

Oral history interview with Michele Farmer, 16 July 2018.

00:00

Born and bred in East London, lived there for 40 years; lost home in compulsory purchase because of 2012 London Olympic Games; born Queen Mary's Hospital, Stratford; lived in tower block in Plaistow; moved to the Carpenters Estate in Stratford; "it had a fantastic view over London and really amazing sunsets" [1:36]; council were strict, regularly checked residents were looking after flats; lots of families with young children; unused solid concrete children's play-room at the top of the building

03:00

During Olympics old children's play-room used by BBC for broadcasting; children's games; local police office (bobby) who knew the estate's children by name; windows in the flat spun around "how no one fell out I have no idea" [4:47]; everybody knew everyone; "the amount of people who came out to see me go and say goodbye, it was really quite touching, quite sad" [5:18]; windows fixed but not very well; when moved in most people "Anglo-Saxon";

06:00

Groups from different cultures moving into the estate; few racial problems; involved in tenant management; playgrounds with concrete; sexual assault of a girl on Sugar Lane; gangs and underworld;

09:00

Assaulted by a man who was allegedly the Kray twins' enforcer; "before I left there the gang culture had really taken over in Stratford" [10:06]; too dangerous to walk anywhere at night; followed home; gang fights; Morris dancers at Stratford Shopping Centre; "I remember being chased across Stratford High Street by a man dressed as a tree" [11:41]; West Ham United winning the FA Cup;

12:00

Visiting Passmore Edwards Museum and the local library; now part of University of East London (UEL); "I was so sad when the university turned it into a bar, now a coffee shop" [13:01]; no television and no washing-machine at home; visiting the laundromat with mother;

15:00

St Angela's Convent School; bullying and fights; "I remember as it was sort of teenage years, people get glassed and knifed, and that was frightening" [15:53]; prayers at school; "our uniform was hideous, it was brown, really soil brown, and either yellow or cream shirts" [16:48];

18:00

Catholic junior school; hysteria about ghosts; strict teacher Miss Smith; boys and girls segregated at play-time; school bullying; never told parents about bullies;

21:00

Wanted to be a nun; A-Levels; course in art and design at East Ham Technical College; the Newham Seven; racial tensions and violence; covered in glass after a fight on a bus; "growing up in East London there was so much you got used to, you just took it in your stride" [23:53];

24:00

Taking artworks home on the bus; art college after repressive convent school; closing mental health facilities; tower block renamed 'the Monument of Misery' due to large number of suicides; mother worked in a health centre; patients who lived in the same block would come to door; arsonist in the tower block; fire in the chute room; "it was then you had the realisation that if there really was a fire that's it, you're dead, cos there was no way out" [26:41]; broken lifts;

27:00

Taking a month's shopping up the stairs; elderly Nan on the nineteenth floor; invasion of red pharaoh ants; stray budgie; homing pigeon; pot shots from air rifles; wouldn't have anything to do with the Olympics; "I was really angry because a lot of people lost their homes, there were some dirty tricks done to a lot of the tenants" [29:01]; always under the fear of losing home; bought flat with parents despite low income;

30:00

Increased service charges on flat; compulsory purchase of flat, given a month and a half to move out; moved out of London; UCL looked at taking over the estate; demonstrations; "that's the thing with the whole Olympic process, they never cared about the little people" [31:41]; businesses on Carpenters Road went under; communities destroyed; moved to Essex; commute expensive; "you go back to Stratford now you don't recognise it" [32:54]

33:00

Stratford changed, universities and market gone; one way system changed; Boardmans shop replaced by pub; council offices replaced old flattened building; Travellers, comments on use of the word 'gypsies'; fair at Wanstead Flats; "I never had a goldfish that died" [35:27]; view from tower block;

36:00

Guy Fawkes fireworks; Stratford Station; "the Hush Hush trains coming through in the night, because the nuclear waste used to come through it as well" [36:11]; can't get used to living in a house after always living in a tower block; noise from parties and DIY in other flats; pipes burst frequently; asbestos;

39:00

Canal where Gala Bingo hall is now; Dad stopped by police while digging up wild horseradish; Dad and Mum were penpals when father on National Service in Africa; parents only met a couple of times and then got married; "I had 28 penpals, because you know we didn't have computers in those days" [41:28]; at school wrote with italic pens; brother married a penfriend;

42:00

Stratford in 20 years' time will be completely gentrified; re-postcoded it to make it sound posher; originally a wealthy area and then deteriorated; now parts feel like a ghetto; expensive gated houses and neglected, boarded up flats; Newham now one of the worst areas in the country for crime, violent crimes; won't go to Newham at night; can't stand Westfield shopping centre; local shops and restaurants vanished; art studio in Livingston House; Greengate House in Plaistow now housing, once a YMCA; not all bad but communities damaged;

45:00

Fear of losing homes and housing; “they’re going to drive everybody out eventually, that’s all going to go, it will be flattened and you won’t recognise it any more” [45:13]; Dad was a navy on the railroad before it was privatised; paid cash in hand on Thursdays; father got ‘tiddled’ (a little drunk) and went for a ride on a trolley at Sainsbury’s; Nan had spies everywhere; the day a lorry backed into a garage which was full of rolls of pornographic films;

48:00

People throwing things out of the tower block, including a tumble dryer; “there was about a year where you used to literally get towards the block and then run like hell to get in, because you didn’t know what was coming out” [48:58]; artwork based on the blocks; drug addicts, finding hypodermic needles on the stairs; ladies running a brothel upstairs;

51:00

Watching police run through the block; looking outside to see a police helicopter almost level with the landing; working at Medicare in Stratford; football hooligans; humiliating sponsored uniforms; “looking back it was this whole series of daft things, lots of daft things, but never boring, it was never boring there” [53:35]; Somalians moved in to tower block;

54:00

Never met Somalians before, very tall; didn’t speak each other’s language but smiled a lot; built a brick oven in their kitchen because they didn’t like the stove; cultural differences could be a problem; neighbour’s grief over ill son; abusive neighbour; visited former neighbour who went in to a home; community spirit isn’t gone;

57:00

Misses Stratford; don’t miss the changes or the violence; “it’s not a safe place to live, not a safe place to have a family now” [57:37]; a lot of people moving out to Essex, crime increasing, drug gangs;

58:30 end