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START AUDIO

0:00:00

Trevor: History of North Regional Broadcasting. Interview number 52, Judith Chalmers.

For this History of North Regional Broadcasting, I've talked to quite a large number of people who were BBC producers, technicians, administrators, but this is the first contributor, who I trust is going to speak to me. She is someone who has contributed a great deal to broadcasting from the north, and to the enjoyment of countless listeners and viewers throughout the whole of the country.

Now, all that began with the BBC Northern Children's Hour audition for this then 13-year-old, on 1st April 1949. On hearing her, Herbert Smith, a valued friend and colleague to staff and artists alike, wrote, 'Excellent quality of voice, with a firm, responsive range, rather elocuted.'

0:01:00 Well, was Herbert's comment, as a result of having had lessons with the late [Una Rashley], now Joan [Wright], or so this audition you wrote on her ink-blotted audition form? Let's start with Judith Chalmers explaining that last bit.

Judith Chalmers: 'Rather elocuted,' I think, possibly was because I'd had lessons with Una Rashley, Trevor. And now Joan Wright. She

didn't take on that name in another life, actually; it was one of her pupils who took me on, and she sadly died.

I remember, I did a poem at that time. You know how occasionally, on a Sunday afternoon, when the fire was all crackling away, and somebody in the family would say, "Let's have a little poem from you?" I used to do something called, "Oh, dandelion, yellow as gold." It was dreadful when I think about it now.

But I did elocute, and of course the first thing you have to learn, really, I think, haven't you, when you go into broadcasting, is that you mustn't elocute? Because it just emphasises it.

But my ink-blotted audition form. Yes, you draw that to my notice. My mother, who I have so much to thank for many, many things, and helping me to go into broadcasting, must be really way at the top of a long list. But she wrote the audition form. I think when you reminded her that there was a blot on it, she was quite horrified.

But the reason we wrote for an audition was because we used to listen, at home, to the Children's Hour plays, and loved the sound of them. I was doing these exams towards a teacher's diploma, which I eventually got, so it all seemed to go together. So we did write for an audition, and thank goodness I passed. By the way, the audition was after midday on 1st April 1949, April Fools' Day.

I went in a grey flannel suit, which was my first grown-up suit. I was at Withington Girls' School when I started broadcasting; obviously still at school. It was navy velour hat, with the maroon crest on the front of the headband, which said, 'Ad lucem,' towards the light. I remember, I wore that when I went for the audition.

I was taken into Studio One. An enormous studio. I saw it in reality and in full force later on. But I was put between very tall, high screens. That was obviously so that I couldn't see who was behind the glass in the Control Room, because that was to keep me nerve-free. I did a piece from Shakespeare. I had to do something on spec. This voice came from somewhere, saying, "Now, we will have the piece. We would like you to read it sight."

I wondered where on earth these voices were coming, I remember, at the time. As I say, I found out later. But that was Studio One in the Old Broadcasting House, in the Bank Buildings, in Manchester, Piccadilly.

I used to enjoy taking part in plays at Withington Girls' School. I also went to the Unnamed Society. There was a gentleman called Frank Sladen-Smith, who was the Director there. But my godfather, George Nutkins, was involved there as well. I used to take part in plays with people like Annie Walker, Doris Speed, of course, from Coronation Street.

A lot of the people who took part in those plays at that time did go on to become a part of Coronation Street, and tremendously in broadcasting in the North Region.

0:04:20

Trevor: You mentioned Doris Speed. At that time, of course, she was secretary to a brewer. Did you know that?

Judith Chalmers: I did not know that.

Trevor: Yes, she wasn't a professional actress at all, and she used to work for us in Children's Hour. She did splendid things. This

was long before Coronation Street and Annie Walker came onto the horizon.

Judith Chalmers: And there she was, standing in the Rovers Return. On my This is Your Life, which she very kindly agreed to come on, there she was, pulling a pint at the Rovers and saying, "Here I am, Judith, still pulling pints at the Rovers Return, and you're travelling around the world. Is this fair?"

0:04:56

Trevor: Well, let's go back now to 1949, and then, on 22nd June, a great moment for you, I think, because it was your very first broadcast. It was in the very popular Brydon Family plays, written by Kathleen Fidler, with you, Judith, in the role of Dr Brydon's daughter, Susan. Producing was someone who's very much a part of this history, because of the expertise and the professionalism she brought to her work as Northern Children's Hour organiser from 1937 until the end of 1949. You know who that person is.

Judith Chalmers: Of course I do. Nan Macdonald, who, in fact, was responsible for my audition. She took that audition, and she must have thought I was alright, because I got a telegram some time later, which said, 'We'd like you to take part in The Brydons Undertake a Flitting,' it was. In other words, they were moving house. I was absolutely thrilled. I got a guinea, you know, for that broadcast, Trevor. It seems an incredible amount of money now, doesn't it? So little. But in fact, at the time, it was a lot. It was exciting.

Trevor: You were very lucky. Sometimes, Nan gave only 10s 6d, and to others, it was just a, 'Thank you.'

Judith Chalmers: Oh, really?

Trevor: Yes.

Judith Chalmers: I was honoured. But what a tough taskmaster. I was frightened of Nan. When I look back now, I was in awe of her. She was absolutely brilliant with those programmes. Because she made such a contribution, not only in drama, for young listeners, but in her whole attitude, I remember, of giving the children on that programme talks and features, encouraging them to use the talents that they had. What a great thing. I don't think it's there now, that sort of encouragement for youngsters. There isn't such a thing, is there, as the Children's Hour that we had then?

But she was a bit frightening. She was a great disciplinarian. Of course, I'm so glad now, I suppose, but at the time, I went in fear and dread of her. All I can remember so vividly is because she had short hair and it was back from her face, and it wasn't flowing all round, her brilliant blue eyes. She always wore a kilt. She reminded me very much of someone else who I was rather frightened of: Miss [Kauf 0:07:07], my gym teacher at Withington Girls' School.

She used to wear long shorts, the pleated variety. I always thought Nan and she were tarred with the same brush. But was Nan shy at all, in any way? Why didn't she talk more lovingly and more freely to us?

Trevor: Strangely enough, she was very shy with young people. Brilliant at the job. If Nan was before the microphone, and the young person was listening at home, then the rapport between Nan and the listener was magical. I'm a great admirer of Derek McCulloch, of David Davis, but Nan, I think, had a special magic. Yet, meeting children in the studio, she had no small talk. She would just smile occasionally, but not very often. Not only the children, of course; the staff were rather in fear of her. The engineers, particularly.

I remember one engineer bursting out in tears, because he was doing the spot effects – the doors, and rattling the tea cups – and Nan kept saying, "Wrong, wrong, wrong." But despite all that, she had this remarkable influence upon us all; young artists, like yourself, and young producers, like myself.

Judith Chalmers: Well, she began to teach me the trade. That's what Children's Hour has certainly taught me over these years. It was she I started with, followed pretty closely by you, Trevor. That's taught me the trade, which has lasted me for all my life. But I'm jumping a bit, aren't I?

0:08:46

Trevor: Yes. We're going to go back to young Miss Chalmers and 1949 and the 1950s.

Judith Chalmers: We had coaching classes, of course. Do you remember those?

Trevor: Yes, Herbert's.

Judith Chalmers: On Herbert Smith's coaching classes. That was exciting, because there were young men there too. It was boys and girls together. We used to go in on a Sunday. On the balcony of Studio One in Manchester, there were these enormous couches, and we used to sit there very- To begin with, when we started, we sat there, listening to her. We were given these scripts to practice with, and then we were told how to use the microphone in different ways. How you shouted across the microphone without bursting the ribbon, and how you could whisper without getting too much of a hiss on the sound.

All that technique we were taught. Weren't we lucky? Well, as far as I'm concerned, it's never been like that. I was very fortunate to get that training early on, and it was exciting, too, seeing the boys.

0:09:44

Trevor: Well, one of them was Brian Trueman, and Nan said, "No," she wasn't going to pass him. Herbert said, "Well, let me put him into coaching classes."

Judith Chalmers: Oh, was this to get rid of my elocuting? It's suddenly struck me.

0:09:58

Trevor: No. Well, it could have been. No, I don't think that would have been the case. But certainly, Brian was rather hesitant and rather shy, and Nan didn't think he was going to make it. But Herbert said, "No, I'd like to take this young lad into coaching classes." It was quite nerve-racking.

Judith Chalmers: Oh, yes, but it was fun too. It was so different. It happened at the weekends, if I remember correctly. I think they were Sundays when we used to go, so we weren't missing school. Although, eventually, of course, with some of the broadcasts, I was allowed days off school.

0:10:35

Trevor: Yes, we used to write to your Head of English Department, I remember. Now, you were in three or four of the Brydon Family serials, I see. Then Nan selects you to take part in the 1949 August Bank Holiday quiz. How did you do?

Judith Chalmers: (Laughter) I haven't the faintest idea, Trevor. I cannot remember, probably because I was so bad. Because I think if we're fortunate, we can blot things out, which are really the worst possible things that you've done. That must have been one of them. I've never enjoyed taking part in a quiz, ever, in my broadcasting career, and I'm afraid, now, I turn them down. It must have been a memory of those early days.

Actually, I remember working with you for the first time. Do you know? You haven't altered. This sounds like an admiration society. But you were always debonair. You've always been slim and trim, Trevor, and your little moustache. You have not changed. Why is it you haven't got a tummy and a spare tyre, like everybody else has as they've got older?

0:11:37

Trevor: Well, the moustache has shrunk. Haven't you noticed?

Judith Chalmers: No, I haven't. It's got a bit greyer, but you haven't changed at all. It was the start of the birth of the Lonsdale series, wasn't it, broadcast across the country, lives of famous northerners?

Trevor: Oh, yes.

Judith Chalmers: The first one was with Frederick Delius, yes.

Trevor: Oh, yes, and you were his daughter, Minnie.

Judith Chalmers: Yes, and I was a sister to Sir John Franklin, the explorer. Then Our House, you reminded me about in the notes.

Trevor: Oh, Muriel Levy.

Judith Chalmers: Yes, I was a sister in that. I played quite a lot of sisters, didn't I?

0:12:13

Trevor: Mmm. Talking of sisters, you were joined in Children's Hour, in the early 1950s, by your own real sister, Sandra, who later was to become Editor of Woman's Hour in London. Then currently, she's Head of Network Radio Presentation.

Judith Chalmers: Yes, radio plays and publicity. In fact, she ran Radio Stoke, of course, and got it to the top of the local radio stations for six years, before she came to London as Editor of Woman's Hour.

She told me the other day, and reminded me, that one of the reasons she decided that she would like to take part in Children's Hour plays was because we did get days off school. She thought, "Well, if Judy can have a day off school, I'd very much like to have a day off school."

So she wrote for an audition, or Mummy, again, helped with that. She had her first broadcast on her 13th birthday in Out of School, the programme that I was presenting then. You will remember very well, because Margaret, your wife, wrote the scripts for Take Your Cue, where you had your chance to do a bit of acting. Sandy's first broadcast was on her 13th birthday, and because she's a leap-year baby, I'm not quite sure where it fell that- It was either 28th February, or 1st March.

But she took her first broadcast, and our father was still alive then. Daddy, when she got home, said, "Yes, that was very good." Then, when she did her second broadcast, he said, "Mmm, good, but you haven't got that ping that's coming through the microphone." That's the word, apparently, that she's used many times since, when she's helped people to get into broadcasting; people who've come for jobs, either at Stoke or Woman's Hour.

There's a special relationship we have with a microphone, isn't there? We've touched on it earlier. You go into people's homes, you go into people's rooms, and it's such a personal thing, radio. People are listening to you, perhaps, on their own. Daddy obviously felt, in that second broadcast, she didn't quite get through to the listeners. But then, just before he died, she was Ellie in the Charles Kingsley's Water Babies, and he said, "That was alright. The ping came through."

Of course, that was the same year that Daddy died, 1953, Coronation year, that we did R F Delderfield's The Queen Came By. I was in that, and there was one line I had to say

that was, "I'm having a baby." I can remember this line to this day. I got so emotional about it. I was a young girl, who should not have been having baby. I'm thinking that at the time.

But of course, yes, it's something that we've both enjoyed, those Children's Hour programmes.

0:14:48

Trevor: You mentioned the Water Babies. Again, adapted by Muriel Levy. Music by Henry [Reid], and Doris Gamble singing the them tune, Clear and Cool.

Judith Chalmers: Oh, it was beautiful.

0:15:01

Trevor: Joan Littlewood as Mrs-Do-As-You-Would-Be-Done-By, was it?

Judith Chalmers: Yes, it was. Yes, Joan. The work in Manchester, look at Joan Littlewood; what a lot of us you all produced, didn't you? How you nurtured the talents that, hopefully, we had, and brought us out, and gave us a chance to do things, to find out what we could do.

0:15:24

Trevor: Well, it was the BBC that put the chance there, Judith, in having a daily programme for young people. In order to sustain a daily programme, the organisers in London, Derek McCulloch and David Davis, the organiser in Wales, Scotland, all round the country, each of us, it was part of our job to audition for drama, for music, for writing. So Olive Shapley in

the 1930s, started Your Own Ideas. Marvellous vehicle. Then we had young artists.

Judith Chalmers: And of course, look at the people who have come from Northern Children's Hour in that sphere. Peter Maxwell Davies was launched on his career as a composer from there. John Ogdon, Martin Milner, John Hopkins. Didn't Brian Redhead come as a musician and bring an instrument, on the bus, to Children's Hour?

Trevor: He did, yes. He thought he was as good as Benny Goodman. He played the clarinet for Nan Macdonald from Newcastle. What I thought was lovely, Brian said, in later years, going back on the tram, having just broadcast, he thought, "Well, if I sit near some of the people who are in the other seats, I'll be able to hear them. They're bound to say, 'Were you listening to the radio? Did you hear that young boy with his clarinet?'"

Judith Chalmers: How sweet.

Trevor: This was only half an hour, having come out of Broadcasting House, having broadcast for the first time. He was convinced people would be talking about him. That was the magic of radio.

Judith Chalmers: Yes. And the magic of radio came to me too. I can't tell you, Trevor, the thrill when I was asked to do other things. You do three Brydons, and you do another little play, and I was waiting for the phone to ring. Pat Paul, who was your secretary for a

long time would say, "Judith, we have another broadcast for you. Can you do it on such and such-?" The excitement, the tingle, was absolutely brilliant. I can't tell you how much I enjoyed it. I've always enjoyed my broadcasting. I'm very fortunate. I've never thought of it as a job, in a way, because it's such a pleasure.

0:17:42

Trevor: What is rather nice, we've talked about Judith and Sandra Chalmers, and then, of course, we also had two brothers who became broadcasting personalities: Geoffrey Wheeler. You mentioned Out of School; that was the teenage magazine that Gwen Pain- After Nan left, Gwen became organiser. She thought Children's Hour should grow up a little.

Judith Chalmers: He did it with Shirley King, didn't he, Geoffrey Wheeler?

0:18:04

Trevor: That's right, with Shirley King, yes. And of course, Geoffrey, then, was joined by his brother, Peter.

Judith Chalmers: Oh, I liked Peter. I still do like Peter. We were very good friends. Our father, apparently, gave him driving lessons when he was helping him towards his test.

0:18:21

Trevor: Really?

Judith Chalmers: Yes. When I was talking to Sandy the other day about things that had happened in the past, she said, "Yes, did you know that Daddy used to give Peter-?" Because his father was the

manager of the Grand Hotel in Manchester. I used to go to their flat within the hotel, which was absolutely delightful. They had a Boxer dog, if I remember, who tried to knock me and the door down. He was a very lively dog.

0:18:45

Trevor: Yes, the Boxer dog did rather overpower as you walked into the Wheeler household.

Judith Chalmers: Yes. But yes, two brothers. Great brothers, and very talented. Geoffrey had a law degree, didn't he?

Trevor: Yes.

Judith Chalmers: And Peter was at William Hulme Grammar School. I think he was one of the boys in the coaching classes. That's why they were so good.

0:19:06

Trevor: Now, I've talked about your sister roles. I think another broadcast sister role, and this was to come to the attention of the nation, was when Herbert gave you a lead part in the Alick Hayes adventure series, The Derringer Children. That started, Judith, in January 1951. You tell me about that as you saw it.

Judith Chalmers: Oh, it was an adventure serial. I had two brothers, John Anthony Howard was one, and Paul Rathbone, for a time, was the younger one. I was the slightly bossy older sister. Then Scott [Finch 0:19:44] took over Paul's... And Alick Hayes wrote it. John Warrington was our father. We used to get into the

most difficult situations, and we had to, somehow, use all our ingenuity to get out of them.

But the tremendous thing about it was that, at that time, there was Request Week. Across the country, young people would vote for the programmes they liked best. And The Derringer Children kept coming top time after time after time. The North always did come out of Request Week brilliantly, didn't it, in other programmes? The ____[0:20:18] Patrol was another serial we did with Sea Rangers and Scouts.

What else came into Request Week voting?

Trevor: Herbert, as old Mr Poppleton, with Joyce Palin.

Judith Chalmers: Oh, yes, because it was Joyce, I-

Trevor: Yes, Elizabeth.

Judith Chalmers: Oh, yes. It was Joyce I used to listen to before I had my audition, because she used to be in the Children's Hour plays before I was. I remember, she played the piano so well too. I remember, she had to get up hours before she went to school, to practice the piano. I think her parents drove her quite hard with her piano. She probably enjoyed it, but I imagine being told you had to get up at 5:00 to play the piano for two or three hours before you went to school, I would have found that quite hard. But she did it.

Trevor: Her parents, I thought, were rather splendid. Her father was a lighting supervisor, I think, for the City of Manchester, Mr Palin. As a family, they lived in a nice house. They were fairly well-to-do. They had a grand piano, of course, for Joyce. When Peter Maxwell Davies sent in a composition, Vi said to me, "Well, I think he's either brilliant or mad. I'd get him in." And we met Max for the first time. I thought it might be an idea if he and Joyce appeared together.

So in Studio One, that you've mentioned, we had two grand pianos.

Judith Chalmers: Yes, I remember them.

0:21:44

Trevor: So on a couple of occasions, I got these two to give a short, 15-minute recital. Four hands on two pianos. Mr and Mrs Palin were so impressed with young Max that they bought themselves another piano. They had to shore up the sitting room from the basement of this house in Withington, in order to take the weight. Then Max used to go round every week to rehearse with Joyce.

If you remember, when you were introducing Out of School for us, Max became the resident composer, and he and Joyce used to play quite a lot of the music.

Judith Chalmers: I remember it very well indeed.

Trevor: But what a marvellous family to have bought a piano for somebody else.

Judith Chalmers: Yes, and also, to keep Joyce at it. I'm sure she loved it, but as a child, you tend to say, "Oh dear, that's a bit of a drag," if you don't want to practice. But it paid off so well. She was so good at it. In relation, what was the difference in ages there?

Trevor: Joyce would have been about a year older. Just a year older. Perhaps just a little, yes. I think Max was 15 when he came to play for me for the first time, when I first met him. He'd send in a composition called Clouds. If you remember, he played that and the very first composition for us at Earl's Court in 1988, when we celebrated Children's Hour and the launching of ___ book.

0:23:16 We've talked about sisters. Judith, I want to keep your most celebrated sister role until a little later. We've touched on Out of School, the programme which Gwen Pain introduced as a Saturday afternoon teenage magazine. It was thanks to Gwen that when we started doing television, I thought that we should do a televised version of Out of School: Children's Television Club. It's with us today as a programme in the 1990s in the form of the celebrated Blue Peter. Now, you tell me all about taking part in that for the first time.

Judith Chalmers: It was my first outside broadcast, my first taking part in Children's Television Club. We went to Merseyside, where I was again recently. All I could talk about, while I was there doing a Wish You Were Here programme, was the time that you'd asked me to present this outside broadcast. I remember standing at the bottom of the gangplank of the Royal Iris. I had to stand at the bottom, wait for a cue, run up the gangplank,

which had its lines across and its steps across. I thought I'd trip. I managed to get to the top without tripping.

Then I had to remember what I was going to say to introduce this programme. The responsibility was enormous. I started to do the piece to camera, I remember, and as I was finishing it, [Sarah Steward 0:24:47] came up behind me with the remains of previous night's fish and chips, which hadn't been used, and threw them over the side. I've never forgotten that.

But of course, that was with Wilfred and Mabel Pickles. I was very interested to meet them. I was, again, a bit frightened of Mabel. I thought she was a bit of a tartar, I'm afraid. I thought Wilfred was sweet, but I felt that she didn't always want me to be there. I'm not saying that she didn't like me; I'm just saying that she wanted to be doing all the things that I was doing. At one stage, I rather resented this, because I felt my part got less and less.

I thought, "I thought I was doing alright in this. Why should Mabel push me about like this?" Perhaps I was being far too sensitive about it at the time. Perhaps I was just thinking, "Well, this is my first movement into children's television," and wasn't I lucky to be doing it?

We moved into the studios after this, and we had a dog called Conker. It was the club's mascot. We had Cecil Korer, who was the Floor Manager, and he used to have to keep taking him out. He needed a bit of grass. Somehow, dear old Cecil always managed to get himself in shot. I think he rather enjoyed being in shot, didn't he?

Trevor: Oh, yes.

Judith Chalmers: ____[0:26:05]. Because they were live, those programmes, too.

0:26:09

Trevor: They were indeed. Ken Lawson built a very nice set for us, if you remember, and we would have the studio full of young people. You were still officially introducing it, assisted by Wilfred and Mabel, even though she-

Judith Chalmers: Was that the way round it was supposed to be?

0:26:27

Trevor: Yes. She never opened the cupboard and pushed you inside, did she, while we were on the air?

Judith Chalmers: No, but I'm sure she felt like it.

0:26:31

Trevor: Do you remember, you even did live film commentaries, Judith?

Judith Chalmers: Well, I'd forgotten that, I'm afraid, too.

0:26:38

Trevor: Well, we had the Scout Soapbox Derby. That was done on 16mm silent film, only because the programme budget didn't extend towards sound on film. I remember you writing out a script. You saw the film a couple of times, and you just did a live commentary. Now, Mabel couldn't have done that.

Judith Chalmers: Indeed, she could not.

Trevor: No, Miss Chalmers.

Judith Chalmers: But again, you see, you taught me that. The programmes taught me that. Part of my responsibilities now are live commentaries on royal and state occasions. So I began to be taught that skill, because I do believe it is, then. And the difference between doing on radio- Because when Out of School was on radio, I remember whizzing along the sands at St Anne's doing sand-yacht racing, and I had a microphone tucked underneath my shirt.

That was commentating for radio, when you're describing all the pictures that you see, and which the listener can't. Whereas on television, that's a different skill, because you have to know that the viewer is seeing, now, what you're seeing, and add extra things. And not say the obvious, like, "There's the Queen, wearing a scarlet robe," because you can see the Queen wearing a scarlet robe.

So I was taught both for radio and television. That's another thing, I think, about children's programmes and programmes in the north at that time: you were given the chance to do so many things. You weren't stuck in a little box and told, "Right, you are an actress doing Children's Hour plays, being the sister Mary," her name was, in The Derringer Children, "And going, with your brothers, on all these great adventures." You were allowed to commentate, but never sing.

Now, listen, why did I never sing? You probably know why I didn't. I can't sing a note in tune. I don't think I ever did that.

0:28:32

Trevor: Go on, sing Clear and Cool now, the theme tune from the Water Babies.

Judith Chalmers: Oh, yes, like Doris. Wasn't that wonderful?

Trevor: I must have been very mean in those days, Judith, because looking back and preparing this, and going through the Radio Times, I never gave you a credit to begin with, for Children's Television Club.

Judith Chalmers: Why not?

Trevor: I don't know.

Judith Chalmers: You made up for it later, Trevor.

0:28:56

Trevor: Well, yes. Because, yes, you did have another series to present for us, and you did all the presentation, didn't you?

Judith Chalmers: I did, and that's Let's Get Weaving, which started me, really, didn't it, in a way, with the Patterson, Robert and Mary, and their very young son, Graham Patterson. Robert was the curator of the Castle Museum in York, and an expert on the subject of wool and weaving. But I still have nightmares from time to time, Trevor, because you put me to doing a bit of weaving, and I used to keep breaking the thread. I was trying to get a full long piece, which I was weaving beautifully, and I

don't think I did that very well. But I did, I hope, present the programme properly.

0:29:38

Trevor: Well, you did. Now, of course, at the time, all children's television, whether it came from Lime Grove, or whether it came from a region- And if it came from a region, ten to one it was from North, because the other regions weren't doing a lot, of course. I had Mary Malcolm presenting the programme from London, generally from Studio E, or McDonald Hobley. I wanted you to start. I wanted us to have our own announcer in the north of England.

Judith Chalmers: You had a lot of faith in me, Trevor. Thanks for all that, by the way.

0:30:12

Trevor: Well, it's like racing, I suppose. You back those that you think are going to be the winners, don't you? I don't know. I'm not a racing man. All I do know is that in those days, we hadn't television links between Manchester and London. We had sound lines, but not vision lines. I had great difficulty in trying to book some lines in order that the Head of BBC Television Presentation – in those days, it was Rex Moorfoot – could see you.

I tried three or four times. In the end, I said, "Look, Rex, I do want you to see this young person." He said, "Well, I'm sorry, but the lines are difficult, the links, as you know. Let her do the first programme anyway. We'll see how she gets on." Which is what happened. Do you remember that we didn't hear from Rex after the first live transmission? I think you rang me on the Thursday or Friday. You must have contained yourself with

remarkable skill before you rang up to know, had I heard anything?

Judith Chalmers: Yes, that first programme was my audition, wasn't it, as far as they were concerned?

Trevor: Yes.

Judith Chalmers: You put me in that fantastic position, which, again, has led to so much, as being the first regional announcer outside London. The Manchester Evening News rang me that night. They actually rang and said, "Well, I think you've passed, actually, because they say they're going to employ you again."

I still have the problem of what to where, when. I know that I got terribly worried about what I was going to wear for that programme, which was, as you say, going out live. It was my audition, though, as well. It was pink, the dress I chose, in the end, which had a round, scooped neck. It had short sleeves. It was pink [cetine 0:32:01] cotton, I think it was called, officially. It had the Austrian braid going round the neckline.

I've looked at that picture since, and I thought, "My goodness, how did I ever get a second chance?" Because my hair, too, was rather tight and close to my head; none of the styles of today, I suppose, which are slightly more buoyant. Did I wear pearls? I think I was probably trying to copy Mary Malcolm, who was a real heroine of mine. I thought, "Well, I'd better try to look like her." But you didn't like that, did you?

Trevor: No, I think we asked you to dispense with the pearls.

Judith Chalmers: You must have had faith, because I wonder how I ever did any more after looking at those pictures.

Trevor: Well, I do remember telling you that you were about half the age, or less, than Mary Malcolm, and you didn't really have to dress up the way that an older woman dressed.

Judith Chalmers: Mmm. You mentioned McDonald Hobley. Somebody else who was also announcing at that time was Alex Mackintosh. I remember when I went for my second only ever audition. The first was for Northern Children's Hour, in 1949, and then I had the audition in London, in 1959, for television announcing for the network.

Alex Mackintosh, I remember going up to London for the first time after I'd passed the audition, and he said, "My goodness. When they said it was Judith Chalmers coming from the north, and she'd passed her audition, and she was going to announce from London, I could not believe it. You, with your Manchester flat As." I thought, "Is this man welcoming me or not?" He obviously was.

I didn't think I had an accent. I suppose we did, in some ways, because when I did my first announcing for television in London, I did a church service, and it was a voiceover. One of the lines was, "And the singing came from..." When I went into the Control Room, they said, "Singing, singing, we know where you come from." I had no idea that a hard G was part of a northern accent. And my As are always- I'll either flat, or flat. I'm somewhere in the middle.

People will say to me, "I know where you come from." I'm immensely proud of being from the north, so I never mind that at all. I say, "No, I'm jolly glad. We're good stock in the north, you know."

0:34:26

Trevor: I wouldn't worry about that. But there was one person who used to listen to Children's Hour, particularly on Tuesdays when Val and I were doing Nursery Sing Song with Dennis Decibel, the postman. Do you remember him?

Judith Chalmers: Very well indeed, yes.

0:34:37

Trevor: This man used to write to me and say, "Don't forget. It is coming up to February." I used to say, "Febuary." He'd also write to me, after Wednesdays at 5:50, when we had Children's Hour Prayers, because he said I used to say, "Now, here is the reverent," instead of, "The reverend."

Judith Chalmers: Oh, really? Yes. Also, I find, now, that I say, "Well, I'm going to this ireland." I have to really concentrate very hard, because I was picked up on that. It's island if you're going to an I-S-L-A-N-D, but I, for years, have said, "Ireland," which is the country, I-R-E-L-A-N-D. But I think colour in language and accent is so wonderful.

0:35:23

Trevor: It's quite obvious, Miss Chalmers, that you were chosen for your most celebrated sister role because you did have nice flat As – ["At 'em,"] and things like that.

Now, this time, it was adult light entertainment, and in those days, Judith, I think you'll agree, you couldn't get much lighter than being Jimmy Clitheroe's sister in the celebrated Clitheroe Kid series from 1957. And then in Laughter Incorporated, with two other well-known names, I think, Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise, a year later. For you, in 1958, it was a case of It's Great To Be Young. Now, in your own early 20s, you were with Ken Dodd. Now, how's that for a track record?

Judith Chalmers: It's incredible, and it was light entertainment I moved into, wasn't it, Trevor? In fact, Jimmy Clitheroe's sister. What a dear man he was. As we know, he wasn't very tall, and he had rather a sallow complexion, but he was so funny. I loved being his sister, Susan. Of course, Renee Houston was his mother in that, and this Scottish, fantastic actress. I've still got a cutting from the Manchester Evening News. She, too, thought that I might make it in television and radio, and said that she thought that I was alright. Now, I don't like saying that. Sorry.

But Renee Houston, the brilliant actress that she was, she was his mother, and In Laughter Incorporated with Morecambe and Wise. Peter Goodwright was there, wasn't he?

Trevor: Yes.

Judith Chalmers: Also, with It's Great To Be Young, with Ken Dodd, the Barry Sisters were there. We did all those at the Playhouse. Of course, It's Great To Be Young, with Ken Dodd, when it moved to London, we were obviously a bit older, because they just called it The Ken Dodd Show then. We'd obviously grown up. But I remember that Ken has always said that the nagging

Lancashire wife was the best part I played. Also, the Duchess. I could, from time to time, take on the role of a Duchess, which I still do. I ask people where my handbag is.

But the nagging Lancashire wife, I quite enjoyed. Also, in that programme, he gave me the announcing task, introducing the programme and giving the end credits. He used to put more and more and more words into those end credits, because they used to dip the music so that I could get that end announcement in. I had just the right amount of time to get those words in, but they used to put more and more and more. So I was going like a train.

When I got it in, and then they could bring the music and swell at the right note, he'd sit back and he'd say, "Ah, you've done it again, Judy." He was taunting me all the time. But they were great shows to be in.

Also, I worked with Michael Bentine as a result of those, I feel, later on, when I came up to London. Now, can you imagine me as Mata Hari? No. Sophisticated, elegant spy. That really shows you, doesn't it?

Bug nagging Lancashire wife, isn't that dreadful to be famous? That was my best part, that and the Duchess.

0:38:44

Trevor: It was James Casey, of course, who cast you as Jimmy Clitheroe's sister.

Judith Chalmers: Yes, it was indeed. But to work at the Playhouse with those audiences- And there was Hilda. Hilda was always in the audience, on the front row. What a supporter she was of all these programmes, like a lot of people. They would come regularly to the Playhouse, and sit in the same seats in the

audience, and listen to Alyn Ainsworth and the BBC Northern Dance Orchestra, who were there. And Roger Moffat with the Sheila Buxton Shows.

Sheila had a pub after that, eventually. She was a lovely singer.

0:39:20

Trevor: Well, you introduced the Sheila Buxton Show for me, which then, later, turned into another broadcast rehearsal, Make Way for Music.

Judith Chalmers: I'm sorry those programmes went ever, Trevor. I thought they were so entertaining. Where did you get all these ideas from?

Trevor: Having been so influenced by Nan, because Nan ran the sort of Children's Hour that I'd never listened to in London, living in Mill Hill. I listened to London Children's Hour. Now, Northern Children's Hour was another ball game. Nan did current affairs programmes. I thought they were rather left wing, current affairs. She had Robert Reid doing A Letter from London. She's had Letter from Paris. She really gave young people- And they were people, not kids. They were young people. She gave them a broadcasting service in miniature.

When I took over from the end of 1953, I tried to bring Children's Hour on, and not make it all Winnie the Pooh and Nursery Sing Song and things like that. Yes, we had slots for the younger listeners, but then there was the middle range and the teenagers.

Judith Chalmers: So everyone was catered for, and encouraged to listen to all these different things, and to be creative themselves and develop themselves in all these ways.

0:40:56

Trevor: I see that besides, also, contributing to Woman's Hour, at that time, Judith, when editions came from the north, you were also introducing The Week Ahead for listeners in the north of England. You know, what's going on this week in the north. You were interviewing for Calendar, the religious broadcasting magazine, doing regular contributions to The Light Programme series, Roundabout, and as I recall, finding time to join me with Out of the Music Box. Do you remember that?

Judith Chalmers: I do. Yes, hospital record requests, and we used to go into hospitals and talk to the children. And weren't they bubbly, these little children? I have a memory of that, and going round wards with that.

Trevor: Mainly because they were orthopaedic wards in those days, and if a child broke a leg or something, they were in for quite a long time. They hadn't all the marvellous cures that they have today.

Judith Chalmers: That's probably the first record request programme I'd done, wasn't it? I went on to do Family Favourites round the world after Cliff Michelmore and Jean Metcalfe. When Jean had six months off in the summer, I used to do that. So you taught me that as well.

0:42:02

Trevor: Do you remember Tripping the Light Fantastic for me on radio?

Judith Chalmers: Oh, I thought you were barmy then. How can you do dancing lessons with Victor Silvester and his Ballroom Orchestra on radio?

Trevor: Well, you did.

Judith Chalmers: I know. You sent me off to the BBC's Aeolian Hall in London, which, sadly, is no longer like it is. The front is still there, but it's sadly knocked down at the back. You said, "Please will you go to Aeolian Hall and talk to Victor Silvester about first steps in dancing?" But we did do that. People say to me now, "You worked with Victor Silvester on television." I said, "No, I never worked with him on television." But they'd obviously heard that on radio, because I never worked with him on his television programmes. Those were all the Come Dancing things I did later.

But you mentioned, also, The Week Ahead. The Topicalities Unit ran that, I think, and Michael Barton, who I worked with very many times there, and [Rosemary Horseman and Joan Oldfield 0:43:07] were involved there. And I think Kathleen Burk originally did that in the News Department. And Yvonne Adamson presented it in those early days, I think.

But all the different things we did. There were conferences on loneliness we covered. Showbiz, football, fine arts, and I did something for the Gas Council about cookery, and there was a tiddlywinks exhibition we covered in that. Every week –

Michael and I were talking about it recently – the number of people who wanted to get a mention on The Week Ahead.

He was saying that he really did have to try to get even just two words about something, rather than leave people out. Because people got so disappointed, because it was advertising their happenings. Very popular programmes, all of them, weren't they?

0:44:00

Trevor: Besides The Week Ahead, I notice you were doing Today in the North, covering such things as women riders in the TT Rally, women lorry drivers. And also, your contribution to the World of Sport.

Judith Chalmers: Can you remember what I did there now? Because Victor Thomas, I think, presented that. I remember I met Daphne Benaud there. She was Daphne Surfleet then; she's married to Richard Benaud now. She was the PA on those programmes. But I think I got involved with boxing.

0:44:30

Trevor: What about cricket? I'm thinking, now, of Mrs Judith Durden-Smith. Did you meet Neil through World of Sport?

Judith Chalmers: No, I met Neil through Pick of the Week in London. Because when I eventually came up to London, there was a man called Gordon Williams involved with a programme called Holiday Hour, which Arthur Phillips was producing. I went down to the Isle of Wight with Gordon Williams to record a holiday programme, believe it or not, all those years ago.

He had asked Neil, who at that time, was in Outside Broadcasts at the BBC in London, and was producing Pick of the Week. Because they all had different months or two months or three months at a time, and different producers would do it. Gordon had said to Neil, "I'm going down with this girl to do a programme in the Isle of Wight. Do you mind if we use the Pick of the Week office on Monday? Because all the tape machines are there?"

On Monday morning, so Neil swears, he came in, and he'd forgotten he'd said to Gordon that we could use that office, and he came in, and we were introduced. Then, at lunchtime, when I was going off to lunch, Neil came from his own office, further up the corridor, and we started to talk. He said he was having a few friends around for drinks that next evening, including Corbet Woodall, the newsreader, who so sadly died of rheumatoid arthritis, a very old friend.

In fact, I think I knew Corbet before Neil did. Neil met him out in Australia when he was an ADC out there. But Corbet rang me up the next morning, and he said, "I gather that you're coming for drinks to Neil's flat in Harley Mews." Just off Harley Street; very nice flat, it was. I said, "Yes, but I can't stay to dinner, if everybody's going out to dinner, because my sister says, 'Oh, you're not going out again, are you?'"

But anyway, we were the last people at that party, and we just clicked. We met and married within three months, which left the family pretty breathless, I think.

0:46:22

Trevor: And now, in the room where we're sitting in, your dining room, I notice collages of photographs of Neil, your daughter and your son. It's remarkable. Looking at your daughter, Judith, to me, it is like looking at you when you were 13.

Judith Chalmers: Is it really?

0:46:38

Trevor: Yes. She's a little older than 13 now, isn't she, Emma?

Judith Chalmers: Yes, she's 25 now, and she'd getting married this summer, in June of 1992, to somebody she's met in Australia, called Mark. Our son is called Mark, so we're having this difficulty at the moment, saying, "We can't say Mark one and Mark two, because that puts one in one place, and in the other." Our Mark-

[Break in conversation 0:47:01 - 0:47:13]

...had been known as Bomber. But strangely enough, Emma is going to be Mrs Bonner. So again, the confusion goes on with the names. But Mark, our son-in-law to be, she's met out in Australia. Emma just went off, having graduated and done her public relations training year, she decided she'd go off around the world for a year. And there she is; she's gone and met Mark. They're going to live out there, initially, anyway.

Our son, Mark, who's also a graduate, I'm glad to say, from Durham University, is going into broadcasting, Trevor. He's doing a course at the London College of Printing, and he's going into radio as well, which is lovely. He comes home with his tape machines, and it reminds me of the time I had to edit and do things. He's working on his project at the moment.

But he has got a special waistcoat for the wedding. It's come from Australia, from Emma, and it's the most brightly coloured thing, which he's going to wear under his morning coat. But great fun.

Yes, that is a montage. That collage is actually Neil's 50th birthday, and shows some of the things that he's been involved with during his life up to that stage.

0:48:22

Trevor: You haven't exactly faded out along with the closing screen credits since those heady days, have you?

Judith Chalmers: Aren't I lucky? I'm so fortunate, because the pleasure I get from my broadcasting- In my passport, when it says, 'Describe your occupation,' – or it just says, 'Occupation,' doesn't it? – it's 'Broadcaster.' I started in radio, as you well know, all those years ago, when I was 13. I've continued with both radio and television. That's the great thing.

Although, in the early '60s, when I passed my audition for London television announcing, I then went on to do things like national news reading and reporting, and regional news and Come Dancing and Royal Ascot, and commentaries on royal and state occasions. I still do those sorts of things. But I have never, ever, and I hope I never shall, lose touch with radio. Because I enjoy my radio.

I love just sitting there, talking to whoever might be listening. I did a couple of years of radio requests just recently, from London, on Radio 2. The letters that you get from people just shows what radio means to people listening at home. There are quite a lot of lonely people who listen on their own. But there are people who listen for fun. There are people who listen for drama. There are people who listen for music. And all those things were in Children's Hour in those early days.

I always hope that I broadcast on radio, because there's a very, very special relationship between the listener and the

broadcaster. And by Jove, if you're false, or if you don't believe in what you're saying on radio, doesn't it come out? Because you can hear, sometimes, people talking, and you think, "They don't really mean that. They're not being sincere."

So people occasionally say to me, "Isn't it easier working in radio than it is in television?" My answer to that is, "Absolutely not." Because you have no pictures to help you in radio. What you say and the way you say it is all important. You have to paint the pictures on radio, which you can't see on a television screen. And there is a relationship with people listening and people speaking on radio that does not come out on television. It's a very special medium, and I hope I shall always be involved with it until I drop.

0:50:52

Trevor: It's rather like reading a book, isn't it? Listening to the radio and reading a book, there, you are dressing the characters yourself.

Judith Chalmers: Yes. The pictures that, if somebody's portraying to you properly on radio, then you can sit- I sit, sometimes, in the car, and I listen to the radio a lot in the car. It's a companion, of course, above everything else. But I get to a place, sometimes, and it's not finished, and I'm home. I have to sit in the garage to hear the end of it, because I've got so enthralled and so wrapped up in it. I can't possibly go in.

Look at The Archers. I love The Archers. It's one of my favourite programmes. I know that Neil, also- I think, "He came down the drive ages ago. Where is he?" Of course, he's in the garage, listening to the end of something as well. Because sport comes over, too, so well on radio. I love listening to sport on radio. I know that an awful lot of people watch the cricket on

the screen, but have the radio commentary on, because the pictures and what comes out of the radio commentary are just so good.

And the boat race. You see, I used to do the boat race with Brian Johnston, who's a very dear friend of ours and Mark's godfather, luckily. Brian and I used to do the boat race together. We'd get out, and we'd be on the towpath, and the crews would come out with the boats, and we'd toss the sovereign that John Snagge gave to the crews for the start of the boat race every year.

Those magical moments will never, ever be repeated for me anywhere else. How lucky I am to have had them.

0:52:35

Trevor: I can't remember who it was, but somebody said to me, a long time ago, "The great thing, of course, you must remember is that the eye is a hard-bitten realist. You can't fool the eye, but you can fool the ear." The BBC very wisely devoted a tremendous amount of time, money, expertise on drama.

Judith Chalmers: Yes, and may they long continue to do so. Because things are being cut here, there and everywhere, but I hope they never cut that. But I do also think that the actors who take part in that drama, Trevor, love it. Do you remember Journey Into Space?

Trevor: Mmm.

Judith Chalmers: I used to run down from the bathroom, because I had to get in to hear Snowy, Dick and Jock. It was the only time she was fast in the bathroom, Sandy, actually, was when they were

starting shortly. You can't translate that into television terms, in my eye, anyway.

I'm quite sure that an awful lot of actors, their first love is still the radio. There was a tent microphone, and it was a padded cell, almost, wasn't it, in that Studio One?

Trevor: To give us an outdoor acoustic, yes.

Judith Chalmers: To give the outdoor acoustic. Standing round that microphone in the adventure set-ups that we got involved with, with The Derringer Children, for instance, we really would be stuck on a sand bank. The tide would be coming in, and you'd hear the waves lapping against the rocks. You were totally caught up in it. Never mind the listeners; we were. I remember that people used to come from London, and almost queue up to take part in those Children's Hour plays in the north. The great actors and actresses.

0:54:34

Trevor: You mentioned Sandy and co. [Noel Johnstone] was a regular, and Francis DeWolff, Ivan Samson, Jessica Dunning.

Judith Chalmers: And in the north, as well, of course, there was Pat Kirkwood, wasn't there, and Julie Andrews? Billie Whitelaw. Dear Billie, Bunkle.

0:54:54

Trevor: She didn't speak to me for ages, you know. Because shortly after Nan left, Gwen Pain, who was Nan's successor, didn't do drama. So Herbert and I carried on doing the drama. Of

course, Nan used to do the Bunkle plays, and I took over Bunkle. I thought, "Well, it's fine in Radio Times, Billie Whitelaw. Billie could be a chap."

But do you remember, we used to have read-throughs in the boardroom?

Judith Chalmers: Very much so. That was on the first floor of Broadcasting House, and looked out over Piccadilly. One of my prize possessions is a painting, which Neil bought me, of Piccadilly, with the trams. It shows, on the righthand side, the old Bank Buildings there, with a balcony. That was the first port of call when we'd got into Broadcasting House, coming to taking part in this. That was where we had the read-throughs. We all sat around. Those were very exciting, thrilling moments, you know.

Trevor: Well, one read-through that I took, on sort of part one of the latest Bunkle we were doing, I can't remember who the lad was, but he came in very excitedly. It was his first broadcast. He'd done Take Your Cue, and done okay in that, so I'd cast him in a role. He said, "Excuse me, but where is Bunkle?" I said, "She's over there." And I can see that boy's face now. He could not believe that that girl was Bunkle, was a boy.

I think, really, it was his reaction that made me think, "Well, Billie is now—" One could notice she was becoming a young lady. I said to her, "Look, Billie, you can't go on playing boys." She said, "What about Patricia Hayes?" I said, "Well, that's different."

Judith Chalmers: Yes, and Norman and Henry Bones.

Trevor: Yes. I said, "You're going to do other things. Don't be cast as a boy. So I'm going to take you out of Bunkle."

Judith Chalmers: But you let her into one of your cameo cartoons, which I never got into.

0:57:06

Trevor: Ah, that was as a girl, as a little Dutch doll. Yes, she was in Robert Rocket Esq., for 5th November.

Judith Chalmers: Yes, those were brilliant, Trevor. Again, as I say, you sent me to learn dancing on radio, with Victor Silvester, but those cameo cartoons were really the sort of Walt Disney cartoons of radio, weren't they? Talk about painting pictures, and the music you had for those, you had Ray Martin and Henry Reid. You wrote those stories, and the voices of people- You had so many people. Joyce Palin, who we were talking about earlier, in Children's Hour, and [Geoffrey Seel 0:57:45]. Also Geoffrey Banks, who was a man very much of the north at that time, and Rosalie Williams.

You sold those all over the world, if I remember. People were enchanted by those.

Trevor: Yes, Transcription Service took quite a few. Margaret and I were commissioned to do one or two together. We did The Little Log Sellers as a sort of Christmas musical for the National Broadcasting Company of America. That was a nice one. And The Light Programme commissioned us. We did a

music version of the Alice stories, sort of in cartoon form, for the Festival of Britain. That was another thing to have-

Judith Chalmers: The relationship that you and Margaret have is unique, really, isn't it? The things that she's adapted, and original plays that she's written, and the way that you've worked together is something to be envied, really, by many couples.

Trevor: Yes. I have to thank the BBC. They are pretty firm, naturally, on husband and wife relationships, and quite rightly so. There have been periods when this has caused some difficulties.

Judith Chalmers: Oh, has it? I didn't know.

Trevor: When I was engaged, I had to write to the BBC and say, 'I'm getting married to this contributor.' Mind you, we started writing together in Germany, in Forces Broadcasting. We did the Robin Hood serial with Nigel Davenport as Robin and Cliff Michelmore as Little John, and Grant Evans as Blondel, the singing minstrel, and Ray Baxter as Guy de Gisborne. And the BBC bought that serial later.

But once we were married, of course, any commissioning came from London, and it was either David, in London, if it was Children's Hour who did the commissioning, or Gwen Pain, when she took over from Nan, for Manchester things. But the Head of Programmes had to okay everything, and rightly so.

Judith Chalmers: Yes. But the combined talents, I remember thinking how lovely it was in Children's Hour when Margaret would have written something, and you'd be producing it. I used to love that feeling. That, again, I suppose, was all part of a team. We were a great team, weren't we? We were a family. Northern Children's Hour was a family above everything else.

0:59:53

Trevor: Yes. We used to agonise as to whether the Wheelers and the Chalmers and the Truemans were going to get through their matriculation and things like that.

Judith Chalmers: Well, I think Sandy certainly did better than I did. Sandy got a degree at Manchester, and she was the first woman president of the Joint Union at Manchester University. I got six O Levels, and had asked you and the BBC in the north where there was a chance of a full-time job. What you advised me to do was get a job where I could take time off to do the broadcasting you could give me.

So what I did was, I went to Miss Wilkinson's Secretarial School for Gentlewomen, just off Albert Square. When I worked at Manchester University as a secretary in the faculty of science, with Dr Burkhardt, I took my holidays off in days, to do the broadcasting you could give me. Which wasn't full-time then, but was still very busy. And then went on, and eventually went up to London.

Trevor: I only mention this because very few of you had said, "Oh, of course, I'm going to be an actor. I'm going to be an actress." It wasn't an automatic thing with a lot of you who'd passed your auditions that you were going to take this up as a career.

Judith Chalmers: No.

Trevor: So Herbert and myself and Nan, and Gwen and the others, we used to think, "They probably aren't going to take up acting. We hope acting hasn't taken up too much of their time." But I think acting was an adjunct to being part of school. I could never get Eric James, the High Master of Manchester to see this.

Judith Chalmers: But Miss Bain at Withington Girls' School did.

Trevor: Miss Bain did see it. We have marvellous working relationships with a lot of schools in the north of England. We would get to know them and say, "Look, is it going to be convenient? Because this is a serial. We can't do them at the weekend, and we can't do them all at holiday time." There were some first-class people running schools, and they'd either say, "Yes," or they'd say, "No, I think this young person is spending too much time starry-eyed with radio, and not enough time studying whatever the set book is."

Judith Chalmers: I must say, that's very enlightened of them. When you say actor or actress, you know, I never think of myself as that, and I'm not. Although my first broadcasting was in those plays, it's a broadcaster I am, and it's, I hope, as a broadcaster I go to my grave. I've never wanted to go on the stage at all, except in those early days, when I did those plays at the Unnamed Society and school plays. It's the microphone I've always

loved, and that, to me, encompasses the general sorts of skills of commentating and interviewing and chairing, and all those things, as a broadcaster.

But I never thought, when I left school at 17, that I would actually have a full-time career as a broadcaster. It was when, as I say, I asked for that advice, "What am I going to do? Because I'd love to go on broadcasting—" But I never thought it would be the full-time career that it has been, and still is. As I say, I'm working more now than I've ever worked. And I'm glad to say that I'm still involved with radio, very much so, because we're going to be doing some new things within Radio 2. So I shall look forward to those.

1:03:30

Trevor: But the time Sandra went to Manchester University, did she go up thinking that she was going to go into broadcasting as a career? Not on the performing side.

Judith Chalmers: Well, I don't know. She went to the university, and loved her broadcasting. She really, really did. Of course, after she graduated she went and worked at J Walter Thompson, the advertising agent in London, and then went back to the north and was involved with Tom [Lazeby 1:03:57] in Presentation. She was an announcer, and then she took over that department, after Tom left, sadly. He died, in fact, and she took over as the head of the department.

She said, at one stage, that in many ways, she'd like to have gone on performing. But she realised that there were two people in the family who had very similar voices. And even now, I hear myself- I've recorded a message on the answerphone, and I've rung, perhaps, from the car, and I've left a message at home. When I switch it on, I think, "What's

Sandy phoning about?" That's me, about my own sister. So talk about how we might have confused listeners. That might well have been the case.

She said that's one of the reasons she went into the production side of broadcasting, rather than staying as a broadcaster. Although she's always loved the broadcasting she did. But of course, she'd, I think, a very good producer. She ran, as I say, Radio Stoke, and got that to the top of the local radio stations, and was Editor of Woman's Hour for six years. And now, is still involved in broadcasting with press and promotional work, as head of that department.

So she's still involved in the broadcasting. But she tells a better story than I do. Get her at a party, and after dinner, Sandy's accents come out like there's no tomorrow.

1:05:17

Trevor: Well, we started off, Judith, reading out your audition report. That was a bit sneaky, wasn't it, I think, to do to you?

Judith Chalmers: Oh, well, I didn't- Yes.

1:05:27

Trevor: I mentioned Geoffrey Seel in connection with the cameo cartoon we did, The Little Log Sellers. Now, Geoffrey, was, if you remember, very much Wigan.

Judith Chalmers: I do remember. He was tiny, wasn't he?

Trevor: Tiny. And he got a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He hadn't been there very long, and he came to

where Margaret and I lived, in Cheshire, in those days. The Principal had sent for him and had said, "Now, Seel, we've been working terribly hard to do something about your accent." Geoffrey said, "So I said to the Principal, 'Yes, indeed you have, sir, and I'm rather worried about it.'" He said, "Yes, Seel, we're also worried about that accent of yours."

He said, "No, I'm worried that you're trying to get rid of my accent, so I'm giving in my notice." And Geoffrey left the Royal Academy.

Judith Chalmers: Did he?

Trevor: Yes.

Judith Chalmers: Good for him.

Trevor: And now, as far as I'm aware, he's running The Bell at School of Languages in London.

Judith Chalmers: Good for him.

END AUDIO

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