

Note: Cecilia rang October 2016 to say she thought she had the FA 1974 date wrong. It is 1975.

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Interviewer

Interviewee

Ok, so can you just give me your full name please?

Its Cecilia O'herlihy

And how do you spell that please?

C E C I L I A. O apostrophe H E R L I H Y

Thanks, and your date of birth?

XX of the XX 1958

Alright, thanks. So Cecilia, can you tell me, er where you were born?

Er, I was actually born in a hospital in Walthamstow, but erm I was brought home to this house here and I've always lived here

Right so, what did you parents do?

Erm, my father worked for the gas board and my mother was a housewife

Right, and do you have any brothers and sisters?

No, no brothers and sisters

Right, so you've lived in the same house for the, for the whole time

Yep

Right and when, what school did you go to?

Erm, I went to St Mary's junior school which was in Sydney Road, just off Sydney Road inn Woodford Green, which was called Parkmore and then I went to Holy Family Convent which was the senior school which was in Mornington Road.

Right

In Woodford Green

And did you enjoy school?

Erm, yes, yes I think I did. I think I did. Parts of it you didn't like, it was strict, we were taught by nuns, so [breaths in] it was er, up and down shall I say, but yes, on the whole yes

Were there any favourite subjects?

Umm, now or then?

Then

Then, erm, no not, not specifically. I wasn't particularly good at sport although I enjoyed doing things like that but, not really, I was hopeless at languages, absolutely, no not really.

Right, and what was it like, having lived in the same area, the same house for so long, what, what are the, what was it like then? As you were growing up, what was the- what was it like?

Erm, as I was growing up I suppose things were very, things were different 'cos the houses were smaller. You find now that most people have extended the houses rather than move, and obviously there weren't so many cars on the road and I used to walk up to school and walk home from school and you'd see what was going on, whereas now I think perhaps it's a bit different in the fact people just tend to walk out their front door and jump in a car.

Right

And you don't get that connection with the neighbours, and people like that, you don't get to meet so many people [laughs]

And your grandparents, do you remember meeting them?

Erm, I didn't remember, unfortunately my father's parents erm had passed away before he, long before, many years before he got married, and my mum's parents passed away when I was a baby, but they lived erm locally, probably about a 5 minute walk, and that's one of the reasons that we actually live here, 'cos my mum wanted to, when she got married she wanted to live near her parents

Right, and do you know anything about where they came from, the grandparents?

Er, on my mother's side, my mother's parents were born in Belgium, and erm there is a member of the family that has done some history going back to about 15 hundred, 14, 15 hundreds on them. Erm my grandfather was from a baking family erm and he was a master baker and my, it went through the family and two of my uncles had their own shops, my grandfather had a shop in Woodford and he had two shops in South Woodford, erm and my two uncles both went into it as well, and I've also had cousins went into it, but unfortunately

there's nobody in the family left that's done baking. Erm, although, I'm hopeless at cooking but my cousins are very good at doing er, making their own bread and cakes and things like that, which is nice. And then on my father's side, my father's parents were born in Ireland, erm, he was born in Forest Gate, er literally down the road from West Ham. Erm and he was one of six children, and he really enjoyed sport.

Right do you remember the name of the baker, er bakery?

The bakery was Gurneys.

Right

The bakery, it was Gurneys bakery. They used to be, my grandfather had a shop in South Woodford in George Lane and then my uncle had a shop in Woodford in Jubilee Parade, which is the other side of the station

Right. Do you remember going there?

Yes, oh yes, definitely yes. Especially going to my uncles one in erm South Woodford 'cos my mother used to go every week, and when it was school holidays I went with her and I was allowed to pick out a favourite cake that I could then take home and have so I like that. And then like many members of the family I ended up working there as a Saturday job erm, and erm, I suppose baking really goes through, through the family from that point of view.

Oh right, that's interesting isn't it?

Yes

Erm, so when you left school, what, what did you do?

Erm, I didn't know what I wanted to do, erm, unfortunately my mother had passed away during my last couple of years of school and she'd been very seriously ill, so there was me and my dad. I didn't want to go to University, I wasn't academically inclined, erm so I ended up getting a job with the Greater London Council in the housing department working for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

Right

And I worked there for about 20 years doing various jobs but I stayed in housing the whole time and when the GLC was abolished and we got transferred over to Tower Hamlets Council so I worked for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, and more recently I've worked er for the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

Right, so what was your first job?

Myt first job was a clerical officer

Right

For the Greater London Council in the housing department. Erm it, it was actually in Aldgate, I used to go up to Aldgate East on the train everyday

Right, so what was it, the, from Woodford, the Central Line?

Go up to Mile End and then three stops from Mile End on the District Line.

And do you remember your wage for that work?

Oh my goodness, no! I dread to think! [laughs]

Right and di you socialise much in, did you go out?

Oh yes, I had lots of friends and I kept in contact with my friends. I mean a lot of my friends went to University but we still kept in contact. Some of them I think you perhaps had less contact with and it wasn't until several years later you know when they came out of university and settled down into jobs that you perhaps got back with them. So some people you would... sort of you've known forever cos they've always been round at home whereas others went away to uni and di their own thing but I still keep in contact with people. And also at wok as well.

Right, right and di you, did you go to the cinema or sort of out

Oh yes, yes, we used to go out to the cinema, we used to go, we used to go down to Southend to a night club [laughs] many years ago! Erm and one of my friends used to have erm a Ford Capri and er we used to try and beat the train if there was a train that was running next to- er the railway line was next to the road [laughs]. But er, that was a long while ago now.

Right, so erm, when you, did you, did you get married or-?

No.

Right

No, never got married. No

Right, and don't have any children?

No

Right ok. So how did the, sort of passion for West Ham come about?

My father loved sport. He loved all sport, erm, but he loved football. Erm he actually played for London School Boys, erm, he was born literally, probably within ten minutes' walk from

where the Boleyn Ground is now, erm and he just really enjoyed it. And his friends, he had lots of friends, but several of his friends had season tickets for West Ham and they were sort of a group of them together, and if one of them couldn't go then they would ask him if he wanted to go, 'cos they knew he enjoyed football, erm and he would go. And eventually if there was two, because by that time it was me and my father and he had, had no sons and they knew I liked football, so if there was two spare tickets then they'd ask me if I wanted to go. But prior to that when my father was at work, it was a big treat, he used to organise for his office for a few of them to go to the international matches at Wembley, and it was a real big treat for me 'cos he took myself and my friend, we were allowed to go, and it was a really big night out for us, because we were going to Wembley like with my dad and all his friends to see England play [laughs]! But he's always been very passionate about, football, but I think the West Ham came more from his friends locally who had the tickets and he was very lucky to erm obviously have the chance to be able to use them. Erm and then he got his own season ticket, and after he got his own season ticket the same thing went on, if there was a spare ticket I would go, always, erm, but then I got my own season ticket, but I was on the opposite side of the ground to him. And eventually I got a season ticket next to him so, that, that was really good. But erm, Saturday nights in our house, even when I was probably about 10, 11, and match of the day was on, and this was in the days of black and white television er, myself and my father would be in the lounge watching the football and my mother would be exiled to the kitchen 'cos she hated it, absolutely hated it. And then when the days of colour television came on it was even worse, and she had to buy her own portable black and white television to put in the kitchen 'cos she just never got to see anything [laughs], see anything when there was football on!

Why do you think she disliked it so much?

I dunno. She just wasn't, he fam- her family weren't particularly sporty, you know they'd always, obviously with having the shops they worked, you know they worked long hours. I don't think she disliked it, it's just it was something that my dad really enjoyed, you know, and I, I can vivid- I can remember him coming back from a football match, and he had this brown box, and it was probably about 18 inches square by about, probably about 9 inches high, and it was covered in brown paper, and then it had string round it like a parcel, and I was very intrigued to know what this brown box was. And eventually I kept saying to him you know, what in the box, what's in the box, and he wouldn't let me open it, and eventually he let me open it, and it was a tin, and there was nothing in it, and the reason he took it to football was, because he was small like me, and of course he'd go and stand, and that's what he used to stand on.

Oh wow.

So

Oh wow. Have you still got the tin?

Errrr... Possibly, possibly, I think, I think there is a similar tin I've got somewhere up in one of the cupboards.

Right, so do, when you er, you're first match that you saw, do you remember that?

No I think I've, I think- I can remember watching football on telly with my dad always, but actually going to it, I couldn't even pick out which was, was my very, very first match that I actually saw.

Right, and getting the season ticket then, and sitting opposite your dad, what, what stand was it on?

My dad was in the East Stand and I was in what used to be the old West Stand.

Right

And I was up behind the directors box, and they used to have to wait for me, cos I used to go with my dad and his friends in the car, so I used to have to walk round, cos they parked that side of the ground where they were, so they had to wait for me afterwards to walk round to get a lift home.

Right so when you first went in on your own with that season ticket, how did you feel?

Erm, a little bit apprehensive, but I was also really pleased 'cos I knew that I would be getting to see it, I wouldn't be missing out, I would be getting to see all the West Ham matches, whereas before it had been very much if somebody wasn't using their seat, or couldn't use their ticket for whatever reason I would be offered it. So it wasn't regular, and you, you maybe wouldn't get shall we say the better teams, you couldn't guarantee that I would see, these days it would be like maybe, I don't know, Arsenal, Chelsea, Man' United, whoever, you know, but having my own seat, I knew that I was guaranteed to see every match that I wanted to see.

Right, and did it, do you know what year that was?

[breaths in], I would say now it's coming up to 40 years ago

Wow

Something like that, easily, and it was in the old stand, but I was also very lucky because friends of mine, her parents, she'd been at school with me since we were small, and her parents retired to Frinton, and through them, they had a friend called Doris Bell and Doris was the sister of Len Cearn, who was the chairman of the club at the time, and when I went down to Frinton to see them, they introduced me to her, and as a special treat she took me in the old directors box several times, which was like a real big thing. The only thing that I didn't like about it was, that I had to wear a suit, and I had to be dressed properly for the director's box. But that goes back now, to the 80s, erm she took me several times, and she said it, it's nice to be able to do it for somebody that is a fan that wouldn't normally get this kind of experience. They've actually got a trophy now named the Doris Bell trophy and the

club give that to the best, I think it's the academy, or the most up and coming youth player that they've got and its presented every season.

Right, right, and the atmosphere at that time, I mean what was it like as assort of a young woman, sitting amongst-

Well I loved- I was used to it and I mean I would also go, at times I would go and see football without my dad, I went- I went to the 1974 cup final against Fulham with one of my friends and stood at Wembley so I mean I was very used to going to see football, and I used to stand, then when I got my season ticket I got a seat, so it was a little bit different, but I think my dad probably felt it was better for me to have a seat [laugh] if I was gonna be by myself over the other side from him, where he couldn't keep an eye on me.

And do you remember the people sitting around you?

Very, very vaguely. Er, er, only very vaguely, I can't remember an awful lot about them 'cos it was just so long ago.

Right and then when you got the seas- season ticket next to your dad-

-Dad-

-what was, what was that like, I mean what side of the stand

That's the season ticket that, well, I've had until now.

Right

So I've had that seat now for, I would say probably it's got to be 35 years.

Right

Easily. In the east stand, in the east stand upper. Erm the club did want to try and modernise this stand and make it bigger but unfortunately there's a road at the back and it leads to the bus garage so unfortunately they couldn't get planning permission to do it. So it's the only stand that was never modernised at the Boleyn.

Right, and the people that you sat around there with, do you remember them?

Yeah. I mean I've always had the same seat and erm certainly since the club erm introduced several years ago the bonds and they had bond holders, erm the people change slightly, so there were more bond holders sitting near me, but I've been sitting now with this group of friends for I would say close on 20 years, erm and one of them particular he lives just outside Southend and he comes and he'll pick me up for every home match.

Right, and were they friends before or did they become friends as part of the football

No, I didn't know any of them before, just, just to nod and say hello to, and that was all, but now it's become, you know people have become real friends, and you know, we email each other now, and we all know what's, what's happening, and if anybody needs a spare ticket, say has anyone got a spare ticket for this match, you know people try and help people out, and its actually quite nice, cos there's sort of like quite a, almost quite a big group of us I would say.

Right, and will you all be sitting together in the new stadium?

Not far from each other. There's a few of them that are gonna be a couple of rows in front of me and they've got 18 seats, erm, we've got, we've got some seats, then through the supporters club, through the board, the supporters advisory board, I got to know a lady who site probably 7 or 8 rows and she'll be sitting 1 row in front of me and just a little bit along and I know her really well, so, I, I think there'll be a lot of familiar faces which is really nice, but erm, I think one of the things is when, erm David Sullivan, David Gold took over the club, I wrote to Mr Sullivan I wasn't happy because of the state of the lady's toilets in the east stand, and I wrote to him a bit of a stropo letter, because they, the old fashioned high level cisterns, and a lady had gone in and when she pulled the chain the lid of the cistern had come off and fallen down on her, and luckily it hadn't hurt her but she was pregnant at the time. So I wrote him this letter, I was, I was incensed about that and I was also incensed about the fact West Ham at that time were offering special discounts for people who weren't season ticket holders for matches and erm they weren't offering it to the season ticket holders, and there was a lot of season ticket holders that felt like me, so anyway, I got home one night and I'd had enough so I sat down and wrote this letter. Thought I'm not gonna send it to the club and I sent it to David Sullivan's home address, and within a week, well within five days I'd had a reply from him, erm and he was saying that they had only recently taken over the club and they would sort out the toilets, and they, 'cos I actually said if you want to meet me in the lady's toilets and come and see the conditions, it's alright for you, you sit in the directors box, you haven't got a clue what it's like over in our stand, cos we were the only stand that hasn't been modernised at all, nothing'd happened to it, erm, and he'd obviously dictated this letter, and he'd obviously read it back, read it after and on the bottom he'd actually handwritten on it, he actually put, 'if you can think of anything else we can do for our season ticket holders or, please let me know', and I thought that was actually quite nice 'cos he didn't just dictate a letter and send it out as a response he'd actually taken the time to write something a bit more personal saying you know, if you can think of anything, or how supporters can be involved please contact me.

Right

Which I thought was really nice, and that was before the supporter's board. And after that letter, within two weeks we had brand new toilets

Wow

So, er I was very impressed, erm and, then I had erm, the only other thing was I got upset about 'cos we had this old fashioned hand drier that used to throw out cold air, and erm, I was,

I just got really annoyed about that so I wrote about that and sure enough we got a new hand drier but er, when er the gentleman that as doing it in the club rang me and spoke to me about it, a long conversation with me, and erm he said to me, he said I hear you've complained about the hand drier, so I said yes, it's the same hand drier, it's been there for at least 20 years, I said it doesn't even chuck out hot air, you know, your hand are always, especially in the winter, it's always cold, cos there's no hot water over there, it's always cold water, 'cos they can't have hot water, erm, and erm he said to me well what do you want? I said I want a Dyson, so he said to me do you think we've got lots of money, so I said to him if you don't ask you don't get. Well I didn't get my Dyson but I did get a hand drier that worked an awful lot better and was still there until we left the ground.

Wow, and were three, were there many women around you, watching the football, did it increase?

It has increased over the years. In mean initially, no. Initially definitely not.

Right. Did you feel an outsider?

No not at all cos I used to go, my dada and I used to enjoy it, and I think, you know, I'd gone with his friends and also one of the er people who sat next to them, his daughter used to go as well, so her and I would always sit together, so there were like the two of use, so that was actually quite nice.

Right, what do you think it was about West Ham that sort of attracted your dad to it, at the beginning?

I think probably because of the proximity to where he was born and it was his local club. That, that, that's the reality of it.

Right, and what is it, I mean obviously your dads sort of love and passion for it got through to you, but when you watch them,. What is it about West Ham that sort of-

There's just something special, I j- just really enjoy it because erm, expect the unexpected, things happen, I mean yes there are good days and there are bad days. There are days when I come out taring my hair out saying how absolutely horrendous we've played and it's been awful, and I never want to see them again, and then on the other hand I'll come out saying wow, can't believe they did that, they did really well.

Right

But my dad was always one, if they played badly, he would always, I can remember going home in the car, and he'd say well they played badly they deserved to lose, and his friends wouldn't be particularly happy, because it, it was their team, erm, and er, I don't think appreciated shall I say that the reality, that that comment was actually quite true, but they didn't like being told it [laughs]! Whereas my dad like to go, he enjoyed the football, you know, he would look at the football, and he'd say, he'd say things like, that footballer

deserved to score, you could see if he's got by however many players, say 3 or 4 players and he's made a long run and he then scores, and that, that's what makes a good goal, apart from the fact where obviously you get goals now where people score from free kicks and their way out, erm which is also really good. So I, I guess that's where I get my passion from.

And you mentioned, just a while ago, about the bond holders, West Ham Fans, how do you feel about those fans that are not as rooted in the team?

Well, the bond holders are very rooted 'cos it was a way of erm, making money. I think West Ham ended up, the issued just over 800 bonds, and people had to pay 1000 pounds if you wanted a bond and you would then have your right to that seat, I think it's for 150 years, something like that. Erm and they would pay you back, 'cos they wanted to build a new stand and this was to do with the financing of it, that you would get 100 pound off your season ticket for the 109 seasons, so it meant a commitment from you to have a season ticket for 10 years. And at that stage, that's if you wanted to get your money back obviously. At that stage I didn't perhaps appreciate it as much as I do, and with hindsight I think I probably would've done a lot better by getting a bond.

Right

But I sit next to bond holders, and bond holders sit behind me, and everyone gets on really well.

Right, right. I suppose I was think of those fans they call like the plastic fans?

Oh no, these aren't plastic fans, these, these ones come in week in, week out. Yes there the passionate ones.

And the atmosphere on Green Street on a, on a match day, what's that like?

Umm electric. It depends who they're playing but the reality is, is its electric. It's a sort of sea of claret and blue and there's only one stall in green street that will sell the opposing teams colours, every, all the other stalls that sell scarves and erm, hats and flags and what have you, will all be selling West Ham ones, but you just have the one which will sell whatever team we've playing, will sort of sell their colours. Erm, and I suppose it, it's different, I mean it's a long while since I've been by tube, but even though, the atmosphere on the train going, you know going to the ground is such, you the supporters all get on, like loads of supporters will get on and everybody be really happy, and erm, there's always a good atmosphere coming out of the station and then walking down Green Street. R- really nice atmosphere. I think West Ham fans have learnt to be positive over the years.

I was gonna say, how do you cope with disappointment?

[breaths in] Erm, you accept it. [sighs] You have to accept it cos there's nothing you do. Perhaps you get a bit frustrated and you hear people say, oh I won't buy my season ticket next season, and you know fully well that they will buy their season ticket next season, erm.

No I mean West Ham don't always win but as long as they put in the work, if the players put in the work and they try that's the main thing. I think it's more frustrating when you look at the players, and you think some of those players are on like 80 thousand pounds a week plus, and you think, you know, they[re not doing anything, why aren't you moving, why aren't you getting yourself up, and, up there, why aren't you getting involved more, and you know. Footballs changed, erm I mean when I used to go with my dad, I mean I think my dad would turn in his grave if he could see how football has changed with money, and I think it started perhaps when Abramovich bought Chelsea, I think that's when money really came into football, and money started talking. And I guess it's all escalated from there.

Do you think it's changed football? Do you think it's changed the game?

I don't think it's changed the game itself as such, I think it's probably, its brought money to the game, but from a- I suppose footballs changed the world over because if you think about now, with the Euros, you know, you've got West Ham players still out there playing in the Euros and we're now at the semi-finals stage, so that's, that's really good. And I think from a monetary point of view, I think they players obviously get paid a load, lots and lots of money, perhaps too, too much money, but then their career is very short lived usually. Is not, it's not like a career you would go into for 30 years or whatever, its nothing like that. But then you'd expect them to now perhaps to have sense and many of them do, you know, they look at other interests and other things to pursue for when they finally aren't playing football anymore.

Do you have a favourite player, or players?

I think one of my, my all-time favourites has got to be Paolo Di Canio. I just think he is just fantastic. He was erm a real bad boy, erm he was playing for Sheffield United and he hit the referee, Paul Alcock, and knocked him over. And he was put on a 10 match ban and at the time Harry Rednapp was managing West Ham and Harry Rednapp took a gamble on him and bought him, and he was just so passionate, and just such a fantastic player, erm he could just produce things out of nothing, and I think he's gotta be one of my all-time favourites, certainly if I had to pick my most recent favourites, he's definitely ranks there. And I did, I was very lucky to get to meet him, because erm, they used to have the erm, press and the TV cameras, the gantry used to be on our side in the east stand, before they built what is now the new away stand, or the new west stand. Erm and erm, he was suspended because he'd had some red cards, and erm, just before a match, one Christmas, it was freezing, it was the week between Christmas and new year, erm the commentator said, over the pa system, oh, Paolo Di Canio is just walking in front of the Bobby Moore stand, and everybody's clapping and we're all looking over, and it was him, then he disappeared into the corner of the stand, and 2 minutes later he's standing opposite me, and I'm just absolutely gobsmacked, lost for words, and I've never been lost words, and we're now, this is like minute to 3 almost and he's come up to go to the gantry but he'd taken the wrong way, he'd gone right instead of left to go up to, up the steps and then up the ladder to go on the gantry, so I was gobsmacked, but once he was on that gantry I knew he had to come down, so with a lot of help from a steward, who's still our steward, absolutely lovely, he's been our steward probably for about 17 years, I waited 'till he came down and erm I got to meet him and I got his autograph, and that was really good.

Did you speak to him?

Oh yes, yes [laughs]

What did you say?

I was just asking him, 'cos at that time there was a lot of rumours, he, he'd gone up to do, we were playing Liverpool and he'd gone up to do commentary for Italian television, that's why he was there, but there was a lot of rumours about Manchester United were after him, and er a lot of the papers were saying oh he's definitely going to sign for Manchester united, you know, he'll be leaving West Ham, and I just said to him, 'cos there was all these er, little children, or shall I say young children all asking him for his [laughing] autograph, so he signed my program for me, and I just said to him, whatever you do, you know, I just hope you get on alright, because at the end of the day, from a footballers perspective if a club like Manchester United comes in view and you really want to go there and its gonna further your career, then, then you'll go

Right

And people have to accept that. But he was just really nice, and he just, I think its perhaps 'cos he was a bit of a bad boy in some respects, that I liked him, but he could, skill with a football was just fabulous.

Right, and did you have, or do you have any pre match rituals?

Erm, when I used to go with my father we used to always leave very early, between half past 11 and 12 o'clock for a 3 o'clock kick off on a Saturday, and we used to drive to the ground and we would go into the supporters club, we were members of the supporters club, which was opposite the back of the Bobby Moore stand. Erm, and we would always have lunch before football without fail. Erm, and we all, we always did that. Erm, now, not so much. We tend sort of more recent times, just to get there, I say early, I'm usually there well before kick-off, and sometimes even before they open the gates to let you in. But no real rituals as such.

Right, and when you are there before kick-off where do you go to, where do you sit?

We sit in the car, 'cos we park round the back of the stand, erm and then we sit in the car and we just have a chat and have a catch up 'cos there's usually 43 of us in the car, erm and once the gates are open we go into the ground and we've had, as I said earlier, our steward, Ryan, we've had him for about 17 years, he knows all of us by name, and we'll go and have a chat with him, and say hello to him, and then the people start arriving who sit behind us and next to us, and everybody's just, is just talking to each other, so it's really nice.

And the stewards, can you tell me, what is their role? What do they do?

They erm, first and foremost its, erm to make sure that the people attending the match are safe, and erm they guide people to their seats, because you get a lot of people who may not have season tickets, who have just bought a ticket for that particular game, and they'll come up with the ticket in their hand, and they won't have a clue as to which way they've got to go, what row it is, whether they go right or left, up the stairs, or just walk along, and the stewards guide them to their seat, sort out any problems. Sometimes you get two people sitting in the same seat, but, and someone's obviously mixed up their ticket, you know they have to sort out mix ups. Also from our point of view, though were all seating, so the stewards don't do so much of it, erm there are some stands where the stewards would have to try and encourage people to site down because they do stand at football, although you're not supposed to. Erm and if the other team score, you know the stewards will be there just to keep an eye to make sure there's no trouble. But you've got all the CCTV, police cameras, and everything else now in the ground. I mean that, obviously, that's something that wasn't there before. What wasn't there many years ago, you know it's changed from sort of a policing aspect of it, and it's the safety of the crowd, and then if West Ham score they're out as well, just looking, just making sure that nobody's just going over the top with their celebration shall I say, for the goal.

Right, and how many seats do the stewards look after?

Wha- They put them at the erm, entrances, so they'll put them at the entrance to a block, erm, usually. So it'll be where you go up there will be a steward a bit like the theatre where you've got at every door, so at every entrance there will be steward, but then you also have a chief steward as well, and you know, they go along, but the stewards I know, they have to go when they're on duty, they get to the ground early and they have a meeting before 'cos depending on who West Ham are playing, you know, they'll be given facts about you know how many visiting supporters will be down, erm, you know and where they've got to be. 'Cos they might want them in different places in the ground. I mean there's also stewards on, outside the ground searching now and of course you never used to get searched, but obviously now unfortunately in this day and age, people have to be searched, their bags have to be searched. Erm, and just down in the concourse as well, just making sure that everything's all right.

That sort of shift in searching and security, do you miss kind of more, a different time?

It, I suppose in some ways I do, but I think the reality is, that in this day and age its necessary and they've got to do it. And if your realistic it hasn't only happened in football, if you think about the airports now, you know, things have changed dramatically at airports, and, and so's footballs changed as well similarly with the searching and stuff. Because, especially after what happened in Paris, you know, so, you, you've got to be aware and also I think there's a lot more awareness about you know, if there's a bag sitting there and it looks like its nobody's bag, you know, it's just been left, obviously, you know, people have to be more security conscious, but I think the reality of that is- I don't think it's so much football, but I think its society, 'cos its happening in other places and even if you think about your shops, you used to be able to go into shops and you would never see a security guards, you wouldn't have CCTV, now your videoed goodness knows how many times you go in a shop, there are loads of security guards.

Right, right, that's true. If you could go back to a time in West Hams history were you thought I've got one day, I can travel back to a time, when would it be, and what match would you say is the most memorable match that you've seen?

I don't know. I can remember going, I can go, I can remember going with my father to see West Ham in Newcastle and West Ham beat Newcastle 8-1, and Alvin Martin scored a hat trick against three different goal keepers and I think perhaps one of the reason, A, that was like something that as really good because, well the goal keeper, he scored it against three different goal keepers was because, the, the first goal keeper got injured, so they brought on their reserve goal keeper, I think, I can't remember if he got sent off of injured, so they then had another one, so he scored this hat trick against three different goal keepers, but it was also I think one of the last matches I went to with his dad when he got ill which was nice, but I think certainly from my own point of view I think Di Canio's scissor kick against Wimbledon which has been voted the best ever goal scored against West Ham, I was at the Boleyn that day, and I remember that. And that's just, was something else, was something good.

Right, right. The sort of, the shops and businesses on Green Street, how do you feel they'll sort of manage without the stadium and the fans?

I think it will be very difficult for some of them. Erm, But I think what people have got to realise is, the shops have been there the whole time, so the shops are open when footballs not going on, so the shops will be open Monday to Friday when there's no football, erm, but some shops, especially the food shops and things like that, on a match day their trade will probably be boosted by so much, you know, it will make a lot of difference. Erm, obviously to their profits and to their turnover. Erm, and I think that, from that point of view, there will be shopkeepers which may not be able to carry on which I think will be quit sad. But I don't, you can't blame the club because the reality is, is that, the club have got nowhere to expand to at the Boleyn, you could, they've knocked down three stands and they've rebuilt them. The only one they haven't gone is the east stand, and they can't do that because they can't get the planning permission, they even talked about putting a tunnel under it for the busses to go through, because the bus garage is at the end. Erm and Newham council rejected that. And the reality is football is big business now, and if West Ham want to be in that, and they want to progress, then, they've gotta move grounds, and much as I'm really going to miss the Boleyn, and I just, I don't know how much 'cos I got quite upset the other day when I went back to get my things I bought at the auction, because all the signs were gone, because they've sold the signs, they've sold crests on the front of the castle, everything had been sold. It looked, oh it just looked so bleak, it just looked so awful. The reality is that, that we've going to a n60 thousand seater stadium, we've got very good deal, erm on that stadium. Also because it's where the Olympics were you're going to get people coming, visitors maybe just coming to London, who just want to see a football match who think, oh yes, I'll go to the Olympic stadium. And, and footballs become big business, and, and West Ham needed to increase the capacity, and, and they physically couldn't do it at the Boleyn. So although it's sad, it's also I think, and there gonna be a new chapter an' a new era, and I think it's exciting. It really is, but erm, I took my camera to every home match last season, and I just took so many photos, 'cos I just knew that it's all gonna be different come August.

Do you think they're gonna lose an essence of what makes the club unique?

No. I don't think so, because I think, the, the majority of the season ticket holders have all got, I don't think there's that- my understanding is that there's only a very small amount that haven't renewed for the Olympic stadium, so a lot of people are going. You've still got the passionate ones. You're- just- I've heard, friends of mine went to a concert there recently, at the Olympic stadium, it was a ACDC concert, and they said the sight lines were fantastic and the acoustics are brilliant. Now if the acoustics are brilliant for a pop concert let's just hope they're gonna be brilliant for a football match.

Right, right

And I think as long as you can get the atmosphere, and I think the West Ham fans will get that, erm, because they're passionate about it, erm, that's what's important, 'cos that atmosphere has got to generate something so that the players know what the fans are thinking. Because my understanding is that Emirates does not have a very good atmosphere. Highbury did, and I can remember going to Highbury. Erm I haven't been to Emirates, but from what I've heard it's not good. And I don't think, I don't think we'll go down that route, I think West Ham players are too passionate about it.

If you could describe West Ham fans in one word, how might you describe them?

[Sighs] I think passion it's got to be, got to be the word I guess. I don't know. That's a bit of a hard question.

Ok. Alright then, let's just er- Erm, so the, are you looking forward to the first match, the first-

Yeah, yeas. I've got my tickets for the Eventus match, which is going to be the opening match, which is before the premiership with all the leagues start, but also, we are probably going to get a Euro cup match before then it looks like, so well have to wait and see

What date is it?

They don't know, they don't know yet, because it depends. There could be a little bit of a technical problem because the athletics are going on and they've got to put the stadium back into football mode, but hopefully it will be alright., I think the first leg is round about the 26th July and the second leg is round about, something like, I think it's the second of august or third of august, something like this. But the official inauguration match against Eventus is on the 6th August. And then the premiership starts two weeks later, 'cos first of all we're away at Chelsea and then our first home match will be home to Bournemouth.

Right, and do you think it will have an impact on the players, being in this, this new stadium?

Um, I think for them, because I think the facilities for them, and also for the people that go. We've never had hot water, erm at. Also I think the facilities are gonna to be good, as long as

the catering outlets, I mean my understanding is that they are going to be well run and competitively priced. The only thing I think what is maybe at the back of some peoples mind is, you know, there's always Westfield's, and Westfield's got McDonalds in it, so if you're desperate you can go to McDonalds. But you really want that, cos your better off, if you're going to have something to eat or have a drink before the match, to do it in the ground, because you get all the atmosphere and everything, and certainly, you know, the corporate, from what I've seen of the corporate hospitality packages, and the things on the internet that they've been advertising, you know the corporate stuff is going to be so much bigger and better than we've got at the moment.

Right

And it's what people expect now. At a football match. You, you know, you've got to be able to compete at that level. Erm so. I, I think it will be , it will be interesting and I think it will work.

Right, so how did you get involved in the supporters club?

Erm, West Ham sent a Christmas card out to all their season ticket holders and it just said oh, if you want to become further involved please email, and I emailed them and I didn't hear anything. Then I went away on holiday, in about the March and when I came back there was something in the program that said oh, we've extended the deadline for the supporters board applications, you've got 5 days to put it in. So, I thought, what's all this about, so I looked into it, and the application was online, so I did an application and decided to put into it, and I think there was about 130 of us to start with and I was one of the lucky ones that got chosen, and that was in about 2011, 2012, and I've been really lucky, I've been on it ever since. And I think it's fair to say I've probably got more passionate about it, erm being on it, but I've also learnt a lot I suppose about how a football club works. Whereas before, when I used to go with my dad, football was 3 o clock on a Saturday afternoon, well we all know it's not that now, its Sky TV wants it at this time, so we have it on a Monday night or a Sunday lunchtime, or whatever. But, its changed, it, its just really changed dramatically. Erm from that, from that point of view. But it, it's what makes, if you like the finances behind a football club, an', you know, how a football club is actually managed, and I think you don't think of it, you go to football, I mean normally I would go to football, sit down, watch the match and that's great, but you would never think of what happens behind the scenes, and that's perhaps what I've sort of learnt a lot more about, and I've found, I've actually found it quite interesting, you know meeting, meeting the people that, that work in the club, and what they do. And you know, it makes you think because, because before I suppose I don't look further, I've never looked further than just going to the match, enjoying myself and that's it. But now, I'm getting everything behind it as well which I really enjoy.

Right, so when does the supporters club meeting? Is everybody invited? I mean how does it, how does it work?

Everybody on the supporters group, at the moment there's 66 members, that's all they've got, because they reduced it, erm, we've had to reapply every year, and we had to get seconded

by people that had an affiliation with club, so it could be, you could be seconded by season ticket holders, you had to be seconded by 3 people, erm, by season ticket holders, or bond holders, or club members, and if they wanted they could write something about you. And you had to fill in this form and say why you wanted, basically why you wanted to be on the supporters board, what you thought you could do, and then my understanding is that the people at the club who got the applications went through them, but they looked at them in terms of the age and the demographics of the supporters at the club, and tried, picked out people in line with that, so they were getting if you like a representative selection of people. So now, what usually happens, is now, certainly for our last ones, erm, we get emails saying there's a meeting, you're invited to a meeting, they'll send you an agenda, is there anything you want to discuss, anything you want to bring up, and obviously they ask you if you want erm, you know if you can reply and then sometimes we'll get a special treat. I mean they, they, we had Sam Allardyce, came when he was managing and he did a presentation for us. Erm, so, and also, at Christmas we've got to meet some of the players which is actually, it's quite nice, and it's very relaxed and informal surroundings which is good, and what I will say from the point of view of the club is that every time you go to a meeting they always put on some food 'cos they appreciate the fact people are coming straight from work, which is good. There is you know, a lot of people might not think of doing that. So that, that's how we get invited to our meeting, and there's agendas and if there's anything you want to bring up- we did the- I mean initially they asked us about the Olympic stadium and how we felt about that and there was obviously 2 factions, some people didn't wanna go at all, didn't wanna know about it, erm, this is when we were going to bid for it, as in to buy it., and then of course that fell through, and it became the rental proposition which it is now. Erm, and then there was consultation as well over changing the club crest for when we went to the Olympic stadium, and the club said they wanted us to look at it first and see, and if we thought it was a good idea, then they would then put it out to all fans, or if we didn't like the idea and thought no, this isn't gonna work, you can't change the crest, you know, it's gonna be awful, then it wouldn't have gone out, and we decided yes it was a good idea, and erm it then went out to all fans, and you know everyone was hopefully given a chance to say what they wanted to say. But, anything I've done, in any of the consultations, especially with the stadium, cos there's obviously, there's been loads of questions asked about that, about the move and what have you, erm, people have negative views. There's negative and positive with everything. And the feedback that I give to the club is what people tell me and they don't like it well I'll say to the club they don't like it. But then equally so when I email out to my friends and other supporters, I'll say to them West Ham are giving you a chance, if you want your say this is it, don't come crying to me afterwards because, you know, this is it. If you've got something to say about this, say it now and I'll pass it on.

When, when the idea was originally put out there were you shocked?

Erm, I don't know about shocked. I think it was actually quite nice because I was thinking its giving people a chance to participate more in something they obviously enjoy doing, and then, so I don't think, shocked, shocked isn't the right word. They'd obviously thought about it, 'cos they'd written it, printed it on the back of the Christmas cards, that's how it first came to season ticket holders, but now they're getting in, they're people from, they've tried to get them from the, er alternative, the fans forums and things like that, and

they're obviously trying to widen, it's not limited to season ticket holders or bond holders anymore, which is, which is good.

I suppose I was thinking of the idea of moving to the stadium the new stadium, so that you weren't sort of, when you heard that was a possibility did you think I don't want to go

I, I didn't like the idea because I didn't want to move, because to me footballs always been going to the Boleyn, but, so my heart tells me no, I don't want to go, I want to stay here, but the reality of it is, if West Ham have got to compete with the other clubs, with the Man United, Man City's, Arsenal's, Chelsea's of this world, then they've gotta get more income and the only way they can get more income is by getting a bigger stadium. And they couldn't expand the Boleyn. And, it's not the end of the world, it's got, if you like the prestige, it's the fact it was used for the Olympics, erm, it's not that far away, and certainly you can see, I mean I know there's several points, I mean, you can be on the North Circular and you can actually see both stadiums, you can see both stadiums

Right

You know so it, it's not like miles and miles away, it's going to be different. I mean from my own point of view it's going to be different because its going to be travelling by public transport, not going by car, which will, I think it will be good fun, and I think I'll enjoy it. It will be different, but I'm looking forward to it.

Right, great. Can I just erm ask you about your career as well, because that will sort, we talked a bit about you starting work and then we kind of diverted a bit. So when you, cos you were in housing for like a long, most of your career

All my career

SO what, how did you progress up through that, and you were-

I, I started off as a Clerical Officer, then I became an Estate Officer and I had my own patch in Tower Hamlets in Stepney, and I managed the tenants. I was the first point of contact between the tenants and the council. Erm and I did that for several years and I really enjoyed it because you'd, you never have two days the same. You can be dealing with a flooding, a fire, you can be showing people a property, you can be doing an eviction, you could be doing anything, erm, but that's what housings like. Erm and from then I progressed up to management and I stayed in Tower Hamlets for quite a while but erm, then decided because I was driving into Bethnal Green every day and it was, er, when the roads weren't as good as they are now, er, so the traffic was horrendous, and sometimes it would take me like 2 hours to get home from work, which wasn't good. Erm it was before the relief road was build, the erm A12 relief road was built, erm and that's when I decided that I would make a change and I got a job with Barking and Dagenham, and er one of my areas just happened that it was in Chadwell Heath where the training ground [laughing] was for West Ham, so erm, I don't know, it's just, I've just stayed in housing always, haven't done anything else really.

And with the training ground being in Chadwell Heath, did that mean you could go and have a sneaky look?

I've got to say I never did. I never ever did, not once, but, it, its, it was quite funny because working in that area, but even working in Tower Hamlets was the same but maybe more so working in Barking and Dagenham, a lot of the people, a lot of my tenants and residents were West Ham fans, and you go in, and you, you go into a child's bedroom and it would be like covered in West Ham flags and things like this and you know then. And, and I think that's what brings you closer, 'cos you're getting all the supporters, you know, you're actually meeting the people that have got sort of the same passion as you have.

Right

So, so it's actually, it's quite interesting.

Right, and, did it change over the years, sort of groups of people that you were meeting and working with?

Erm, nnnno, I don't think so. I no, I don't think, it's funny how you, how you don't realise and then you suddenly go round to see somebody, you have to go round and see somebody, and you go round there and erm there'll just be something that you see and you think, oh they're a West Ham fan, and you just, you don't say anything but, it's just, it's just interesting.

Right. And did, you've finished week yesterday you said.

Yeah finished work yesterday

Right, how does that feel?

Mmm, strange at the moment. Strange. But hopefully, hopefully I'll go on to do something, I'll like to do something else, but er, I don't know what, I don't know if I'll go back into housing or not yet.

Right, do you think maybe something with the club, could that be-

I'd like to do something with the club, but I couldn't possibly work when West Ham were playing at home, 'cos I would be too busy watching the match, erm with he move to the stadium they have been recruiting people for the ticket office and for the shop, but its working on match day and I, there is no way I will work on a match day as such, because I need to be watching the football [laughs].

Right

And I'm not going to miss any of it because I'm working

Perhaps they'd put a little screen up and it wouldn't be the same would it?

Exactly, no, so

Alright well great, is there anything, how are we- is there anything else that you'd like to, sort of think we haven't covered about West Ham and sort of feelings about that-

No I-

About them

I just think it's funny how, how the fans all stick together and I think they really are passionate about their club. I mean even, even things like there was something a few months ago and David Sullivan was going to the ground to a home match in his Rolls Royce and a West Ham fan had broken down on the side of the road and they stopped and gave him a lift, to the ground. And I just think to myself that is like, the chairman stopped his Rolls Royce, you know, that's like really nice, like an', an' there is, there's a bond, there's definitely a bond, I can't explain this bond but there is a bond.

Do you think it's about sort of working class culture, do you think people, a particularly cultural-

Not- Maybe some of it is, but I would say maybe not so much now because certainly the corporate, from the corporate side you're getting people from the city, that's, you know, you're getting people from the city who are going down and even, erm, in the supporters group, you know, with the supporters advisory board a lot of people there, when you first went always used to be suited up, and you know you'd think, you know, obviously they'd come out of the city, out of their job, and you'd find out you know, they'd supported West Ham for years, so I, I think, I think it's something that's been, it's like my dad took me, and my guess is it's something, you know someone in their family has taken them to football since they were small, and I think that's more it.

Do you think that bond is unique to West Ham?

Yes. I think West Ham, West Ham supporters are special, definitely. Definitely. But then I suppose there's an argument that I wouldn't support any other club so I couldn't tell you what the other side of the story's like, but I don't particularly want to know. But erm, it, its, I- I would say yes because the friendships that I've made, certainly through the people that sit next to me and sit around me, you know, and they come and they pick me up and they take me to football, they don't have to, it's a little bit out of the way, but they come and pick me up for football, and it's really nice, an' and you've really got to know people well, and people help you out and, you help people out if you can.

And I suppose that kind of kindness, how does that sort of, when you read about the fans who are, sort of the troublemakers, how does that make you feel?

It makes me feel cross that there is a section, and I don't honestly think people that are trouble makers are fans of West Ham. I really don't because, especially if you look back to our last match against Manchester United and the problems with the Manchester United Coach being attacked allegedly by the West Ham fans, and I just think those people can't be West Ham fans. But then equally so I think it's stupid of Manchester United to have been that late for a match when they knew it was the last ever match being played at the Boleyn, er they only had to come from docklands, it wasn't miles away, it's not rocket science that the roads are gonna be solid, erm, they know, it, you know, I, I, I've got to say I feel quite a lot of that, was the Manchester United's fault that that happened. I, I really do, because that coach should never have been there at that time, you know, just before kick-off, and they had, then they had to make the kick off later. You know, because, because Manchester United wanted, wanted to have their warm up time, and I just think how stupid because several things prior to that they'd done exactly the same thing at Tottenham, they'd turned up late and the game had to be put back by half an hour. And I thinking just because you're Manchester United, you know, you can't just keep doing this, for goodness sake, every other club can manage to get their team to West Ham on time, why can't you? You know and knowing, especially knowing, that they know what the West Ham fans are like, they know how passionate they are, they know because a lot of our players have gone to Man United, they've gone on to play for them, erm and they, they should., somebody somewhere should have just had a little bit of forethought, forethought and just said no, we're gonna get to West Ham really early.

Right. Right, and how do you feel when a player moves across?

Sometimes I get upset, I don't like it. Erm, because it might make, if it's a player I like and I think they're playing well, but then I suppose from their own point of view a footballers career isn't that long, it isn't something that's gonna last 20, 30 years, they're making money, obviously it's their income, if they've, they may have a family, erm, and the reality is, is if they get an offer from a bigger club, a better club, make money, then they would perhaps be silly not to take it. You know, er and, and they've got to look at what's best for them, and erm, I think this is what's worrying West Ham fans at the moment because Pyet's playing so well out in front that you know, are the likes of some of the big European clubs going to come after him, though he's just signed a 5 year contract with us.

Right.

I think it would be a shame if he did leave us, erm, but, you can understand why, why players do it. And sometimes they do it for personal reasons, you, you know, they, maybe, they may not get on with everybody, or something like that and they may want a move, to a different club, but erm the majority of it is usually because, you know, a bigger clubs coming for them. An, and you've gotta be realistic, basically, it's like a job, in, in your job if you get offered promotion, you take it.

Right, yeah, yeah, yeah

And that's what you've got to look at from the players point of view. If they get offered a job at a bigger club, then if they think they're gonna make the first team every week, they're not gonna be sitting on the bench then they should take it.

Right and so finally, what, what, was your, the last match that you saw at the Boleyn, what was that like for you?

Oh, that was fabulous. It was, it was, I loved it. It was against Manchester United, we have a bit of a record with Manchester United in that we stopped them, we stopped them getting Champions League football on that particular occasion, and also in the past we've stopped them winning the premiership as well, erm, and I think we're a little bit of their bogey team, and, nobody could've written a script that we would go 2-1 down and then we would come back to win 3-2, no, nobody could have written that script. And I'd also think that the erm, after the match, the bringing on all the old players that erm, and if you like the celebrations and the fireworks and everything else that went with 'em, the music and everything, that the directors obviously have put a lot into that and somebody somewhere has thought that out, and they made it a fitting tribute to the end of, of the match. You, you know, and this, this, this the last thing that's going to happen at this ground, you know, in a Premiership match. Yes we did really well, we beat Man United, everybody's thrilled and then we, they just put on such a good display afterwards, it was just lovely, it really was, and I think everybody I've met keeps saying to me did you go to the last match, did you go to the last match

Right. And just very finally, what have you bought from the auction?

Erm, I've bought one of Bobby Mores medals, erm, I've bought a crest that is 1.3 metres high by 1 meter high, but I haven't quite decided where to put it yet, but I'm thinking about that, erm, I've bought a sign from the Paulo Di Canio lounge, erm, I've bought a replica of the George Rokay trophy that was presented by the FA. I've also bought this er, pewter dish that is very battered erm, and it was presented to West Ham in a pre-season friendly, they played XXX (1.12.07) in Germany, in the early 1960s, and West Ham won the match, but amongst the scorers was Moore, Hurst and Peters. And that's the reason that I bought that. Er I also bought the, er a copy of the premiere league chairman's charter for last season 2014, 2015,16. And its signed by every chairman in the premiere league. So, erm, I got a Celtic penant, and er some bits and bobs, some mementos from pre-season friendlies from games in Dublin and in Belgium, but er, no its nice because the opportunity will never come again to get these things, so I've just, from my own point of view if I hadn't have done it then you'll never get that opportunity again, so it was really nice.

Right, fabulous, well thank you very much

Thank you, thankyou

END



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Note: Cecilia rang October 2016 to say she thought she had the FA 1974 date wrong. It is 1975.

Interview Details

Name of interviewee: Cecilia O'herlihy

Project: Stadium of Stories

Date of interview:

Language: English

Venue: Eastside Community Heritage

Name of interviewer: Rochelle Scholar

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