

*[Start of interview - 00:00:05]*

WRM What's your name?

LR Rukin, Lawrence Rukin; Laurie Rukin.

WRM Oh yes, you're famous actually, I've known your name for years.

LR You ever?

WRM I have, yes. Were you a postman?

LR My Father was, aye.

WRM That's it! So you're Laurie Rukin. And it's R-U-K-I-N?

LR Aye, that's it.

WRM And you were born here at Keld?

LR I wasn't; I was just born two or three mile just out o' t' village, at a farmhouse up there like. But I've lived 'ere...

WRM Which farm was that?

LR I was born up at Harker House; it's a holiday cottage now though.

WRM Oh, yes. And what was your job in life?

LR A farmer.

WRM Pardon?

LR Farming.

WRM You've been a farmer all your life, have you?

LR Yes. I lived there, then my Grandfather had a farm on there like, then my Father did, and then I did, and then my son's there now.

WRM Oh, yes? So there are four generations?

LR That's it.

WRM And which farm is this?

LR In t'village here, Park Lodge.

WRM Park Lodge Farm at Keld?

LR Yes, that's right.

WRM And four generations of Rukins have been there?

LR Since 1901.

WRM Oh, yes? And you own the farm, do you?

LR No; I do own some land, I've got eighty acre like, but...

WRM Did your Grandfather deliver the mails as well?

LR No, he started at Tan Hill pit, with another lad of t'similar age, when they were nine years old.

WRM Did he? What was your Grandfather called?

LR James Rukin. He went by the name of Bob Jim. *[Laughs]*

WRM Bob Jim? And what was the other man called?

LR He was Hunter. Willie Hunter's Father.

WRM What was his name?

LR I wouldn't know. I believe he lived at Crow Trees. Actually I think he's staying with his daughter up at West Thorns at the present, they've moved from Crow Trees to Muker.

WRM What, Willie Hunter?

LR Aye, and his grandson's taken over now, you see.

WRM Well, last time I saw Willie Hunter I called after being up with... not 'gut' Bill, the other one who lives just o'er top from Gunnerside... ah dear, my memory's fading rapidly. Anyway, we went up t'coal pits and then Willie Hunter was telling us about it.

LR Aye, no, I think he's up at West Thorns now with his daughter just for a week or two.

WRM Is he?

LR He's what? He'll be comin' ninety four.

WRM He'll remember Susan, won't he?

LR Oh, aye. *[Coughs]* Yes, he'll remember Susan.

WRM Oh, well, is it the first farm as you come down from Tan Hill?

LR Yes.

WRM Because I've had a chat with a lady and her husband who is sixty one is out chasing sheep at the moment, and she mentioned about her old...

LR Well, I mean he shouldn't be chasing on 'em; I think he might be fallin' on 'em. We don't chase 'em, this time o' day it'll lamb, it's comin' up to lambin'. *[Laughs]*

WRM She mentioned about her... was it her Father-in-law?

LR Her Father...?

WRM She said he wouldn't know very much about Susan because he was from further down t'dale.

LR Aye, that's right. Yes, that's right. But they used to live just half a mile... I think the farmer, the Father, lived about a mile on, like.

WRM What was Willie Hunter's Father called?

LR No, I couldn't just tell yer.

WRM Anyway, one of the Hunters.

LR Yes.

WRM And did your Grandfather tell you anything about those days up at the pit?

LR Well, I don't know you see, he did a broadcast once when we... three of my Uncles and myself. My Mother was t'eldest of eight, you see, see that's how I gained to seem me three brothers and we once or twice, well, three times, broadcast from Leeds on t'radio, like.

WRM You weren't these famous dales singers, were you?

LR I were one of 'em, aye.

WRM Were you?

LR I was one of 'em, aye.

WRM Oh, that's lovely.

LR And this time me Grandfather was...

WRM Was he a dales singer?

LR No, but he was talking. It was a programme, you see: Harry Hopeful, walking supposedly from Cam Houses to Tan Hill, you see, and the folk he'd met, this Harry Hopeful, like. My Grandfather talked about when he started when he

was nine year old like an' 'e 'ad a shilling a week like. And he said in the wintertime it was dark on a morning when they set off and dark when they came back. So the only time they saw daylight was on a Sunday.

WRM Then they wouldn't see so much, they'd have to go to Chapel, wouldn't they?

LR Well, I don't know.

WRM And then your Father was the postman?

LR Aye, well he had t'farm, you see, and it's just half a day, three hours maybe, posting.

WRM That's right; and your Father's first name was what?

LR John.

WRM John Rukin.

LR John Rukin, aye.

WRM I wonder if I've interviewed him sometime, I must have done.

LR It's quite possible. I've some photos here, and Susan, up at Tan Hill, they're somewhere in that drawer like.

WRM So he was posting up there in the 1930s was he?

LR Oh yes, he started in 1912 I think, posting.

WRM 1912?

LR Aye, 'til '42, so he was posting thirty year.

WRM Good heavens! And then when he first started off, did he walk up?

LR Oh yes, walk, aye. Well, he might take his push bike you know in summer-time, like. Mind they've down there to go, you see. A farm on there, Crackpot Hall and up to there, oh no, he walked a lot, yeah.

WRM So which farms did he go to then? He went from...?

LR He delivered round t'village, Keld, then onto Crackpot Hall. You can't see it on there, it's too late now. East Stonesdale, and then he'd walk up the moor to Frith.

WRM F-R-I-T-H?

LR Yes, and then up to Tan Hill.

WRM Two farms at Frith, and then up to Tan Hill.

LR Yes.

WRM And did he come back by West Stonesdale?

LR Yes, walked back.

WRM How long did it take?

LR On that route he didn't deliver letters to West Stonesdale, the other postman did that, and then back round up near dale head as we call it, like.

WRM But he did go to Tan Hill?

LR Oh, definitely, and you know when Susan... well, Mrs Peacock, Susan Peacock, she was married before like. I didn't know her first husband. Parrington, you see? Of course you probably know, I'm mebbe tellin' yer summat yer know? *[Laughs]* No, well, I mean I'm sayin' like, she had three daughters, and they were living away workers and if one was writin' their father said, 'God, if there wasn't anythin' 'as she sent yer the daily paper?' *[Laughs]*

WRM And this was when she was Susan Parrington?

LR Yes, that's right.

WRM And she had three daughters?

LR Aye, and then after that, after she was married again with Peacock like... well, it's in a book that's on Swalesdale, isn't it? About when she was on by herself and when there was the roadster we call 'em, the tramp, you know. You'll have read that as well. The roadster pulling a revolver out, like.

WRM When the tramp came up?

LR Aye, he wouldn't leave and he pulled a revolver. My Father said she had a revolver like.



WRM She had?

LR Yeah.

WRM You see, your Father actually would have known her for all those years.

LR Oh yes, aye.

WRM And was she hospitable?

LR Oh very, aye.

WRM I mean, did she give him a cup of tea when he got up there?

LR Well, she could do, yes. Oh, she was alreet, but she was the boss, like. By God, she could [unclear 00:07:50] away, could Susan, like. Well, we used to go up there when we were going dancing like.

WRM Dancing?

LR When we used to go calling, we were going to Arkengarthdale or the [unclear 00:08:02 – the Stem?] maybe, maybe on a Sunday afternoon when we shouldn't. We should have been at Chapel. Or on a night. I had a little harmonium, you know, and I used to play there.

WRM What, up at Tan Hill?

LR At Tan Hill, yeah.

WRM You played for dancing, did you?

LR No, there weren't dancing there, no. But if anybody came in there'd be a bit of a sing-song or there was a little harmonium there that they had anyway.

WRM So actually, you yourself when you were a lad you used to go off with other lads dancing over in...?

LR What age do you call a lad, like?

WRM Er, teens...

LR At what age do you give over bein' a lad, you tell us?! Twenty-nine, aye!  
*[Laughs]*

WRM It's like 'Old Amos' in the next issue of *The Dalesman* is going to say, 'Old age is ten years older than what I am'. *[Laughs]*

LR Aye, that's it, aye!

WRM So when did you first see Susan then?

LR Oh gum, I couldn't just tell you. I didn't start going to pubs like right soon.

WRM Did you go out with your Father on his rounds?

LR No. No, I did once go up... I believe he was ill one day, and I went on horseback under the snow. Well, once or twice mebbe. Up to Tan Hill, like.

WRM What, to take the mail?

LR Aye, the same.

WRM And what do you remember of Susan?

LR Well, I don't know what she was particularly like, she was very... Well, she broadcast as well once with us at Leeds.

WRM Yes? What did she look like?

LR Have you never seen a photo of Susan?

WRM Yes, but you can never really tell from just a little black and white snap, you know? A bit thin-faced was she?

LR Oh, yes, very; yes.

WRM And sharp eyes?

LR Yes, she had a bit of a cataract on her eye 'ad Susan, yeah.

WRM What was her manner like? Was it brisk?

LR It could be, although she would be friendly. But she could be brisk as well.

WRM Bustling about, was she?

LR Oh, aye, you see she was a worker. She'd do a lot of teas, mek teas, you know, at Tan Hill. Then of course her husband, well 'e worked for the Council, on t'road like: Mr Peacock.

WRM What did Mr Parrington do, the first one?

LR Oh, I don't know. I couldn't talk about him; I didn't know him, you see?

WRM No, fair enough.

LR They were from... I think Parrington used to live at, did he live at Kettlewell?  
I just forget now. No, I couldn't talk about them because I don't know.

WRM No, Big Bill would tell me about that.

LR Well, I don't know whether he'd know much about that.

WRM Anyway, he can allus make it up, can't he?

LR *[Laughs]* Aye, you'll see...!

WRM Yeah. And at Tan Hill, were there sheep sales in the old days or are they quite modern? I mean, you get sheep sales up there now, don't you?

LR No, it's a show.

WRM A show, is it?

LR Aye, the last Thursday in May. Now that started in 1952.

WRM Was there anything like that in the old days?

LR No, not up there, there wouldn't be, no.

WRM You didn't get sports and things did you?

LR No.

WRM What do you remember, going up there? Were there a lot of horse-drawn wagonettes and things in summer?

LR Well, people used to go for t'coal, well they didn't go to Tan Hill actually; the pit was just a mile this side of Tan Hill, you know, where t'old coal mining... They mebbe used to go there for coal like, up there.

WRM Yes?

LR Well, Michael Peacock, he got called out from behind t'house like, yer see.

WRM What the pit was just behind the house, was it?

LR Yes, he had one; just a small one that he broke himself.

WRM They broke through it recently.

LR Pardon?

WRM They broke through it recently.

LR Aye, yeah?

WRM They were sinking a bore hole.

LR For water, aye.

WRM And they went straight through... what would it be? Would it be an 'addit'? I mean, what was the local name for it?

LR At t'pit, d'you mean?

WRM Yeah, a gallery, you know, is it called an 'addit' up here? Anyway, they went through it.

LR Aye, well it would be a level, like.

WRM A 'level', that would be it.

LR They were levels. Aye, t'level.

WRM You've been up with horses and carts, have you?

LR Aye, I did t'this one 'ere, well I once went for some to Tan Hill, like. It's very small is that, you know?

WRM Was it?

LR It's alright for banking up on t'fire, like.

WRM So you remember going up to Tan Hill then, and you took a horse and cart up?

LR Aye, to this pit 'ere.

WRM No, up at Tan Hill.

LR Aye, well, it isn't really that big now like, there'd be enough in this t'other one.

WRM Aye. I mean, what was it like up at Tan Hill? Was there a little building

behind or something where...? I mean, what was the routine?

LR No, I don't know, we just... I've just read a book about this, Tan Hill and how it had its own pit, like. He didn't get a lot of coal out; he'd get a bit.

WRM Did he just heap it up behind the inn?

LR Aye, somewhere round t'back. I just forget now where exactly it was.

WRM Yes, but it was small stuff, was it?

LR Very small, aye. Only for caking like, banking up, and what we call cake, like.

WRM What did they call your little group of singers?

LR The Keld Singers.

WRM The Keld Singers. Now when did they used to operate, was it the 1930s?

LR Aye, that's right. There was three on us, two of me Uncles, and as I say, we broadcast in Newcastle, and it's an awful long time since. Fifty one years sin' '35, aye.

WRM Is it? 1935, yes.

LR No, but we'd done quite a bit of singing in concerts round here, you see.

WRM And who were your two Uncles?

LR Well, there were three, but one on 'em is dead now, he died two years since.

He just lived on there; Richard.

WRM So there was Richard Rukin...

LR No, Alderson.

WRM Richard Alderson...?

LR The eldest was Jim, 'Mosser', he went by the name o' Mosser; he's in Richmond House, he's ninety three.

WRM So The Keld Singers were Richard...

LR No, Jim.

WRM Jim Alderson...?

LR Dick (or Richard), and Chris or Christopher, but I never heard him get called that.

WRM So it was Jim, Dick and Chris Alderson?

LR And Laurie Rukin.

WRM And Laurie Rukin, and the four of you were The Keld Singers?

LR Yeah. At one time there was another young man joined us, he was a farm worker round 'ere. Cyril Barningham like. He lives at [unclear 00:14:30] now.



WRM Cyril?

LR Barningham.

WRM Barningham.

LR He's one of these singers lower down the dale, there's about eight or ten of 'em. They're goin' round givin' musical evenings... they were over in Westmoreland about a week since.

WRM Barningham. B-A-R-N-I-N-G-H-A-M, is it?

LR Yes, Cyril, he lives at [unclear 00:14:58]. He was a farm worker up here in those days like, and he was a nice, a good singer. Like, he's not a lad, he's seventy hissel'. 'ere's me givin' 'is secrets away! *[Laughs]*

WRM It doesn't matter. And when did they close down then, The Keld Singers?

LR Well, really when we started without... let's see.

WRM Was it a Chapel choir?

LR Well, there was a small choir in t'Chapel. It was probably where it started, like. It'll be fourteen years since now, I should think, or fifteen since we sung together. I bet the last time we sung together was in t'Thwaite Chapel, the four of us, at the Harvest Festival.

WRM Yes, lovely.

LR It was a Chapel, up Swaledale, first on the right as you go down. It's closed an' it's t'village now.

WRM We've got an Alderson living two doors away from us in Giggleswick.

LR Oh, aye?

WRM He got his wife from Appersett.

LR Aye, Appersett.

WRM At t'top o' t'hill.

LR I know where Appersett is. If this isn't Hawes, I know where Appersett is.

WRM And 'e were born in Swaledale.

LR An Alderson, Giggleswick?

WRM Yeah, he has a farm at Horton in Ribblesdale.

LR Alderson?

WRM Yeah. I was at a dance with him the other day, he and his wife.

LR Oh, not Tommy? Oh, aye, I know who it is, it's Tommy.

Mrs Rukin Which Tom is this then?

LR Jessie Tom.

Mrs Rukin Oh, Jessie Tom.

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LR Oh, I know 'im well. Oh yes, he got Ted Metcalfe's daughter. Ted Metcalfe's sister actually now, aye. Oh aye, I know Tommy, aye.

WRM It isn't Tommy, is it? No...

LR You did just say Tommy, didn't yer?

Mrs Rukin Yes.

LR Yes, Tom. Ernest...

WRM It is, you're right.

LR Ernest's just retired... well, he's kept house and his wife is not so well up at Askrigg there. Oh yes, it's Tom, aye. I got that when the father died, Tom's father.

WRM What is it?

LR Well, it's just electric, well you switch 'er on...

WRM It's like a kind of electric keyboard, is it?

LR Aye. Well, no, it has to be plugged in, like. And then you put that thing there.

WRM Oh, I see.

LR Because when his father died at Hawes...

WRM Ida's his wife.

LR Yes, that's right, I know.

WRM Yes, that's right. I tell you, I'm gettin' 'baffley'. *[Laughs]*

LR I'd played on it in this little cottage at Hawes like, and when we came out...  
it's a big house along there like, Park Lodge, we had a piano and two organs.  
So I said, 'I'm going' to hiv that.' *[Laughs]*

WRM What do you remember about the harmonium up at Tan Hill? Have you  
played it?

LR Oh, I've played it, aye. I've played many times. A very small one it was.

WRM Up at Tan Hill?

LR I don't know who it...

WRM It was actually in the pub, was it?

LR Oh yes, that's right.

WRM And was it in the bar?

LR Aye, well, there only was the one room there. They had a little room where  
they had a tea room like, at the side.

WRM And when did you play on it?

LR On a night, like.

WRM Yeah, good. For dancing was it?

LR No, not for dancing; just a bit of a sing-song mebbe.

WRM Yes, and what sort of songs?

LR Oh, well, I don't know, I can't remember.

WRM Were they all Dales songs?

LR Aye, that's right. Mebbe a hymn or two. You usually do sing hymns in a pub, don't you? *[Laughs]*

WRM That's right. And before cup finals.

LR *[Laughs]* Aye.

WRM Now, old Susan's buried just over there, and that's in the grounds of what...?

LR It was the...

WRM The Congregationalists?

LR Aye, it was, the United Reformed Chapel.

WRM And do you remember the funeral day?

LR Oh aye, definitely, aye. God, we had a photo an' all taken at the...

WRM What year was it?

LR It were either '37 or '38.

WRM Yeah, and it was a big do was it?

LR Oh, aye; it was that. There was a photo taken outside Tan Hill, with the coffin there and all the cars. I don't know how many, but by God, it was a big funeral.

WRM How did they get the coffin down?

LR Well, there would be the hearse, you see.

*[Phone rings. Taping interrupted.]*

WRM She liked to hear a hymn or two, did she?

LR Oh definitely, aye; well, there wasn't much way of getting away from Tan Hill, was there? Oh, lad'll 'ave took trap; aye, he had a pony and they had a trap.

WRM They took t'trap, was it a little thing?

LR No, but when she walked, she should walk down. By God, she could walk an' all.

WRM Have you seen her walking down?

LR Aye, well, she had to walk down for her shopping.

WRM Where, at Keld?

LR Aye. Oh aye, she was like a very [unclear 00:20:09] thing, she used to stride about.

WRM Yeah. Did she come down by herself?

LR Oh, aye. I remember this time we were broadcasting in Leeds and it was in February and there was a bit of snow on, you know, and this Harry Hopeful said, 'Will Michael be listening in?' That was her husband. 'He will if he thinks on,' she said, 'he will if he thinks on.' *[Laughs]*

WRM And you sang in the same programme, did you?

LR Oh aye, yeah.

WRM How did you get to Leeds?

LR We had taxis, like, for two guineas each; with four on us, mebbe that's eight pounds. We once came for a half hour's programme, The Keld Singers, in Leeds: five of us there was. That'd be ten pounds, plus we had t'carriage there. I wish we could mek a half hour programme now wi' some o' the... what would we mek, five thousand ?

WRM I know it's amazing, isn't it?

LR *[Laughs]*

WRM So this village would be blotted out on a funeral day, would it?

- LR Aye, oh no, but there were a lot of visitors came you see. She was known for miles around was Susan, like. Susan Peacock, she was like a character. She was a real character, like, really. Oh, aye.
- WRM Ee, well thanks very much, lovely. I'll go and photograph her grave. There is a headstone is there?
- LR Aye, it's down this corner 'ere, down the bottom left-hand corner there. It tells you who all she was married to, Michael and Paddy. And then her daughter Edna, the youngest daughter, see, she who lived at Lower Road, and then she was buried somewhere there as well like.
- WRM And your name is...? What's your first name? Laurie?
- LR Lawrence, I was christened Lawrence. But they call me Laurie, Laurie Rukin, aye.
- WRM Now I've learnt from long experience, it's always better to double-check in Swaledale otherwise you can fall back on nicknames. What's your nickname? Have you got one?
- LR Well, when I went to school it was 'posty', because my father was the postman, you see? *[Laughs]*
- WRM Yeah. Oh, lovely...
- LR I know what Big Bill's was an' all, he might not like it, so don't put that down.



WRM No, no, I thought it might be 'Big Bill', isn't it?

LR It was, but when he went to school I don't think it was.

WRM No?

LR 'Bill up t'steps', aye, 'Bill up t'steps'.

WRM Ee, lovely. So you used to set off and go to a dance from Keld?

LR Aye, we'd ride up to Tan Hill, and then of course we'd call and have a drink,  
you see.

WRM You'd ride on what, bikes?

LR Well, motorbikes it used to be formerly, and then cars, like.

WRM Yeah.

LR This was, and then when you got out, by God, it nearly blew you over.

WRM Yeah. And you used to call in for a drink?

LR Oh, we generally called in for a drink! *[Laughs]*

WRM Yes, and then where was the dance being held?

LR Well, it might have been on Stainmore or Arkengarthdale, you see?

WRM Oh, yes. And it could be really wild up there, could it?

LR *[Derisive snort]* You want to try! *[Laughs]*

WRM Did it used to blow you up there?

LR Oh, by God, yeah. Aye, I've heard me Father say, if he had his push bike like when he was posting, from Tan Hill down to West Thorns and when there was a west wind he said you could hardly be a-risin' it was that strong. But I know, you do get the wind yonder, aye.

WRM Wonderful.

*[End of interview – 00:23:50]*