

DEAR CHILDREN, SINCERELY...TWO DECADES OUT

[THE STAGE IS DARK – THERE ARE TEN CHAIRS SET ABOUT THE SPACE. ON OR UNDER EACH CHAIR IS A CARDBOARD BOX. THEY ARE LIT FROM THE INSIDE, AND GLOW SOFTLY IN THE DARKNESS. MUSIC PLAYS

AS THE PERFORMERS ENTER THE SPACE, THERE IS A SLIDE SHOW ON THE BACK WALL OF ALL THE RECENT GRADUATION ACTIVITIES. THE PERFORMERS TAKE THEIR CHAIRS AND AS THE LIGHTS COME UP, EACH PERSON OPENS THEIR BOX AND PULLS OUT A SELECTION OF ‘GIFTS’ AND MEMENTOES FROM THEIR FAMILY. THEY SET THEM AROUND THE SPACE]

[FINN OPENS HIS BOX AND PULLS OUT A HAPPY GRADUATION CARD. GLITTER SQUARES FALL TO THE FLOOR]

FINN: (reading) Hello Finn. You know we’ve always been immensely proud of you, but this is something really special. We just wanted to say, ‘well done on your graduation’ – but while I’ve got your attention, and just before you’re about to step out into the big bad world, there were just a few things I wanted to say to you. From me to you....

[GRACE OPENS HER BOX AND PULLS OUT A LETTER. THE LONG CONCERTINAED LETTER OF BEAUTIFULLY PAINTED PAPER ZIG-ZAGS TO THE FLOOR]

GRACE: (reading) Dearest Gracie. We always knew that you would do it! We always knew you’d pass with flying colours! But we never expected just how brilliantly. Just how brightly you would shine. And just at this point where you’re about to go out there, start your life, I

just wanted to put my thoughts down on paper. Pass a few things on from grandmother to granddaughter...

[ELLI OPENS HER BOX. SHE TAKES OUT A PAPER SCHOOL EXERCISE BOOK. THE READINGS BEGIN TO OVERLAP. OTHERS FIND LETTERS AND PARCELS IN THEIR BOXES]

ELLI: (reading) Dear Elli. The warmest of congratulations. Your parents let me know about your brilliant results, and I just wanted to write to you to say well done. You proved them all wrong, all those people who said it wasn't worth reaching for success. I remember just how upset you were not to take the 11+, and look at you now. That's one in the eye for all of them! It has been a real pleasure watching you become the young woman you are today, and I thought, I hope you might appreciate a few words from someone who has been 'around the block' as you move to the next phase of your life...

[ILARIA OPENS HER BOX. SHE PULLS OUT A PAINTED PHOTO FRAME. THERE IS RIBBON AROUND IT WHICH SHE READS.]

ILARIA: (reading in Italian). Beautiful darling Ilaria. We are so proud of everything you are achieving in the UK. Only so far away? Still, as long as you are happy for now, but we can't wait for you to come back to Italy. We miss you too much....

[MORGAN TAKES OUT A NEWSPAPER. GOES TO THE NOTICES PAGE AND STARTS READING]

MORGAN: (reading) Congratulations to Morgan Lewins (22) on her graduation with a BA Hons in Drama from the University of Essex. We wish her all the best in her teacher training in Birmingham, and in setting up her new house with Tim. But going out to work in the world, setting up your own home, these are big stages in life, and I just wanted to put down a few of my thoughts...

[MEGAN FINDS A SHINY NEW NOVEL IN HER BOX AND STARTS TO SILENTLY READ. RUBY TAKES AN OLD BIBLE OUT OF HER BOX AND STARTS READING]

RUBY: (reading) They say it's often easier for advice to skip a generation. That sometimes we are too close to our own parents to ever listen properly. Not that I was ever close to my parents. But they say it's best to get a bit of distance. Perspective they call it, don't they? And that perhaps our history might be far enough away for it to make more sense. And perhaps by writing this down here, I can make sense of a few things too...

[JACK FINDS A SOUND-PLAYER IN HIS BOX. HE PLUGS IN THE EARPHONES AND BEGINS TO SPEAK AS HE LISTENS. In the first instance this is mocked-up until the part of the tape is used]

JACK: (echoing) Hello Jack. Grandad here. And Grandma, let me get to the mic, budge up. All right Pat. There is that better? Is it still on? Yes. Now, Jack, - hello Jack - we just wanted to say how proud we are of you. We are. And Granny and me, we just wanted to tell you that you can do this, you can go out there and make something of your life. But we also wanted to say a few things about life, you know, being an adult. So, this is for Chloe as well. Yes, we need to tell Chloe, at least she might be able to remember what we've said.

[JACK MOTIONS TO CHLOE AND THEY ARRANGE THEIR CHAIRS TOGETHER, LISTENING TO THE TAPE. MEANWHILE MEG OPENS HER BOX AND TAKES OUT HER LAPTOP. IN THE GLOW OF THE SCREEN SHE STARTS TO READ]

MARTIN: To the most magnificent Ms Megan Symons. True. From one success story to another. I just wanted to say well done love, I'm sorry I can't be there with you, your mum might have told you I'm visiting Katie in California, but I hope you all have a brilliant party. I am so pleased that you've done so well in your degree. Nothing is as important as your education. (address) Youngsters in this country take education for granted, and they don't take full advantage of it. They will be left behind by countries where they work a lot harder; like China and Korea, I think education is a big thing. I would've like to of... and I'm not bitter about it, or upset, but I would've liked to have become some sort of professional, some sort of academic, I would've loved to have been able to go to university, which in those days really, was pretty much unheard of, everyone goes these days, but back in my day you had to of come from a pretty privileged family to have gone to university. I loved to have done that.

JANET: You know Finn, I wanted to go onto university. But my parents were so poor they could never have afforded to send me anywhere, and also my father said, what's good enough for us, is good enough for you. I didn't take the 11+. I was in the top 12 to pass and all set to go to grammar school, but I was ill. It was all the wretched milk they made me drink. So, I was left behind and I hated school, absolutely hated it but I was very good at art, and English and drama and singing. The art teacher, managed to get me into art college. They had a word with my mother and said you cannot overlook this child, she is talented. But I was always the most intelligent one in the family, I have to tell you. Not because I say it, because everybody else did. And a friend of mine said, are you sure you weren't adopted? But I wasn't.

MARGARET: I was border line between a grammar and a secondary modern school, but there was only 7 places for Lady Margaret's school, in Fulham, and I didn't get one. Janet Street-Porter did. I didn't. I was always very middle of the road. I never had aspirations to do anything special, like you do. I wanted to be a window dresser, and I had to have 3 O-Levels for that, in art. And my mother wouldn't let me wait for my O-Level results without getting a job. So I got a job in an office. In an agency, supplying nannies to the landed gentry. I worked with 8 old ladies that had all lost their fiancés in the 1914 war. And then when it came to my O-Levels, I passed the exams I needed, but then when I went to apply to be a window dresser they only employed boys, so I never did get to do what I wanted when I was young.

CHRISTINE: (address) I had a very basic education. I left school at 16. I was at a secondary modern school and there were no exams done or anything like that. In a girl's school I was doing home making activities. We were doing dress making, needlework I think they called it, home economics, and we did have commercial classes, so we had typing, and short-hand which I was totally hopeless at.

TISATO: (address) I only went to primary school. I walked to school and I used to walk 2 to 3 kilometres every morning to go there. But you learned straightaways the things that now girls don't learn. Knitting, crocheting, dressmaking... Now girls don't do that. My mum came from a big family. Her father died when she was nine and left seven children. She had a life full of

sacrifices. My mum only did “seconda elementare” so only until age 7, because after that she had to work in a “filanda” - making threads of silk and wool.

SYLVIA: (address) I remember my history teacher. She was always on about politics in history. And she used to say, when you teach a boy you teach one person, but when you teach a girl, you teach a family. She was always on about the suffragettes. You know about the suffragettes? Got killed and that? Yes, of course you do.

JOY: (reading from a novel) My mother brought us up to be very respectful of our elders. Never EVER addressed anyone by their Christian names, they were always ‘Mr’ or ‘Mrs’ or ‘Auntie’ and ‘Uncle’. And though we were born in India, we never ever spoke the Indian language. We went to a school where it wasn’t part of the curriculum, and of course my mother was very, very strict on how we spoke, if you dropped your ‘H’ for instance, she will bring you in front of her:

XXX: (as Joy’s mother) Now repeat that, what was that you just said?

JOY: We said “Ouse mum!”

XXX: It is not, and how do you spell it?

JOY: And she would make us spell and we’d say “H-O-U-S-E”

XXX: What is in front of ‘Ouse’?

JOY: And we’d say “H”

XXX: WELL SAY THE ‘H’

JOY: I mean, she was my role model. Now as I’m older. She was wonderful. And I look back and yes. She was brilliant

[A SHEET OF PAPER FLUTTERS OUT THE NOVEL AS MEGAN IS READING. SHE PICKS IT UP AND READS]

JOY: (reading) Dearest Megan. You always told me that I should write a book of my life stories, and you know, I told you that I was too old, that nobody would care about what I have to say, that it was too much effort. But you told me to get on with it, and that nobody likes writing essays, and so I took inspiration from you, and I did it! Granted, I did do a lot of dictation, but it turned out people were interested in what I had to say...

[JACK AND CHLOE SWITCH ON THE TAPE AND BEGIN RECORDED DELIVERY SPEECH. THEY PLAY THEMSELVES AND THE PARENTS TOO]

DENNIS: Thing is you had to earn money.

JACK: Yeah

PAT: Nobody in my group of friends or in, or were in the classes that I went to, were had any interest in getting to University they just wanted to go out to work.

JACK: Yeah.

PAT: And get some money.

JACK: ...did you feel like your generation was doing the right thing? It's a very broad question.

PAT: Erm... I don't believe any generation have got it completely right.

JACK: No.

PAT: But I don't think we did a, I dunno.

DENNIS: As I said before I think we were the best generation.

PAT: Yeah... But it doesn't mean we got it right does it.

DENNIS: No, no, far from right. Blimey I mean it was -

PAT: It didn't feel as wrong as it does now sometimes.

DENNIS: Well it's not as... it's not as frantic as it was, as it is now, it's not, it's... you've got everything at your fingertips now, bloody social, as I say social media and stuff like that you can get hold of anything you want to whereas in them days, erm, you were protected strongly from things, erm, and I think, as I said before, you were more content.

PAT: Yeah, I think our generation were, has been quite a, on then, in the main a happy generation. You know, we had a good NHS, we had a good job system, we loved the music, so yeah, I think we, we did.

DENNIS: If I had a choice of any time to be born, I would pick the time we were born.

PAT: Me too.

JACK: Yeah.

DENNIS: Every time.

JACK: Yeah.

DENNIS: Even over now. Like I would pick that time [...] People are far too money orientated now, they keep chasing the buck don't they, not, not content with what they're got, don't make the most of what they've got.

MARGARET: You see Gracie, I was brought up as a generation if you couldn't afford it, you didn't have it, and therefore I envy nobody for what they've got. If they've worked for it, that's

wonderful. but everyone wants everything straight away. Yes, a lack of contentment. And they forget things had to be worked for. They know it's available so they want it. But why have it and put yourself in a muddle just to say that you've got it.

DENNIS: Well we were born in the best generation. No doubt about it. We had the best music, we had the most opportunities for work.

SYLVIA: We had good times then. I used to go out every night with my friends, we were all teddy boys and teddy girls. Every night we used to go up to Croydon and go in to coffee bars and that. Really had a good time I suppose when I look back. I know it might sound like simpler times to you, it's just different to what it is now. We didn't have that much money but we still had the same amount of fun. My friend used to get paid monthly and I got paid weekly. So. When she had run out of money, we used to use mine.

MARTIN: We have so much more opportunity now. I think the UK now is the land of opportunity, despite the odd hiccup, but we have freedom. Back in our day we were categorized; if your dad was a labourer then you would become a labourer. It was frowned upon if your mum went to work, she would be classed as a bit of a loose woman if she worked back in the 50s, so women have a lot more freedom now, people, have more freedom and opportunity now than they used to have.

DENNIS: You could, you could leave. I walked out of one job, because I rowed with the foreman, and walked straight into another one. Same day. And no problem finding work, work was easy to find if you wanted to work.

PAT: I remember I used to write away for jobs, I probably wrote four or five letters and would get offered two or three of them, you know? Not like it is for your generation I'm afraid.

JANET: I can see there's good and bad in all generations. I'm not one of these sort of people that are saying I'd like to go backwards, and oh, the good old days because there's never any good old days, in every generation there's good and bad, advantages and disadvantages really. I think in your generation, there is far more stress, because of the mass media and social media,

television and radio, you all know about everything almost before it has happened. We lived in blissful ignorance, it was blissful ignorance, we didn't know what was going on so much.

SYLVIA: I think the sixties was really a turning point with everything. Y'know. Fifties and sixties after the war. The music, like with Elvis and that, used to be all like, from America but then we had the Beatles come along after Elvis and everything changed then. Like we used to have all these parties, when I was married and that, even. All the parties nearly every week and we used to go to people's houses, and I would take David in the carrycot. We had a good time really, in the sixties.

CHRISTINE: Yes, it felt like we were going into better times. In the 60s it was a very optimistic time - post-war, people were better off, they had more spare money, it wasn't quite so, I mean for some people it will always be difficult, but on the whole people were better off. Hire purchase came in in the early days so people were able to buy more consumer products and things – and that always perks things up a bit, a bit of shopping! Yes, and I mean it had been, for my parents, it had been hard, after the war, and all the rationing and things, that didn't stop after the war ended, that carried on.

PAT: When we got married, and you might not want to hear this, but we saved and we didn't go out anywhere, when we were saving to get a house, we went very few places and we had to get a deposit. But, we bought the house and we didn't have the furniture to go in it and we had rooms that were unfurnished for quite some time. We did have our bedroom furniture on hire-purchase. And that was the only thing we'd get, and we wouldn't buy anything else on hire-purchase until we'd paid that off. And that was how we got everything for the house, we didn't have carpets and stuff but we were really happy, you know, it was fun. Buying the stuff as we went.

JANET: The biggest thing in our household was getting a fridge which my father took out on 'HP', on the drip, which was very much frowned upon. And the fridge, had a lock on it, my Mother kept it locked to stop us all nicking the food. On pay day, they used to count out all his money on the table. They were really hard up my parents.

MARTIN: I think my parents' life was financially a lot harder, they didn't have anything at all. They didn't have a bathroom. I didn't have a bathroom until I was 13...14. We had a big galvanised tin bath and, everybody had a bath on a Sunday evening and we would share, about 6 or 7 people would share the water. So that was how we kept ourselves clean. We didn't have a kitchen and we didn't have a bathroom. The toilet was downstairs, outside in the garden. So that was it. If it was raining, you got wet.

SYLVIA: Well, pfff, there are so many luxuries now. We never had a fridge or anything. Washing and cleaning, we never had any machines for that. We even used to have hard toilet rolls. My gran used to have newspaper hanging up, squares of newspapers hanging up. But that's what it was like. And there was no central heating, nothing like that. It was freezing cold in winter. We used to have all icicles inside the house. Really freezing cold, we used to sleep with our clothes and socks on.

MARTIN: There was still rationing when I was very young, you couldn't buy sweets, couldn't buy sugar that sort of thing. You never had a banana or anything like that, nothing in the way of fruit around. Chicken was a luxury, it was like Christmas dinner basically.

MARGARET: I didn't know what a banana was, because I'd never had one. And my aunt came home from the paper factory and she had a banana. In her lunch hour, she came home with this banana, and she cut it open carefully, and gave us all a slice, and I hated it! But because my cousin said it was gorgeous, I kept trying to pretend I liked it, but I didn't like it. And then, she stuffed this banana with cotton wool, and stitched it all back together again, and took it back for everyone at the factory to see she'd actually had a banana. As a child I didn't have toys, because there weren't any toys. I only had what my uncles would make me because my dad wasn't there to make me things. One Christmas I had an ironing board, a dolls house, even an iron, all made out of scraps of wood, that my uncle found, and everything was painted bright red, because that was the only paint he could get hold of. And all the doll's house furniture my mother made out of matchboxes covered in scraps of material. But I didn't know any different.

TISATO: We were five children and I was always incredibly meticulous with clothes, you know it, Ilaria. So, when my brothers and sisters had to go out, even though I wasn't that much older than them, they always had to leave the house in an impeccable state. Always well dressed. I made a pair of trousers for Beppe and then I made this dress for Auntie Lella! I was like the fashion designer of the house! Yes, I made everything.

MARGARET: The first time I had a balloon, I was only about 6. You didn't have balloons because the war effort needed the rubber. I had this balloon and I let it go near the blackberries in the garden, and it burst, and I can remember crying and crying and crying because my mum wouldn't stick it together again. It's just silly memories isn't it really, memories that you don't think are important.

CHRISTINE: We would just go out in the countryside, we used to roam around quite a lot, it was much freer, sort of childhood. It was different, but it was still much freer, because even when we were in London we would play out in the street or go up to Crystal Palace Park. So, it was all much freer.

JANET: When I was a teenager, I used to thumb everywhere. I used to thumb lifts everywhere, with a friend of mine of course, not on my own. I remember we used to, I used to belong to a jazz club. I used to love traditional jazz jiving and we used to thumb up to Brentwood. This man who was, this chubby chap with a big hat, who had a big car. We always used to try and get him at the same time every week to give us a lift to the jazz club, and he used to be one of these men that made animals out of balloons. He always had balloons in the car and sometimes he used to make something and give it to us, you know a poodle. I mean there was never any problem, you know, never a problem. I remember one night, I couldn't get back home and I used to have a partner, a jazz dance partner, he was a bloke but I wasn't going out with him or anything but he was a very good dancer. We used to dance for hours and hours, we were late and it was just too late so we went over to this lorry park and we slept in this lorry, it wasn't locked, we just got in this lorry, I think we got through the window. We just slept and I remember it was cold and I think we both had duffle coats on because I was a bit bohemian by then and because I was at art college. I remember him vividly, because the next morning when

he got up, there was a horse trough with water in it, in Brentwood, in the high street. I remember him cleaning his teeth in the horse trough with a toothbrush, out of his pocket

DENNIS: We used to come home from school, four o'clock or whatever time it was, and we'd have tea, and go straight out. And we'd be gone, all evening. There was no –

XXX: Where you going?

DENNIS: and –

XXX: What you doing? Who are you going to be doing it with?

DENNIS: We used to have a raft down the river. That was owned by a bloke called Brooks and he was as mad as a hatter, and we used to go on the raft and we'd fight. Try to throw each other in and last man standing on the raft was the winner. But that was so dangerous, when you think about it, now. And that river, I mean that was nothin' like it is now, that's clean now, I mean that was absolutely filthy, and we used to swim from Bourne Bridge right across to the power station which was on the other side of the river, and back again. But you had to time it right. Because if you came back and the tide was going out you'd be in trouble. But there weren't the same fears. Not like today. You never heard of the rapes and murders and knifings that you do now. Much more violent these days.

JANET: The Moors Murders, do you remember the Moors Murders? Myra Hindley and Brady. And I think a lot of people started to get really anxious about their children being out, being stolen and taken away. Those were big fears going around in public, in the newspapers and things like that. I remember saying to Clive, just phone me if you're not coming back, just telephone me on somebody's landline. I was talking to your mother about it, nowadays she's always in touch with you children on the mobile phone and when our children went out, they just went out you know.

MARTIN: Family ties were very strong, probably an awful lot stronger than they are these days. It was very much a family unit. It was poor but nobody ever went without particularly.

JANET: I had a lovely childhood really, I had my Nanny and Grandad, and my Great Granny and my Auntie Daisy all living in the same house. I had two Nannies. I had a Great Nanny, who was called Big Nanny and Nanny was called Baby Nanny. It was a big house, I think that's why family is so special to me now. My family were very open. My nanny used to always help everybody, all the neighbours and everyone. They all had a great time at parties and they would enjoy themselves. And all the relatives used to come in, all, all, all the extended relatives that used to live round about. I remember my father playing piano and everybody used to join in and they always used to do the hokey-cokey and they used to dance.

MARGARET: I remember the day WW2 ended, because there were just such parties in the streets and dancing. Yeah, 1945, I was 6. I can just remember everywhere was so happy, the sheer excitement of everyone shouting out to each other from their houses. And my youngest auntie had made me this dress all in red white and blue. I didn't quite understand what was going on, and all I knew was that daddy would be coming home. I've got pictures of me at the party and I do remember it. And the fish paste sandwiches, it was such a luxury! It really was! Madeira cake, just the luxury of all this wonderful tea that they seemed to rustle up with their meagre rations.

TISATO: When WWII ended, they rung all the sirens that were telling that the war was over, there was such a turmoil. I still remember today that I was at the Maso of the Lora's. And I didn't understand everything because I was little, but I saw everyone celebrating. We were all poor and miserable but the end of the war was a big celebration. I remember when they murdered all of those who were imprisoned. The fascists were arrested. The prison's guardian was my godfather, so I went inside the prisons many times. The partisans went into Schio's prisons and killed almost all of them. When I passed by on the morning to go to church I saw all the blood coming out of the gate onto the sidewalk. But I was little, I didn't understand everything because I was about 4-5 years old. But I remember taking a longer step on the sidewalk to avoid the blood.

SYLVIA: When I was growing up, we was bombed out of Davison Road in the second world war. And my sister and I went to live with my nan and grandad. And when the war was on we

used to have to go in a coal cellar, when the sirens come on. And then after the war there was all the bombsites we used to climb over, just playing in the bombsites as kids. And then I moved to Marion Road and we lived in a prefab. They were just like a square hut. They were only supposed to be up for two years, and there was asbestos in them which was dangerous, but we lived in ours for nine years.

MARTIN: I know your generation have a lot to say about being priced out of houses, but back then there was a massive housing shortage, where I lived an awful lot of people had lost their houses, they'd been bombed and when I was a child there was bombsites all over the place. The pre-fabs were actually quite desirable because they had a kitchen and that sort of stuff. And then after that, people were moved from places like that, out to new towns, like Dagenham and Basildon or Harlow.

JOY: I was brought up in India. We didn't have houses like you have in England. We had houses that were individual houses. They were all...detached. With a huge garden. With a wall around. So-nice and secluded. And as I remember as a child we always had a gardener. We had servants who had their quarters right to the back of the house so that they would prepare everything and bring the food to the house. We as children never went to see what was happening at the back there. And consequently when my sisters and I came to England, we didn't even know how to make a cup of tea. Honestly! Every single thing was done for us. We had never cleaned a pair of shoes, the tailor would come to the house, we had never made a cup of coffee, and it, it wasn't a good thing. And I remember when we were in Malaya, we took my mother to a market and she was calling out –

XXX: (as Joy's mother) Coolie, coolie!

JOY: For someone to come and carry her bags. She was so used to having, and in India as well, so used to having people around her. Life was definitely different to what it is here in England and consequently I think we were thoroughly spoilt.

PATRICIA: I was brought up with nuns. Father Hudson's Homes. I went in when I was three and I stayed there until I was fifteen. Because me dad died and my mum wasn't allowed to

take care of me. Yeah...I think she went a bit nutty actually. She couldn't raise all of us. There was four girls and three boys. The girls went to Father Hudson's and the boys went to St Edwards. The convent was too strict. We had a lot of canes for silly things. Just silly things. Like not having your socks up right, or your hair not up. They were evil. There was an orchard there and we used to go and nick the apples and we got in trouble for that. Oh the nuns had the sticks out for us for that! Oh god yes, we had to do as we were told and if we didn't we'd get punished for it. The nuns were very sadistic you know, I just think they enjoyed doing what they did to us out of pleasure. They were in charge and that was it. Well you couldn't say anything back then love, the church was so powerful that no one would listen and you'd be too afraid to say anything in case you got another beating. I'm glad you had a better childhood than me. I honestly cannot name a favourite memory from childhood, can't name one love. We either had to be working, in the home, or we had to go to church and pray. Afterwards I went to a girl's hostel in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, and I was under their care until I was eighteen. I just think um...because of the upbringing, it was just sort of, I just got on with life as it came, you know. You just sort of hoped for the best really.

JANET: My mother was, God bless her, she was a very difficult woman, and she had this nervous breakdown. After the war, there wasn't many opportunities, so my parents put their name down for a council house, which they eventually got, and I was the age of 7 when I went to live in Harold Hill in Essex. But, my mother really missed her immediate family, because they came from a very close family. Very London, close family. And she, got quite mentally ill. She got agoraphobic and wouldn't go out. Nanny said she had always been a bit strange. My mother was quite sex mad. What's the word for that? She was after all the men, all the soldiers, all the American GIs. When my father died, my mother had loads of boyfriends, she sort of burnt her bra sort of thing, decided she was going to go bananas, but never mind.

JOY: My grandfather was Italian and in those days the Italians, the Germans, the Spanish, all used to come to India – that's where the work was. And sometimes they left families behind, they came and were encouraged to meet up with the local girls, and a lot of them consequently had two families – a family in India and a family back home, whether it's in Italy or whatever – and that happened to my own grandfather, cos back home he had his one

family, but in India he started my family. In India, parents often arranged marriages. Not like they do with the Indians, but my mother ALWAYS encouraged boys to come over, and they would pick for you. And they would think, he's good, I think I'll set her up with him. She set me up with some HORRIBLE fellas! Anyway, this particular man that she chose for me was seven years older than me, as I was seventeen he was...well that would be twenty-four. Yeah. And he had a good job and my mother said –

XXX: He's got a good job, he'll give you a good house, you like doing things, you like going places, he'll look after you.

JOY: And that was it. It was partially an arranged marriage.

JANET: I just wanted a different life from my parents. I was determined that I was going to have lots of animals, lots of children and lots of money. In fact, when I met Peter, Grandad even, I said to him, okay, do you believe in God? Do you like children? Do you like animals? They were the three questions, and what are your prospects?

XXX: I'm going to be a millionaire.

JANET: I said okay then, that's fine. And it was at the Tower of London, next to a big bed of red tulips and the first thing he ever bought me was a big bunch of red tulips. It was predetermined, my marriage to your grandfather, in time and space.

MARGARET: One night me and my best friend Annette – who your mum is named after - went dancing to Kensington Town Hall – much against the wishes of my parents because I was only 17 - and it was a foxtrot, and I was saying "I can't do this, I don't know how to do it." And she said

xxxx: If you say no again to the next man that comes up I'm not going to talk to you for the rest of the night

MARGARET: So the next boy that came up to me and asked me to dance was your Granddad. So, I told him I really couldn't do the foxtrot. But he could. He was the most beautiful dancer, the most beautiful ballroom dancer. He was in the household cavalry then. And the next dance he rushed over and got me again and danced. Then he took me to the bar for a drink. Well my mother always said I must never, ever accept a drink from anybody, so I waited outside. And he brought me an orange squash. And all the other boys kept telling him –

XXX: Oh, chuck her

XXX: Oh, forget her

XXX: Not if she don't wanna come and have a drink

MARGARET: But he said to me -

XXX: Can I see you tomorrow?

MARGARET: But the next day I couldn't remember what he blessed looked like! So, I got there really early, and then I thought, well, I'll see him arriving and recognise him, and when I got there really early, he was already there, and Granddad has done so ever since; been really early for absolutely everything!

JOY: I hated being married so young. Because as I said, we were not experienced like you girls are these days. Girls know too much about sex. We were not schooled in that. And my mother never told us anything about it, so it was quite a shock - and even my sister said the same thing, what a shock when we got married, you know? So, perhaps, I would not advise that either.

PATRICIA: Umm, romance.... I just, I think with that, it was just because of me upbringing you, you didn't know what it was all about. I didn't really know what love and sex was. Oh god no, it was never even mentioned to us back then. It was quite intimidating meeting your grandad and getting pregnant. A shock? You can say that again.

CHRISTINE: Most of my friends got married before I did anyway, I was 28 I think when I got married. In those days that was quite late to get married. I got married in 1972. John and I, my husband, separated 10 years ago.

JANET: I remember my parents rowing about money. My mother always wanted things and my father always used to say –

XXX: Ooo, you can't have that! We'll never afford it.

JANET: My father used to say, when money comes in through the door, love flies out of the window and it did. But it does make lots of problems when you can't, you know, feed yourself. Money was very tight. And you had make do and mend. Because we were that working class. My father was a trade unionist, he was a very strident unionist who stuck up for the workers. But my mother wasn't very interested in politics at all. She was more interested in Tom Jones the singer, whom she loved.

DENNIS: The working man always voted labour. I never really took any interest in politics.

PAT: And your parents never ever told you what they voted.

DENNIS: No.

PAT: My Mum never knew what my Dad voted or vice versa.

DENNIS: No. Never.

PAT: I've got a greater understanding of it now. I won't say I understand it completely because it changes from week to week. But I'm much more interested in it now than I used to be. I didn't feel that I could make a difference at all then, not that I can now I suppose.

DENNIS: We didn't bother to vote sometimes did we.

PAT: No, no I didn't vote for years.

DENNIS: And I know you lot all got to vote in this most recent election, but you'll soon find it just all goes in a big circle.

PAT: Swings every kind of ten, fifteen years or so doesn't it.

DENNIS: It's changed a few times since the war, but then it always changes back because they don't keep their promises.

TISATO: The Government are thieves. Everyone is money-sick. They all want to cheat, they want to get rich... they don't think about the fact that they leave it here. They don't think about the fact that you're not taking it with you in the afterlife

CHRISTINE: Well my mum and dad always voted Tory – Conservative. They'd be quite - not my mum so much, my mum was quite a quiet, private person, but my dad was quite vocal and quite gregarious you know, and if we had visitors some discussion would go on. It was an influence certainly, because when I first voted I voted Conservative, because that is what my family had voted.

MARTIN: In those days, I wasn't really into politics, when I was in my 30s there came the time of Margret Thatcher, and for me at the time I thought that was absolutely brilliant, and then today I think she did a lot of good for a lot of people, and I know she gets a bad rep from you younger people these days, but Thatcherism for me was a very big positive, it gave people opportunity, especially in the city where I worked. The city used to be an old boy network, and it was all dodgy dealing, but the city opened up under Thatcher and that was really good for me. And good for some of my friends as well. I got a job as a commodity broker, which was totally unheard of, I didn't know what I was doing, but there was opportunity there, and I took opportunities almost on a daily basis. We joined the EU, which provided economic stability, it provided international security, but it looks like we might be losing that within the next year or two now so, which is a shame.

DENNIS: Doesn't scare me, at all really. I don't think that anybody is going to let it dictate so much that it ruins the country. If the people in Europe want to punish Britain then unfortunately they will be punished as well. It works both ways. We import and export all over the world and now we've got free trade as far as I can see it and we're now in a position to be able to make our own laws as well. We're going back to the days when Britain did stand on its own.

JOY: My opinion of the British people is very low. Because having been born in India, we were treated like second class citizens by the British that came to India. They came to India, they took all the jobs. They were in the country we lived in. But they always, ALWAYS thought they were better than us. And when I first came to England we were looked down on by the Brits. They would call us –

XXX: Curry and Rice Eaters

JOY: And I can tell you, I didn't even like curry because I never ate it. And they would say,

XXX: Why aren't you carrying your baggage on your head like they do in India

JOY: Why aren't you wearing those Indian clothes?

XXX: And how come you speak such good English?

JOY: These ridiculous questions. Which would make me so angry and I would think, you are the stupid one. You've never travelled, haven't had much education and you don't know what's going on.

JANET: My family, they were all Labourites, all Labour. Working class and they were Labourites. But, I think who impacted our lives most, was Mrs Thatcher. Before then I think most prime ministers were, like MacMillan, they were very weak. Harold Wilson, he was a

really good Labour leader actually, but I think Mrs Thatcher really did change things, big time. Everybody felt the wealth, everybody got wealthier under Mrs Thatcher.

JOY: My children used to come home crying from school because they were called “Black shoe polish” and various things, and you know, they’re not that dark! They’re not that dark!...that’s how we were treated when we first came to England. So my opinion of the British people is very, very low. No, they haven’t changed, and they haven’t learnt either.

JANET: Mrs Thatcher really gave people big ideas for them to achieve. Our children are Mrs Thatcher’s children really. I did admire her, I must admit, I did admire her as a feminist, and I still think men rule the world, and I think she did a good job of beating that down a bit.

CHRISTINE: I’m not anti-monarchy – there are aspects of it I don’t like, But I’m not particularly anti-monarchy that I would want it wiped out. The queen I think is a remarkable woman, she does fulfil her role very well. But whoever took their place, because they’d have to be some sort of head of state – you could end up with someone like Donald Trump!

PAT: I love the Queen. I love the Queen, I love all the Royals, I love the pomp and ceremony of it.

DENNIS: Nobody does pomp and ceremony better than the British. They are masters at it and if you go around the world, and you speak to Americans, they absolutely love our Royal family. I mean America’s got no history anyway cause they’re a quite a new nation.

PAT: Queen or Donald Trump?

DENNIS: The British, I mean you can trace them back hundreds of thousands of years.

MARGARET: The Queen, I think she’s absolutely wonderful, very gracious. Yes, I think she’s been absolutely brilliant, because she’s never, she never passes judgement, even though sometimes she must want to say something, she must want to say things about the situation in various places, or some of the people she’s been made to meet or the things she has to

suffer to sit through. At least she doesn't have to suffer the Royal Variety Performance anymore!

JANET: I do love the Queen. I think she is very dutiful and I think she is very well thought of, but I would love to know the real Queen because I don't think she presents herself at all as she really, really is. I think she has been under Phillip's thumb all her life. I think that's most important about the monarchy is the stability of the country. I think because we are an island nation, a lot of people don't realise how small we are. I think the monarchy keeps it stable. You know the Queen doesn't really own anything, she owns nothing, that's why she enjoys her dogs and her horses because she does own them. It's the nations treasures she's looking after, not hers. I mean I get very jealous at the fact she has probably never done any washing up in her life. I mean I have a cleaning lady, I can't speak really.

PAT: I love the Queen, but I also love the fact that they bring money into the country, and they do lots for charity, she's the patron of god knows how many charities. It's just a good thing for our country.

DENNIS: I think she's done a good job.

JANET: I've always viewed charity work as very important. I've always been for the underdog and the most important thing as I hate, hate, hate with a passion, unfairness. I was into girl guiding, I was either under a tent or in the Café de Paris in Monte Carlo, there was no in-between, it was either one thing or the other. It kept me humble, being in a tent, I would never get above myself, I can't bear snobs. People taking advantage of other people, I can't stand it. I think I would have been a suffragette, I definitely would have been a suffragette if I had been born in those times.

TISATO: I used to work in Lanerossi, the big textile factory from when I was 15 or 16 years old. But I got married when I was 22 years old. Yes indeed, at your age Ilaria I had been married for a year already! But your grandad was jealous, because I used to work with men, he made me resign from my job to follow him around. My husband. I miss him the most.

PAT: It was much worse, much different to what it is now, women went for certain jobs and men went for certain jobs.

DENNIS: Industry for men

PAT: Yeah

DENNIS: Engineering, building

PAT: If a woman applied for a job like that she would she have just got laughed at. She actually wouldn't apply

DENNIS: Yeah

PAT: You grow up with a certain way don't you?

DENNIS: It was accepted

PAT: I never aspired to be anything different to what I was and I never had a resentment that men were out doing these jobs and earning more than me. And I actually used to think well they have to do the harder jobs.

JOY: So, I came to England when I was 27, when I was widowed... He died, and a few months later I came to England, and I would have to be the bread winner. Being widowed at an early age, I had to learn how to do all the man's jobs. Because there's no one else to do it. So... I put my hand to everything. I think a woman can do, other than lifting heavy things, that a woman, she's quite capable of doing a lot of things that a man can do.

PATRICIA: I didn't really work when I was with your Grandad. I think Clive was 9 when we divorced, and yeah, I think Steve had just started school so he was 5. And then there was, your mum, she was at school with Clive. I did go work after the divorce, I had to go to work then because I had three kids to look after so I took whatever job I could find really. But once

we, once I got back on me feet I got on with whatever I got to do as far as work goes and trying to keep a roof over our heads and that, which wasn't easy. But, I did it.

SYLVIA: They used to think that women are sort of like, less? Like the men used to go to work, and women used to stay at home. But a lot of us did work, I was lucky to have that home working. Its equality in wages, now isn't it, and I think that's how it should be. You know, why should we not earn as much as the men. You and Tim, both training together, going to do the same job, why shouldn't you earn the same money. I suppose there are some jobs where it's heavy lifting and that, but that's all changed hasn't it. You know, we get doctors that are women, and you get nurses that are men. And it never used to be like that. You know, it's changed like, women will go in the pub when they would never have used to go, well I did, and *you* wouldn't think twice. But years ago, girls just on their own, they never used to go in the pub, and I think it's a bit like that up North still.

MARGARET: I never ever remember my father going in a pub, or going out for a meal. And I certainly didn't. I didn't even go in a pub until I was married. The only time I travelled without your grandad was when I went to Amsterdam for a florist convention, when I had my shop. Pat and I, once we'd finished all these various lectures about floristry, we went all down the side streets where all the lady-boys in the windows. And you could hear them calling –

XXX: Live fucky here dear!

MARGARET: Oh yes! it was the biggest eye opener for a couple of London girls that had become country bumpkins. We never stopped laughing! And wondered if we'd ever see our hotel again, or we'd be caught up in some vice-ring or some wacky backy café!!

SYLVIA: Didn't go abroad, never used to go out for meals, like we do now. That's another thing that's changed. Now it's more of a regular thing, you go out with the family. You can take children in the pub. You never used to be able to. Which is better in a way, because you can take the children out with you. And I was, I was nineteen when I got married. And then I had my son at twenty, and then the baby that I lost at 21. And then 22 I had my daughter, Sue. So, I had three children in twenty-seven months. But things were different then, we

didn't have family planning and that. And also, when I lost the baby I wanted another baby so we kind of went in for her.

CHRISTINE: I remember a friend of mine, who I worked with, was getting married, and she wanted to go on the pill and she wanted me to go to the clinic with her, she didn't want to go on her own. And I know you probably can't imagine not being in charge of your own reproductive health nowadays, but that was really very new then, it was a very different way of living.

PAT: My biggest fear, I think probably was one of the reasons why I was a virgin when I got married, is because I was petrified of getting pregnant. Absolutely petrified, my Dad would have killed me, the shame of getting pregnant before I was married. If a girl got pregnant before she got married it was her fault. I preferred it the way we did it, but if I had my time again now, I wouldn't wait three years before I had sex. But having said that, it can't have been a bad thing because we're having our golden wedding anniversary this year. Yeah, so whatever way we've led our lives has done us well really.

JANET: I loved having children, I just loved them. When I had one I couldn't wait to have another, I just adored them. I have always been such a hard worker Finn, and I was 21 when I had Clive and I had lots of energy and, when you have your children young, you just grow up with them really. I love them, it was hard work. We didn't have any money.

MARGARET: Absolutely everything changed in my life when I had children. It was my dream to have children. And it was my dream to have a daughter. I know Granddad perhaps would have liked a boy as he said, but he's always loved his girls. I didn't go to work, but not because I was lazy, just because there weren't any nurseries or day centres or anything else. We just had to manage. And my life revolved around my children, and I loved it.

JOY: I think the only thing I regret...is that having had children so young, I never fulfilled my dreams. I wanted to, I like creating things, artistically. But I never had the opportunity because when you've got children, children come first.

MARTIN: I crossed from being a young person to an adult at the birth of our son Matt, followed by the birth of our daughter Kate, I think until then, we were still out partying as much as we could, and mixing with friends and doing stuff people in their early 20s do, but when Matt was born I was 24 and I think you're forced to become an adult then, your whole life changes. You realise you've got responsibilities and a family to look after. I miss my children, you know, good luck to them, I give them as much positive vibes as I can, but they live at other ends of the earth, but thank goodness for technology.

TISATO: I don't want a mobile phone. Now people are completely addicted to their phones, do you know what I mean? Of course, you know what I mean, always messaging your boyfriend. In my days we went out together, we stayed together. Nowadays people if they don't have their phone with them they go mental. You people must have your fingers poisoned!

PAT: I think families don't pull together like they did. Even things like sitting down eating meals together and having conversations and I think families are much more disjointed now than they used to be. Sunday lunch was a family thing and everybody went round the table and, and you talked, you didn't have your phones at the table and, you know you respected each other a bit more I think. I'm not saying the youngsters don't respect their parents now, well a lot of them don't.

DENNIS: I don't think they do. They just see them as cash cows and as long as they can get what they want, go where they want, do what they want.

PAT: But I think that that goes both ways. I think a lot of parents don't demand the respect from their children.

DENNIS: A lot of parents probably don't do things with their children.

PAT: And they haven't got the time for them. Some of it is because they're working I suppose. But for me that's a big thing why the country could be in a lot better place, if people had the family values that we had growing up.

MARTIN: Social standards, social standards have gone down quite a lot, consideration, respect. I don't know why that is. I don't know why. I think some people have too much money, and they don't know how to handle it. I think that's why there is a lot of alcohol and drugs, because people can afford it, whereas in years gone by they couldn't. Discipline in schools has disappeared really, there used to be discipline in schools and school children took notice of what the teachers said but that doesn't tend to happen.

SYLVIA: I do think now there's not enough discipline in the school. I've got to say that. That is a big thing. There not allowed to tell em off or do anything, and I think some of the teachers are frightened of the parents. Some of the teachers are frightened of the children.

JOY: It's important. To value what you have, to value your parents to listen to your parents. They do not listen, children will not listen to their parents. Children growing up thinking they know best, but they don't...

SYLVIA: But I do think there are some really nice youngsters around, I've gotta say. I get on alright with them. There's a lot of the youngsters go to the park, and a lot of them are Polish and that, and they chat and they are really nice you know, so you can't say all. I mean, black people. I mean now, nobody takes no notice. And I've got to say, there is good and bad in everyone you know.

PATRICIA: I think they've got to be understanding, they've got to think about other people even though they might not agree with what's sort of going on around them it's like, everybody wants their families safe and I just think at the moment, it's very, I don't think it's very good how we're not keeping our people safe at all.

JOY: Its these global wars, that's what's got worse in my lifetime.... which is so bad because so much hatred between countries which causes these wars. Because there really is no need for people to hate each other to that extent. But they have to blow up children and things like that that, it is so needless, so sad. When I think about it, I could cry. I really could. That's what upsets me to think that there is no love anymore.

CHRISTINE: We tend to look at the past with, we remember the good bits, the old rose tinted glasses, as they say. Yes so, my life is very different now, and it's very different from the life I thought I was going to have, I didn't envisage really that Paul would go and live in Canada, and that my grandchildren would be so far away. So, life is very different from the life you, I mean, I didn't expect to be on my own either to be honest, and it's ok being on my own but—you have an idea about how your life is going to pan out but yes, it isn't how I thought it would be.

MARGARET: Each stage of your life changes. It changes when you get married, it changes when you have children, it changes when they go, it changes when they sometimes comes back again. Life keeps changing, so no. I don't dwell on the past.

TISATO: Oh god. I'm one of those people that wouldn't change a thing about my life. What do you want me to change? I'm happy like this. Sometimes I thank God for making me like this. I have hopes for young people. Not in the elders.

SYLVIA: I do like the young people. I think you've got to be honest. And you've got to love people. I think that is the main thing. Love each other. Love each other. I think that is the most important thing. Do you think that? Love each other. And not talk about people. But caring about each other. That is the main thing. But the young that I have found are really nice.

MARTIN: I'd say don't be scared of working hard, have trust, consideration, with other people and remember we are very lucky to be born in a country like this, it's purely luck of the draw. Whereas you could've been born in Rwanda. You're fortunate to have been born in this county, don't take it for granted.

JANET: I want the young people of today to know that really they should never despair, that there is always a light at the end of the tunnel, there is always a light at the end of the tunnel. And to be kind and to be loving, because what you give out, you get back. It's like a boomerang, life, it'll come back and hit you in the back of the head.

MARGARET: Aim high, but work for it. And be kind to each other.

DENNIS: Always try to do the right thing. Even if it's the hard thing to do.

PAT: To look after each other. To put somebody else before yourself.