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Interviewer: Could you tell me your name and your age, please?

Ray Peacock: Yes, I'm Ray Peacock, and I'm 68.

Interviewer: Okay. What is your association with Stevenage Football Club?

Ray Peacock: I signed for Stevenage in 1964, after leaving Watford.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: I think they'd just turned professional that year. I played for them for four years, in goal.

Interviewer: Wow.

Ray Peacock: I can say they were my happiest years. I went to other clubs, I went to Cambridge City, Bedford.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: I can truly say they were my best years. Unfortunately, I think it's '68 it folded up.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And I moved on to Cambridge City.

Interviewer: Right. So how did you become a professional footballer?

Ray Peacock: Well, basically, through school, playing football, obviously county, and then I played for Watford Juniors, and then we went on a tour to Holland, Watford Juniors, I was 18. I came back, and they liked what they saw, and I signed professional forms at 18.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But in those days- we're going back now to '58, '59- you never really broke into the first team until you were more experienced and older. And there wasn't specific goalkeeper training, so you basically did it on your own.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: I'd been there two years, and they'd signed, and I thought, "This is good, I'm enjoying this." The following year, two of the goalkeepers left, I was the only goalkeeper left, and I thought I'd sort of cracked it, almost. And then they signed Pat Jennings, (Laughter) so...

Obviously the maximum wage then was only £25 as well, remember. They signed Pat Jennings, and I saw him play a couple of times. He was there for a year, and I stayed for eight months, I think. And I thought, "I'm not going to get in this team."

I was almost thinking about starting my own business, as well, which ironically enough was a thing called silk-screen printing, but I'd channeled it down to printing for football clubs. Pennants, banners, and that.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: So I played in the reserves at Queens Park Rangers for Watford, and George Curtis, their manager- I think he'd just been signed in '64, for Stevenage- came and watched, and signed me on.

He signed me on in the 24<sup>th</sup>... Sorry early March. I was getting married on 24<sup>th</sup> March, and I played on that Saturday, I think, although I got married. I think, I'm just trying to think, this goes back. But anyway, I was just mad for football.

Anyway, towards the end, we played two rounds in the East Anglia Cup. It was a trophy, it still goes around now, but it's not

got the authority it had then. We beat Woodford, and then we played at this ground, we played Norwich City in the final, and I've never seen this ground so full. I mean, there was no standing room, they were on their shoulders. I can't remember the gate; I think it must have been about three and a half, four thousand, and we beat Norwich 2-1. We had a fantastic time.

That was the end of the season, and then obviously we started... Every year, we got there, or thereabouts; we never quite made it until '68, when I think we finished third in the league, and we got promoted to, then, the Premier Division.

We had a good run at it. We didn't get relegated, but unfortunately that's when the club demised, you know.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: You know, they'd done all this, and it was such a shame, because they'd put all these facilities in. The ground was never- the ground was one of the worst in the league, but they put floodlights in, a new stand, and everything else.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But there's been some fantastic players at this ground. I mean, Stanley Matthews has been here.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: John Charles played, when he was manager at Hereford. Cliffy Jones, it goes on and on. Because in those days, when you'd finished almost your time in the football league, which would have been, say, 32, 33, the next move was down into the Southern League.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And that's why they got lots of good professional players, coming towards the end of their career, but still good players. And it was good, the Premier League was a good standard then.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: I loved it, and George was a lovely man, super manager. Very defensive-minded.

Interviewer: Playing defensive?

Ray Peacock: Oh, we played defensively, yes. I mean, we used to get booed going away from home.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: Just the way we played. But it worked. I mean, I think our promotion season, I think I let in- 45 games we played, I let in 31 goals through the season, and I think we had 24 clean sheets. I mean, it was amazing.

But I can remember one game, Hillingdon, in Hillingdon, you come out of the dressing room, and you used to run quite a little gauntlet to the ground. Stuff was thrown at us, and booed, because we were so boring to watch. We must have been, I wouldn't have gone to watch us. But we used to get results, and we had a tremendous defensive record.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But there again, we had quality. I mean, Johnny Brooks was here, and he was a wonderful player. He was an absolute- again, coming to the end of his career, but he was still a wonderful player.

And little Tommy Watson, who went to Peterborough United. Colin Powell. We had some quality players, good players. It was a good standard, a good standard.

Interviewer: Absolutely. How did your defence work? As the goalkeeper, are you in charge of the defence?

Ray Peacock: No. Fortunately, no, I wasn't- I didn't used to shout a lot. I did control them at some point, but we had two centre-backs, John Mills and Delvin Stevens, and big John, well, he used to say he had giraffe legs. His legs could stretch out, and he was high, big fella. He controlled it, basically. He was-

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: He controlled the defensive line.

But yes, I wasn't a great shouter. I used to call for the ball, and they'd come out, but I was more concentrating like mad, you know?

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter) Is it intense, the concentration?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: Do you watch the ball, even when it's up the other end of the pitch?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes. All the time, yes. I used to come off, totally- what's the word- tired, I shall say.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: I was tired as those on the field.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: Because you would just be watching 100%, otherwise you'd lose the thread of the game, you know?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And funnily enough, I watch now, and I think, "The goalkeeper didn't have a lot to do," and I can remember games like that, and yet I'd come off washed, you know, drained. Yes, it's... They say goalkeepers are mad anyway, so I don't know whether it's... (Laughter)

But fortunately, I didn't miss a game for Stevenage.

Interviewer: Really?

Ray Peacock: All the years I was here, in the first team. And then we used to play- I think I missed two games out of everything, out of the whole, you know, East Anglian Cup, FA Cup. I think in four years, I missed two games. I was very fortunate there. Very fortunate.

Because Tommy Biggerstaff was with us the last year.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: George got us promotion, and then he left for whatever reason, I don't know.



Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And Tommy Biggerstaff came down from Scotland. Tommy was, again, another lovely guy.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: When the club folded up, Tommy went to Cambridge, and took three, four, five of us down there with him.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: And I played there for four years. That's the only injury I got down there, I broke my collarbone.

Interviewer: Ouch.

Ray Peacock: Yes, ouch. So I was out for a year then.

Interviewer: That's a long time to be out. Was that a consequence of the medical-

Ray Peacock: Well, yes, it was a badly-damaged one.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: I couldn't quite get it right. Actually, to be honest, I packed up after that for two years. Then I came out of retirement and played for Bedford.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: I had four years at Bedford, again, and we got promotion.

Interviewer: Yes. How old were you when you played for Bedford?

Ray Peacock: What, when I finished up? 38, I think.

Interviewer: Right. So that's quite old for a footballer.

Ray Peacock: Yes. Goalkeeper's not bad, though. Goalkeepers can go on for a long while.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: You know, I still feel I could jump in. (Laughter) Seriously.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: It's just, I do it with the kids when we're playing cricket, I dive and catch balls. It's just in your nature to dive.

Interviewer: Sure. Can I take you back to your childhood, and the first time that you were conscious of being keen on football?

Ray Peacock: I was very bad at everything at school. Seriously, I mean that; English, Maths, I had no interest in school. I used to hate school, literally.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Then I went to secondary. I had struggled to read at 10. I went to secondary school, and we had a very good master there. He put me in the football team, and I went in goal straight away, for some reason.

After I got- and things followed after that. I got the interest in football, and the interest in school followed.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: I know it was a bit late in life then, but it did follow down the line. I was so wrapped up in the football then that, you know, it was almost, "Well, if you don't do your work properly, you're not going to get in the team," and that spurred me on.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And it gave me a hell of a kick in life.

Interviewer: So football changed your life.

Ray Peacock: Oh, definitely, yes. Yes, 110%, yes.

Interviewer: Had you come from a sporting family?

Ray Peacock: My uncle way back is Roy Paul, he was captain of Manchester City's FA Cup-winning side.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: From Wales, because my mother's Welsh. But I think that's the only- my father wasn't, or my brothers weren't at all. Just something I took to, for some reason.

Interviewer: Yes. And did your family encourage your footballing career?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes. Yes, they did. Mum used to come and watch me at school, and Dad used to... The only thing with my father, he would say, "How did you get on, son?"

I said, "We won 3-1."

"You let one goal in?" (Laughter) But behind, to other people, he would say, "My son's all right." You know, but it's a hidden sort of thing.

Interviewer: Yes. Keep you on your toes to your face, and praise you up behind.

Ray Peacock: That's right, yes. I think so, yes. That's right, yes.

Interviewer: And presumably you're a London lad. Is that where the-

Ray Peacock: Well, I might sound like it with the accent, but I'm Watford.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: I was born in Watford, overlooking Vicarage Road, the football ground.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: (Laughter) Which is strange, isn't it?

Interviewer: Yes, it is.

Ray Peacock: Yes, so Watford was in my blood then.

Interviewer: Yes. And you played for the youth team at Watford?

Ray Peacock: Played for the youth team, and then obviously, from the youth team, I then signed- I didn't do an apprentice, I was never apprenticed, I just went straight from the youth team, and then signed professional forms for the first team. Played in the reserves, but never made the first team.

Interviewer: Okay. How did you get into the youth team? Did somebody come and scout you?

Ray Peacock: Yes, well, my father, when I left school- I was playing for school sides, and when I left school, I was looking round for a local team to play for, and there wasn't many, so my father started his own team, which was rather fortunate for me. He started a team called North Bushey Rovers, that was Bushey just up from Watford.

So he said, "Can you get any players?" So I got some boys from my school.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Knew a friend from another school, who was brought here, so we got 12 players together. We had a really successful season, won the league, and one thing and another.

One of the boys we got, our centre-forward, actually played for Watford youth team, and he recommended that the manager come down and watch our games, and watch me. He came down and watched me, and then he said, "Will you come in the youth team?" That's how I started playing for Watford youth.

Interviewer: What were youth matches like at that time? Were you playing in a league, or...

Ray Peacock: South-East Counties, it was called. It was West Ham, Tottenham, you know, all the top clubs.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: It was a good league.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: A good league. We didn't play on the- I'm just trying to remember, we didn't play on the club grounds, we played on stadiums. There was a stadium called Woodside that Watford used. Big stadium, but we didn't play on the club ground.

We used to get a lot of scouts watching, a lot of scouts.

Interviewer: Did you get good crowds as well?

Ray Peacock: Not really, no. You know, a hundred, couple of hundred.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But for youth, that was quite good good then.

Interviewer: And was it good training?

Ray Peacock: It depended on what manager you had at the time. We had a fella that was an old fall-back, Dai Davies. He was a fall-back at Watford, and that was his job, to coach the youth. He was very good, to be honest. He was very good.

(Laughter) We were coming back from one game, and we were talking at the back of the coach, and we got onto my mother being Welsh. He was Welsh, obviously. And he said- this was towards the end of the season- he said, "Why didn't you tell me, son," he said, "that your mother was Welsh? I could have got you in the Welsh youth team straight away."

Interviewer: Oh.



Ray Peacock: He said, "Because the goalkeepers down there are rubbish."

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: So that's one, you know, there's a little miss, but you don't know how things work out.

Interviewer: Did you ever play for the Welsh youth team?

Ray Peacock: No, I didn't. No, after that, I was going up.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: That was the end of my last season in youth football.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: I had a couple of trials for England, down at Oxford.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: First one, this was the old Oxford Manor ground, I went down, there was... They had a professional side, and an apprentice side. I got put in the apprentice side, although I wasn't, and put

in goal; and I can remember some of the players on the other side. There was Martin Peters, Geoff Hearst, on the other youth- these were all youth teams.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And I played, I was on there for five minutes, and got knocked out and carried off on a stretcher.

Interviewer: (Laughter) Oh, no.

Ray Peacock: Yes.

Interviewer: What happened?

Ray Peacock: Well, I just went out for the ball, somebody came through with the knee, knocked out, and off I was. So that was my trial gone.

I'm just trying to think who the goalkeeper was, who played in goal. A fella from Portsmouth, I think.

I said two. No, that was my only trial. They dismissed me after that. (Laughter) Obviously they didn't give me another chance, but, no.

Interviewer: Yes, unlucky there.

Ray Peacock: Yes, that was. But you never know how life turns out, do you?

Interviewer: Yes. And when you played for the youth team, presumably you weren't getting paid?

Ray Peacock: No, no.

Interviewer: So you were living at home, and your parents were supporting you?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: How old were you at that time?

Ray Peacock: Just turned 16, 17, I think. Yes, 16, 17.

Interviewer: was there any pressure to go get a job?

Ray Peacock: Well, I did have a part-time job.

Interviewer: Right, I see.

Ray Peacock: Oh yes, I did have a part-time, silk-screen screen printing.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Soon as I left school, I got a part-time job.

Interviewer: Right, yes.

Ray Peacock: And even when I played for Watford full-time, when I was getting- or playing for Watford, or getting paid for Watford, we used to train only three mornings a week.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: As professionals. It sounds ludicrous now. And in the afternoons, a lot of the guys would go down the dogs, go to the bookies. I couldn't stand it, so I went back to this old fella I used to work for, and I said, "Look, can I come part-time?"

And he said, "Well, just come down whatever hours you've got, and I'll pay you hourly."

Interviewer: Oh, right.

Ray Peacock: So I learned the trade. That's how I learned the trade of silk-screen printing, and that's when I got on from there.

Interviewer: Good, excellent. In case things go wrong.

Ray Peacock: Yes, because we make stuff for England now, for the FA.

Interviewer: Really?

Ray Peacock: Well, I don't, I've given up the business, but my son runs it. And you know the banners they hand out at matches?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Well, we make those for England, and they've got all fancy frills around them, brass nobs, and...

Interviewer: Yes. And was it your decision to sort of carry on this association with business? Or were your parents in the background, saying, "Footballers' careers are short?"

Ray Peacock: No, it's nothing to do with the parents, then, I don't think. Not to say they weren't worried, they just... No, it was on my shoulders, really.

But as I say, the maximum wage was £25, so there wasn't- I was earning more when I came to play for Stevenage than I was being a professional at Watford.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: Because I was getting paid £15 from Stevenage, and also I was making a decent living in my business.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: So I was getting two wages, so I was earning a lot more than pro footballers then. Then obviously it changed a couple of years after that.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Johnny Hayes started getting £100 a week, and then blah blah blah, it snowballed to what it is now.

Interviewer: Yes. What was it like, signing those first professional papers?

Ray Peacock: Oh, it was the most exciting thing I've ever done.

Interviewer: Really?

Ray Peacock: Yes, it was an unbelievable thrill. I can still remember it.

Interviewer: What happens? Is it a formal ceremony when you sign?

Ray Peacock: No, just in the secretary's office.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: Can I tell you how-

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: The manager was Ron Burgess. We'd come back from Holland, and we'd won the tournament, we hadn't let in a goal, we'd got the best defensive record, and so on and so forth. So we'd won this tournament, and we were playing Crystal Palace, Bayern München, Zeebrugge, it was quite a big tournament.

We came back, and they gave us a celebration do, a dinner, in Garston, near Watford. I can always remember, I went out to the toilet, we went to find the toilet, and Ron Burgess came in, the manager, and he was standing next to me, near the toilet. And he said, "Do you want to sign professional terms, son?"  
(Laughter)

You can imagine what a shock I got. So I said, "Do I?"

Then he said, "We'll arrange the day," and then I went and signed on.

Interviewer: Did you discuss the change with anybody? Did you have a girlfriend at the time?

Ray Peacock: No, I didn't. No, I didn't have a... No, I told all my friends, obviously, and they were pleased. But...

Interviewer: But there was no moment's hesitation?

Ray Peacock: No, not for a minute, for one minute. No.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: I mean, you know, if I knew how I was going to be looked after then, there might have been.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: Because it wasn't good. To be honest, as I say, you had no specialist training, you were just- basically, goalkeepers were left, "You go in a corner, throw the ball at each other." And that's basically what it was. That's when you saw a ball, because hardly in those days, you never saw a ball. You used to run and jump, and run and jump.

I mean, people say nowadays, you know, it must have been mad not to give them a ball to play with.



Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: So that's the situation.

Interviewer: So there was no professional development, really.

Ray Peacock: No, not at all, no.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And the poor apprentices, I mean, they were signed on as apprentice professionals, and they were cleaning the stands, sweeping the stands after the match, cleaning the boots.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And if they were lucky, they'd get out on the pitch afterwards.

As youth players, we did sometimes train in the evenings. There was a guy, you wouldn't remember him, Cliff Holden, he was a really good player, played for Arsenal. They used to call him 'Thunderball', because he had a shot on him that was unbelievable.

He used to be a part-time player at Watford, yet he was a fully- he was getting paid- I think he worked out a deal with them

that he could do a business, and be a professional footballer, or get paid. After he came down from Arsenal, so he had a lot of sway.

He used to come in the evenings, and the youth team used to train in the evenings, so he would come and shoot in against me, and kick in.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: So that was good.

But no, I mean, it's totally different now. They have goalkeeping coaches, which is wonderful, which is fantastic. I'd like to see one of my grandsons play in goal, that would be nice. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes. What was the view of professional footballers in the 1960s, when you turned professional?

Ray Peacock: I don't know. I don't think they were revered as much. They were just... If you said you were a professional footballer, "Oh yes," like, you know, not knowing the background, but just say, "Professional footballer," it had a bit of kudos.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But I mean, nobody said, "Oh, you're wonderful," and you know... I don't know, really.

Interviewer: Yes. Didn't make the papers on a regular basis.

Ray Peacock: No. No, not the front pages, either. (Laughter)

Interviewer: No. And did it work with the ladies, saying, "I'm a professional footballer?"

Ray Peacock: It did help. It did help, yes, I must say that. It did help.

Interviewer: And you met your future wife, presumably, when you were a professional footballer?

Ray Peacock: I did, yes.

Interviewer: Did she have any doubts or hesitations about your career?

Ray Peacock: Yes, she thought it was quite risky, because I might get injured, and then...

But as I say, my backup was my own business.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: So I did always have that in mind, that if anything does happen with me, at least I've got... Which then, a lot of players didn't.

I mean, one example was, Cliff Jones used to play for Wales and Tottenham. I played with him down at Cambridge City, when he was at the end of his career.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: The guy was absolutely a god. I mean, he was a fantastic footballer. And you thought he made lots and lots of money. He played for Wales, as I say.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And yet the guy was on his uppers, and giving 100% running about the field, at the end of his career, and he had nothing behind him. You know, he was going to get a paper shop or something at the end.

And Johnny, Johnny Brooks, again, fantastic player.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But wasn't earning enough to put it, you know... A lot of them got pubs.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: No end of players got pubs then, or little restaurants, or something like that.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: No, it was a totally different outlook then.

Interviewer: Yes. And was there a bitterness and a disappointment when you found that at Watford, you weren't getting the games in the first team?

Ray Peacock: I was upset, yes. You now, I was upset, because- I'm not blowing my own trumpet, but I had some good reviews.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: People in the background had said- but I needed that chance, you know?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And I felt I never quite got the chance. I mean, as it happens, it turned out great, you know.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But I felt I just didn't quite get the break I needed. But football is like that, you need the breaks.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: You know, it doesn't matter how good you are, you need those little pushes.

Interviewer: A lot of luck.

Ray Peacock: A lot of luck, yes. Well, it's the same in life, isn't it?

Interviewer: Yes, it is.

Ray Peacock: Yes, you just need that little bit extra.

Interviewer: And then, when you came to Stevenage, were you playing for the first team straight away?

Ray Peacock: Yes. No, I had a couple of reserves games, and there was a guy... Ironically, and this is very ironic, the fella that was here, a guy named Keith Warne, at the beginning- this is the beginning of '64- Keith Warne came from Watford.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Left Watford to join Stevenage. Broke his leg, so then they had a fella named Sinclair, I can't think of his first name. Obviously George thought he wasn't quite happy with him, but that's why he came looking for me.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Then I played two reserve games, and as I say, I played in this East Anglian semi-final, had a good game in that. Had a good game in the final, and then it was...

Me and George got on really well together, as well.

Interviewer: Yes. Are those personal relationships important in getting games?

Ray Peacock: Well, they've got to like you, I think.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Unless you're really, really outstanding.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: There's got to be some... And I think the whole ethos of a good team, there's got to be something- not everybody likes you, you can't have 11 blokes like each other.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But say three or four in defence, you know what I mean? They've got to get on at some stage, and the managers, a good manager would be friends with everybody; or not friends, but you know...

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Be on good terms with them.

Interviewer: Was the team cliquy? Was the defence sort of one little clique, and the-?

Ray Peacock: No, no. No, we used to come back on the coach, and get the cards out, and it'd be everybody.

Interviewer: Yes. So it was a friendly side.

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes. Brilliant, yes.



Seriously, I had my four best years here.

Interviewer: Really?

Ray Peacock: Out of all the football I've played, and I'm not just saying that because I'm on the mic, because otherwise I wouldn't be here today, talking and bringing bits and pieces along that I've got. And I did, I used to go on sites and look in, and see Stevenage, and it went down to the borough, and this part of my era is never mentioned anywhere.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: I couldn't find it anywhere. I thought, "That's a bit sad." It's a little bit sad, really-

Interviewer: Yes, it is.

Ray Peacock: Because I think some of the younger supporters perhaps might like to know about when it first turned professional, and that's when it-

I know it's gone bust a couple of times in between that.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But still, the history. It's the same ground. It's the same ground I used to play on.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: When I look at- it's almost the same goalposts, when I look out this window. (Laughter) You know, that stand wasn't there, and it was a small stand. The changing rooms were right over in the corner, the far corner. There was what we called the big stand here, and there were floodlights.

But I mean, I brought my grandson, some two years ago, and I could almost visualise still playing here. You know some grounds are totally different.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Totally alien, they've changed, but this has still got some feeling. I'm not saying it's old-fashioned at all, but it's got some homely feel about it.

Interviewer: Yes. Was it a nice ground to play on?

Ray Peacock: No. (Laughter) Well, the supporters were fantastic, but the surface was unbelievably bad.

Interviewer: Really?

Ray Peacock: It was like- I've got a picture in one of my books, and it's like a paddy- well, it's called a paddy field.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: It was knee-deep. How the forwards, John, skilful player that he was, he used to float over the top of it somehow. (Laughter)

But I mean, you were ankle-deep in mud.

Interviewer: Really?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: And they let you play like that?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes, we used to play, yes.

I think there was one- I can only remember one game being called off, and that was through mud, they couldn't mark the lines, because it was so...

And then we played Easter here, we had to beat Merthyr Tydfil, and there was a dust storm. I couldn't see the goal the other end. This dust, because it dried out, it was either ankle-deep mud or bone dry. (Laughter) I couldn't see the goal the other end, there was dust and everything everywhere.

Interviewer: Yes. It doesn't sound like you had much grass.

Ray Peacock: No, there was not a lot of grass here. Not a lot of grass at all.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But the supporters were fantastic. I think for a lot of the games we used to get 2,000 people in.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: That's a lot of people in those days, you know, for a small club just starting up.

Interviewer: Yes. Were you conscious of it being a new town, and the sort of-

Ray Peacock: Yes, I think so. You know, when I arrived, I can remember coming in the gate over the far side, behind the training rooms there, and I thought, "What have I come to here?" Because it was dark at night, and I don't think they'd put the floodlights up there. And I could see this little old shed, because they hadn't built the stand, even, when I was signed.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And I thought, "Goodness, what have I come to?"

And then I talked to George, and he persuaded me to sign, and that was it, it just snowballed after that.

When I was- sorry, skip a bit.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: When I was at Watford youth- sorry, when I was in the reserves there, I had the chance to sign for Queens Park Rangers. Alex Stock, the old manager there, invited me up to a game, I was sat in the director's box with him. I almost signed, but believe it or not, it was too far from home. (Laughter) I mean, it was only a tube ride-

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But I thought, "No, this is too far away. I'm a Watford boy."

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter)

Ray Peacock: So things might have been different then.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Sorry, anyway, I digress.

Interviewer: Did you move to Stevenage, when you signed?

Ray Peacock: No, because of my business, I had to be sort of in between them both.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: I moved to Dunstable, which was closer then. It's not far from Stevenage.

Interviewer: Yes. And presumably you'd met your future wife by the time you moved to Stevenage?

Ray Peacock: No. Oh, yes, I met her, yes, as a girlfriend.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Yes.

Interviewer: So tell me about that match that clashed with your marriage.

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes. Well, also, it was my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, which was on 24<sup>th</sup> March.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And you know, I can't- I know we didn't go on honeymoon, because we played on the Saturday. But when I got married, I can't remember whether I got married on the Friday, or... I really can't remember. I don't think it was the Saturday, I'm sure it wasn't, it wouldn't have been.

But I know we didn't go on honeymoon, and we didn't until the season had finished.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: Well, honeymoon, then, I think we went to Ruislip Lido or something like that. (Laughter)

Interviewer: And what was your wife's reaction to that?

Ray Peacock: She was all right. She knew I was a football nut, and that was it. I mean-

Interviewer: So she always accepted that football had to come first?

Ray Peacock: Oh, she always, yes.

Interviewer: Yes. Was she relieved, then, when you retired?

Ray Peacock: No, we'd divorced before I got retired.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. I'm sorry.

Ray Peacock: No, it's all right. No, I've got a lovely wife now. And it was football.

Interviewer: Was it?

Ray Peacock: Oh yes, it was totally football, yes.

You imagine, I didn't realise at the time, but I would go to Cambridge, travel all the way down to Cambridge from Dunstable, twice a week, to train in the evenings. I would go on a Saturday, and I would have to leave at, say, ten o'clock in the morning. Get to the game, finish the game, come out. I never used to stay long; I used to have a quick drink then, but then come home, so I wasn't home till six, seven o'clock. It was a long time.

And then, Boxing Day, we used to play.

Interviewer: Yes.



Ray Peacock: All the hol- Easter, we used to play three games over Easter.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: With a family, that's not a great thing, it's not a great-

Interviewer: Yes, disruptive.

Ray Peacock: It is, it's quite disruptive, and in the end she couldn't handle it.  
(Laughter) Shouldn't laugh, but she's well now, anyway.

Interviewer: Good, excellent. What did you think your best game was for Stevenage?

Ray Peacock: Oh, I know, it's fixed in my head. It was Merthyr Tydfil away.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: I don't know whether- well, there was a lot riding on it, because we needed all the points that we could gather.

And I used to love going down to Wales, because being my mother was there, as soon as we got across the border there, I could smell the coal dust. We used to play Barry, Barry Town, and Merthyr Tydfil. I always used to play well down there, but

this Merthyr game, we were just up against the wall for 90 minutes.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And George even wrote in the programme afterwards that it's a wonder I haven't gone to a league club yet, because it was just a blinder.

Interviewer: Right, yes.

Ray Peacock: I did, funnily enough, we played Hereford up at Hereford, and we lost 5-3, and yet I got 'Man of the Match'. [If I let three past 0:32:35], it tells you what a battering we took.

John Charles had a word with me afterwards. He said, "Do you want to come down here to a Welsh club?"

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: He said, "Do you want to come to Cardiff, Swansea, or Newport or somewhere?"

And I said, "Yes." You know, I would go back into the league again if somebody wanted me that badly.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: So we played Hereford about six months later, down here at Stevenage. He came in the bar afterwards, and he said, "What's wrong with you?"

I said, "What?"

He said, "I sent the scouts to watch you, and they said you were bloody useless."

Interviewer: (Laughter) Oh, no.

Ray Peacock: I must have had a bad day on that day they came, which is, you know...

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Which happens. But... (Laughter)

Interviewer: Did you read your own reports? Did you get written up, I suppose, in the local papers? Did you ever pick up the Stevenage local papers and read the reports?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes, I've got a book here now with them in. My dad used to keep them.

Interviewer: Really?

Ray Peacock: Yes, he used to keep them.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Yes, I've got some nice reports in there. They keep you going over the winter months when you're old. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes. What did you do with the bad reports? Were there any bad reports?

Ray Peacock: Well, there must have been, but my dad never put them in the book for some reason. (Laughter)

Interviewer: No, it's odd, that, isn't it?

Ray Peacock: No, to be honest, you know, I never used to have... The only time I had a- well, the one I can remember, we played Sutton in the FA Cup down here. We lost 2-0, and I had a stinker. It's the only one that really stands out in my mind.

I used to get terribly nervous, I was a very nervous goalkeeper. And FA Cup, I was more nervous, because we always wanted to progress to play a league club.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Never did. In all the time I played, never got to- when I was at Bedford, we had three replays against Kettering, and if we'd won, we would have played Cardiff, and the same at Stevenage. Enfield, we played Enfield three times in the FA Cup, and could never quite... Barnet.

So I always used to get nervous for those games, more nervous than a league game. And I can remember that, that was a stinker. I can't remember what happened on the day, but I know the papers the next week said, "He played a lot better than he played last week," basically. (Laughter)

But I used to have a good rapport with the supporters, very good.

Interviewer: Yes. Did you interact with the supporters who were behind your goal, or are you too busy concentrating?

Ray Peacock: Oh, no, I used to lark about with them.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: I used to, yes. And I was a bit of a showman, to be honest. Anybody you see today remembers, I used to dive.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: But I was safe, I didn't do it just to show off. I was pretty safe.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But no, I used to enjoy chatting to them behind the goal. And if I was at an opposing ground, I'd wind them up something awful, so they'd boo you, and that used to get the adrenaline going, you know?

Interviewer: Absolutely.

Ray Peacock: And grounds were obviously, then, were a lot closer. I mean, you could touch them.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: You know, now there's- not here, but a lot of the grounds, they keep you away.

Interviewer: Yes. Did you have any rituals to calm your nerves? Like lucky socks, or things like that?

Ray Peacock: No. I always used to kick the goalposts when I went out.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: I always used to run up to the goalposts, kick both goalposts, and then I used to run about a lot while I was, back and forth. I was always on my toes. As I say, I was a nervous sort of person, you know.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But no, I didn't have any rituals as such, I don't think. No, not like running out behind somebody, or so forth, no.

Interviewer: Yes. Can we turn now to what it was like in those darker days at Stevenage, when everything was going wrong, towards the end of your time here?

Ray Peacock: Yes, it was sad, actually. I mean, although they'll tell you nowadays, footballers, you know, what goes on in the papers and that, they're just getting on with the game, and to be honest, 95% of you are. You're just concentrating on the game you're playing on. You can't affect what's going on behind doors. But we knew, we knew there were some big troubles in the wind.

And as I say, we were all friends, and we got on really well. We'd been through four seasons together, a lot of us. I can remember the last game we played at Hillingdon, that was quite tearful.

The annoying thing was, we weren't going to get relegated, which, for a small club like Stevenage, to get in the Premier,

we were playing Chelmsford, Dartford, these were all top sides. I mean, Chelmsford had loads of money.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: So in our way, that was quite some achievement, not to get relegated, you know, playing these bigger sides.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And that was even more a shame, that we didn't quite...  
I mean, I don't know the stories behind the scenes, and I might be talking out of turn, but the directors were so lovely, these guys, and they were putting all this money in, you know, mortgaging their houses to get the floodlights built.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And it was a local thing. It wasn't some big guy with pots of money coming in.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: These were local guys, putting all their money in to trying to run a club and keeping it going. That was really sad, I felt.



Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: It was very sad. Very emotional when I came back to play here again, because when I went to Cambridge, we played the Stevenage FA trophy.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And yes, I think I had a tear in my eye that day, when I came back.

Interviewer: Did you?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: Did the fans remember you?

Ray Peacock: Yes, it was only about three years later, I think, two years.

Interviewer: Did you get a good reception, or-?

Ray Peacock: Yes, oh, no, I got a lovely reception, yes.

Interviewer: Yes, that's nice, isn't it?

Ray Peacock: I went down the bar afterwards, and chatted to them all. No, that was lovely, yes. That was nice.

Interviewer: So how did you find out that the club was going to fold? Was there an announcement, or did you just sort of come to know?

Ray Peacock: I just think it went down the grapevine, you know. I mean, I think it was one of these things where it's right up to the last minute whether it goes or not.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: That's the impression I got, from our manager, even. "Keep going, lads, another two points today. You know, you never know."

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And that's the impression I got. If we kept going, it might survive. Somebody might come along and...

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: We had a director- not a director, a president. And I'm surprised he never... Reader, do you remember the guy who used to do the Scouts' 'Gang Show'? Do you remember 'The Gang Show'?

Interviewer: Yes, not really, but I know of it.

Ray Peacock: Well, he used to run 'The Gang Show'.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: Ralph Reader, was his name? And I thought he might put some money in, he must have a few bob. But it was never forthcoming from anywhere.

Interviewer: No. Did you know that last game was the last game?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes. Yes, on that day, we knew. When we were going there, we knew it was the last game, yes. And we won 1-0.

Interviewer: Right. Well, that's at least a nice finish.

Ray Peacock: Well, that's right, yes. And I've got some pictures here, it's got 'Swan Song', and all this.

Interviewer: Sure. And it was an away game?

Ray Peacock: It was an away game at Hillingdon Borough.

Interviewer: Right. Did lots of the Stevenage supporters go to it?

Ray Peacock: Yes, we had good support there. Yes, it was a good crowd, nice ground there as well. I used to like playing there as well.

Interviewer: What happened at the end? Were the supporters in tears?

Ray Peacock: Yes. It was very- it was just very sad, very quiet. I think we had a quiet drink, and that was it, really. Just sort of petered out, you know.

I'm really sad that we never sort of had anybody- it could have been me, really- to keep us, and meet every year. Because I do have one at Cambridge City now, where I still meet the guys. I'm talking about 30-odd years ago, and I still, we meet once a year, and that's through the trainer. Every New Year, he rings all the players.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And we all have a meeting once a year. I would have loved that done at Stevenage, but it never happened.

Yes, it just petered out. We knew we were going to lose players. We knew by then- I'd got a few things in the pipeline: Margate, Dover, Chelmsford, and a couple of other sides.

But Tommy Biggerstaff then said, "I'm going to Cambridge, do you want to come?"

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Delvin said yes, Billy Bannister said yes, John Brooks said yes. I think there was about six of us in all.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: And we all toodled off down there, and then the other guys went away. I bumped into them very irregular, now and again, you know.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But...

Interviewer: Was there a sense of you feeling that you were being disloyal, leaving to go to Cambridge?

Ray Peacock: Well, no, it folded. There was no team here, nobody to play for.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And you know, I thought, "Well, the best thing's to stay with Tom."

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: I knew him well at Stevenage, so... No, there was no team here. I wasn't even as if they were going to start the next week in another league, or anything.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: I mean, I don't... Do you know, I don't know what happened then. I don't know whether they did- well, obviously it did start in a minor league then.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But I don't think it would have been a paid league then, a professional league as such.

Interviewer: No, I think you're right.

Ray Peacock: No, I didn't think I was disloyal. I'd had four good years, and I would have had another four good years if they'd kept going.

Interviewer: And what was the little Stevenage group like at Cambridge? Did you all manage to play? Were you all getting games for Cambridge?

Ray Peacock: Yes. Oh, yes, we all played. We got a terrible reception down there, I know.

Interviewer: Really?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes. (Laughter) I played, Tom put me into the- they were playing...

I signed just before the end of the season, again. Sorry, the season had ended, but Cambridge and Cambridge City, Cambridge United and Cambridge City had a cup they used to play for. Well, they're deadly rivals, they are real deadly rivals.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: Tom said, "Look, the squad have all gone. Will you play-" sorry- "The goalkeeper's left, but the old team's here. Would you come and play in goal?" So I said yes.

So we played at City, we drew 0-0.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: There were 5,000 supporters there. Went back to Cambridge United, there were 7,000 there. This is how big this game was.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: I'm playing in goal. A guy I used to know at Watford, a guy named Dai Ward, headed a goal in. The referee gave it offside. Next thing I know, I'm on the ground being hammered by supporters, Cambridge United supporters.

Interviewer: Really? Wow.

Ray Peacock: I was getting beaten up. A couple of policemen came and picked me up and dragged me off. The game was abandoned, and there was no score there.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But that was my first eye-opening of Cambridge City and Cambridge United.

Interviewer: Yes, gosh.



Ray Peacock: That was scary. I'd never been so scared in my life.

Interviewer: You wouldn't have thought Cambridge would have been that rough, would you?

Ray Peacock: Oh, no. I think it's died down a bit now, but it was tooth and nail there. Tooth and nail.

But yes, so then that was the end of the season, obviously, and then we started up with, as I say, Delvin, and Billy, and Johnny.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Didn't get off to a great start, although Tom was a good manager, but I knew he was going to pull it round. The following year, I think, we got promotion into the Premier League again.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And went on from there. I think, did we win it, or come second? I can't remember.

Interviewer: Did you continue to follow Stevenage? Are you a Stevenage fan?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes. First result I look for. Oh, yes. Definitely.

Interviewer: Why is it this club, then, that sort of has that hold on your heart, when the other clubs that you played for don't?

Ray Peacock: Well, they do, but it's the first one I signed- you know, I felt I was important here, put it that way.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: I felt I was important here. I might not have been, but I felt I was important here, and I felt, four years, I'd given everything, and I just had a good time. That's basically it, yes.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Very good. When we won the league, or got promoted, that's what we got, look. (Laughter) A picture like this. I think, did they buy us a drink at one of the hotels in town, I think? Never had a lot of money.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: There wasn't the money to push it.

Interviewer: No, absolutely not.

Ray Peacock: We were just pleased to get promoted, for the town and that.

Interviewer: Yes. Can we finish up by talking about professional footballers today, and the comparison with professional footballers during the 1960s? I mean, do you approve of the sort of things that go on today, with the huge pay, and-

Ray Peacock: No, well, the pay... Does anybody agree with it? I think it's astronomical. I think it's gone over what it should be, but I don't know where you put a limit on it. I mean, everybody will say, "Well, a surgeon should be earning, you know..." But I don't know how you put a limit on it, I don't think you can.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: They don't seem to have, a lot of them don't seem to... They seem to get the money too quick, and don't keep their brains in the proper place.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Because some crazy things go on that you read on the front pages, which shouldn't be, that shouldn't be there. You know, a lot of them are too young to have the money there.

And the diving, I hate the diving about. (Laughter) I can't stand that.

Interviewer: Really?

Ray Peacock: But as a spectacle, I think it's fantastic now.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And it's so fast, and they're so fit.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: You know, they train before the start- this is what I can't get over. They train twenty minutes on the pitch before the- do you watch a game?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Twenty minutes before the start, then after the game they usually have a warm-down.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Goodness me, we used to get- I used to get to the game here, if I got stuck in a traffic jam, half-hour before we played, and you'd get your boots on as quick as you can, play the game, and then vault in the bar afterwards. (Laughter) I mean, it's not a great athletic trait, but we used to run about, we were fit.

But no, I think they're athletes now.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And some of the skill level is terrific, it's good.

Interviewer: Yes. Did you have manager's team talks before you went on?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes. He would say, right, you know what he wants to do, and what you want to do.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Yes, you know, but... And the captain would do a lot, as well.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: We'd cheer each other up, I think.

Interviewer: Yes. And presumably everybody on the teams that you were playing for was English, and English-born. Did you have any foreign players at that point?

Ray Peacock: No.

Interviewer: What do you think of the influx of foreign players into teams now? I mean, some of our Premier League teams are all foreign, aren't they?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes. Yes, definitely. Yes.

Yes, I don't know whether it's good for the development of our guys, but that's the way it is. Again, I don't think it's something you can change.

The first, I think, we used to have one at Watford, a guy named Bill Brown. He was a coloured fella.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But the first one I can remember coming up against playing was a guy named Eddie Dilsworth. He played for Wealdstone, and Stevenage played Wealdstone in a cup match.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: They used to say that coloured fellas weren't brave.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: This is a thing that used to go round. They weren't brave. Good footballers, very tricky and that, but they weren't brave.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But that's definitely changed now.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Definitely changed, and it's changed over the years.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But...

Interviewer: Do you think these people encountered a lot of racism when they started playing?

Ray Peacock: Oh, yes. Oh, definitely. Definitely, yes. Horrendous, I wouldn't...

Interviewer: Did that come from the supporters, or from the other teams?

Ray Peacock: I think it was, I don't know whether the guys actually meant it, but I think it was a wind- you know, sort of a, "You know, I'll get him going."

Supporters, yes. It wasn't good then.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: Thankfully it's changed a lot. Well, I hope it has. I mean, we don't know, we haven't got our ears to the ground in a lot of things. But I would hope it's changed a lot.

Interviewer: Yes. Was there much hooliganism at all, or are we a bit early for hooliganism when you're playing?

Ray Peacock: No, there was... I mean, I wouldn't say, not round Southern League grounds. That was quite... They were well-behaved.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But there was, down in Millwall, and... I mean, I went to Millwall, we played Millwall when I was at Watford reserves, on Wednesday afternoon, and our coach got stoned.



Interviewer: Wow.

Ray Peacock: And this was only a reserve match.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But then you used to get 3,000, perhaps, at a reserve match on a Wednesday afternoon, because Wednesday was half-day shopping, and that's why we used to play a reserve match on Wednesdays.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: I can remember the coach being stoned then, so that would have been '59, '60, something like that.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: So it was going on, it was going on big time, but not round Southern League.

Interviewer: No. Can you just tell me, just to finish up, what you think your happiest memory is of Stevenage?

Ray Peacock: Yes, I think, I know it might- I mean, promotion was really good, but that's the graft over the years.

Winning the East Anglian Cup was big for this club.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And as I say, there was no standing room round the ground. It was packed, packed to the rafters. And we played a really good Norwich City side.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: I mean, they had some good- [Jerry Pate 0:50:28], there was a few players you wouldn't know now, but I would think half their team was first team, the other half were reserves.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: So to beat them 2-1 was some feat.

Interviewer: Sure.

Ray Peacock: I think it was one of the first things they won here, as well, which was nice. (Laughter) I've got the cup at home, what we got. It's an egg cup, about that big.

No, the East Anglia Cup was quite big then, because all the big teams used to play in it.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: But yes, I think that's... Yes, standing, I can remember the little stand over there, and it was ballistic.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ray Peacock: And we went to Letch- what's the golf course up there? Knebworth.

Interviewer: Knebworth, yes.

Ray Peacock: Knebworth golf club for a celebration afterwards.

Interviewer: Right.

Ray Peacock: And that was good, very good.

Interviewer: Yes.

END AUDIO

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