

Bob McGuire Transcript

Speaker 1:

What is your full name?

Bob McGuire:

My full name is Bob McGuire.

Speaker 1:

What year were you born?

Bob McGuire:

1947, September.

Speaker 1:

Where were you born?

Bob McGuire:

I was born in Forest Gate, London.

Speaker 1:

What did your parents do for a living?

Bob McGuire:

My mom didn't go to work because there were seven of us. But my dad was a lorry driver and a plasterer. That was my [inaudible 00:00:34] occupation.

Speaker 1:

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

Bob McGuire:

Well, I was living in east London at Canning Town and I lived near a big building that was called the London Overseas Mail Office, LOMO for short, I abbreviated it to LOMO. And I used to drink in a pub around the corner and all the blokes who worked there used to come in the pub. And at the time, the wages in Royal Mail wasn't very good. And I was looking around for another job. I was working on a job and they said to me, "Why don't you try and come over here?" So I said, "Well, the money's no good." So they said to me, "Money for 40 hours is not very good, but we get loads of overtime."

So they told me a little bit about it. So I applied and I got the job. And that's where I started. But where we worked wasn't delivering letters or anything else, it was a big building that had all lorries and containers. And every parcel that come into the country to be sent abroad, come into our office. And every parcel that come from abroad, from all the countries around the world come into our office. So it was quite an interesting job because you you learn lots of geography and stuff like that.

And it was heavy work. It was very heavy to work, big bags. In them days, all the parcels was put in bags and tied up and sealed and they were heavy bags. So most of it, was it was mainly men that

worked there because we were loading up lorries and loading up containers. So it was a physical job, but it was good fun. You'd go to work and you'd enjoy going to work. The blokes was all good men.

Speaker 1:

Tell us about any family members who worked for Royal Mail.

Bob McGuire:

Actually, I don't think I've got any family members that worked for Royal Mail. I think I'm the only one that worked for it. I was. I haven't got anyone else in the family that's work for Royal Mail.

Speaker 1:

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

Bob McGuire:

Well, my wife didn't mind because it was only a five minute walk from where I lived. I just used to walk to work across the road. It was nice and easy. So if I had to get out quickly, I was able to get out quickly. I'd had one daughter at the time when I joined there in 1978, and a year later I had another daughter. So it was convenient. It was convenient for working near where you lived.

Speaker 1:

What did your family members think about your decision to...

Speaker 3:

You just asked that.

Speaker 1:

Tell us how you started working for Royal Mail.

Bob McGuire:

Well, I think I've just done that because I met some people in the pub who told me about the work that they did and the money that they could earn with overtime. And because I had a young family, I said I was going to have a go. And I went in there and I was in there working in that office for a good number of years until it closed.

Speaker 1:

Describe the training you did.

Bob McGuire:

Well, first of all you had to go to a place at Kings Cross, it was called Bell Grove, where you had to do the cards. If you know in the post office where the postman sorts the letters into the frame, we had to do that training, even although all of our work that we was going to do when we got back to the office was nothing to do that because that was all English counties and English towns. But you had to be able to do this sorting at a certain speed for you to get the job.

And then once we went back to the office in Canning Town, we then started to learn about the different countries in the world and we had to learn places in those countries. So as we knew, if a parcel coming for San Francisco, we knew that went to the USA. If a parcel come in for Montreal, we knew it went to Canada and so forth. So we had to learn that. Then we did a bit of heavy lifting training, learning how to lift the bags properly and load the things up properly. So there was all those type of training that they gave us prior to us going out and doing the jobs all around the office.

Speaker 1:

What was the first job you did for Royal Mail?

Bob McGuire:

Right. When I went in, the first job are picked up was it was two shifts. One was on the ground, on the east platform and it was called loose load. And there would be 40 foot containers and it would all be American parcels because there was lots and lots of parcels going to America. And in there you had two types of mail. You had surface mail that went by boat, went by ship, and then you air mail. The work that we was doing there on the loose load was surface mail. We would load up the container with all those parcels. There was no bags on the American one. We loaded all up the container, the 40 foot container with loose parcels. If there wasn't enough at the end of the day for the container, it'd be shut, they would close it up and then load it up the next day when they had more parcels for America.

That was one week. And that would be I would work from 8:00 until 4:30. And then the second week I worked on the no flat form, which was a heavy old job where all the air mail parcels and stuff were coming in from abroad. And when you had to unload the lorries and you had to hook them on a chain. Then took the bags, right the way up to the second floor where somebody would cut the neck of the bag, cut the string, all the parcels would fall out and go into what they called a hopper, a great big thing where all the parcels and then these parcels would go down a belt and somebody would sort them to the different countries where they had to go for the next stage of their onward processing.

Speaker 1:

Tell us how you felt on your first day at work?

Bob McGuire:

Like everyone, I suppose, a little bit nervous. I wasn't sure how it was going to be but because of the friendliness of the people that worked there and everyone was helpful, you quickly dispelled them fears and it was fine. It was a good atmosphere to work in. In fact, I spoke to a friend of mine only last week who's quite old, maybe 87 I think, this year. And he said to me, "Bob, it used to be fun to go to work." And I think that sums it up.

Speaker 1:

Describe your work in those early days.

Bob McGuire:

Describe the work?

Speaker 1:

Yeah.

Bob McGuire:

Well, as I say, it was mainly fairly physical work. The bags were about 23 kilos heavy and you had to pick them up and you had to put them on what they called [broots 00:09:07] and they would be pulled around the office by a small tractor like a golf cart. But it was a bit more stronger than a golf cart. And you would pull the things around, take them out to the containers to be loaded or to another platform where they'd be loaded onto lorries. So it would be physical work, but enjoyable work.

Speaker 1:

What was the atmosphere like at your work in the early days?

Bob McGuire:

The atmosphere was terrific. It was a good atmosphere with blokes who were all doing their jobs, working together, helping each other out. And as I said before, it was fun to go to work. You'd go to work and the work would be hard but it was fun. You'd have a laugh, you'd miss a brand, you'd probably do things we shouldn't have done but it was good fun. We was like a lot of kids really enjoying ourselves while we was working and earning our wages.

Speaker 1:

What kinds of people were you working with?

Bob McGuire:

All different types, all different nationalities. Prior to the office in Canning Town being built, I think it opened in 1968, the work of the overseas parcels used to be done at a place called the Agricultural Hall in Islington. And because there was more and more parcels coming out, more and more foreign parcels and everything else, they just didn't have the room to cope with all the work that was going on there. So they built this new office in Canning Town in the late 60s. And the people there, some of the people had come from [Agio 00:11:18], as they used to call it. So there was a lot of people from North London, lots of people from East London, lots of people from Essex.

There was a diverse community. At the time, there wasn't lots of women working on the shop floor. There was women working there, working in the canteen, in the offices, in the cleaning. Later on, yes, younger girls came in, a few younger girls, but not many younger girls came in to do the work that the postmen there were doing. It was mainly male orientated, but a diverse community from all over the place.

Speaker 3:

So just to add to that, and bounce ahead, I think you said that a lot of the people that worked there came from the docks?

Bob McGuire:

Yeah. There was lots of people, as the docks started to close in the 70s, lots of people started to come in from the London docks. When the London docks were starting to close down, lots of people... Because if you knew people, if you had friends, I had friends who worked in the dock and were going to come in, were losing their job, redundancy, they started to come apply for jobs and came in to the post office there. So it was a close knit community who worked in there, people who knew one another. I had lots of people who worked in there that we used to play football together when we was kids at school and

everything. And through the years, we played for different football teams. So it was you sort of know everyone. It was an atmosphere that was friendly and a nice.

Speaker 1:

How diverse was your workplace when you started?

Bob McGuire:

As I said to you previously, the workplace was diverse. We had a good number of Indian and Pakistani boys, men, West Indians, some Africans and Irishman, Scotchman, Englishmen. It was completely diverse. Except as I say, on the working floors, there wasn't a lot of women that actually did the heavy work. The women would mainly be doing the cleaning, the office and the canteen and stuff like that.

Speaker 1:

What sort of equipment did you use [inaudible 00:14:00]?

Bob McGuire:

Well, lots of things. Forklifts, I was a forklift driver at one time. I was a tractor driver, which was like a golf cart. And you would attach the, you had these big trolley things that were called brutes and you would attach... The first one would attach to the tractor and then you could attach the second one, third one, fourth one. They would be loaded up with all the bags and then I would get on the tractor, as it was called and take them out to the container where they was going to be loaded.

Forklift, we did the forklift because later on when they started to move away from having bags and started to do more and more loose parcels, there was... If you've been to the airports and you've seen what they call the igloos, that got loaded onto the plane, have you ever seen where they put the luggage into at the airports and they get loaded onto the plane? Well, we started to use them in the post office. We loaded them up with loose parcels and then they would have to be moved. So I would pick them up with a forklift, take them out to the back of the container and load it onto the back of the container. And then they would then be taken to London Airport, Gatwick Airport, for them to load onto the planes to be flown abroad.

Speaker 1:

Describe a typical day at work.

Bob McGuire:

Well, we'd get in, in the morning and we would work in a gang. And you'd get in about 7:00 and you'd start working and you'd start loading up the things that you had to load up. Then at half past seven, half of the gang would go and have a cup of tea and the other half would stay down and they would carry on loading. Then when they come down at 8:00, then the other half would then go and have their cup of tea. Then you'd come down and you'd all work together and then later on you'd have another tea break about 10:00. and you'd all go together on that one. And then you'd come down together and then you carry on working up until dinner time.

And then once you got to dinnertime we used to then, some of them, half of them would go home and then the other half would stay and they will have to load the containers with only half the gang because you've let half of your mates go home. And sometimes people used to say this is too old, you might say to the governor who was out there working, "There's only four of us, we can't load this

forklift with four of us." And he would remind us, "There's not four of you, there's eight of you. I don't know where the other four are, but you do." So we would have to shut up and say, okay. Because the next day we would go home at dinner time. But those things, they did come to an end later on. But we did take a few little liberties which made it nice and pleasant to work.

Speaker 1:

Describe your uniform.

Bob McGuire:

Uniform. We had numerous different types of uniform. You would get a pair of trousers, a jacket. But where we work, because we weren't dealing with the public, we never, ever went out and saw the public. We was in a big building with loading bays right the way round. You had the north platform, the south platform, the east platform, the west platform. So we just worked in that area. So mainly where we would work, we'd wear overalls. We would have a shirt, a post office shirt, a polo shirt or a post office shirt and we would wear overalls because the bags were messy. The surface bags which went by sea, they were made by prisoners in the prisons, they were sacks whereas the air mail ones were nylon bags and they were dirty. They'd get where they were thrown about on ships and they were thrown about on planes, dragged across the floor and everything else. So you were better off wearing overalls and that's what we used to wear mainly because we didn't deal with the public.

If you was in the mail side of it, in the letter side, those blokes were facing up to the public. So they insisted upon those blokes wearing the uniform, whereas we was all right if we had our overalls and we had our shirt on, it was okay.

Speaker 1:

What were your favorite things about your work?

Bob McGuire:

My favorite things. I think my favorite things was at the time, I was fairly young and healthy and the work was keeping me fit. But it was the atmosphere, I think. It was the camaraderie, the friendship that you made with people and the laughs. And we used to have governors, the governors were in the post office. The background of it was military. It was a military background when you went into the post office and you went to that training school at Bell Grove, you had to call them sir and it was all very officious and everything was abbreviated. That was a difficult thing when you went in the post office and you didn't know what the abbreviations stood for, but you had an IOI, which was an assistant inspector and it was like just your governor.

And the IOI would be your direct governor. He would have a governor above him that was an inspector. And then above him there would be a COI who was a chief inspector. So all these are abbreviations and it took a long while to start to understand all the abbreviations. And the governors would be keeping an eye on us and we would have nicknames for the governors. Some of them knew their nicknames, some of them didn't. Some of them were quite polite nicknames and some of them wasn't.

We had a bloke that we called the Road Runner because he used to walk so fast everywhere, he would be charging about like that. So someone said, "Look, is the road runner coming?" So he got the nickname of that. There was another governor, very nice man, but he was very quiet and very timid. And he would come up and he'd say, "Would you go over there and do that," and he was very timid so they

nicknamed him Botley Bill because they said he was frightened to ask you to do anything. So his name was Botley Bill. And they had loads of nicknames for loads of governors. And as I said, some of them knew their nicknames and they found them out fairly quickly. But it used to be good humor, good fun.

Speaker 1:

What were the difficult things about your work?

Bob McGuire:

Nothing was too difficult, nothing was over difficult. I suppose, perhaps for some of the older men at the time, perhaps lifting some of the staff was a bit difficult and there was a floor that was... Any parcel that come into the country from abroad had to go through customs check. And on the second floor, they had loads of customs officers. So when the parcels was all opened, when the bags was all opened, the parcels would be presented to the customs officer. The customs officer would look at the customs declaration and he would decide whether he would let that parcel go to the person it's been posted to or whether he wanted to open up to check what was in it or he might go when it sent through the X-ray machines, you know at the airports now when we have to put our bags through the machines? They had them machines in the office and the parcel would go through it and the customs officer would be able to look at that parcel.

And they sometimes would say you've got to open the parcel up because they want it checked. So those jobs I wasn't particularly pleasant with, I didn't like. That was a bit boring for me, so I found them jobs a bit difficult only because of the boredom of it. But I preferred working downstairs where we was doing the lifting and stuff like that.

Speaker 3:

Can you start number [inaudible 00:23:35]?

Speaker 1:

Tell us about the skills you needed for your job.

Bob McGuire:

Well, as I said, you had to know your geography quite well. If you were working on certain jobs that you were sorting the parcels, they'd parcel sorting machines, you had to know your geography quite well. Because a parcel might come through and it might have a name of a city, but it won't have the country. It may have Barcelona, so you have to know Barcelona is in Spain. If it come through Port Louis, you had to know that Port Louis was Mauritius. Sydney, Australia and so forth. So you had to know your geography, you had to know how to lift heavy things correctly, because if you didn't, you could hurt yourself. So you had to know how to lift things. And any of the machines that you drove, you had to be trained and you had to be regularly assessed on those forklifts and the tractors and things like that. You had to know what you was doing on them things.

Speaker 1:

Can you tell us about any discriminations you experienced or witnessed?

Bob McGuire:

Because later on in the post office, I became the union rep I was a union rep in our office and then progressed to be the regional union official and then went and worked full time for the union, so I did come across some discriminatory stuff where people would say the wrong things to each other. And I think in them days, things were said that wouldn't be tolerated today. And in them days, perhaps people said it and they had to be reminded that, that wasn't what you did. But there wasn't anything too discriminatory, I don't think. No.

Speaker 1:

Tell us the story that stands out from your working life.

Bob McGuire:

Well, I could tell you hundreds of stories. I'm just trying to think of one that would be what you're looking for. All right.

Speaker 3:

So you're self-censoring?

Bob McGuire:

Well, I'll tell you a story, right. When I was on there and I was the tractor driver I was also playing football for the post office. We used to have a football team and we played Thursday afternoons. And my job as the tractor driver was to make sure that all of the brutes that were loaded up with the mailbags for the containers was taken out to the right platforms for them to be loaded. And you could put in a release form if you was playing football and the governors would authorize it, that you could go off your job and someone else would cover your job.

But I didn't want to do that. So I had an arrangement with me governor that I would get in early on the Thursday when we were playing football and I would load all the Brutes up myself, load all the brutes up and everything else and then I would pull them out on the platforms before I went off to play football. And I think this day, I think I loaded up something like about 30 brutes which was hard work because it was you'd put about 11 of these heavy bags on a brute and you'd load them with four on the bottom, four in the middle and three on the top. So there's 11 bags on the brute and I was loading up about 30 of these. So 300 bags I'm loading up on my own and then dragging them outside.

And then I went off to play football after doing all this work, but then I'd have to come back after the football and I'll come back and I'd forgot to bring two of the brutes out. I remember the governor giving me a [inaudible 00:28:56] because I'd forgotten to bring these two brutes out and I didn't take very kindly of that. I said, "What, two brutes? I had 30 brutes and you couldn't get someone to pull them out? You're having a go at me? Blah, blah, blah." So me and him had a bit of a [inaudible 00:29:13] that day. So I think that sticks in my mind.

Speaker 1:

What were some of the naughty things people did at work?

Bob McGuire:

Well, because there was lots of high valued articles that come through, there would be people who would try to steal some of them things. But I think in main, most of them were caught and they didn't last long in the post office. A lesser offense, I suppose, is if we used to work in gangs and that we would

work half of us to go at dinner time and the others would stay and cover you. So I suppose they were naughty things we shouldn't have been doing, but we did it.

Speaker 1:

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

Bob McGuire:

First of all, when we went in, because we hadn't completed our training, we were put in the bag room, which was all the empty bags. After the bags was all emptied of the parcels, they would be taken to this room on the ground floor, which was called the bag room. And you had to get the bags and you had to flat them out into cages and it was the most boring job in the world because all you were doing was flatten these bags and doing it here and doing it there. And I remember there were six of us started in the first day together, and we was all put in the bag room and we were told we couldn't do the other jobs because we wasn't trained.

But every afternoon, because they were short ended out on the platforms, the governors would come in and pull us out of the bag room and get us loading the containers. So after a few days, I had a bit of a two [inaudible 00:31:31] about it. I said, "What's going on here? You're telling us we can't work out here all the time but when you need us, we can come out here. What's that all about?" He said, "Well, you got to play the game." And I said, "No, you got to play the game. If we can come out when it suits you, we can come out here and you can vary our work because we've been stuck in this bag room for about four weeks," and it really was boring.

So luckily, because I had a bit of a go, we managed to get out and they put us on different jobs. The jobs I didn't like was up on the second floor with the customs people, opening the parcels up and then closing them up. And up there, it was a bit too regimental, and there was governors all around, there was too many governors to the number of postmen that was working there. And it was boring work, boring and sitting about and waiting around. I didn't like that. I preferred it when we was [inaudible 00:32:40] get stuck in and do the work.

Speaker 1:

Tell us about your favorite job.

Bob McGuire:

My favorite job. I think it would have either been the tractor driving or the forklift driving. They were jobs that you had to be trained for, you had to learn how to do them. So you needed a certain element of skill. You would be called upon to do tasks that other people couldn't do. Most of the jobs, I didn't mind any of them, I didn't mind them. I did find the boring ones a bit... Didn't like them too much but any of the physical jobs and the jobs where you used machinery, I used to like them sort of jobs.

Speaker 1:

How did you progress in Royal Mail?

Bob McGuire:

Well, I didn't really progress in Royal Mail. Where I can say that I progressed was I became the union rep in the office in the early 80s and used to go to our union's annual conference and started to get involved in the union and speaking at conferences. And then I got elected to be the regional official for all of

London and the south east of England for parcel offices. And then I got elected to the union's national executive in 1996. And then in 1998, I went to work full time for the Postal Workers Union, which was then called the Communication Workers Union and I worked with them until I retired in 2012.

Speaker 3:

Ask these questions now.

Speaker 1:

What made you join the union?

Bob McGuire:

Well, at the time, when you went into a job, you had to join the union. If there was an agreement between the employer and the trade union that represented them, part of the agreement was that you joined the trade union. Some people would say that they didn't want to but in the mine, most people joined the union. I'd worked, previously going into the post office, I worked in the dock industry in ship repair and [inaudible 00:35:29]. And down there you had to be part of the union.

And being part of the union, I think is the most important thing that everyone should do because in today's world, everyone needs the backing of a union otherwise... We know things have improved greatly, but there's still lots of employers who will abuse people if they get the chance. So I had no problem with joining the union, wanted to be part of it, took part in it became, quite vociferous at union meetings and stuff like that because if I felt strongly about an issue... And one particular time in the early 80s, I wasn't on the union, I wasn't a union member but the nurses were on strike and they were asking for support from everyone.

And our union decided that they would leave it up to each individual office to decide whether they went on strike. And our particular office said that they decided not to do it. So I stood up at the meeting and said, "Listen, this is wrong. We should be out on strike tomorrow supporting the nurses because we all rely on nurses and we need nurses for all of us." And it led to a little bit of an argument and a debate. And I lost the debate, it went to a vote and I was going to... Because I wasn't happy with that, I was going to go and take one day strike myself.

In those days, you didn't have to have a ballot, a legal ballot or anything, you could decide if you want to go on strike, you go on strike. So I decided I was going to go and I was going to say, "I'm on strike tomorrow." And what that would have meant is that everyone in the office would have lost their bonus for that week because part of the agreement was that if one person took any strike action, everyone lost their bonus for that week.

However, I worked with a man who was a bit older than me and a bit wiser and he said to me, "Bob, if you'd won that argument and we were on strike tomorrow and somebody come to work, what would you have thought of them? I said not a lot, they would have been breaking what we had agreed. And he said to me, "Well, listen. You had the argument and you've lost the argument. Now you want to have a go and you want to cost everyone?" He said, "I don't think you're right." So I thought about what he'd say to me. And I said, "Yeah, you're absolutely right." So I'd already gone and told them in what they called the book room that I was going on strike the next day. But I went back to them and say to them, I won't be on strike tomorrow.

So they all sighed a big sigh of relief because they knew that they wasn't going to lose their bonus, but there was a big march in London the next day so what I did is I phoned in sick and said, "I'm not well, can't come to work." But I went on the march because I believed that we should be supporting

the nurses and that we should be supporting all of the people in the NHS. So from there on in, people kept asking me, "Why don't you put forward for the union? Why don't you go on the union? You should be on our union. You should be representing." So that's how I sort of progressed from the start.

Speaker 3:

[inaudible 00:39:24]

Speaker 1:

Tell you about your relationship with your colleagues.

Bob McGuire:

With my colleagues? Well, like everyone in a big building, I got on well with some and didn't get on well with others. And we had our arguments, I dare say, like everyone in every industry. I had some good friends, mates and good friends, still friends with a lot of them. We still have reunions. And they closed the office that I worked in, in about 1997 but we still all meet up once or twice a year in a pub. So in the main, I got on quite well with people, but like everything, we don't get on with everyone, do we?

Speaker 1:

Tell us about your experience of joining clubs at work.

Bob McGuire:

Joining clubs? They did have lots of clubs actually in the London Overseas Mail Office. They had a camera club, they had a pint in club, I think. I wasn't too interested in them. I was more into the sports side of it. I used to play a lot of football, did a lot of football coaching with children. So the clubs I belonged to was the football club. We had a running club at one time and we all went in and ran the London Marathon. I ran the London Marathon in 1986. So they were the sort of clubs. They had a weightlifting gym and stuff like that. They were the clubs that I sort of went for. I didn't go for more of the art clubs or the photograph clubs. That wasn't my scene.

Speaker 1:

Tell us about any other [inaudible 00:41:27]

Speaker 3:

... opportunities.

Speaker 1:

Opportunities to socialize.

Bob McGuire:

Any opportunities?

Speaker 3:

To socialize.

Bob McGuire:

Well, unfortunately where we worked, there was a couple of close pubs where people had their dinner breaks. And actually when I first went into the office, we had our own bar in the post office. Lots of post offices at the time, big post offices, they had their own bar. So we would go up to the bar at lunchtime or we would walk a few hundred yards to the local pub. We had two snooker tables in a room, we had tennis tables, table tennis tables, so there's lots of ways for you socialize. I think mainly mine was probably down the local pub or in the bar.

Speaker 1:

What was your most memorable moment at the post office?

Bob McGuire:

My most memorable moment. I don't think I had a memorable moment, there was all memorable moments.

Speaker 3:

[inaudible 00:42:53] previous question, isn't it? It makes good connection [inaudible 00:42:56].

Speaker 1:

Looking back over your working life, what has working for Royal Mail meant?

Speaker 3:

No, that's the last question. This one.

Speaker 1:

Over your working life, what were the main changes at work?

Bob McGuire:

I would say mechanization. Mechanization, because when I first went into the land and overseas mail office, all the work was moved around by chains, everything was in bags or 95% of everything was in bags and it was all attached to chains that were slow, that went up two or three stories and belts that were fairly slow. And as the changes started to occur, the bags started to be eradicated and it was more loose parcels. So parcels would all come in loose. So the things that would use before the bags and the brutes started to be eroded and more cages, tall sort of cages where you could load the loose parcels in and wheel them about came into operation and they changed the mechanization of the office.

But it didn't match up with the progress that needed to be made. Elsewhere, parcel companies were starting to be built, Amazon, DHL, Federal Express and they were opening up big offices with new type mechanization that handled parcels faster, quicker with more computerization. So it was the mechanization stuff that really was the big difference from me going in to finishing up.

Speaker 1:

What was your most challenging-

Speaker 3:

No, number four.

Speaker 1:

In what ways do you think the job has improved?

Bob McGuire:

I'm not sure it has improved. It's certainly easier in terms of lifting stuff, you're not lifting so many heavy things because the things the now individual, the parcels are individual rather than in bags that contain... Because I remember, the air mail bags that we used to send abroad, the limit was 23 kilograms, which was still fairly heavy. But sometimes you'd get bags that would come in from Germany, especially Germany and places like that, that sometimes would be 50 kilograms. And we used to complain to the governors and say, "Listen, these bags are too heavy, we're going to get them..." You couldn't move them on your own, you needed... So that would be the sort of big difference, I think.

Speaker 1:

In what ways has it gone worse?

Bob McGuire:

In what ways has it gone worse? I don't think there is the camaraderie that was there. I don't think there's the fun that used to be there because there were so many of us working together in a building where you relied on each other lots of the time, it was fun. You enjoyed going to work, you was with your mates, you was having a laugh, you would tease one another, torment one another about your football teams, your different results. If West Ham had lost, we'd be getting stick, if Arsenal had lost we'd give the north London boys plenty of stick and the Spurs boys. So I think that's changed. I think that camaraderie is there and I don't think it's as much fun as it used to be. And that's a big, big difference.

Speaker 1:

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

Bob McGuire:

Yeah, I wouldn't have a problem. I would tell them some of the pitfalls, but Royal Mail is not a bad company to work for. You have to be in the union. You have to make sure that you've got the backing of the union so then you're protected because sometimes you need their help because there, in Royal Mail, like everywhere, there are good managers and there are bad managers. Some of the managers are really nice people and they deal with the people very well. But like in all industries, there are some bad ones but I wouldn't deter them if they decided they wanted to do it.

If you're working in the Royal Mail delivery letters, it's a healthy job, you're outside in all weathers. But you're walking, you're walking miles every day. It's a healthy job. And over the years, the pay and the terms and conditions have improved. So it's a job that I would recommend to them if that's what they wanted to go in.

Speaker 1:

If you were the boss of the Royal Mail, what changes would you make?

Bob McGuire:

Too numerous for us to recount a day, there would be loads of changes, but there'd be too numerous for me to mention today.

Speaker 1:

Looking back over your working life, what has working for Royal Mail meant to you?

Bob McGuire:

Oh, I think it has meant everything. In the end, I didn't really want to work in there, I had no intention because the pay wasn't very good or whatever but I went in there and I wouldn't have met as many nice people as I have. I wouldn't have had my career in the union, which I've enjoyed. I've seen different parts of the world, different parts of the country through the union and met many new friends and faces through the trade union. So for me, that's helped me along the way and made me perhaps more articulate and perhaps a better person, I hope.