

Billy Hayes Transcript

Tina:

Hello, what is your full name?

Billy Hayes:

My name is Billy Hayes.

Tina:

Okay. So, what year were you born?

Billy Hayes:

1953.

Tina:

Okay. Where were you born?

Billy Hayes:

In Liverpool.

Tina:

Okay. What did your parents do for a living?

Billy Hayes:

My dad worked in a factory and my mom was a cleaner.

Tina:

Okay. Thanks. Please tell us why you decided to work for Royal Mail?

Billy Hayes:

Well, I didn't have a job at the time in 1974, so I decided to join the post office for a year and I stayed 18 years. And then I got involved in the union, and come to London to work.

Tina:

Okay. Tell us about any family member who worked for the Royal Mail?

Billy Hayes:

Well, my brother-in-law worked for Royal Mail. Yeah, so he was a driver in Royal Mail.

Tina:

Okay. What did your family members think of about your decision to work for Royal Mail?

Billy Hayes:

Well, they didn't know till I started. I didn't tell anybody. A bit superstitious about things, so it was only when I landed the role, they obviously became aware that I was a postman.

Billy Hayes Transcript

Tina:

Okay. Tell us about how you started working for Royal Mail.

Billy Hayes:

Well, I started working for Royal Mail back in 1974. You have what they call an induction, which is two weeks. I'd been told about this job, because although it seems like a simple job, you have to have a bit of common sense, because you've got people's birthday cards, people's money that was being delivered by special delivery, and you've got to be able to find... be on your own for a long time, delivering letters and letters and packets and things like that. So, you do do a bit of training before you're actually allowed to go out on the streets by yourself.

Tina:

Okay. Describe the training you did.

Billy Hayes:

Well, the training was... as you can imagine, laying out to sort letters, which seems easy but can be quite complicated. Learn how to post letters, learning how to get some special letters signed for, and to keep a track of that on... a lot of that now has changed because a lot of it now is, like most things, a lot of electronic stuff. And they can track your packets now from being sent to being delivered. And eventually they'll be able to track every single letter, which is incredible, really.

Tina:

What was the first job you did for Royal Mail.

Billy Hayes:

The first job I did was in collecting from pillar boxes in the streets. You know you see the people come with the keys and that, and that was my first job. I was an assistant to a driver, and we used to just go round-

Tina:

Did you enjoy that?

Billy Hayes:

Hey?

Tina:

Did you enjoy that?

Billy Hayes:

Yeah. It was quite a long job. Because when I started, we worked six days a week. And you had to be up at half past four in the morning. But the benefit... the particularly good part about it, by 12 o' clock you were finish for the day. Although the pay was quite low, so a lot of people work overtime and that. But I basically enjoyed the job, yeah.

Billy Hayes Transcript

Tina:

Okay. Tell us how you felt on your first day of that work?

Billy Hayes:

First day in the post office?

Tina:

Yeah.

Billy Hayes:

It was a bit mind boggling, really. It was a bit like... I imagine, although I've never been in the army, it was a bit like being in the army in a way. You had a uniform, you had a badge, you had a cap, and a sort of... this is my cap which I brought along, just to show you what postmen and postwomen used to wear. Hey? I'll put it on my hat. It might not fit now. Here's the hat we used to have to wear. It's a bit like being in the army. They were the caps you had to wear, and the uniform, it was like... almost seemed like a military uniform. It could be quite awful when you was on delivery. That's changed a lot now, but so it was a big experience, yeah.

Tina:

What kinds of people were you working with?

Billy Hayes:

Oh-

Speaker 3:

Sorry, Tina, what you can do, because you're missing out a few questions, put your finger next to ones you are asking, so. You're on question four now, yeah.

Tina:

Four. Okay. Tell us how you felt... I'm sorry. Tell us how you felt on your first days at work.

Billy Hayes:

Well, as I say, it was a bit like joining the army. And there's a lot of people work extra time, because the pay was quite low. So what my feeling was, that you had a uniform on all the time, that's what it felt like. Long days. And I suppose the biggest feeling of any postwoman or postman must be, feeling tired, because you snatch your sleep. I remember when I used go out to pubs and things like that on a Friday night, many a time I'd come home and just lie on the couch for a few hours and then go to work the next day. But it was like... it's strange, and it is very much like... seems to be like, being in a regiment or an army, something like that.

Tina:

okay. Describe your work in those early days.

Billy Hayes:

Describe my?

Tina:

Work in those early days?

Billy Hayes:

My working days, early days?

Tina:

Yes.

Billy Hayes:

Well, up by half past four. In them days, there was only one bus you could get at five o' clock in the morning. I'd get scramble up, get showered and changed and everything, get ready for work, and then rush to get the bus and normally by 5:00 AM in the morning. And if you miss that bus, it's very difficult to get into work. And sometimes you get post office vans going into work, and then you'd catch them. So, feeling tired a lot, but a lot of friendliness, a lot of comradeship in the workplace. Although you see a postwoman or your postman out on delivery by themselves, in the workplace they were together a lot. And nowadays, of course they're doing things differently, you see postmen and postwomen working as duos. Two people together.

Tina:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, okay. What was the most... pardon me.

Speaker 3:

That was [inaudible 00:07:03]. Number six.

Tina:

Oh, I just missed a bit, like your work in those early days?

Billy Hayes:

It was okay. When I look back now, like any other older person, people smoked and worked in them days. And that was a bit strange. I don't know. Didn't smoke. And there was even people drinking alcohol, would you believe? Even early in the morning. But generally speaking, you would say that people were very congenial, particularly at Christmas time. Because at Christmas time, everyone gives the postman and postwoman a tip, I hope your mom and dad do. Hope your mom and dad do. And they get quite a lot of money at Christmas time for that. So yeah, it's very... I didn't dislike the job.

Tina:

Okay. What kinds of people were you working with?

Billy Hayes:

In the early days it wasn't a very diverse workplace, where I worked. But eventually it became more so. But I know a lot of old buildings... when I started there were very old buildings, you can normally...

because the post office and British Telecom used to be one organization. And there was a kind of like a civil service type build, as it were. They're easy to recognize now. Old telephone exchanges or old post offices. They're a bit Victorian in some ways, as it'd probably be described.

Tina:

Okay. How diverse was your workplace when you started?

Billy Hayes:

Well, it wasn't very diverse where I worked in Liverpool. In fact, black and Asian people were underrepresented. And it was the union who took steps to make sure the workplace was more representative in terms of race. But then in terms of gender, it was very unrepresentative of... but in recent years, as you see on the buses now, this was more and more women coming into the workplace, which made for a better environment. So when I first joined, it wasn't a very diverse workplace.

Tina:

Okay. This is equipment. What sort of equipment do you use in your work?

Billy Hayes:

Pen. That was the biggest thing that we used. The pen. And then more latterly, more technology. And nowadays, it's very... although it's a paper industry, it's very technology driven. So every item of mail now, it's called track and trace. Everything's just, from the minute it's received to the minute it's delivered, it's tracked and traced. But it wasn't like that when I joined. Even the machinery in the big sorting offices like Mount Pleasant, which is not too far from here, they didn't have big machines. Nowadays, they have big machines. And now if you look on your letters, you have a thing called a post code, and that can tell you lots of things about where people live and all the rest of it. And Britain is unique-

Tina:

Could you not talk to the mic, please?

Billy Hayes:

Sorry. Okay. Britain is unique in that it has a letter and a numeric based system. So when you see your post codes around here, it's WC, which means West Central. And then there's another few letters, tells you where [inaudible 00:10:58]. Whereas if you lived in America, it's all numbers, and they call that the zip code. In Ireland, they haven't yet got a post code, apart from the north of Ireland. So most postal administrations now have some kind of signifier of where you live and that, which even in marketing terms is used heavily now.

Tina:

Okay. Describe your uniform.

Billy Hayes:

As I said before, it's like a military uniform. In them days it was gray, like [inaudible 00:11:37], which always itched in the summer. And nowadays, it's much more casual. One of the jobs I had in the union, was responsibility for uniforms, so we had campaigns, would you believe, for postwomen and postmen

to be able to wear shorts in the summer. Sounds incredible, doesn't it? But that was the case. We never used to be supplied with shirts, we used to have to provide our own shirts and we campaigned to get that, as part of a... and we can get tax out. The uniform in the olden days, if you like, was very, very heavy. And as the years went by, it got more and more modern, more and more... so as nowadays, it looks very... I think it looks a bit sloppy, but maybe that's just because of my age. I don't think they're very tidy postmen nowadays.

But we had this campaign in the '70s called "Look Smart", which was designed to make sure postmen and postwomen wore their uniform smartly. I can't say it was a great success. It is a bit like trying to keep school kids smart. It's a tough job.

Tina:

Okay. Tell us about the skills you needed for your job.

Billy Hayes:

Well, I think the biggest skill you need to be a postal worker, is the biggest skill in life, really. And that is common sense. Which is the ability to work things out for yourself without much education. The strange thing about common sense, it's not that common. You have to take a test to join the post office, or what we now call Royal Mail. And we took a test, and it was like a big classroom, a school room. But really, really simple test for example, what way is the water flowing if you see the bubbles? You see a little cartoon diagram where bubbles flowing in a stream. And it was so obvious, so simple a test, [inaudible 00:13:49] kind of a test, and there was people sitting next to me saying, "How could you tell what way the stream was flowing?" By the bubbles. I didn't know what to say to the person, so I got out a bit. But I was quite surprised, in a class of 30, 15, 20 people would fail. So you had to take a test for a bit of common sense.

And that's things like for example, putting your fingers in a letterbox. That seems a simple thing, doesn't it? Until the dogs try to take your fingers off. So you have to be learning. The idea is, what you do is, you lift the letterbox open, and drop the letter in. Now, that seems like a really simple thing, but if there's a big doberman on the other side, it could save your fingers. And I've been bitten by dogs a lot of times. And all the owners have a saying. And it goes like this, "It's okay." So I'm assuming it's a male dog. "It's okay, he doesn't bite." And then when they bite you, they say, "He's never done that before. And it must have been your fault." So there's things like that. That's why they changed a law in the country to make sure that postmen and postwomen could prosecute people, because often if we tried to prosecute people, they'd say, "Oh, it's not my dog." And the reason why every dog has a chip now, is because postal workers campaigned to have their chips for dogs.

I haven't had many attacks by cats or pet hamsters, but you never know.

Tina:

Okay. Describe a typical day at work?

Billy Hayes:

A typical day at work, as a postal worker.

Tina:

Yeah.

Billy Hayes:

I'm thinking on delivery, right?

Tina:

Yeah.

Billy Hayes:

So you get up at half past four, get into work for a quarter to six, you get your mail which you... your mail have been sorted to what's called your route. Now your route which is like... say your job would be all the streets around here and you'd be given all the mail for your streets. And then you would have to divide it into streets and get the numbers in order. And what you often find, when you're a postwoman or postman, you often find them thinking of going right up a street and they got to the very end, and found that they've got number 100, and they've got items for number two. And have to walk all the way back down. And so you have to sort your mail in logical and numeric order. Nowadays, because of machinery, it's often sorted for you, right down to... we've lots of machines that sort it now, right down to your address and your street. Although you still have things like, I'll give you an example. I was in New York a few years ago, on Ellis Island.

I don't know if you know that's a famous where the Statue of Liberty is. And in Ellis Island you have a list of the number of Liverpools in the world. Places called Liverpool. And there must be at least 30. So often we used to get letters addressed to Liverpool, so and so. And it was for Liverpool, USA, or Liverpool, Australia, or Liverpool in Canada. So that's what you'll be doing, arranging your mail. And then you put a certain amount of mail in your bag, and you take it out. And normally, halfway through your round, when you'd finished those items, somebody else would bring another bag out to you in a van. And you'd do the remainder. But nowadays, because there's so much packets, they use vans a lot more.

So that's what your job would be. And you'd be racing to finish, because the quicker you finished, the quicker you're home. But now they have machines to sort your routes, or routes as they call them in America, and now they have almost... they're now talking about introducing a system that tells you exactly when you finish. You know like you can see where you see where anyone is on your phone?

Tina:

Yes.

Billy Hayes:

Well, that's what they're talking about for postwomen and postmen now.

Tina:

Oh. Okay. What were your favorite things about your work?

Billy Hayes:

Finishing. The comradeship, I suppose. Like all jobs, it can be a bit tough. So the favorite things were being able to finish, having a chat with people, being out on your own with your own thoughts. Yeah, meeting other people. And we used to have a little scam, if you like. You know what scam is, don't you?

Tina:

Yeah.

Billy Hayes:

Well, so we'd all finish a bit early, but we'd all go into a little caf, and have a cup of tea, because if you went back to the office, the manager would give you some more work, so best to have a cup of tea, and then go back to work. So... but that kind of thing, the solidarity.

Tina:

Okay. What were the difficult things about your work?

Billy Hayes:

I think on being delivery work, is the weight. To have to carry a lot of heavy things on your back, and there've been studies about curvature of the spine for postmen and postwomen. And we used to have to... particularly say women who were pregnant. You had to deal with that as a... as more women come into the workforce in the mid '80s, I would say mainly. We had to deal with a new environment... and I don't want be... for example, if you go in the toilet and you're a man, it's a lot simpler than go on a toilet if you're a woman. And there's certain dangers in there. So we had to look at ways of dealing with things like that. And our managers really, I suppose the post office is a bit over... was when I was there. A bit over managed, a bit like school in some ways. Well, in the post office, I don't know whether this is the case now.

But if you wanted to go to the toilet, and it's often grown women and men here. If you wanted to go to the toilet, you have to put your hand up to go to the toilet. And the manager would check how long you're in the toilet for. And I remember myself in this very old building I used to work in, in Whitechapel in Liverpool. Being followed to the toilet by a manager. And when I'd come out, he said to me, "That was a long time you were in the toilet." And I thought like... that caused a lot of stressed.

Tina:

Oh, okay. Can you tell us about any discrimination you experienced or witnessed?

Billy Hayes:

Oh yeah, I've seen lots of that. As I said, black people were underrepresented in Liverpool. And I've seen gay people attacked, and sacked. And we stood by them. And so like... but then the post office was in the same time period as the rest of the world. So thankfully things like on LGBT issues, things have changed a great deal. Not completely. So we have to deal with those kind of thing. And harassment of women postal workers. All these kind of things. And the post office was no different in that regard. I've seen people be picked on because they were gay. I've seen people be picked on because they were black. I've seen women picked on because they were women, and we stood against that. And you get all petty prejudices of those times. But like in all things, strange to say, when people struggle together, it makes for a better workplace eventually. Sometimes you have to make a stand against things and it's not very popular. And that's the right thing to do.

Jesus wasn't very popular, was he? When he first come on the scene. But nonetheless, we did see things like that.

Tina:

Okay. Tell us a story that stands out from your working life?

Billy Hayes Transcript

Billy Hayes:

That's a big one there. I'm trying to think.

Speaker 3:

We can come back to that one, we've done that last time, didn't we?

Tina:

Yeah, if you want.

Speaker 3:

Let's come back to that one Billy, because it is a big one. [inaudible 00:22:42]

Billy Hayes:

Okay.

Tina:

Okay.

Speaker 3:

Maybe to hold eye contact [inaudible 00:22:46].

Tina:

Okay. What were some naughty things people did at work?

Billy Hayes:

Oh, have long tea breaks. Because when you're working, I used to find that postal workers, you could always tell if... it's like to a manager in a delivery office, right? If you as a postwoman or a postman, a lot of it done some external recruitment. You could be a postman or a postwoman one week, and the next week you could be the manager of the delivery office. And so the manager, if your tea break was 10 minutes, the manager was always the person who had 10 minutes. The postwoman or the postman, they always had 12 minutes. So they would be like naughty things. Taking longer breaks, just having... taking longer to do things. Maybe playing tricks on peoples, like people do sometimes. So things like that.

Tina:

Okay. Talk us briefly through the different jobs you did while working for Royal Mail.

Billy Hayes:

Well I've done delivery, which is delivering letters on the street. I had just done sorting, which is just staying inside the post office and so on. I've done packets, which is like your parcels you get from Amazon, sorting them into big bags, worked on the docks, loading foreign mail for containers. What else? That was about it really, in terms of the jobs.

Tina:

Okay. Tell us about your favorite job.

Billy Hayes:

My favorite job was when I worked for the union.

Tina:

Oh.

Billy Hayes:

Yeah. Because I used to get paid for causing trouble, which is great.

Speaker 3:

She's got a lot of questions about your union [crosstalk 00:24:45].

Billy Hayes:

Okay, yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 3:

So let's [crosstalk 00:24:46].

Billy Hayes:

Okay. So being on delivery was... but what happened. If you think about a 24 hour cycle, we're all I suppose... going back to your previous question, was monotony [inaudible 00:25:05]. And so I could do deliveries one week and be very happy, but then get fed up doing that. And then want to do indoors. Doing nights, working a night shift was great when you're working nights. Horrible when you have to go in at 12 o'clock at night or half past 10 at night. But great when you were going home in the winter, at six o'clock in the morning. You knew you were going to bed. And all those other postal workers were out delivering in the rain. But the big thing I like about any job is variety and challenge.

Tina:

Okay. Last question from the working life. How did you progress in Royal Mail?

Billy Hayes:

Well, I stayed a postman, really. Just quite happy doing that. Didn't want to... I could've progressed to a... they used to have a grade called postman/postwoman higher grade, which is an indoor job and all that kind of registered letters you get, they have to be signed for. That's a special job in the delivery office. I could've done that, choose not to. I could've been a manager, I chose not to be a manager. So I was quite happy doing the job I was doing.

Tina:

Okay. That's all right. Social life. Tell us about your relationships with your colleagues.

Billy Hayes:

Billy Hayes Transcript

Oh well, in them days, it was like, just talking about things that people talk about. Football, maybe political controversies although not much of that. And drinking after work, that was a big thing in them days. A lot of people drank a lot of beer in the pubs and clubs.

Tina:

Tell us about your experiences of joining clubs at work.

Billy Hayes:

Oh yeah. There was clubs were... the post office have a sports association, so they used to have football teams, tennis teams, all sorts of normal things that you'd have in your own school, like, as I say, tennis, football, badminton, volleyball, things like that.

Tina:

Okay. Tell us about any other opportunities, social wise.

Billy Hayes:

Oh, just the one... just done finish that. Liverpool also had the chess championships. So we had a chess team, you know chess, yeah? And would you believe, they beat the Liverpool University professors at chess. How about that? Incredible, isn't it?

Tina:

Yeah.

Billy Hayes:

I told you a sad tale. Yeah.

Tina:

Okay. So this is unions, yeah.

Billy Hayes:

Okay.

Tina:

What made you join the union?

Billy Hayes:

Well it was... because I had to in them days. No, actually no. It was voluntary by then. Because I thought it was the right thing to do. I've been in a union in previous jobs, so I thought that's a good thing to be in a union.

Tina:

Okay. Why is a union important for postal workers?

Billy Hayes:

Well, unions are important for everybody. Because what a union does is, when you're in a workplace, you need someone on your side to counterbalance the power of the boss or the manager, so that's what the union does. And provides for a bit of... make things better for everybody. And it's proven if you're in a union, you're likely to be better paid. And that's what the union was there for. And so, but in the post office... in fact, I've been all round the world and unions are very common in the post office. In places where unions per se aren't that big, like say the United States of America, six percent of people now are in a union in the workplace. Whereas in the USA, their post office is completely unionized. And a very strong union at that.

Tina:

Okay. So tell us about any-

Speaker 3:

And number three?

Tina:

Oh, sorry. What part did the union play in your life?

Billy Hayes:

A very big part, although I wasn't very involved in the union when I first joined the post office. In fact, I was saying the union was rubbish and didn't do anything for anyone. And somebody said to me, "But you don't go to the union meetings." And I didn't. And so I went to the first meeting, and I knew the union had something to do with something called an Annual General Meeting, where the people get together and discuss policy and procedures and stuff like that. And I went there. And I was there for about 20 minutes. And then I discovered I was at the sports and social. So didn't know that much about the union at all. And so I went to the union meeting, and got more and more involved, and it became a big part of my life.

Tina:

Tell me about any strikes or disputes you were involved with?

Billy Hayes:

Okay. Well, the big strike I was involved in was in 1995. One of the biggest strikes, when the whole of London postal workers, 20,000, all come out on strike, in support of people North West London. And that was a very big strike. And it was an unofficial strike. It was spontaneous. So people just started out all over London. And we got taken to court, and the future home secretary was our leader at the time, Alan Johnson, and myself, had to go to the high court in the Strand. And we got fined for unofficial. We got fined 1,4 million pounds.

Tina:

1.4 million?

Billy Hayes:

1.4 million pounds.

Billy Hayes Transcript

Tina:

Wow.

Billy Hayes:

And the judge said it wasn't unofficial and we said it was unofficial. And he said to us, "But why did it stop at the London post code? Why didn't it continue to spread?" So we said, "Maybe there was some people saying go on strike." Because that was a big strike. The judge was called Judge [Tucker 00:31:17], which is a bit funny. A funny name. But that was a big event. I've been involved in quite a lot actually, but that was a big event.

Tina:

Okay, so this changes now. What was your most memorable moment in the post office?

Speaker 3:

It could be at the union as well.

Billy Hayes:

Okay. Well, actually, there was many memorable, but I'll give you one. There was a postman, and this was back in Liverpool, who was sacked, not because he was gay, but it was... we think it had something to do with it. And everyone thought we couldn't win the dispute. And I went to the office, a place called West Derby, where Holly Oaks is made, by the way. I don't know if you watch that program. And all the people in the workplace loved him. There was 80 people worked there. And they said, "We're not going to go back until he's given his job back." And I thought that's a very big order. Anyway, they went on strike for three weeks, so they went without work for three weeks. And eventually we got him his job back and an apology. So that was a big moment.

Tina:

Okay. What was your most challenging moment in the post office?

Billy Hayes:

What was my most challenging?

Tina:

A moment. Like-

Billy Hayes:

In the post office?

Tina:

Yeah. [inaudible 00:32:45].

Billy Hayes:

Getting up in the morning. That's very challenging. Half past four. When I was getting up at half past four in the morning, there was no television, you couldn't... there was radio, actually. The radio didn't come

on. You'd get foreign radio at half past four, but it was a very bad signal. So that was probably one of the most challenging things. And I had to do that six days a week, no matter how much sleep I had, I had to be up at half past four.

Tina:

Okay. [inaudible 00:33:16] you working, what were the main changes at work?

Billy Hayes:

Right. [inaudible 00:33:20] I think there's a massive growth in diversity. More women in the workplace now. More ethnic minorities in the workplace now. More technology in the workplace now. Somebody was saying to me the other day, DVDs are old fashioned and they are. So much more technology now. And the strange is, contrary to popular belief, people say, "Well because there's more technology, there'll be less letters." Well, actually there's more. There's been a drop because of the COVID and the recession and everything. But what happens is now with technology, they can segment your letter more, so like for example, if you buy something when your baby's born, the data they collect now, they call it big data thing. They're able to send a letter to you, saying your child is now starting school, buy these clothes. And then data thereafter can say when your child is leaving school, you should be looking at this. So a lot more data. A lot more tracking. And a lot more...

Whereas we used to have managers managing people, now you've got machines managing people, or technology manning people. And such stuff keeping a track on people. So much more technology now. Much more de-personalized. But like some people call the post office the world's first social network, if you think about it, it's the only network that used to deliver to every part of the world. You think about that postwoman, sees more people in a day than a chief executive sees in a year. All them people. So... but what's happening with technology? It's not diminishing the number of letters. It's actually complementing it and developing it. You can see things like now Moonpig, you might be familiar with Moonpig? When you can do a card to your friend? And so with all the data they're getting now, more and more.

For example Google street view, you can... whereas you hit somebody's address years ago, you can only imagine or maybe see something in the paper or something. Now you can actually see their front door from wherever they live in the world. I once sent a audio tape to my uncle in Australia and it took six months. Now I can see my cousin on Facebook in split seconds. So, that's what's changing.

Tina:

Okay. In what ways do you think this job has improved?

Billy Hayes:

I think it's got more diverse, which is a good thing. Postal workers now work five days a week and not six, which I was instrumental in getting in the post office. [inaudible 00:36:26] liked the idea of that. But as Charles Dickens said in A Tale of Two Cities, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Every age brings its own problems. I don't believe in simply living in the past and saying everything was fantastic then. When I was growing up, you could be discriminated against because of your color. In London, you probably may be aware of this one, they used to have signs on the doors of hotels, "No blacks, dogs are allowed." That's changed now, because people changed the law, so that's a good thing. Things have got better, but some things have got worse. There's more casualized. Less security in employment nowadays.

Tina:

[inaudible 00:37:23]. In what way does... sorry. In what way-

Speaker 3:

[crosstalk 00:37:31]. Go to six.

Tina:

Okay. What would you think if your child wanted to go work for Royal Mail?

Billy Hayes:

I wouldn't mind. It's a better paid job now. But I wouldn't say it was a well paid job. Any advice I'd give to anyone being involved in work, is have something you can sell. Try to develop skills. But my experience of working, and being an employer, personality and outlook is much more important than anything. I've met people who have got degrees and PhDs, and there's more sense in a brick with them, and I've met people who haven't got any degrees and is the wisest people in the world. So personality is important. I know it's a cliché, but I'm a believer in glass half full, as opposed to half empty. It's not what happens to you, it's your attitude to what happens to you, that makes all the difference. That's all the evidence I've seen in my working life, both as an employer and an employee.

Tina:

Okay, last question changes. If you were the boss of Royal Mail, what changes would you make?

Billy Hayes:

That's a good question. I'd continue to work on diversity. I'd continue to work on improving the workplace. And it sounds cliché, but the greatest asset in any company, is the workforce. If someone is... and I wouldn't say this is the case nowadays, if someone is glad... I don't like the work proud, actually. If someone is glad to work for you, that's a real asset. So using technologies that enhances people, and being more concerned with getting the job done instead of monitoring how the job is done. Because when I worked there, it was a lot more like... I felt like the managers were trying to catch mice all the time. And the mice being the workforce. Trying to make sure they didn't have too long a break. Trying to make sure they didn't talk too much. But of course the truth is, if you think of the best things you do in life, you don't have to be managed. You don't have to be managed to do your favorite thing. So make it so that the workforce are glad to work for you, and celebrate your company.

That's the key to any organization. To be happy working. So I'd say, give postal workers more pay of course, but give them more responsibility. Give them... they say nowadays, give them ownership.

Tina:

Okay. This is a [inaudible 00:40:28] job, the last question. Looking back over your working life, what have working for Royal Mail meant to you?

Billy Hayes:

Oh, it gave me a living. For all the arguments... when I started in the post office, there was lots of work in Liverpool. But I lived through the '80s where there was... Liverpool lost about 100,000 jobs. So it gave me a living. And I'm not grateful, but I'm appreciative of that. It gave me a living. It gave my life a bit of meaning through the union, and I met a lot of fantastic people.

Tina:

I was going to say, is there anything you wanted to say, like add something?

Billy Hayes:

Well, I can say I've been interviewed by lots of people, right, on the telly and you're the toughest interviewers I've ever met.

Speaker 3:

Can I just ask you a quick thing? [crosstalk 00:41:28], I had a chat with Billy at break time, and he just said a couple of things I thought would be good to... and then you two ask. I just want some [inaudible 00:41:33]. Number one. Could you talk about... remember you were talking about just how many people worked there, I don't think they realized [crosstalk 00:41:39].

Billy Hayes:

Oh, yeah. Okay, yeah.

Speaker 3:

Could you talk about it?

Billy Hayes:

Well, the post office in 1964, and I've seen this in a book, so it must be true. One in four of all workers worked in the GPO. So knowing this nowadays when you see Open Reach or BT, that used to be part of the post office. It was called the General Post Office. So everything to do with communication was what was called the GPO. The General Post Office. So one in four of all workers worked at the GPO. And that's why you get lots of people whose mom or dad worked in the post office. Lots of famous people. They often say, "Oh, my dad was a postman or my mom was a postwoman." So.

Speaker 3:

And then the other one. Just talk a bit about when you started there, there were people in the military, and they were [inaudible 00:42:33]... just that one.

Billy Hayes:

Yeah, okay. Well, in the post office, it was never by law or explicit, but it was often the case that an awful lot of ex-army, navy, air force people come in to the post office because it was a very militarized system. They had lots of rules and manuals to manage people. Very like... and it was what was called a civil service, which means that it was a company that was wholly owned by the government. That's no longer the case. But it was very militarized. But what also happened as a result of that, although you would think, "Oh well, I'm in the army. Let's all be like little marionettes or little soldiers." The funny thing was, because they'd been in the army, and if you think of the army in particular, because that was very... they have troops and regiments and cadres and everything. They have to rely on each other, so it's a bit of definite elements of solidarity and I'd say in the USA, even now, what I think is one third of all the jobs in the United States postal service, have to be given to ex-military.

So you're not allowed visitors there. And you'd be surprised how many people were ex-soldiers or whatever.

Speaker 3:

Okay, we've got very little time left, but I just want to open up to the rest of the group, Sammy, [inaudible 00:44:12], have you got any questions? If you can answer towards Tina when you answer the question, please.

Speaker 4:

Okay. My question is, when you younger, did you expect you would grow up to be a postal worker?

Billy Hayes:

No, I didn't actually. I wanted to be a policeman. No, I didn't. But I've got a little bit of a theory about what you expect. I think who are and what you are is set very early on, in terms of your outlook and our attitude. I don't know if you've seen the film Seven Up, which is a fantastic film. A bit sad in some ways, in terms of what happens, "Give me a child until he's seven," it's a Jesuit saying, "and I'll give you the man." It should be woman as well, of course. Now I don't think it's inevitable, how people turn out, but I do think your school days bring out who you are. And I can see you one day directing... you three people directing something. Sammy?

Speaker 3:

Sammy, you've got a question?

Sammy:

What inspired you to become a postman?

Billy Hayes:

Not having a job. It's always a good way to want to be a job. And I had a little bit of what's called tinnitus, which is a hearing difficulty, and I could've worked in a car factory, but I didn't get in there. I didn't get in Ford or Vauxhall, so I remember saying, "If I can't get a job until, I'll try the post office." But I was only going to be there 12 months. And I ended up staying there 18 years.

Sammy:

Mm-