

Interviewee: **Edie Martinson (Transcript 2 of 2)**

Interviews conducted by Nicky Leap and Billie Hunter during research for the publication '*The Midwife's Tale: an Oral History from Handywoman to Professional Midwife*' (1993; 2nd edition 2013)

Date recorded: June 1986 - April 1987

Duration of audio: 3:39:30 [Interview 1- 2:54:42; Interview 2- 0:44:48]

Collection: Special collections of the archives of the Royal College of Midwives

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Description:

Transcript of an interview with Edie Martinson covering her experience as a young mother in London (1918), including childbirth, midwives, social conditions, death of her first baby to enteritis and third baby to poverty, her service with the Land Army during the First World War, her different jobs to support her family, marriage breakdowns, sexual knowledge, contraception, abortions, benefits, and health during pregnancy.

Edie Martinson was born in London in 1902 and came from a working-class home. She married in 1920 and had five babies between 1920 and 1935, two of them dying in early infancy. Edie had various jobs throughout her life, including washing-up, waitressing, cooking and factory work.

This transcript is of the second of two interviews conducted with Edie and is made up of two audio files.

Topics include: Midwifery; Maternity Services; Childbirth; Caesarean section; First World War; Contraception.

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For enquiries and access to audio contact the archives of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists [email: archives@rcog.org.uk]

[START OF INTERVIEW 2]

[From 0:07:19.6 to 0:29:52:0 of the first audio file for Interview 2 the recording quality deteriorates as the tape speeds up intermittently, affecting what can be heard]

[The son and neighbour of the interviewee are present. The quality of the recording is low and heavily distorted. As a result several parts of the conversation are inaudible]

Edie In my twenties I'm anybody's.

Responder 2 You haven't changed; you've only got older.

Edie ((laughingly)) Don't you think so, Doll?

Responder 2 You haven't changed; you've only got older.

Responder 3 Drink your tea, love. There's some biscuits there.

Responder 2 She's only got to feel a bit bright and she's full of beans and-.

Edie Ramsgate, John, two grandchildren.

Interviewer 1 Yeah. It's a lovely photo.

Edie Right...

Responder 2 Everybody's friend, Edie.

Edie ...I think, um, what I'll try and do, I'll try and outline the years if I can.

Interviewer 1 That would be very useful.

Edie If I can outline the years and give you the funny bits, the sad bits, the funny bits.

Interviewer 1 Yeah, because what we might have to do, Edie, is come back and see you a couple of times to get see where we've missed bits out.

Edie Try and fit them in.

Interviewer 1 Think, Oh what happened then, and we'll come back and ask you "What happened then?" You see what I mean?

Edie Yeah.



Interviewer 1 So we get a real picture.

Interviewer 2 When we write it out we'll show it to you and make sure that you think it's right.

Edie Well, as I'd say, you can take whatever I say as gospel because – thanks love – because you only say things as they shoot to your brain and you remember, don't you?

Interviewer 2 Yeah, that's right.

Interviewer 1 Yeah, we need to sort of swap things around a little I expect so that it reads easier.

Edie That's a job on its own then. It's a big job, isn't it? Well, I hope when I'm dead and gone it brings you a fortune. ((laughs)) I hope you've got a lot of customers waiting. No, I won't fade out on you yet. I'll ((laughingly)) see you through.

Interviewer 1 See us through the book.

Edie Those drops, Alec, when you have them in the corner of your eye is it left corner or any corner, as long as they get in?

Responder 4 Yeah, I'll keep on ((inaudible))

Edie I know you've got to lay back.

Responder 4 Head back, you know.

Responder 2 As long as it goes in the eye it doesn't matter where, just get it in the eye.

Edie Yeah.

Interviewer 1 Are you getting to tell us about the wedding?

Edie The 18 years old wedding?

Interviewer 1 Mm.

Edie I had a drunken father, I had a drunken Dad, a jolly Dad but drunk. Everybody loved him but he was always drunk. He used to go out and sell the home up and buy a new one. Well not a new one, go up Caledonia road Market, sell up what we had.

Responder 2 Edie, have you told them the day you got married you was 18?

Edie Just going to get round to the marriage now.



Responder 2 They'll laugh about that. What about Georgie Johnson's outside, that bit?

Edie Oh, the wedding. We'd got two stalls in Exmouth Street Market, um, coming up for 18. I got married in May I think and someone said "You're getting married Edie?" Everyone could come, anyone, no invites, no cards, no photographers, anybody could come and we lived over stables. My Dad used to let out horses and we had stalls. Above this stable we had a chaff cutting machine. We used to feed the hay into the chaff cutting machine. That was to feed the horses – so much hay, so much oats. I'm getting round to the wedding. So I'm going to get married. No one helped me, no Mum, no Dad, I buy myself a frock for three guineas, ivory one – nice – and I got to buy a barrel for five bob. When I got home I found there were two barrels in the box, so a girl on another stall she was getting married at the same day so I gave her one. I didn't take it back to the shop and said "I got two." Wedding day comes round and everyone that said to me "You're getting married, can I come?" "Anyone can come, don't worry, anyone. It's open house" and on that day my mother had a big barrel of beef. I don't know if you can imagine lofts? Went up loft stairs, wooden stairs over stables, steep wooden stairs and there were five ordinary rooms and two great big lofts, so actually we had three big rooms and two big lofts. The lofts were bare boards and all the beer was stacked up in the corner in two dozen-, they used to put two dozen bottles in the crate. Everybody's watching Granddad to see he don't get drunk: "Watch Dad, watch Dad, watch Dad." Outside the stables we had – what do you call that, Doll? – trough where they used to put all the horse manure in, everyone's horse dung. As they cleared the stalls out they'd all go in this thing. Well, I had to walk by there in my wedding clothes to get the taxi and I was getting a bit worried. I thought I've got to go by all that stink to get to the taxi and so what with worrying about that and worrying about keeping Dad sober-. Any rate, the trough was cleared out and whitewashed. Then came the daytime to go to the wedding. "You alright Dad? You alright?" He'd got a tie on that. I thought He's not so bad, so going down we got to the Holy Redeemer Church in Exmouth Street, WC – not north London, WC – off-, near Mount Pleasant. Got married in the Holy Redeemer Church there and as he got out the church I said "Shh, Dad you're alright, ain't you?" because he's had a lot of beer. So he put his arm up and said "Come on my darling." We went into the altar so they're

saying their vows and all I was thinking to myself I hope Georgie Johnson's outside to see me. No, this Georgie Johnson I'd always fancied. He didn't know I liked him. ((all laugh)) He didn't know I liked him at all. I didn't even do nothing about this. I thought he was nice. I thought I wish I went out with him and all I was thinking about while I was taking my vows I hope Georgie Johnson's outside and can see me. Anyway, we got married. Back we go to this house above the stables. The first thing I done – there was no etiquette then, no cameras, no reception, never heard of it, you know, well, we hadn't in our family – so I took my frock off and put an overall on. So I'm mingling with the people that are all coming up for the beer, you know, and someone said "Who's got married" so I said ((laughingly)) "I couldn't tell you, I don't know." ((all laugh)) I got along with it. Anyway, cut a long story short, everybody got blind drunk, I harnessed a horse. We had a horse went-, walked like Tushie. We've called him Tushie. There was a race horse about at that time called Tushie because he had a funny old walk, so this old grey mare we had was called Tushie, so I got someone to harness him up to a cart and I took all the girlfriends that I had all round the streets for a ride on my wedding day. You know, there was no-. I never knew no different.

Responder 2 No husband. Didn't know where he was. ((all laugh))

Edie No. I never knew where he was, just got all the girls out riding in this cart. We had one room to go home to. That had a bed in it. That cost £2 – brass bed. One wooden table and two chairs, the gas stove in the room.

Interviewer 1 So was that in Penton Street?

Responder 2 That was in Penton Street. Have I told you that before? We had a bucket and underneath the washstand for water. That was my first married life but I did have a bed valance, which made it posh. All round the bed white bed valance, on the top. We used to wash and starch that, the bed valance, and a nice white Marcella quilt.

Interviewer 1 What year were you married in Edie?



Edie 1920 I think. I got married-, I was 18, must have been '20, 1920 because very age I was that year was two years over, so I got married at 18 and it was 1920 in Penton Street I lived.

Interviewer 1 So when did you have your first baby?

Edie That was six months afterwards. ((laughs))

Interviewer 1 Right.

Responder 3 Six months, was it?

Edie Six months. Never told no one in those days. That wasn't the right thing to do then. ((laughs)) I don't think my Mum even knew. I never told anyone, just had my little white wedding. All I wanted was a veil and a white-. A romantic kind I was, you know, and I still am, aren't I, Doll?

Responder 2 Oh yeah.

Edie So that was the wedding and I'm glad you've got that because I always thought it was-, keep getting married at 18 and wishing Georgie Johnson was outside to keep her Dad sober, you know, it's-. Really it's sad, isn't it?

Interviewer 2 It is sad, yeah.

Interviewer 1 Did your sister get married before you then?

Edie My sister? Oh yes. My sister was two years or 15 months. She was older than me, Em. Em was the one you should have had a like story about. Em was the character, weren't she, Dolly? Em was the character.

Responder 3 Yeah, but she didn't have a laugh like you, did she?

Edie Oh no, she wasn't sort of gay.

Responder 2 She was more of an academic, your sister. You was a 'flipperty-gibbet'.

Edie I was called buttons and bows because-.

Responder 2 She was buttons and bows but her sister was an academic. Quite a sharp person, wasn't she?



Edie Oh, a lovely brain, Em.

Responder 3 Yeah, but she didn't lead a life like you...

Responder 2 No.

Responder 3 ...in the Land Army and ((inaudible)) and all that business.

Responder 2 No, much quieter.

Edie She was true blue, Em.

Responder 2 Edie was looking for fun always.

Edie Yes, I was a fun girl...

Responder 2 She was always fun.

Edie ...but - six months after I had my baby, Edith.

Responder 2 My husband called her button and bows.

Edie Yes he did, er-. Baby, then my trouble started. They tried to-. Before I had the baby they started soon after I was married. We worked on my Dad's stall. We weren't short of money, plenty of food and in those days, a fur coat and you wear high boots. We were I suppose ((inaudible)) girls, well-dressed ((inaudible)) girls I suppose. Looking back we weren't office staff, we weren't office material. We worked for my Dad. He just went to market, to the fish market, buy the fish and we done the work. He had a goldmine of a business and when I married my first husband he kidded him to leave his job. He worked on the Orient tea wharf in the east end. He said "Well, leave that and come and have a job with me", so he put us both on haddock smoking, which was a trade and the first week-. Seven pound was a lot of money those days because £1 was a lot of money. The first week we earned £7. We went round Sunday morning to get our wages and he was in bed as usual, Dad was, and I said "We want some money Dad." I said "Seven pound we've earned." Worked it out, so much a stone, the haddocks. He said "Bloody £7 you'll get," he said, "you'll be lucky." He said "Have 30 bob and take that chest of drawers if you want it", so we got 30 shillings and a chest of drawers given to us for our first. We're going to have this baby, I'd got my own home, the rent was three bob a week. I told you

my sister paid nine shillings a week and I paid three, so we broke away from my Dad, which meant then we were out of work. I got a job in a kitchen and my husband went on the dole. I had the baby. I went back to the kitchen work when I used to do a day's washing just about that time, with the baby in the pram. For half a crown a day, I used to go out washing for Italian people that had two big fruit stalls and I used to get half a crown for that, nine 'til four. Then I found a ticket in my husband's pocket. He was paying off a velour hat, if you don't mind, for three guineas and we was hard up as anything.

Interviewer 2 Why was he doing that? Why was he paying off for a hat?

Edie Well, he wanted the blue hat. He wasn't a vain man but that was nearly seven bob, you know. He liked his-. Something like George Raft to look at, very, very similar. Very nice looking, 'shortish'. I didn't like short men a lot but that was Jack. He had a lovely face and paying off the blooming velour hat. Then I went back to work at Millers in Grays-. No, I went to work at Millers as the baby was born, because I was in there about-. When the baby was about a fortnight old I was working at Millers, because all I could see when I was over this washing up tank was my baby's face and washing up.

Interviewer 2 Millers – was that the Italian family?

Edie No, they had fruit stalls. No Millers was a restaurant in Grays Inn Road. They were well-known catering people, the Millers and I went to work there.

Interviewer 2 Did you take the baby with you?

Edie No, a friend, a neighbour or someone – I can't remember who – minded the baby and I went back very, very early to the Millers.

Interviewer 1 So when you and Jack left working with your Dad was when you were pregnant?

Edie Yes. I was pregnant before we got married. As I say, I never told nobody at all. I got married in May and my baby was born in November, um-. Then we had a lot of trouble. We change our address, Jack used to go out and buy a sack of winkles Sunday morning for ten bob, bring them home and boil them in the copper, take them out on a barrow and sell them for Responder 30 shillings. So he earned £1 through going down Billingsgate Market, buying the winkles, bringing them home, cooking them, take them out selling



them Sunday afternoon and that was start for the week again. He was-. I don't know if he ever-. There was dole about then, yes, because when I left the Land Army the dole started then. That was before marriage. Going through now when we moved over to the east end his mother said "Come over here." We went to the east end and we had her little front room. It was a two-up and two-down. I think smaller than Coronation Street, I think, and she had Nelly, Mary, Katy, Tommy, Georgie as well as that one I'd married and another one that was married and another one. Well, there was three others. She ((inaudible)) little house and they all slept in one bed upstairs or one little bed and a big bed. We had a little front room. I got a job in Whitechapel. Whitechapel High Street I got a job, a German Jew man, Abrahamson or Abram. Abrahamson or Abram and I used to go there. It was a night trade and when I went in there was washing up all round the kitchen that high and a great big wooden sink. I used to have to stand on a box and that's where he come and made a pass at me. The girls said "You want to watch him. He's a dirty old man, the governor." Well, it wasn't long, a few days probably, before I found out. I used to have to have a half of the restaurant to clean and I would take my shoes off so I wouldn't knock the toes out and I found a pair of big boots – men's boots – in the cupboard, so I used to put them on to clean the-, to do my cleaning in to save my shoes. So one day he says to me "That all the shoes you got Edie?" I said "Well, I've got a pair governor" I said or "sir. Got a pair, sir" I said. "I don't like to kneel in them", so he gave me, I can't remember if it was five bob. I couldn't remember quite the amount, to go out and buy a pair of shoes in the daytime. So I got home and I got me shoes. Next day he gave me half a crown to buy the baby something, so one of the girls said "Watch him" they said and sure enough the next day I don't know whether-, I can't remember whether it was when I first went in or during the day. He said "I'm going to let you off early today" he said. "I want you to meet me at Stepney Green pub" about getting my husband a job. He said "I can get your husband a job" he said. "Oh good." He said "What can he do?" I said, "Well, he was in the tea wharf and he's been smoking haddocks." "I'll get him fixed up" he said. "I want you to meet me at Stepney Green station" and although I was young I couldn't have been silly, so I saw that and I had to pick the baby up too, so I said "I'm very sorry, sir. I must go as I've got to pick the baby up a certain time" and I wouldn't

meet him and then he said “You’re silly. You’re a silly girl, you are. You’re silly” and he never spoke to me after and I went in his big kitchen for some plates or something and he said “Oh, she’s silly. She’s a silly girl, wouldn’t talk to me” and his wife used to work in the restaurant. She used to have her hair dressed high, a little Jewish woman, and they never spoke. He led his life. He was a great big fine looking German Jew he was, and he was the governor of his restaurant. He had night waiters and that was me-. He fell out with me; I never met him. Well, then we’re still in-. It was about that time my baby became ill. I went home one night. I used to have to leave her. Jack was out of work and I used to leave the baby with Jack and he used to play Up the Wall – ha’pennies Up the Wall. They ((inaudible)) the gutter and they used to throw ha’pennies Up the Wall. I don’t quite understand the game but it was to do with amusing themselves. He minded the baby with one of the youngsters. When I got home Edie had diarrhoea and sickness and if I took her to the doctors, I can’t quite remember. She went straight to-. She kept vomiting and I was young and instead of no food I make her another bottle. Oh, I thought She brought that bottle up ((inaudible)) make her another one ((inaudible)) few hours, two or three hours and I took her over the hospital. They kept her in Bancroft Road Hospital and I think I told you this. There were 50 babies died in that week in Bankcroft Road Hospital with a stomach epidemic, diarrhoea. They took her. She was on cow’s milk and baby water. They told me that if she had have lived she’d have had meningitis. Whether they told me that to please me, I don’t know but she was a beautiful baby. Fifty babies died that week but at any rate I walked about like a silly girl for about three months. I just couldn’t settle and then I was pregnant with my – Dolly’s husband – then.

Responder 3 Come in darling.

Responder 5 ‘Allo, ‘allo, ‘allo.

Edie This is the one that’s taking her back, taking my sister back to Ramsgate. He’s taking her to the Green – Camberwell Green – and they’re going to get a coach from there to Ramsgate.

Responder 5 Is there one in the pot?



Responder 3 I think there's one in there. There's a lot.

Responder 5 I'll make it, shall it?

Responder 3 No, no. Look at all his keys! ((laughs))

Edie So that's-. We go to the baby, haven't we?

Interviewer 1 What year was John born in?

Edie John was born in-.

Responder 2 Clerkenwell?

Edie No, not Clerkenwell, Northampton Street. No, it was Clerkenwell. Northampton Street was Clerkenwell. Yeah, Northampton Street John was born. He come back then from the east end and moved away.

Interviewer 1 Did you live there before you went to ((inaudible))and then you moved back there?

Edie Yes and I moved back because my mother-in-law at that time committed suicide and I stopped there to mind the children because with all the lousy heads I had to clean that's how I found out how to clean the head and I stopped there, then I went back with my baby. No, with no baby to Northampton Street. John was born there.

Interviewer 1 So did your mother-in-law commit suicide before John was born?

Edie Before John was born while I was pregnant at the ((inaudible)). Did I tell you she used to send a £1 round to about eight money lenders. She used to pay her debts every Saturday. She'd send Nelly, one little scraggy-haired kid. Now, pay that, take the interest and have the pound back, then go onto so-and-so. That pound would do the rounds paying the interest. Extreme poverty. Did ever tell you the state of the place?

Interviewer 1 Mm.

Edie Bugs all behind the pictures. I started – that's what happened – I started burning the beds and taking the pictures down. Nelly took offence. She was about 13. Taking her home to pieces I suppose the kid thought, looking back and the father used to bring them half a crown a day. He was a paper seller in Leadenhall Market, Leadenhall Street, outside a



bank. Half a crown a day, he used to give me. That's what he used to bring home. That was extreme poverty and the mother committed suicide. I went back to Clerkenwell. Jack got a job on a greengrocer's stall.

Responder 4 Alright Charlie?

Responder 5 Yeah, how's the ((inaudible))? All alright now is it?

Responder 4 ((inaudible))

Edie I started working in a restaurant. I didn't stay there too long. ((laughs)) Did tell you, the house where I got a room in in Northampton Street, I had one room there, always had one room. The lady downstairs was a great big huge woman. Mrs ((inaudible)) her name was and we used to go the pictures once a week and she was so big she couldn't get in there. They used to save her an end seat and if ((inaudible)) all she had to do was lay him across the ((inaudible)).

Interviewer 1 ((inaudible)) cinema?

Edie I took him with me to the pictures and if he ((inaudible)) or she'd make a big pot of ((inaudible)) up the stairs "Ede", share their soup. All happened in Northampton Street.

Interviewer 1 Did you just used to go you and her to the cinema?

Edie Me and her. Never had any husbands ((inaudible)) knew where they were. ((inaudible)) young days but I was a happy girl ((inaudible)) poverty as said. Once we applied for help on the-, they didn't call it assistance board. I forget what they called it. I will remember. We called it the bun house now but there was a name for it then and they-. We had to go there for assistance. "We can't help you" they said. "Your father's got money" they said "but you can come in if you like?" I said "Where?" They said "Workhouse." So that was the only offer I had, to go in the-. So that was there. Northampton Street- after that one room ((inaudible)) and sharing our pots of ((inaudible)) and Jack with his winkles, you know buying his things and ((inaudible)). I remember they were ten bob. He got 30 shillings for them. We moved from Northampton Street. It stepped up a bit then. ((inaudible)) district then. I don't know if I went to live with my sister. Yes, I think I went to live with my sister on Bromar Road.



Interviewer 1 Was Freddy born in Dulwich?

Edie No one was born in Dulwich. David. Dulwich.

Interviewer 1 Freddy, where was he born?

Edie Freddy? Oh, I know. I slipped a bit there. I'm not quite sure of that part from Northampton Street to the next move but I'm trying to think of Johnny growing up. I remember he went to a nursery in Drury Lane and we got a job in Drury Lane. I went to work with my sister. We took the babies into the ((inaudible)) and onto the ((inaudible)) run by two ladies- a family friend. She turned out- it was like a mum. Anyway, my sister worked there for many years, and ((inaudible)) Edie, because she said to me "Edie, you're a- I had four and sixpence. It was quite a lot, wasn't it?"

Interviewer 1 So was Freddy born then when you were working?

Edie Freddy was born in Ockendon Road-, Essex Road. I had a very nice big room there. I had gone up a bit. I had a piano. I had a piano in this big room, I had a seven-piece suite, a round polished table. I had the bed curtained off with about 14 or 15 yards ((inaudible)) and that ((inaudible)) the bed ((inaudible)).

Interviewer 1 When you had Freddy was that when you had ((inaudible)) and the midwife, was she the woman who ((inaudible))?

Edie The midwife? Yes, she came in a big ((inaudible)) Sunday.

Interviewer 1 Was she a midwife in uniform or was she a local woman?

Edie No, no. She was a midwife with a collar, grey coat, ((inaudible)) then ((inaudible)) calling me out" she said. "I've got a headache" so I said ((inaudible)) was very hard. My- piece suite was a very hard one. I ((inaudible)) tell you the story about ((inaudible)). A man lost his wife and wanted to sell this three-piece because he didn't want the seven piece, so he wanted £3 for it and I ((inaudible)) three piece.

Responder 2 Bye Charlie.

Responder 5 I'll see you later on.

Edie See you later Charlie.



Responder 2 He's no coming -

Edie Well, I've got to now.

Responder 5 I'll see you later.

Responder 3 ((laughs))

Edie He's just lost his wife, Charlie. He's just lost his wife about four weeks ago and he has a dinner and tea now. He's been taking me up the hospital every day, been a real good pal, you know. We're on the midwife, aren't we, on the furniture. Mrs ((inaudible)) lent me the £3 for the furniture and I paid her about ten bob a week. Same thing happened with a bike. I went in one morning and I wanted a bike. I'd seen a bike for 15 shillings. I thought Oh, I love that bike. I must have- "Edith ((inaudible)) outside?" So I said "((inaudible)) if I don't get that bike." You know, I was talking about when I bought the bike and Mrs Ward lent me the money for the bike and I used ((inaudible)) lost my first baby because ((inaudible))

Responder 2 Charlie just reminded me. Now, it's not a very- your cousin Lou, any ((inaudible)) house and she always had this big pot of stew and she didn't care who went in but ((inaudible)) and I was a bit older than him- kids went in and ate all this ((laughingly)) pot of stew, didn't you? All the kids in the street- dipping it in with a spoon, all the kids in the street.

Edie Yes. Pass me bag? A handbag, down there. Glasses in there in the- No.

Responder 2 Funny way of life. That was the house that had the donkey in the front room. That is truth, a donkey slept in the front room.

Interviewer 1 What did they use the donkey for?

Responder 2 Business. They were ((inaudible)) cousins. The donkey slept in the front room.

Edie Yeah. That's not the royal side of our family. We have got the royal side of our family. ((all laugh)) That's a story on its own, Aunt Lou.

Responder 2 Well, she lived in my ((inaudible)) so I know about her.

Interviewer 2 Where was that?



Edie Eastern- Eastern Street, Clerkenwell, near where ((inaudible)) market there.

Responder 3 What about Fred ((inaudible)) bananas. Where was that? Before you -?

Edie Oh, later on in life. Alec comes into that.

Responder 3 Oh yeah, that's right.

Edie I'll give you this little bit now, clear it up. I'll give you this bit now ((inaudible)) You can put it in later on. I was helping my Aunt Edie to run her shop at the Elephant and Castle, Newington Causeway. Dolly's husband Fred and I ran it in conjunction with Aunt Edie. She was very religious. She used to leave us in charge on weekends. I met Alec there and suddenly Aunt Edie said "I'm coming back." – give me the shop and she were going to open a mission said - could have the shop, so ((inaudible)) was a philanthropist ((inaudible)). No, she was going to keep the big shop next door, so we said ((inaudible))she went Alec, so he were going to fit us up with our own shop, take all the trade from my Aunt ((inaudible)). She wanted her shop for a mission. Right at the very last minute she turned said "I've changed my mind" so there was cousin, ((inaudible)) husband and myself left with no job, no shop, no wages ((inaudible))at that time paying 16 shillings a week over Northampton to be minded. So we used to run a Communist meeting every Friday night let the shop out for five ((inaudible)) to Moseley's followers. We weren't politically-minded or anything, we just ((inaudible)) for the shop and we used to do the tea and cakes. That was all ((inaudible)). She would make-, serve them all tea and two or three batches of rock cakes ((inaudible))Friday night and we all ((inaudible)) with the catering. Anyway, suddenly we're out with nothing so we get a flat in Hackford Road, Brixton. I never knew then but it was a prostitutes place in the ((inaudible)) told anybody ((inaudible)) somebody's address, well, you was embarrassed. They said "Oh," they said, they thought we're prostitutes ((laughingly)) prostitutes but we'd got a big flat for 25 shillings in Hackford Road. Well, Fred's got-, Fred went ((inaudible)) fire station, you know, the fire salvage place? ((inaudible)) had about £3 and he bought his own ((inaudible)) and he finished up with a gold-

[AUDIO FILE EDIE MARTINSON (II) 1 ENDS AND AUDIO FILE EDIE MARTINSON (II) 2 BEGINS]



Responder 3 It's alright if you have a nice early start.

Interviewer 1 Edie, can I just ask, you know the shop that was in Newington Causeway?

Edie Number 80. It was number 80. What is it?

Responder 2 Eighty.

Interviewer 1 So going up towards London Bridge, which side?

Edie You know the archway, that arch?

Interviewer 1 Yes.

Edie By that on the corner. Is it Lancaster Street?

Responder 2 It's still there.

Interviewer 1 Is it by the Atlas paperworks?

Responder 3 More up the Elephant and Castle way.

Edie No, know where the arch is?

Interviewer 1 Yeah.

Edie Directly by the arch.

Interviewer 1 There's still a café there now?

Responder 2 I'm sure it's still there, isn't it?

Edie No, not as a café.

Responder 5 Not as a café, no.

Edie No, no, no.

Responder 5 The shop's still there.

Edie That's all been built up. We're not thinking of Shelly's. That's all gone Dolly.

Responder 2 It's all gone, has it?

Edie Yes, all-. It's a building of some-.

Responder 3 I haven't been that way for years, have I?



Interviewer 1 Just because I walk up and down there nearly every day and I'm always thinking I bet it was round here somewhere.

Edie On the corner with the-, where-. My Dad and his sister opened it, Aunt Edie, and my Dad, I told you he was a drunkard. He used to make the cups of tea and they loved him. On a big blazing fire he had a big old kettle and his job was to be there at 12 and make the cups of tea. Nine times out of ten he'd come in well cut and his sister was religious, a different type, you know. That's how the Causeway started, didn't it, with Dad and Granddad and Aunt Edie. Well, naturally they rowed. They're going to row, aren't they, and he used to go round with these cups of tea and they all laughed and liked him but they fell out. Then Aunt Edie ran it I think. Before Aunt Annie's days she ran it with help.

Responder 2 She had help, yeah.

Edie She had two girls working in because she had-. One we used to call Penny in the Slot Vi. She was like automatic.

((?)) ((laughs))

Edie You know, cousin Jack called her Penny in the Slot. She'd go, never stop, wash up, wipe up, pick a cup up. That was Vi. There were twin sisters, Violet and Rose, and Vi they always called Penny in the Slot. That was Aunt Edie's days, wasn't it?

Responder 2 Then her sister took over.

Edie Then Aunt Annie-. I'm wondering where I came in. Oh, Aunt Annie took over and I came in with Aunt Edie, didn't I? I used to work with Aunt Edie.

Responder 2 Yes, first.

Edie Aunt Annie come-. What happened, back to this story when she-, never chucked us out, "I'm taking over." Freddy bought his home down at the salvage place. My Dad went over the sale room for me and Alec. He bought me a big arm chair for two bob, a table for two bob. Oh, he said "I know, I'm going to get them some-." Said "Lovely roll of lino" he said. He marked his catalogue off, number so-and-so. In the meantime he went in the pub. So back he went when he thought his number was coming up and the roll of lino was by the



rostrum and he thought they were bidding for that, see, so raising his catalogue it went up to ten shillings, so he said to the man-. “Knock down to Mr Baker” they said. So he went up. He said “That was cheap, that roll of lino.” He said “You haven’t bought a roll of lino.” He said “Well, what have I bought?” He said “Harmonium”, ((all laugh)) so we finished up ((laughingly)) with a harmonium.

Responder 2 No lino.

Edie No lino, no. Went in our room. It was funny. Freddy had got £3 left. We’d got a nice big flat. He’d got his room done with his £2, worm-, full of wormwood, Queen Anne suite and a big brass bed.

Responder 2 ((inaudible))

Edie We’d got a big bed and big plush armchair, a big one in the kitchen and a wooden table. I can’t remember. Oh, I know, we had a blue brocade settee. That was the highlight of the room, wasn’t it? Then we, well, Fred decided, because he was very musical, he was really-. He’d been trained, you know.

Responder 2 Well, he went to the Royal College of Music.

Edie Aunt Annie-.

Responder 2 Wasn’t he? He went for two years to the Royal College of Music.

Edie Oh yes, yeah. Aunt Annie wasn’t rough like my Dad. Her sisters and brother, there’s a story on their own, that family. Mother was a German lady, she married a taxi man. First he worked-, he was a dairy man, worked for a dairy and always drunk and she used to stand in the middle of the room saying “Oh William, whatever shall we do.” All the kids used to scatter when he come in. That was the story my Dad-, and her husband’s mum – there were some more of them – they were quite a contrasting family. Some are refined, one was a fiddler but my Dad was a drunkard, intelligent and well-liked but bad, no good for family life. Where were we?

Interviewer 1 The bananas – we never left- ((all laugh))

Responder 4 ((inaudible)) bananas.



Responder 2 Freddy bought the piano.

Edie Yeah, Fred bought the piano. We'd got a grand piano in this room, no lino...

Responder 2 Nothing.

Edie ...and we had a bed in that room.

Responder 2 And he never had any money-

Edie No. Alec said "Well, I can push a barrow but I can't sell anything or buy anything." Fred said "Well, I can buy and sell." He was the business man because he had hotels and they had good business in Ramsgate, a lot of business. So Alec said "I'll push the barrow", so Fred went and bought the bananas, down there, went to Camberwell Green with their barrow of bananas every day. Fred came every night and he was only courting Dolly then. She was 18.

Responder 2 Seventeen.

Edie And then I'd got the two children home by then, John and Joan. I said "Well, I'll have my children back now." We were trying to settle down and make a real life, so they'd got two little beds in their single room, we'd got the double bed and, er, back come Freddy every night. Couldn't find where he lived the first night and was accosted about 20 times ((laughingly)) by prostitutes. He forgot his number, see, and every day these bananas got blacker and blacker, bought home a few shillings. On his way home he'd go into Lyon's and buy a nice fruit tart because Dolly was coming, because Dolly was always very ladylike. I must show you some pictures of Dolly later. You were more refined than us, weren't you? I wasn't rough. I wasn't a rough girl but I've been grown up with a down to earth father, I suppose, hard-working Mum, but he brought this fruit tart in every night and the kettle would go on directly we've all got in and a load of wood we put on this fire, draw the settee up. Freddy would play and there was Dolly, myself and Alec. The two children would be put to bed about half past seven or eight.

Responder 2 We'd sit and listen all night.

Edie That was our night-, that was our life every night, wasn't it...



Responder 2 Yes.

Edie ...until these bananas ran out. They got so black so of course...

Responder 2 ((inaudible)) left.

Edie ...so of course Freddy's broke. Freddy's got broke, I got a job in a pub over Hammersmith as a cook.

Responder 2 They took the piano away, didn't they?

Edie Oh, that's funny.

Responder 2 You lost the piano.

Interviewer 1 Who took the piano away?

Edie Bailiff. The piano people took that and the bailiff came in after that.

Interviewer 1 What year was this? Do you know roughly?

Edie What year? Yes. I was about 28 when I met Alec.

Responder 2 I would say.

Edie It was only about a few months. It was in the early days of just meeting Alec and I was 28, so that's roughly thirties, wouldn't it be? Roughly thirties Doll, because I was 28 when I met Alec and it all happened about-, within a few months, didn't it, of meeting him and leaving the-.

Responder 2 I was married in '35 and I was Fred four years.

Edie Ah, that's a lot time after. You had the shop for-. I'm talking about when we left the shop, took this flat. It was only a few months of Alec coming-, meeting Alec at the shop.

Responder 2 I suppose I was about 18.

Edie What you were saying there came quite a long while after your marriage.

Responder 2 Oh yes, '35.

Responder 3 Four years after, Doll said.

Responder 2 I was married in '35 and I was with Fred for four years.



Edie Well, you can go back that way.

Responder 2 So that would have made it '31. Thirty-one when that was ((inaudible))

Edie Probably by that time I'd got to 29. It's ((laughingly)) quite possible, isn't it? So I got a job as a cook and by sheer bad luck I was pregnant, so sheer bad luck again I haemorrhaged and I'm the only breadwinner. ((laughs)) So Alec used to come to the underground station to meet me. I used to have little ((inaudible)) case and I used to bring all the food home. I think Alec was getting the dole then and I'd bring the thing of food home. Then I couldn't work then. I had a very, very bad illness and I spoke and told the lady that owned the flat "We've got to give the flat up" and we didn't pay that week. We reckoned we owed a week and a half's rent because I didn't reckon the week in advance. I reckoned, in real truth, we had a week and a half. I was in bed very, very ill with this bed tipped up, haemorrhaging every five minutes and she came and she was covered gold, here gold, all gold and gold, you know, big woman. She stood at the foot of the bed. "Oh, I'm sorry dear" she said. I said "Well, we're getting out on Friday night and going up to my sister's." She said "Oh, very well" and she went. She went straight and put the bailiff in. The next morning cousin Jack, that was Freddy's brother, he was a gay boy – we just lost him – he was the gay boy of the family, Jack. That's all you could him, weren't it, the playboy Jack?

Responder 5 Playboy.

Edie And he worked in a pub local, so he used to buy some biscuits, come up to our flat, put the kettle on and he used to love to bash on the piano, honky-tonk. 'Bangedy' bangedy banged bang – Jack.

Responder 2 Honky-tonk ((inaudible))

Edie So I'm laying in the bed half-dead, Jack's playing the piano. I think Alec had gone down Covent Garden because he used to hang about around Covent Garden trying to shift lorries. Anyone that couldn't back them in he would back them in for a couple of coppers or a couple of cigarettes. Alec was doing that because he was out of work. So there's me in the bed, Jack playing the piano and the bell rang. So in come a man with a bowler hat.

He said-. Oh no, the bailiffs come first. "Do you mind if I look round?" I thought he was about repairs or something. I said "No, help yourself." He went in the kitchen, he was writing down things. Oh, piano men come first to take the grand piano back. We'd asked them to take it back. We couldn't afford it, so back they come. They were unscrewing the legs, dismantling this grand piano, it was a beautiful piano ((laughs)) and while they were doing that the bell rang again, the other man come in and I thought it was their governor. I thought It must be the governor of this piano man, so he said "Oh, you beat me to it this time" he said. So he said "Do you mind if I-." I said "No, not a bit." He went in one room and he had a book, so suddenly I said "Are you with these men?" "Oh no," he said "I'm the bailiff." "Bailiff?" I said "I only owe a week and a half." I said "I told her we were going to get out Friday night." He said "She's within the law" he said "You owe her money." So anyway he's written it down. He said to me "Can't-," then he said to my cousin "Can't you raise it?" He didn't know that was my cousin and it was in a prostitute's area, so I said "Can't he pay the rent? Can't he pay?" "Don't trust him," I said "that's my cousin." I bet he thought ((laughingly)) I've heard that one before and Jack was always broke, wasn't he? ((all laugh)) I said "That's my cousin" I said. "Ask him." Well, he said "She can't put you out while you're so ill" he said. "Have another week. I'll give you a week." Of course we didn't have the week. Friday night they started. Alec took the stuff out on a barrow, pushed it up to Dog Kennel and up to my sister's house in Bromar Road, top of Dog Kennel Hill and I'm in bed. I'm the last thing to be moved, so my sister then and her Mum, her Mum was my closest friend. She always mothered me. If I was ill I'd send for Dolly's mum because my Mum was always minding my Dad. He took up all of her.

Interviewer 1 What was Dolly's mum called?

Edie Her mother was lovely. Anyway, her mother...

Responder 2 Mary.

Edie ...her mother and my sister came six, seven o'clock – I forget – for me. They gently get me out of bed and put some clothes on. We-, between the two of them I went to a tram. They got me to the tram-, onto the tram. We went to Dog Kennel Hill. As I got off the

tram at Dog Kennel Hill I haemorrhaged. My sister grabbed me up like a child, my Em did, ran down to a street down, ran me down to her house. I was put to bed, sent for our Mum. I was tipped out, the lights were doused down a bit, covered over. The doctor come up and I heard all this. I heard the doctor say "Well, she's got no-." Oh no, "Send for ambulance." I heard the ambulance bell come and I heard it stop and I heard them say "Oh we can't take her, she's got not pulse." ((laughingly)) So once more I nearly died, so they said "We'll come back in the morning" the ambulance men said and the doctor said "I'll come up every hour" and that was I think the nearest I can remember. I kept going into big black holes. I suppose it was unconsciousness. It was like going down a big black hole and I was holding Alec's hand one side and my sister's the other and coming up again I suppose. Every now and again you nearly went out, that was the sensation, and it was a big black tunnel and then I come up. Well, the next morning the ambulance come back and took me away, so we were all landed at my Em's then. Alec's on the dole and she looked after us, didn't she? Em looked after us in those days?

Responder 4 Oh yes.

Edie Alec used to give her his dole. He'd have six pence a day back for cigarettes. For quite a few months I lived there.

Interviewer 2 So how many of you lived there with Em?

Edie Er, myself, Alec, I didn't have David then, and the two children, John and Joan. They had a bedroom upstairs. We had two rooms from Em, I rented them, but John shared his cousin's bedroom upstairs, shared a bedroom with his cousin. We were there quite a while then. David was born there and they were happy days there, didn't we? Alec got a job. We had our first car there, about £4 or £12. Twelve pound wasn't it Alec? That first car we bought, that Citroen, was 12?

Responder 4 Twelve pound, yeah.

Edie Twelve pound.

Responder 4 We went back and forth.

Responder 3 It wouldn't even buy a tyre now.



Edie We used to go back and forwards to Wales as though we were going round the corner. We used to go to Wales with no worry we might breakdown. It never dawned on us. Now, we wouldn't go out now without belonging to the AA or something, you know. ((all laughs)) We haven't got no car now, by the way, because his eyes is all gone.

Responder 5 - cost me hundreds.

Edie ((quietly)) Life's changed since you were here last but, er, we were-.

[END OF INTERVIEW 2]