

Clip 2 – Cowdenbeath memories

Clip:gb2315jl5231_clip1

From: James Cox meets Jennie Lee, 22nd June 1982

From: audio 5/2/3/1 - BBC interview 1982

In: 00:00:33

Out: 00:02:40

Dur: 2min 13sec.

Jennie Lee: Cowdenbeath – my earliest memories from three to eight was the old Arcade [Hotel], Cowdenbeath. My father managed the theatre, my mother managed the hotel above. My uncle – my mother’s uncle, the one capitalist in our family, owned everything around, shops and the lot. And so, my life was a cascade of music in the music hall down below and of course the top of the bill used to stay in the hotels, so it was music all the way.

James Cox: Your mother was known as Ma Lee and she was a very important figure in your life, and indeed in many other people’s lives as well wasn’t she?

JL: Oh yes. When my grandmother was ill, my mother was persuaded to go into the hotel, to run the hotel, and then my mother’s uncle John Pollock persuaded her to stay on for another five years, managing the hotel. Everybody loved her.

JC: But in fact your people were mining people of course?

JL: ‘Course they were. My grandfather Michael Lee along with Keir Hardie and Bob Smiley, they were pioneers of the Labour and Trade Union Movement and then my father, he went into the pits, he was also night school, he was scholarly, he took his deputy certificate and he used to train young miners in our back parlour, even for the managers certificate but of course, he was a socialist, a trade unionist and a member of the union.

JC: What was it like living in Cowdenbeath in those days, I mean you make it sound in your books and talking about it, as if it was tremendous fun and I’m sure it was, but equally it was a pretty tough life wasn’t it?

JL: No for me it was fabulous. I was protected. It was my father and my grandfather that had the hard times. I owned a theatre! I mean it never occurred to me that I had to *pay* to go into the theatre and the top of the bills, particularly the comics, were great favourites with me, they used to sing their songs – the one that came on dragging a little wooden dog and saying “I’m happy for life, I’ve lost my wife and found a rare wee dog” now I thought that was marvellous, I had a great time.