

Patricia Transcript

My name's Patricia, and I've lived in Brighton since '74. But I used to work in Worthing in the late 50's and 60's and we used to come in to dance in Brighton.

(Where did you used to go to dance?)

At the Regent Ballroom on top of Boots, where Boots is now. And also a place called 'The Chinese Jazz Club' which is where the aquarium was. And I've never met anyone else who's heard of that.

(Which did you prefer?)

I think I preferred the aquarium jazz club, except it was ahead for me, it was new, it was the beginning of the 60's it was coming to. It was foreign to me but I found the men nicer. I've got a story there - the men at the Boots Ballroom. They used to hold you so close and - excuse me - used to have erections and they'd be drunk and breathing down your neck, maul you. That's why I've come today. It needs to be documented, all this stuff about that television presenter, that's died. All that stuff was commonplace in the 60's. I would've been 20, 21. Where as in the other one people were interested in jazz and ideas and so I enjoyed that better, although I couldn't do it, it was beyond me then.

(Where did you learn to dance?)

I was brought up in a children's home. With 200 children. And the nuns used to bring out in the middle 50's - a box which was like a big record player. I was always called up to show people how to dance and it was the only subject I knew how to do. We used to take it in turns to be the boy and be the girl. And today's brought that right back to me I've loved today, I've loved doing those dances.

(What dances did you enjoy dancing the most?)

I think the Waltz, Foxtrot and... Polka! I was very good at the polka. And line dances, things like cha cha. I loved the rhythm of the music and the sway, it's like a romantic viennese thing really. I think I feel like now. But as a child it felt so lovely to be moved by music.

(Who did you used to go with?)

I was nursing. So we used to go, it was like a group of us, four or five girls at the time.

(What type of people used to go to these Ballrooms?)

Well the women were great, they were like women now but the men were terrible.

Well certainly I never seemed to meet any (that weren't) and I remember before I was going out one night, saying to this friend that I didn't know how to flirt. I didn't know how to attract a man, 'cause I was all goggles and brought up by nuns so I was very inhibited. And she said "this is how you do it, you sort of catch their eye and you give them a little grin or something" and I did it and this guy tapped his friend and they all began laughing at me. So that probably wasn't so good. And I've flirted more today than I've flirted all my life. There was an older man I was dancing with. And it was only fun but I really enjoyed the eye contact and being cheeky with him. I really loved it.

(What was it like waiting to be asked to dance?)

Terrible, terrible. Absolutely terrible. You felt like a wallflower. We used to call it wallflower. Well all the attractive girls used to be asked first. I was probably the last to be asked.

(What was 'the beautiful girl' those days?)

I think it was confidence as much as anything. I mean certainly not wearing glasses. But I think it was how they carried themselves.

(Was it like thin girls or..?)

Well we were all thin. Even I, I mean I was a bit over weight but I would say I was slim by today's standards. Because that was the diet then. You didn't have a lot of anything. People were much thinner than now. There were very few overweight people. I think it was confidence. I think men were a lot more gauche then they are now. Well not all of them, I wasn't being against all men. But I want to go back to that Chinese jazz club, 'cause then you had a different type of man. You had a man that was interested in folk music and jazz. I didn't know that then, but looking back you could have a decent conversation it wasn't only about flirting.

(What was your favourite part of the evening?)

Getting ready I think. There was such excitement. Also fear, that feeling of clothes everywhere - not that you had that many clothes - what were you gonna wear? But the excitement of going off together and being hopeful. The first dance usually crushed the hope! And then also it used to be quite fun getting home we usually had difficulty getting home 'cause we usually missed the last train or last bus. And I remember once we got as far as Hove and we were walking the streets near Hove station and some Jehovah's Witnesses called out from their flat and asked if we wanted to stay the night, and we did! And they were very caring. We were scared stiff that there would be ghosts and all sorts of things. But they were very pleasant to us.

(What kind of clothes were you wearing?)

We would've worn shortish skirts, the mini skirt didn't come in 'til a bit later so down to the knee. And sleeveless, probably just a round collar or something. I remember a dress I made - Yes, so round collar.

(Was it like the best dress you had you would wear?)

Yes. And we always had nice handbags. You wore handbags and gloves, and hats to about the middle 60's in this country when you went out.

(What did you do after dancing?)

Go home. We'd be glad to get home. And also because we were nursing we weren't allowed. We used to have a pass to get out at night after 10:30. And sometimes we didn't have a pass. So we had this system of climbing out over the roofs. You used to go into a ward where a friend of yours was working and climb out the window and climb all across the roofs to get to get into the nurses quarter. And there was always a night cook. And he would cook, if he was friends with you he'd cook an egg and bacon when you got in.

(What do you miss the most about dancing in Brighton?)

Having a nice partner I think. What I've enjoyed today is having a good partner.

(What is your best memory about dancing in Brighton in the 60s?)

I think the Chinese Jazz Club, although I don't think I knew it at the time. It's probably the nearest to what I later became, interested in those sorts of things, it was my first introduction to that sort of music and those sorts of people.