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Interviewer: Could you please state your name for me?

Janice Comerford: My name's Janice Comerford.

Interviewer: What role do you have at Stevenage Football Club?

Janice Comerford: At the moment I run the cash office on a match day, which means making sure they've got enough turnstile operators and programme sellers. Then I set-up all the turnstiles with the correct amount of tickets and the floats. It's quite a busy role. It's just to make sure that everything runs smoothly on a match day. At the end, I pay all the stewards and the turnstile operators. Then we've got to balance all the money. So it's quite a busy day for me on a match day. I don't get to see any of the game at all.

Interviewer: Do you support Stevenage Football Club?

Janice Comerford: I do. Only through working here over the years really. It's good fun.

Interviewer: So you do enjoy your job?

Janice Comerford: I do. I'm married with two children so it's nice to have somewhere I can be me for a day really rather than mummy.

Interviewer: Do you get to experience the atmosphere on a game day or not quite?

Janice Comerford: Yes. I'm always walking round the ground before kick-off, making sure the turnstiles are okay. There's always something gone wrong somewhere. So you do tend to get the pre match build up, but the cash office is based downstairs so we've learnt to recognise the cheers if there's a goal for Stevenage.

Interviewer: Can you tell the difference between the two?

Janice Comerford: Yes, we can now. There's always music played if Stevenage score.

Interviewer: What particular music?

Janice Comerford: I'm not sure what he plays. It's an actual tune so I'm not sure what it's called. So we've got to learn the difference between... But sometimes we can't hear if the away end have scored so we think we're winning and then you realise that we've lost.

Interviewer: I know you said you don't get to watch the game but when they win do you ever go out and celebrate with them?

Janice Comerford: Not really, no, because we're still busy normally.

Interviewer: Oh, after the match as well?

Janice Comerford: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you know the players or anything?

Janice Comerford: I know their names. Some of them I recognise. I don't have much dealings with the players. My background is non league football. I've worked in non league football for different clubs for about 20 years.

Interviewer: Which different clubs?

Janice Comerford: I was assistant club secretary at Barnet Football Club many years ago. Then I left there. My family moved up to Stevenage and they asked me to come and be club secretary here. So that was in '93. I was here for four years. So I knew a lot more people in that role. I knew a lot of the players then because I dealt with them on a day-to-day basis really. The role I've got now I don't tend to deal... It's a separate role really.

Interviewer: Are any of your family football supporters, maybe not for Stevenage?

Janice Comerford: My husband used to be a referee. That's how I met him, through football. My son, who's out there playing his DS, he loves football.

Interviewer: Does he come to Stevenage games?

Janice Comerford: He does. Not many. He loves me working here and it's a bit cool that mummy works for a football club.

Interviewer: So he's very popular at school because of it?

Janice Comerford: Yes. He loves coming here. He does. That's one of the old players. It's a nice place to bring a young child because it's not too busy and it's quite a safe environment here really.

Interviewer: So it is quite a nice environment? You don't get a lot of trouble or anything?

Janice Comerford: Not really, no.

Interviewer: Have you ever had a lot of trouble on a particular match?

Janice Comerford: No. Not that I know of. I know the safety officer now and again evicts quite a few people. You don't really get to know. Occasionally the players have an argument in the tunnel. You tend to hear that sometimes.

Interviewer: Yes, because you're sort of down in-

Janice Comerford: Yes. If you're offended by bad language this isn't the place to work (Laughter). It does get a bit fruity language sometimes, but that's the environment that you're working in really.

Interviewer: I remember you said you worked here before. Have you noticed a change in the ground at all?

Janice Comerford: Yes. It's a lot bigger. When I was here you had this main stand but it was a lot smaller. You didn't have any of these boxes. It was a lot smaller. Across there was half the size.

Interviewer: Oh, so it was literally half the size?

Janice Comerford: Yes. The end, the south stand, the away, that was just terrace and it was just gravel behind the goal. It's changed an awful lot since then.

Interviewer: I guess the conditions now are so much better that they can train in such a way where they can have a better quality of football, would you say?

Janice Comerford: That's right, yes. It's more professional. They've had to do the ground up to progress through the leagues really.

Interviewer: Yes, because they've gone up in the league quite quickly?

Janice Comerford: Yes, the last few years they have. They've done really well. When you think '93, they'd just gone into the conference, which is two leagues below, after years struggling to get into the Conference.

Interviewer: Part of the state of the pitch at the time as well meant they couldn't have people coming to play home games, was that right?

Janice Comerford: I think that was before my time, yes. When I was here they were in the Conference. I was just checking the date with Chris in there. I think it was '96 that they did win promotion but the ground had to be of a certain level.

Interviewer: So they had to fit some kind of-

Janice Comerford: They had to do some building work and by Christmas we hadn't got it done. I think the chairman at the time didn't

believe that they would win the league so he didn't think we need to spend any money on the ground. But then obviously they were doing very well at Christmas time and he started doing the building work but they ran out of time and money. So when they actually got promoted to the Football League they weren't allowed to go up because the ground wasn't ready.

Interviewer: So they obviously fixed that problem soon after that?

Janice Comerford: They did, yes. I think a year later they were ready but they didn't win it obviously until two years later.

Interviewer: So do you think that management realised that they were doing well and that the only way they were going to get further was to actually sort the pitch out?

Janice Comerford: I think so. Every club watches the pennies don't they? I think at the time the chairman didn't believe that they would be in the running for promotion, and then all of a sudden it was, "Ooh, we're doing very well."

Interviewer: Did that come as quite a surprise then to people, the fact that they suddenly started doing well?

Janice Comerford: I think so. They've done really well over the years. It's lovely me coming back. There are all the same season ticket holders that there were in '93. They've all got the same seats.

Interviewer: Can they pick their seats?

Janice Comerford: Yes. So they can buy a season ticket which covers all the games throughout the season, and they can sit in the same seat. There are people who've got exactly the same seat as they had in 1993 when I started. So when I came back two years ago, seeing people that are still there in the same seat was lovely.

Interviewer: That shows their dedication doesn't it?

Janice Comerford: Yes. So I'm really pleased the club's doing well for them really, because they've supported them through thick and thin and all the bad times and the good times. So it's really for them, I think. Years ago there used to be something called The Old Boys. They were called The A Team. They were all in their 80s and it was all voluntary people. There was only four full-time staff in '93. The rest were voluntary members. They used to keep this ground spotless. After a game they used to pick up all the rubbish and they used to do painting jobs.

Interviewer: They were all volunteers?

Janice Comerford: They were all volunteers. They used to have a tea hut in the corner with this battered old tea urn. They were wonderful. There's only one surviving member now. He still comes. Their

dream was for Stevenage to go into the Football League. They wouldn't believe that they're now in League One.

Interviewer: There are a lot of volunteers here now still aren't there that work on the gates and things?

Janice Comerford: Yes, that's right.

Interviewer: Are they quite valued still?

Janice Comerford: I think so. I think every football club's got to have some element of volunteers really. It's lovely.

Interviewer: So you do really enjoy working here?

Janice Comerford: I do. When I left in '97... My parents are terminally ill so I... It's a long story but the chairman said basically he couldn't support me. So I left and that was hard because I didn't want to go but obviously I had to be with my parents. I kept in football over the years, different clubs and things, but I still watched for the Stevenage scores. Even if you don't work somewhere you still-

Interviewer: Just because you remember it and it's a big part of your life?

Janice Comerford: That's right. So when the new regime took over and they asked me... They kept asking me to come back and it wasn't

the right time really with family. My husband was the safety officer here as well.

Interviewer: Is he still?

Janice Comerford: No. There's a new one here now. So when my husband stopped being safety officer and they kept on at me about coming back and I thought, "Yes, maybe it's the time I could come back." It worked out well. So that was two years ago and I'm still here.

Interviewer: That's really good. That's really nice.

END AUDIO

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