

Speaker 1: [00:00](#) What is your name?

Speaker 2: [00:01](#) My name is John David Barrett.

Speaker 1: [00:04](#) What year were you born?

Speaker 2: [00:06](#) Oh, six of September, 1936.

Speaker 1: [00:11](#) What did your parents do for a living?

Speaker 2: [00:14](#) No, my father was Mariner a lighterman on the Thames. And our mother did all sorts of jobs including during the war. She did office cleaning. She was because there was no men about, she actually was a gas fitter for awhile. And then later on in the war we had a pub at new cross.

Speaker 1: [00:45](#) Describe what your local area was like for you as a child before the war started.

Speaker 2: [00:50](#) Sorry, I'm a little bit deaf.

Speaker 1: [00:52](#) Describe what your local area was like for you as a child before the war started.

Speaker 2: [00:59](#) Well I lived in deptford and it was quite a nice area. Nice areas for us kids to play in. We had good local buses and we lived near a station called st John's.

Speaker 1: [01:16](#) How did you and your family feel when war was declared?

Speaker 2: [01:21](#) Well, everybody was devastated. Obviously when war was declared, I was very young. So it didn't affect me so much cause I, I was the [coughs] at the time. I was the youngest of four. I had three elder sisters and me.

Speaker 1: [01:43](#) What was it like to live in London when war broke out?

Speaker 2: [01:49](#) Well, it was, it was pretty rough actually. You know,

Speaker 3: [01:54](#) Okay.

Speaker 2: [01:56](#) At the start of the war, I don't remember too much cause I was young. So the, the, what I remember of the war was when I was evacuated. I was evacuated to Brixham in Devon and me and my two eldest sisters. We was taken in by the trawler owner in Brixham quite a rich man. And his name was Mr. Dyer. And my two older sisters went to the local school. And obviously I went

to the local junior school which I don't really remember too much about it. The only thing I can remember was mr Dyer gave me a box. And in that box were some of the shells that were dug out of the decks of his trawlers. And I thought that was like toys for me, if you like, you know,

Speaker 1: [03:01](#)

What did your parents do during the war?

Speaker 2: [03:04](#)

Well, my father went into the army and he was um a tug captain on, on a Canadian tug and he went from stranrar to North Africa. Well, he fueled on the South coast of England and then he went to North Africa. And then from North Africa he went to a place called Bari in theSoutheast corner of Italy where he spent all the wall towing ships into the Harbour. Which was quite stressful. And when he came out of the army, he was virtually a broken man because the Germans knew that if they knocked the tugs out, the ships wouldn't get in. So it was a very, very stressful job that he had. And unfortunately he came home and he didn't live long. He was, he died when he was 51.

Speaker 1: [04:06](#)

How did you feel when you first found out you were going to be evacuated?

Speaker 2: [04:17](#)

Well, I didn't feel anything really, because I wasn't old enough to understand. But the worst that, that was the second time I was evacuated because what happened when I was at Brixham, the lady, Mrs. Dyer just lost a son. I don't know the circumstances, but she her husband was keen to have a son to turn the business over to the trawlers. And he was, he was a middle aged man and apparently, and she wanted to adopt me, well soon as my sisters wrote to my mum and said, this lady wants to adopt me. That's when she came down to Brixham and took me home. So that was the end of Brixham. And then the second time I was I was evacuated was two Wales where my mother decided that she would take the whole family to Wells where which I don't, again, I don't remember too much, but I I was still very young.

Speaker 2: [05:42](#)

And I do understand some, some of the, what went on during that period because it, it my elder sisters again were they understood they was going to a local school. And again, I was very young and, but I used to go to a school, which was about two miles away through country lanes. And I was walking home from school one day, and bearing in mind, I'm only, barely six or just over six. And there was this dog followed me home and it was a big dog. And, and I said to, my mom, cannot keep this dog. She said, no you can't! See, but anyway, this, this dog

stayed with us and it, and I named him Buller and he went wherever I went, he went with me, he followed me everywhere. And I went to school and as soon as I got home, Buller was with me and I'd go to play because where we lived in this place called [?], which is near Aberdare I, it's beautiful countryside you know, and I used to go and play with Buller and this went on for I think about three months and one day a policeman arrived at the house and he said, your dog has been reported as worrying the sheep.

Speaker 2: [07:16](#) He said, and if the farmers make a complaint, the dog will be shot. So I was devastated, but the dog was so obedient and the, the police officer was quite taken with him and he said, will you sign the dog over to me? So I thought rather than being shot, even at that age, I understood very being very young, I was crying as a kid. I've lost my dog. And he, we had to sign to the fact that he took the dog. And but what was nice that we used to see the local chief of police in, in, in Aberdare. And we used to see him with this dog. He kept the dog and we used to see it in the car, you know the reason we were in habitat areas because the women at to go and work into the munition factories at so every morning there was a bus came down, collected all the women and took them down to the ammunition factories to Bridgend place called Bridgend.

Speaker 2: [08:29](#) And as kids would go off to school, then something happened in the family and we all came back to new cross in South London. And then the bombing got too much and it was really, really bad. We lived in a, a road called I'm trying to think of the name of it now. Childerek road and the house next door to us was, our whole street was bombed. So my mother then decided that she would have to send us kids away again and we were then put on a train. My two older sisters stayed at home. Me and my second sister, we went off to Yorkshire and, and that wasn't very nice. I told it, we, we would nearly it nearly 24 hours on the train. Well I can remember of it, you know, it was terrible.

Speaker 2: [09:45](#) The, they came round with these curly sandwiches. There was all dried up and it was terrible and, and, and cold drinks. And then when we got, we got to Leeds and then we were put on a bus and we went to a place called Batley, which is an industrial place in your ship. And we were put into a a church hall, bearing in mind, we'd had no sleep or anything. You know, I was just at a suitcase, a gas mask and a label saying who we were. And we, we was just in this church hall and they gave us a bit of cake and a cup of tea and there was all these kids, million around in this church hall. All of a sudden people started to come in and, and

look at you and you know, what are they doing? And then a person came up to me and he said, Oh, we'll, we'll take him. I said, no, you take me and my sister, my sister's going to be with me. And there was a big argument ensued. Bearing in mind, they're all grown up. So now I'm a little boy, but I'm fighting my corner to stay with my sister. And I got quite annoyed. But can you get annoyed with grownups? You, you, you've got no grounds to be annoyed that, you know, growing up saw someone you respect. But and it was quite, you know.

Speaker 2: [11:29](#)

Well, it was, it was demeaning. Rarely. but we, we, we, we got into this church or they decided to take us off somewhere and then they, we was, we went into this family this family took us in and it was numb. I can remember it as plain as day number 20 Purwell Avenue, batley. And I mean I had these, I always remember I had these really nice shoes that my mother had bought me before I went away. And the next day this family took me down to a clog shop in Batley. And my lovely. Leather shoes disappeared. And I'm now wearing clogs, which I didn't, if you've ever seen a pair of Yorkshire clogs, they're horrible wooden soles with a big metal, like a horse shoe on the bottom. And the how there was a whole day ensued.

Speaker 2: [12:38](#)

And then we went from there to the school and I was told, that's the school you're going to go to. We went home and they, they said, Oh, you hungry? I said, yeah, I'm starving. And they put up a plate in, a white plate in front of me with a white square of something on the plate. I said, what is that? And they said, that's your tea, you know. So I said, well, I don't like it. And it's, it was tripe. I don't, you've ever heard of tripe. We'll try. It is the intestines of a cow or the stomach lining. But this is boiled and in milk. And I was just, I just couldn't eat it and I don't know, I can't remember what else but, but they gave me something else. And the next day I was taken off to school and there was one other little boy, he was a bit younger than me.

Speaker 2: [13:43](#)

Well, I can remember in the school. So I palled up with him. So we're in the Class and we're, they're teaching us something and all of a sudden it's play time and out we went into the, the buildings were really old, you know, really old decrepit buildings. And we went out into the playground and it was, wasn't used like what you've got here. It was like a yard, you know, and a fountain that didn't work and, and things like that. And this boy came up to, he was head and shoulders, taller than me and he said you come from London. So I said, yes, I did. He said, can you fight? I thought, I mean I'm, I'm, I'm a six year old, bordering on and he wants to fight me. And I felt, and I thought,

what do I do? And this kid is towering over me. So being the person that I am a physical person, I kicked him as hard as I could with these clogs.

Speaker 2: [14:56](#) And the next thing I know, I'm up in front of the school as a London bully and it didn't go down very well with me. And I thought, why am I being treated like this? I want to go home. And I know I spent, I think it was in the region of about nine months in this place with this family and their name was ball, mr and Mrs. Ball. it was, it was a bitter winter. It was really, really cold. And we, and it was a, I'll suppose it was autumn when I arrived there and then winter came along and there was so much snow. But the only adventurous part I remember was it was so cold that the ponies came down off the moor because they had nothing to eat. And they was raiding the gardens and eating the privets in front gardens.

Speaker 2: [16:03](#) And I can remember they, they frightened the milk horse. There was the milkmen had a horse and cart in those days and this horse went charging off. And that was an adventure for me, you know, cause it had been so sad up to that, you know, and my mother came up to visit me and she could see that I was stressed out and not being treated quite as well as I should have been. And she said, I can't take you home now. She said, because A, I can't afford the fare, you know, so she went off home because she had a return ticket and soon as she had enough money to take me home, she came out. And I can remember it really well. We went from Batley to lead to get the station. And in all that time I'd had no, nothing nice. And she took me into leads into the market and yeah, she bought me some sweets and and that, that was it virtually. Oh, that's all I can remember really about my adventures. So carry on the questions.

Speaker 2: [17:34](#) Well, I'll say I didn't re I didn't remember too much about it, but it was, it was the train journey really. It was lots of kids milling around on, on a train. It was a corridor train. You probably don't remember them. So that, they had corridors is what, that you could walk down and then go into the carriages. And there was about 10 kids in each carriage. And we weren't allowed to open the windows because in those days you had windows, you pull the lever and the window went up and down on the old trains. And we weren't allowed to touch those. So it was all sitting in this stuffy train for quite a long time. As I say, it was difficult to work out the timescale because when you're young, it's difficult to work out, but it was definitely in the region of 16 to 18 hours on this train.

Speaker 1: [18:41](#) Who were you evacuated with?

Speaker 2: [18:47](#) Oh, it was as I say with, with my family, well, when when I went to Brixham, it was my two older sisters and me when when we went to Wales, it was the whole family where we had, we had a house in Aberdare. And then obviously when I went to Yorkshire, it was with my next sister, the sibling just bit older than me.

Speaker 3: [19:25](#) Okay.

Speaker 1: [19:27](#) How did you feel when you last saw your parents when you were going away?

Speaker 2: [19:32](#) Well, my dad had already gone to war. He was already in the army.

Speaker 3: [19:37](#) [Inaudible]

Speaker 2: [19:40](#) It was strange being so young and seeing your mom walking away, you know, for it. It didn't sink in until you realized that she wasn't coming back. And you can imagine all these kids around you Oh, crying and won't in their moms, you know, I mean, you're a lot older than what I was then. So you can imagine how I felt, you know? Then

Speaker 1: [20:11](#) Tell us about the things you took with you.

Speaker 2: [20:19](#) Well you had a little suitcase and it's all you had was a, a change on the clothes and a couple of shirts. The shoes that you stood up in on a, on a jacket and a cap. Actually, I've got a photograph of that. So

Speaker 1: [20:38](#) What were you feeling at first?

Speaker 2: [20:46](#) You, you felt deserted, you know, you, you had no one to turn to really you was just alone in the world. And I'll, I'll say now, and I've always said if it happened to my family, I would never ever split them up because whatever dangers you're going to go through your go as a family. And now the idea of sending the children away from their mothers wasn't necessarily to save the children in my life I can see that it was a political thing so that the mothers were available to work in the munitions factories.

Speaker 1: [21:36](#) Describe how you ended. Describe how you ended up, with your first host family.

- Speaker 2: [21:48](#) Well as I say, I was too young that that wasn't, that was decided by my mother when she knew that this woman wanted to adopt me because she had lost a son. So I had no, I quite liked it there. What I can remember of it, of this box of bullets that I played with. You can imagine a little boy, Oh, these are bullets. I'm going to play with these. And that's basically what I could remember. I know I used to go to, I was taken to, to the nursery school in a car, a chauffeur driven car. So there was quite rich people.
- Speaker 1: [22:27](#) What was the house like?
- Speaker 2: [22:30](#) The house, what I can remember of it. I had my own bedroom and a nursery room, which was quite nice. And my two sisters had their own bedrooms and it was in a very large bungalow on the top of the cliff, just outside Brixham Harbor. And I went there many years later where mr Dyer had died. And I met his wife.
- Speaker 1: [23:01](#) What was school like?
- Speaker 2: [23:04](#) Well, I went to nursery school at the first place, so it's all I remember. Really.
- Speaker 1: [23:10](#) [Inaudible]
- Speaker 2: [23:12](#) Sorry. What about the latest schools? Oh, the later schools. As I say, the, the, the welsh, the welsh schools weren't too bad. The Welsh schools, eh, that wasn't too bad really. But the Yorkshire schools were terrible, really. It, it, it was the kids were quite aggressive because there was an attitude, I don't know why or what the reasons were, but there was an attitude that the London boys were tough. I suppose. I don't know, but I had to prove that I was, and I paid the price of being the school bully at six year old.
- Speaker 3: [24:22](#) Okay.
- Speaker 2: [24:22](#) In the new area. Oh, Oh, Oh, sorry. Yeah. and in, in Brixham I was treated very well. That was unbelievable. It was fantastic, in Wales you were new kids on the block and obviously but you was treated with respect and, and you got along well. In fact, there was, there was one lady on the way home from school if she saw us going by the word for grandma in Welsh is polpa and she, she came out and if she saw us, she used to give us cakes on the way home from school. And she said, you call me polpa. So I used to call in there and Ppolpa would give me a bit of cake.

And on the way home that was quite nice. But in Yorkshire it was quite aggressive. And you, you really had to watch, cause the kids that was a lot of the kids were older than, but they respected us because they knew that we, we could fight our corner. And I thought that was rather sad really. And these are not memories that I like to bring back. Really.

Speaker 3: [25:50](#)

Tell us some of your experiences in the countryside

Speaker 2: [25:55](#)

In the countryside. Well, I didn't the, the Welsh was was beautiful because where we lived in Wales there was just across the road there was woods and it, it dropped down into a Valley and there was a lake and a river and in Wales that's called a Coombe. And I used to go down to the Coombe with my dog Buller and play in, in the, in the, in the river. And on the way home I would go and collect the eggs for some of the people, used to let the chickens all run around all over the place. And sometimes we would go and collect the eggs for the people, find the eggs in the bushes and, and take them to the people, you know. And I would have my dog Buller with me all the time.

Speaker 1: [26:53](#)

Tell us about any friends you made.

Speaker 2: [26:59](#)

I didn't have too many friends because of the attitude of, of, of the other kids. It's, it's, it's, it's something I really regret that I didn't, I had friends in, in Wales, in, in, in, in the schools there, but I don't remember too much about it. But in Yorkshire, I had no friends at all. It was, it was, it was a tragic period in my life.

Speaker 3: [27:27](#)

Yeah.

Speaker 1: [27:29](#)

What happened to your family in London while you were away?

Speaker 3: [27:33](#)

[Inaudible]

Speaker 2: [27:36](#)

Well mum had it really rough because we, we were bombed out and childerek road. We then we lived in deptford high street for a period. And then my mum got a big old Victorian house in deptford, st John's, a place called st John's, which was quite nice. And we lived there for something like 20 odd years, you know, after the war. Which was quite nice. It was a lovely old house, you know.

Speaker 1: [28:13](#)

Can you tell us about any times you communicated with your parents while you were away?



- Speaker 2: [28:21](#) What can I say? I can't tell you anything about my dad because he was, he was away. But mum worked very, very hard. She, she had to to, to make ends meet because there was firstly no money coming in and she used to do office cleaning in the morning and she would be home for me going to school. Then she would go do a day job, which was a gas fitter. She had a bike and she had a basket on the front with spanners in it and she would go and fit gas stoves things because what you remember, what you actually remember is houses were getting bombed and the gas was leaking. So her and a friend would go and turn the gas off and, and re fit the, the gas stoves. And then in the evening after she cooked us a meal, she would then go office cleaning in the evening, you know. So she mum was a hardworking person and a wonderful person. Really?
- Speaker 1: [29:32](#) Did she write any letters while you were away?
- Speaker 2: [29:34](#) Yes. Yes. Not until not until Yorkshire and what you gotta remember is I went to so many schools, I went to so many schools that my education was virtually nil. I left, I left school with no qualifications whatsoever, but luckily I knew that the job that I was going to be do, so I was going to be an apprentice lighterman and that's something that I really loved. So navigation to me came so natural. And I finish up as a captain for 40 odd years.
- Speaker 3: [30:26](#) Tell us about any more tell us about any more evacuations you experienced from the war. What did you do when, when there was an air raid?
- Speaker 2: [30:54](#) An air raid. Oh, as I say, we once I'd come back from Yorkshire, we lived in this big houses in St. Johns and they built, every house had an air raid shelter, in the garden, built in the garden. And they were called Anderson shelters. That was after a politician. And what we used to do was as soon as the air raid warning, we, when we would go into the shelter and my mum had kitted it out quite comfortable with bunks and nice blankets. And we had a heater in there, you know I think it was a sort of parafin heater, nasty smelly thing. And we would stay in there until the air raid siren was over. But one particular night we was in the shelter and we heard this whooshing noise and it was a Doodlebug.
- Speaker 2: [31:58](#) And you can, you can check on this. The st John's church was at the top of the road. The doodlebug came along and it clipped its wing on the church and turned it around and it came down over top of our houses and it came at rooftop high. And as it did, it

drew all the slates off the roofs of all the houses in st John's vale and then crashed down. And it, it blew up about 20 houses and only one person was hurt, or as I can remember, which, because all the people were in their shelters.

- Speaker 3: [32:36](#) Tell us about any friends or family who were injured.
- Speaker 2: [32:45](#) I had distant aunts and uncles that had injuries, but nobody was actually killed in our family at all. So we was extremely lucky.
- Speaker 3: [32:57](#) What were you feeling when you came back to London after being evacuated?
- Speaker 2: [33:08](#) Well elated. It was wonderful. I can remember, I rough hold clothes on during the war and I, my mother took me to a place called Peacries, which was a a store in deptford high street and another place called Gardener's, which was a well known store in those days. And kitted me out with a brand new suit and shoes and socks and underclothes, which was really nice. You know, it was, it was a real, it was a treat in those days to have a new shirt or new socks or new underpants. Or whatever, that was a treat you, you didn't, you didn't have toys because nobody could afford toys, but to have clothes was nice. So that was a treat really
- Speaker 3: [34:11](#) What were your feelings about your family?
- Speaker 2: [34:19](#) Well, the feelings where it were fantastic was, were all together then. And we was all looking forward to dad coming home. And my dad and mum organized a street party, which was what they did after the war. And everybody got together and put everything that I, they could afford into having the party in the street. And what you did, you just simply put a, a rope across the end of your road and they got tables and chairs and there was an old lady that lived just up the road and she, she, she gave some money to my dad and mum. And we had this lovely street party, which was rather nice after the war,
- Speaker 3: [35:14](#) How had London changed while you are away
- Speaker 2: [35:20](#) Considerably. There was bombed, bombed houses everywhere. And and, and you, it was amazing. Really. Yeah. You know, all this, all this debris. And it is, it was difficult to understand really all this damage that was taking place and people not knowing what was going on really. And we didn't quite understand what was going on, but it w w it wasn't, it wasn't very pleasant. You know,

- Speaker 3: [35:59](#) How did your host family feel when you were leaving.
- Speaker 2: [36:07](#) My host family? Well I only had my home family, not my foster family. Oh, how did they feel when you were leaving? Oh, sorry. Yeah, I'm sorry. I misunderstood. The, the, the people, cause we had a house in Wales, so that, that, that was the, when I left Brixham that was quite, I don't remember too much about that, but it's, they were very, very sad that I was leaving because the business of them wanting to adopt me. So I don't think that was very pleasant. You know, mother just went down there and took, took my sisters and me home. In, in Wales. We had a house and we had neighbors, so they were all nice people. Really. and they, they, you know, they all turned out and said goodbye to us and particularly pauper who used to give us kids the cakes. But Yorkshire was glad to leave. And I don't think what I can remember of it. The party must know that. Nice. Really. You know, I think my, my mother was sort of saying to them, well you, you didn't look after my son very well. And, and I don't think it was very nice at all.
- Speaker 3: [37:51](#) Did you stay in touch with any of your families? How did you celebrate the end of the war?
- Speaker 2: [38:03](#) Well, that was the street parties really. It was amazing. Obviously everything was on rationed. So you've got very little food and, but luckily being the mum that I had, she was very resourceful. And when we had the pub at new cross, which was like right at the end of the war the, she used to do cook dinners. Now in you, in pubs years ago, you couldn't get anything to eat. You could get a biscuit or they used to have arrowroot biscuits in a jar in pubs, but pubs years ago for drinking only, and the, there were inns in the countryside where you could get food, but in London you couldn't get food. But my mother decided that she was going to sell, she was going to do dinners and we had friends in the countryside family, friends that could supply you with meat, which was the, it was banned.
- Speaker 2: [39:26](#) You, you couldn't, if the ministry of food found that you would get fined. But she used to have this meat sent up and she was cooking meals and, and it was, it was each meal was two shillings. That is 10 pence in the money today, but which was quite a lot of money then. And one day a ministry of food man came into the pub and I, I was like doing something. I was always doing something, you know, making things tidy or whatever. And he said, he is, is, is you, you know your mum here. So I said, yeah. So she came over and he said your serving food, where are you getting the the food from? So she said,

well, I feed the fire brigade, I feed the policemen, I feed the ARP and all sorts of people.

- Speaker 2: [40:30](#) He said, she said, and it's for me to know and you to find out. And once he knew that she, she was doing that much good for the local area, he walked away, but she could have been fined a lot of money and possibly put in prison really because the meat that she was getting from Holsman den this was a little village near Tunbridge Wells of obviously it was against all the rules really. But as I say, being the person that my mum was she always did things for people. She was a very good, she was a good person. She always wanted to make sure that you, you had a full tummy and, and looked after people.
- Speaker 1: [41:26](#) Looking back, how do you think your experiences as an evacuee has affected your life?
- Speaker 2: [41:34](#) I would like to think that it's made me a better person, but a good period of, I wasn't very enjoyable, but I think, I think it has probably made me a better person, hopefully.
- Speaker 3: [41:52](#) What, what are your strongest memories from the war?
- Speaker 2: [41:59](#) Well, the actual bombing the shelling, if you like the and the devastation that was going on around you. It was, it was terrible. You, you'd be walking along the road to school and there would be houses all broken down and water spurting out where the, you know, it all broken, everything was broken. There'd be people crying, people trying to get salvage furniture from houses. It's, these are memories I don't really want it to bring forward it, you know, but I would like people in the future to know really what went on, you know, hopefully.
- Speaker 3: [42:56](#) Is there anything else you would like to say that we haven't that you haven't already said?
- Speaker 2: [43:02](#) No, I think I've covered most of it. But it's, it's difficult. I mean, what you've got to remember it's so many years later there are, there are,
- Speaker 3: [43:23](#) Okay.
- Speaker 2: [43:24](#) You remember the good things, but you try to put the bad things in the back of your mind. So I'm trying to draw things out of the back of my mind, which is difficult really now at my age.