Interviewer:

What is your full name?

Nicholas Carter:

My full name is Nicholas Carter.

Interviewer:

And where were you born?

Nicholas Carter:

I was born in Clapham, in London.

Interviewer:

What did your parents do for a living?

Nicholas Carter:

My father was a postman and my mother worked at a dry cleaning shop, for some of the time, not all of it.

Interviewer:

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

Nicholas Carter:

Well, the reason I joined, it was call the GPO in those day, the General Post Office. The reason I started working for them was because I didn't have any qualifications when I left school. I wasn't particularly good at school. When I left, my father worked for the GPO, the post office. I had an uncle, a cousin, and brother who all worked for the post office. And it was kind of, "Well, that's what you're going to do. You ain't go any qualifications." I'm not particularly skilled with my hands in DIY or anything like that. So, but my dad got me an interview to join the post office as a telegram boy. And it sort of followed on in the family, really?

Interviewer:

Describe the training you did?

Nicholas Carter:

The training I got when I first started was when I was a telegram boy, they used to call them young postmen at the time. You went in and you got to do some of the routes on a bike. You had to learn the whole of the Salfords One area. I started in Victoria in Salfords One and there were about 30 or 40 fellows between the age of 16 and 18. And we had to learn the routes. So, you got a week's training. There were five routes that you had to learn. And you got taken out. Three of those routes you did on a bicycle, two of them you used to walk. The ones you used to walk, they deemed it was too dangerous for you to go on a cycle, because it was over the other side of St. James's Park. All around there the traffic was pretty chaotic, even in those days. So, those ones you used to walk. The ones such as Knightsbridge, Sloane Street, the Mill Bank, and Grosvenor Road, Pimlico, you used to do on a bike. So it

was a fair bit of stuff you had to learn, because no one... you didn't have a sack nav. You had to set your work, and your telegrams, and your express letters and go out and deliver them when it was your turn to deliver them.

So, it was about a week's training. Wasn't really enough, because when you first went out on your own it was quite traumatic and quite a worry. You didn't quite know where you were going. And it did take you at least a good month to six weeks before you felt comfortable with where you were going and you learned everything you needed to know.

Interviewer:

What was the first job you did for the Royal Mail?

Nicholas Carter:

Well, I worked as a telegram boy, as I just said. They used to call us young postmen. You worked there from the age of 16 and once you became 18 you then progressed to become a postman. So, I stayed there until I was 18.

Interviewer:

Tell us how you felt on your first days of work.

Nicholas Carter:

My first day I was very, very nervous. I remember I had to go to a place called 207 Sloane Street, which is in Salfords One. Not far from Knightsbridge. I got the bus from my house, a number 317 bus, took me straight outside 207 Sloane Street. I went into Sloane Street. Remember, I'd already had an interview and passed the test. The test wasn't particularly hard. And then they call you back, you have a medical, and then you go up for your first day. On my first day I went to Sloane Street, it was offices mainly. It's where all the office work was done for the GPO in Southwest London and they had a mini bus that used to shuttle from Sloane Street to Victoria, which was the main delivery office. Well, it was a collections and delivery office. I went there, I was very nervous, didn't have a uniform. Walked into a small room, probably twice the size of this room, and there were about, at any one time, 25 young lads of my age, between 16 and 18. So you can imagine to walk in there on your first day was quite nerveracking.

Fortunately, they were nice fellows. Well, in mind. Obviously, you don't get along with everybody. But most of them were nicer. They ranged from 16 to 18. Obviously the ones who were nearly 18 were more advanced in the job and knew exactly what they were doing. And they were the ones that used to train you. So, it was quite nerveracking. But straightaway in there they asked me if I could ride a bike. I said I could. So in the morning, someone took me out on the bike. Showing me part of a round that eventually I would have to know.

Interviewer:

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

Nicholas Carter:

In the early days it was fun, to be perfectly honest. I used to get up in the morning... they had different shifts. You might be on an early shift which was, for young postmen, telegram boys, started at 8:45 and you worked until 4:45. You had a half a day, and then you would get Saturday off. So you worked six days, but you got a half a day and used to have Saturday off. Then the next week you'd be on what they

call the late attendance, where you started at 11:45 and worked until 7:45 and you did the same on that Saturday, as well. So you got every other Saturday off, basically. But the atmosphere was great. It was one of fun. We used to do a lot of sport. We used to play a lot of games in the office while we were waiting to go out on delivery. Yeah, it was fun. It was... I used to... I very rarely had a day off sick. I was never late, not once in all the time I was there. And I enjoyed going to work. I made lots of friends there. They were nice guys. We used to play sport together. Football in the winter, cricket in the summer. I even did a bit of running if you could believe it, but there you go, in those days.

Interviewer:

What kinds of people were you working with?

Nicholas Carter:

Well, like I said, they were all mainly people of my same age. There were a few... a couple of Black guys there. I don't think there were any Asian. There were no females there at the time, no women at all. Girls. They were all boys. But they were all nice people. There was a few that I obviously didn't like, but most of them were good. Even to the... if I could elaborate, we had such good fun, we even went on a holiday. The guy who was in charge, he was called at PSM. The called it a Postman Supervisor Messenger. So he was an adult, obviously, he was a postman was his job, but he had this job of supervising telegram boys. And he arranged to take us on a trip. I'd never been out of the country at the time, and he asked us who'd be interested in going for a week to Switzerland. Well, my hand was up like a shot, as you could imagine. And there were about 9 of us, 10 of us went.

We hired a minibus and they took us to Switzerland. And I've got to say, apart from things in your personal life, it was probably one of the best weeks of my life. We had a great time. We met lots of people out there, lots of different people that this guy had known, because he was in something called the Territorial Army. So, he'd been there before and he knew people. They put us up. They introduced us to people. I had an absolutely fantastic time.

Interviewer:

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

Nicholas Carter:

Well, they thought it was good, because obviously, my dad had been there since after the war. He joined in 1946 and had been at Clapham sorting office. My uncle had been there since 1946. So, they thought it was a good job. And at the time, to be fair, it was a good job. It was a job that you were told you were going to have for life. And not that I don't think there are jobs for life any more, but in those days, it probably was. It had just some out of something called the Civil Service, where you were employed by the government into a publicly owned company back in 1968. So, things had changed somewhat. And it was not so regimented. Because prior to me joining, back in the early 60s, if you hadn't been in the Armed Forces, or somebody in your family hadn't been in the Armed Forces, you couldn't get a job in the then GPO. So, it was a good job. It was a good job. It was steady. You got paid every week without fail. You got paid if you were ill, off sick. And my family were delighted that I joined.

Interviewer:

How diverse was your workplace when you started?

Nicholas Carter:

Not particularly diverse. Like I said, the ethnicity of people, the different cultures and that. Mostly they were people who weren't highly intelligent. Well, by that I mean they hadn't passed a lot of exams at school. Most of them had come out of the comprehensive school system and hadn't particularly achieved great awards in school. Not great exam passers and things like that, and were mostly just like myself. Just normal kids. Like I said, the diversity wasn't quite in there at that time. There weren't many children or kids from ethnic backgrounds. They were basically... most of us were white people and there were a couple of Black Afro-Caribbean kids who worked there.

Interviewer:

What sort of equipment did you use in your work?

Nicholas Carter:

Equipment? I had a bike. We were allocated a bike. If you were lucky, you got one where the brakes worked. If you weren't lucky, you had to try and sort it your yourself. One of the kids there was allocated... Well, it wasn't allocated, it was a question. "Does anybody know anything about bikes? If someone put their hand up, they would then become the bike boy. So it was their job to fix the bikes. If you got a puncture, you used to put it on a rack until the bike boy used to fix your puncture. Or if your brakes... if you had any, jokingly, brakes is a bit of a joke, they used to fix those for you and hopefully you wouldn't go flying. After I'd been there about a year, I did manage to get a new bike. And that was a luxury because it had a padded seat, which was a bit better than the first one I had, which didn't have a padded seat. So, it was a bike, you had a satchel, you had a thing called a belt and pouch, which was like a little pouch attached to a belt, leather it was. And you could put your telegrams in there. You had to set them in where you had to go. And the pouch you could put any bigger items in.

That was basically it. Apart from a uniform, of course. We had a uniform. But they gave you one pair of boots or shoes every six months. And they were not the nicest of shoes, I've got to say. They weren't your Armani or anything like that. They were leather. All leather. The sole, the heel. I'm sure they were worth a lot of money at the time, but they were horrible, really. Because when you used to walk in them, for the first three or four weeks, they used to squeak because it was new leather. And as you walked along the floor, you're kind of like [inaudible 00:12:08]. They would squeak like that. But once the weather had got on them and you hit them with a hammer a bit, they softened up and they were okay. But they're weren't exactly the most comfortable.

Interviewer:

Tell us about the skills you needed to do for your job.

Nicholas Carter:

The skills? Well, most of it was local knowledge, really, of knowing where you were going. Being able to know that if you had a bunch of telegrams and then a bunch of packets or what they called express letters, you could put those in, in order, so you weren't going here and there and everywhere. You could follow an order. So that was basically the skill. There was another skill, but it was a skill that you weren't supposed to have. And you want to know about that? I'll tell you what that was. That was where you used to... they called it waxing, where you used to take your time. So there were five basic runs and when you've done a run, you used to come back, hand to the guy in charge a docket and he'd put you at the bottom of a list. There might now be 20 in front of you. So, you used to know which run you could

get once you worked it out. So if you wax out, they used to call it waxing. It's like wax on a candle goes down. So you're standing about, watching people come back. And if you timed it right, you could get in to get the run that you wanted, or get the maximum amount of sitting down, not doing a great deal of time, while the others got called out.

But there was a skill in that. It probably took you about four or five months to pick up that, because when you're a new fella, everybody was doing it to you. What you were trying to avoid... there were five runs. You had the first run was called Pimlico, you did that on a bike. The second run they called it Up and Down. You were up and down Victoria Street a while. The next one was called Over the Parks. You used to have to walk over St. James's Park. You do the Hay Market, Regent Street, those sort of places. The next one was called Knightsbridge. Now, Knightsbridge was the one that everybody tried to avoid. Because you used the bike, you had to go up Sloane Street to Dugan Square, Sloane Square, all these places. They've got a lot of work, lot of telegrams, lot of expresses. It was not the easiest. And then you had Mill Bank, which was a bit easier. Again, used the bike. So you used to try and work it out so someone else would get the rougher runs.

They also had a thing called telegraph expresses. Now, they were much prized if you could get one of those, because you used to have to pick up something from a shop. If it was your turn, you'd get... they called it a TE, telegraph express. And you might have to go to Harrods, pick up a package from Harrods and take it somewhere else, like in the city or the West End. You'd get on a bus or tube, deliver it and then you'd come back. Very prized little jobs, because you could really basically take your time and no one could really argue. There was one done on a Tuesday. Every Tuesday without fail. You used to go to Harrods, pick up a package, and take it to Eaton College, which is in Windsor. And you used to get... there was a thing called a Green Line Bus. Used to stop at Buckingham Palace Road. You got picked up from Harrods, go to Buckingham Palace Road, get on a Green Line, and they obviously paid your fares before you went, and you went all the way out to Windsor, deliver the package and come back.

Obviously, before you came back, you might sit and have a sandwich and a drink in Windsor. Basically that was your whole day done. Lovely trip out to Windsor. What a day's work.

Interviewer:

Describe a typical day at work.

Nicholas Carter:

A typical day at work? Still you want to know when I was a telegram boy or do you want me to move forward? A telegram boy, right. A typical day. Depending. If I was on an early duty, say 8:45, I used to leave my house, get on the tube. It was five stops. Two stops to Stockwell, Stockwell to Victoria, three stops. Walk along, I was there. Used to go in. First thing they sued to do, the guy who was usually in charge, always used to make sure that we had something to eat. So, he'd either cook us something, we used to chip into the breakfast club and he'd make a big bowl of scrambled egg or something like that. And then you'd wait until the runs were full. And we used to have a thing called a tube room. That was upstairs, about two floors up. And it was literally a big tube, used to run right along the [inaudible 00:16:59] and down, down, and come through a gap in the wall up there, down. And inside that tube, there were telegrams. There was a couple of ladies used to work in the tube room.

When the telegrams come through on a telegraph machine, they used to type out the message, put them on strips onto a letter, put that in an envelope, fix it in a tube, and send this tube, used to be [inaudible 00:17:24], down and it used to come into the office where we were, what they called the sending out room. They would then be sorted into the separate five runs. You know how I told you there

was five runs. Sort them into there wherever they were going. And then sometimes they'd send someone up to get the stuff. So I used to go up, get the stuff, bring it down. Sort it into the boxes. You used to get an express delivery. A delivery of a lot of express letters around about half past 9:00. And then they'd make up the first run and you'd go out wherever you were in order on your first run about half past 9:00.

Used to take about, usually do it in about an hour, hour and 20 minutes, unless you were trying to wait your turn so five got back before you. Then it would take you a bit longer, depending on how particularly coming you felt that day. Then you'd come back, you'd sit around, you'd have a game of cards, maybe, with your mates. You might be playing cricket that day for the post office team. Or you might be playing football in the winter. And we had teams that played cricket, football, and did a bit of running, as well. But most of the time we were playing cards.

Interviewer:

What were your favorite things about your work?

Nicholas Carter:

The favorite things? At that time, the favorite thing was, well, the comradery. I made lots of friends, we played lots of sport. We were reasonably successful while I were there. We won a couple of cricket competitions. We got to a couple of cup finals at football. We were reasonably successful. And the fact that we used to go out, we went on holidays. So, the work wasn't that difficult once you learnt where you were going. So, it was enjoyable. I enjoyed every bit of those two years, from when I started there when I was 16, to when I left when I was 18. I don't think there was a day I didn't actually enjoy.

Interviewer:

What were the difficult thing about your work?

Nicholas Carter:

The difficult things about the work? At that time, in those two years, the first month was difficult, because I didn't know where I was going. They give you a bag of telegrams and someone would set them in for you, so they were in order. But you really didn't know where you were going. You used to have an A to Zed. You know an A to Zed? The books that got all the maps in? You used to have the pocket one of those to take out to try to work out, but it wasn't easy, for the first six weeks. Once you learnt where you were going it was a piece of cake. But before you'd learnt, it wasn't easy.

Interviewer:

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

Nicholas Carter:

Personally, I didn't witness any. Not at that time. I have in the post office since, I think I've witnessed discrimination, but at that time, no. There was none. Everyone was treated the same. There weren't many kids there of an ethnic background. So I'm not saying they wouldn't have been treated differently if there had been, but the ones who were there were part of us at the time. There were 32 of us, maybe. We were quite a close knit family of people in that room. I didn't see any at that time, to be honest?

Speaker 3:

Can you tell us about how that changed then over time?

Nicholas Carter:

Oh, I could tell you how it's changed, yeah. Because as I then went to become a postman, I did hear... I first started in Victoria, which was the office where I was working. You had a choice of where you wanted to go. I could have gone to Clapham, which was basically 20 yards from my front door. But because I'd made so many friends, I thought I'll go to... I'll stay where I was. Bit of a mistake, really. I should have gone to Clapham, because it was totally different when you went as a postman. I started as a postman in January of 1975. I'd been a telegram boy for the two years before. And then I went, after the Christmas... my birthday was actually in November. But they said to me, "You stay as a telegram boy, get Christmas out the way, and then come up in January." So I did that. And things were different then, because there were a few more people who weren't of white origin. There were ethnic people there. There were quite a few Asian people. There were quite a few Black, Afro-Caribbean people. Still not as many as there are working there today.

And I believed on many occasions, I heard those people being racially abused. Yeah, I did. On a couple of occasions I actually intervened when I heard it being said, the words being spoken to people that I thought weren't right. And the managers took no notice, didn't go anything about it. And I didn't like it, to be perfectly honest. But I think it was something, wrongly, was accepted as the norm. And I didn't like that. I got to be honest. Partly because of that, not just because of that... I didn't like the way the place was run, I didn't like the fact that I had to get up a little earlier to get there either, if I'm being honest. But I moved. I transferred from that office to the Clapham office in May of 1975. So, I was only there as a postman for five months, but I didn't really like it to be honest.

Interviewer:

Tell us a story that stands out from your working there.

Nicholas Carter:

Well, I'll tell you a story. Yeah. Not the most pleasant, but when I first started, I was a telegram boy, as I told you. When it got to November and I was 18, I was due to go as a postman, but they didn't want me to go up because they didn't have time to train me during the Christmas and any of that. So, they were using me as doing makeshift duties. "Do that, do this." And during the Christmas rush of that year. Would have been Christmas 1974, I guess. There were a lot of problems with letter bombs. There was a dispute going on in Ireland at the time between the IRA, the Irish Nationalists, and the Republicans. And there was a lot of problems. The troubles were going on in Northern Ireland. And there were quite a few incidents of letter bombs.

I remember being sent from the sending out room and they wanted some help, a place they used to use, it was the horticultural hall in Victoria. They used that as a temporary sorting office at Christmas because we used to get masses and masses of mail at Christmas. Christmas cards, presents, that sort of stuff. So, I remember being sent over to the horticulture hall. It was about 4:30 on a Friday afternoon. And it was dark by then in December. As I walked through the door, a bomb went off and blew someone's hand off. I didn't actually see the person lose their hand, but I heard the bomb go off and I heard the commotion. And I was taken aback and went outside. But what I found out afterwards was somebody who was there working as a causal, a temporary working over Christmas, they were a student from a university, had actually lost their hand in a letter bomb explosion. That was unpleasant. That wasn't nice at all.

Interviewer:

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

Nicholas Carter:

Naughty things? Well, I've seen people drink too much at work, that's for sure. We used to have bars in the sorting offices. Not all of them, but a fair amount of them used to. And many, many times I've seen people going on collections after they'd had a few to many to drink driving out. I don't think drink driving was quite as locked upon as it is nowadays in the sort of mid-70s. People used to drink and drive and postmen were no exception. But I've seen people driving in vans with bottles of Ochre in the front of their van. And that was pretty bad I thought, but couldn't say I didn't have a drink myself at times. But I was never a driver, so there you go. So, that's probably one of the things. I've seen people hide mail, as well. Just to keep it back so they could get home earlier. I've seen that happen on a number of occasions. I've seen managers do that, by the way. But this was way back it used to happen.

Interviewer:

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

Nicholas Carter:

Right. Okay. I started off as a telegram boy, so you know about that. Then I went as a postman for a while at Victoria. Didn't particularly like that. So I left there and I went to work at Clapham as a postman. That was a different cut of fish. It was a very small office. There were about 60 or 70 people there in all. I had my father worked there, I had an uncle worked there, my older brother worked there, and I had a cousin worked there when I went there. The street I lived in was the same street the sorting office was. There were 13 people from that street, Venn Street, in Clapham, worked in the sorting office. And I was there as a postman for, up until 1977, when my uncle, who was actually the union representative at that time, he was the area representative, but he was also based at Clapham, was the rep there. And he asked me if I thought about coming on the union. So I took him up on it. I got on a committee there on the union.

Then I become the chairman. Then when he left the job in 1984, I took on a role as an area representative. Well, I took on... I got elected. I didn't just take it on. And then when, finally, 1987, I became what they call the area secretary. So, I was not any longer doing deliveries. I was negotiating of behalf of postmen and postwomen, trying to improve their jobs inside of Salfords, London. And in 1992, I became what the call the area delivery rep for the whole of Salfords, London, which covered Salfords One to Salfords 20, including Buckingham Place and the House of Commons. And I did that until I left the job. We moved from... we had an office in a place called Mull Street in Stockholm. We moved from there to a place called Great Dover Street, which is in Southeast London. And then we moved into [inaudible 00:28:44] sorting office. We had an office in [inaudible 00:28:47] in the year 2000. And I was there until I left the job in 2016.

So the jobs that I've had have mainly revolved around, the later part certainly, being a full-time union official, although still working for and being paid by Royal Mail. But they had an agreement where we would be released and most of my work was then negotiating, doing attendance cases if somebody'd had too much time off. I used to represent them at those interviews, and if someone had done something wrong, then I would represent them at those. And I did that for most of the last part of my service.

Interviewer:

Tell us about your favorite job.

Nicholas Carter:

My favorite job? My favorite job was the Windsor run. You can't beat the Windsor run, can you? You go into work, you get a little form, you go to a counter, what might have been a perfume counter, excuse me, or flowers, or a gift [inaudible 00:29:55]. Pick up a package, come out there, get on a Green Line bus, go all the way to Windsor, lovely sunny day like this. Sit outside, have a couple of pints, get back on the bus, and come back. And then time you got back, it was time to go home. You can't beat that. What a day that was. But I had lots and lots of good times. Lots and lots of good times. Not so many bad times, but good times. Lots of stressful times when I was a union rep, as well. That's for sure.

Interviewer:

Tell us about your relationships with your colleagues.

Nicholas Carter:

With my who? Sorry.

Interviewer:

Colleagues.

Nicholas Carter:

Oh, my colleagues. Oh, I've had many, many good friends. I've made lots of friends. I've got a friend still, who I used to go on holiday with, him and his wife and my wife. There's another guy being interviewed here, Greg. I've been a friend of Greg's for 20 years. We go out together, we got away together. If there's a party at my house he'll be at my house. To be fair, most of my social life for the last 40 years has probably revolved around friends I've made during my life working in, now Royal Mail, and before, the GPO. So, yeah. All my social life, really, is made up of being with friends from the post office. So, I've got good friends to this day. And hopefully they'll last until I pass away probably.

Interviewer:

Tell us about your experience of joining clubs at work.

Nicholas Carter:

Of what? Sorry.

Interviewer:

Joining clubs.

Nicholas Carter:

Clubs? Oh, blimey. I used to join any club going, yeah. The social club? Put me down, I'll join that. Yeah. There were lots of different clubs. When I first started they had the London Postal Federation Club, which was open to anyone from London to join. They had lots of different functions. They used to have sporting grounds. I think they've sold them all now. But they had big sporting venues. So, if you played

cricket, you'd be at a place called [inaudible 00:32:12], which was owned by the post office. And the social scene of that changed also in Royal Mail, once they moved from two deliveries a day to one. Because what happened, when you had two deliveries, you used to go and do your first delivery and then when you got back, you'd all be in the canteen together for an hour, maybe an hour and a half, until you went on your second delivery. So you had time to have a chat, game of cards, the comradery was there.

Once you went to one delivery, you didn't all came back. So once you went out, you were out. And then you finished on the road, you didn't possibly see people until the next morning. So, that changed the social side of the job, vastly.

Interviewer:

What made you join the union?

Nicholas Carter:

What made me join the union? Well, I always had a background of... I didn't like to see anybody put down, I didn't like to see anyone discriminated against, I didn't like to think of anyone not being treated fairly, and I've always had... my father was what they call a socialist. He had very socialist views. My mother's brother was very high up in the Trade Union Movement. And that was probably bred into me at an early age. I remember back in 1971 there was a big strike in the post office. It lasted seven weeks. I, at the time, was still at home. My dad was on strike, my older brother was on strike, my uncle nextdoor was on strike. There were 13 people from our street all on strike. And in those days, you were out on strike for seven weeks solid. No money coming in hardly. Very little money. So, it bred you into the way of thinking, "Well, hold on. This is my path, my way. I want to be part of these people trying to protect their rights, trying to work their way into a better life for working people."

So, when the opportunity came for me to join the union as a representative... I was always a member. I joined on the first day I started at the post office. But I was always a members. But then the chance for me to represent people, I thought, "Well, this is great. I'll have a go at this." And I stayed there all the way through.

Interviewer:

Why is the union important for postal workers?

Nicholas Carter:

I think the union's important for postal workers because it protects them at work. If it wasn't for the union, and obviously, I'm biased, because if you cut me in half, it would say "Union" somewhere in the middle there. But I believe that it's important that people are protected, not only in the post office, but in all walks of employment. I think life would be a lot more difficult, I think there would have been a lot more people made redundant in the post office. And I'm quite proud of the fact that in the post office there hasn't been one single compulsory redundancy in the whole of, well my time certainly, in the 43 years I was there and up until now. Not one person has been made compulsory redundant. And that is, in many ways, thanks to the collectiveness of being in a trade union.

Interviewer:

What part did the union play in your life?

Nicholas Carter:

Well, it had a massive part in my life. It was my life, if I'm being honest. And my wife would certainly say it was, for many, many years. I was a representative. If I went to a meeting, you can't say, "I'm leaving now because I've got to go home." You had to stick it out to the end. I've been in meetings that have started at nine o'clock in the morning, you'd still be in there at 12 o'clock at night. And other meetings where you have to go around the country. I've spent quite a bit of time away from my family being at special conferences and other meetings, in Birmingham, or Sheffield, or York, or Scotland. So, its played a massive part in my life. Yeah, it was the be all and end all for my working life, really.

Interviewer:

Tell us about any strikes or disputes you were involved in.

Nicholas Carter:

Oh, how long you got? I was involved in many, many strikes. In the post office, in the 80s in particular, there was a big change. From in the 70s, I think you'll find unions had a little bit more power than some people would say they should have. I certainly wouldn't. But that changed when the government changed in 1979. There came a woman called Margaret Thatcher. You've heard of her? She become the Prime Minster in May of 1979. They brought in different legislation to try and curb the power of trade unions. The post office at the time were going through a re-organization. They were trying to change things, make more money, become more profitable. The way you become more profitable... there's two ways you could do it in a post office. You can either put the stamps up, or you can cut the amount of people who work in it. There's not many other ways you can make too much money. You either put the prices up or you shorten the amount of people who work for you. You lessen the workforce.

So, throughout the 80s, we were in many, many disputes. Many strikes that I led. Some lasted as much as four or five days, some lasted a couple of hours. It depended on whether the management wanted to do a deal quickly to sort it out or whether they were going to dig their heels in, in which case you might have to be out until someone cracked. It was usually some kind of compromise done and you'd make a deal and then it was basically my job to make sure that Royal Mail stuck to that. And their job, probably, to make sure that they got away with as much as they could. But at the end of the day, I was involved in lots of strikes. And being involved in a strike is very pressurized. It's very stressful. Particularly if you're the person who is leading it as such, because you've got the livelihood of possibly 4,000 people, in Salfords, London is certainly was 4,000, on your shoulders. You don't want anyone to lose anymore many than they have to. Because once you go on strike, you lose money. That's it. You're going to lose money. The post office got more money than you have, so it's who can hold out longest.

And I didn't like going on strike. It was very hard work, to be honest. My home life, obviously, was reduced even more because of it. And I usually had a couple of kids. And it was quite tricky. But many, many disputes we had.

Interviewer:

What was the most memorable moment at the post office?

Nicholas Carter:

Most memorable what? Sorry.

Interviewer:

Memorable moment at the post office.

Nicholas Carter:

The most memorable moment? Oh, dear. Very difficult to say, really. I had lots of memorable moments. Most of them were to do with arguments I had with managers. But I went on a... I think it was in 2015, we went on a... it was the 500th anniversary of the setting up of the post office. And there was a do in... I remember it was up near what used to be the King Edward Building. There's a place there, a park. It's called Postman's Park. I don't know if you've ever been there. It's quite an interesting place. The Post Office Museum used to be there. It's changed now, it's somewhere else. But we went there and there was all sorts of activities. There were celebrities there and it was quite memorable. Because for an institution to last from the times of Henry VIII to nowadays, there's not many institutions like that, is there, really, that I can think of certainly now. So, it was quite memorable. We went there. There were a lot of people there. Somebody had done a walk in aid of, I think it was cancer. They walked from Scotland all the way down to be there. Not continuously, but they walked for charity to be there. It was good. Yeah, and we had a drink and a celebration afterwards. I enjoyed that day. It was good.

Interviewer:

What was the most challenging moment at the post office?

Nicholas Carter:

My most challenging moment? Christmas 1988 was my most challenging moment of my life. Not just in the post office really. We were in a dispute and it was coming up to Christmas. And the best time to have a dispute for us, as union members was Christmas. Because 9 times out of 10, Royal Mail would give up, because they got lots of revenue at Christmas. Would usually give in and we'd normally get, more or less, what we wanted, give or take a little bit. And in Salfords, London at the time, they weren't giving us what we wanted. We wanted an overtime ban from the 4th of December until the 30th of December. That was very, very challenging. Our cart was under a lot of pressure, there was a lot of press interest, as you can imagine. The mail was piling up everywhere. It wasn't great. And that was very, very challenging. I was going home, I had press camped outside my house. I had people from the Post Office Investigation Department following me. And it wasn't good. Yeah. But we got through it. We went back to work. We got paid what we asked to be paid to clear the backlog up. So at the end of the day, all's well that ends well.

Interviewer:

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

Nicholas Carter:

The main changes? Well, moving from two deliveries to one delivery was main change. It was very difficult. Very difficult times, because when you did two deliveries, you knew what your job was. We'd been doing it for years, and years, and years. All of the sudden, and it was a cost cutting exercise, basically. To do away with the second delivery, to put it into the first delivery, that changed the whole ethos of what'd we'd always been. We were probably... it were only probably us and one other country, I think it was Denmark, who were doing two deliveries in the world at the time, a day. So you could guarantee you'd get a first delivery. Anything that was still there would be delivered on the second delivery. So you're more or less guaranteeing you could post a letter in Edinburgh at six o'clock and it would be delivered the following day, for one universal price.

Now, that changed when they did one delivery a day, because if that letter from Edinburgh missed the connection, you weren't getting it the next day, much as that was covered up at the time. And it was a difficult way to go. We had to make lots of changes, lots of route alterations. And it was very, very difficult. But we got through it. I think that happened it... oh, when did that happen? I'm trying to think of when that actually happened. I think it was '96, or something like that.

Interviewer:

In what ways do you think the job has improved?

Nicholas Carter:

Improved? I'm not convinced the job has improved. In some ways, though. Because there are more women, it's more diverse. There's more opportunities for women, because there's more part-time jobs than when I was employed there, certainly up until my last 10 years, there were very few part-time jobs. But I think part-time jobs help, because women, if you look in society, women can do the job, they then look after the children. Men can do part-time jobs and look after children as well. So, I think that's changed. It's more diverse now. There are more ethnicities working within the post office, Royal Mail, than there ever were before. That can only be a good thing. And so in that respect, it's improved. Some things have not improved. The social side of it are not as good as they used to be. The comradery is not as good as it used to be. But you trade one thing for another. So, things have improved, in that respect.

Interviewer:

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

Nicholas Carter:

I'd have no problem whatsoever. Both my actual children are grown up now. One is... she's a psychiatric nurse. One is a hairdresser. So, there's not much chance they ever will. But if they did or if they had wanted to work in Royal Mail, I wouldn't have a problem with that at all. I would never knock it as a job, because I was there for 43 years. My pay was missed on a Friday once in 43 years. That was to do with some mishap at the bank. So, it was a good job. It provided me with all of the things I need to bring up a family in the main. And I would never knock it in terms of a job. So if one of my... I've got now four grandsons. They're only small. If one of them came and said to me, "Granddad, I want to work in the Royal Mail," I'd say, "Oh, fine. Absolutely splendid. Why not. Why not."

Interviewer:

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

Nicholas Carter:

If I was the boss, I'd get more people from the rank and file, more people off the floor, who know the job, involved at a higher level. I'd do away with recruiting as managers direct from degrees, because now they're taking people with degree education in as senior managers. I'd do away with that, because in the main they're not very good. In the main. Not all. But most of them are not very good. They don't know the job. So I would be saying to them, "Look, I'm the boss. We're going to take on people who know the job. People who've done a few years, got a bit of experience. Let's get them up to the board level so they can advise us on what we need to do." Because there are, no doubt, lots of problems in the post office at the moment. I mean, nobody really very often writes a letter nowadays. In my early part

we had millions of letters coming through and people were taught at school how to write letters. But no one writes letters anymore, do they? They send texts, send an email. It don't cost you anything and there you go. So it would be very challenging to be the boss, I imagine. But I certainly would be looking to make it more inclusive at the top level of people who knew the job.

Interviewer:

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

Nicholas Carter:

Well, its meant security, that's for sure. Because I never, ever felt... apart from some of the times I've told you when I was on strike and probably they could have taken me to the cleaners to be honest, particularly with the way the laws are in this country. But I always felt it was security. I had a job. When I first started I remember my dad saying to me, "Well, that's a job you'll have for life." And to be fair, he was right. Because I still had it when I took voluntary retirement at the age of 59. I could have still be there now if I wanted to be. So, its given me a security. Its given me confidence that my wages would be paid. It'd give me confidence that if I fell down a flight of stairs and broke my arm, no one was going to sack me. I would have a chance to recuperate and go back to work. So, there was all those things. And its given me an opportunity to bring up a family, put food on the table. It was never the best paid job, but never the worst paid, if you see what I mean. So, it was always a fair amount of pay, you could always earn a bit more if you needed it. And its given me security. Yeah.

Speaker 3:

Thank you, [inaudible 00:49:34]. I've got a couple of other quick questions.

Nicholas Carter:

Sure.

Speaker 3:

Take it right back to the beginning, you told me earlier about your interview that you had?

Nicholas Carter:

Oh, my-

Speaker 3:

Your very first interview. Could you talk us through that?

Nicholas Carter:

The first day I started? Yeah, it was very strange. The first day I started, you remember I told you I come off the shuttle bus from Sloane Street and they brought me in. And the first day, the first question they asked me was, "Can you ride a bike?" "Yes." "Okay, good. You're all right with your feet, walk?" "Yeah." "Okay, can you play cricket?" And I could play. It was July and, "Yeah, I could play cricket. Yeah." He said, "Well, do us a favor. This afternoon..." this was my first ever day, "You've got a kit?" I said yes. He said, "Go home, get your kit. And at two o'clock this afternoon, someone will pick you up at Pelham Station to go and play cricket for the post office." For the adult side, actually, because they were short a player

upstairs. And that was my first day. And from that day I thought, "Well, do you know what? I'm going to like it here." And I did.

Speaker 3:

And another quick question. What was the strangest delivery you had to make as a telegram boy?

Nicholas Carter:

The strangest delivery? Yeah. I was asked to deliver a bunch of flowers. This is when I was a telegram boy, again. Yeah, sorry. I was a telegram boy, again. I was asked to... it was called a telegraph express. I picked it up and I had to go to Harrods, but the floral department. I'm sort of 16, maybe 17. So I've gone there. Told them who it was, "Oh yeah," and they gave me a bouquet of flowers like that, with an address tag on the bottom. Great. It was a great big bunch of flowers and I had to deliver them to Pall Mall, which is a street in Southwest London. A posh part of Southwest London. And there was a club there. The RAC Club, and there was a guy, an actor called Douglas Fairbanks Jr. His father was probably a more famous actor than him, but he's not alive now. And I had to deliver this bunch of flowers to him in the RAC Club in Pall Mall. When he came out, he had to sign a slip for me, and I wouldn't give it to anyone. Only him. I could have given it to the door, but I wanted to see him.

So, he came down. He had what they call a smoking jacket, like a dressing gown. And he had a cigarette with a holder. A big long cigarette like that. And he signed it and said, "There you are. Off you go." That was probably the strangest one I ever did. But there were quite a few. We had to take telegrams into Buckingham Palace and that sort of thing. So, we could walk in through the front of Buckingham Palace. We were allowed to do that. And when you went in there, you know... you ever seen the guards in Buckingham Palace? They walk up and down with the big furry hats? As you walk through, they used to say to you, "Son, what's the time?" "What?" "What's the time?" "10:03." Because they wanted to know what the time was, because they're fed up walking up and down, how much longer they had to go. They weren't allowed to look at their watch their self. So, sometimes if you wanted to be horrible, we used to tell them the wrong time. So, it was 10:03, so, "Quarter to," something like that. "Oh, I've got another four hours," when they really didn't. So, you could be horrible to them. But I tried not to be.

Speaker 3:

Sorry, just finally, last one.

Nicholas Carter:

Yeah, sure.

Speaker 3:

Once you moved to become a postman, what was your training like then?

Nicholas Carter:

Ah, the training was a lot different than it is now. You had to spend two weeks... was it two weeks? No, a week at a place called Belgrove. Belgrove House, right? Which was the post office training center. It was in Northwest London, near Kings Cross. You used to go there and you had to learn what they called the cards. The cards were like counties, split up into what was in counties. And you had a frame and you used to sort these cards into a frame. You had to pass a test. You had to do the counties. They give you a

couple of days to learn it. They used to teach you how to empty pillar boxes and how to make deliveries. How to deliver properly without dogs biting your hand off, that sort of thing. And they used to have these cars. So, you got a bit of time to practice, to know [inaudible 00:54:07] was in Yorkshire and Braton was in Berkshire, and Ascot in Berkshire, and Sussex. All this broke into cards. And then you had 500 cards. You had to sort them in 15 minutes and you're only allowed five mistakes. So, you had to pass that test and then you could become a postman.

There was another test, as well. You had to do the home counties, which was Kent, Sussex, Essex, Surrey, that sort of thing. And it was... you were there from nine o'clock til about four o'clock. And every day they trained you. I had an advantage, because I'd been a young postman, we had a frame up in our what I called the sending out room, where we could practice. So, when we went there, we were pretty okay with it anyway and knew how to do it. But it was good training. And then when you got to a delivery office they trained you on whatever particular duty you were going to be on.