

Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series

Alan Davies interview

Conducted by James Newberry

May 20, 2015

Transcribed by Caitlin O'Grady

Alan Davies

Born in the East End of London in 1932, Alan Davies was evacuated to the English countryside during World War II because of German air raids. As an adult Davies worked for the Air Force Exchange Service on an American military base in Germany. After transferring to the United States with his job, Davies retired in 1993 and settled in Marietta, Georgia. He recorded his oral history interview at Kennesaw State University in May 2015.

Full Transcript

Cameraman: Legacy Series. Davies. Take one.

Interviewer: All right. So this is James Newberry. I'm here with Alan Davies on Wednesday May 20, 2015 at Social Sciences Building at Kennesaw State University. And Mr. Davies, do you agree to this interview?

Davies: I do.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. So let's just get started at the beginning. When and where were you born?

Davies: I was born on the twenty-seventh of March 1932 in East London, in the borough of East Ham in the community called Manor Park.

Interviewer: And what was your full given name?

Davies: Alan Ivor Davies.

Interviewer: So tell me, what were your parents' names?

Davies: My father was Frederick John Thomas Davies. And my mother was Florence Ivey Coultart. C-O-U-L-T-A-R-T. And I've often thought, it sounds as if she was from French extraction or something. But she was very East London as far as I know. Coultart is a strange name. I think—well sometimes I used to pronounce it Coultart to make it sound a little bit more sophisticated. 'Cause Coultart is a bit crude. But that was her name.

Interviewer: So can you tell me a little bit about the, the Davies family. Maybe a little background on your father's family.

Davies: Unfortunately James, I was never one that was very interested in family. In fact, my mother and I had some disputes 'cause I, I would never visit relatives when I was growing up. And I think this annoyed her quite a bit. But she gave up 'cause I was a hardheaded little bugger. And so, I, I don't know—my, my father's father, to the best of my recollection, worked as a bricklayer at a brewery. A big brewery in East London. I can't—it might've been Whitbread's. And I think they still exist. So he was a, he was a bricklayer for a, a brewery company. On my mother's side, it gets even a little less pleasant 'cause her father was a man who had very bad eyesight. Never really held a, a permanent type of a job. And he became a heavy drinker. He had no money, but he—what little he had, he spent in the local pubs. So that was on my mother's side.

Interviewer: And how did his life come to an end?

Davies: He kill—he killed himself. Two years after I was born. 1934. He gassed himself in the, in the oven. In our—in their little house. In East London. Going back to my father's side, his, his mother developed some mental problems late—later in life. She had, I think, five children. And kind of—Again, life in East London, back in those days—tens, twenties, and thirties—was tough. It often worked very hard on the women. And she went into a depression or schizophrenia or—I don't know the exact description of her illness. But she wound up being committed to a mental hospital. And—but lived until, as I recall, the age of seventy-two. And, and spent about like twenty-five years in this mental hospital.

Interviewer: So in your household, there were two other siblings.

Davies: There were. I had an older sister, Vera, who was six years older. And a younger brother, six years younger, Roy.

Interviewer: So what did your parents do for a living? Specifically your father to start with.

Davies: Ok. My father started off at that brewery. In—working as a brick layer apprentice, or something like that. But he, at the young age of seventeen, he decided he didn't want to spend his life doing that. And took the train to become a London taxi driver. And in London, you had to be very knowledgeable because it was regulated by the Metropolitan Police. And they were, they were quite strict. It took him about three years, 'cause he, 'cause he worked on weekends, on push-bike, cycling around the streets of London. Studying maps, I guess. And it took, took him nearly three years to acquire the knowledge, and go before the police board, and get his taxi license. And he, he never owned his own cab. He always drove for a small company. I think they owned seventeen or twenty cabs—something like that. And so that's what they used to call mushing. He mused for the rest of his life, except for his four years in the army.

Interviewer: And your mother?

Davies: My mother, of course, had very little education. The one job I do know, before she got married, she worked for a cigar making company in East London. And they, they imported Cuban tobacco. And she rolled cigars. That's the only job I know she had. She probably had one or two others, but I'm afraid I don't have any knowledge.

Interviewer: So, in your book that you, that you wrote—your memoir—you said, you compared London's East End to Rio de Janeiro's Favelas.¹

Davies: Yeah.

Interviewer: You recall doing that?

Davies: I do. 'Cause I...

Interviewer: Why? Why?

Davies: Well, I was, I became very conscious of the discrepancy of, of British life. You know, the upper and lower classes. Of course I was somebody who resented it. And so, I was trying to make, make the point—probably it wasn't quite an appropriate comparison. I've never been in Rio de Janeiro Favelas. But I imagine that they're rather grim. And I thought some of East London is rather grim. It still is, I believe, to this day.

Interviewer: So describe that area to me. What, what was it like? What are, what are your impressions as a young person living there?

Davies: In the real deep East End, near the docks—which is what later became the object of the German bombers—there were little row houses all together. You know, small. No front yard. No backyard. You walked in off the sidewalk, went straight into the house. And they were small, very basic, abodes.

Interviewer: What sort of activity was going on in the street?

Davies: I'm sure there were a lot of snotty nose kids playing on the street. There were, you know, very few, or maybe no parks in that part of London. And so the kids had nowhere to play. They had no backyards. They had no front yards. So they played on the street. On the sidewalk. 'Cause in those days, James, there was relatively little traffic. It was foot traffic and people on bikes, by and large.

Interviewer: So your parents moved quite a few times.

Davies: Yes, yes. In my book—'cause my mother did once give me—a list of the seventeen different homes they had before they bought their final home. And she

¹ Favela is a low-income urban area. The first favela in the heart of Rio de Janeiro appeared in the late nineteenth century. Following the Canudos War, soldiers built this favela because they had nowhere else to settle.

said that they moved so much al—always in the attempt to improve their living conditions at the least cost. That’s how she covered the times they moved. ‘Cause I naturally assumed they were always moving to beat the rent collector. But it apparently wasn’t true. So...

Interviewer: And by 1939 they were in Forest Gate...

Davies: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you describe the house there? The street?

Davies: Again, it was a row house. And I think the street was almost a mile long, I believe. And there was one house after another; joined together. But they were a bit bigger than those earlier houses I was describing. We had a small front yard, and a bit bigger backyard. And in fact we had four bedrooms. And at one time it had been a street with a little bit of an uppercl—better class of—client or individual living there. Because the house where we moved had been the home of a schoolteacher. And he left—he fled London—but—coming of the war. And my parents moved in in 1939. Of course the year the war was declared. And that, you know, that—The teacher moved because of the war and he, he went to the West Country. As I, as I recall. Yeah, I think he went to Devon. A very nice English county.

Interviewer: So, you liked soccer. Correct?

Davies: I did.

Interviewer: And, and was that sort of recreation for you?

Davies: Yes, yes. You know, East London kids were normally very poor, and soccer, all you needed was a football. And then some space to play it. You dropped four coats to make the goal posts. And you, you play. And we used to play for hours.

Interviewer: And where did you go to school at that time? When you were still quite young.

Davies: I started off in the—I forget the proper term for the school and I’ve been—where you started age five, I believe. And it was called...Fourth Avenue Road School. And it must have been on a street called Fourth Avenue. Because they came up with imaginative name Fourth Avenue School. And that was where I stayed until—I think I would’ve stayed there until...the age—let’s say...seven or eight. Then I transferred to a junior school called Salisbury Road School. Where I stayed until I was eleven. But we should get into that a—perhaps a little bit later on. ‘Cause that was—that’s a big thing in my, in my life. What’s your next question?

Interviewer: So tell me, what was the Boy’s Brigade?

Davies: It was a, it was a—trying to be like the Boy Scouts. But the Boy Scouts in East London was considered a bit of a sissy group. And I didn't want to join that. But the Boy's, the Boy's Brigade—they had little pillbox hats. And a white belt—a shoulder belt—and a boy's belt. So I looked a bit like the military officers who wore brown leather belts with their holsters. We didn't have any guns. But I joined it, at some cost to my parents, 'cause you had to buy the hat and the belt, et cetera. And, and then—Can, can this get an X rating? Because the reason why I left—much to my mother's annoyance—because the man who ran this thing—in a church hall—we met one night a week or—yeah one night a week—and did gymnastics. And then one evening—You want the dirty details, right? He asked two, two small, two smallest boys—of which I was one—to stay behind. The other boys—Do I have to go any further?

Interviewer: Well, so, so it was a, it was an issue of, of molestation.

Davies: Molestation. Yeah, yeah. Although—to get it on—You want to get all the details, right? He didn't touch us. He just looked at us. He stood us on a bench. See I still remember this very well. And he observed, but he didn't touch us, to the very best of my recollection. But that was my first exposure to abhorrent human sexuality.

Interviewer: Ok. So you at that point, you had sort of been very eager to join...

Davies: Yes.

Interviewer: And then you suddenly chose to get out, and your, your mother was annoyed.

Davies: Well, 'cause she had spent the money. I never told my mother what happened. I was so dumb and shy. I never told her. And, of course, she couldn't understand when I pestered her to buy the uniform. And of course I wanted the uniform because there were so many military troops in London in those days. I wanted to look like a soldier. And I thought I did. And I thought all the nine-year-old girls were in love with me.

Interviewer: So what kind of kid were you?

Davies: A little bastard.

Interviewer: How would you say you got along with other kids your age?

Davies: Oh, ok, 'cause I was in the—played soccer—and I liked having mates in those days, as they called it in London. Friends are called mates in East London. So I had my share of mates.

Interviewer: I know your, your siblings were quite apart in age. So were you close to them? Not close to them?

Davies: Not close to them. No, no. Had very little to do, and to the best of my recollection.

Interviewer: I know you were still young in 1938/1939. But do you have any sort of awareness of events on the continent? In Germany specifically.

Davies: I was conscious in '38/'39 of a concern in my parents' voice when they talked about—I didn't really understand much, but I knew I detected a, an apprehension—fear—in my parents' voices. And, I attribute that to the uncanny ability—ability of children to pick up their parents emotions without necessarily understanding what the hell they're talking about.

Interviewer: So what about when the war began in September 1939. Do you remember that specifically?

Davies: Well, I do remember hearing the radio broadcast because the very next day my father—who could rent his cab, he had to pay the owner of the cab, but he could rent it himself—he took us away into the country, right away. Because the, the government announcement warned of imminent German bombers coming. And so he, he took us up to Norfolk—about one hundred and fifty miles into the countryside from East London. And we stayed there for about six weeks. But of course the bombing didn't start. The government had warned, but it didn't happen right away. And somehow—and I don't know quite how this worked—but we wound up living with the village clergyman. And so they were looking for a replacement maid. And so, my mother jumped into this. And because they had the room to take her and two kids—my brother and myself—my sister who was nearly fourteen years of age and would be going out to work very soon—she went back to London with, with my father. So we stayed with this clergyman for I'm gon—four to six weeks—I, I don't know exactly now. But, my mother was maid their, their master slave. And of course my mother is a bit feisty. And she didn't like that. And since no bombing was happen—my father rented the cab again and came and took us back. So I do remember the begin—the beginning of the war. As I say, bombing didn't start, so we didn't notice any great change.

Interviewer: But you were in the north with your mother and brother, and your father and sister were back in London. So this was sort of the first separation?

Davies: Yes. That, that was my—That was my—I consider it an evacuation. Although I was there with my brother and my mother in this house. But I call that my first evacuation.

Interviewer: So after the war started these, these blackout orders came. And what is—Explain that.

Davies: Well the government required you to put up any material that would block light being emitted from, from windows to aid German bombers. But although the war started on 3 September '39 the bombing didn't start until June of 1940. So it was approximately nine months after the war started that the, that the bombs start. And Hitler mounted raids virtually every night. The only time that they didn't happen was when the continent was fogged in. And they, they couldn't take off safely, I guess. So, we got respites. But the bombing went on for—again, it took nine months for it to start and then it lasted about nine months before Hitler would quit. I did hear once that he was hoping this heavy bombing would cause the British people to sue their government for surrender. But of course that didn't happen.

Interviewer: Do, do you remember the, the, the will of individuals—of your parents—of other adults? How, how did they feel during that period? What, what was their, their response when they had to do these constant blackouts, prepare for the air raids? Things like that.

Davies: How did they feel? I'm...They complied because they could've been thrown in jail if they hadn't. So, but I mean that was no, no, no big deal. How they felt—I'm, I'm sure life was, was made more difficult. Rationing started, which would've made daily life quite tough. Just getting the food on the table, et cetera. But we were never—it never got to the point where we were gonna starve, I don't think. And late—later on, of course, we got a lot of food from America because I remember very clearly the boxes of dried egg that came from the United States. They were little square boxes—khaki color—with the government contract number printed down the side. And the American eagle printed on the other side. I still remember. We ate a lot of dried egg. My mother cooked it in many ways. And also dried milk that came from America—and Canada. Canada was very generous and helpful to the United Kingdom in the Second World War. So Canada and the United States fed a lot of the working class people of England.

Interviewer: Well, we often hear during that time of, of radio broadcasts—specifically Churchill's speeches—on the radio. Is that something that stands out in your mind at all?

Davies: No. I cannot say I, I have a recollection of that. But he did, I guess, talk quite, quite a bit. And of course he was a very eloquent speaker. And he was the right man in the job at the time.

Interviewer: So you—for those air raids that you were present for—when you were not evacuated—where would the family go for protection?

Davies: Ok. I can answer that, in some detail. Because the government issued free—a shelter. That had to be put in the back garden. So you had to have a back garden to use this gadget. But it was—I read it this morning—it was about eight feet

long by four feet wide. And it curved—corrugated steel. So you dug this pit, and put these forms in, and bolted them along the top. And of course it had sections that filled in the back. And the front had a little door, and some surrounding material to form a door. And it was dug in the ground about four and a half feet deep. So some of it was in the ground, and some of it was protruding above the ground level. And then you threw the dirt that you dug out of the pit over the top to make it a little bit more bomb proof. And it said in the, in—James, I remember this only ‘cause I read it this morning.

Interviewer: You wrote it. So...

Davies: It said it would not save you from a direct hit, but it would save your from a bomb that fell, you know, not so far away.

Interviewer: So maybe from debris...

Davies: Debris, et, et, et cetera.

Interviewer: Shrapnel...

Davies: Shrapnel...

Interviewer: Other material...

Davies: Exactly. Exactly.

Interviewer: So during those bombings, what was the noise like?

Davies: Well I, I, I must admit, I don't have any rec—recollection of that. And it was only after I came back from my second evacuation that I really experienced the shelter. Because it was—although Hitler terminated his max bombing after nine months, thereabouts—he did let bombers come over every now and again. More or less as nuisance raids—propaganda raids—I'm not quite sure what the military—if there was a military objective—I, I don't know. They're the things that I remember because my mother used to have to come around and get us out when the siren went. We had to go into the shelter, which was in the bottom of the garden. Thirty yards down, down the, the garden. But of course it's cold in London—in Britain. And the water level in England is very high 'cause it rains all the time there, as you know. So there was always water forming in, in this pit. So you stepped into the thing—you stepped into water. And of course we had had—my father built some bunk beds—so we climbed onto the bunk beds. But after you stepped in—and you're doing this in the middle of the winter with your pajamas on and maybe a coat over you—to go into the shelter. So it was a decidedly unpleasant experience. So I got that I wouldn't go in the shelter. And of course that drove my mother—another thing my mother was driven nuts by me. Because I, I would give her a hard time about going in the shelter.

Interviewer: Were there any close calls?

Davies: The closest bombings we had were some prosperous bombs, which were dropped on our, on our street. And blew out our front windows. Now that happened as I say after I came back from my first—second—big evacuation when I stayed away for about a year. They blew the windows in, they blew the windows in. Though we're getting a little bit ahead of the story here. You need to ask me about my evacuation. Look, why don't you sit here, and let me sit there.

Interviewer: You can do both jobs. Ok, let's talk about that first...

Davies: You don't mind if I make jokes, right? Good.

Interviewer: That's kind of nice and refreshing actually. So, let's talk about that first major evacuation in—I'm, I'm going to try and pronounce it—Gloucestershire.

Davies: Very good. Exactly. Gloucestershire. Well that, of course, once the bombings started seriously—and that was in June of 1940—that's when the government said, "you should evacuate your children." And most families complied. There were a—well a few wealthier families went away to—as a family unit. But for the government sponsored evacuation, only the kids went. Parents could—could not go on, on, under that program. So, that's when my school was evacuated—they had, they evacuated you by the school and by the class, so that you stayed with people—kids—you knew. But your parents weren't, weren't included. And so I went to Gloucestershire to a, a little town near the—a little village—near the town of Cirencester. And the town was called Ampney Crucis. Which, you know, sounds very medieval to me. And it was just a little village. But I was not put with an individual family. And families who volunteered to take children were paid a small amount. Actually it was ten shillings and six pence. That's the old British decimal currency. No, not decimal—It was the old British currency. You got ten shillings for the first child and eight shillings if you took a second child. Meant a bit more in those days. And most kids got picked up by families. Most of the families were really only interested in that money, rather than taking the kids. I'm sure there were a few good souls who did it out of the goodness of their hearts. But most were interested in the, in the...money.

Interviewer: Well let's talk about that first place you went. Ok, you went with your class, so you weren't necessarily traveling—like was your brother...

Davies: No...No, he...

Interviewer: So he went somewhere else?

Davies: No, he was too young then.

Interviewer: So he stayed with your parents.

Davies: Yeah, he stayed home. He stayed home.

Interviewer: So in this first location where someone was being paid to house you—can you describe that place?

Davies: Well, in the end, we wound up going to an estate of a wealthy man. Who turned out—I found out later, much later in life—had been in the oil industry, and worked for the company that became BP. A well-known British company nowadays. But he had been with it long before it was even called BP. So he, he was a valued government employee at that time. And he—I didn't see him around the estate very much—and I think he was always in London working at probably the Ministry of Supply—whichever handled gasoline supplies to Britain in those days. Oh, but there were, there were six boys. And he didn't let us, he didn't open up his big home—and he had a big home on that estate—'cause it was also a working farm. There were six boys. And what he did was, he had a room above—he at one time had had pleasure horses. They family had had pleas— They got rid of the horses, and so they got rid of the grooms who took care of them. And we were put into a room above the stables. We didn't sleep in the stables. We were in a room above the stables, which he had decorated, you know, prepared a bit decently, I think. And he provided six beds. And next to this room where the beds were, there was a little kitchen area because it's where the grooms had lived at one time. So we took over that. But it was a working farm. And, you know, I have many recollections of, of the farm activity going on there.

Interviewer: How independent could, could you, you be as a child staying there? Could you go into town? Did you wander?

Davies: Well, yes we did wander around, around the countryside. I imagine—well I kind of believe we always—'Cause there's six boys—the age ranged from about six years of age to twelve. So we broke up into two groups. The older and the younger groups. And so I did wander around with the younger ones, of course. Yes, we could go into town. Much to the annoyance of the local villagers because we were snotty nosed London kids. And, you know, they didn't particularly relish their little village being invaded by these heathen children.

Interviewer: How did you demonstrate your, your heathenness?

Davies: Oh well we, we made a lot of noise and we generally disrespected the quiet of the village by making a lot of noise.

Interviewer: Did you get along with each other?

Davies: Oh yeah, yeah. I'm sure we did. I to the—I don't ever recall any big, big fights. But as I say we separated into the older and the younger, which is, I guess, perfectly normal for children, right?

Interviewer: And did you attend local schools?

Davies: Well, that's a good question because, of course, they didn't have—the local school couldn't handle this influx of—And I don't know how many children descended on Ampney Crucis, but I would guess it was a hundred and fifty, perhaps even two hundred. So suddenly you got this influx of kids and the local school couldn't handle it. So what they did, they made the school in the community hall—which was itself not that big—but we all—each grade or form, as it's called in England—had a table. But you had then—so kids from six years of age up to fourteen—in this one room. So you can imagine it was not conducive to the pursuit of higher education.

Interviewer: Did you feel at all as if you were on a vacation?

Davies: Did I feel like I was on a vacation...No, I can't say I ever recall thinking I was on, on vacation. 'Cause I, I didn't like being away. I, you know, I missed my, my family 'cause my mother was a good mother. She was an easygoing mother. And so, I thought she was good.

Interviewer: So talk about that separation. This is the first major one where you're away from both your parents. And how did that—how do you think that impacted you then? How, how do you think that impacted you over a long period of time?

Davies: Well, you know I had mental/emotional problems later in life. And it could easily, I suspect—and the doctor once said—it could've been, had its foundations, in that time. But I don't know that to be a fact. It's a good theory though.

Interviewer: So it wasn't something you were conscious of then?

Davies: No. No. I was conscious of the fact that—course they put a woman in charge of us from, had come from East London herself. And she was put in charge of us. She lived in a room in that farmhouse building. She, she was there to be—I guess she cooked meals. But she was, she was an evil woman. She used to disappear to the local pub a lot. And I'm sure she didn't do a very good job in meal preparation. So, that was the first one. But she was eventually exposed and fired. And then we got a very nice—Mrs. Price. I still remember her name. And she took much better care of us. As I said, I have an image of this woman in a floral apron with a teapot welded into her hand 'cause we lived on tea. And she walked around with this teapot all the time. But she was a good woman. And as I say in my book, "not all the heroes of World War II had uniforms. Some of them wore aprons." I like that.

Interviewer: So tell me returning to your, your family after that first evacuation.

Davies: Ok. Well I stayed away twelve to fourteen months. I, I do not remember the exact time. But, yes, when the bombings stopped we all went back. And...so I went back to my old school. A very inadequate school. And of course, I was very pleased to go back to my mother's cooking. Well, you know, food was, was not readily available. But my mother did a good job.

Interviewer: So how many times overall did you have to evacuate?

Davies: Well then there was another time. So, you know, the war went. The bombings stopped. Although Hitler kept up occasional raids because it was on one of those occasional raids when our street got hit with those phosphorous bombs. And our front windows were blown out. But then it was June of forty—see I, I remember the date 'cause I read the book—June of '44 when Hitler launched his V1 and V2s. Well, V1s came in June and V2s came in September. The V1 was, was a pilotless drone plane—packed explosive in the nose. But it was—it flew pretty low. It was very noisy. It had a strange engine that emitted a, a, a weird sound. But it, it was a—I saw several go over at night. And they had this orange flame. It was a jet type engine. I'm not a mechanic so I can't tell you too much more. But once the engine stopped, the thing came down. That was the V1. The Vergeltungswaffe—that was in German. Then in September '44 he came up with his V2—the rocket. And that was scary. If he had had the rocket at the beginning of the war, the whole war could've gone a different way. Because it was a, you know—it travelled 900 miles—943 miles an hour. And it went up/down. You didn't know it was coming. It traveled so fast. You only knew it was there when it exploded. As I was saying, had he had that early in the war, I, I really believe the war could've taken a different course.

Interviewer: So, did you evacuate—on the subsequent evacuations, did you go to different...

Davies: Yes.

Interviewer: ...places?

Davies: See, when he fired these new weapons in, in summer of '44...Remember France—the Normandy landings occurred on the sixth of June 1944. They evacuated the London school kids again 'cause he concentrated on London pretty much, this next time. And so, once again, the kids were rounded up and this time we went to Torquay in Devonshire in the west coast of England. Actually, quite an elegant town, but—And this time my brother was older so he and I went to together. And we wound up being billeted with an old couple who were eking out a meager living run a small—very small farm. A small holding really, not a farm. A small holding would be the proper word, I believe. You know, a few pigs, a few chickens. No cattle there. But it was an unhappy situation. They really only took us in for the money. But of course, I was older, and even more

objectionable to not being—when I was younger. Started to protest to my poor mother a lot in postcards—very ungrammatical and misspelled postcards. But pouring to London.

Interviewer: What were you saying?

Davies: “Get me out of here! I don’t like it. I want to go home.” And of course the government very much discouraged that. But my mother—being the good soul she was—she paid our way back.

Interviewer: So, what was so intolerable about this, this household in, in Devonshire?

Davies: The, the old guy who ran the small holding was very gruff, very aggressive—just an unpleasant human being. I wasn’t very exposed to that before. So, I, I, I was in protest. He had a, he had a, a daughter. Well, I don’t think she was their natural daughter—a young girl of maybe fifteen or sixteen living in the house, and she had to do all the washing up and a lot of the chores around the house. He was very aggressive to her and they often had rows at the dinner table, and my brother and I were there. And you know, it was very unpleasant. I knew I didn’t like it. And one other thing. He used to go and collect pig, pig food. People who would put out any food scraps, he would pick them up from buckets that people would leave them on the side of the street—in front of the house. And of course he made me go with him. And of course I didn’t care for scraping out these [unintelligible]. You can imagine, there was no food in any case and we were picking up the scraps of what little food there was. And he always made me scrape the bucket into—he had built a trolley, a trashcan—I had to get the bucket. He pushed the trolley, and I did the scraping. And I didn’t like that work arrangement. Nada.

Interviewer: How did your brother react?

Davies: Course he was much younger, of course. So I was twelve. So Roy was only six. Well, Roy is a very undemonstrative kind of person. So he, he, he didn’t make a lot of protest.

Interviewer: Did you feel a lot of responsibility for him?

Davies: Yes, I, I did ‘cause I took his part once in a—when some kid was picking on him. I got in—involved. I got the crap beatin’ out of me, but I did intercede.

Interviewer: So you, you got to come back to London because you, you pleaded with your mother.

Davies: Yes. She, she paid our way back. I couldn’t tell you what the fare was, but she wouldn’t have had a lot of money to, to devote to that. But she was good enough to do it. But then I, I was saying in my book, I think we got back in about August

of '44. And in the January of '45 a rocket fell fairly close to where we lived. And my brother—that morning—had gone around the corner to a, a friend's house to play—in, in, in his house. And a rocket fell—I can't give you an exact figure—but it blew the front of the house—and several houses along there. And my, my brother got a gash on his head from—Fortunately they were playing in the back of the house. I wasn't there. My brother got a gash. And he was the only one in the end in all the war of our family who got injured.

Interviewer: So did you see him with that injury?

Davies: Yes. And remember, it was a gash on his head. It was nothing too, too, too bad. The point being, I had instituted my mother to bring us back. And had my brother been killed, who would've been really culpable(ish)? Me.

Interviewer: Is that something you, you thought about later? Or was it in the, in the, at that time that you felt...

Davies: No, I didn't.

Interviewer: ...guilt stricken?

Davies: I'm not the kind of person that feel a lot of guilt on anything. But I mean, I realized later on that had he been killed, who would've been responsible? Me. So...

Interviewer: So you, you only evacuated one more time?

Davies: No, that's the three times. You know, the short one right at the beginning, the long one in Gloucestershire, and the short one in Devonshire.

Interviewer: Ok. And at that point you had returned. When did your father join the, the Royal Army Service Corps?

Davies: He was called up in June of 1942. He, you know, it was late in the war really. But of course he was an older man. He was 40—or 39 and six months—when he was called up. So, you know, they called up the young men at, at the beginning of the war. And they worked up the age scale as the war went on. And so he, he was called up in June of '42. I happen to have that date in my head because as I say in my book—When my father came back four years later—I was such a dumb youth—I never questioned him anything very much about his, about his was experience.

Interviewer: And he, he was a driver.

Davies: He was a tank transport drive—He hauled the tanks on those big trucks. And he, he actually went to North Africa very quickly after he went in the army. He, he

came home once on a leave. Oh I have to mention this 'cause in those days salt—the British troops had to carry their rifles with them all the time. So he would come home. 'Cause I think, I think he came home twice before he went overseas. And he would let me wander around the house with his rifle. Fortunately it wasn't loaded. And I'd take pot shots at imaginary Germans. And that was great fun for me.

Interviewer: So when did he board the ship?

Davies: Ok. He, he left—he sailed from Greenock, Scotland, which is a port just west of Glasgow on the River Clyde. And they went out. Joined up in a convoy. And in those days, any convoys—if any ship got sunk from the convoy—others were not allowed to stop and pick up any survivors in the water. They had to keep rolling. So if you, if your ship was hit, you were on your own. But ok, he sailed so far out into the Atlantic to avoid the German submarines operating out of the west coast of France. They had had—the Germans had—four or five big ports where they operated submarines from. And they operated by a Biscay. And so they went—skirted that by going—At one time, he was closer to the United States than he was to Europe. Anyway, eventually they turned off east and went through the Mediterranean—went through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean. And when they were only sixty miles from Algerias—Algiers, which is Algeria—they got hit by a aerial torpedo. And the boat holed, and it went down fairly fast. My father had to slide down a rope hanging down the side of the ship into the water, and swim to a raft. But of course the convoy moved on. His ship was one that was—there might have been one or two others, I'm not sure. But the convoy moved on. So he was bobbing around in the Mediterranean on this raft with other men, of course. But, the British Navy had some destroyers circulating, and he was picked up after about an hour of being on this raft. And was taken to Algiers, which was their original destination.

Interviewer: And when did your family discover the news that that ship had gone down?

Davies: I'm sorry. I, I don't really and truly know that. I don't know when, when we learned. I don't remember, you know, how my mother reacted. I, I, I don't have any—I can't answer that question.

Interviewer: So he was gone for, you know, out of your life for four years.

Davies: Four years, four years.

Interviewer: So you wouldn't have seen him then again until about '46?

Davies: '46. June of '46. He left in June of '42, he came back in June of '46. I was already finished with school—and working—when he, when he returned.

Interviewer: So do you remember the end of the war?

Davies: Yes, yes. It was a jubilant time. I think a friend and I, we even went up to the West End with all the crowds, you know. Of course the thing that's so—left me with deep impressions—were all the foreign troops in London, in England, during the wartime. You know there were—What, there's a million and a quarter GIs, American GIs, prior to the invasion of Normandy. But we had thousands of troops from Canada, and New Zealand, South Africa, Australia. And I was—of course I was always impressed with all these uniforms. And I think seeing all these foreign soldiers is what first jingled my, my imagination about foreign countries. I really do.

Interviewer: So you recognized them by their uniforms?

Davies: Yeah. And many of them had very distinct hats. You know the Australian hat. The GIs, the American said we had lots of American sail—sailors in England. Yes, and I also—Well I started—many kids tried to collect the badges. You know, the cap badges that the military have. I became a, a, a badge collector along with hundreds of other kids.

Interviewer: And what was life like then, in the months, years—first years after the war? We know that there were shortages still, in at least in Britain. But they had to be dealt with.

Davies: Yes. Well the irony of all this is that food rationing in Britain went on until—I think it was 1954, '54. Almost ten years after the end—nine years after the end of the war. Food rationing ended in Germany in '49, I think it was. So the Germans did away with food rationing four or five years before the British did. You know, that seems a little bizarre when we were supposed to have won the war.

Interviewer: Do you remember its impact specifically on your family?

Davies: Well, as I, as I've said—I know that we survived a lot on American dried egg, American dried milk.

Interviewer: Still after the war?

Davies: Yes. For, for some time aft—after—after the war. Although I, yeah—my recollection of that is a little bit hazy, so, I'm reluctant to really make any firm statements about that. But I remember the, you know, the American contribution to my diet in—during the war, very much.

Interviewer: Well, let's transition to your—what we were talking about very early on. You were eleven; you were at Salisbury Road School. This was a sort of big moment. Do you want to elaborate on that?

Davies: Oh, yes. The big, the bigness of all this deals with the fact that in those days—and I believe, I believe it's been done away with—but there used to be what was called the eleven plus exam. 'Cause you took it when you were eleven years of age if you were going to a state school. And if you, if you passed the test, you could go on to grammar school, which gave you more of an academic background. If you failed, you went to a so-called vocational school where you supposedly learned some skills, which were virtually non-existent, as far as I'm concerned. So it was a big government hoax, in my book. And of course I f—My sister passed it. But life being full of unfairness, my parents wouldn't let her go on to grammar school. They felt she—I guess a lot of working class Brits felt girls didn't need an education. They were gonna get married, and have children, and man the home front. So she's the only one in our family who passed the eleven plus. I failed it. My younger brother, who did go on to become an engineer, failed it also. So anyway, I went to this Sandringham Road School. I think it was called Road—Sandringham Road School—which was a vocational school. And the only—they did have a few carpentry work benches in there and a few old tools—and that was about the extent of the vocational education. And of course you learned virtually nothing else. Now I will admit, I was a bad student. I wasn't interested in school at that time. But the government didn't make much of an effort to make you be a serious student in as far as I'm concerned.

Interviewer: So were you thinking about your future? Your career at that point? Or were you...

Davies: No, not then. I didn't think about my future until I got to be eighteen, and suddenly I was pushed out. I was, I was in the working world.

Interviewer: But you finished school at fourteen.

Davies: I finished school at fourteen.

Interviewer: And, at what point did you take a job at the newspaper?

Davies: A few months later because I, I started—Do you want this much detail? I got a job on—My mother got me my first job. Around the corner there was a, something called a London Cooperative Society, which was a big department type store. And right around the corner from us was where they had a milk bottling plant, a shoe repair plant, a mattress repair plant. And my mother got me a job in the mattress repair plant. And what my job was, was to whe—See people in those didn't throw away mattresses, like we do in America. You send them, had them fixed, cleaned, fixed up. And used them again for the next 29 years. So I was ripping open these mattresses, pulling out the stuffing, and that was milled—remilled—'cause a lot of it was, the content was horsehair. The cover was cleaned, and put back together again. I have no idea what, what that cost, but that was my first job. And of course I was—took me about a week to discover I didn't like it. And I was looking immediately for something else. My next job was a, as

a messenger boy in an office in Central London that made printing blocks. Blocks that were in the printing process. I can't give you the technical details of this. They were metal forms on, on wooden blocks that were used in—to produce advertisements in newspapers and magazines. And I took these, these things around in a satchel carried on my back, riding around London to deliver these things to different newspapers and magazine offices. Well I didn't like that after a few weeks either. And then one day I had to deliver some blocks to Fleet Street, which is where the newspaper industry was concentrated. And still is, I believe. Although it's shrunk much now. And I saw a job in a provincial office—in the London office of a provincial newspaper, the *Birmingham Mail and Post*. Britain's second biggest city. And so I—that's how I wound up working for a newspaper. But the big thing about that was there I was exposed to educated people for the first time in my life. And somehow, I took an interest.

Interviewer: So how did that—how did it begin to change for you? What, what did that job mean for you? And, and how did you begin to sort of open up and look for more books to read? These sorts of things.

Davies: Well, just because I was among—not that they had any dealings with me particularly—but I was in the office and these various reporters would come in and talk with the subeditors. And, you know, I began to see that this was a different kind of human being. These were men that knew what the hell they were talking about. And one reporter took an interest in me. And said to me on several occasions, “If you wanted to be in the newspaper business, you got to get some education.” And that's when I started going to night school. I—and he told me I should start reading. And I did start reading. And I'm still reading eighty-three years later. So...

Interviewer: Well I want to talk about one incident when you were—you collected an advanced copy of one of Churchill's speeches...

Davies: Yes.

Interviewer: ...for the paper. Do you recall that?

Davies: Yes, I do.

Interviewer: And what did that involve?

Davies: The interesting thing was that Mr. Churchill had a home in, in Central London on Hyde Park—near Hyde Park. The park—one of the parks—in Central London. Just off the park. I can't remember the exact address, but I went there on a, on a bus from the Fleet Street, and went to the house. And I'd been told I mustn't go to the front door. I had to go to the tradesmen's entrance, which I assumed would be around the back. Well when I went around the side of the building there's a big wall. You couldn't get to the back of the house. So I went back around the

front and I noticed there were steps down to a door in a—below the street level. So I banged on the door. Took them a while to answer the door. But I wasn't invited in. I was told to wait outside. And that shook me up because I thought I was gonna get in and see Mr. Churchill. I never saw Mr. Churchill. But I'll tell you another interesting little thing. As I was waiting there after I'd been told to wait, I noticed along—because we were below the street level—and down at the base of the wall lots and lots of crates with empty wine bottles and beer bottles. So I'd never seen anything like this. I went over and picked up a few bottles. Couldn't pronounce any of these names. Mainly French product. And yes, Mr. Churchill liked his whiskey, and wine, and brandy, I'm sure. But he earned it, right?

Interviewer: Right.

Davies: He earned it.

Interviewer: See, and so you started attending night school and did you do that with purpose? I mean, did you have something in mind?

Davies: Yes, I was then aiming—I had this vague hope and vision of trying to become a reporter. So I took English, I took shorthand, I took typing. Yeah, they, they were the th—but I went four nights a week. And I kept it up until I went in the service four years later.

Interviewer: Was that obligatory? Going into the service?

Davies: Yes. In those days national service—like it was in America for a while, right? But the Brits' service—the Brits' was the first country to switch to volunteer force, I believe. It was volunteer force. But in my time, we had to go in.

Interviewer: And you were in the Royal Air Force.

Davies: I was in the air force. Mmhmm.

Interviewer: And so what were your, your duties in the Royal Air Force?

Davies: Well I—by, by that time—I could write shorthand and type. And so I became a shorthand typist.

Interviewer: So they sort of took advantage of your skills.

Davies: [nods] And I'd studied well, and I, I, I knew my subjects well. I was fairly good, I believe. If I do say so myself.

Interviewer: And when you came out of the service, what did you do next?

Davies: Well, I went back to the job I'd had before because I had quit newspaper after three years, and I, I started working for a, a book publishing company. In this sales office. Yeah, I worked for the salesman. Yeah, I was more or less a secretary. That's what I was. Though I didn't like to be called a secretary. And I went back to that for a while, but meantime that particular company had been sold. And so I switched to another company—and a small publishing—And they happened to publish the *Royal Air Force Magazine*. So I was working for the *Royal Air Force Magazine*. They published a few other things as well, but the one that really interested me was the *Royal Air Force Magazine*. But, as you mentioned, I, I got this weird idea that I wanted to do something for humanity. And quit that job, and signed up to be a nurse. Nurse—for nurse training. Also, another little aspect of this was I really wanted to get away from home. I, I felt I needed to leave home. And in those days, working class mothers sort of, I believe, had a feeling you shouldn't leave home until you get married. You know, unlike in this country where kids leave home very easily and freely, in working class Britain, this was not done. Mother's seemed to be offended by this. So by becoming—going into nurse training—I could leave home, you know, with a valid reason. Which was part of my motivation, but I, I was—also liked to kid myself that I really wanted to do something for humanity. And after a few weeks of dealing with bed pans, I decided I really didn't care about humanity. So I left that after six weeks. I'm not gonna look...

Interviewer: Well you, you described yourself in the book, several times, as fickle.

Davies: Right. Maybe that's a better—putting it mildly.

Interviewer: So you hadn't settled necessarily? And so let's go to that, that idea of after the war you were seeing all of these servicemen from different places around the world. And you, you began to travel...

Davies: Yes.

Interviewer: ...a good deal.

Davies: Well, somewhat. Yeah, and I never had money. But yes, I, I wanted to travel and see the world. Yeah. 'Cause I should've joined the navy or something, but I didn't do that. But yes, I was interested in other places. And—well eventually I emigrated to Canada.

Interviewer: Well, I want to talk about your job in Germany. When you were working for the Air Force Exchange Service.

Davies: Yeah.

Interviewer: And...

Davies: So this was many years later, of course.

Interviewer: So this is with the Americans?

Davies: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: In Germany.

Davies: Yeah.

Interviewer: So these sorts—these bases—had been established post-war. And what were you doing in, in—with the exchange service?

Davies: I started out in the services—not in the retail side of the house. And let me just give you a little preface here. You have to realize that the exchange services—big business—they doing ten billion dollars a year. Why? Because the U.S. Military's so big. And this was the army and air force exchange service. The navy has an exchange service. The marine corps has a navy—an exchange service. And the coast guard has a nav—an exchange service.

Interviewer: So what's the exchange service doing?

Davies: Well, they're the, the department store on, on the bases. You know, you can buy everything from a safety pin to an automobile.

Interviewer: This is like a commissary?

Davies: Well the commissary—there is a separate entity called the commissary—that sells food. And they sell it at good prices to the, to the U.S. At the exchange, it didn't sell well. You sold some items. But the commissary is what's provides the military with food. Obviously the soldiers get fed by the army, but this is for dependents of the military. And because the U.S. military is so big there are a lot of dependents. So it's a huge community on each base. You, you buy the—you buy food at the commissary. You buy pins and automobiles at the department—at the exchange service.

Interviewer: And what did you do specifically?

Davies: I was in the services department. Sorry, I have to—I first of all started in plans and, and headquarters. Later on I got into the field in services. So I, I had to kind of—two careers at first. I spent a number of years in the plans department, and that was writing plans. You know, in, in the military you have to write everything down. You can't do anything unless it's written down. So...

Interviewer: Documentation.

Davies: Documentation, basically. Yeah. And we had lots of, lots of documentation. But then later on I, I once again got tired of that and wanted to get into operations. So I got into services. And the services side ran the garages, the beauty shops, the barber shops, the concessions, and several other things as well. We had the contract for the truck rental. You know, we had a contracts with U-Haul. What's the other big one? There's a couple of them. But we had—the exchange had a contract. That was one of the things I handled. And of course, course they're always moving the troops around. There was a lot of business for truck rental. A lot of soldiers moved themselves.

Interviewer: And through this exchange service, you eventually met a women named Julianne First [sp].

Davies: Yes.

Interviewer: Who's that?

Davies: My wife. Well...

Interviewer: So how did that, how did that romance blossom?

Davies: Well she came to work for the exchange. I was in the, I was in the European headquarters of the exchange service in Nuremburg, Germany. And she came to work for them. She, she had gone from Germany to England and spent about six years in London where she learned English, of course. And, and she could write English shorthand. And so she became a secretary. And because she could speak English she wanted to use it when she came back to Germany from England. So she came and started with the exchange. So, an office romance.

Interviewer: What about her attracted you?

Davies: I can't answer that question. Why, she was an intelligent woman, attractive, and likes to read, and is a great hiker. She hikes the pants off me today. So, a number of things. And I was then in my thirties already—early thirties. And I, you know, never married up to that time. So it was a good idea to, to get married.

Interviewer: But you had a small wedding.

Davies: Yes, we did. You really want the detail, right? We just got married in the, in the Nuremburg City Hall. You know, civil ceremony. No church wedding. So, the morning of the wedding, Julie did take a taxi from where she lived to the city hall. But I went to my own wedding on the streetcar for twenty-five cents. I spent twenty-five cents on a streetcar to go from where I lived to the city hall for, for the wedding. So you can't do it more economically than that.

Interviewer: How did you tell your parents that you were marrying this German woman?

Davies: Well, I never anticipated any opposition from my parents. They're too easy going.

Interviewer: So that was not a significant point?

Davies: No, no, no.

Interviewer: So tell me when you moved permanently to the United States.

Davies: Like, as I, as I say, I left England. I immigrated to Canada. Like a lot of Brits go to Canada. And a lot come to America. That's exactly what I did. I left in '54. Went to Toronto. You know, that was a pleasant experience. I worked—I got a job with the Canadian Pacific Railroad as a stenographer. 'Course I didn't, I didn't particularly like that. My, my hopes of becoming a reporter had gone down the tubes. And—but, you know, I, I saved my money and had about a thousand dollars when I decided to come—with a friend, I didn't do this by myself, I was with a friend—we came to America. And came to America because we had met this New Zealand guy. And, and he worked in the Canadian Pacific [unintelligible]. He was on one of these around the world—a lot of Australians and New Zealanders, they must feel this pang or pull from England because that's where so many of them are—came from originally. They want to go back. And so they take—undertake—these around the world tours lasting two, or three, or four years. And this guy was—had reached Toronto, Canada and worked for the Canadian Pacific. And he was always talking about San Francisco. He used—I'd see him in the local library reading books on San Francisco. And he was always on about this great city of San Francisco. So it fired up me about coming to America. And we went to San Francisco. So that's—I don't know if I would've done it if I hadn't met this, this New Zealand guy.

Interviewer: So the Air Force Exchange took you back to Germany, then eventually after you'd married, you returned to the United States.

Davies: Oh yeah, well I, I would, you know, they moved us like they moved the military, every few years. So I knew I was gonna be going back to America. Julie, you know I told her right away when we began to get a bit serious, that I would be going back. And by that time I knew I had to hang on to my job because I was now in my mid-thirties. I couldn't—I'd switched around so much I knew this is one job I needed to hang onto.

Interviewer: And you stayed with the exchange service?

Davies: I stayed with the exchange service.

Interviewer: When did you retire?

Davies: 1993. I was 60 years of age.

Interviewer: And when—how did you end up in Georgia?

Davies: A daughter. We had two children in Germany. One of them became an attorney. She did her undergraduate work in Florida and then came up to UGA in—in Athens.

Interviewer: That's correct.

Davies: Athens, yeah. And became an attorney. And she used to come to Atlanta quite a bit, and she said that she was going to settle here. She never did like moving. You know, she didn't like when we had to move. So she wanted to settle down. I will admit, I would kind of liked to have gone back to California after I retired, but housing prices are so great. Couldn't afford it. So we decided to come to Atlanta to be with our oldest daughter.

Interviewer: And you wrote a memoir titled *A Life in Shadow*. So why'd you call it that? And why did you decide to write it?

Davies: Well because I'd had this great interest in writing since age fourteen and joining the newspaper. And I did, for many years, operate as a freelance writer. I had this government job, but the government job never really stimulated me. So I took up freelance writing and, and did it for quite a few years. And met with some success, not great success. And you certainly won't get rich on freelance writing, but I enjoyed it. So it, you know, something that satisfied my ego.

Interviewer: And what was the significance of the title?

Davies: Well I, you know, I, I felt I, I, I made a lot of mistakes in, in my life. And I did have a—I did suffer a depression. And that went on for quite a few years until I finally went and got some professional help. And he put me on a medication. Boom! It was gone like that. So that's the shadow in the title.

Interviewer: Ok Mr. Davies, I appreciate it. We're gonna end there.

Davies: We're gonna end. Ok, well thank you very much. Thank you folks. Thank you.