



Life's a Story: Autobiography as Myth-making. A Qualitative Investigation into Self-creation, Myth, and the Construction of the Positive Face

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This study hypothesises that the formulation of the autobiographical self is a creative mythology, formed through and by the speaker, via language. Firstly, it will examine and critique currently published theories of autobiography, to determine whether scholars have considered autobiography as a creative genre/process, and to what extent. Secondly, it will detail my data set, my Grandfather's recorded autobiography, and relay two qualitative research methods of autobiography which are used in the composition and analysis of my data. Thirdly it will explain Jung's psychological theory of archetypes and Erikson's concept of Ego Integrity, which assist in the linguistic analysis of the data. Finally, it will methodically examine transcribed excerpts of my grandfather's autobiography in two parts, to show the way in which autobiographies are highly creative, in that they essentially tell a mythological story of the self through repeated schedules of positivity.

Autobiographical narratives are the ontological mappings of an individual's perceived existence. Mediating 'between "self" and "life"' (Benstock, 1988: 11), history and memory, identity and imagination, autobiographies advance towards the speaker's 'self-interpretation [...] as a means of self-creation' (Vidal 2003: 76). The creative capacity of the genre has been challenged by the perception that autobiographies are a 'mirror in which the individual reflects his own image' (Gusdorf, 1980: 33). However in favouring the concept that autobiographies are exclusively products of verisimilitude, the critic is reductive in his negation of the individual's subjective creativity. Qualitative research reinforces this notion, exposing the fallacy of the genre's assumed agenda which is defined by 'an almost legalistic definition of truth-telling, [...], [an] anxiety about invention, and [a] preference for the literal and verifiable' (Gilmore, 2001: 3). Such 'objective, factually correct, "truth-like," documentary features' (Denzin, 1989: 23) would theoretically refuse the speaker's creative agency, because they suggest that autobiographies are bound by a framework which forces the speaker into a monadic reduction of the self. Thus 'the attempt to fit autobiography out with formal and linguistic pacts and functions violates the freedom and fluidity of self-expression and self-representation' (Marcus, 1994: 299). Moreover, theories of limitation fail to recognise the impossibility of communicating one's autobiography through literal language because 'human language and the human mind are not *inherently* literal' (Carter, 2004: 77, italics in original). Marcus negotiates this problem, postulating that autobiographies operate on a dialectical basis, lying 'between "literature" and "history" or, perhaps, philosophy, and between fiction and non-fiction' (Marcus, 1994: 299). Atkinson takes the notion of autobiography a step further. His qualitative study breaks with the traditional theoretical trajectory, revealing the genre's preoccupation with storytelling (Atkinson,

1998). Echoing Sartre (1969: 39), Atkinson observes that 'we often think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story. Storytelling, in its most common everyday form, is giving a narrative account of an event, an experience, or any other happening' (1998: 1). Brockmeier reverberates this sentiment: 'natural or everyday forms of autobiographical discourse' are 'based on a story of development [...] [and] shar[e] some features of traditional narrative genres' (Brockmeier 248). Morley's echoing of this theory in *The Cambridge Introduction to Creative Writing* indicates that it is the current common consensus within the academe: autobiography utilises the 'same methods as fiction [...] story-like qualities such as hooking the reader with the first sentence' (Morley, 2007: 179).

Although this study embraces the concept of autobiography as story-telling, it identifies a critical gap which fails to address the extent to which the autobiographical 'creator creates and is in turn created by his or her creation' (Pope, 2005: 147). Existing theories on autobiography have also not addressed how far our identities are 'formed as well as informed by the "stories" we circulate and which are circulated through us' (ibid). This study will fill that gap, by postulating that the creator is fully created by his or her story, and the story fully creates the person/s identity, because we cannot project pure forms of ourselves through discourse.

Whilst Achebe warns of the cyclical '...stories create people create stories...' (Achebe, 1989: 162) within the realm of narrative, 'stories' and 'people' can be interchangeable entities if the 'story-teller' or autobiographical speaker is no longer alive. If an autobiography records the final life story and ultimate reflections of an individual, then the 'story' of the "person" becomes a historical artefact in which the 'person' is that 'story'. This perspective can be fully realised if the analyst of an autobiography has never known the speaker, and the recorded autobiography is replayed several years after the death of the author. Thus, 'the author is never more than the instance writing' because the 'scriptor is born simultaneously with the [record], [and] is [literally] in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the [speech act]' (Barthes, 1977: 145) Therefore, if the creation of the self through autobiography is unable to transcend language, then the "story" projects the speaker's personal mythology and is a 'product of allegoresis' (White, 1990: 45).

This qualitative study builds on the premise that autobiographies are essentially 'fictive composition[s]' (Freeman, 2001: 295), but it furthers the theory by analysing *how* language unavoidably participates in the creative process of making the mythical self. The data set is taken from my own transcribed excerpts of an autobiographical interview with my Welsh grandfather, Vernon Roberts. At the time of the recording, he was at the end stage of lung cancer, and in considerable pain. He died aged 64 in 1987, two years before I was born. My mother conducted the interview in my grandparent's home in North Wales, over a period of three weekends. It takes the form of a semi-structured interview, where questions were agreed with my grandfather prior to the recording. My mother was acquainted with co-counselling techniques, which involved using questions as prompts, followed by careful attention to the response without undue interruption. It is clear from the recording that they both found the process a moving experience. The final interview took place one week before my grandfather died. It is the last thing he ever said to my mother, but it is the first thing that he said to me.

Whilst the transcription is biased towards my subjective editing, this study has tried to overcome this problem by adopting Atkinson's qualitative research method, exemplified in his case study. Atkinson suggests that when transcribing autobiographical interviews for linguistic analyses, 'you would not want to leave out the "ums," or even the pauses, and certainly not the dialect used. Language usage and every other verbal idiosyncrasy would be important to keep intact in the transcript' (1998: 55). He notes that there is a tendency for transcribers to mark dialect phonetically, but states that the 'general rule is that it is all right to use standard spelling even if the interviewee doesn't' (ibid). He recommends that laughter,

sighs, fillers, false starts, backing-and-filling, tag questions and undecipherable utterances should be acknowledged in the transcription (ibid: 56). My transcription has marked these occurrences in square parentheses, and italicised emphasised utterances. Whilst Atkinson's case study depicts a transcription of an entire autobiographic interview, a transcription of my grandfather's interview, which lasts for 157 minutes, would be beyond the scope of this investigation. This study therefore utilises Denzin's qualitative research approach, in which 'patterns of meaning and experience' can best be sought if '[n]arrative segments and categories within the interview-story are isolated' (1998: 56), but understood within the context as a whole. Finally, for the purpose of reliability, accuracy, and authenticity, this study suspended theoretical assumptions until the transcription process was complete.

Analysis of the transcription revealed high levels of metaphoricity, idiomatic language, reported speech acts and self-reflexivity. These units of language are underpinned by varying levels of positive and negative face (Brown and Levinson, 1987), used to creatively mask or negate the speaker's negative emotion. Jung's theories of archetypes are helpful within this context, because the speaker uses language to creatively map the characteristics of the masculine animus, the hero, intellectual, and generative father (Jung, 1976), onto himself. The data showed that creative language patterns participate in the construction of this archetypal mythical self, and will be discussed as follows:

Part 1

The heroic self

Oscillating patterns of positive and negative face, theorised by Brown and Levinson (1987), reveal the speaker's preoccupation with deliberately maintaining a heroic self-image. In the context of face theory, the speaker recognises dialogic social contexts, which inform levels of autobiographic creativity pertaining to face management. Positive face is characterised by the desire that 'others want for him what he wants for himself [...], a positive self-image' (Brown and Gilman, 1989: 161). Summarites like 'I've had a jolly good life', 'I have no complaints', and 'I'm a very very happy man' (Example 8) reinforce the speaker's heroic self, because he emits a consistently positive face during a time of despair (physical pain and impending death). By contrast, Example 5 posits high levels of negative face (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61). Negations like: 'I don't think that it is necessary to go into the pros and cons of a, the life of a soldier. I, I, don't think many soldiers like to talk about it really' (Example 5), reference the speaker's desire not to be imposed upon or impeded by others (ibid), but it simultaneously reveals his censorship of certain events within his 'story'. Vast spatiotemporal jumps in the narrative are the consequence of negation. The resulting effect is that the self-reflexively imposed lacunae, masks what is not said, to maintain the speaker's positive face and heroic character construction. The creation of the self thereby appears to be seamlessly optimistic in it's over shadowing of negative events during the speaker's life. Hence, negation in this instance hints that the 'story' is a construct of a mythical self because it foregrounds a positive bias in the self-creation. Paradoxically, contradictory examples of epistemic modality could serve as a FTA (face threatening act), overriding the speaker's positive face with negation: 'course I had a great time at school / I thought that it was a place of punishment' (Example 4). Whilst this appears to enforce a positive FTA, the irony underpinning the statements could serve to reinforce a positive state, if it is seen as ironic. Therefore the speaker becomes a comic hero. A secondary possibility is that retrospective perceptions of the past can vastly differ from the lived experience, because the speaker's perspective has changed over time. Similarly, overt emotive expression in Example 9, characterised by direct commands like 'don't think for a moment, that I am sad, because I am not' conflict with non-linguistic signifiers like '[sobbing]' and '[vocal quivering]', to correspond as a positive FTA. However, the positive

linguistic expressives in this statement attempt to override the speaker's explicit emotion outside of the text-world/recorded-world, and the language ventures into a mythological deception of how the speaker is really feeling. Thus, on a linguistic level, the speaker attempts to re-instill his positive face and maintain the heroic image.

Mythological structures emerge through reported speech acts which interact with the speaker's positive face. Evidencing creative retrospective interplay between heteroglossic languages, the speaker re-creates Mr. Humphrey's voice, the Headmaster, in juxtaposition to his own. Appearing to ventriloquise Mr. Humphrey's voice in Example 3, "re-present[s]" the original communication and thereby maximally foreground[s] the continuous, expressive, and creative qualities of the reported event' (Lucy, 1993: 61-62). The creative properties of this quotation erect Mr. Humphrey's as punisher, because an identity tag is foregrounded by the existing schema of school as a 'place of punishment' (Example 3). Whilst Mr. Humphrey's exclaims: 'anybody else who was down by the canal on Sunday, outside into the corridor, outside my room!' (Example 3), the speaker uses playful linguistic creativity to exercise his innocence: 'we'd go as innocent as anything' (Example 3). The speaker's assertion of his innocence disrupts and refreshes the existing schema (Stockwell, 2002: 80) of guilt. He reveals his guilt to the listener: 'We used to play with these things, playin' motorcars, and of course inevitably, the wheelbarrows would finish up in the local canal' (Example 3). Even post-accusation, the speaker insists that his excuse 'was the truth' (Example 3), a direct contradiction of the events previously detailed. Capturing a comic irony, the speaker precipitates playful narrative creativity (Carter, 2004: 82) intended for the pleasure of both himself and the listener. Consequentially, the 'truth and lies [...] are not easily distinguished' (ibid) within the 'story' (Example 3) because the reported speech act of Mr. Humphreys may be designed to evoke humour. Therefore contextual play develops the speaker's highly tailored image within the story, inherent within the construction of the positive face of the hero.

The intellectual and generative father

The mythology of the intellectual self is captured metaphorically through retrospective epistemic modality: 'if if I'd had a good education, I most probably would have gone to the top of the tree' (Example 4). The speaker adopts idiomatic language in his utterance of the conceptual metaphor 'top of the tree', presuming and implying his intellectual capacity with the concept that GOOD IS UP. The conceptual metaphor is extended when he later references planting trees at a school: 'remember the trees that I planted here' and 'look at the trees' (Example 9). The locative noun 'school' in conjunction with the past tense verb 'planted' also suggests planting the seeds of intellectual growth. The speaker also basks in the reflected glory of his children's academic success by stating 'most of my life has been centred, ever since I left the army, in any case, with educating my children' (Example 7). This statement could be viewed as a paradox because the speaker admits through repetition: 'I didn't obtain a very very high standard [of education]' (Example 4). Yet the statement serves to reinforce the speaker's positive face because he projects a mythical intellectual status upon his children. Thus the speaker is generative in that his legacy ameliorates his own lack of education.

Part 2

The speaker's continual reinstatement of the positive face reflects what Erikson defines in his positive growth model as *Ego integrity*, the positive force (Erikson, 1963: 85-87). This model 'stresses the advantages and positive aspects of aging' (Gross, 1992: 732) and notes that '[t]he task of aging is to take stock of one's life, to look back over it and assess and evaluate how worth while it has been' (ibid). Thus Erikson's psychological theory supports

Cook's notion that language is produced through cognition (2003: 9). This process can lead to the mythologization of the self because it focuses upon perpetuating generativity (positivity), rather than despair (negativity) (Erikson, 1963). Analysis of the autobiography revealed a direct link to Erikson's theory as well as Butler's concept of the 'life review' (1964: 265-280) which documents the way in which recollections of the past reflect 'accomplishment, satisfaction and peace (equivalent to Erikson's ego integrity)' (Gross: 737). The second part of this analysis follows three stages of Erikson's positive growth model, to show the way in which the speaker's act of reminiscing creates his ego integrity and positive identity through language.

1) Life has a purpose and meaning

The speaker's identification of purpose and meaning in life, takes place largely in example 9, the penultimate section of his autobiography. Future time references perpetuate the speaker's positive world view, the meaning of which is captured by the authoritative tone: 'My only advice to you all is this: Live your own life, and be happy' (Example 9). The schema of happiness is continued through the directive 'you've always got to remember' and summarize 'your dad is a happy man' (Example 9). The repetition of the adjective 'happy' reinforces the concept that the purpose of life is to be happy, thereby developing a persona of the positive self. Epistemic modality captures the speaker's belief that education is an important means to achieve purpose and meaning in life: 'But my greatest, er, achievement I think of all, what I, er, I'm very pleased with this [...] educating my children' (Example 7).

2) The inevitability and acceptance of un-folding events during one's life

The speaker's first memory is a 'story' (Example 1) of disaster and survival. This is a leitmotif which runs throughout his autobiography. Detailing un-folding events in consecutive order, the speaker uses logical modality to recollect the inevitability of the tragedy: 'because this dam burst its banks, this disaster happened' (Example 1). Relaying the story of the dam disaster in narrative form, the speaker dramatises the event, embellishing memory with post-disaster information, notably specific death toll numbers: 'sixteen people lost their lives' (Example 1). Uniting simile with onomatopoeia, 'it was like a...a... clap of thunder' (Example 1), the speaker reports that 'The noise was terrific' (Example 1). The resulting effect is that 'the people in the village, the village was in turmoil' (Example 1). Plotting a tri-part isomorphism between the nouns 'noise', 'people' and 'turmoil', the speaker maps the inevitable devastation of the village. The interviewer's probing question, 'What effect did the Dam disaster have on the people in Dolgarrog and on your family in particular?' (Example 1) encourages the speaker to expand, simultaneously reflecting the dialogic co-creation between interviewer and interviewee. The speaker moves towards acceptance of the event, in the final sentence of Example 1. Loaded with 17 commas, to indicate breath and stream-of-consciousness, the speaker describes how the tragedy of the dam disaster was translated into a moneymaking scheme by local children, who would 'fight for the privilege of telling the story and have a few copper's thrown at [them]' (Example 1). Through re-creating the story of the dam disaster in oratorical form, the speaker moves towards acceptance of the tragic event during his childhood. His retrospective emphasis on the noun 'privilege' indicates the way in which he values telling the story, within his own autobiographical story. Therefore, the speaker's identity as an orator within his life story has been informed by stories from his childhood.

3) Understanding our humanity: the universality of birth and death, past, present and future

Directly addressing the universality of emotion, the speaker posits a metaphysical understanding of humanity: 'I know that this can be quite emotional [voice quivering], but none of us can be without emotion, we wouldn't be human if we were not' (Example 9).

Cohesion between '[vocal quivering]' and the topic of the sentence, human emotion, generates a cyclical loop, reinforcing the speaker's own humanity. Whilst the affective interjection of '[vocal quivering]', within the context of Example 9, threatens the speaker's positive face and indicates loss of control; he redresses the positive FTA in the second half of the sentence, whereby the coordinating conjunction 'but' pragmatically intervenes. By contrast, the closing phrase in Example 9 'Goodbye, goodbye... I don't know... [sobbing]', reinstates a positive FTA, because the speaker's physical response ('[sobbing]') is counterfactual to the speaker's previous insistence that he is a 'happy man' (Example 8). Ellipsis signified by "... " extends the speaker's struggle to sign-off, as does the reductive processing unit 'I don't know'. The final phrase structure of 'I don't know...' could also be perceived as a deictic marker, projecting forward towards an anticipatory, but unknowable death. The final conclusion of the autobiography, documented in Example 10 ventures further into existential territory, deictically pointing towards the future, whereby the speaker adopts a disembodied existence. Perhaps the most creative linguistic act during the autobiography, occurs when the speaker posits an 'imagined space that represents [the] alternate world' (Stockwell, 2005: 6), a future in which he is no longer alive. Expectation modality 'Well I expect' (Example 10) projects a temporal alternation from present tense in Example 9, to a future context, in which listeners have 'all had a very good cry' (Example 10). Thus the mythological construction of the self is restored because the speaker depicts a world in which he no longer exists, but simultaneously belongs to via projection. Finally, the closing sentence in Example 10 reinstates the positive self by referring to positive-cognition verbs "laugh" and "fun" in the directive statement: 'Have a good laugh, and have fun' (Example 10).

The hypothesis of this study is that autobiographies postulate a personal mythology, formed through and via the speaker. Analysis of autobiographical excerpts, revealed this to be the case, particularly in relation to the speaker's continual reinstatement of the positive face following an FTA. This study utilised Jung's theory of archetypes to consider the way in which the speaker creatively constructs his self-image through language to reflect the model of the hero, intellectual, and generative father. It considered the way in which Erikson's concept of ego integrity relates to autobiographic language, pointing to the psychological purpose underpinning the speaker's self-creation. In relaying how a speaker's identity is enclosed within his creation after the discourse event, this study has shown that the autobiographic creator creates and is consequentially created by his story. The results of this study indicate that the autobiographic speaker's positive bias can have an implication upon what is said. They therefore validate my critique of Gusdorf's conceptualisation of autobiographic narratives as mirrors. Furthermore, the linguistic analysis reinforces my critical assessment of the perception that autobiographies are founded upon truthfulness, objectivity, fact, literal language and verifiability. Thus, it has advanced the notion of autobiography as a story, by reinforcing the concept that 'a personal myth is an act of imagination that is patterned integration of our remembered past, perceived present, and anticipated future' (McAdams, 1993: 12). However, this study is atomistic due to its small-scale qualitative research method. It therefore identifies important questions which warrant further analysis: To what extent does the interviewer and perceived audience have an impact upon the speaker's construction of himself? Does the creative tone differ in autobiographies recorded by younger people or those with better health? If so, in what way are they more or less creative? Does gender, race, or culture have an influence upon the way an autobiography is constructed? How does the interviewer's relationship to the interviewee influence the autobiography? Moreover, to what extent does the analyst's bias interfere with the analysis? Finally, how does the interactional dialectic between the speaker, interviewer and analyst,

create meaning? These questions are important, and need to be addressed. Nevertheless, this study draws attention to how through the stories of our lives, we are able to create mythological selves who can generate positivity, even after death.

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Appendix A

Selected excerpts from Vernon Edward Holliday Roberts' recorded autobiography

Key

Interviewer: Marina Kennedy Speaker: Vernon Roberts

Pause: [pause length indicted in seconds]

Tonal Emphasis: Italicised Undecipherable phrases: [?] Non-linguistic items: i.e. [sobbing]

Example 1

Interviewer: Dad, what can you tell me about your earliest memories?

Speaker: Oh, my earliest memories? Now let me think. Er, well the first thing I can remember. The very first thing I can remember as a child is being carried somewhere. I didn't know where. I was being carried by a member of my family. My step-sister Eena, I found out later on. Now this occurred when the great Welsh Dam disaster took place. Erm, I may as well tell you of th...the story of the dam disaster because you might not have heard it before. On, um, November the Second of Nineteen Twenty-Five, half past nine on a Monday night, above the village in which I lived, the damn burst its banks. The lake was called Lake Eigiau, or in Welsh, Llyn Egiâu. It burst its banks and all the water flowed down into a low level dam, and then cascaded down on the village [0.02] and sixteen people lost their lives. The aluminium factory down below in the valley was flooded. The water was needed, apparently, by the dam, to generate electricity for the local aluminium factory. Then [0.02] I can remember being carried by my sister, my step-sister Eena, as I mentioned earlier, away from the house from where we lived, and I was only two and a half at the time, because this dam burst its banks, this disaster happened, um, in November Nineteen Twenty-Five, and I was born in Nineteen Twenty-Three, August Nineteen Twenty-Three, so I would have been, er, two and a half at the time. That's my earliest recollection [0.02] of my *life*. And later on I discovered we were carried away from this village, from the row of houses, known as um, Hill Side. Number seventeen Hill Side, that's where we lived, to another part of the village where we were given refuge for the night. Um, that's the earliest recollection of my life.

Interviewer: What effect did the Dam disaster have on the people in Dolgarrog and on your family in particular?

Speaker: Oh, pretty traumatic. It was a great, er, it was a great, er, *event*, or disaster. It had pretty terrible effects on people. One chap for example, watched his wife and three children, three little babies, three little baby girls, and erm, [0.02], he got some compensation, some financial compensation, [0.02] and he attempted to commit suicide, he tried to cut his throat, poor chap. Er, of course, he remarried later on and had about seven other children. However, um, [0.01], on the village itself, it was er, [0.03], it it *it never went away*. You see this dam they built

up, they've never built it again, and ther...there is a statue of [?] empowerment, I believe, I'm not absolutely certain, whereby they shall never build it again because of the possibility of it =happening a...a...again. Erm, and as far as my family were concerned, we still went back to the same house, although apparently my Father thought that the *world* was coming to an *end* that night. Um, and I've heard many many stories from my parents at the time. The noise was terrific, it was like a...a... clap of thunder lasting for about half an hour or an hour. Um, and the people in the village, the village was in turmoil on that particular night the silent films were taking part in another part of the village on higher ground, and the majority of the people, in the village, I would say about ninety people were at the cinema, otherwise there would have been a far greater loss than sixteen. You see there were sixteen people that lost their lives. And had a...a... the...the silent film, I believe it was a Tom Mix film, though I was told later on, that was taking place at the local laugh and scratch at the assembly rooms which belonged to the aluminium factory. Because everything was centred around this *aluminium* factory, really, th...that er, [0.02], that came to Dolgarrog. And I think it was the second aluminium factory in the UK, the first one being in Scotland. And I think the second hydroelectric scheme in the country. Scottish pioneers came there, and English, er, [0.02], pioneers who knew about, er, aluminium, and er, they wanted to source the water supply for generating electricity. And the lakes above Dolgarrog were ideal for that purpose. The Irish Navvy's came there, they built the lakes, they built th...they built the walls and er, the built the pipe lines, er, so that the water would come down the steep part of the valley and into the generators, and, er, generate electricity. When I was a kid there in Dolgarrog, growing up, when I was going to school, about seven or eight, I could recite in Welsh, and in English, the whole story about the dam disaster, and the visitors use to come, [0.01], visiting North Wales, in their charabancs and in their, their, private cars, and so on, and when a charabanc stopped, known as coaches today of course, we children would scramble onto them, and fight for the privilege of telling the story and have a few copper's thrown at us.

Interviewer: Yes

Speaker: Erm.

Example 2

Speaker: Oh, by the way, my Mother and my Father used to tell me and my brothers and sisters lots of stories when we were little. I was enthralled on a Sunday night, when there was nothing to do, we used to sit around a *roaring* fire, especially in the winter, having had our bath on a Sunday night, and supper, they would tell us about their early childhood, in particular, my Mother, [0.02], such stories as er, [0.03], my father for example, [0.02], he'd get up to all the mischief, him and his brother Harry, and er, his other brothers, they'd go down by the the...the river, on the pretext of catching fish. And of course

that was not the real purpose, they all had [muffled]... And my Grandfather came down there once, and caught them red-handed smoking a pipe! My, er, Uncle Harry, my Uncle Griff, and my father incidentally, he put his pipe in his pocket [laugh], and er, he said "Are you smoking as well Teddy?", and my Father said, "Noooooo Taid! No, I'm not, I'm not er, er, smoking Dada." He said, "Well what's that smoke coming from your pocket?" [laughs], he said "I don't know how it got there." [muffled] ... were caught and severely punished. And er, there was another occasion, er, when down in the crypt in the local church, there was a story, banded about, that there were some old bones there, and er, the place was haunted. Of course that story wasn't true, but we took it to be true when we were little. Well when this story was told, you could hear a pen drop. Now, the story goes as follows, there they had a bet with one another, a half a crown bet, who ever would go down into the cellar and bring the bones back, would win the bet. [0.02] So they'd all go, one by one, they would have to go on their own incidentally, one by one into this cellar, and it was usually on a Sunday evening at darkness. And they'd light a candle, and go down there, one by one, [0.02] and the story has it, according to my Father, that to get down there, and in this box were a heap of bones. And after each one got there, a voice spoke out, "These are my bones. These are my bones." And in Welsh, they repeated, "Rhain yn fy esgym. Rhain yn fy esgym." Of course, they'd run for their life. My father said he'd do it. He was determined to get this half crown. However, he tried it. And as far as I'm concerned, he never got it either, because he ran for his life as well! And that was one of the stories on a Sunday night that used to keep up enthralled.

Example 3
Speaker:

Friends, I had several friends, er, all living in my part of the village. Alleyn Gordon, Bertie Gordon, Louie Gordon, my sister Phyllis used to play with us. Oh we were just one big happy gang of children, and we used to make our own entertainment apart from the cinema of course. And we use to roam around in the mountains there, and we [0.02] we could climb like monkeys, we could run from the bottom of the er valley, right to tops of the mountain, there above Dolgarrog. And that was our happy hunting ground. We made our own entertainment in the summer time for example, we'd get up in the morning, get some breakfast, and we'd be out, all day long. We wouldn't get another meal 'til at night time. We used to live on berries, blackberries, hazelnuts, erm, anything you could eat, gooseberries, wild gooseberries in the hedge row. And we'd come back at night famished. But we survived all that. Er, and we were forever lasting in mischief. When they were diverting the er, the river, in the valley there, where the dam disaster happened, there was constant flooding there so they wanted to build a...a...erm...a diversion wall [0.02] and when they built it of course they had dozens and dozens of labourers, who were only paid a pittance. Pick and shovel, that's what they worked with, pick and shovel. Now, on Sunday', I distinctly remember on a Sunday morning, we used to go down, [0.02], to this area where they used to work, with

their wooden wheelbarrows. We used to play with these things, playin' motorcars, and of course inevitably, the wheelbarrows would finish up in the local canal, and the canal was tidal. And when the tide came in, in goes the wheelbarrows and we would try and float on them! Of course when the tide started going out, we'd have to scramble out, and down would go the wheelbarrows, down the river Conwy, and they'd finish up in Tal-y-cafn, four miles down the river, and some of them as far as wh... , far as w...Deganwy, which was near Conwy. Of course, there was hell to pay, hell to pay on a Monday morning. A policeman would come to school, [0.03]. Of course we knew what he was there for. And the headmaster, Mr. Humphreys, coincidentally didn't like me, and I didn't like him. Humphreys would come to the classroom and say "Right, Alleyn Gordon, Bo Roberts, Bertie Gordon, Jacky Evans, Louie Gordon, Phyllis Roberts, and anybody else who was down by the canal on Sunday, outside into the corridor, outside my room!" And ah ah we'd go as innocent as anything, we, oh oh, ah. [0.02] And the local police man was there, and he'd come outside, sit on a chair with Mr. Humphreys, and Mr. Humphreys, he, the headmaster would can a cane in his hand. And he'd say, "Right, I want the truth. Who was it who put the wheelbarrows in the canal?"... "Dunno"... "Where were you yesterday?" We were anybody but the canal. Well obviously we were not gonna admit to something we hadn't done. That, well it, was the truth. However, we were quite loyal to one another. Not once, really, as far as I can gather, did we ever get beaten for putting those wheelbarrows in the water. Because we always had a story that we were elsewhere. Although local people might have seen us, they couldn't prove anything because there was some distance from where the houses were, and where the, er, actual, er, works were taking place.

Example 4
Speaker:

'course I had a great time at school. I...a...w, although although I didn't obtain any any educational qualifications. A'course on the whole, as I said earlier, I thought that it was a place of punishment. It was also fun playing truant. And I can't remember ever having spent one week at school really. But on the whole, it was fun. And great, I had great friends, and I shall never forget them [0.05]. Of course the inevitable age of fourteen came around, and that we, er, leaving school. And I remember seeing the headmaster at the school. The day you left school, he saw you. And I remember him [laughter] seeing me. He said "well right, you're going out into the big world now". He said he he... a...a, "Where you going to go to?" I said "well, I'm going to the aluminium works site, been promised a job, in the laboratory." He said, "but you haven't got any education qualifications." Well I don't think I understood what he was, what he was talking about, "education qualifications". I could read, I could write, and I could spell a little. It was all my education really came later on when I joined the army. I went to a military school, er I learnt er, there. I didn't obtain a very very high standard, but nevertheless it sufficed, er and stood me in fairly good stead. But I have been told, really, er, later on in life, if I'd had a

good education, I most probably would have gone to the top of the tree.

Example 5

Speaker:

It wasn't long before we were in Belgium. And I remember going into Brussels. The er, and I remember going into Holland. I'm not going to go into the rigmarole of what I did during the war. I mean, I did pretty much the same as everybody else did. Sometimes it was exciting, sometimes it was boring. Sometimes, it was, a...dangerous. Very dangerous [00.2]. But I don't think that it is necessary to go into the pros and cons of a, the life of a soldier. I, I, don't think many soldiers like to talk about it really. [00.2]

Example 6

Speaker:

I didn't have what is called a bad war, er, compared to the infantry, I don't suppose. [00.2]. Er in the main, I enjoyed it and the experience was, was, very good I think, on the whole, but I don't think I'd ever want to go to another war. [00.3] Well, er, I think, I think I've said enough about the war. Of course there's an awful lot more I could say, but one can't remember when one is...a...a... doing one's memoirs for the first time, or one perhaps doesn't do it for the second time. When you're doing a tape recording, you can't remember everything.

Example 7

Speaker:

But my greatest, er, achievement I think of all, what I, er, I'm very pleased with this, is the fact that most of my life has been centred, ever since I left the army, in any case, with educating my children [0.02]. And I think I've achieved this. It's been a great...a, a great blessing for me to know that my children have been educated.

Example 8

Speaker:

So here I am at this, er, ripe old age of sixty-four. [0.03] Er. I think that I've had a jolly good life up to now. And er, I have no complaints. Should I decide to kick the bucket tomorrow, I, I, I have no complains. I'm a very very happy man. A chap who never thought he'd get married, I got married. A chap who never thought he'd have children, I had four children, [0.03] and has got them all educated. But this is not an achievement of mine, of mine alone, this is the achievement of Mummy as well. She played a part in it and so did the comprehensive school. And now we've got a government in office that's prepared to destroy the comprehensive system, and wants it privatised. And goodness knows what they're goin' do with students who want to go to university. They'll make them *pay*. If they can't pay now, they'll make them pay later. Well I don't hold much prospects for the future.

Example 9

Speaker:

So, don't think for a moment, that I am sad, because I am not. I have had a good innings. We come from a hard resilient family. We're made

of stern stuff, there's no doubt about that. I think that we are realistic, and we can put up with the trials and tribulations. My only advice to you all is this: Live your own life. You've got your own life to live, and be happy, and remember the trees that I planted here. So when if you ever come to North Wales, pop into the school next to the old house and have a look at the trees. [0.04] I must thank my brothers and sisters, for their wonderful support. I've seen them all [0.04] and I know that this can be quite emotional [voice quivering], but none of us can be without emotion, we wouldn't be human if we were not. So I thank all the brothers and sisters, Deborah for coming to see me. I would have liked to have seen Myra. Maybe she will come to see me. Thank you all [0.05]. And last but not least, [0.05], my dear wife Mary [sobbing], [0.06]. Don't pay much attention to this emotion [0.08]. She been a brick. A wonderful wife [sobbing] [0.07], be good to her [muffled], *be good to her*. [sobbing] [?]. So don't forget, look after Irish. That's w...[laughing] one of the old jokes Mum and I always have. She's been a good mother to you, and she's been a good wife to me [sobbing]. I respect you all for what you've been. Great children, [0.04], and I love you all very much [sobbing]. Once again, I'll take my leave and say bye bye. If I have time I'll, I'll make some more recordings, who knows? I haven't said everything I'd like to say, but you can't remember all these things. There are so many things I've missed. [0.03]. But you've always got to remember that your dad is a happy man and I've loved you all very much. Goodbye, goodbye... I don't know... [sobbing].

Example 10

Speaker:

Well I expect that by now you've all had a good cry. Well that's how it should be. Get it out of your system now. That's what I intended it to be like. You get the crying out of your system now and then you can all have fun. Have a good laugh, and have fun.