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STREET FIGHTERS

Elijah Debnam, Derker, Feb 2010

“1954 we moved in, so you can work it out for yourself. The 17th of March 1954. And I’ve lost my son and I’ve lost my wife here. So there’s nothing much more left is there at 89 years old, for me to want to...you know, I wanted to soldier on here, finish my time out....but if I have to move out of here it’s going to be hell, for me and for them. Because I can’t do anything about it, they’re going to have to go and reach me, fetch me, carry me and everything. And you know, I mean, I don’t want to be buying homes at this stage of life. And I certainly don’t want to be going in a nursing home, do I? No, I mean I’m not that bad.

I’m originally from Oldham, born and bred. Went in the forces, you know. Did my service, six years’ service. Registered on my 20th birthday. I served nearly three years at Gibraltar and served from Normandy right through to France, Belgium, through Holland and into Germany, from ’44 ’til I was demobbed in 1946, two years later. With this scheme, good houses are being pulled down just for their whim. I think this house, with a bit done at it, could last another 50 years. There’s nothing physically wrong with it, to warrant it being demolished. It’s not because it’s been condemned, it’s because of the whim of somebody who wants to build flats here. We went to the High Court – it was a waste of time. Even the [public] inquiry was a waste of time, because he [the inspector] goes round after the inquiry’s over, but I mean he doesn’t go into your houses to have a look at your houses and see what you’re living like. He just drives around in a car probably.... “oh pull them all down”. Then you go to the High Court and none of those judges know anything about Derker. I bet they’ve never seen Derker or known that it exists. You know what I mean? And that to me doesn’t seem right. How can you judge something when you’ve not seen it? I’ve just had a notice through that if I don’t reply in 21 days they’ll take possession. I have a 21 day period to answer them. And I’m 89 – 90 in June. They’ve just sent me a letter like anybody else. And I’ve nobody. I live on my own here – nobody to represent me. Nothing will compensate me for losing this house. I’d sooner them keep the money and leave me here. They can have all the money they’ve got. They can have their £300m. It’s my house. This house is worth £300m to me. Because I wanted to finish my days here. It’ll last, it’ll last my days, and that’s all I’m asking. Leave me alone. But they won’t. They’ll win...they’ll win. But where I’m going, I have no idea. I’ll probably finish up in a bloody nursing home or some bloody thing. And that’s one thing I dread.”