

**Valdis and Aija Auers** Valdis b. 18/2/1929 / Aija b. 9/11/1935

**Transcript of Interview with Judy Caine and Ros Stoddart – 9<sup>th</sup> January 2018.**

*(N.B. – timecode numbers refer to the audio recording)*

***Photos, songs and additional info added after 2<sup>nd</sup> visit by Judy to Valdis and Aija on 20/2/19.***

**Judy Caine:** [00:00:01] Right. Well, my role in all this. I got involved with Ros on the last 'Our Woods' project - a Deep Roots Tall Trees project about the woods, the environment and getting people engaged. My role in this project is project coordinator, but I'm also helping out with some research as well, so I have to get people in the right place at the right time, within the budget else she shouts at me.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:00:25] I'm a horrible boss.

**Judy Caine:** [00:00:27] Oh, awful, awful. (all laugh)

**Judy Caine:** [00:00:30] Anyway I just want to formally identify this so I'm going to put these on (headphones) so I know that's still working (points to audio recorder) so you can laugh at me with these if you wish. I can hear us all perfectly OK.



**Valdis and Aija (both with glasses) seen above with their family on Valdis's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday at Catthorpe Manor.**

**Judy Caine:** [00:00:42] So just for my record can you give me your full name?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:00:48] My name is Valdis Auers.

**Judy Caine:** [00:00:51] Would you like me to call you Valdis or Mr. Auers?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:00:54] Called me Valdis

**Judy Caine:** [00:00:55] Thank you, and please call me Judy.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:00:59] And can you tell me ... Aija, was it?

**Aija Auers:** [00:01:03] Yes.

**Judy Caine:** [00:01:04] How do I spell that?

**Aija Auers:** [00:01:07] A.I.J.A.

**Aija Auers:** [00:01:08] You, usually you know, when I'm in hospital the nurses are calling me Ayja [pronouncing it like 'Asia' - should be pronounced 'eye-ya'], I can tell them 10 times its Ayja and they still say Asia, but ... I'm used to it, so why not? [all laugh]

**Judy Caine:** [00:01:26] Right. Thank you very much for letting us into your home. Can you tell me first of all when you first came to Corby?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:01:40] Let me think now ...

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:01:42] I can't remember when I did!

**Judy Caine:** [00:01:46] Oh, I can - 16th April 2006, that's when I came to Corby.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:01:47] Really!

**Valdis Auers:** [00:01:50] Previously I lived in Bradford, Yorkshire.

**Judy Caine:** [00:01:52] Oh OK.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:01:53] Yeah.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:01:53] That's when I came to [Corby] I think 51.

**Judy Caine:** [00:02:06] 1951 ... what brought you here?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:02:11] The Choir.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:02:13] Really, literally because of the choir and the choir leader.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:02:13] No, not that, but, you know, I wanted to join the Zuika, the male voice choir, and that's, that's how it started.

**Judy Caine:** [00:02:26] How had you heard of the choir being up in Bradford and the choir in Corby?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:02:29] They came to sing, they used to sing to Latvian communities - Bradford, London, Birmingham, Coventry and Leicester and so on.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:02:44] ... and you were so impressed by them, that...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:02:47] Yes.

**Judy Caine:** [00:02:48] That's fantastic. Did you come down with just your wife? Did you have family?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:02:53] No. On my own.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:02:56] So did you meet Corby.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:02:58] No, no we met in Germany in a youth congress, if you call it that.

**Judy Caine:** [00:03:09] So when you came down to Corby to join the choir did you have a job?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:03:12] Yes.

**Judy Caine:** [00:03:13] What were you doing?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:03:14] British Steel.

**Judy Caine:** [00:03:16] And what was your role at the works?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:03:18] Oh generally, I didn't last long. I didn't like it. The main aim was to join the choir to get to know the choir chairman, Mr. Bude, he arranged the jobs if people wanted to come and then, at the steelworks, Stewarts and Lloyds steelworks, so most of most of the choir members worked there.

**Judy Caine:** [00:03:48] Did you find it easy to get into the choir, did they welcome you with open arms?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:03:53] Yes, it wasn't hard, you know.

**Judy Caine:** [00:03:56] What voice did you sing, tenor, baritone, bass?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:03:58] Baritone, I started as a tenor in Bradford in the choir - there was a choir there, mixed choir - I still sing in the mixed choir now, if you want to know.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:04:09] Is that the one down the A14.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:04:09] Catthorpe Manor.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:04:14] Yes, do you think we could come and hear?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:04:20] Yes.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:04:21] I love to come to that choir.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:04:24] I'll let you know when it's on, through Agris.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:04:27] Thank you, thank you. That would be lovely.

**Judy Caine:** [00:04:30] OK. So, music's clearly really important to you - why, why is it so important?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:04:38] Because I like Latvian folk songs for a start.

**Judy Caine:** [00:04:41] Tell me about Latvian folk songs.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:04:49] What do you want to know?

**Judy Caine:** [00:04:50] Did you hear them as a child, did you sing them at school?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:04:52] Oh yeah, I did. I did sing at school as a child. And then and I was in a male quartet here as well. I sang in there. We sang songs there. But, by Latvian composers and Latvian folk songs.

**Judy Caine:** [00:05:10] What's your favorite Latvian folk song? If you have one?

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:05:15] Big question - there are probably lots!

**Valdis Auers:** [00:05:18] I would say Put Vejini

**Judy Caine:** [00:05:21] What does that mean?

**Aija Auers:** [00:05:24] It was a kind of hymn. I would say for Latvia, but it was under the Russians. They couldn't sing the real 'God save Latvia', you know, our song, so they sang this one. It is about a young man who likes to have a drink. The Russians said Oh wonderful, that's a wonderful song is it, and they did sing it every time when they met. And somehow it has become ours, so every time when something ends here, we like to sing it together.

# PŪT, VĒJIŅI

Latviešu tautas dziesma

ANDREJS JURJĀNS  
(1856-1922)

**Mēreni**  
Sopr.  
Alti  
Ten.  
Basi

*p* *mf* *f*

1. Pūt, vē - - ji - - ņi, dzen lai - - vi- ņu,
2. Kur- zem - - nie - - ce man so - - lī- ja
3. So- līt so - - la, bet ne - - de- va,
4. Teic' man' lie - - lu dzē- rā - - ji- ņu,
5. Ku- ru kro - - gu es iz - - dzē- ru,
6. Pats par sa - - vu nau- du dzē- ru,
7. Pūt, vē - - - ji - - ņi, dzen lai - - vi- ņu,

*p* *mf* *f*

*p* *mf* *p* *pp*

1. Aiz - dzen ma- ni kur - ze - - mē.
2. Sav' mei- - ti- ņu ma - - lē - - jīn'.
3. Teic' man' lie- lu dzē- - rā - - jīn'.
4. Ku - - me - - li- ņa skrē- - jē - - jīn'.
5. Kam no - - skrā- ju ku- - me - - līn'?
6. Pats skrēj' sa- vu ku- - me - - līn'.
7. Aiz - dzen ma- ni kur- - ze - - mē!

*p* *mf* *p* *pp*

Pūt vējiņi, dzen laiviņu  
Aizdzen mani Kurzemē.

Translation first verse only:

Blow little wind, push my little boat, Send me home to Kurzeme (Western Latvia).

See this link to hear a rendition of this song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fcyjnrnm5GM>

**Judy Caine:** [00:05:57] Fantastic, so are you going to give me a rendition?

**Aija Auers:** [00:06:02] Not me, I can sing, I'm not the one who sings - he sings ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:06:05] Valdis sings the first verse of the song mentioned above

**Valdis Auers:** [00:06:25] That's about it and then the next verse.

**Judy Caine:** [00:06:25] That was gorgeous, thank you, I'm honored. I thought you might chicken out there!

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:06:33] That gives me a fantastic idea about the Latvian part of the project. When we've learned a lot about Latvian songs and so on, we want to put on a little performance. And if we could have that as the end song of the concert, it sounds very appropriate from what you say because it's something you usually sing at the end of a thing.

**Aija Auers:** [00:06:59] Yes. That is since you know, how can we say, since the latest Latvians are coming over here to live and work, for them it means I think a little bit more than for us.

**Judy Caine:** [00:07:04] Why's that?

**Aija Auers:** [00:07:13] Because they were used to singing it at special moments we still did sing our old hymn ['Dievs, Svētī Latviju' – 'God Bless Latvia'] you know, for us that's the first one and the last one, but for them it was somehow, you know even if they are young they have learned it from their parents and grandparents, and for them it means something. And somehow, they are taking it over I would say because we are getting less and less, and they are getting more and more. Because our generation, oh well, they will be just be in some other place, that's how it is you know.

**LATVIJAS VALSTS HIMNA**  
**Dievs, svētī Latviju!**

Baumaņa Kārlis  
(1835 - 1905),  
mūzika un vārdi

**Maestoso** ♩ = 69

Soprano  
Alto  
Tenor  
Bass

Dievs, svē - tī Lat - vi - ju, mūs' dār - go tē - vi - ju,

svē - tī jel Lat - vi - ju, ak, svē - tī jel to! to!

Kur lat - vju mei - tas zied, kur lat - vju dē - li dzied, laid mums tur

lai - mē diet, mūs' Lat - vi - jā! Lat - vi - jā!

God bless Latvia, Our beloved fatherland, Do bless Latvia, Oh, do bless it! (repeat)  
Where the Latvian daughters bloom, Where the Latvian sons sing, Let us dance in happiness there, In our Latvia! (repeat)



**Judy Caine:** [00:07:49] How important you think it is to pass on songs like that from your generation to the next generation, and is it getting harder?

**Aija Auers:** [00:08:03] It's difficult to say you know. Our daughter, she sings in the choir as well.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:08:09] She comes from London.

**Aija Auers:** [00:08:10] She lives in London. She will be here on Saturday she stays up the night with us here and on Sunday morning she will go with her father to Catthorpe to sing there because she loves it so much. Our son, he doesn't sing, but his wife's singing. She sings in the choir and in the summer there will be a ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:08:29] Latvian song festival in Riga the big one.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:08:36] Yes, the big, big one.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:08:39] Big one ...

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:08:39] Big is not the word it's enormous.

**Aija Auers:** [00:08:43] I suppose you have seen but I guess it is enormous.



**Postcard sent by Valdis's son who wanted to know where his Dad was in the choir!**



**Valdis walking through the Streets of Riga as part of the festival holding a red flower.**

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:08:46] Yes, I've seen some film ...

**Aija Auers:** [00:08:47] Twenty-two thousand or something like that? Valdis has sung there and our daughter she's singing there and our daughter in law will be singing. So somehow it goes. I don't know how it will be with the next ones you know? My grandson doesn't like singing very much you know ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:09:13] But they live in Latvia.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:09:15] Right. OK. So, so they went back in a way they went back to Latvia. Where they born here the grandchildren?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:09:21] No no no no. Our son was born here but ...

**Judy Caine:** [00:09:26] How big is the Latvian community in Corby now?

**Aija Auers:** [00:09:29] Well difficult to say because I would say we are very few in our age group but the next one, I would say about a thousand. It could be ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:09:44] Yeah, More than before anyway.

**Aija Auers:** [00:09:44] They are having a Latvian school here, dance group.

**Judy Caine:** [00:09:46] I remember that because when I was mayor of Corby in 2013/14, I opened the school.

**Aija Auers:** [00:09:55] Yes.

**Judy Caine:** [00:09:55] And they gave me some amazing - I don't know what you call it - it was this sort of cascading cake sort of thing. It was honeycombed. I don't know what it was called. You probably know. Do you know what it's called?

**Aija Auers:** [00:10:11] Is it honey cake? Could it be Medus Kuka?

**Judy Caine:** [00:10:12] Yes, that was it. Gorgeous.

**Aija Auers:** [00:10:23] Yes. So, but as you can understand they are much younger than we are you know. So, we see them not very often because they are thinking they are in a different world to us.

**Judy Caine:** [00:10:39] Do you get involved with the school at all?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:10:44] We were there once last year, but not really.

**Judy Caine:** [00:10:50] What did you go for?

**Aija Auers:** [00:10:51] Well it was the ending of the school year, end of term - it was in May.

**Judy Caine:** [00:10:59] Does the school and the younger generation, do they value the older songs and the older ways?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:11:05] No, not really.

**Aija Auers:** [00:11:07] I think maybe there is a little bit difference between them and us you know because

for 50 years they were under the Russian rule, they learned other songs and we somehow stayed with the older ones. And my daughter talks to them and they say, oh you do speak like my grandmother you know, or your way of thinking is like my grandmother because she grew up here. So actually, we did sing the songs that our parents did. We were children when we left Latvia, Valdis and me you know, and we did sing the songs our parents did, we learned from them, and then we gave them to our children. But they were the songs from the time, you know, in Latvia, but these people have learned your songs.

**Judy Caine:** [00:12:08] Do you think that's a shame. Are you sad to see it?

**Aija Auers:** [00:12:10] No I don't think it's a shame you know. Time changes. I think if you look here at England, I think this music your mother grew up with is a different one to what you want. It's different for the younger ones as well. That's the way of the world.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:12:26] It changes like everything else is changing.

**Aija Auers:** [00:12:26] Yes, everything changes.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:12:35] But we still, I mean look, I quite like classical music we still listen to the things of the past don't we as well.

**Aija Auers:** [00:12:41] Oh yes.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:12:41] Yes, yes.

**Aija Auers:** [00:12:43] They do listen you know, but you'll have to ask him. I wanted to leave I said because when they start talking you'll lose, and he can't get a word in you know but he said just sit there.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:12:57] How many people were in the choir at its best time, its highest?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:13:16] I'll let you count.

**Judy Caine:** [00:13:16] Okay. We have pictures coming up. Valdis gets photos ... (Ros gets glasses from her handbag).

**Judy Caine:** [00:13:25] Wow, what year was this?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:13:35] That would be about, about.

(Judy counts choir members in the choir while Valdis thinks of the year.)

**Judy Caine:** [00:13:44] ...Thirty-Three there (hands photo back).

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:13:45] Can I take a photo of that (new photo).

**Valdis Auers:** [00:13:45] Yes.

**Judy Caine:** [00:13:46] Ah, there's some details on the back.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:13:51] 33 yes. Maybe 35 if they were not all there.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:13:57] And what year do you think that kind of was?



**Valdis Auers:** [00:13:58] 50s, late 50s



[00:14:17] General chatter goes on at this time about cameras and technology etc. Ros gives up and Judy takes photo (above).

**Aija Auers:** [00:14:39] For a while short while Agris sang in the choir as well. [Agris Krumins – see separate interview - is their nephew].

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:14:46] He never told me that.

**Aija Auers:** [00:14:46] For a short while, yes, he did.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:14:48] I just can't find it, you know the programme, with the numbers and how long each member had been there.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:14:59] And how long were you in the choir for? When did it stop? In the 70s? or?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:15:07] I'll figure it out. I Would say I've been in this choir, the mixed choir for 30 years.

**Aija Auers:** [00:15:18] And it was shortly before that ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:15:21] ... shortly Before that, it was 30 years the 18th of October this year.

**Judy Caine:** [00:15:27] [looking at photo] struggling to find you in here. Judy takes photo to Valdis.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:15:32] This one [points].

**Judy Caine:** [00:15:32] Brown hair then?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:15:32] Black hair.

**Judy Caine:** [00:15:32] Very handsome.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:15:32] You see that one that's a rehearsal.

**Judy Caine:** [00:15:57] Scottish lady in the tartan?



**Valdis Auers:** [00:15:57] Yes, but she but she emigrated to Australia later on, had a boyfriend there.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:16:14] So about 30 years ago you joined this present choir - you say it's a mixed choir.

**Aija Auers:** [00:16:21] Yes.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:16:21] What does that mean. Is it Latvian people and other people?

**Judy Caine:** [00:16:26] Or male and female maybe?

**Aija Auers:** [00:16:30] Male and female.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:16:31] Ah, male and female but all Latvian.

**Aija Auers:** [00:16:32] No, there are some people who are married to a Latvian who would like to sing also they are singing there as well.



[00:16:41] Valdis brings out more photos.

**Valdis Auers:**

[00:16:42] This is the current choir (shows photo - colour)

**Ros Stoddart:**

[00:16:44] Oh fantastic yes and wonderful costume. Yes, it's a national costume.

**Judy Caine:** [00:16:52] Can I take a photo of that one too?

**Judy Caine:** [00:16:54] Do you make your own costumes do you get them sent from Latvia?

**Aija Auers:** [00:16:57] It depends you know. When my daughter was dancing in a dance group here, I made that costume myself.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:17:07] You do? Oh fantastic! Have you still got that?

**Aija Auers:** [00:17:11] Yes, I have got it. It reminded me of time with my daughter, but she can't use it anymore. She was so tiny. She is bigger now.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:17:25] Yeah, we all get bigger.

**Aija Auers:** [00:17:30] Yes. And now she's singing in her grandmother's costume. My mother had a costume and now she's singing in her Grandmothers costume.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:17:43] Oh wow!

**Aija Auers:** [00:17:44] And there are other girls who are having them from grandmothers or from mothers and others are making them.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:17:45] I'm really interested in seeing some costumes because I've only seen them in pictures and they just looked so beautiful. And I'm sure you know the detail of the sewing is just lovely.

**Aija Auers:** [00:18:02] But in Latvia you can buy them now as well.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:18:02] Yes, but nothing is as special as a handmade one.

**Aija Auers:** [00:18:09] Yes. But you can buy them in different parts and many of them are buying some. But my daughter in law is having her done like this as well.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:18:20] And are they different in different parts of Latvia?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:18:23] Oh yes.

**Aija Auers:** [00:18:24] Oh yes, very, very different and in the older types you know if you made a special dress then your neighbours said *"well I would like to have another one but I am not doing the same stitches you are doing, I will try to change it a little bit"*. You know. Nowadays you have to do it as it was the first one. Now days they all want to have it you know like uniforms. But in the older days, ladies tried to do something else and I think it was much more interesting.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:19:00] Yes, yes, you had your own creativity.

**Aija Auers:** [00:19:03] Yes, you created, because they had to create the colors as well. There were no shops where you could go buy ...

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:19:08] ... so you dyed them?

**Aija Auers:** [00:19:11] Yes, they had to dye them and so on for the older times. But as I said everything changes.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:19:21] Yeah. But I think that even if not so many people may be singing your traditional songs it's very important to have some record of them because they're so beautiful and so, you know, whether it's the costumes or the songs or, you have to know how they were, it's really important.



**Aija Auers:** [00:19:42] Oh yes, it's coming back in Latvia. We have special groups that are singing in an old-fashioned way, I would say you know. They try you know to get the old way, and the Kokle instruments.

Internet Research



Kokles or kokle is a Latvian plucked string instrument belonging to the Baltic box zither family known as the Baltic psaltery along with Lithuanian kanklės, Estonian kannel, Finnish kantele, and Russian gusli.



This image taken by Judy Caine at a Catthorpe Manor cultural evening on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2019. Stamp and photo to the right from internet.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:20:01] Because we are quite interested in professional singers, a person who can take workshops of Latvian songs coming to work with us. So, you know if you know of any, anybody from back in Latvia at all who is in England. That would be lovely.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:20:22] We'll have to ask somebody ...

**Aija Auers:** [00:20:22] Yes, we'll have to ask around.

**Judy Caine:** [00:20:27] Just coming back to the music, you came to Corby - a question for your husband Aija.

**Aija Auers:** [00:20:31] Sorry I will try stay quiet...

**Judy Caine:** [00:20:33] No, no, that's not what I meant, don't be offended.

**Judy Caine:** [00:20:36] I find it very interesting that you came to Corby because of the music. I'm a musician myself, a flute player my granddad was a musician - a long line of musicians so I understand that attraction. And for me it's a very cultural thing, it's part of who I am. Do you think that the current generation of Latvians identify with the current mixed choir or the Latvian folk songs as a way of remembering a cultural identity from a homeland or anything like that? Tell me your thoughts on that.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:21:13] I Would say yes. About the cultural background we had there in Latvia. What else to say?

**Judy Caine:** [00:21:33] Whatever you want to tell me about the folk songs what makes them so essentially Latvian?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:21:40] Well, that's a difficult question.

**Judy Caine:** [00:21:48] I'm sorry, I don't mean to make it difficult. Tell me what you like about Latvian folk songs.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:21:58] Oh, what I like. Because they are easy to sing. If they are composed, you know they're not so easy in the simple way as the old Latvians used to sing. We just learned in the school then.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:22:23] That was part of you.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:22:25] Yeah. That was it.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:22:29] Gunta was very funny, because she said to me all Latvian songs are sung in at least eight parts. I think your choir isn't used to singing eight parts, they can be very complicated. That was Gunta. And they can be, can't they?

**Aija Auers:** [00:22:47] They can be complicated, if you have a big choir that's right. But not if you are singing you know in a group with your friends.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:22:54] Yeah. Yeah.

**Aija Auers:** [00:22:57] And what about the folk songs. The people like to sing the old Latvians, you know whatever thing they are doing. So, the songs, you know, are about everything. About the mornings that you have to get up, about love, about this about everything, about the work you are doing. Yes, if you put every day little things, you know, from the morning till night and that's what's so interesting in them you know some of, most of them, are very sad because of the life. But then there are very funny ones as well, you know.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:23:31] Where there a lot about working the land as well?

**Aija Auers:** [00:23:32] Yes. That was the most because they did work the land as well, that was a thing that Latvians were doing.

**Judy Caine:** [00:23:49] How much did you have to keep your Latvian songs secret from the Russians?

**Aija Auers:** [00:23:56] I really don't know how it was, you know. They really were not allowed to sing such songs. They couldn't sing in a room if somebody listened to it, they could send you to Siberia ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:24:07] ... just ordinary folk ... they couldn't do anything.

**Aija Auers:** [00:24:13] So simple things, as I said about what you are doing in the war and so on, that they didn't sing a song, but if there was some nationality in it you know.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:24:23] There was a bit of a problem

**Aija Auers:** [00:24:27] And you know how it is young people, when they know that there's a problem they try to go.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:24:36] Yeah.

**Aija Auers:** [00:24:36] But the more things are as they are very simple, very simple things the music is very simple. If the Conductor say if he's doing something else out of it but usually, they are simple melodies.

**Judy Caine:** [00:24:56] So do you have, I mean most people do, do you have specific songs for specific times of year, specific ceremonies, is the one specific ceremony that you have lots of songs for?

**Aija Auers:** [00:25:10] I think so, but you, when we look at Christmas time. Then I think the songs that we sing is church things I would say.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:25:23] Well, there are folk songs.

**Aija Auers:** [00:25:23] Yes, there are folk songs as well, of course there are, so somebody else said we are doing you know Christmastime is one set of folks so yes. And then more singing is at midsummer time.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:25:40] Ah your midsummer celebrations ...

**Aija Auers:** [00:25:40] Yes, the midsummer celebrations you know there's the singing and the dancing and folk dancing and folk songs.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:25:53] We used to have it in Corby in the woods there, you know, but the years go by ...

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:25:54] In Kingswood? Which wood?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:25:58] No, the one by Aldi Shop [top end of Rockingham Road] - across the road there's a woodland there. Belonged to Stewarts & Lloyds - we get permission to go there. That was right in the woods there.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:26:19] So that was a big celebration of Midsummer.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:26:23] Oh yes. They get all the wood, they got all the fire wood from Stewarts and Lloyds, and everything you know, that was arranged.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:26:33] So that was a good bit of working for Stewarts and Lloyds.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:26:34] Oh yes, yes.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:26:42] So, tell me, I've met Agris's mother, what relation are you to her? Are you from the mother's side or the father's side?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:26:51] She's my Sister.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:26:52] She's your sister.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:26:53] Yes.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:26:55] I wasn't sure about that. I think we should interview Agris as well.

**Judy Caine:** [00:27:02] Definitely.

**Aija Auers:** [00:27:04] Yes. Yes. Yes, you should because she can tell everything much better than he does.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:27:13] Ah, I've got I've got a terrible memory, my mother has a better memory than I do.

**Aija Auers:** [00:27:16] Dzidra has a wonderful memory.

**Aija Auers:** [00:27:20] She really has, and she can tell more about him than he himself. (All laugh.)

**Valdis Auers:** [00:27:21] All from bygone years.



**Ros Stoddart:** [00:27:21] Oh I love it. Do you think she would, would she be happy?

**Aija Auers:** [00:27:34] Well you'd have to ask her.

**Judy Caine:** [00:27:38] Yes, we can but ask...

**Judy Caine:** [00:27:43] So in the choir you sing in now, [Aija], did you sing in the choir as well as it is a mixed choir?

**Aija Auers:** [00:27:50] No I can't sing at all.

**Judy Caine:** [00:27:50] I don't believe that!

**Aija Auers:** [00:27:50] No really, I don't have the voice for singing. I can't sing at all.

**Judy Caine:** [00:27:57] Are there many young people in the choir now?

**Aija Auers:** [00:28:01] Uh, no, not so many I would say at most the younger people are from, from what came over recently here from Latvia, is the younger generation.

**Judy Caine:** [00:28:18] What age do you call the younger generation?

**Aija Auers:** [00:28:20] Twenty-five, Thirty, Thirty something yeah...

**Judy Caine:** [00:28:29] Do you think it's important to pass your traditions on through the music to younger people?

**Aija Auers:** [00:28:35] They had a Christmas concert, in December, and Valdis said to the choir, he said I said I've only just a few of the older ones and they couldn't sing without the young ones and would the young ones stand up. Yes, they did stand up, most of them you know they were about seven or eight only who stayed sitting. So, most of the people in the choir nowadays are younger and from the generations who came over from Latvia.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:29:08] So, the choir you are singing in now, it sounds to me as if it's quite important as the Latvian choir in England now, because people come from London and ...

**Aija Auers:** [00:29:20] No, no, I think in London...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:29:22] ... London, they've got a good choir there ...

**Aija Auers:** [00:29:24] ... I think that's the Biggest choir.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:29:25] Which started many years ago...

**Aija Auers:** [00:29:25] ...many, many years ago many years ago. I'd say, Valdis, I think it is fair to say that there are about 40 people in her choir.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:29:43] I think it's more than 40 because they haven't got enough chairs in the Latvian Hall. They have to do go to the Estonian hall because they have more chairs to sit. I think they got about 70 now.

**Aija Auers:** [00:29:56] Oh yeah, that's a really big choir ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:29:57] But they've had to close the list down.

**Aija Auers:** [00:29:59] But they have only about 25 in his choir [Valdis' at Catthorpe]. But the people, the seniors are coming from all around they are coming from Nottingham, Leicester, from Northampton, Peterborough. Because they like to sing, and they like to say they are spending Sunday singing.

[00:30:25] PHONE INTERRUPTS INTERVIEW HERE and Valdis goes to answer it.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:30:25] In London?

**Aija Auers:** [00:30:25] No, here, in Corby ... in London there are plenty of young people studying and so on and they are all singing, and the choir is so big nowadays, I would say because they would like to sing in the festival.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:30:46] Do you think the choir director of your choir or the one in London might come and help us learn some not Latvian songs? We would pay them.

**Aija Auers:** [00:31:01] We could ask Inta. [See separate interview with Inta Batsman and her mother Inara Abolins]

**Judy Caine:** [00:31:06] What's his name?

**Aija Auers:** [00:31:07] Its a girl. I have to say young woman.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:31:14] Yeah. Yeah.

**Aija Auers:** [00:31:17] The other is a lady as well. She's not so young. Lilija is over 60 but Inta is younger. We can ask Inta, because she is not only the conductor of that choir she is singing in a choir as well. Another English choir. She likes singing, she likes music.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:31:38] Oh wow. Fantastic.

**Judy Caine:** [00:31:39] So, how often do you rehearse with the choir.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:31:42] Well every Sunday we try to. Doesn't always work like that.

**Aija Auers:** [00:31:52] But you see our daughter she comes only every second Sunday because she lives in London. She works in London. She has a husband in London, so she has to stay there sometimes as well, you know.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:32:05] Yeah. I think most of the time really, otherwise her husband might get a bit fed up.

**Aija Auers:** [00:32:09] Yes.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:32:09] He used to sing ...

**Aija Auers:** [00:32:12] ... he used to sing but he thinks that he's old now and he doesn't want to. He did sing because he wanted to have our daughter and she said yes and that's why he stopped. (All laugh.)

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:32:29] So, does she come and pick you up here and take you?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:32:32] No, she comes by train.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:32:36] Oh OK.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:32:37] On the cheap tickets, you can get some cheap tickets if you book and then I pick her up from the station and sometimes she goes back the same day, from rugby or the next day.

**Aija Auers:** [00:32:50] But she usually comes on the Saturday afternoon and then she goes back on Sunday after the choir.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:32:59] That's great though isn't it.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:33:00] Yeah.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:33:00] You're singing together and also you're seeing her regularly. Lovely.

**Judy Caine:** [00:33:04] Do you always rehearse in the same place?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:33:10] Yeah.

**Judy Caine:** [00:33:11] Where is that?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:33:12] That's the Catthorpe manor.

**Aija Auers:** [00:33:18] Well, but you should speak about this Zuikas Viru Koris ...

**Judy Caine:** [00:33:25] What is Zuikas Viru Koris?

**Aija Auers:** [00:33:25] It was choir.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:33:25] Yes, we want to learn about the previous Latvian choir.

**Aija Auers:** [00:33:29] Yes, that's amazing.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:33:31] So, what can you both tell us about that? ... it Started in the 1930s I hear is that right?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:33:44] 44 ...

**Judy Caine:** [00:33:44] ... I thought it was 44, yes ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:33:46] 44 in Latvia ...

**Judy Caine:** [00:33:46] ... and was it 47 after the war here?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:33:55] Yeah, when they first came here 47, 48, I think. But the conductor couldn't come, he was a family man. He had two children and wife, and so he had to stay behind in Germany, but he came later I think in 51, yeah.

**Judy Caine:** [00:34:16] Same year you came down.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:34:17] 51 Yeah. Then he took over. Previous to that there was another Latvian composer

who sang in the choir, but he was conducting and then they emigrated to America. Same as Mr. Zuika emigrated later.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:34:36] ... and did the choir continue after he emigrated to America?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:34:42] Yes. I think there's another ... yes, [Valdis passes a photo] ... the conductor is there on the end [right]. Yeah, Mr. Rutenbergs. But that was in later stages.



**Ros Stoddart:** [00:35:07] And, did you say the date? It kind of fizzled out, you said didn't it? When did you actually stop singing in Corby? About 30 years ago did you say? What did you say?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:35:20] I would say, yes, 30 years ago.

**Judy Caine:** [00:35:24] Why do you think it fizzled out?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:35:28] There wasn't enough male singers, I would say as simple as that. But what was left, we all used to stuff into four cars to get to Catthorpe Manor every Sunday. You know to sing, so that was that.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:35:47] It's just it's wonderful because I mean, I don't know masses about Corby really, I know some but, the Latvian choir's always been something I've known about as a really strong thing in Corby for many years. So, it's got a fantastic reputation. Even now.

**Judy Caine:** [00:36:11] Oh Definitely...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:36:12] I want to show you something in '53 ... shows programme ...

**Judy Caine:** [00:36:15] Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:36:15] Yes, in 1953.

**Judy Caine:** [00:36:24] Did you perform in this?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:36:25] Yes, we did perform there - we were in the evening concert.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:36:33] So this was in Wales!

**Judy Caine:** [00:36:34] So is there a picture the choir in here? [pointing at programme in Ros's hand]

**Valdis Auers:** [00:36:42] I don't know. Maybe?

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:36:48] London Festival Ballet started here.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:36:48] Oh yes, you know, it's a week long.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:36:55] What is the connection with Wales?

**Judy Caine:** [00:36:59] The singing I presume ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:37:01] Well, yes, the conductor heard about it and he went the year before that to have a look and they said that we should join it.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:37:12] There's a lot of different things in here ... [still looking at programme]

**Judy Caine:** [00:37:20] Yes, look, Latvian folk dancers ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:37:22] ... Oh Yeah, they're from Leeds.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:37:31] There's Polish folk dancing. So, was it was it very much about being an International Festival?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:37:35] Yes, it still is.

**Judy Caine:** [00:37:40] ... [to Ros] It's fantastic, if You haven't been you should go.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:37:44] Yes [laughs].

**Judy Caine:** [00:37:44] My son and daughter live in Wales, well lived there for a long time. I can't find you listed yet. I'm sure you're here somewhere. Was it a good experience?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:37:54] Very good.

**Judy Caine:** [00:37:55] Why?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:37:55] The main thing was to raise the Latvian flag on the mast.

**Judy Caine:** [00:38:06] Yehudi Menuhin, gosh you were in good company, weren't you? First prize 10 pounds, and look this is all in all 'old money' ten pounds, ten shillings and no pence.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:38:35] Was Latvian traditional music very much secular, very much folk music or was it also church based?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:38:46] Less obviously church based.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:38:49] Because you talked about Christmas quite a bit. I just wondered.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:38:51] Oh Christmas, yes, then you know but ...

**Judy Caine:** [00:38:57] There you are. [Judy finds them in programme] - Latvian. Male Voice Choir. Roberts Zuika.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:39:00] Yeah.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:39:01] And there's a book about him there.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:39:03] Yeah, but that's in Latvian though.

**Judy Caine:** [00:39:07] So, there they were - Saturday the 11th July 1953, they were the 13th choir on at the Welsh Eisteddfod - Latvian Male Voice Choir.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:39:19] Yes. I think we got the fifth prize and then they wanted one song we sang, in Latvian you know, a Latvian song, you know, they wanted to have that, as a, for the future, how would you say? For singing ...

**Judy Caine:** [00:39:31] To leave like a legacy for other people?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:39:50] Yes, no ... to let the other choirs sing as well.

**Judy Caine:** [00:39:56] They wanted the music.

**Aija Auers:** [00:39:57] Yes, that was it, so that they could sing you know.

**Judy Caine:** [00:39:59] And what was that, what was that song?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:40:01] 'Vitols', you know, but his wife was living in America and she couldn't get on. She wouldn't let it.

**Judy Caine:** [00:40:09] Oh that's a shame.

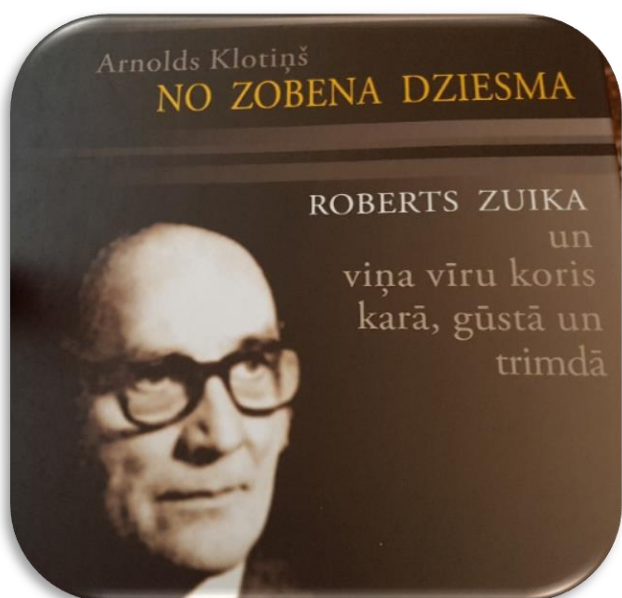
**Valdis Auers:** [00:40:10] Yeah it is a shame.

**Aija Auers:** [00:40:12] It is actually a shame.

**Judy Caine:** [00:40:12] It's a great shame.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:40:15] Yeah.

**Aija Auers:** [00:40:16] But some people are like that you know.



**Judy Caine:** [00:40:18] Did they record the song that you sang there?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:40:21] At that time ...?

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:40:22] [looking at Roberts Zuika book] There is a summary in this book in English.

**Aija Auers:** [00:40:26] Oh wonderful.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:40:29] Absolutely wonderful.

**Judy Caine:** [00:40:30] Oh marvelous.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:40:35] There's our choir - there was a big tent.



**Ros Stoddart:** [00:40:38] And that's at the Eisteddfod?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:40:40] Eisteddfod, yes.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:40:41] Fantastic tent, my gosh. There were a really big audience.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:40:47] They were yes.

**Judy Caine:** [00:40:48] Can I take a photograph of the English story.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:40:54] Well of course you can.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:40:54] Its very long.

**Judy Caine:** [00:40:55] I'm afraid I don't read Latvian - very remiss of me I know. (Judy just took photo of cover of book to obtain later as summary was 16 pages).



**Aija Auers:** [00:41:35] But at 100 he [Roberts Zuika] was conducting the choir.

**Judy Caine:** [00:41:36] Gosh that's a lovely memory. Thank you.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:41:37] We should take a photo of this [Zuika at Statue of Liberty in Riga - left].

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:42:02] We could ask Agris to translate it for us.

**Aija Auers:** [00:42:14] Yes, yes why not.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:42:16] Make him do some work.

**Aija Auers:** [00:42:17] It's so easy for him to do so.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:42:17] After we sang at the Eisteddfod, we had the invitation to sing at Wigmore Hall.

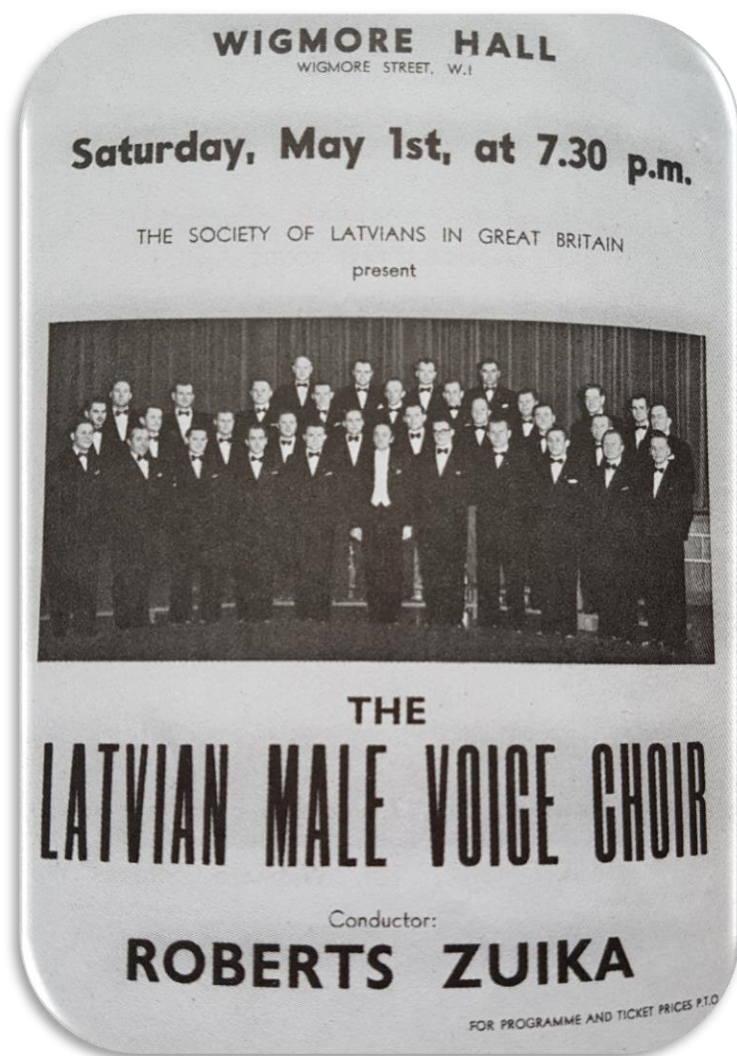
**Judy Caine:** [00:42:29] They sang at Wigmore Hall? That's very prestigious isn't it?

**Aija Auers:** [00:42:29] Yes, it was, the choir was very famous for us Latvians. I was living in Germany when they went you know, to sing in Germany, but it was a Latvian community. Everybody knew the name of the Zuikas Male Voice Choir because he was the first singing in Latvian and so on and so on.

**Judy Caine:** [00:43:03] That's the next, the following year ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:43:06] Yes, that's the following year, we sang at Wigmore Hall.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:43:07] Really, wow, that is the cream of places to sing. I think. A very special place is Wigmore Hall.



**Valdis Auers:** [00:43:21] After the concert we had a reception at the Latvian embassy.

**Judy Caine:** [00:43:24] Very nice.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:43:26] We drank all the gin that was available there.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:43:35] Is it possible to get this book still? I think this book should be in an archive somewhere in Corby.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:43:46] I suppose so.

**Judy Caine:** [00:43:47] What is the ISBN number? Let's write it down.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:43:47] In the Heritage Centre - they should be having things like this. Because it's beautifully done and very informative. There's your ISBN number.

**Judy Caine:** [00:44:03] Could you read it out for me please Ros

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:44:05] ISBN 9 7 8 - 9 9 8 4 - 8 7 9 - 3 3 - 8 and it is called.

**Judy Caine:** [00:44:18] I'll photograph that [all laugh] - I'll be forever, trying to write that down.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:44:18] Ros tries to pronounce the name of the book 'NO ZOBENA DZIESMA' - What does that mean?

**Aija Auers:** [00:44:53] Zobena means actually sword because the songs all started from...

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:44:59] ... a sword?

**Aija Auers:** [00:45:02] Yes, because they were all soldiers when they first sang in Latvia. They were all soldiers.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:45:09] They were all, you know in the German army.

**Aija Auers:** [00:45:09] I wonder if there is a picture of it? There should have been a picture I think, when they were singing in their uniforms. It started as soldiers.

**Judy Caine:** [00:45:33] So the soldiers came to the UK?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:45:42] After Germany, yes, after the war, yes.



*This is Zuika in 1938 in the Latvian uniform. Latvians Were forced to fight in the German Army during WWII*

**Aija Auers:** [00:45:46] Yes that's it.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:45:47] But that's the Latvian uniform. Zuika was called up to the Latvian army.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:45:53] Is that Latvian army too?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:45:53] Yes.

**Aija Auers:** [00:46:03] Put your glasses on.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:46:05] I can see!

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:46:05] Better than me I can't!

**Valdis Auers:** [00:46:08] The conductor sits there.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:46:10] That's the conductor. Yeah but that's him.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:46:14] Previous to that they were ...

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:46:20] Here they are actually fighting in the war ... Graves ... This is a really well put together book isn't it. Lots of pictures of them in the war.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:46:34] But it started in Germany - that's interesting. Yes, there is, there's a lot about the war.

**Judy Caine:** [00:46:42] So when the choir came over was it just the singing that they kept going, just the songs, or did they do other cultural activities as well?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:47:03] Well I think that maybe that was part of Corby's Latvian society, but there was a Latvian Welfare Fund as well which kept the folk dancers and the other activities like a dance evening to raise money for welfare.

**Judy Caine:** [00:47:28] So you're saying you put on events to raise money to keep things going?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:47:32] Yeah, yeah.

**Judy Caine:** [00:47:34] What sort of events did you do?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:47:37] Oh dancing I suppose, that was the main thing wasn't it. And 18th November which is our Independence Day and then in January there is book day which was introduced by our last president.

**Judy Caine:** [00:47:53] So what ...

**Aija Auers:** [00:47:57] You should buy a book yourself, and present the book to somebody ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:47:57] ... to schools.

**Aija Auers:** [00:47:57] ... to show that people like to read.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:48:10] So encouraging people to read?

**Aija Auers:** [00:48:11] Yes, to be more encouraging to young people, older people you know to read to love books. So, book day people go buy a book and they give it to somebody you know as a present.

**Judy Caine:** [00:48:27] That's lovely.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:48:27] And was food very important culturally in these events and festivals?

**Aija Auers:** [00:48:32] Yes, some kind of, you know we like to eat the food we were used to eat. I suppose my Agris has shown you and you have tried the Piragi, that is the Latvian food?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:48:40] And 'open sandwiches'.

**Aija Auers:** [00:48:40] ah yes, open sandwiches that we are making, yes, we are making those.

**Judy Caine:** [00:48:51] So what is your national dish?

**Aija Auers:** [00:48:55] Well that's very difficult to say because I think Latvia was always under the Russians or the Germans or the Swedes you know. It was, the folk, the true Latvians were the farmers, the labourers. The masters always somebody else mostly Russians or Germans. So, our food is a mixture of all that.

**Aija Auers:** [00:49:28] We love sauerkraut you know and roast pig, pig roast, such things like that.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:49:29] Have you always enjoyed cooking?

**Aija Auers:** [00:49:44] I suppose you know I had to cook because he doesn't want to cook. (All laugh.)

**Judy Caine:** [00:49:52] It's all your fault [Valdis].

**Valdis Auers:** [00:49:52] You could get ready made?

**Aija Auers:** [00:49:55] I mean because he doesn't want to you know, but I like to cook the way we Latvians used to, but I like to try something else as well. Chicken dish as well in Latvia are very favoured because on the land they had always chickens, you know, chickens, they had pigs and so on, so that mostly the things were from chickens and from pigs.

**Judy Caine:** [00:50:22] You mentioned your national day on the 18th November what you do on your national day what you celebrate?

**Aija Auers:** [00:50:32] We are going to celebrate it this year - it will be the 100th.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:50:34] Latvia will be 100 years old on the 18th.

**Aija Auers:** [00:50:42] There'll be a big celebration not only Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania as well. They all leave with their freedom at the same time.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:50:53] They got [their Independence] earlier, Estonia in February and Lithuania as well in February.

**Aija Auers:** [00:50:59] Yes. Only Latvia in November.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:51:02] November 18th, yes.

**Judy Caine:** [00:51:03] So what will be the main thing of those celebrations?

**Aija Auers:** [00:51:04] There will be a big concert because we are singing always you know, we are always singing, so there will be big concerts. I don't know what else - festivities will be in Latvia.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:51:17] Please can you invite us, if possible. I would love to hear that.

**Aija Auers:** [00:51:24] Yes, we will have some singers at Catthorpe Manor of course.

**Aija Auers:** [00:51:27] Because in Corby we are only a few people and the younger people they are all working you know. So, we meet at Catthorpe Manor.

**Judy Caine:** [00:51:43] How do the young people learn about their Latvian history now.

**Aija Auers:** [00:51:48] I suppose from television and from probably reading books as it was in our families and for Agris and Gunta his wife. The parents did tell us that, what was in the family.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:52:00] Well they all went to Latvian Sunday school [now – 2018 - held on Saturdays at Catthorpe Manor].

**Aija Auers:** [00:52:02] Yes. As you can see the Sunday schools were for our children, as well as for others. Good for our children there were Sunday schools where they get once a week told about the Latvian things and they were taught the Latvian language. How good they are in Latvian depends on the family not on the school because you can't teach much in one day a week.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:52:33] We should really ask actually Sarma and Marcus and the other brother how much they've learned from Gunta and Agris shouldn't we?

**Aija Auers:** [00:52:45] Yes. I Think they have learned quite a lot because what is left is very good, you know. And he does. I think that the thing it is with the next one. Marcis is good already speak English and Latvian. The next one when they go to school they like to speak in English and so the Latvian becomes a little bit less and so it goes out.

**Aija Auers:** [00:53:12] But it depends you know when you talk with the children at home.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:53:16] And Agris and Gunta will talk a lot about Latvian things because they are quite intellectual and like the arts ...

**Aija Auers:** [00:53:23] and their Latvian is perfect, both of them, you know, and they know everything about the Latvian culture or musics. Good they used to sing, they really know about everything.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:53:34] I'm very pleased to see in this book a chapter about Corby.

**Aija Auers:** [00:53:49] Yes, there is a chapter about Corby, have you forgotten it already?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:53:49] No ... (laughs).

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:53:55] ... It's a great, great book.

**Judy Caine:** [00:53:55] Definitely have to get hold of that.

**Aija Auers:** [00:54:01] Yes, the thing is he, and the other ones, were soldiers during the war, the thing was that they had to go to there to be sorted because the Germans asked everybody that was that age had to go into the army. But they were Latvian soldiers, so they have a little sign on their shoulders to show everybody that they are not Germans, but they are Latvians.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:54:31] Like a tattoo?

**Aija Auers:** [00:54:37] No, on their clothes.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:54:42] At the early stages they had the Latvian flag, but the Germans said, no, no, no, no, ...

**Aija Auers:** [00:54:46] ... They didn't like it you know because the Latvians thought they were different.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:54:47] They only wanted death, fighters, you know ... that's all ...

**Aija Auers:** [00:54:47] ... they needed somebody to fight and that was it. If you didn't go to the army then you went where all the Jews went, you know.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:54:59] To death.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:54:59] That's pretty black and white.

**Aija Auers:** [00:55:07] Yes. So, it's easy to say that the Latvians fought for Germany, but they didn't, they were forced to do it you know.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:55:19] What did both of you do in the war? How old were you, what were you...?

**Aija Auers:** [00:55:25] I was 8 years old.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:55:28] And you can remember it?

**Aija Auers:** [00:55:31] I can remember that every night, when I went to sleep after a few hours when my mother said in a while we have to go to the cellar because the bombs are starting you know. I was always scared. Scared, you know of, I'm still scared of flying.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:55:51] So you really remember it?

**Aija Auers:** [00:55:54] Yes that was what I remember. We were evacuated, my father worked you know, all the people worked. All the people were evacuated to Germany and in Germany he had to continue to work in Germany until the Americans came and because my father was too old, he was not a soldier. He was too old for them. They needed the younger ones and young people not the older ones.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:56:27] Do you have any memories of ...?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:56:29] Well I was on the farm, on a farm in north Germany. My father had a farm you know.

**Aija Auers:** [00:56:35] Yes Latvia, north Latvia not Germany.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:56:36] Yes north Latvia, sorry. But he was in the Army because he was officer...



**Aija Auers:** [00:56:44] ... he was a professional ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:56:50] professional officer in the Latvian army.

**Aija Auers:** [00:56:50] So the Germans took them ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:56:55] He fought in both wars, the first one as well.

**Judy Caine:** [00:56:58] So how old were you when the war broke out?

**Aija Auers:** [00:57:08] I think eleven or twelve, something like that?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:57:11] Eleven, yes.

**Aija Auers:** [00:57:11] So, we were just children. Valdis came to England, what year?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:57:25] 1948, 1<sup>st</sup> of January.

**Aija Auers:** [00:57:27] Yes and I grew up in the refugee camps in Germany.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:57:37] My father was caught very early in the war by the Germans and was in prison of war camp for the whole war and I think that was quite difficult.

**Aija Auers:** [00:57:46] It was difficult for him but in some way can be it saved his life. He was not in the fire you know.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:57:52] Yes, it's true.

**Aija Auers:** [00:57:57] It's so difficult to say, but the bombs were flying every single night, it was scary. At my age I couldn't quite understand what it was you know. It was a sense that we had to leave home and go on the ship. My mother was crying. My mother didn't want to go, but father said we have to go, you know. I couldn't understand my father wanting to go, my mother was crying. I was in the middle of the ship, the ship left Riga to Germany. In Germany everything was strange, it was, you was used to Latvia. And the refugee camps they were not the nicest places you can see.

**Ros Stoddart:** [00:58:48] Going back to the choir. Do you think the Latvian choir in Corby was very much the thing that brought the whole of the Latvian community together? It was the kind of the king-pin to all of you Latvians in Corby because that's how I see it and I was just wondering if that's true?

**Valdis Auers:** [00:59:09] Difficult to say, but it was in a way...

**Aija Auers:** [00:59:12] It was part of us...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:59:17] Because it was mostly, the choir was ...

**Aija Auers:** [00:59:19] Most of the men were singing ...

**Valdis Auers:** [00:59:22] ... because they lived in a barracks, where Aldi store is behind there, there was an old army barracks, they lived there, and then at a later date they built houses, they got married I would say now. But it was part of our cultural life here definitely, yes.

**Aija Auers:** [00:59:51] Yes but there was some kind of festivities and you were singing.

**Valdis Auers:** [00:59:57] Yes.

**Aija Auers:** [00:59:57] 18th of November, Christmas time, everything in our church hall. Yes, it was always them singing and afterwards there was Latvian dancing and so on, but they were the main attraction. And not only here but they were travelling as Valdis said to other places where Latvians were.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:00:14] Fantastic.

**Judy Caine:** [01:00:14] Where did you find most of the songs to sing with the choir? Were they specially composed for you or ...?

**Valdis Auers:** [01:00:27] Well they was lots from Latvia already but our conductor Zuika, he got in touch with composers in America, in Canada and got new songs composed specially for the choir. Yes.

**Judy Caine:** [01:00:43] Did you ever write your own songs?

**Valdis Auers:** [01:00:46] No. No.

**Judy Caine:** [01:00:49] What was your favorite type of song? What did you like singing most?

**Valdis Auers:** [01:00:53] Folk songs, they're the easiest (laughs).

**Aija Auers:** [01:00:54] ... nowadays you may say that, but when you were younger, you didn't think so. You said like the old you remembered, the old big ones...

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:01:08] What are the old big ones?

**Aija Auers:** [01:01:09] 'Gaismas Pils' (literal translation 'Light Castle')

Latvian  
**Gaismas Pils**

Kurzemīte, Dievmīte,  
Brīvas tautas auklētāj'!  
Kur palika sirmie dievi,  
Brīvas tautas dēliņi?

Tie līgoja vecos laikos  
Gaismas kalna galotnē.  
Visapkārt egļu meži,  
Vidū gaiša tautas pils.

Asinainas dienas ausa  
Tēvuzemes ielejās,  
Vergu valgā tauta nāca,  
Nāvē krita varoņi.

Ātri grima, ātri zuda  
Gaismas kalna staltā pils,  
Tur guļ mūsu tēvu dievi.

English  
**The Castle of Light**

Kurland, God's land,  
Nurser of the free folk!  
Where went the grey-haired gods,  
The sons of the free?

They were in the old times  
On the top of the mountain of light  
All around, spruce forests  
In the middle, peoples' castle.

Bloody days dawned  
In the valleys of the Fatherland  
The folk became enslaved  
Heroes fell and died.

Swiftly it sunk, quickly it disappeared,  
The light mountain's lofty palace  
There lie our fathers' gods.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:01:13] Well (laughs).

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:01:14] I bet it was really exciting singing when you were literally a thousand people together in a really big big choir?

**Valdis Auers:** [01:01:21] Oh yes ....

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:01:22] It must have been amazing, I can't imagine that.

**Aija Auers:** [01:01:25] It is wonderful. It is really wonderful you know that.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:01:28] We sang twice in Riga, back in '93 and I don't know how many years later, '96 / '97? Yes, it's every 4 years there, we sang again at the same festival.

**Judy Caine:** [01:01:45] How did it make you feel?

**Valdis Auers:** [01:01:46] Oh, wonderful. You know you could hardly see conductor he was somewhere ...

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:01:52] ...miles away.

**Aija Auers:** [01:01:52] What's that photo over there?

**Valdis Auers:** [01:01:52] She's going to look for the photo.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:02:02] If the choir was the one of the things that you found as a Latvian community was really important, what were the other things?

**Aija Auers:** [01:02:14] That's a postcard, our son send it to us. It was after the first time his father did take part. And he said Mummy, can you find Daddy on that picture? (See page 6 for image.)

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:02:27] So, that's what it's like. It's just amazing.

**Aija Auers:** [01:02:31] That was the first one when you did sing you know but there have been more recent.

General chatter here in English and Latvian about photos, not clear enough to transcribe.

**Aija Auers:** [01:02:50] The next is also the different national dresses you know.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:02:55] Where is this again?

**Aija Auers:** [01:02:56] In Riga.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:02:56] In the park.

**Aija Auers:** [01:02:59] But its outside.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:03:01] In the park outside Riga.

**Aija Auers:** [01:03:02] Just a little bit outside.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:03:05] Well the place has been rebuilt you know for ...

**Aija Auers:** [01:03:08] ... for this year.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:03:09] ... for the listeners as well.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:03:15] So, at this concert in Riga. How many do you think are singing there? A thousand?

**Aija Auers:** [01:03:21] How many? How many singing, I think it was twenty-one thousand or twenty.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:03:30] Yes. Yes.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:03:31] Twenty-one thousand people singing?

**Aija Auers:** [01:03:32] Yes, you just have a look at all the sites. Nowadays they do not allow everybody to sing. They say some choirs are not good enough, I don't know.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:03:37] They are a bit choosy, you know ...

**Aija Auers:** [01:03:50] ...there is no more space, no more space for people to stand so they are choosing now.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:03:57] But that does show that song is still really important.

**Aija Auers:** [01:03:59] Well it is because the people want to, and it's not only song our folk dances as favoured as well, people like to folk dance.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:04:04] And was this last year?

**Aija Auers:** [01:04:12] Oh no, that was the first year 93.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:04:15] 93.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:04:17] It still happens?

**Aija Auers:** [01:04:19] Oh yes, every five years it happens every five years and it will be on this year you know it's happening again yes.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:04:29] Are you going?

**Valdis Auers:** [01:04:30] No we are going before. I'm not going to sing anymore.

**Aija Auers:** [01:04:33] We are too old for that. It takes very, very long. You know, the first thing is you have to walk for quite a while until you get there. You can go by tram you know and then you have to walk. You have to walk. You have to walk. And then they are singing and singing. The singing starts at 8 or 9 o'clock, I think.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:05:01] Yeah. and then it finishes in the morning, they carry on singing?

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:05:04] They carry on all night.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:05:07] All the night, you know, without conductors.

**Aija Auers:** [01:05:07] We are a bit too old you know, we will be watching on the television. We are going to watch it, we will see you know.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:05:17] And they are standing up all the time I presume.

**Aija Auers:** [01:05:17] They are, they are.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:05:22] Exhausting.

**Aija Auers:** [01:05:23] And not only that when my daughter said for heaven's sake, I can't stand it anymore because they have rehearsals, you know, how many ... 3 days before the Saturday. I have to spend from 8 in the morning to 11 in the evening there. Rehearsing, rehearsing, rehearsing. She came home very tired in the morning and father was there - you have to get up - and she said Yes, I have to go singing again.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:05:52] Is it it's quite something.

**Aija Auers:** [01:05:55] But whatever, I have to be there to listen to them you know. Some of the choir are going to Latvia singing you know.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:06:06] Ah yes, they, the youngest ones, get mixed up with the London choir, a mixture, they already got a bunch definitely to go. You have pass though.

**Aija Auers:** [01:06:14] They have to pass now.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:06:16] They have to be good enough.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:06:20] Yes, good enough, good enough you know.

**Aija Auers:** [01:06:22] There is too many people. You can see how full it is, so they just take a few persons more, it's just impossible.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:06:29] It's fantastic that it's such still such a big important thing. Just wonderful.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:06:36] When you when you were out of the room, I asked Valdis - in Corby the choir seems very important but not the only important thing for the Latvians culturally what else do you think ...

**Aija Auers:** [01:06:49] Well there was a folk-dance group and one of the things was the Welfare Fund you know.

**Judy Caine:** [01:06:57] The Welfare Fund?

**Valdis Auers:** [01:06:57] Latvian Welfare Fund, yes.

**Judy Caine:** [01:07:02] Does the Latvian dance group still perform?

**Aija Auers:** [01:07:06] No. You have to ask Valdis because he was dancing in there ... Valdis laughs.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:07:13] I'd like to see that.

**Aija Auers:** [01:07:17] Oh yes, do ask him, there are pictures and everything, because they did do it, before they went to London, you know.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:07:23] Did they start a new school?

**Aija Auers:** [01:07:27] The new school are having a new band; they are having a new dance group but it's a different one now.

**Judy Caine:** [01:07:33] Is it still the traditional dances that they do?

**Aija Auers:** [01:07:33] Yes, it's the traditional dances.

**Judy Caine:** [01:07:33] And that's at the supplementary school?

**Aija Auers:** [01:07:41] Yes.

**Judy Caine:** [01:07:42] Is that Saturday now or Sunday?

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:07:44] Saturday.

**Aija Auers:** [01:07:44] I think we had on Saturday. I think. I Don't know if it is on Saturday or Sunday the new school.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:07:55] I don't know.

**Aija Auers:** [01:07:56] We went on the Saturday, when our children went it was on Saturdays.

**Aija Auers:** [01:08:03] But obviously it was at the school that he was later a teacher [Agris]. Gunta she did come to help us in the school, when she finished, she was teaching the children to sing, you know. But they all took part. It was partly you know, one thing and another thing. But the first Latvians, I think, came here because of the male voice choir as my husband did. He came here because he wanted to take part so, and secondly it was easier to get houses when you get married in Corby.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:08:43] There was hope and opportunity, wasn't there.

**Aija Auers:** [01:08:45] Yes. It was easier when you married. At first there were quite a lot of young men who sang in the choir and later their families came, and they would get houses, and they wanted to sing because they loved to sing, so they came together. At first, they lived somewhere else but since then they all came to Corby to sing.

**Judy Caine:** [01:09:10] Can I ask, what is your most vivid memory of music and singing when you were little in Latvia?

**Aija Auers:** [01:09:18] Actually, I know that my sister and I would do a play and there was singing, and I liked it very much, but I can't remember if that was the main thing. The thing was, that if there was a party at the house, people were always singing when they were sitting around the table. I think it was the same with you, you know. With the friends when they came, they were eating and then they were singing.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:09:51] It was very much part of your life.

**Aija Auers:** [01:09:56] Yes. It is the same nowadays you know at Christmastime we went to my daughter's house in London, and my son and his family came from Latvia, you know. My daughters' mother in law came and we were sitting and eating and after that we were starting to sing, you know. But they are Christmas songs at Christmastime. But it's quite natural that we are singing, and my grandchildren were singing quite nicely with us. They were not running away, they were sitting there and singing with us. It's quite natural you know, they grow up in that, where people are singing. It's the same when they are going to friends, we are singing you know.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:10:47] Did you make lots of other friends from work as well or was the choir was the thing from work?



**Valdis Auers:** [01:10:56] Well, choir was the thing from work, yes.

**Aija Auers:** [01:10:59] Would you like to have some refreshments; would you like a cup of coffee?

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:11:03] You know what I'd love is just a glass of water please.

**Aija Auers:** [01:11:08] How about you?

**Judy Caine:** [01:11:09] Likewise. Water is absolutely fine. Thank you so much.

**Aija Auers:** [01:11:13] I think you have got some bottles, I'll sort a glass.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:11:19] We mustn't take up too much more of your time ...

**Valdis Auers:** [01:11:22] What I liked in Latvia was the Army band. My father was an Army officer.

**Judy Caine:** [01:11:31] And did you play in a brass band?

**Valdis Auers:** [01:11:33] He didn't play no, but there was a brass band. Yes.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:11:38] But I liked it ...

**Aija Auers:** [01:11:40] ... yes, and he liked to march with it.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:11:44] (Laughs) on the side, in my youth I lived among army people.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:11:54] So that's his memory of childhood. Fantastic, and what do you think of Agris' film?

**Aija Auers:** [01:12:09] I think it's very nice, very nicely done.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:12:11] Yes. I thought it was good he did it with his daughter didn't he.

**Aija Auers:** [01:12:16] Yes with Sarma.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:12:17] I think it's lovely because it does talk about now, Latvian people's views now in Corby and a few other places and looking back at things.

**Aija Auers:** [01:12:29] Yes, I think it is a very nicely made film, but I have seen the other one as well that he made in London, you know.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:12:37] Oh right, who made that film?

**Aija Auers:** [01:12:37] Agris and Sarma.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:12:44] Oh yes. Yes, sorry I'd forgotten about that one.

**Aija Auers:** [01:12:47] Yes, the poet, [Velta Snikere] you know, I've seen that as well. I think it's wonderful. I think Agris can do these things, you know, and he has a wonderful voice when he's talking over you know. Telling all these things, he has a wonderful voice but they both haven't got enough time. Sarma, they are always so busy, and he's so busy with everything, with his work and so on.

**Judy Caine:** [01:13:30] So did you ever sing with the bands?

**Valdis Auers:** [01:13:33] No.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:13:33] They were two separate things were they the choir and the band.

**Judy Caine:** [01:13:45] So, is there anything else you'd like to tell us about the choir?

**Valdis Auers:** [01:13:48] I don't think there is much more to tell!

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:13:54] Did you meet every week?

**Valdis Auers:** [01:13:57] Twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:14:00] Wow, so it really was serious.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:14:02] It was. Yes.

**Aija Auers:** [01:14:04] They were a good choir.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:14:06] Yes, I can see that - most choirs meet once a week, that is very serious and wonderful. What was it in an evening two hours on a Tuesday and on a Thursday?

**Valdis Auers:** [01:14:20] Evening. Two and a half hours, you know. I think there's a picture?

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:14:21] There's a picture of the steelworks in there somewhere ...

**Valdis Auers:** [01:14:21] ... I just can't find it.

Chat here not clear enough to transcribe whilst Valdis tries to find a photo. Lots of paper rustling. Ros spots a photo of Pen Green ...

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:15:24] ... Pen Green - that's where you rehearsed.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:15:25] Yes, rehearsals. I used to walk from town centre there and back. It was easy then. I wouldn't walk anymore. Across the field sporting fields.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:15:40] Yeah, right, because Pen Green now is a famous place of education.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:15:46] Yeah, famous.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:15:46] Still there.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:15:46] The chap who wrote this book, he came to Corby and that was taken on the journey we passed, and I showed him.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:16:00] So what was that building used for in the daytime when you used it as a choir in the evening.

**Judy Caine:** [01:16:06] It was a grammar school I think or just a ...

**Valdis Auers:** [01:16:08] It was a school, yeah, they sat on the benches there.

**Judy Caine:** [01:16:09] We probably can get a hold of this [book] because it was only published in 2013.

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:16:21] Interesting.

**Judy Caine:** [01:16:23] Right. Well I think we should let these lovely people ...

**Ros Stoddart:** [01:16:27] ... I Think we should give you a rest. That was really interesting.

**Aija Auers:** [01:16:33] I hope we helped you.

**Valdis Auers:** [01:16:39] You did more helping than me ...

**Aija Auers:** [01:16:39] ... I told you so I should have been up-stairs.

**Judy Caine:** Turns tape off and thanks both Valdis and Aija for their time.

