

**File: BMD Gill Baldwin**

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START AUDIO

Interviewer: Okay, so if you could say your name for us?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, my name is Gill Baldwin, and I've been working at the club for probably about 17 seasons now.

Interviewer: Seventeen seasons?

Gill Baldwin: Yes.

Interviewer: And were you a fan before that?

Gill Baldwin: I was a fan before that, yes. I came with my youngest son when he was probably 9 or 10, and we used to stand behind the goal, watching the games, it was very friendly, with a chap, with a goalkeeper in between the action.

Interviewer: So it was always a good team in defence, he wasn't too busy then?

Gill Baldwin: Well, he had his moment, yes. Yes, he had his moments.

Interviewer: So, how long ago was that, that you first came?

Gill Baldwin: I first came probably in 1994.

Interviewer: Right.

Gill Baldwin: Yes.

Interviewer: So were you still a fan in the famous - well, infamous - '96 season?

Gill Baldwin: Oh yes, I've been working here, as I say, for about 17 seasons now, and going to a lot of the away games, and certainly that is big in my memory, still, the Newcastle Cup game.

Interviewer: Right, of course. How did you find that huge occasion, of [playing Newcastle 0:01:15]?

Gill Baldwin: Oh, it was massive, yes. I had to seek permission from my son's headteacher, two sons wanted to come up from [Alain's] School, and I gave a written request to the Head, and she granted permission for them to go.

Interviewer: So it was big in the community, everyone appreciated it-

Gill Baldwin: It was absolutely huge, everybody was whipped up who wasn't remotely interested at first in football. Yes, it was a massive occasion for the town.

Interviewer: Has that been the biggest occasion, while you've been a Stevenage fan?

Gill Baldwin: No, subsequent years when we won the trophy twice, and obviously going up, League 2 and then League 1, and we're climbing still.

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_[0:01:59].

Gill Baldwin: It's unbelievable, yes.

Interviewer: With the Newcastle match, how did that go for you? What was your experience of the match day?

Gill Baldwin: My experiences were, the home game here, I was allowed to sell programmes so that I was able to watch the game rather than be stuck in the turnstile when the action was starting to build. The replay, as I say, I went with my two sons and

friends, and the anticipation of the big ground was- I was let down, I felt.

Interviewer: Really?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, Newcastle, the pitch was awful, we were stuck in a corner, the stewards kept getting in the way.

Interviewer: How did it compare watching from a big stadium, compared to the likes of the Lamex?

Gill Baldwin: I prefer the smaller stadiums. It was more intimate.

Interviewer: Sure. Do you feel like you've got more of an impact on how the players play?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: And how does it translate? How do you feel, the smaller the stadium?

Gill Baldwin: I think certainly from my viewpoint that you can feel more of the action that's going on. I've been to a few more bigger clubs, Manchester United, obviously, with the Trophy final, it was the Trophy final, that was a playoff wasn't it?

Interviewer: Yes.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, I think. That was very odd, being stuck up there, as is Wembley, really. But no, it's all a fabulous experience. Yes.

Interviewer: Yes. So, how did the matches go for you? The first game here, against Newcastle, a 1-1 draw was it, how did that match transpire?

Gill Baldwin: The excitement was unreliable. Yes, we felt we were well matched and I think Newcastle were suitably stunned, obviously. All the hoo-ha that went on afterwards about them not wanting to play down here, and in the end they had to play down here, that was interesting. That was very interesting.

Interviewer: How did you find it interesting?

Gill Baldwin: Inasmuch as they seemed to want to determine what was going to happen, and it was our home game.

Interviewer: So did you feel a sense of being wronged by Newcastle?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, definitely. Definitely. And was so pleased when we got the extra seating to placate the powers that be, and it was able to go ahead here. Yes, it was massive, the whole town, as I

say, was rippling, and although it was all those years ago, it's still held dear, most definitely. I have stacks of memorabilia that I hadn't realised I'd kept, I said to my son to keep, everything that was in the papers, we kept.

Interviewer: Oh, wow, that's brilliant.

Gill Baldwin: A huge amount of stuff, yes.

Interviewer: So is that the game that sticks out in your mind?

Gill Baldwin: I think so, yes, and it's lovely to see the children of that time, now as grown-ups still coming to the games. Obviously working on the turnstiles I've seen them grow up, and they're now adults and some of them are bringing their own children to the game. That's smashing.

Interviewer: So, like you say, you've worked on the turnstiles, have you worked in any other capacity?

Gill Baldwin: I've stewarded, yes, that's been very interesting as well, yes.

Interviewer: Which do you prefer? Because, like you said, with the turnstiles you get to see the same faces come through, as a steward do you still get the same relationship with the fans?

Gill Baldwin: No. When you're stewarding you have a more important role to play because ultimately you're keeping an eye on the crowd and you're not watching the game. You should be keeping an eye on whatever is happening around and about you.

Interviewer: As a fan, is that frustrating, to have your back to the game?

Gill Baldwin: It was, yes. Yes. I was allowed actually to have a particular spot - not all the time - so I was able to see most of the game, but also I was aware of the job that I had to do as a steward, and keep an eye on the crowd.

Interviewer: Sure. How did you find it, being a female steward? Is it a very male-dominated- ?

Gill Baldwin: It's not an exception, no, not here. I don't know about other clubs. When we've been away, yes there are quite a few stewards- No, I didn't feel it was us and them, no.

Interviewer: No? That's good. So, do you prefer working in the turnstile?

Gill Baldwin: I do, yes, I like working in the turnstile.

Interviewer: Like you say, when you see kids growing up to adults, is it a strong family club, do you feel?

Gill Baldwin: Not as much as it was all those years ago. I think when we were Conference, when Paul Fairclough was here, he would always make a point, before the gates opened, of walking around the ground and saying hello to as many of the staff that he could. You felt involved then.

Interviewer: Oh right. Do you feel that, as Stevenage have progressed, that's sort of been eliminated, it's become corporate?

Gill Baldwin: Well inevitably it had to go that way, yes. You're still proud, friends that I have that are turnstile operators, you're proud to represent your club, you are frontline. You're frontline, you're the first person that the fan sees when they come through.

Interviewer: Sure. You mentioned Paul Fairclough, was he the best manager?

Gill Baldwin: For me, personally, yes.

Interviewer: Yes, for sure. And was that because of the on-field antics, or like you say, because he took a vested interest further?

Gill Baldwin: Both. He is a lovely, lovely man, and he was very compassionate, both for his players and for the fans, and for those involved working with the club. Yes, a lovely, lovely man.

Interviewer: Have you had any other charismatic characters, whether they be chairmen, players, or managers who you've really taken note- ?

Gill Baldwin: We've had some interesting characters, yes, come through the players' management, yes.

Interviewer: Have you got any incidents that are repeatable?

Gill Baldwin: Not that spring to mind. A memorable moment, for me, been an Arsenal fan, was when we had the pre-season friendly. The first that they came when there wasn't an inch to breathe hardly, out in the stands, and I had to come back to the office and on my way back to the office, after having finished my turnstile stint, I bumped into Arsene Wenger.

Interviewer: Oh wow.

Gill Baldwin: I was just rooted to the spot. (Laughter) And babbled something stupid about an autograph for my son.

Interviewer: Was he nice?

Gill Baldwin: He was an extremely nice guy, very, very tall, and he was obviously on his way to do something important, because the match hadn't kicked off, but he took the time to talk. Wonderful.

Interviewer: Sure. Oh that's good. It's nice when you meet your heroes and they live up to expectations.

Gill Baldwin: Yes. Yes, he certainly did, yes. We've had a few tantrums from other managers and visiting players throughout the club, that's not very nice to see, but inevitable.

Interviewer: Is it always from bigger clubs? Is it over conditions, of the pitch, or...?

Gill Baldwin: No, just generally, I think. It's interesting. Generally try and watch the game after I've done the turnstiles, with my friends, and we sit pretty much behind the dug out, so we can see and hear things from visiting teams and home teams that are going on, and that's interesting. Yes.

Interviewer: Yes. Does it give you a new perspective on Stevenage? Because obviously you're so familiar with working here and coming here as a fan and working, is it nice to see a new perspective?

Gill Baldwin: It is nice to see it and to be appreciative of all the administration, and the rules and regulations that have to be followed now. As we've climbed so rapidly, after all these years, yes, we've seen big changes, things that have to be done to the club, and the ground.

Interviewer: How have these new changes impacted on your job, working as a turnstile operative?

Gill Baldwin: We've had to be quite a lot more vigilant, in terms of fans and season tickets, ticketing in general. We put up with quite a lot of moans and groans. Some visiting fans, when I've been on the away end, haven't always checked out their ticket prices when they come to the game, so there are a lot of moans and groans there.

The home fans, equally, perhaps haven't got to grips with now we have A, B and C category games, that's quite hard for them, because the prices obviously change, and if they're not ready for that- We've actually had people come to the gates, not had enough money with them, and are unfortunately not able to come in.

Interviewer: Right, wow, that's...

Gill Baldwin: That's quite tough, yes.

Interviewer: Yes, definitely. Do you have a certain turnstile that you prefer working at because you get the same fans come through, or is it all \_\_\_[0:12:31] the home and away?

Gill Baldwin: No. No, the club try to keep the rotation of the turnstile operators going. We have 20 turnstiles here, and I think if you- It works two ways, if you're on a turnstile and you [get to 0:12:50] regularly, yes, the fans get to know you and you can

have banter. But equally, it can disrupt some days, you know? So it is better if you move around, and you get to see different perspectives around the ground.

Interviewer: What you were saying before about the problems with the ticket pricing- Or not problems, but misunderstandings. How do you feel that can be altered, for the better? Do you think there is a different way of doing it that might- ?

Gill Baldwin: I don't know, I haven't really thought about it. Generally on the club's website the ticket prices are up. Sometimes on the away, the visiting fans' website, the information hasn't been put up correctly. The most confusion, I think, seems to be where our fans can bring in an under-11 child, or two, for free, that is purely for the terracing and our fans, but if they haven't read that properly, they've looked at our website, they're assuming they have an under-11, and that's quite a disappointment, and obviously a bit costly if you haven't taken that on board.

Interviewer: Sure. Is that the worst aspect of the job, the complaints that can occur?

Gill Baldwin: No, I wouldn't put it... No, no. No, I don't think so. The worst aspect is if you're stuck underneath the East Terrace and you hear a goal build up and you cannot come out of your turnstile anyway to wherever you are in the ground to see that, but if you're on the main stand turnstiles you can, through your door, see what's going on, pretty much. But to hear the build up and then hear a goal going in, that is frustrating, yes.

Interviewer: Is that one of the aspects of the job- Do you have to stay quite impartial? Especially when you're associating with the away fans, or do they accept that you will be a Stevenage fan?

Gill Baldwin: Well, not everybody who is a turnstile operator actually stays to watch the football, or is indeed football-orientated. I find that quite hard, myself, but no, if I'm working on the away end, you have to be professional, you're not saying stupid things to them, "I hope you lose," or anything like that. No, you're doing a professional job, you are frontline, like I said.

Interviewer: Sure. And, being frontline, do you have to leave your hang-ups and your personal problems at the door when you come in? Like, if you're tired, you've had a tough day, you have to be completely happy to see everybody.

Gill Baldwin: Oh yes, it's fine. I always enjoy coming, match days, I always look forward to it, and even now, after all these years, when I'm driving to come to work, I get butterflies, still.

Interviewer: Yes, that's brilliant.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, I don't know why, either it's a fear of not doing my job properly, or the anticipation of a bad game, bad refereeing, whatever, but I still get butterflies.

Interviewer: That's great. If you could just talk me through your pre-match rituals, or the regime that you go through before a game, that would be great.

Gill Baldwin: Yes. Quite often, it's not every game, but we will have a briefing, if there are certain things that are different to the previous game, i.e. if the management know that it's going to be a big game, and how many fans, away fans are expected, then we will be briefed on that. If there are special concessions that are happening, like family groups can come in at whatever price, we'll be briefed on those, but we generally come in and line up, wait for our money tin, tickets, and obviously where you're to go, and generally check, even though the money is obviously all bagged up, we check our money, we check our sheets, we check our tickets, and make sure that we're comfortable, really, no problems within the turnstiles, even though maintenance obviously have had a look. Then we wait.

Interviewer: Wait for the masses?

Gill Baldwin: Wait for the match to start, yes wait for the gates to open, I should say. A frustrating point then for those of us who are fans is waiting to be locked up, which seems to be getting later and later.

Interviewer: Sure, and have you seen a big difference in the swell of fans coming in, as you've progressed?

Gill Baldwin: The numbers are beginning to increase now. Back when I first started and the first year or two afterwards, we had bigger crowds, most definitely. Obviously prices were a lot lower, and we had certain characters within the squad at that time who were extremely good value for money, entertainment wise as well as good footballing. That, I think, brought people in.

Interviewer: So, as the club has become more professional, have you seen that go on to the pitch with the players, are they more professional, and is that a detriment, or...?

Gill Baldwin: Oh no, I don't think so, no. They still acknowledge fans, certainly on away games, when we go away, they are looking to see the reaction that they're going to get, which is obviously favourable, and they're spotting faces that are familiar at home, I'm sure. No, they are much more professional, I think. That's taking nothing away from the years gone by.

Interviewer: Sure. When you say about these characters, how did they- Have you got any incidents, any favourite incidents of when- ?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, I can't remember which game it was, actually, but we had a player called Jason Solomon, and he was not a goalkeeper, but had to stand in for the goalkeeper, I can't remember the incident. Anyway, unbeknownst to him - I'm not sure whether the elastic went in his jogging bottoms, which he had on at the time, or whether he was just in the process of disrobing for his shorts, because he'd warmed up enough, but the ball actually game towards him as he was part way through doing this, and that was hilarious.

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_[0:20:01].

Gill Baldwin: He saved the goal. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Oh, he saved it. That's the main thing.

Gill Baldwin: That was really funny, yes.

Interviewer: Wow. Well you don't expect to see David James or [Paul Robinson] do that, do you?

Gill Baldwin: That was funny, yes. He took it in good part, as well.

Interviewer: Yes? Do you see the socialising? When you first started, was there more player interaction with the fans?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, yes, most definitely. Certainly where I used to stand with my youngest son, behind the goal, there was banter, not just with the goalkeeper before the match started, but with certain players, if you called out, "You're doing a great job," or blah, blah, blah, a hand would go up in acknowledgement. The concentration was still there, but yes, it was great.

Interviewer: It feels more personal, and more...

Gill Baldwin: Yes, it was, it was. Yes. Whether that's because you didn't have that much more pressure- I think pressure was there for the players, but obviously now it's much more meaningful.

Interviewer: Do you think it's the pressure of position for the club now, for players that play now, and when it was- When you were saying when you were shouting to players and they were waving their hands, do you think they felt a lot of pressure for playing for the personal fans?

Gill Baldwin: No, I think whatever level footballers are playing at, they are appreciative of the response that they get from their fans, most definitely. I think at times, with bigger games, you are that extra man, the crowd are that extra man that can really, really help, yes.

Interviewer: Sure, and do you find yourself then singing throughout the whole game, to cheer them on?

Gill Baldwin: I don't sing all of the things that a lot of the fans sing.  
(Laughter) I've become, a lot of people probably that know me know that certain bad language, which, it's paramount that- If it's a family club, most football clubs have a family area, and I just hate to hear it.

Interviewer: Sure. So you were saying about a family element, and a family club, how do you find bad language within football, and the abuse that the referee gets?

Gill Baldwin: I don't like bad language, and I have accepted, to a point, in certain parts of the football ground - and I'm not saying just this football ground, anywhere where we've been - I accept language to a point. I think it's unnecessary, and it most certainly is picked up by children, very young children, and that I hate to see and hear.

Interviewer: Especially because you were saying with your young lads that you were bringing, how do you think there could be a way to protect them from hearing that?

Gill Baldwin: Well, to be fair, it isn't obviously just football grounds, it's something that is happening all over, and I think it's unnecessary. You can use other language to express your disappointment, your disgust. It's not just men, some fans, something just takes over.

Interviewer: It's very tribal.

Gill Baldwin: It is extremely tribal. I'm calling out things that I thought I would never do, I would not use bad language, I'm no prude, under extreme pressure at home I might let rip, but to nothing- Bad language, extreme bad language, no way, and I have stood up to one or two fans when I was stewarding if I've heard a

certain word - there is one word that I would not accept, and I have made that very, very clear.

Interviewer: Right, and were the fans responsive?

Gill Baldwin: The fan was extremely responsive, \_\_\_\_ [0:24:29]. Yes. I'm not too sure what- I know what could have happened, but it didn't happen, he just went, "Okay."

Interviewer: That's good, it's nice to have that respect. Have you come across any abuse, racism, sexism, or just against the referee? Have you come across anything?

Gill Baldwin: I've heard and seen quite a lot, yes. I've also heard abuse being given to stewards at this club, and it's been dealt with very quickly, yes.

Interviewer: Obviously it's a very small minority in every club, it's not the majority.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, absolutely it is, yes.

Interviewer: Do you find that a lot of this trickles down from contention issues like, because people are passionate, and there are certain bad images shown on TV from that-

Gill Baldwin: I don't think that helps, definitely. I think behaviour, certainly with children, is learned, and yes, the observations, the games that they watch on the TV, some of them do not help at all. But as you said, it is a tribal thing, and where you might meet a certain individual walking around the town one day, and you see them at a football match, you would not think they were the same person.

Interviewer: It is quite shocking, isn't it? Also, sometimes a couple of pints helps to aid that transition.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, well, generally we are made aware that if we suspect anything as a turnstile operator then that particular individual, generally, is not admitted.

Interviewer: Right, that's good. Do you have lots of safety aspects, like that?

Gill Baldwin: Yes.

Interviewer: And has there ever been any trouble within the club itself, like, for want of a better word, the 'firms', or football hooliganism?

Gill Baldwin: I can't immediately think of anything springing to mind. There have been away fans that have been ejected. I can only think of one occasion, maybe, certainly for a home fan to be put out. As you say, it's a minority anywhere, and those individuals generally are quite well known.

Interviewer: Ah, so action can be taken beforehand?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Like you say, it's good to know the club and the people that come in, so you're able to identify.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, and the way that the club has had to grow now, with CCTV gone in now.

Interviewer: Oh, of course.

Gill Baldwin: That is extremely beneficial for the security staff, the stewards.

Interviewer: Do you think, as the club has grown, has it made your job easier, or are you given more responsibilities? Have you been given better facilities to operate? No?

Gill Baldwin: No, we're still in the same working environment.

Interviewer: Would you like see changes in those areas?

Gill Baldwin: I'm sure changes will be made, but of course, everything comes down to money, and I'm sure that, should Stevenage be lucky enough to progress even further, that turnstiles will be automated and that's been interesting to see that at other clubs, when we've gone away, you've still got turnstile operators within- You're overseeing the automation. So you put your ticket in, and it's scanned, and you're let through.

But at - I can't think of which club we went to, but it was fully automated, and that I didn't like.

Interviewer: No, I know what you mean. At Fulham we have it, but we have also personnel behind the machines, so you still talk to people.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, yes. I think people still- Their anticipation of who they're going to see on that day, the opposition, they still would like that little bit of banter as they come through.

Interviewer: It's that personal effect, that you need to share, it's a very sharing thing.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, that's right, and you're welcoming, we're always- It doesn't matter that you're not working in a bank greeting somebody, you're working at a football club, you're still talking to individuals, you still need to give over that professionalism and politeness, regardless of what you get back, and that is learned. Somebody who perhaps comes one week and sees you again the following week will remember how they've been spoken to, and I've noticed that, you then get that back.

Interviewer: You get more respect, and the club is respected through...

Gill Baldwin: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: When you first started working the turnstile, were you nervous the first time?

Gill Baldwin: Very.

Interviewer: Was it hard to-

Gill Baldwin: Extremely nervous, yes, and I really didn't think I would be able to do the job.

Interviewer: No?

Gill Baldwin: No.

Interviewer: What changed? Was it just how nice the fans were?

Gill Baldwin: I think it was the lady who had asked me, did I want a job, my son and I had come through the turnstile and I knew this lady, and I said, "My goodness, we're busy today," and she said, "Would you like a job?" So I said, "Yes, what do I have to do?" She said, "Well, see me afterwards," and that's the way it went

on, and I couldn't believe I could come in and watch the game, and get paid for working as well.

Interviewer: Sounds great.

Gill Baldwin: It was fantastic, but as I say, it doesn't take away from the fact that you are there to do a job, and then you watch your football.

Interviewer: Of course, You have to maintain that professional attitude.  
Purely speaking as a fan, do you feel the club treats you as a supporter, or a customer?

Gill Baldwin: That's quite hard to answer. I think, having been here for all these years, we are acknowledged as true fans, yes. Yes.

Interviewer: Do you feel the club takes special interest in how you want to see the club develop?

Gill Baldwin: Certainly the manager, Graham Westley, when we have fans' forums, and maybe he and the Chief Executive, or he and the Chairman, are there to answer questions. They pretty much answer everything that's asked of them. Yes, that's interesting.

The only thing I say on that, I would like to see more fans actually turn up for the forums. Sometimes there is a lot of grumbling that goes on, and they then have their opportunity, but they're unable, or don't want to come along, to the forum.

Interviewer: Is that part of football do you find, that there is an element of grumbling, about the referee, about the performance, about the club?

Gill Baldwin: Oh yes, yes. Yes, definitely, and obviously not just here, with the boys' football, youth football, teenage, whatever.

Interviewer: It's part and parcel.

Gill Baldwin: It's part and parcel, most definitely.

Interviewer: Which changes have you agreed with the most? Which have really, you've seen a marked improvement around the ground? Is it the stand itself, or the pitch?

Gill Baldwin: The pitch actually is pretty good, yes. The underwater sprinklers and things went in this season. The pitch has changed a lot over the years, but I admire the guys who look after it, most definitely, yes.

Interviewer: It's a lovely looking pitch.

Gill Baldwin: It is, yes.

Interviewer: It's like a carpet out there.

Gill Baldwin: Actually a few years ago I had a young lad who came up, I think he was a temporary gap really, that he came as a groundsman, and he actually lodged at my house. That was a bit strange, but I got an insight into the work that he had to do, yes.

Interviewer: Do you get lots of time to socialise with different members who work here, and different areas of expertise?

Gill Baldwin: I do have a few friends, yes, we do socialise quite well. Unfortunately the friends who are closest, we are both obviously unable to go to Bury today, she has a family engagement, she and her husband, and so she couldn't get today to do the memories day, either, but I know that we'll be keeping in touch, text-wise.

Interviewer: The updates.

Gill Baldwin: Yes. When she was in Greece and we were in Portugal, the texts were going betwixt and between. Yes, when the build up to the Trophy final was happening, and we actually made it, yes.

Interviewer: Do you find that it's easier now, with new media, to keep tabs on how Stevenage are doing, with the internet?

Gill Baldwin: Absolutely, absolutely yes. Tuesday, when we weren't able to go to Brentford, I think two radios upstairs, one radio and the computer commentary going, to get the updates.

Interviewer: \_\_\_[0:34:18], yes.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, it's crazy. Crazy.

Interviewer: You were saying before that you're an Arsenal fan, do you find that a lot of Stevenage fans have other teams, whether they be in the Premier League?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, certainly, being so close, there are a lot of fans from all of the London clubs who come down. It has been booter about that could be a reason for us not getting the huge numbers of fans that maybe we should be getting.

Interviewer: Right, because they're-

Gill Baldwin: Priorities, yes.

Interviewer: And of course, international games are also played on a Saturday.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, whether they're going in person or watching it on screens, pubs, wherever. Yes, certainly, everything is weighed up.

Interviewer: The FA have initiated a new system where they're actually having the international matches on a Friday so that people will go to their non-league clubs, but it hasn't seemed to affect the attendance at all, no?

Gill Baldwin: Well, no. Not that I've really noticed, no.

Interviewer: Have you got any suggestions or ways in which attendance could be boosted, or do you think it's just part and parcel of, obviously with the prices going up and people having other teams, and playing football themselves - because a lot of football fans play football - do you feel- ?

Gill Baldwin: I personally, and I know my good friend, who works with me, feel that more should be done for children. I know that that'll be disputed, that the under-11s will come in free, but that's just the terracing. Not all small children can stand up for that length of time, and we've had that, and it's pretty costly for one parent, two parents, to come through with three children who cannot stand for that duration of the game, so they have made a sacrifice, as you like. It's a big treat for the kids, and they'll come and sit down, and that's a lot of money for an afternoon.

So, I understand the costs - obviously I don't know all the costs of running a football club, and I do understand where that's coming from, and ultimately that's building for the future. But the fans are the future.

Interviewer: It's hard to find a balance.

Gill Baldwin: It really is, yes.

Interviewer: And do you think that's an issue that's going to roll on and on?

Gill Baldwin: I'm sure it will. I'm sure it will. There's something else actually that's more minor, I know when we go away, the thing - especially on a winter's game - that you most look forward to, is a good [tea bar 0:37:00] and food.

Interviewer: Sure.

Gill Baldwin: And sometimes that's an overriding memory that you go away with, "That was a really nice day out," regardless of if the boys played well, you might have lost, but you've had a nice pie and a hot drink, and the toilets were good.

Interviewer: It's a nice environment.

Gill Baldwin: It's a nice environment, and certainly here that has been addressed, the tea bar is... There's pretty good food now that visiting fans and home fans can buy.

Interviewer: So when you go to away matches, do you take how they work, the stadium, and bring it back?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: What's your favourite away trip?

Gill Baldwin: Actually, we enjoyed, for the food, I think it was Kidderminster?

Interviewer: Yes?

Gill Baldwin: Yes. I think it was Kidderminster. It tends, with me, unless I write it down, to all blend into one. But that was excellent, they had such a variety of food there, and good staff.

Interviewer: That's good. So, what's your fondest memory of watching Stevenage play?

Gill Baldwin: I've got lots, but one memory, really, was the last game of the season, I think it was '97/'98, and my son and I went to Halifax on the coach, last game of the season, and Halifax really had to win to stay up, and it was horrible weather, it was a horrible stand, that's what I remember, and ultimately we had a rotten game, and Halifax, we did them a favour, and they stayed up. My son was one of the mascots for the day, and he went down to talk to the players, I think he was only about 12, 11/12, and he actually asked Barry Hayles for his shirt, the last game I

think Barry Hayles played for us. So we came home on the coach, a bit dispirited because of the game, but very happy to have Barry Hayles' shirt in a Tesco carrier bag, absolutely humming with Barry's sweat and mud, and we've still got that shirt, it was wonderful.

Interviewer: That sounds great. They're the real memories of football.

Gill Baldwin: Absolutely, real memories, super day, really.

Interviewer: And did he sign it?

Gill Baldwin: He has signed it, yes, and we've got a few of the other players as well, favourite players that we had, all real characters back then.

Interviewer: Yes, certainly Barry Hayles, I remember when he came to Fulham, he was a very distinctive figure.

Gill Baldwin: Oh, wonderful. Lovely guy, and he comes back every now and again here, you know, and you see him sitting in the stands, yes.

Interviewer: Do a lot of former players come back?

Gill Baldwin: You do see them, yes, and a lot of other- Now we're moving, a lot of managers, different faces that you see, I don't always know them, someone usually points them out to me, "Did you see so and so in the stand?" "No, point them out." (Laughter)

Interviewer: Sure. It's nice that players, and people associated with the club, still want to come back.

Gill Baldwin: It is. It was a really, really happy club back then. I know it's moved on, I'm sure it's still happy, but yes, they were very, very friendly.

Interviewer: And obviously, being in such a close and intimate stadium, you see a lot of on-the-pitch action, what are the memorable experiences that have happened really close that you can't appreciate at a big stadium, or on TV?

Gill Baldwin: I think one for me, which sounds a bit... Not macabre, but we had a super young player that Paul Fairclough signed, Paul Thomson, and we had a pre-season game, he came out, I don't think we were very far into the game, and my son and I were standing behind the goal, as usual. He went in for a tackle, and we heard the most horrible sound of a crack and then we saw his ankle had actually come away from his foot, from his leg, it was awful, absolutely awful to see that. I said to my son, once Paul had been dispatched by the ambulance, I said, "We've got to go down and see that boy, cheer him up, let him know that the fans are rooting for him." So we stopped off at the shop, bought him - I think it was chocolates, not grapes, I think we bought him chocolates, and he was still on

the bed in A&E, being tended, and he was so chuffed that we had gone down to say to him, "We're all there for you, and so sad that that has happened."

Interviewer: Oh that's a really nice thing to do.

Gill Baldwin: Subsequently, when he'd been sorted, when he'd got his plaster and he was able to get about and he was a bit bored, he actually agreed to come down to my son's football birthday party, it was probably only about a couple of weeks after that. So we've got a picture of him in his plaster casts. Really nice young guy, a horrible thing to have happened.

Interviewer: Of course, does the bring it home when you're sat so close, that you can hear things like that?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, yes. I would never want to hear anything like that again, it was unbelievable.

Interviewer: On a happier note of sitting so close, does it really bring home the skill and athleticism that you see?

Gill Baldwin: Absolutely, and it's been a big insight when you hear Graham Westley, talking about the regimes that the players actually go through, the nutrition, the diet, the psychology, everything that these boys seem to have now seems a bit alien. When my son was playing football, he went out there and he used the skills that he had, diets and things didn't seem to come into it, but

you can totally understand that psychology, to get them to the absolute peak that you can. Yes, I appreciate that.

Interviewer: And it's great, like you say, to be close and to see that sort of poetry in motion, so to speak.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Obviously it's more for your sons, but are you given any inspiration to carry on with football? Does it...?

Gill Baldwin: Well yes, the youngest one, he was a pretty good player. He's 27 now, I think he still might do five a sides, but he now has children of his own, both boys, so I'm sure that they will be playing football, yes.

Interviewer: Sure. It carries on.

Gill Baldwin: It will carry on, yes. It gets within the boys, most definitely. I never thought that I would become the fan that I have. My brother, when we were growing up, he always played football, and used to play for [Whyteleafe 0:44:29], and he was a target really, he was six foot seven - well, he still is six foot seven - but he was a target, and a good footballer. But I could not see the point; when he was growing up and he used to be out playing football, I couldn't see the point in football.

Interviewer: No? So a late developer?

Gill Baldwin: So an extremely late developer to come to the sport for me.

Interviewer: And was that through- Was your first taste of football at Stevenage, or was it earlier?

Gill Baldwin: No, I think pretty much it was Stevenage, yes.

Interviewer: Wow. And what really got you? Was it the atmosphere of seeing it live, or the actual football on the pitch?

Gill Baldwin: The actual football on the pitch, yes. I remember coming to see them and I couldn't understand, and I probably still don't understand a lot of it, even after all these years, but the fact that - it sounds a bit stupid now - but when the white lines of the pitch, when the players were able to take a throw-in, and stand outside the white line, I thought, "That doesn't really work, you're not allowed to do that," and then of course it was explained to me. So it's been an extreme learning curve.  
(Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes, it's good to learn like that though, better to learn from a book.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, yes, it has been good.

Interviewer: Has the passion, has that come about the more you've watched? Or has it been gradually over time that you've just felt like this is- When talking to the fans and you understand all the politics that go on behind everything-

Gill Baldwin: I do understand it, and I've found the fans and the people that you stand around, I'm not afraid to say it, years ago, "Well why did they do that?" And they will always say, will give their information and their knowledge to you, and obviously you pick your way through, but that has been extremely helpful.

Interviewer: That's great. So like having a couple of coaches around here.  
(Laughter)

Gill Baldwin: Yes, I did actually, I found through all my memorabilia that I encouraged my son to keep, and I can't believe how much stuff we actually did keep, that there was a piece I'd written for one of the magazines that was the fanzine, unofficial. I'd written a birds-eye view of the borough, and that summed up everything that we've just spoken about, pretty much, about, "What did he do that for?"

Interviewer: Oh, cool.

Gill Baldwin: So, everything I wrote in that holds today, really.

Interviewer: Did you write many articles?

Gill Baldwin: No.

I have voiced my opinion and been a complete wally at times on the radio.

Interviewer: Yes? Which radio station?

Gill Baldwin: Three Counties, Five Live I was on when we did the Newcastle, and... When we were going up to Wembley I was interviewed on the coach, they were doing the coaches. Yes, so obviously the passion whooshes through when we're waiting to do those sorts of games.

Interviewer: And do you find that the media is a great asset to football, or do you think it's a bit-

Gill Baldwin: No, a lot of it is frustrating, especially certain times with Three Counties. I don't think they really acknowledge that we were, and are becoming, an even better football club, priorities seem to be elsewhere.

Interviewer: Right.

Gill Baldwin: So it's... Yes, they're beginning to realise actually we are in League 1.

Interviewer: Yes, so you think it's more that you've been dismissed as a local team. Do you think they could do more to promote things?

Gill Baldwin: Yes. There are some nice guys at Three Counties, but the... It is three counties, but at times they're focusing on one county.

Interviewer: Right, and that would be... Luton?

Gill Baldwin: That would be Bedford, yes, Bedfordshire, Luton, yes.

Interviewer: And obviously they're the big rivals.

Gill Baldwin: Well I wouldn't say they're rivals, no.

Interviewer: No? Who would you post as your rivals?

Gill Baldwin: As our rivals, I don't know... I don't think we've established a rival, we're so new still, I wouldn't say that we have- I mean, Woking, I think the die-hard fans kept Woking as rivals going for a long while, but that was pretty pointless because a lot of the kids that started that are now adults and...

Interviewer: Outgrown it.

Gill Baldwin: Outgrown it somewhat. I really can't, for me personally, can't think of a team that- I probably will. Luton I think are definitely big headed.

Interviewer: Right, but they've got the rivalry with Watford.

Gill Baldwin: But they have an enormous fan base, I have to say, and I envy them for that.

Interviewer: Yes, it's hard, but obviously like you say, it's still relative to new Stevenage, so- What do you see as the aims? Where would you like Stevenage to go?

Gill Baldwin: Well, back where we were Conference champions and we should have gone up, that hurt for an awful long time, for an awful lot of people, and we still, as fans, do probably not know the real reason, I have to say.

So, we're over that now, but a long time coming. I actually, to the embarrassment of friends, when we went into League 2, started to take my baby bear, if you like, not Borough Bear, but Barney, as a good luck charm to let us stay up in League 2. Subsequently he has managed to get us into League 1, and he is now amongst I think dozens of fans, friends, he is [Laurie Wilson's 0:50:39]... I can't think of the word I'm looking for.

Interviewer: Lucky mascot?

Gill Baldwin: Sponsor.

Interviewer: Oh, sponsor. Oh right.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, sponsor. Oh dear, brain, senior moment. Yes, we actually sponsor Laurie Wilson, so it's Barney Bear and Friends, and poor lad, he had his photo taken with Barney Bear, I said, "I'm so sorry, but he has got us to League 1."

Interviewer: So is he your only lucky charm, or do you have more?

Gill Baldwin: No, I think a friend of mine announced on Three Counties radio that she had lucky knickers. (Laughter)

Interviewer: It's one of those things though, isn't it? It's the big fear of football, relegation, do you think that's an extra touch to the passion, like when you say you drive and you feel butterflies, it's that anticipation.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, it is such a relief to finish a season and you're still where you started at the beginning, but the way that we're going at the moment. Obviously, like a lot of clubs when they're promoted, your overriding aim is to stay into where you have moved up to, and then to go back to back, and now be in a position that we are mid-table in League 1 is unbelievable really.

Interviewer: So, if we have a comparison between the highs and lows of being a Stevenage fan, what did you do the day that you found out, in '96, when the stadium wasn't ready and you weren't getting promoted?

Gill Baldwin: We just could not believe it, as I say, we used to stand behind the goal, and I can't remember exactly, I think we had something like 110 points that season, every single game you could rely on Barry Hayles doing the business, and we just absolutely [romped 0:52:37] that. To be then told that your ground was not up to date, and you knew that when you visited other grounds that were pretty disgusting, that they had been higher than we- That had come down from on high, and yet their grounds were deemed acceptable.

Interviewer: It's a real smack in the face.

Gill Baldwin: You cannot understand it, and as I say, I think there was much more to that decision than met the eye, and we as fans will probably never know what that reason was.

Interviewer: How did you personally take the news? Did that affect your whole week, month?

Gill Baldwin: I was very angry. Oh yes, it lasted for a long, long while, yes, I couldn't believe it. I could not believe it, and to see the devastation on Paul Fairclough's face, yes, that was sad.

Interviewer: Do you feel that was a stumbling block that has put you behind like 20 odd years from where you should be?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, the Conference are very, very hard to get out of. I would say that the majority of clubs have acknowledged that fact, including Luton.

Interviewer: Yes, and obviously that's the downside. What about being promoted to League 1 now? Do you remember the day- ?

Gill Baldwin: Absolutely amazing. Absolutely amazing.

Interviewer: Do you remember the day, and how you celebrated?

Gill Baldwin: Oh yes, yes, we just couldn't believe it. We couldn't believe it. I think, my good friend Callie that I spoke about, who is not here today, she dressed up as a Where's Wally hula-hula girl.

Interviewer: Where's Wally hula-hula?

Gill Baldwin: Wally hula-hula, and managed to get herself interviewed on the local TV up there, and it was just unbelievable. Even a good friend, who rarely gets emotional about her football, and her husband comes along to the big games, even he was emotional.

Interviewer: Sure. Is it like a big release?

Gill Baldwin: It's a huge release. After all these years, to have gone up, League 2, and then to League 1, it was a huge, huge achievement, nothing should be taken away from the club and the manager for that.

Interviewer: What felt better, going up to League 2, or going up in League 1?

Gill Baldwin: Oh gosh. Probably League 2, because the bottom line, probably, we thought we wouldn't- Well, not that we wouldn't stay there, but we would have to battle quite hard to stay there, and ultimately we battled harder than we thought we were capable of, and got the reward, yes.

Interviewer: Sure. When you have a moment like that, are you able to celebrate with the players, do you feel? Do you feel like it's a big team effort?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, yes, and it's lovely to see them with their families at the end of a game, celebrating, and small children, a lovely, lovely moment for them.

Interviewer: Are those the moments you remember the most, or is it coming with Cup successes or goals? Which stand out more in your mind, the raw emotion of the celebrating or- ?

Gill Baldwin: Oh, I think, no, if you've been to an ordinary Saturday game and you know that they've played well, even though they may have lost or drawn, you know that they've put on a good performance, you come away lifted.

Interviewer: So the performances matter more than results, do you feel?

Gill Baldwin: I think so, yes.

Interviewer: And is there a better buzz about the stadium and the players when it's a good performance?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, yes. We went away to Bournemouth a couple of months ago, and had a weekend down there when all the floods- We came back and it was all flooded, and a player that we had that I hadn't seen, hadn't been with us very long, I thought he had such huge potential, super, super quality player, but I've only seen once since. Because I think the training that they have is so intense, and while it's just going off track a bit, while we all have a grumble and a moan in the stands about, "Why isn't he playing so and so?" You don't know the full story, so and so might have done something awful in training.

Interviewer: And attitude.

Gill Baldwin: Yes, so they are unable to play.

Interviewer: Sure, and when you compare your first experiences, say 17 years ago, to how you would know, do you feel that there is more enjoyment? Are you happier to come in now, than you were then? Not just because of the familiarity, but because of the way the football club has progressed.

Gill Baldwin: I think that the way that we are now, up with the big boys, if you like, and we are included in things like Sky, the football reports there, you're in with the mix, it's incredible when you look at Premiership and Championship and then we're there, that is still hard to take into your head, for me.

Interviewer: Yes. Is it kind of like... It doesn't feel real?

Gill Baldwin: No, it doesn't.

Interviewer: It doesn't feel like it's your Stevenage. Does it feel like a completely different club from when you first started?

Gill Baldwin: Yes, yes. Definitely.

Interviewer: Would you find it hard if, say, we had a time machine and we said, "This is your first day," do you think you would recognise

anything? Do you think there are parts that you've completely forgotten because of the changes that have been implemented, or is there still that familiar background?

Gill Baldwin: Oh yes, it's still familiar. It's hard for newer turnstile operators that we have to feel what we felt back then, and I'm grateful that I experienced that. Obviously they won't have the same thing. I mean, even... Coming up here, I used to come up here regularly, I stewarded and would go down at the end and chat to everybody in the offices here, and just go in next door to the... It's got the same perfume-y smell in there, that sort of familiarity, that took me way back, just how friendly everything was, and that it was accessible. You can't do that now.

Interviewer: No. Do you feel proud of Stevenage?

Gill Baldwin: I do.

Interviewer: Do you feel proud when you can say-

Gill Baldwin: I feel very proud to have been part of that history, way back, when we were put on the map, really. I mean, people do remember Newcastle, the Newcastle game. You say Stevenage, people have never heard of Stevenage, and then they're football orientated, "Ah, you played Newcastle."

Interviewer: Yes-

Gill Baldwin: So that's the bottom line, even though it was, how many years ago? '98, my maths is not good...

Interviewer: Yes, 13...?

Gill Baldwin: A lot of years. A lot of years ago, yes.

Interviewer: And finally, obviously you've said that you're a Stevenage fan and also an Arsenal fan, if someone comes up to you in the street, who do you support?

Gill Baldwin: If someone comes up to me, what, I ask them?

Interviewer: No, in the street, they come up to you and ask, "Who do you support?"

Gill Baldwin: I would say Stevenage. (Laughter)

END AUDIO

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