

Judith Lawson Transcript

(What's your name and date of birth?)

My name's Judith Lawson and I was born in Enfield Middlesex in 1946.

(What's one of your earliest memories of the cinema?)

The thing was that I moved down to Brighton with my parents, my Mum in 1952. And we never had telly, so you know; we were always going to the cinema which was here or the Gaiety Cinema which was in the Lewes Road.

(Do you remember the first film that you ever saw?)

I'm not so certain about the first film I ever saw but for some reason there always seemed to be films that I could go along with even though I was younger, they didn't seem to rule out children. I don't know whether censorship was involved or not but I don't think I ever saw anything inappropriate because it was all governed by the standards then. But they were sort of 'epic' films. I particularly remember 'Ben-Hur' I don't know when that came out. I know I was 'Carmen' which was fantastic and one woman did say to my parents she didn't think it was suitable for me to see. However I had a love of musicals ever since.

(How long would it take you to make the trip?)

Oh, quite a way. We used to leave Patcham, go up Braeburn Avenue, down Ditchling road, cut through the upper Lewes Road. And there was always a YZ chewing gum machine, in the upper Lewes Road which I always used to put some pennies in so that I had some sort of sweets, chewing gum. Now it's frowned upon. We could never really afford to go upstairs 'cause it was more expensive. But if there was a special occasion my dad would used to treat us and we went upstairs. So it was important, you know, to go upstairs for a special occasion.

(How often did you go?)

We went every Saturday and Sunday. If the Sunday film was particularly good we would always go on the Sunday but we always went Saturday night. And that's how we used to enjoy our films. And it made me a lover of the cinema.

(Would you dress up to go?)

I mean, in a way. Whenever we went out the house we always used to try and look smart. But yeah we were going to the cinema and if it was a special occasion I suppose we would, yeah. 'Cause we were celebrating something and we were going upstairs - it sounds crazy now but you know, in my mind then it was really

important.

(Can you describe the insides, how was it?)

Yes, I mean with the Gaiety Cinema in the Lewes Road it was quite extraordinary, 'cause it was like on the corner going round and there was a sweet shop opposite. Then you went in and you paid at a kiosk and you could go that side or that side. So I remember like two queues, then it seemed in my mind an extraordinarily long corridor, then you went up about 8 steps and then there was refreshments or a bar here, and if you were going upstairs, you would then go round to the left then you would go up the stairs to the balcony. But we usually carried on up these small little flights of stairs, then you turned round and you went into the stalls downstairs.

(Do you remember what the refreshment store sold?)

Yeah, they was always ice creams and lollipops and drinks, fizzy drinks. I can't remember tea and coffee being sold and things like.

(What was your favourite do you remember?)

Yes, I can remember, it was a raspberry lollipop, Ice-lolly, yes.

(How were the seats?)

Yeah well I can't remember anything about the cinema that was uncomfy. But they weren't quite like what ours are. I'm pretty certain that people could smoke inside and there was always like a bit of a hue if you went back in.

(Were there adverts or news or anything?)

There was the newsreel. And I'm sure at the end they used to play the National Anthem. But I'm glad they don't do that now. But at the same time, I do believe in some places in Northern Ireland they still do that. And they always had a safety curtain that used to come down to show the audience that it was there.

(Were there ever any intervals?)

Yeah, I can remember an interval in some of the bigger; the big films definitely an interval.

(You said they used to have newsreels, is there anything in particular you remember seeing?)

Not really no. But I do remember seeing it. I think that might be another possible link in as to why we always went so regularly, why my parents always went.

(What did your parents do for a living?)

My Father was a cabinetmaker and my mother really stayed at home but she was a short hand typist in the war, and my father was in the reserve occupation in the war. So when we moved down here when I was 6, it was roughly for a better life because they had gone through all the bombing in the war.

(Did you have any brothers or sister?)

I had a brother ten and a half years older than myself and we would all go together. But of course when I was about 12 he joined the RAF so you know, it was a kind of progression for him, with the age gap. It was different.

(Do you know how much tickets cost?)

Yeah, I know this seems crazy but I can remember nine pence somewhere along the line but maybe research would have to check that out. Whether it was nine pence to go upstairs, and that's why it's stuck in my mind and it was cheaper to go downstairs.

(Did anything unusual happen when you went to the cinema?)

Well when you say unusual I remember queuing, long queues, sometimes for particular films and you don't really get that nowadays do you.

(When you said about queuing, were there any films in particular?)

It was the Epic Films like 'Ten Commandments' and 'Ben-Hur' I'm sure there were other similar ones. Yeah, it was the epic ones.

But Sometimes I used to come here (Duke's), in the Duke of York's here the windows upstairs in the toilets look exactly the same as what they were. I do love coming out to the cinema, staying home and watching DVDs or Telly's just not the same. I remember the introduction of sound when it started coming out at the sides. That made it different. And my parents, they loved the cinema so much, they were both born in 1908 and they loved the silent films and they would travel all across London to find a cinema still showing a silent film, after the talkie films were introduced! They used to tell me, "no, no! We resisted the talkie films for ages" until in the end there was no silent films. So they were just as keen on the cinema as myself.

(Did you have the same taste?)

My mother loved historical films; in fact I still like them. But the musicals started coming in and that was another turn in history. And I loved anything that was the children one - like you said about 'Epic Films', But things like 'Snow White', when

they were made into films. Stories like that.

(Compared to modern cinemas, what are the differences you have noticed?)

This particular cinema is unique, 'cause the Gaiety cinema is a Sainsbury's now you see, it was pulled down and Sainsbury's was built on the gyratory. But this cinema has remained as it was and I love it and would dread to think if it ever went because I think we need to keep a bit of history around the cinemas. And it is unique to Brighton.

(Did the staff have uniforms or anything?)

Yeah I think they used to have little outfits but I can't remember what they were. I mean some people were a bit derogatory about the Duke of York's they used to call it 'bit of a fleapit' but it wasn't it was affordable. That's the thing. And of course some people, you know, try to put it down, but it's always been a good cinema

(Are there specific points in your life that you remember or things that you saw? Anything that was really meaningful?)

I think, in terms of memories, I think you could say it was a common interest. I think it kind of bonded the family because what they always used to do is at the end of the films they showed the trailers for the next week. Then that lead to debate and you know, what we were gonna see the following week, so it had a meaning, the whole cinema aspect had a meaning. And we'd plan it accordingly. I don't think there was anything that any of the family liked and the other person didn't like. I mean we weren't over the top about it, I mean I never studied cinema as a subject in particular but it's just a memory. My memories are so rich about the Cinema. They were good days, good days and this cinema, I love it as it is, and I wouldn't want it to change.

(The musicals?)

Well yeah, because it was like a show, occasionally we used to go to the Hippodrome as well, I'd like to see the Hippodrome saved because brilliant live shows that went on there.

(Did you have any favourite film stars?)

Well I remember Kirk Douglas of course, oh yes. Definitely he sticks in my mind. Definitely Kirk Douglas. I ought to be able to mention more, I suppose I must've been in love with Kirk Douglas. All that type yeah, I can picture the females but I can't remember their names, Audrey Hepburn, you know, beautiful, lovely lady, lovely actress. I remember Doris Day. I saw all the Carry on films. Barbara Windsor. Things like that they do stick in your mind, Sid James. Oh, Hattie Jacques, loved her. Well there you go, I could rumble on. But definitely Kirk Douglas I think I must have

been in love with him. And the Alfred Hitchcock films were good. 'Brief Encounter' I loved, in fact I have got that at home on a DVD.

The cinema gave to me and my family, and me now, happy memories. My daughter likes the cinema, and she likes DVDs but she doesn't go to the cinema as much as I do, I'm still coming to the theatre, I find it's a unique experience to actually go out, sit down, relax and watch a fantastic film in a different environment and you can cut off completely.