difficult gentleman because he'd worked years on the stage and he had his medical sketches and he always wanted to bring in another medical sketch. And I wanted to get them changed, these were all Billy Tennant's days, I did a lot, the awful Beside the Seaside shows, dreadful. Jack Hilton Productions, we used to have meetings at his place at the back of Piccadilly and a script would come up with corny, corny jokes in and he would put in even more corny jokes, you used to write at them

John Hamilton: And all the old recycled music hall rubbish

Bimbi Harris: No lavatory jokes, he said, no lavatory jokes, take those all out if the script writer put them in and then put another corny joke in, I used to cringe at them but I don't suppose I got the go-ahead to refuse to do them, I don't know, I was just allocated them, but they were really quite chronic shows

Roy fowler: I think one just accepted that sort of thing as one's job

Bimbi Harris: That's right, they got good viewing figures

John Hamilton: It was a very difficult cleft stick period that, wasn't it, when we were beholden to Mr Hilton, light ent

SIDE 4, TAPE 2

Bimbi Harris: I did a lot of Hughie Green's and we used to do these discovering programmes. And we used to go up to Birmingham or Liverpool or wherever it was and preview 200 acts at a time, you know, next, next, next, next. At the beginning I used to go in his car which used to take the pianist, the secretary and me, and he had an a big Jaguar and he used to sway around and I used to feel so sick in the back of it. So in the end I said I'll go by train, I'll see you up there Hughie. He didn't like that of course, but on the train I could have breakfast and arrive and all fresh and nice. So I used to go by train. And I remember we went to Nottingham which at the time had Boots

John Hamilton: headquarters. Boots, Players

Bimbi Harris: And they had a legation or they had something there and all the hotels were full. We had been in Birmingham and he said we'll drive on to Nottingham for the next day and get a hotel there. So we got there just before midnight and we went to a hotel, yes they had four single rooms, that was fine, book in, where's the garage. 400 yards up the Grove, up the road sir. I'm not going to drive 400 yards, Hughie said. And he wouldn't. So we tried other hotels, couldn't get one. We then went to the police station, and then we went back to the original hotel and they said they were shut up, I said we could go to the police station, I believe may have to offer travellers accommodation, if no one's got them. But they wouldn't. We had to drive all the way back to Birmingham. Get a hotel in Birmingham and the drive all the way back the next morning because he wouldn't drive 400 yards to park the car in the garage. Hughie Green

Roy Fowler : Was this a typical example of his attitude

John Hamilton: Yes

Bimbi Harris: Afraid so. Yes

Roy Fowler: I don't want to put words in anyone's mouth

John Hamilton: You don't have to with Hughie

Roy Fowler: Is it possible that people looking back from the future to these times and if there is the old kinescope around of Hughie Green they will marvel that such a person achieved any kind of position

Bimbi Harris: I suppose it's this transatlantic accent which was good in his day

Roy Fowler: And he owned the property too.

Bimbi Harris: He owned the property, he was very good with the contestants on the air. He put them right at their ease, he was very good at that and he was very indifferent at the auditions, and as I say next please, next please, next please. And we'd 200 and you might get one

Roy Fowler: What was he like to work with

Bimbi Harris: He was quite reasonable to work with

John Hamilton: Well, he seemed to like breaking microphone when he got cross with the PA system in the studio and things like that

Bimbi Harris: That's when he got into a temper

But he had to rely on me, he was relying on me very much. We did this lovely show, when we went over to the States. I had dancing on the tarmac at Heathrow, and dancing up the steps and all this sort of thing. I think Hughie was doing the comparing, it must still have been a Hilton show because we had seats taken out and a piano and put in. And his girl Rosa, and Winnie Atwell playing. I remember Laurence Harvey been there. We had a plane load of artists. And of course they were given champagne cocktails when we arrived. We went up and they were all happy within half an hour. And then there was a fault and we had to dish out the petrol over the Irish Sea and come back and the next day and go the next day. I said for goodness sake, don't give them cocktails.

And so we started off the next day, because of union difficulty I had to take a film crew with me to film on the flight going over there. We were doing interviews and things like that. And Laurence Harvey was always wanting to get up and down the gangway because that was the only way, and we were always shooting, he was a nuisance. However, we did songs, and cabaret acts, we had a little girl of four on the plane, because she wasn't allowed to perform in England or the United States but she could if an perform in the air. So it that was one of Hughie's discoveries

Roy Fowler: Whose idea was this, it sounds positively bizarre

Bimbi Harris: Jack Hilton's I think

John Hamilton: It was a Hughie Green, Lloyd Williams plot

Bimbi Harris: Yes, more or less

Roy Fowler: To get to the States

Bimbi Harris: Any how we got there and the crew weren't allowed to work, so I had to have an American crew. I had to work of course. The crew stayed in the hotel and got tight every night, doing nothing. And apparently they had such a huge bills that Jack

Hilton nearly blew his top when they got back because they had five nights drinking, eating all the rest of it

Roy Fowler: Good ACT men

Bimbi Harris: Anyhow I had an American crew who were fine because the unions were a bit hard in England at that time, but they said any time you want to go on working, we'll go on working. And they did, we went on and on and on. We had Paddy Stone dancing

It John Hamilton: And Paddy wasn't an the easiest man in the world to get on with, was he

Bimbi Harris: But I'd got on very well with Paddy

Done Hamilton: He was a wonderful choreographer

Bimbi Harris: He was a wonderful choreographer, and we went up the Empire States building and danced all round it, and it in the park we danced. But of course all the numbers were arranged, planned ahead, for Paddy to work out, but we had to work with a metronome. And I went into the United Nations building, with the a great stairway up, I had permission to go in but I started the metronome. And every security man from all round, they thought I was going to blow it up of course. Ticking. But we did film all over the place

John Hamilton: He didn't move without the metronome, Paddy, did he

Bimbi Harris: He had to, because we had no music

John Hamilton: He had to keep the tempo in his head.

Bimbi Harris: He had to get the melody in his head really, and he had the tempo on the metronome. That was lovely to do. But of course I came back to England and the crew of course, who hadn't worked, had to have a day's rest when they came back, didn't they. I had to go straight into editing because it had to go on the next day. And I was so tired. I hadn't slept all the way back and I'd done all this frantic five days. I never had a rest. They never thought the directors had to have a rest, did they

Roy Fowler: You were a member of ACTT, surely by this time

Bimbi Harris: But they said the show had to go on the air.

Roy Fowler: The union wouldn't have, I don't think

John Hamilton: They didn't really become entrenched, what year was that Bimbi, ACTT didn't become entrenched until 1944

Bimbi Harris: I suppose it was about 1960

John Hamilton: I had my little contretemps I recounted in 1963, nastiest time, walk out, and that, and that was just the beginning of what was effectively a closed shop.

Bimbi Harris: Then I did things like Late Extra, that was a nightly show

John Hamilton: Edmund Purdom

Bimbi Harris: No, I had Barry Took's father

John Hamilton: Barry the barman

Bimbi Hamilton: He reminded me of this later, if only I had known my fall later on

John Hamilton: With Barry

Bimbi Harris: However. Late Extra was a late night show with guest artists and a bar where you had informal chats, and a dance floor, and a little bit of music. And different acts. Acts, interviews.

John Hamilton: It was a bit In Town Tonight.

Bimbi Harris: It was a bit In Town Tonight.

John Hamilton: It was a good programme

Bimbi Harris: It was a good programme and it ran for quite a long time

John Hamilton: Steve Rays Quintet, Ray Davis who doubled on vibes and trumpet, xxx but interesting and Edmund Purdom, fronting it. Whatever happened to Edmund Purdom.

Bimbi Harris: I don't know

Roy Fowler: He lives in Rome and is a recording engineer believe it or not, not an engineer, a recording producer

John Hamilton: He was a great character actually, in the bar in Television House, on your show.

Bimbi Harris: That probably lasted 6 months or so, it might even have lasted a year, it lasted a long time

John Hamilton: It had a long run. It went on after you left it, somebody took it on. Who took it on

Bimbi Harris: I can't remember. I did Millie Martin as a star and that was nice to do.

Roy Fowler: Where have we hit now

Bimbi Harris: About 60, the early 60s I would say, she had just come up

John Hamilton: 1963ish.

Bimbi Harris: When did That is the Week start

John Hamilton: The end of the 50s.

Bimbi Harris: That is what brought her to stardom really, wasn't it.

John Hamilton: Millie, yes.

Bimbi Harris: That is why I did the story of the star. And I had a young dancer

Roy Fowler: Later, early 60s

Bimbi Harris: Early 60s, anyway at the beginning of the 60s, and this young dancer was portraying Millie as a young girl of course, and years and years later I found she was the wife of Brian Love, do you remember Brian Love lighting.

John Hamilton: Now working at Sky Television, along with lots of other people. Freelancing.

Bimbi Harris: Sorry, we're digressing. Then I had my whack of Ready, Steady Go and Elkan Allan and I used

Roy Fowler: What are your thoughts about Elkan Allan, John was not restrained

John Hamilton: You can join an ever increasing club of people who loathed the bloody sight and hated Elkan Allan

Bimbi Harris: You wonder first how he ever got there, how he ever got the job, what he ever knew about it and how bumptious and irritating and talentless

John Hamilton: Objectionable shit

Bimbi Harris: He used to have bright ideas for programmes

John Hamilton: Stolen

Bimbi Harris: No doubt, no doubt, but he always used to say to me, set it up for me, because he couldn't visualise from a piece of paper to what it would be like, it was impossible for him to visualise it. So in the rehearsal room I used to plot it all out as though it was a studio and I used to move round as cameras and say this camera, to explain to Elkan what was happening, so the poor artist had to go through all this, because I knew Elkan could not see, he could not visualise. But most of the ideas were no good but I had to be put through the motions of setting all this up, and raising artists hopes. No, it was a thankless task. But Ready, Steady didn't take much of your time really. Not preparatory time anyhow

Roy Fowler; The mystery with him, it isn't a mystery because you went into this in some detail John, not necessarily that he got where he did but that he survived in that position

Bimbi Harris: Well he had a very lucky format, it was all the time of the new pop groups coming in, it was the rage of the pop groups

John Hamilton: Yes, he took over from Alan Morris at the crucial time, and he was very lucky

Roy Fowler: And got the kudos

John Hamilton: And the general manager referred, or deferred, to him because Tom didn't know about anything

Bimbi Harris: No, Tom didn't. Tom **Brownrigg**. I was doing one show, I can't remember what it was, I think it was a Hughie Green show and at the end of the series I was going to go down on the floor to be thanked and I had about timed it to allow myself about 20 seconds to go on the floor, leave the vision mixer just to do the credits and the goodbye. Brownrigg was standing behind me watching the show, so I got up from my chair, 20 seconds to get down on the floor, oh Mrs Harris, how nice to see you, did you have a nice holiday. This was my seconds going, it showed you how little he knew of what went on. So I did just make it by the skin of my teeth, and Hughie thanked me on the air, that sort of thing. But it is unbelievable that he could stand watch the show and hear me saying to the girl take this shot, that shot and the other shot, and then roll the credits. But there we are

John Hamilton: He got marginally better as time went on, Tom

Bimbi Harris: The only thing about him, I always think these large companies need an oiler, and he was an oiler, he was at the top, he knew all the financial side of it, and you need a man like that to keep the finance going, and the oiling of the works going and he was very good at that

John Hamilton: And he had his discipline as well because of the naval thing, and in the early days it was vital

Roy Fowler; The problem then is that they all begin to get delusions of grandeur and creativity

Bimbi Harris: That's it, they want their show, they won't listen to ideas, they want their show on. And they have their say and it goes on

Roy Fowler: These are the years of Rediffusion, we were talking about the ethos and atmosphere of the BBC when you were there, how would you describe Rediffusion.

Bimbi Harris: I think Rediffusion was very happy, particularly after the first 3 months after the first weed out, everybody was very happy

Roy Fowler; After it survived

Bimbi Harris: After it survived the almost financial crisis.

Roy Fowler: Were you on the first programme, the opening night programme

Bimbi Harris: Yes, I've got pictures of me, I was on the televised. I've got masses of pictures here and pictures of me being interviewed by Cecil Lewis

John Hamilton: Wonderful man

Bimbi Harris: That was the opening and I was describing the panel games

Roy Fowler: You didn't work the opening at all.

Bimbi Harris: No, I was on the floor as a guest describing the panel games as enthusiastically as I could.

Roy Fowler: I wondered if you'd worked on it

Bimbi Harris: No. It was the night before and it was, who was the director who started This Week, he always used to go and do the openings of films, to the Odeon and he always used to ask me to go along and always used to ask me to come in evening dress and I always had to go and do those, because often in those days you were director and vision mixer, it saved them on staff

John Hamilton: On OBs, essential.

Bimbi Harris: Again my background helped me because I could just step in.

Roy Fowler: What were some of the interesting OBs that you covered

Bimbi Harris: I did a series called Here and Now which I loved doing that, that was Hugh Thomas, and we had every item under the sun there. We used to go to hospitals and do deaf children, we used to go out on farms and do milking, and we used to go every where

John Hamilton: We all had a go at those

Bimbi Harris: I used to love those, absolutely loved them.

John Hamilton: That was during the Equity strike wasn't it

Bimbi Harris: Is that what it was,

John Hamilton: Yes, in 1962, I went on at great length about Here and Now in my interview

Bimbi Harris: I thought it was a lovely programme

John Hamilton: Because it opened up all sorts of opportunities for everybody in current affairs

Bimbi Harris: Tin smelting,

Roy Fowler: These were pre-recorded and edited

John Hamilton: Many of them were live

Bimbi Harris: Some were live

John Hamilton: I did 5 in one week once, 3-recorded and 2 live. Incredible

Bimbi Harris: It is incredible the way we worked

John Hamilton: During that period particularly, trying to fill the holes

Bimbi Harris: Well you had to go to the location and get your xxx and get story

John Hamilton: The strike went on for nearly a year, the Equity strike and there was a total withdrawal of labour, and apart from old movies and things like that there wasn't anything. It killed Sixpenny Corner, it killed the daily soap operas, and this show Here and Now, 15 minute thingies, we used to meet in the Green Room in the morning and look at the papers, do the usual research bit, Michael Ingrams, who was producer used to say who wants to do what, and Bimbi would hive off with something and I'd say well I'll go and do the lady anvill bashes at Sunbury on Thames and off we'd go and do them.

Ring up the OB unit, tell them where we're going, or take a film unit or go and do them live

Roy Fowler: You didn't have to worry about the link

John Hamilton: The whole OB would be mounted in a single morning usually

Roy Fowler: Including the link

John Hamilton: Including the links, yes, everybody was on a sort of permanent standby. But it worked, it was ever so interesting, you literally made the thing up and buffed it, the whole thing

Bimbi Harris: But the 11 weeks we were out I think I made myself really ill, because you never knew when you were coming back, you had no money of course, no money at all. And I'd just bought my microwave stove, microwave oven

John Hamilton: We're talking about 1979 now are we

Bimbi Harris: Is that going on as far as that, that strike. Sorry I've really leapt ahead.. I will tell you that story later. That is a later story

John Hamilton: It's now how the Equity strike gave rise to Here and Now as a programme format.

Bimbi Harris: I will tell you about that later. What else was there then. I did things like Division and This Week.

John Hamilton: You did lots of lovely children's programmes, you did Tuesday Rendezvous and all that stuff.

Bimbi Harris: And 5 o'clock Club which although I never got the credit for producer, of course I was producing, I had the budget, I used to have the budget for 3 months and I used to save up my money to take the children out and we used to go, we went to Wembley swimming pool and had 8000 children there and did the show in front of the pool, I took them down to Brighton pier and do the show at the end of the pier there, thousands of these kids, it took an enormous amount of organising. And the Brighton pier one, because the scanner was at the end of the pier and the pier was very long I had an electric invalid charm and I used to whiz down to the end of the pier to give notes and whiz back again. I remember we had the Soul Sisters on and they were too big to get through the turnstile so we had to get a room in the hotel for them to change and let them in. There was a deal with the pier management, that we should use all the facilities but pay for rides and things like this. And there was a horrid man on one ride who had no hand and a crook handle, and he used to keep putting the crook handle on the side of the scanner saying they hadn't paid for this or they hadn't paid for that and it was quite

horrifying. And at the end of the show he stole the roller caption machine and trundled it right along the front of Brighton. What good he thought it was going to do him I don't know. I had a little house in Brighton in those days and they all came back for parties. There was Lulu and Susan Maughan and

John Hamilton: It was amazing who you could get for 5 O'Clock Club

Bimbi Harris: I got some lovely stars

John Hamilton: Just for the plug. It was in the happy days when you could get all the recording artists for 5 quid

Roy Fowler: These are still relatively innocent days, compared anyway to now where it has become such a multi billion dollar business, the pressures

Bimbi Harris: I did a series called In Search of Adventure which was nice to do. We did skiing in France, baby seal hunting off Ramsay Island, they were lovely shows to do. Shark fishing off Poole, All Search of Adventure shows. They were great. I loved doing those. I liked being out on my own, I think that's what it is.

John Hamilton: Being producer and director with a good PA and SM if you were lucky and you got on with it. You didn't have committee telling you what to do

Bimbi Harris: If you have committee to me you thin the programme, immediately, as soon, people put this idea, this idea in. And I said you're losing the main theme, you nearly always have to have a main theme although you do diverse in different ways but if every body chumps in and says do a spot on that, do a spot on that, you weaken it and you end up with weak show. And they couldn't see it, it was always a weak show if it was a committee show. So give me an idea, let me work on it, approve it or not as you see fit, but let you work on it

Roy Fowler: Someone has to carry the can I think is really what one is saying,

Bimbi Harris: But they would never let me be called producer in those days, but obviously you're producing it, who else is doing it

Roy Fowler: Did you have a nominal producer or a head of department

Bimbi Harris: Head of department, and they always got the credit, but they had nothing to do with the show whatsoever

John Hamilton: I enlarged on this in my bit, in that particular period when ACTT were trying desperately to get real main grabbers into the thing, the huge arguments started about the definition of the producer and director; and it droned on in the Asquith Room for weeks, months, years on end with whoever happened to be the chairman, John Nelson

Burton, anybody, whoever it was and it went on and on and on. Never accepted by the management

Roy Fowler: Summarise the positions

Bimbi Harris: It ended by the current producers being called executive producers, that is how it ended, so they still had their title roll, but they still knew nothing about programme making

John Hamilton: The director was still effectively producer director

Roy Fowler: What was the essence of the discussion at that point, between union and management. Directors wanted to be recognised for

John Hamilton: Trying to organise producers in to the union, basically, which wasn't accepted by management who said no they are management people

Roy Fowler: So their function was recognised

John Hamilton: As Bimbi said it was done by making an executive producer by title

Bimbi Harris: By title. But we were still producing directing, because once you're given a script and a project then it was your production, it was nobody else's production and then you still directed it in the box which I call the director's job.

John Hamilton: It was always accepted in drama terms of course that the producer

Bimbi Harris: was the director

Roy Fowler: Or the producer would be producing and the director

John Hamilton: And that was the only area in which it worked, with happiness between the two parties concerned. Everywhere else there was aggravation, there certainly was in light entertainment, it was murder. The only really happy place was OBs, when you got on with the bloody thing and did it.

Bimbi Harris: You got away from them

John Hamilton: And just talked to Ray Dicks or Graham Turner, dear old rat bag, whoever was in charge at the time. And he just said yes go ahead with it and you got on with it.

Roy Fowler: Anything we should cover before we conclude this phase of the career

Bimbi Harris: I did go to America, I filmed several times in New York which was nice but I did go to Disney land as a guest of Walt Disney and that was rather nice to do. I got to new York and it was for children and it was with Michael **Seagull**, do you remember Michael Seagull

John Hamilton: Who was heavily into Disney Wonderland, Eddie Evans, the Disney rep over here

Bimbi Harris: That's right, I was their guest and there was a plane strike in the States so Disney sent his plane over, they said you can go by train, mind you it might have been very interesting to go by train because it would have been a rest and I gather they're beautiful, but anyway he sent his plane over, so when we left New York I got my guest bag of Scotch to take down. Michael Seagull never thought of, I said you better have one of these to give, because he had no idea of socialising with the Disney world. And Walt Disney, of course, is a little chap but all his assistants were tall, 6 ft 2, southern gentlemen, so courteous and kind, and they took me all around and they gave me a book of tickets to go on all the rides because I was setting up this programme of Disneyland. I think they used to wonder what this middle aged woman was doing going on all these little rides, I had tickets and things, I was very impressed with Disneyland at the time, it was fantastic.

John Hamilton: Michael Seagull perhaps we should explain was the then incumbent head of children's programmes.

Bimbi Harris: But he knew nothing about filming

John Hamilton: He wasn't there very long

Bimbi Harris: He wasn't there very long

John Hamilton: He was another Elkan Allanism really, we're in that strange period in Rediffusion when the titles of the main producers kept changing, Jeremy Isaacs was executive producer group 3, whatever that meant, which embraced current affairs and features and something else, somebody else was exec prod group 1, which embraced drama

Roy Fowler: It sounded as if someone somewhere was sitting in a corner office devising all kinds of charts and flows

John Hamilton: John **Macmillan** idling his time away at that period doing things like that

Roy Fowler: If you can talk about hiring Jeremy Isaacs, at least sometimes they got it right, but they didn't always recognise when they had

Bimbi Harris: They didn't, one as I said they hadn't got perception of shows, and they didn't perceive talent either, backroom talent, which is to me very, very sad

John Hamilton: No, chronologically it was Brownrigg retired, John Macmillan became general manager, Cyril Bennett became head of features and he brought Jeremy in to take over, Cyril became controller of programmes and he brought Jeremy in from the BBC, Jeremy was Granada BBC, Panorama and stuff and then came to us.

Bimbi Harris: And the kid's one, Michael Seagull. I used to have a lot of rows with Michael Seagull, because you know how we used to have to sign the PSTs and he used to switch the money around

John Hamilton: He was an artful dodger

Bimbi Harris: And I would say I've never had that money, I'm sorry I'm not signing it. And of course you can imagine the rows that go on, and it wasn't signed the PST, the programme wouldn't out.

Roy Fowler: PST,

Bimbi Harris: Programme as Televised, and that was the official paper that when you finished the programme was all the costing of everything, above the line and below the line.

John Hamilton: The bible,

Bimbi Harris: The director had to sign it.

John Hamilton: All returns, artists payments

Bimbi Harris: And they were so out

Roy Fowler: Were they fiddling, there was fiddling of some sort

Bimbi Harris: It was fiddling, there was fiddling going on left right and centre

Roy Fowler: But was it just internal book keeping or were people getting on planes to Geneva

Bimbi Harris: I think there was a lot of fiddling

John Hamilton: There were some very strange things went on in Seagull's era.

Bimbi Harris: Yes I'm afraid so. And that was my chief rows with him.

Roy Fowler: Where had he come from

John Hamilton: He had been a schoolteacher I believe and in fact I think he now lives in Italy with his second wife and is teaching in a college. I heard that relatively recently - somebody who had been to Italy and actually met Mike in northern Italy, he's in Milan or Turin or somewhere. His wife I think has got something to do with educational television there and

Bimbi Harris: I hope he's learnt a little bit. I used to kick at everything. They used to have, this is kid's programmes I was doing, and they brought in buttons for them to play with. I said the kids will pick those up and put them in their mouths. Get on and do it, this was the answer I had. And then they used to do hop skip games up and down the curb with traffic going by, I said I can't put that out, get on and do it. That was always the answer I had, and I used to kick an awful lot with him, but that was always the answer, you're not there to question, you're just there to do it, which is the way to encourage a worker isn't it

Roy Fowler: Stunning attitude from any point of view.

Bimbi Harris: So I was glad to get out of that. But Disneyland was a lovely time.

Roy Fowler: You said you met Uncle Walt

Bimbi Harris: I met uncle Walt, whose since died of course. I liked the way he worked his studios because he always had the post boys there rushing around, and they all started as postboys like our cameraman, like John Rearden, and they all came up because they said he said the post boys know every department, they go from every department and they know a little bit about and I don't mind them lingering or wasting their time if they got caught in the labs or somewhere because they're learning. And he always recruited that way. And it seemed a good principle. Incidentally, I've recently bought a holiday home in Mxxxx, and Walt Disney comes from there, Southern Spain, that is where his parents came from. Little Spaniard made his way, with his brother.

Roy Fowler: I'd never thought of his being of Spanish. extraction

Bimbi Harris: I'm now onto the programmes I did with Buddy **Bregman** called *Swinging Scene* and they were nice. He really was good at writing music, he did the writing and arranging the music beautifully, he was not so good as a producer, or director, but they were very exciting shows to do because they were big musicals, big orchestra and it was lovely to have. And we did different things every week and I enjoyed doing those. And then I did things like *Three After Six*, which they're doing now, which Jeremy Isaacs is doing now, he has got 3 people in to talk about it. Different titles you see but it is the same programme

Roy Fowler: Was it originally Jeremy's programme

Bimbi Harris: I think it was Cyril Bennett's.

Roy Fowler: But Jeremy would have known about it, There is a memory there

Bimbi Harris: And you took three policemen, three doctors; and they all chatted together, it was quite interesting to do, that one. So we're getting towards the end of my period with Rediffusion

Now when Rediffusion packed up, the most successful company, making all these dire quiz games, I admit but they were making money, people wanted to know watch them. Half of the awful shows I was working on, people wanted to watch for. So I was supplying a need shall I say. Then there was a period when we had the choice are of either going to London Weekend or Thames. I found in the end, although I had interviews with both of them, I was signed on with both of them, and if I had been clever I would have got a salary from both

Roy Fowler: Let me ask you a how it was presented to you, because the companies by and large did not expect their franchises to be withdrawn

Bimbi Harris: No, it was a great shock

Roy Fowler: So overnight

Bimbi Harris: It was a great shock, overnight, and they said we close down in three months

Roy Fowler: How did that effect the staff.

Bimbi Harris: It shattered, absolutely shattered, everybody was absolutely shattered

Roy Fowler: And did it you consider it unjust

Bimbi Harris: Yes, I very definitely considered it unjust, it was a profitable company

Roy Fowler: But you say you had in effect been working on rubbish and you were aware you were

Bimbi Harris: Yes, and it was a popular

Roy Fowler: And did you feel television ought to have provided something more or was that left to the BBC

Bimbi Harris: Mostly it was left to the BBC but it was beginning to creep up. But it did take London Weekend and Thames to the big dramas, the big, very expensive dramas

which Rediffusion hadn't really tackled. And I don't think they had enough drama directors

Roy Fowler: ABC had been a drama strong contractor

Bimbi Harris: That's right. So they were lacking in that. But they supplied a need and they had the viewers

Roy Fowler: Did the staff feel that there was something lacking in the Rediffusion programming schedule, were you all feeling you ought to be doing better than you were but nevertheless that's what management wanted.

Bimbi Harris: I think so, I certainly was and I think a lot of people must have thought there are better things in life than this. Particularly when you're working on them because you see you get it ad nauseam. The viewer can watch and switch off, but you've got it. And you really are stuck with it but you're earning your living and it was a livelihood and it was an enjoyable way of earning a living. And you carried on doing it

Roy Fowler: Was there then great job insecurity

Bimbi Harris: There was a little fear but during that period Grampian wanted a light entertainment director and they asked me to go up there and I said I would go up there for a limited period because I didn't want to be forever because I wanted to be wherever the new companies were

Roy Fowler: Was it a director of light entertainment or director of light entertainment programmes

Bimbi Harris: I was a programme director, but it was such a small company they wanted a

Roy Fowler: So it was also an executive position

Bimbi Harris: So I was still paid by Rediffusion, and I went up there for three months. And it was very interesting because the total staff up there was 21 personnel, that included the chap who swept the yard, the person who made the tea, every one, 21. They knew nothing about television. They had some chap who said he was a lighting director. You would see him come on and I would say what about second nose shadow, are you going to do something. Oh, I hadn't noticed that he'd say. Obvious things. They didn't know how to dress a set and I had to teach them how to put drapes up, I had to teach them absolutely everything. I was absolutely amazed that they could be doing programmes up there so backwardly.

And I started a little programme called **Ellie's Place**, there was Ron Barton was the ACT representative up there, you may know him, his wife Ellie is a singer. And I said we will have a sing song round a fireplace. So I got the designer to design the fireplace and up

came cardboard sides and wall paper bricks and I said this will never do and the poor designer, I must have upset him. I said come on boys, we'll go out to the yard, and we got all stones from the yard and we built a real stone one and of course we had to have the fire engine there, and we got beer in from the local bar, and we had all the local people in singing, and I think although I was only there 3 months but I think the programme lasted 6 years or something. And I started several like that. I started a cookery one which went on and on and on, several I started there and it was David **Windlesham**, and he was very sorry to see me go because I started, I mean it was fine for me because I had an opportunity to say let's do this and they went on and on and on the shows

Roy Fowler; So you enjoyed having that kind of authority

Bimbi Harris: I enjoyed having some of my shows on, so that was really rather nice. But it was a great challenge because they said now we'll do a children's programme. I said what 's the budget. And they said £80. I thought what can you do for £80. They said well we have a xxx organist here, he only charges £40, that's half of it, and then you get the kids in and all the rest of it. It is amazing how you manage. And I did the history of the Royal Mile and I went to all the papers and places and said I've no money, can you let me have any pictures, do you know there was no film crew up there at all. No film crew, I had to get it from Glasgow or somewhere, it was absolutely incredible. So I had to go to papers, press people, to get a stills photographer. They were so minute.

Roy Fowler: Presumably the union had something to do with that because if you had a film crew, you would be paying them ACT rates which would be a large sum to have on the payroll of a small station

Bimbi Harris: Well they just didn't have one.

Roy Fowler: You couldn't have kept them working enough time to warrant their cost

Bimbi Harris: Needless to say I produced, directed, did my own vision mixing, everything, really everything. Church service children's, light entertainment, quizzes, absolutely the lot.

Roy Fowler: It is great fun and that is certainly the way a lot of local stations in the USA used to be run, probably still are

Bimbi Harris: But I'm sure they learnt a lot from me, because I brought all my knowledge you see from the big station. Anyhow I did the 3 months there and then I came back to London Weekend and we started at London Weekend. I can't remember what I started at London Weekend with, my goodness

Roy Fowler: Why did you make the choice between Thames and LWT

Bimbi Harris: Very difficult to make the choice, I hummed and ahd. As I said, I signed on for both, both thought I was working for them, so if I'd been clever I would have got salaries from both. Because they both sent me forms for a long time, but it was London Weekend I wanted, I don't know why I went to London Weekend. I'm glad I have now because I think they're a very good company.

Roy Fowler; They make some wonderful promises in those days

Bimbi Harris: They made some wonderful promises

Roy Fowler: The initial franchise promises

Bimbi Harris: They made some wonderful promises, they have lived up to a lot of them, they have done some very good shows and they are very, very good to their staff, I think they've always looked after their staff. I think they've had a good welfare section, haven't they

John Hamilton: Always

Bimbi Harris: From that point of view it's been a wonderful company to work with, I had many happy years there

John Hamilton: It's not now as paternalistic as it was,

Bimbi Harris: If you haven't got the money you can't be. I'm trying to think what I started with at London Weekend. What date would we be now, in the 70s I suppose

John Hamilton: The first week in August 1968 was the start of LWT, and we went on strike you may recall.

Bimbi Harris: Yes, it was the strike that

John Hamilton: 30 seconds past 7 pm on Friday 2nd August.

Bimbi Harris: That is when I get in my microwave story. We were on strike for 11 weeks and no money

John Hamilton: No, that was 1979, no we were on strike for two weeks in 1968, we resumed on Friday 20th

Bimbi Harris: I don't remember the strike in 1979, perhaps it didn't affect me so much, I don't really remember that one. Never mind

John Hamilton: It was a carry over from the Rediffusion days of cover, it was the arguments about cover pay. And the fact that LWT intended through **Intertel** you may

recall, we hired their scanner and stuck it into Wickham Road, the studio there, and Intertel's own studio to do some colour productions and things were being shot in the build up stage, the stock piling in colour, mainly on film. Some plays, some of the early dramas were being shot, we had colour capacity, and you may recall that back before the loss of franchise, we'd been arguing about colour payments because we knew it was coming, and that was really what precipitated the 2 week strike in LWT. It was stupid, now we think back on it, it was futile because colour didn't happen for another two years anyway.

Bimbi Harris: I think you were still working at Wembley weren't you

John Hamilton: Yes

Bimbi Harris: Now I had gone down to the South Bank because I was doing this Collecting on a Shoestring and I might have been a bit out of it there. I was doing a programme called Collecting on a Shoestring, which again was fascinating, which was collecting antiques

John Hamilton: But you had an office in Station House,

Bimbi Harris: Yes I had an office in Station House, but as I lived down there I very rarely used it because I was going to the studios. Collecting on a Shoestring was collecting antiques where we gave someone £10 to go out and spend and we went and filmed and showed how they spent their £10

Roy Fowler: There is a programme they're doing now called Pictures

Bimbi Harris: Nothing changes

John Hamilton: Yes, go and buy a picture for £500.

Bimbi Harris: Now the first series the IBA insisted that I did it chronologically, collecting items by date. I've forgotten who we had on it but he was not very good. But the programme was sufficiently interesting for them to do another 13 weeks which they let me have a free hand because I said people don't collect that way, they collect glass or pottery or steel, they don't collect by dates

Roy Fowler: I don't understand the IBA's hang up

Bimbi Harris: I don't know, I had to go and have a little interview and chat with them and discuss my programme with and that's what they stated, and I had Hugh Thomas and I had

John Hamilton: Whose banner was that Dorian Stevens,

Bimbi Harris: I think it probably was.

John Hamilton: Frances Colman would probably be exec producer

Bimbi Harris: That's right. Anyhow the second one I had my freedom and people said they didn't recognise it as the same programme and it just went wild. But they won't listen, that's the awful trouble, I suppose people say this throughout life.

John Hamilton: The story of our lives

Bimbi Harris: The story of our lives, they won't listen. Anyhow it was very good, we had people from all over England, we interviewed people from all, I used to take different studios, I would go to Birmingham and take the studio, go up to Manchester and take the studio and down to Cornwall, but no matter which studio I went in it is extraordinary, there was always a little voice up from the thing, ah Bimbi,

John Hamilton: From your early wanderings with Rediffusion, you make a lot of friends in the regions

Bimbi Harris: Yes, you do make good friends all round

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BIMBI HARRIS

SIDE 5 , TAPE 3

Bimbi Harris: Francis Gorman always took the credit of executive producer. He was the head of section, he never knew what was on the programme, who was in the programme, nothing to do with the programme whatever, but he always took the credits.

John Hamilton: He always knew where you were having lunch.

Bimbi Harris: Did he? Oh yes he always turned up, when you were filming

Roy Fowler: How do they occupy their time, these people

Bimbi Harris: I don't know, he did religious programmes as well, which I was glad to be out of.

John Hamilton: A good musician, Francis, he did a lot of music programmes, a lot of music programmes for the BBC

Bimbi Harris: I just didn't think they should have this executive producer credit to, because what had they done for the programme

John Hamilton: Nothing in his case. I did several On Reflections and he didn't contribute anything except turn up at lunch, quite miraculously in some cases, where I did deliberately withheld and retained to the last minute where we were going to be and he still managed to find it, it was all quite incredible. Spoon had the same thing too, he did quite a few

Roy Fowler: I have my methods, as what sin here can tell you

Bimbi Harris: He and his wife, Ann Beach, you knew Ann Beach, John

John Hamilton: The actress, very good, very nice lady

Bimbi Harris: A very nice, she and Francis and his children went and stayed at my place in Ibita once, way way back

John Hamilton: And the daughter became a mini Star in some Thames children's programme xxx which is being released I see, no being performed on the stage at Oxford, the Apollo, and I couldn't believe our eyes, I saw it in a local paper last week but that was Francis and Ann's daughter who starred in the television steage series which Alec Guns wife Gay was in, for Thames, I don't know whether she is involved in the stage, mustn't digress

Bimbi Harris: On reflections was quite an interesting programme. I suppose he might have had a say in the subject matter writer at the beginning

John Hamilton: Sort of

Roy Fowler: Was a buffer required between the programme people and management, was that his connection or part of the his function

Bimbi Harris: It must have been

Roy Fowler: Were their problems

Bimbi Harris: There must have been criticism of some sort, there must have been

Roy Fowler: Were there areas of embarrassment where management wanted a cut out

Bimbi Harris: I was never asked for it and I was never conscious of it

John Hamilton: There has always been the buffer syndrome hasn't there, and at the risk of backtracking this is the Old Elcan Alan thing. John McMillan put Elcan Alan in to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune from people like us and vice-versa, because he didn't want us tramping up-and-down to his office which I did quite a lot, all the time.

The same thing happened with Francis and Dorian Stevens who was head of sections but Francis was there as a titular executive producer to presumably

stave us off except that he didn't contributed anything to the programmes. It was largely down to the individual wasn't it. You'd treated the subject and got on with it and off it went on the air with the credit for a nebulous guy on the end called the executive producer

Bimbi Harris: Dorian Stevens used to have a weekly meeting with our section.

John Hamilton: And then he'd vanish.

Bimbi Harris: Don Gale was at that meeting and I used to go to that meeting and we used to sit and twiddle our thumbs, because they used to discuss the programme the night before and they'd say how did they do that trick, tell us how, and we would have to sit there and tell them these tricks of the trade when we were meant to have a production meeting about future programmes. Don and I didn't want to go back and tell tricks of the trade but we were rather forced to do so. That was a bad era, a very bad era

John Hamilton: A very strange 18 months, the first 18 months of LWT

Bimbi Harris: Wasn't it, Dorian Stevens and who was her sidekick, and who has made Grange Hill ever since

John Hamilton: And who is at Yorkshire Television still, Joy Whitby

Bimbi Harris: That's right, neither of them knew anything about television, sadly

John Hamilton: Joy knew marginally more than Dorian, but not a lot

Bimbi Harris: However, they got by, there we are

John Hamilton: She did go to Yorkshire eventually and became head of children's programmes or something up there. And then formed a production company, I think I remember reading some years ago

Bimbi Harris: I think they were uneasy days, those first days

Roy Fowler: Was there feeling it was going wrong

Bimbi Harris: I think so, I think there was a feeling of unease. There was a feeling of impermanency, a little bit of fright, a little bit unsure, is it going to last after the last upheaval which was a shock. Will this go on

Roy Fowler: What about all those very famous characters who signed the manifesto, people like Frank Muir and David Frost

Bimbi Harris: They did a few programmes at the beginning and they die off

Roy Fowler: Did you do anything with them

Bimbi Harris: No, David Frost used to be a researcher with me on those early programmes, way way back. Always very enthusiastic about, till of course he got his own programme and then away he went, good luck to him

Roy Fowler: Was his nature, his character discerned early on

Bimbi Harris: When he was very young, very enthusiastic and very determined and yes, he was going to make it.

The John Hamilton: Saw him last week at L W T going into a retirement party

Bimbi Harris: He usually remembers which is quite surprising

John Hamilton. We had a fantastic a 20 minute memory lane conversation. He always was an affable guy, whether we thought highly of him or not

Bimbi Harris: And he's made a great success

John Hamilton: Within 18 months you met your old friend Barry Took

Bimbi Harris: Barry took over lighter entertainment but that was a bit later wasn't it

John Hamilton: Was about two years in, about 1970

Bimbi Harris: Then the Simon Dee Programme came in that period.

Roy Fowler: What was the Simon Dee Programme, which in its day was a storm in the teacup

Bimbi Harris: Simon Dee was a late night entertainment programme, Brian Izzard had been doing it and he quarrelled with Simon and I was asked to takeover. And we had quite friendly chats. What do you want to do, Tell me and I'll fit in. We used to plan things and I used to say, Simon where would you like to come in this week. And he would say I will come in from A and walk down to C and do my opening there. And on the recording he would walking from B, unlit, no sound, walk in and then it grumble to the whole studio she doesn't know how to set up a studio. Although we planned it. It didn't make two hoots to me which way he came in as long as I knew. And this is the sort of arguments that used to go on

Roy Fowler: Did he do this deliberately, provocatively

Bimbi Harris: Deliberately. You see if he start shouted over the studio the studio staff would be with him. But fortunately they were all with me

John Hamilton: He couldn't have been more wrong

Roy Fowler: What was his problem you think

Bimbi Harris: Insecurity.

John Hamilton: Psychopath. Although a lot of the artists he wanted, I wanted too. We had lovely Eartha Kitts and Shirley Bassey. Anybody who was anybody, because stars we had on the show. We had very very big names indeed

Roy Fowler: The who was pulling them, was he pulling them

Bimbi Harris: No, I was. We used to have a list of the celebrities that arrived over and there was always this bargaining with celebrities that if they do the show and that show, you pay half the fee and half the fair, and all this which I used to do. But he used to say she never has my artist, she never has this, that and the other. There were terrible rows on the set.

Roy Fowler: He said this on the air

Bimbi Harris: No, he said it to the whole studio

And Roy Fowler: In the warm-up or with all the crew around, sometimes with the audience. One show, you see because we used to recalled the show half-an-hour before it went out, to get out his swear words mostly, he used to curse and an swear, and so used to go to VTR and half-an-hour later it would be out. Once he was just standing there and the camera was there for his goodbyes and he came storming up to the control room and said I have never been treated like this, I have been doing television for the three years, and the studio called out, and she's been doing it for 30 years. They always used to be in the background because they heard about rows, Stella used to be on all the

John Hamilton: Everybody was on your side

Bimbi Harris: Everybody used to be there and I used to say Simon your audience is waiting for you, your public is waiting for you just go down to the studio and let us do this final announcement. And he used to go down and we used to do it and we used to get on the air. But there were always these enormous upheavals, but you can't really from an artist point of view, you can't kick the system so much that it does harm to yourself as well as the system. And he was just harming himself. So I'm afraid he was out

John Hamilton: It certainly hit the headlines as your scrapbook indicates

Bimbi Harris: Absolutely, absolutely, front page of all the papers every day of the week, it was a long running sage, they even interviewed my son

Roy Fowler: What is interesting is that nobody picked him up thereafter

Bimbi Harris: Well he had been thrown out of ATV and thrown out of Australia. You see had been thrown out, this was his last chance and basically I'm quite an amenable person, if only he had just joined in it would have been fine. But he just couldn't, it was not his nature, pity because he was a good-looking boy, spoke nicely, he had a great future

John Hamilton: His early BBC shows on Saturday were enormously successful, he was the king of the chat show

Bimbi Harris: That's right, he could have gone on and on and on. I expect he curses me left, right and centre now. Sadly, he was his own worst enemy. They were pretty hectic to-do though, trying to get that last bit of a recording, and the recording engineers waiting and waiting for the editor to get the bits out before it went on the air. And every time I was caught up in a little row he would be champing there, we're on the air in 10 minutes, tell me what you want. It was really quite frightening. We did make the air every time.

The so what happened after that

John Hamilton: You had a long lie-down I hope. We always felt for you to

Bimbi Harris: That was nice, thank you. I know the studio staff were entirely

John Hamilton: Totally everybody was, you were the buzz of Station House for the right reasons -- how could Bimbi stand it, will she go mad before he does. Everybody felt before you because he was a twit of the first order

Bimbi Harris: And also I had rather a bolshie research staff which was handed to me from some where else which didn't help. Tanya Bruce Lockhart

John Hamilton: On, yes

Bimbi Harris: She used to come in with a huge Alsatian, never mind

Roy Fowler: Let's mind, let's talk about Tanya Bruce Lockhart, her father's well known

John Hamilton: The whole family were. Was it her mother or her sister who worked at Rediffusion and used to carry the to Pekinese around until Brownrig, coincided with her in the lift and he met her in the lift and said what you doing with those two cats. She said they were Pekinese. He said no they can't be dogs because I don't allow dogs in the building

Bimbi Harris: She had a huge Alsatian

John Hamilton: Which followed her around for years, it was quite a nice dog actually, I don't really like dogs and I don't like Alsations particularly but that one was quite an affable and a more which always confounded me considering its mistress

Roy Fowler: Was she disruptive

Bimbi Harris: Not particularly, she was just new to the game

John Hamilton: Typical researcher with pretensions

Bimbi Harris: Oh yes, latterly in television they came in as a researcher and ended up as a producer. And that happened again and again and again, they just skipped out the middle bit which is a pity really because if they had done a couple of years, they might have done something learned something

John Hamilton: If she'd listen, but she never would Tanya. I did a couple of things with her but she always knew it all and there was no way you could explain to her out what you wanted to do really. Never mind they've come and gone haven't they. We've seen that lot off

Then I had my By Jingo days which also you know about. I had a musical called By Jingo which Penny Chilern selected the songs. There was not really a script to write, it was the linking of the songs. And she didn't want the choreographer to do another Oh What A Lovely War. But on the other hand you can't have everybody sitting static singing songs, you've got to have movement and. So I did have a lot and there was a lot of argument about that. And she didn't want to go out and Barry Took was then head of Light Entertainment and after I'd sweated for three days in the studio on the tightest schedule I have ever come across, I really slotted every second into, he said there was a dirty mark on the flat in that song. I said perhaps well we could do that song again. And that girl wasn't miming very well, I said yes, I know she wasn't miming very well but I had no time to retake, that was my schedule, I had to accept it. If you think that was bad, let's do that again give me a schedule for a studio for a day and I'll do all these things again.

And he took it to Stella Richmond and Stella Richmond said I can't think what all the fuss is about, I like it as a show. And I took it to some body in the IBA and got them to see it, and they couldn't see what things wrong about it and, and Barry Took was still a storming that it must be cut. I had a copy of it and in fact I even took it home and it was under my bed because I was going to show it to the IBA next day. Foolishly I took it back and Barry Took had it wiped

Roy Fowler: The entire show

Bimbi Harris: The entire show. In those days it was a £40,000 show

John Hamilton: A lot of money even in 1972

Bimbi Harris: I had a feeling he was going to have it wiped so I went to Vic Gardiner and said can I have a copy made because I have a feeling he is going to, I had a copy made and it was the copy I took home to go and showed to IBA, but he got the copy back and he wiped it.

Then when Michael Grade came in I said Michael, this shouldn't be wasted and, there are one or two things, a day in the studio and I can put these things right. We had the whole music score, we had an hour's programme, it was By Jingo all the songs of the War and it should have gone out every November for the year dot, it should still be going out. And they chased and chased and found it and said no, it has been wiped. I don't know if you know any more of story on the other side of it

John Hamilton: No

Roy Fowler: What were the politics of the personalities of that situation because it wasn't conceivable that anybody

Bimbi Harris: Penny Chiltern, Penny Chiltern the writer, didn't want a lot of dancers so she got onto Barry Took and Barry Took thought up all the little things like dirty screen

Roy Fowler: Why would he be so subservient and to Penny Chiltern

Bimbi Harris John Hamilton: Don't know

The Roy Fowler: Was she in any way involved with Charles Chiltern

John Hamilton: Yes, she was his wife and

Bimbi Harris: I expect it was Charles who suggested the songs,

John Hamilton: I'm sure Charlie suggested the whole bit and but didn't want to be involved with television, he was always frightened of television

Roy Fowler: I'm baffled that some how corporately, even if one of the shareholders' interest, disposing of that amount of programme money

Bimbi Harris: Surprisingly I had a phone call about six months ago from some body who said and do you have a copy, any copy of By Jingo, one of the camera crews working on it and. And he said the programme company had the most programmes was the wealthiest company nowadays and this would have been invaluable. I said no, I'm sorry. It was all wiped. I've got a sound track and that's all I've got

Roy Fowler: Did it Relate To Oh What A Lovely

Bimbi Harris: And no, not at all, but it was the war songs

John Hamilton: It was similar, which is typical of Charles, the obviously Charles who started off Oh What A Lovely War, The Blue And The Grey which are all things that he did for radio, civil war songs, World War one songs, or whatever. It was the genre's in which he worked and he was brilliant at doing it

Bimbi Harris: It was, in fact and I had done a On Reflection on War Songs and he was very pleased with that and that was lovely John Gow singing

John Hamilton: And Alfie as the M D the, brilliant arranger

Bimbi Harris: Brilliant arranger, the music was beautiful, the recordings were beautiful, the artists were beautiful. The artists were heartbroken, absolutely heartbroken as I was. In fact they had done so much and they all said we realise how pushed you are in time, and every song had to be

scheduled in with make-up, because they were only allowed a certain amount of make-up for all the war songs and the bloodings and all these sort of things. It was a tragedy, absolute tragedy, it was the biggest tragedy of my whole career really because it was so moving, some of them. Brian Love for lighting and those scenes with the turquoise sky and the barbed-wire and the roll told of all the dead and it was so moving, there were people in the studio with tears and some. And then there were the songs, the Tipperary songs the whole studio was singing. It was a wonderful, wonderful feeling, absolutely wonderful. I think it broke a lot of people's heart that. It should never have been wiped. So I don't think very kindly of Barry took at the moment. It was a very wicked thing to do

John Hamilton. Fortunately he didn't last long. About 18 months

Bimbi Harris: He didn't last done, no but it should have been kept in the archives, it really should have been. And that was more or less the end of me. I did Police 5 and Look Heres and things like that

Bimbi Harris: You were blamed for that and fiasco

Bimbi Harris: I was never personally, I was never told I was blamed for it but I never did another

Roy Fowler: It was held against you

Bimbi Harris: I never did another big light entertainment after that, because it was a lot of money, and it was a lot of money that didn't go out on the air. Whether they blamed me up above I don't know but I was never brought in for an interview and told

Roy Fowler: The common sense of the situation is that if Barry Took wiped out 40,000 quids worth, he would have blamed someone, he wouldn't have blamed himself would he

Bimbi Harris: And if you wipe the evidence you can't be miss proved, can you

John Hamilton: He left a lot of correspondence behind, Barry a lot of it very amusing

Bimbi Harris: Yes, he was a clever writer

John Hamilton: But now you're talking about it Bimbi, I can't remember any on this particular subject, which is interesting in itself

Roy Fowler: The files were weeded

Bimbi Harris: I think they must have been, because he didn't last for much longer after that

Bimbi Harris: Neither did I, I didn't have another big show after that, that was my last big show. Well I was getting older and Police Five was three days work a week and it suited me

Roy Fowler: By acceptable professional standards would you, could you fault to what you had done, the [programme as it finally

Bimbi Harris: Yes, yes, I would have said if I had been given another day in the studio to correct the poor miming and one of the sets was not as it should be all could have done it very easily, very easily, even without getting artists in

Roy Fowler: Some minor retakes, I could have run old wartime films over the bits where the miming was bad, just mixed in, the voices were beautiful. I could have done it, almost without a studio I could have rectified it and but it was never to be. The sad thing is I didn't keep the copy under my bed. That was the very so sad thing

The Roy Fowler: You weren't given a chance presumably to justify your story

Bimbi Harris: I didn't know till Michael Grade came that it had been wiped. When Michael Grade came I said Michael there is this programme, you must get it out, it was coming up to November, I said it will be ideal, and it will take so little to put right, so little. And he searched and searched, or had people search, they couldn't find it. Very very sad so really you're almost at the end of my career

For Police Five, I got on very well with Shaw Taylor and he is very easy to work with, and I used to know how he was going to pace his spiel and I would pace my pan with the camera and you would know exactly, you would get to know a person so well, you know how they're going to talk and you pan and you end and it all sinks in

John Hamilton: You needed to, didn't you

Bimbi Harris: You worked very hard on that

John Hamilton: Let's not denigrate yourself Bimbi, I did a few, only a few and they're bloody hard work. Particularly at ITN,

Bimbi Harris: They were very hard work

John Hamilton: A very blasé news crew who we used to go in and bag the newsreaders clips and things, and do that kind of thing to flow in with Shaw, apart from all the exotic location filming and reconstruction and things, early Crime Watch stuff. It was all pioneered in Police Five

Bimbi Harris: I tried to sell Crime Watch to the company and they wouldn't listen. I said you know you've got an evening, this was before Crime watch, I said you've got an evening show here, it just wants, the Yard were co-operating, everyone would have been co-operating, inexpensive show, compelling viewing, wouldn't listen, they wouldn't listen. You must have heard that a lot of times on various people's recordings

Roy Fowler: I think it is a fact of life of the business. The classic dramatisation of that is in a film called Sunset a Boulevard where in the producers office Bill Holden says to Nancy Olsen who has turned his story down, he says for Christ sake you would have turned down Gone with the Wind. And it is Fred Clark as the producer who says no that was me, who wants to see a picture about the Civil War.

Bimbi Harris: And I did Rod Allen's Look Here. And that was going into current affairs programme who were not used to professional directors, were they. And they had the idea that they would write a script and you would put the cameras down the side and he said, it will take about half an hour won't

it. I said I don't work that way, if I'm directing the show, you give me the script, I will illustrate it, I'm the director, and they were quite shattered, they never had anyone in that department to tell them how a director works.

Roy Fowler: That is Rod

John Hamilton: After he left broadcasting and editing, he came to us as a producer bringing the idea of Look Here, look at television from inside type thing

Bimbi Harris: He was very nice to work with, but he just had never worked with a professional director and there were a lot of little things that shattered them

John Hamilton: At that time there weren't any in the current affairs department. It was rife with the John Birts and the xxxx and xxx who are all enormously important now

Roy Fowler: What was the date of By Jingo.

Bimbi Harris: By Jingo was about 1970 I suppose

Roy Fowler: And how long thereafter did you stay with LWT

Bimbi Harris: I suppose 1979. And I have to tell you my story of my microwave

John Harris: We're into 1978 when Rod joined us.

Roy Fowler: The great microwave strike was 1979

Bimbi Harris: The microwave had just been invented, we had this 11 week strike and I know I had no money and I was getting very worried about it and I got headaches and headaches and headaches. And I'm not a headache sufferer, so I had the microwave people in and I said you must check this microwave, it must be giving me headaches, so they checked it all around and it was the blessed strike

John Hamilton: I tell you what, Shadwell and I had headaches. You had only bought a microwave, we'd just bought a bloody house, it was only £25,000 then folks, but that was a big headache.

Bimbi Harris: And the COI kept saying will you come in and do some shows. I said I'm not allowed to, I can come in and wash dishes but I can't direct shows. And then I found out afterwards there were directors going in, so I went to the local labour exchange and said I would like some temporary work and there was a company who wanted a fortnight's relief wrapping books, I said I'll do it, I'll do anything. And I went down there and he looked at me and said that they've sent a girl and a slip of a one at that. He wouldn't employ me.

Roy Fowler: Did LWT fire you, or was it the end of your contract

Bimbi Harris: The end of my contract, old age, when I got to 60 we had a little note in our pay slips, all ex Redifusion staff can work on till 65. So I said fine, I'll work on. They said they don't mean you, they mean the men. I said that is sex discrimination. So I went to the unions, I went to all sorts of women associations and I fought it every way I could, but no way, they did give me an individual contract for another year, but no way would they let me stay on, although the men could stay on till 65. I mean it had been my life and I didn't know what I was going to do with myself, I mean I love it now but I didn't know what I was going to do with myself then.

Roy Fowler; Before we come onto that later period let's talk about the last era and some of the people. Tell me about Michael Grade.

Bimbi Harris: Michael Grade was a very charming young man and he was also willing to learn, so I think there is a lot to his credit that he came in, he came in, he was introduced to all the directors as the son of, nephew of, and we should give him all the help we could. And I think most of us did. And he wandered around, he was always very pleasant, he would always see you if you wanted to see him and he would always listen. Didn't always follow it on but he was always willing to listen

John Hamilton: He came in as head of light entertainment, the latter days before Cyril departed which is how Michael then became controller of programmes

Roy Fowler; It was Cyril Bennett who brought him in.

John Hamilton: Yes, from London Management which he was running

Roy Fowler: Do you know why, because he discerned talent in Michael Grade

John Hamilton: No, Barry had gone and there was an interval before we had a new head of light entertainment because we weren't really then doing light entertainment shows, we were heavily into Please Sir and sitcoms and all that kind of stuff and people like Mark Stewart and IZARD who were at the back of and running those kind of programmes didn't really need a head of department, they just got on with it and they were long running things anyway. And then quite precipitously, I remember the announcement at the meeting and Michael was introduced as our new head of light entertainment. Unfortunately it wasn't much later that Selsdon Park happened and goodbye Cyril, and after some hovering and many meetings with the board, it was quite a close run thing between John Bromley who could possibly have been controller and Mike, and Mike got it.

Bimbi Harris: When did Brian Tessler come in

John Hamilton: 1973. The year before the world cup from Thames as controller of programmes, he went up to managing director when John went, when John Freeman went leaving the controller of programmes vacant after Cyril died

Roy Fowler: What is there to say about Cyril Bennett

Bimbi Harris: He was a journalist really, he wasn't a vision man, he was another one who couldn't visualise anything, you had to explain pictures in great detail to him. He tended to listen though, he was sympathetic to ideas and he used to say go ahead and set it up and let me know, if he liked the bare idea he would say go and do more about it and come back. I don't know if it was a putting off technique

John Hamilton: I don't think so, I think it was done with the best of intentions and at least he had a sense of humour

Bimbi Harris: He had a sense of humour and he did take up some things but I think he was probably pressurised from many sides, for programme ideas, and then as all controllers do they get their own ideas and they just want to put their own ideas out then, and I think that's what happened

John Hamilton: And he took on too much, Cyril, he tried to do everything latterly which broke him down I suppose. Although bringing Mike in took a lot of burden away, because a lot of the aggro in contracts were mainly in light entertainment programmes, what with the artists and big shows at the Savoy, horrendous award things.

Bimbi Harris: I used to go and set the shows up in the Savoy, did you

John Hamilton: No, I managed to avoid them but Skrim did quite a few of them and we were sharing an office, so I lived with the aggravation.

Bimbi Harris: I used to do them too, with David Frost I used to get in, we used to go and do cabarets, set up a cabaret at the Savoy, nothing to do with our job at all

Roy Fowler: Just for presentations

Bimbi Harris: Just for presentations, but they did get it professionally presented didn't they that way, and you go and set it up and you go to the Savoy

John Hamilton: And in the outcome they were very good shows but full of contractual aggravation, the Sun being involved, and all the Murdoch bleeding men, it took the gloss off doing it as a job and

Bimbi Harris: And no output, at least in television you do have an output at the end of your efforts

Roy Fowler: Let me ask you about Murdoch's involvement, I thought he was only a shareholder, was there a more overt presence

John Hamilton: No, as we all recall with thanks, Rupert's money John Freeman's front saved us in 1970 when we could have gone under entirely at

LWT. But thereafter because of the connection with the press side, Rupert didn't interfere, he might have done at board level but who knows, but my recollection of the archives of that period don't indicate anything that I can recall that interfered with programming level, but nevertheless the Sun awards was obviously big on our promo for his papers and his minions below, several in particular I won't name - Olly, on the sporting side, a real pain, knew nothing about television but thought he did

Roy Fowler: Were they interfering for the benefit of the Murdoch organisation

John Hamilton: Totally, all they wanted was more and more shots of the Sun, logo all over the place

Roy Fowler: That is very interesting again

John Hamilton: Yes, we were bound by the IBA regulations, at producer level, you have to stick to the rule book

Roy Fowler: Given that contest who won

John Hamilton: It was a matter of then becoming involved with the controller or even general manager because they're always trying to pare the contracts down or getting more money for their particular artist they were pushing, one way or the other the director could not win, you were in a no win situation between the management and the fringy people from a gentleman who had a big shareholding which was a bit naughty. And the IBA really ought to have done more about it than they did then

Roy Fowler: The IBA was aware of it presumably

John Hamilton: Oh yes, I've seen lots of correspondence from Grade and the IBA and all sorts of things. Mike was on the side of the operators throughout that period

Roy Fowler: When you say the operators,

John Hamilton: I mean the workers at our level

Roy Fowler: He wasn't representing the vested interests

John Hamilton: Oh no, no, not at all.

Roy Fowler: Given the background of the family one might expect him to be on the side

John Hamilton: He didn't push that too much

Bimbi Harris: No he didn't

John Hamilton: London Management had most of the artists worth mentioning in this country but if you look back over the billings or whatever you won't see too many of them, there was still ATV of course then and they still had their outlets on the weekend shows, Tom Jones doing massive spectacles for America and here and so on.

Bimbi Harris: I never remember a phone call or anything saying look here darling do you think you could

John Hamilton: No, he is not that kind of operator

Roy Fowler: I don't think it was done in that fashion

Bimbi Harris: It was in the past

John Hamilton: Very erudite notes, and again quite amusing notes but with the needle in the middle of them. So by and large he was not a bad controller of programmes really, there have been many many worse that I can recall. Not only in our company but else where.

Roy Fowler: John Birt

Bimbi Harris: I worked this last year of my working life on Look Here which is in current affairs of which I was a member of that staff, a staff of a dozen and he never recognised me, we had parties and all the rest of this and I tried to go up and say hello, I'm working in your department now, he would always look away, always, so I never ever spoke to him

Roy Fowler: A shy man

John Hamilton: No, no no.

Bimbi Harris: I don't think he would have been that shy.

John Hamilton: He only knows about research, he doesn't know anything about cameras and sound and lighting, things like that that make television programmes

Roy Fowler: Has that carried over into his BBC career

Bimbi Harris: I don't know what his life is like now. I imagine the BBC management are more aloof from their staff, I imagine they've always remained more aloof, whereas in the commercial world they mix in more

John Hamilton: Or used to, they started to grow apart in the Birt era, as far as LWT is concerned, and I think that also happened in Thames as well, , big companies started to move in as well, also

Bimbi Harris: Maybe it's a deliberate policy to keep the separation, I've no idea.

Roy Fowler: How is Birt regarded at LWT

Bimbi Harris: Poorly, poorly

John Hamilton: A joke. That was the unbelievable thing when Mike went, the fact that Birt got the job, Bromley's name came back into it, personally I don't think Bromley would have made a controller in a million years, down to the country too often, an overall controller of programmes, covering all aspects, but when Birt got the job, we all collapsed with mirth, unbelievable, absolutely unbelievable

Bimbi Harris: We had done a current affairs, one hour a week or something

John Hamilton: Weekend World and more and more current affairs programmes, but fortunately he let people like David Bell who Michael

Grade had brought into light entertainment run the late end shows, and then subsequently Alan Boyd and people like that who knew what it was all about thank god, and Birt didn't unduly interfere with them, I don't think again from archival correspondence.

Bimbi Harris: I don't think he did in the current affairs either, what is the name of the man who used to run current affairs, Barry Cox

John Hamilton: Now director of corporate affairs, whatever that means,

Bimbi Harris: Barry Cox, lovely Cockney man, came in, he was a basic man too, down to basics, and Birt used to hand him the department really, I suppose he might have said do something on this and do something on that but Barry used to do it all

John Hamilton: Did you ever come across Nick Elliott at all

Bimbi Harris: Yes, Nick Elliott was the executive producer of Police Five, titular, I never ever saw him, in fact after I had been doing the show for about a year, I met him once and he said you probably don't realise but I'm the head of that, I said no I didn't, I hope you enjoyed watching them. So it shows you how little he had to do with it.

John Hamilton: I think after last weekends Murder on the Moon and the Goldeneye thing for which was he executive producer, two of the most unbelievable programmes I think I've ever seen on television

Bimbi Harris: My son worked on that murder programme, he worked 3 days on it and even the crew were not told the final ending.

John Hamilton: Would it have made any difference

Bimbi Harris: I said how on earth did they work, you can't hear anything, you can't see anything, everyone is talking at once

John Hamilton: We're confusing our programmes, the one Mike Aspell did

Bimbi Harris: Yes, that's right, murder at the weekend.

John Hamilton: I was talking about Murder on the Moon, that awful thing that was wished on us all last Sunday night. It has been panned by every critic I've read

Bimbi Harris: So I presume was murder at the weekend, was it

John Hamilton: One or two of them thought, I must say we didn't stay with it because it meant watching Friday, Sunday, we couldn't anyway, it had the basis of a good idea but it went wrong almost entirely

Bimbi Harris: It went wrong because they had a nucleus of artists and a mass of the public altogether and you never knew when the public was going to speak therefore you never could hear them, and when the public got hold of an artist it wasn't lit, you can't blame the lighting people, and the cameraman couldn't get in because somebody over there was speaking and they had four cameras apparently rolling the whole time. Apparently it was the editor who had the big headache of trying to make any sort of show out of it at all. You cannot mix members of the public with artists who have been given key lines.

John Hamilton: There you go again, it is another executive producer who doesn't really know anything about television, and certainly not entertainment television, ie Nick Elliott, one of the dreaded four who came in from Granada land in 1970/1. Birt, Elliott, Barry Cox and David Elstein who didn't last long. But look where he is now, at Thames, multi millionaire apart from anything else, biggest share holding in the company, bigger apparently than the chairman

Bimbi Harris: And as you say they always turn up at the luncheons

He was at the BBC, I remember him at the BBC.

Roy Fowler: When you left LWT how did you life go

Bimbi Harris: I was very upset at leaving, the first thing I did was to take 6 months and go round the world. That was fabulous It really took my mind off that. And I proceeded to sell my little house which was right next to the studios at London Weekend and move down to the river, because I didn't need to live next to the studios. I sold my place in Ibitha because I didn't

want to go to an island bought on Spain because the money handed over so conveniently. And that has occupied my time since I've retired and I've thoroughly enjoyed my retirement.

I thought I was going to miss it, I thought I was going to do shows, in fact what is the firebrand, who does so many freelance shows asked me, one or two people have said why don't you come and do this, why don't you come and do that. I said if I'm broke I will but so far I've not been that broke, so I've been thoroughly enjoying life, taking it leisurely. And really only when you stop do you know the stress that you worked under. You work under and you don't realise, I didn't realise I was working under such stress but now I've stopped I thought did I really do all that, did I really do all those shows that week,

Roy Fowler: It always seems to me that there are two kinds of stress, one is a very healthy stress where one is working at full tilt and enjoying it

John Hamilton: Adrenaline, yes,

Roy Fowler: And the other is just running interference and coping with interference.

Bimbi Harris: That did come later in my working life

Roy Fowler: That is the unnecessary stress,

Bimbi Harris: They always say that people with stress and heart attacks are not the managers, they're the deputy managers aren't they.

SIDE 6, TAPE 3

John Hamilton: You said earlier we might do a retrospective on the end of how of how things have come round to full circle to some degree, from Bimbi starting when you did your own studio maintenance, try everything, be a camera person, be a sound person which I think was a bit unique in her case, because that it didn't happen to every lady because as you explained that's part of your personality, to push and get tired of doing one thing, not tired of it but wanting to explore other things

Bimbi Harris: That's right

John Hamilton: But now as with the new agreements with the Yorkshire Television and what is happening in practice at London Weekend, television is jacks-of-all-trades, it is being extended Maybe wider with the instance of Dave Woods who is a fine video tape editor, runs his own business outside with the company's knowledge , they know he has an external business outside which supplies facilities for this that and the other in partnership with another couple of editors and is now directing as well, has just taken over a sports show on Saturday and is about to do some big matches. And there are others in the new Visions department, they are nearly all Jack's of all trades. They can light, they can operate cameras, they can do location planning. It is becoming a multi-faceted business

Bimbi Harris:: A friend of mine who works at Mould, HTV, she is a make-up artist. And there is one make-up artist and one wardrobe and they said they should interchange. And June said, June is the make-up artist, June's said wait until I burnt a precious dress and they weren't asked me to do it again

Roy Fowler: Obviously some individuals are multi-faceted but a great many aren't and are very content to do their job and go home at a reasonable hour. We come on now to the union because the union started out earlier on in the film business by coping with those abuses, down at Denham people worked 14, 16, 18 hour p a d, six days a week, they got home at 4 o'clock in the morning spell on Sunday and that was the only time they had off

Bimbi Harris: Most of my working life I feel has been like that

Roy Fowler: It is one thing to work long hours through choice but it is a hell of a another matter it's to do it at the behest of your employer who says you must do it otherwise you're out on the street and we now seem to be in that era. I myself don't quite understand it or see where it's going to end. I don't see it working personally

John Hamilton: Well the power of the union has been so undermined that there is not a lot that's anybody can do about it except the individuals alike the Dave Woods of this world to accept it. Obviously he wants to direct, in fact he did an attachment to World of sport long before I left World of sport and I let him to an entire race meeting. He is perfectly capable of doing it for. That was prior agreement, it wasn't under the counter or anything and he thoroughly enjoyed it but he then lay fallow, More's the pity for another five or six years before this has come up to pass but assuming he has done some deal with the management to recompense him for doing more than one job which I sincerely trust he has, I wouldn't like to guarantee that in the present circumstances where people are going and taking a voluntary redundancy

Roy Fowler: I don't see how that relates to a cameraman who considers himself a cameraman, that's all he wants to be and he's rostered for 18 hours in any one day

John Hamilton: Well print rostering is now flexible as well you see, because of the changing pattern within the studio ie there are nearly all becoming facility houses, probably be only traditions are running in the smaller companies in the regions, like Anglia if and Grampian and Border whatever, where they've got a very tight staff anyway, a fair tight operation, and where in the American context you would expect people to be ambidextrous and do all sorts of things for the sake of the station and a small operation. But I think it is probably there that cameramen will continue be cameramen and soundmen will continue to be a sound men.. Whereas in the big companies, they will now be utility guys depending on the productions that are brought in, the independent productions. Gone now from LWT, as far as an can see are the days when a crew and a sound crew were allocated to things and

that's all they did and in their own area. There aren't any established shows anymore

Roy Fowler: Leaving aside the work of disciplines what I'm talking about is the requirement placed on them by management to work willy nilly

John Hamilton: And I think it is with the union agreement

John Hamilton: And I went say with the union agreement, it because the union as you pointed out has no power Maybe Wardour St hasn't agreed, but the local shop have agreed things. National agreements now have gone out the window as we knew them in television, across the board deals. As heavily witnessed by the Yorkshire signing last week, and the LWT settlement, they just settled last week. And a share holding 7% and a share holding. Here we go again, the Thatcher syndrome of making a everybody shareholders phobics is now rubbing off and. Now that in LWT terms is enormously complicated, the chairman's new proposals to buy back shares and then it give a greater share holding to the chosen few, now being called Ali bland the 40 thieves. The workers at floor level would kill me if they heard that in the bar yesterday. But at what risk and, apparently the company are now going to have to borrow £100 million at today's interest rates in order to finance this kind of the deal to keep people there against them hopefully getting a franchise in 1992 and 1993. Who can guarantee that with no IBA, no one knows what the new commission is going to do. I'm certainly glad I ain't there anymore and. Couldn't work under those conditions

Bimbi Harris Yes, although I missed out on the shares, I left to soon, so I missed the shares and I resent Rediffusion's pay off. So I feel I missed out on quite a lot of financial things

Roy Fowler: What was your association if any would the union

Bimbi Harris: I was a director used rep at one time with the union, but I found it a very frustrating time, because they always wanted to have directors in from the BBC

Roy Fowler: Had you joined ABS when you were that the BBC

Bimbi Harris: yes

Roy Fowler: Active

Bimbi Harris: Not particularly

John Hamilton: It wasn't a very active association

Roy Fowler: It was known as a staff union, a house union. Do you have any memories of it

Bimbi Harris: Just a mass meeting once a year or some think like that. But it really wasn't effective at all

Roy Fowler: When did you join ACTT

Bimbi Harris: When I started with commercial television

Roy Fowler: That wasn't a requirement

Bimbi Harris: No,

Bimbi Harris: No, but I joined them and when I became a director I became a director's rep for a period

John Hamilton: You supervised me at one stage quite early on in 1960. I started on 1 January 1959 and you supervised me, it was an ad mag

Bimbi Harris: Ad mag Days, we've just not mentioned ad mag days

John Hamilton: You were the directors rep for about the year, Daphne Shadwell, lunatic, took it on for a very short time and I coped it thereafter for a very long time

Bimbi Harris: It does take a lot of your time, a lot of meetings, a lot of discussions

John Hamilton: That was until about 1962

Bimbi Harris: Then they bought in someone who does the quiz games now, Macintyre or something. They said we must have this chap from the BBC because he had done a lot of quiz games, I didn't even brought it up because I think I've done more quiz games than anybody in the whole of the industry but I didn't want to do any more, so they wanted to bring in this chap from the BBC to do them, he was very welcome to them

Roy Fowler: What is your feeling about ACTT, whether it has been a good, bad or indifferent influence

Bimbi Harris: Shall I say they have been good to me, I've had two major operations and they've been very good to me, but that is just the personal side of it, Jack O'Connor I like very much and has been very good to me, very helpful, tried very much on the retirement to help me but unsuccessfully, but they did try.

Roy Fowler: Did Jack's drinking habits impinge on his function as a union rep

Bimbi Harris: I didn't think so at all, but I was not, I was not a drinking person myself, I did not often go to the bar you see, so I wouldn't have seen him there, it is the other one I took exception to somehow

John Hamilton: Mr Sapper

Bimbi Harris: Mr Sapper, much more the bullying type of person.

Roy Fowler: Why did Alan get you going in the wrong direction.

Bimbi Harris: I don't know but I never saw eye to eye with him.

Roy Fowler: Politically

Bimbi Harris: No, just as an individual, I didn't really come in contact with them an awful lot really. We used to observe the union hours, the union hours for filming, the union hours for musicians and you just observed the hours and that was it, as long as you did there was no problems. So I didn't really rub across the unions at all. And the only time I did seek their help was at 60 when they were powerless.

Roy Fowler: Do you think they have been a benefit to the business

Bimbi Harris: Oh yes. I think they have been a benefit and I think that people now will miss them, and I think it is up to each person to fight their quarter. I have a son in the industry who is a vision controller and he freelances, he has been freelancing for three years and he has never stopped working and he negotiates his own hours and there are so few freelance vision controllers he can dictate what shows he does. He went up to Leningrad and did the ballet and he did all the Salzburg music festivals and he is going over to Madrid to do something and for a vision controller this is a good life, you don't imagine vision controllers being freelance but he is making a very good living out of it and dictates their own terms. So each person has got to fight their corner as it were, accept a job or they don't accept a job. But you've got to be in a strong position to do that.

Roy Fowler: There has to be I think a collective force on behalf of

Bimbi Harris: The weaker

Roy Fowler: Yes, well everyone working in the business

Bimbi Harris: But that is the country, isn't it, that is the market reaction isn't, that it that everyone fights for themselves.

Roy Fowler: Yes, and I think it changes all the time

Bimbi Harris: Yes, I think it does change but that is the element of the country at the moment, everybody fights their corner

Roy Fowler: The prevailing way

Bimbi Harris: And I think that's the way people are reacting to the lack of the union, they fight for themselves or they go on doing it. I'm very sorry for these friends I've got up in Mould but mostly they are people who opted out of the busy London for a peaceful life up there doing very little, the unions are sorting them out and they can go to Cardiff or they can take redundancy, that's their choice. Most of them have bought houses up there, and beautiful country side and they resent having to buckle under now, but they were the

type of person who did take the easy line anyway. So it has come of more of a shock to them, because the fighters were left in London if you see what I mean, I think they need support now because they are the weaker individuals.

Roy Fowler: Shall we go onto ad mags

Bimbi Harris: Jimmy Hanley, and Jim's Inn and Shop on the Corner

Roy Fowler: We're back into the 50s now. You did all those

Bimbi Harris: Yes, I had a little go at them all and when you see now satellite shopping you think my goodness they want a director or something, they will never sell anything that way, I don't know if you ever watch satellite sales shop, they have a sales shop and they have unbelievable presenters, I don't know how they ever sell anything, I suppose they have directors

Roy Fowler: It could be spontaneous combustion

Bimbi Harris: I think they could do admags on the satellite sales programme very well, I think they would make them

John Hamilton: So much cheaper, the advertisers are always moaning about advertising costs aren't they, one of them that I've read has suggested to the IBA they brought back ad mags, it was only Harold Wilson that stopped them, quite arbitrarily, he didn't like them.

Bimbi Harris: They were tripe weren't they, but satellite tv could get them in beautifully.

Roy Fowler: I imagine that they would be outdated in the sense that there will be home shopping in the American style if satellite ever catches on, I think it will be direct selling

Bimbi Harris: This is direct selling now, which is so badly done. They don't know how to show the objects, you can't see them, if wanted to buy it I want to see it, show me for goodness sake.

John Hamilton: But apart from the advertising agents themselves who were always pain in the air weren't they largely again because they knew very little about television anyway then

Bimbi Harris: And they had to keep their job

John Hamilton: Of course they did, we all know the turn over in that industry, they were quite fun to do, I thoroughly enjoyed them

Bimbi Harris: I think they were fun to do. The miraculous way the scriptwriters twisted in, I thought they were very clever actually sometimes

John Hamilton: The David Edwards and Tony Halls and people like that, quite brilliant. They were quite fun

Bimbi Harris: I wonder what happened to David Edwards. David Edwards did my scripts for the Disney shows

John Hamilton: He is very successful David now, he lives in Minnesota, his ex wife and her father live in the next block to us, the next doorway to us, David lives in Minnesota, he is very big in advertising and television

Bimbi Harris: I'm very pleased for him

John Hamilton: I saw him about four years ago, Simon their son is very grown up now, but he just knocked on the door one evening and there he was. A great reminisce. About children's programmes and ad mags and you name it. He was a good actor, I saw him in a play once, very good indeed, The Long and the Short and the Tall

Bimbi Harris: They had this submarine in Disney land we always used to do little carry ons, the submarine caught on the ledge and you would leave it till next week, and we were doing other little stories with cliff hangars, he was very good at that.

John Hamilton: It will be Muppet land soon, Jim Henson has been bought by Disney for an awful lot of money.

Bimbi Harris: Kermit, when Rod my son went over to the States, they kept saying have you seen our frog, he said it's not yours, it started in England but the Americans think it is American

Roy Fowler: It comes from Sesame St, so in a sense

John Hamilton: Yes he did, I was reading about it this week and Kermit was one of his original puppets and he is very fond of it for obvious reasons, but it is 30 years ago and for Sesame St, but it was Lew Grade who made the series

Roy Fowler: For the Muppets but Sesame St had been going on for 10 or more years before that, very famous and marvellous, a great education series

Bimbi Harris: What happened to schools programmes, they just completely stopped didn't they

John Hamilton: Sadly yes, they're still seen on Channel 4 but much less so than they were in our day, Redifusion particularly, great shame

Bimbi Harris: the advantage of a schools programme was that when you'd done a programme the teacher asked every student in the class to write a little report so you got a feed back on the programme, and you didn't ever get a feedback at other times, it was quite interesting.

John Hamilton: Video I suppose killed schools programmes, with videos and VCRs you can have it any time and you can repeat it and do what you like with it

Bimbi Harris: You almost feel it should do away with programme controllers and planning, all the programme schedules, what does it matter which order they programme them in if you video them

Personally I'm quite glad not to be racing with everybody trying to get work.

John Hamilton: Especially now when nobody knows what is happening anyway

Roy Fowler: I think that is they key to it, nobody does know and every one is really rather desperate, terrified they're going to miss out, get it wrong

John Hamilton: Especially with the end of the IBA and the incoming commission

Roy Fowler: And I really rather suspect that on the one hand we're seeing the decline and fall of practically everything and I think the crumbling of this particular regime in this country, what is going to come out of it is going to be quite interesting.

Bimbi Harris: But who is going to afford these big dramas

Roy Fowler : It will be a wholly different thing, and in my time in the States I worked on things like Studio One and Playhouse 90 and all that's gone. Long since so now it's going here too. Along with the national health service and everything else we felt fondly over

John Hamilton: In winding up I would like to say that Bimbi was everso lucky particularly in her early days because the vast experience and wonderful chance she had of trying all sorts of bits and pieces.

Bimbi Harris: Yes, I was very glad to have those days

John Hamilton: In a developing stage of television.

Bimbi Harris: It was nice. I was one of the first women in the BBC in the war years, I was at the start of BBC Television, I was at the start of Lime Grove, I was at the start of Redifusion, I was the start of London Weekend, the start of Grampian, so I feel I have been the start of a lot and lot of programmes. But with all that I have no recorded programmes to show, none at all

John Hamilton: How sad

Bimbi Harris: It is sad, forty years of work and no recorded programme to show

John Hamilton: But what do you do with them, Daphne and I have a cupboard full of tapes, of rubbish, that Daph's and I have done, and we never look at them,

Bimbi Harris: That's true but I just wish that I had a programme.

John Hamilton: Our old friend Joan Kemp Welch is in exactly the same position, she is dying to have xxx and I know it exists on 405 line tape, and I know a guy who knows where it is and she is desperate to have something and particularly that which was one of her great great things of course, we will get round to get it

Bimbi Harris: You see we're just too old, that is the thing, you can't have it all ways.

Roy Fowler: It is a movable feast, one partakes