

Interviewee: **Mary Thorley**

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: 19 May 1986

Duration of audio: 01:33:28

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

Archive Reference: RCMS/251/16

Description:

Transcript of an interview with Mary Thorley covering her friendship with the midwife, Elsie Walkerdine, accompanying her on her rounds at the end of the Second World War, pregnancy complications, the midwife's duties, payment of midwives, home births, and roles of handywomen, and also including experiences of a mother whose daughter had been delivered by Elsie.

Topics include: Midwifery; Maternity services; Childbirth; Antenatal care; Homebirth; Second World War

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[START OF INTERVIEW]

Mary I had cysts removed from my vocal chords. You youngsters, you know, you ever listen to The Archers?

Interviewer 1 Yes.

Mary I sound like the Old Granby ((Laughter)), when I came out of the hospital. Was it Old Granby? Some name like that. Oh it was terrible, you know. I've always had a deep voice from a youngster, yeah. A proper – what they? – proper tomboy, what with that and what with whistling.

Interviewer 1 You've got a lovely merry whistle though. It was nice to hear it coming up the stairs.

Mary Do you know what my old dad used to...? I could, the next bedroom to us when we were kids, I could hear my dad – I could imagine what he was doing: putting his pants on and dressing – and he'd be whistling away. I take after him.

Interviewer 1 When did you start whistling?

Mary I could whistle before I could talk. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 Did they used to tell you not to whistle? Was it not proper to whistle as a girl?

Mary Oh, very unlucky, very unlucky.

Interviewer 1 Is it?

Mary A whistling woman and a crying man is neither good for God nor man – they used to say that. I said, "Don't worry I'll I'm..." I was going to say, "Don't worry; I'm a man hater". ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 Oh lovely, very nice.

Mary I have a whistle. And do you know, sometimes I whistle when I'm out, especially if I'm on a bus.

Interviewer 1 I think that's nice.

Interviewer 2 Oh, it's so cheery. Lovely to hear.



Mary One of them, I was at, um, at one of the stops, Oxford Street – you know where the 53s turn round, or something like that – and I was sitting in the bus waiting for it to, to go off, you see. And this driver and the conductor were sitting up; I was whistling and they... ((Laughter)) And they said, “Well, there’s only one person – it’s you. Is that you?” “Yeah” I said, “I’m sorry. It’s a bad habit of mine”. “I never even saw your mouth move!” ((Laughter))

Interviewer 2 Mary, can you tell us a bit about you and how you met Elsie?

Mary Yes. Well...

Interviewer 2 When were you born?

Mary Oh, I was born in 1912. Of course...

Interviewer 2 Whereabouts.

Mary In New King Street. Um, I grew up and of course my step-mother’s sister, right, she had a room of my dad upstairs – as they used to years ago – and, um, she was very fond of the babies. So, you know that part. And Walkerdine used to come to visit her and give her help with her confinements, you see. Of course we knew Walkerdine trotting about the streets. Then about 1940, 1940, um, it was before that I went to live with my sister who lived next door to Walkerdine in, um, Prince Street. Now, around about the 1940 mark her aunt, it was only her aunt and uncle, they brought her up – her mother died, strangely enough, just after confinement.

Interviewer 2 Did she?

Mary Yes. And, uh, you know, just, it’s just neighbourly like that when Walkerdine – I get in the habit of calling people Walkerdine, their surnames over this nursing business. ((Laughter)) And when Elsie came out, “Hello”, that sort of thing. But, um, they were people that kept themselves to themselves. Elsie was a bit different because of the work, you see; she had different... so many people. And, um, I turned round, uh, out of politeness and neighbourly, and said, “How’s your aunt?” Because she had, she had an accident; she fell over in the black out and broke her leg. “Ooh” she said, “We’ve managed to get her downstairs, you know; somebody had helped her and that”. She said, “Why don’t you come in and see her?” Well,

they were people that didn't have a lot of visitors; a relative occasionally, on the uncle or aunt's side. So, I went in. and of course that made us more sort of friendly, you know.

My sister unfortunately was not in very good health and she used to worry about me because I was terrible, and still partly, with food eating. And, uh, I think it was about the Christmas of 1940 I was working at ((inaudible)) you know. When I came, uh, came home from work on Boxing Day – you went in Boxing Day that... you know, when the war was on – Elsie's uncle was standing at the door. So, he said, "We've been waiting for you" he said, "They've been in and gone round to, uh, a relation" you know. Oh, that was very nice. Well, that was on the Christmas, Christmas... Boxing Day. And, um, I was turned around, and we stayed in there and we were playing cards and my sister turned around and she said, uh, "They've knocked us, so we're going round to her sister-in-law's. Would you like to?" I said, "No, I'll go indoors when I come in from here". Well, of course Elsie's aunt said, "Oh, you not going to sleep in the house on your own" of course with bombing and that. So, I said, "Oh, I won't be afraid" I said, "I'll just get up if it starts". "No" she said, "You go upstairs in the off room". And I went up in the little off room up there. And I never went back to live at my sister's after that.

And, uh, I, I'll be truthful; I was pleased really because Elsie, her work was her life. But she's gone now, and I can tell you that she was tied to her aunt and uncle's apron strings, because they hadn't had any children and they doted over her. Apart from her work she was expected to be with them, you see. And, um, I mean if she went to the pictures – this is true – if she went to the pictures and it was the first... you know Deptford High Street, the little picture palace?

Interviewer 1 Yes.

Mary She went there and they would always know where she was sitting. Because she didn't have any off duty, not like we do now. No, it's true. She was always on call. And she... but she, there was, I think it was August, she never booked any confinements for August. That was her time off. And then she'd take her aunt and uncle away to Clacton. She went to Clacton religiously, you know.

Interviewer 1 Did you ever go with them?



Mary Not with her aunt and uncle no, no, no. I, um, uh, when I got more familiar with them all, um, we got to... I, I said... my friend that I had before the war she got killed during the war. And, um, then I started saying to Elsie, "Well, why don't you go away?" you know, and we started going to Weston-super-Mare.

Interviewer 1 Oh did you? I know it very well.

Mary Lockey Road.

Interviewer 1 Yes, I know it.

Mary Do you really?

Interviewer 1 Yes.

Mary So, we went there for quite a few years, you know. Um, and, uh, then of course we, uh, carried on. And I don't think I missed a holiday. I used to go away. It was something good for Elsie because she never had no other companions apart from her aunt and uncle. And they treated me... Elsie was more like my mum; I mean, she was old enough to be my mum – especially in this day and age. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 Was she?

Mary Yeah.

Interviewer 1 So, how old was she when you first knew her?

Mary Uh, I mean, well I've known her for all the years that I was able to recognise her as a midwife, you know. So, I knew her for donkey's years, you know.

Interviewer 1 But when you moved into the house with them she was...

Mary Oh, that was, what, um, say about 1940. She was, she was about – oh, you're getting me now...

Interviewer 1 When was she born?

Mary 1892.

Interviewer 1 92, so that was 48. And you were how old?

Mary Uh, I was... how old was I then? 48? I was born in 1912.

Interviewer 1 So, you were...

Mary About 20 years younger than Elsie. Elsie was born, I was born 1912 and she was born 19...
uh, 1892.

Interviewer 2 So, you were 20.

Mary Yeah. I really, I felt I was doing something for Elsie. My family accepted Elsie like one of us.

Interviewer 2 Did they?

Mary My brothers and sisters. Oh yes, oh yes. Never went to any of my relations unless Elsie was invited, you know. Yes, she was really, um, a wonderful person. There's no getting away from it. I mean, I'm not making out that, uh... when Elsie's uncle and aunt died in 195... I think it was about 52 and 1955, Elsie's aunt died... her uncle died first and then her aunt, you know. And of course that left Elsie and I. We were living in Ayrwood Street then, Sycamore House – you know Sycamore House?

Interviewer 1 Yes.

Mary Uh, we went in there when they were first opened. They've just pulled that down. I don't know if you know that one.

Interviewer 1 Yes.

Mary And, um, then they told Elsie that when she retired she would have to have smaller accommodation by that was the caretaker and the rent collector, because we used to have a rent collector then. "Don't forget, Ms Walkerdine, when you finish work you have to have smaller accommodation". So, eventually the time came round for Elsie to retire: 1957. And, uh, shortly after that we had the letter, or at least Elsie had the letter, because Elsie was always the tenant; I was the lodger. No, I was down as her niece. ((Laughter)) So, uh, she said, uh, she got this letter to move here. So, uh, uh, Elsie said, "I don't really want to move, Mary". So, I said, "Look Elsie" I said, "they want you to move and" I said, "it's no good being too sentimental over things that have gone". So, um, she said, "All right". We went up; we had notice to view this flat. I don't know if you know much about that Lewisham borough

then, but it was Miss Stansbridge that was the housing officer. So, we went up to get the keys then of course to view this one. Now, bearing in mind that the caretaker and the rent collector had emphasised to Elsie, “Ms Walkerdine you must... don’t forget you’ve got to have smaller accommodation”. And we went up and saw Miss Stansbridge, “Hello, Ms Walkerdine. Do sit down”. Sat down; and the first words out of that woman’s mouth was, “You know, we would never have bothered you to move”. Not that I didn’t... but she done us a favour because that deteriorated diabolically.

Interviewer 1 Did it?

Mary Oh dear.

Interviewer 1 It’s very nice in here, isn’t it?

Mary And of course we moved in here. I’m happy in here; I don’t want to leave.

Interviewer 1 It’s a very nice flat.

Mary I could have gone up to Peterborough with my... well, my niece lives in Stamford, up in Stamford. But, um, I, uh, could have gone up. Peter said, “Get Aunty Mary a flat up there or something”. I said, “Oh” I said, “you’d bury me”. Because when you get as old as I am I lived in Lewisham, Camford, Bromley; and nine times out of ten I’ll see somebody that I know: “Hello Mary, how are you?” you know, and have a chat. And this is the way life’s been. And that’s why I don’t want to go. It’s the same as the lady downstairs, when they were putting the doors on, this big door – which is a great asset – she said, “Not very wide is it?” she said, “Not if anybody wants to move”. I said, “Mary, don’t worry” her name’s Mary, I said, “Mary, don’t worry” I said, “because when I move I won’t my furniture”. ((Laughter)) Scribble that one out. It’s true; I don’t want to move.

Interviewer 1 Well, it’s your home, isn’t it?

Mary And I tell, and I tell my neighbour here, you know, I say, “Grace, anything goes wrong with me, I’m not well, sick, you have to call the doctor in, you get me away first before you notify my nieces and nephews. I don’t want to be a nuisance to any of them”. I’ve got nieces and nephews. They’re all my nieces and nephews up there. That one on the right-hand side, the first lower one, is my neighbour. That is her daughter she lost. She was only in here three

years when her daughter died. She lost her two daughters. She only had two children and she lost them both. Do you ever see people that you imagine or you feel sure they would have made lovely parents? Well, that's what I had the feeling about Grace and Will. But I've got nieces and nephews I go and see them occasionally.

Actually when I was going to Broadstairs I slipped up there; I thought it was holiday Monday this week.

Interviewer 1 It's next week.

Mary It's next week. But I shan't go to Broadstairs. I don't like going down there holiday time.

Interviewer 1 It's very busy.

Mary Too crowded. It's too crowded in my nephew's house. ((Laughter)) I don't mind if it's just my niece. My niece lives with her brother. Her brother's married and got two children. And, um, but Eileen she lost her husband so she went down to Broadstairs with Frankie and, um, she does his clerical work for him. Because he's in, um, the pub trade, you know, around... He doesn't live in a pub. No, he don't, no. He's got a nice house in Broadstairs. I don't know what they call these ((inaudible)) or something.

Interviewer 2 Sort of manager.

Mary One in Broadstairs, and, uh, it's in shares with a club, um, hotel. I don't know if you know Broadstairs at all?

Interviewer 1 No.

Mary No. And then he's got two over the East End way, pubs; I suppose he manages them or something. And a couple of clubs up there, you know. But, uh, no, I like to go and see them, but, um...

Interviewer 1 Well, it's nice having them in a holiday place.

Mary Well, there is that. And the other one, the niece, I go to Stamford up in Lincolnshire, near Lincoln. Do you know Stamford at all?

Interviewer 1 No.



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Interviewer 2 Not really.

Mary It's very nice, very nice that is. And we went to, uh... I tell you where it's near, the bulb place, where they do all the bulbs. Spalding.

Interviewer 1 Spalding, yeah.

Mary It corresponds with the Dutch bulb fields. Have you ever been up that way?

Interviewer 1 No.

Mary Fantastic it is to go up there with the...

Interviewer 1 And you used to go up there with Elsie, did you?

Mary I never went, I never went anywhere without Elsie.

Interviewer 1 Didn't you?

Mary No, because, uh, you see she was more like my old mum and I wouldn't... I never hardly went out without her. And if I did it would be sometimes to, um, one of the telecoms places or something like that. No, I didn't. I looked on Elsie as my mum.

Interviewer 2 Did you share in her work at all?

Mary No. Did I?

Interviewer 2 Yeah.

Mary No. The only thing I did was the latter end of the war, you know, when it was still dodgy, um, I used to go out with her; I used to go out with her.

Interviewer 1 Keep her company.

Mary Yeah. And, um, what... and during the raids as well I would rather be out with her, you know, than I would sort of indoors...

Interviewer 1 Worrying about her.

Mary But no, I used to go out to quite a few people. I've seen many babies born.

Interviewer 1 Have you?

Mary Good grief, yeah.

Interviewer 1 Tell us about that.

Mary I'll tell you about one. I went to one with Elsie and, uh, you know, the usual procedures, the little girl was in labour or the young lady was in labour and all that sort. I wasn't in the room then. And, um, I was sitting there in the dining room or whatever you call it. All of a sudden, Elsie was saying, "Now, do as I tell you, there's a good girl" you know, usual patter with midwives. So, um, uh, all of a sudden she said, "Mary?" so I said, "Yes, Elsie?" She said, "Come in here a minute". So, I went; it didn't worry me because as I say I'd been there. And, um, she said, "Hold the girlie's hand". So, I said, "All right. Come on love, you'll be all right. You look after nurse and she'll look after you". And afterwards I found out the little girl said, "Ooh, aren't you brave coming in here". I found out that she hadn't very long lost her mother, and she was only a teenager.

Interviewer 1 Oh.

Mary And that was that one. And another one I was at – I used to be downstairs keeping the husband company, you know, chatting away – and it was strangely enough, not very far away, and we were sitting there, you don't know what to talk about but you usually found something to talk about, all of a sudden you heard a little squeal of a baby, you know. And, um, Elsie came down and said, "Father, you've got a nice baby boy" or something. And he, in the excitement, he was, "I've got a baby boy!" Hit me on the back, he nearly knocked me choppers out! ((Laughter)) You know, it was the excitement of it.

No, I've been to lots of babies. And one family she used to go to and they'd send round for Elsie, you know, and Elsie would go. She'd gone out to this lady, but I remember she was a very well-known character, Lizzie Hughes. And her husband was a busker. And she had lovely children though. When Elsie used to go round to her she'd say, "Ooh, I'm glad you've come". And there were very, very few people called Elsie by her name, very few; always nurse. But she was one that always called her. "Elsie, I'm glad you've come" she said, "But just let me finish this bed and cheese and I'll great on the bed then". ((Laughter)) That was... Yeah, true, true. That was Lizzie Hughes, and she used to live in New King Street.

Interviewer 1 Really?

Mary That's true.

Interviewer 2 How many babies did she have?

Mary Um, I think she had about five or six then. She had lovely babies; fair, masses of curly hair. And also, also when she had that 21st baby in Deptford High Street.

Interviewer 1 Somebody's 21st baby?

Mary It was a 21st baby, yeah. Because she woke me up this particular night and she said, "I'm going out, Mary". So, I said, "Oh all right, Elsie" I said, "Where are you going?" So, she said, um, I think it was Mrs Britten, I think that was her name. "Ooh" I said, "I must come and see this one". Years ago down Deptford High Street there was a place called the Showgrounds. And next door or next door but one – because all shops – it was the one and only house in Deptford High Street, and she lived here; and that's where I went and saw her have the 21st baby born.

Interviewer 2 What was it like?

Mary Well, ((laughter)) I think... what was she like?

Interviewer 2 Yeah.

Mary I think it took all the calories out of her, all those babies.

Interviewer 2 Did it?

Mary She was very... well, it could.

Interviewer 1 Were the 21 births all easy?

Mary I wouldn't know. 21 over a period you see.

Interviewer 1 But the one that you saw, was that an easy birth?

Mary No bother. I never heard Elsie complain, no. "I'll see you later on, mother".

Interviewer 2 She just got on with it.

Mary Yeah. And when she had, um... once, again down the High Street where the picture palace is – well, it isn't now but the building is still there – she had triplets down there.



Interviewer 1 Did she?

Mary Yes. And she, uh, she never called the doctor in till after. So, of course he said, "Sister" she said, "You should have let me in on this". And that was Dr Rhys Jones in Edward Street, used to be there. She said, "Why? What for?" she said, "There was nothing wrong. It was all straightforward. If I'd had called you in I would have frightened the patient". And she had it and she had the triplets.

Interviewer 1 Did she know they were triplets or did she just...?

Mary She arrived there. Well, I should imagine that she knew there were either two or more. Three girls they were. And, um...

Interviewer 1 Were they the only triplets she had?

Mary Yes, but no end of twins.

Interviewer 1 Did she?

Mary No end of twins. And she very seldom... and this is why, this is why, um, going just by Elsie, um, I, I wonder why or whether it was the limitation of space and such like why they ever... they almost compel people to go into hospital now, don't they?

Interviewer 1 Oh yes, for twins.

Mary No, for birth.

Interviewer 1 Oh all births.

Mary Yes.

Interviewer 1 Certainly for twins. And breach babies as well, bottom first.

Mary That's it, yes.

Interviewer 1 I expect she did a lot of them at home, didn't she?

Mary Well, this is it. I mean, it was second nature to her, wasn't it, that sort of thing.

Interviewer 1 Did she often take people into hospital? Were there often problems for her?

Mary Occasionally, occasionally.

Interviewer 1 What sort of things would she take people in for?

Mary Well, I don't know. But the point of the fact is, you know, um – I mean, all these happened years ago – and, um, I know that she took a baby in, a girl in and it was her first baby in Greenwich District Hospital. St Alfredge's hospital then. So, I don't know. I mean, Elsie sort of told whoever was in charge, would have been the sister of the maternity ward then, and, um, Elsie wasn't very happy about that because when Elsie took her in they should have either given her a caesarean or whatever it was, and that girlie died. And Elsie said that she should never have died.

Interviewer 1 Really? She died in the hospital?

Mary Yeah. It wasn't the same day, it wasn't the same day. I mean, if it was the same day one would say, oh the midwife should have taken them before; but no.

Interviewer 1 Did Elsie have any maternal deaths? Any women die giving birth at home?

Mary I don't think so, but I wouldn't say no for sure. I tell you what, um, if you were that interested – I mean, don't get... I'm not being rude – but when Elsie died I took her register of births, deaths and everything up to the Royal College of Midwives. It could be in their library.

Interviewer 1 I'll follow that up. That would be very interesting.

Mary That was the first, that was the first, from the first to the last, all the babies.

Interviewer 1 All her registers.

Mary Yeah, BBA and all that jazz. I mean, um, I, uh, as I said I went out with her for quite some time, and, um, I'd often come back home at night and phoned the doctor when she said she wanted a doctor.

Interviewer 2 Of course, not everybody would have phones, would they?

Mary No. she did then, didn't they? That time... when was it the GRC took over? 1937, 38?

Interviewer 2 That's right, 37.

Mary Something like that. So, uh, therefore, um, you know, she'd turn around... and I always remember one day she said, uh, "Mary would you go and ring Dr – I think it was Dr Johnson

then, there was a Dr Johnson in Ealing Street – and tell him that we’re having trouble with the placenta”. You see. So, uh, she had the baby. She called me in the bedroom, “I’ve got my baby”. When she come home she said, “Did you notice anything about that baby?” I said, “No”. I’ll be truthful; I was never terribly interested in babies. ((Laughter)) “No” I said, “They’re all the same to me. They’re all like little rabbits with their tails,” ((Laughter)) And, uh, she said, “It’s what they call a mongrel”.

Interviewer 1 Oh was it? Down’s syndrome.

Mary Yeah. Well, that’s what she... what I knew the name as. And then another time, um, I went out with Elsie to New King Street – near where I was born, matter of fact – and the doctor, the lady had twins, and the doctor, Dr Johnson... no, no, his father years back used to live in Deptford High Street and he had two or three... two sons and a daughter doctors. Anyway, um, Elsie had the doctor in attendance – whether it was at the confinement I’m not sure – but said, um, “I’ll see you round about here at ten or 11” or something like that. Well, anyway I went with Elsie to this house, the lady had been confined, and I thought it was such a nice thing: when we went into the bedroom doctor – I can’t think of his name; yet he was really a lovely doctor – he was sitting there with a twin there and a twin there by the fire. This lady knew me, so she said, “What do you think?” “Well, babies, they’re like little rabbits aren’t they”. ((Laughter)) “Oh” she said, “You don’t mean that!” I said, “I do”. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 Did Elsie love the babies?

Mary Oh yes. That was here life; the babies were her life, really and truly. She, um, she right from a child she wanted to be a midwife, you know, a younger person. She did go with a young man and he used to live local. And I think he sort of wanted to court her, you know, those days. But her work come first. He said, “It sounds as though you prefer me to your work” she said, “I still want to bring babies into the world”. And, um, this is it; so she kept on her own all through life. But she was never unhappy because her work was her life, you see. This is the thing. But, um, there you are.

Now, tell me something about you. When you said you were an independent midwife; is that like Elsie was before the GLC took over?

Interviewer 1 That's right.

Mary Are there many of them about now?

Interviewer 1 There are less than ten of us in the whole of the country.

Mary Is there really?

Interviewer 1 There are four in London and a couple in Manchester and one and two dotted around and that's all.

Mary Now, is that because, um, uh – I don't mean to be rude when I say, do they pay you?

Interviewer 1 Well, it depends how you go about it. Because we like doing home births, we like...

Mary I'll be truthful, my dear; I think people should... there should be more home births. People should be able to please themselves.

Interviewer 2 Exactly.

Mary But of course in this day and age finance stops it.

Interviewer 1 Well, a lot of people aren't able to get the sorts of births they want on the National Health Service, so they come to us. Some can pay and some can't. So, we do a sort of Robin Hood: we get the rich ones to pay for the poor ones.

Mary That's fair enough, but I still think people should... when you hear about what it costs for people to be in hospital I still think that it would be cheaper for them to pay that woman, or the midwife rather, to have the child at home.

Interviewer 2 It would be cheaper for the government to have that sort of thing too.

Mary Of course.

Interviewer 2 On the NHS you should be able to get a home birth as you want it.

Mary Well, I still think that it should be; people should be able to please themselves.

Interviewer 1 Do you know anything about the women who used to pay Elsie? Did she have difficulty getting the money from some of them? Because they must have been very poor a lot of the women around here.



Mary Of course they were. But you see, the point of the fact is once again, um, Elsie lived with her aunt and, uh, her aunt, her aunt and her uncle helped to pay for her midwifery. Because she paid for her midwifery to become a midwife; you didn't, you didn't get it like you do today, you know.

Interviewer 1 Where did she train, do you know?

Mary I think it was, I think it was in Camden Town somewhere, because she used to come home and that sort of thing, well she used to. Um, getting round to pay, you see, Elsie's uncle he had quite a nice job so therefore if Elsie didn't have the money he did. So, once again, Elsie's work was her life; it was her baby. And if somebody paid her so much money a week, which they used to – they used to pay it – um, and they hadn't got enough or paid enough when the time come Elsie couldn't turn around and say, "Well, I'm sorry, I can't come" because that wasn't Elsie; that wasn't Elsie. Elsie used to turn round and make allowance for it. And she was always knitting for the babies.

Interviewer 2 Was she?

Mary Oh yes. She, she...

Interviewer 1 And did people used to give her things instead of money? Did she get presents from people?

Mary Not presents as such. Um, she, uh... they tried to give in kind, like food; especially when the war was on. Now, when the war was on I do know that Elsie exchanged her margarine for their butter because they couldn't afford the butter, the children... people with children. And they did; they offered her lots of things. But she didn't have to take them because fortunately her uncle looked after her.

And you see we lived in an area, a very poor area, you see. Uh, because other nurses used to say that thought Elsie had been a fool. But Elsie wasn't.

Interviewer 1 She just loved her work.

Mary If you go short, if you go short for the love of your work then you're not a fool.

Interviewer 1 That's right, yes, yes. And the women must have loved her?



Mary Oh they did, they did. Really and truly she was idolised. Um, and even today I've met people and, um, "Oh she was an angel". That's the expression. The description of people of Elsie, "She was an angel".

See there was another one, Nurse Strickland – you may know.

Interviewer 1 Yeah, I've heard of her.

Mary You may have heard of her. Actually she come from, I think she come from Greenwich District, St Alfrede's then, onto the district. Now, this is true, I've known her to ring up Elsie – she only lived in... you know Armada Street?

Interviewer 1 Yes.

Mary Gilbert House; she lived in Gilbert House. And I've known her to ring up Elsie and say, "Elsie, we've got a case with so and so, what would you do?" See. They all...

Interviewer 1 She supported other midwives.

Mary Yes.

Interviewer 1 That's good.

Mary Then there was a Mrs Rowe from Greenwich, South Street. I don't know if you've ever heard of her?

Interviewer 1 No.

Mary She, um, actually she was at Elsie's funeral. She died, Elsie died about 5th May, 4th May 79, and Rowe she followed on about a fortnight afterwards. Because I was in Broadstairs and they rang me up from the hospital to say that she'd passed away. But Mrs Rowe was a silly lady; she neglected herself. She was in St Alfrede's about three times with malnutrition.

Interviewer 1 Oh that's sad. Was that when she was working as a midwife or when she got older?

Mary When she got older.

Interviewer 2 Oh, isn't that sad?

Mary It's a sad affair, you know, because she was a very good midwife.

Interviewer 1 Did Elsie have very good health? She must have been losing sleep a lot; how did she keep going?

Mary She kept going extremely well ((coughs)) up till about, um, um – now let me think – I suppose it would be about in her 50s. Because, you see, when Elsie went to do training for a midwife she was – her health didn't falter till she got older – but she was six stone ten, Elsie. And, um, when... whilst she was... done a bit of private nursing there she used to go away with several mothers – they were a bit better off than what these people are. And, um, one in particular she went to Bournemouth after three weeks after the confinement, when she was able to get up – because as you know they used to keep in bed for a fortnight then – she went with this person for a fortnight or three weeks to Bournemouth. And she put on weight there and she never lost it; she never lost that. She went up to, she was five foot... four foot ten, and she was about, oh, ten stone.

Interviewer 1 Was she?

Mary Over the years, period of years. Then when she retired, um, I don't think it was... I don't know whether it was her health then although I knew that she wasn't very good in her health from about her 50s, late 50s. Um, and she went right down when she retired to six stone again.

Interviewer 2 Did she? Must have been sad for people to see.

Mary Yes. No, she, uh, she... And of course she had the, uh... they said, they said – she wasn't working – they said that she was epileptic.

Interviewer 1 Did they?

Mary They said, the health visitors had never heard of anybody at 65 becoming epileptic. I don't know; I've never studied medicine.

Interviewer 1 She retired when she was 65?

Mary 65 yes, yeah, because that was the age then. And, um, then she had, when she was in the hospital, she had a stroke.

Interviewer 1 Did she?



Mary Hm. She died in the Greenwich District. And, um, she only went away for two days and, um, I forget now, she had several things at the District. We had the doctor from Greenwich District did domiciliary with her GP, he came over and he chatted; but she wasn't with it at all.

She had a good life because, as you say... as I said, she... we, we had quite a nice period of holidays together when she retired.

Interviewer 2 Did you? That must have been fun.

Mary Well, actually we went away with midwives.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Mary There were five of us one year. We used to go... they used to go to Spain; never interested in Spain. Italy.

Interviewer 1 Italy did you?

Mary Italy yeah.

Interviewer 1 Wonderful.

Mary Italy and, uh, Switzerland.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Mary Austria.

Interviewer 1 Gracious.

Mary Well, it was very nice. I was more interested in such places as Italy because of the place of interest, you know. You know, we went to Rome, and, uh, well we stayed in Lake Como. You know?

Interviewer 1 Yes, I know it; I've been there.

Mary ((inaudible)) we stayed there. No, um, Elsie saw more life – no disrespect to her aunt and uncle – she saw more life after they'd gone because she, uh, she was freer, see. And, um, mind you she really and truly she idolised her aunt and uncle.

Interviewer 1 Did she?

Mary Oh yes. They were her parents, as the saying goes. But no, she was very good.

Interviewer 1 What sort of a person was she? I mean, how would you describe her? Was she very cheerful, chirpy? Or was she quiet?

Mary No, no. She was, um, she was chirpy; very sociable; but she wasn't rowdy, she wasn't loud – definitely not. You use, I've met so many midwives and they vary. The point of the fact is that what a patient would say to Bickerton – that was the midwife that used to lived in New Cross – they wouldn't say to Elsie.

Interviewer 1 Really?

Mary They never joked out of the way with Elsie. They were sociable and laughed, you know, a giggle; but there was never anything out of the way said. Like another nurse, Bickerton would – she used to live in New Cross – she would speak her mind sort of thing. But Elsie never; she was never one for, um, a joke the wrong side of the thing, you know. Well, that was the way she was brought up. Yes, that's the way she was brought up.

But, um, no, there were a couple of letters there that will tell you how she was thought upon, you know.

Interviewer 2 There's a lovely one here about sort of a reference.

Mary Dr Cowen. Now, if there's one there about Dr Cowen, that was when she was in – I don't know exactly the name of where she was, nursing home or something like that – and he used to ring up for Elsie and he wanted the little nurse.

Interviewer 2 Really?

Mary Yeah. And, um, he turned round and said to Elsie – and this is only Elsie telling me – he said, "If you stay with me, nurse, you'll never be poor". But she chose to come home amongst the poor. But he used to go to all these cases, you know, around Camden Town way, which was somewhere then; I don't know what it's like now.

Interviewer 2 Still pretty good. ((Laughter)) It's on the upper again, yeah.



Mary Oh well it would be now, yes. It used to be. She was, um... she wasn't miserable; far from miserable.

Interviewer 1 No, she was cheerful.

Mary She was a cheerful sort of person, yes.

Interviewer 1 And was she very warm with the women?

Mary Oh yes.

Interviewer 1 Was she quite tactile with them? When they were in labour and things did she support them by giving them a hug and that sort of thing?

Mary She was very thoughtful, um, and she looked after them. And there was never, never no cross word. And I've been... and I've heard somebody else, you know, "Now come on, you can't carry on like that" you know.

Interviewer 1 She wasn't like that?

Mary She wasn't like that, no, definitely not.

Interviewer 1 That's nice.

Mary No, Walkerdine wasn't like that. Because, uh... and then you see the point is that really and truly I should imagine that Elsie, never been married, never had any children, you could have expected her to be the reverse really. But no, she was very, very patient.

Interviewer 1 Were there lots of young women giving birth in Deptford, unmarried women?

Mary Well, you know, not so much then; not like now, is it. Well, you're old-fashioned if you disagree with it this day and age! ((Laughter)) this is the thing, isn't it? But no. I mean, let's face it years ago it was a crime,; wasn't something that was accepted like now. But Elsie never made no difference about that, no, no. But I don't think there was, um, not the number we've got today – let's put it that way.

Interviewer 1 Do you think women used to approach her about how they could control the number of children they had? Did they ask her about contraception and abortion and things like that?

Mary Well, I don't know about abortion; but I should imagine, I only should imagine that they should talk to her about that sort of thing.

Interviewer 1 Because they had that sort of...?

Mary There was one family in, uh, Deptford and, uh, Elsie had told them that she thought that she should have, um – not abortion – sterilisation. And of course the husband turned around and she said, "Well, of course you'd better see so-and-so". I forget the name now, although I knew them well. And he said, "If it's going to interfere with my pleasure no". And she had, she had children, you know.

Interviewer 2 Dreadful, isn't it?

Interviewer 1 How did Elsie feel about that? How did she feel about the men?

Mary But the point is, dear, she could only advise; you can't compel. Even in this day and age you can't compel.

Interviewer 1 That's right. But did she used to complain about some of their attitudes, some of the men's attitudes?

Mary Not many, not many, no. She, um, uh... there were very few that she would bring her work home, you know.

Interviewer 1 Really?

Mary Unless of course, um, such as you know, when she was saying about that baby who died.

Interviewer 1 She was upset?

Mary He turned around and – you see, that was their first baby, the young couple – and he turned and he said, "Will it live?" So, Elsie said, "Look father" because she always called them mother and father.

Interviewer 1 Did she?

Mary Yeah. Never by names; mother and father. "Look father, don't ask me questions right now" because she said, "It's bad". The child didn't die... didn't live. And if you'd have seen the... I saw the husband and wife, they were handsome looking. Because these things happen; you

wonder where and how. I think it's something that they'd never got to the bottom of these births.

Interviewer 1 Sometimes she must have had babies that died at birth?

Mary Of course.

Interviewer 1 Did she used to bring that home and talk to you about it?

Mary Very little; very seldom. Very seldom. We didn't know much about that. Although according to, according to her register – which if you get the opportunity – Elsie didn't lose a lot of babies.

Interviewer 1 Didn't she?

Mary No. Not in, not in comparison, um, uh... I suppose really and truly there are far more babies born in hospital than what there is on the district. All right there was – we're going gback now to Elsie's time of midwifery – um, you see, the thing is that, um, somebody said, "Oh no, you didn't have them number of births... deaths on the district". Because you didn't have that number of births. I mean, in the hospital they were going from left, right and centre, you see, coming in to have their babies.

Interviewer 2 That's right.

Mary I think really and truly that this sort of thing, um, people should, we should go back to those times when people can, uh, please themselves about babies, you know, having them at home.

Interviewer 1 And she didn't lose many, as you say.

Mary I don't think so.

Interviewer 1 And apart from the woman that you remember who died in hospital, you can't remember her ever coming home and saying she'd lost a mother?

Mary I don't think Elsie ever lost a mother on the district. No, I don't think so. A baby she may have done; nobody knows until you're confined what sort of baby or state it's going to be in, do you?



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Interviewer 1 That's right.

Mary But a mother I don't think so, I don't think so.

Interviewer 2 Did she ever have the husbands in at the birth and that sort of thing?

Mary I don't think so. I think they were...

Interviewer 2 Because nowadays they do.

Mary Of course, they go for that sort of thing now.

[END OF FIRST AUDIO FILE]

[START OF SECOND AUDIO FILE]

Mary You get your information that you want.

Interviewer 1 That's lovely.

Mary That's my junk up there on the mantelpiece. Don't knock them down. You know why I put them up there: because otherwise I'd forget them. I don't forget... the first thing in the morning I take them, uh, you know. Bit of a... I don't know, take about two and a half in the morning and two at night, you know. I don't know what it's for. Blood pressure, is it?

Interviewer 2 Probably if it's two and a half in the morning and two at night. ((Laughter))

Mary I went into hospital in 1968 with a heart condition; so I haven't done too bad since, have I? ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 Not at all.

Interviewer 2 Certainly haven't.

Mary Lady, are you Australian?

Interviewer 2 I am. ((Laughter)) You've been very polite not to ask me before.

Mary You know I ((inaudible)) not because I look at that. I do look at the television but not too much. I was over there 1967.

Interviewer 2 Really?



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Mary 19... no, wait a minute, 19 – oh grief – 1979. Elsie died in the May, and I went over there in the December with my step-sister. I went over there for three months.

Interviewer 2 Did you? Is your step-sister over there?

Mary Her son was over there in Perth.

Interviewer 2 Oh really?

Interviewer 1 Did you used to cook meals for Elsie when she came back from deliveries?

Mary No. Um, you see, the point is Elsie's aunt and uncle they cooked for us, right; and then Elsie cooked for me. But then when Elsie started to be sick I took over. I wasn't no cook! ((Laughter)) I didn't... I'd been around: I'd lived with my stepmother and dad; then I went to live with my sister-in-law in the 30s because I lost my eldest brother – he would have been 80 odd now; um, then I came back and I lived with my sister. You see, I was always sort of cooked for. Then Elsie's aunt and uncle cooked for me, and Elsie. And I didn't start cooking until quite late life.

Interviewer 1 Did Elsie like cooking?

Mary Elsie liked cooking and Elsie was a nice cook. But unfortunately she started going... um, you know, one day I went home – I think we had meat pie for dinner; a nice cook – went home and all of a sudden there was, "You want some meat pie?" And she went and got one of these, not meat pie from the pie shop, a Birds Eye thing. I said, "Elsie, if you can't cook me a meat pie you won't have these; I'll cook them when I come home". ((Laughter)) I very seldom... I'm not one of these that live out of the tin, even now, no, no. I think, um, I've just sort of, um, it's only just recently that I've ever got anything out of even Marks & Spencer's. I've always cooked for myself.

Interviewer 1 Because you're obviously very capable because you were a fitter, weren't you? You say you were a fitter; I'd have thought you were very good at looking after yourself.

Mary Yes. As I say, with being a fitter it was electrical and tools.

Interviewer 1 But that's practical, isn't it?

Mary Yes, it is, it is.

Interviewer 1 Very practical work.

Mary I do; I look after myself. I mean, I cook every day.

Interviewer 1 Good.

Mary Um, not today; just potatoes today because I'm very fond of cold meat. If I had what I had yesterday, I had pork you see, and, uh, I had cold meat and boiled potatoes. And the Yorkshire puddings that I didn't eat yesterday I heated up today with jam on. I like to look after myself as far as food goes.

Interviewer 1 So, when Elsie went to women in labour did she stay with them during the labour? Or did she tend to go and go back again when they were getting on?

Mary I should imagine that that would be according to how far they were on in labour.

Interviewer 1 But she didn't stick with them throughout the whole of the labour usually?

Mary Not unnecessarily because, as I say, um, a midwife if they know their work they know how long they can leave a patient, don't they?

Interviewer 1 Did she ever not quite get there in time?

Mary A BBA?

Interviewer 1 Yeah.

Mary Oh yes! ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 Misjudged it; we all do that all the time.

Mary Of course, yes. But I mean, there were these unexpected arrivals. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 But sometimes, in your experience, did you think she was out for a very long time with say one woman waiting for a baby?

Mary Well, I suppose she had had times like that.

Interviewer 1 Where she was with somebody for hours and hours and hours.

Mary Where she wouldn't leave them; yes, I expect she did have. And, uh, she might just comment – she wouldn't have a lot to say about it – but she would comment such as to

say, "Oh I had a job with that" you know. But yes, I think she did. Uh, I don't think, irrespective of who it is what... and how you good you are at jobs, things don't go 100% all the way through, do they?

Interviewer 1 Sometimes you have to sit for hours.

Mary Well, this is the thing, you see. But I think, like yourself, um, you would go according to how the patient was, how long you could leave her, you know; that sort of thing. Of course Elsie... um, "Just" matter of fact I've been indoors when Elsie went, "I'll just have a cup of tea. I shan't be back for dinner, Auntie; I'm going to stay out". And she'd have a cup of tea and such and go back, you see. Oh yes, that was her way of life.

Interviewer 1 And did she people find her if she was on her rounds? Because she'd do postnatal visits, wouldn't she?

Mary Yes. But, you see, the point of the fact is that she always had, um, a slate, a slate, and she would put down on the slate where she was going, first, second, third, whatever the case may be. And, um, she would put the time approximately; definite time when she left home; approximately where she would be at different cases. Um, and then of course that would be... wouldn't be on the door or anything like that; her aunt or her uncle would have charge of that. They'd knock at Elsie's house.

Interviewer 1 And what about after they died, who looked after the slate for her?

Mary Well, 1955, um, the, uh, thing is that she would turn round then and leave something on the door: call at so and so. Of course you could then; but you couldn't now.

Interviewer 1 And did she walk to all her appointments?

Mary Oh, she walked.

Interviewer 1 She didn't have a bicycle?

Mary Uh, she had a bike for a little while, but not long. And that was in the very beginning. And, um, before Elsie was a midwife – let me point this out – while she was waiting to, to, uh, go into learn midwifery she went into needlework, and she used to make the, uh... you know... heard of Coal Row?



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Interviewer 1 No.

Mary It's down near Millwall football ground.

Interviewer 1 Oh right, yes, I know where you mean.

Mary She worked for somebody there and she used to do the linings for opera cloaks. She was a very good needle worker.

Interviewer 1 Was she?

Mary Yes, she was a very good needle worker. As she grew up and that she used to make her aunt's dresses and things like that.

Interviewer 1 Do you know whether she used to do her own suturing, stitching, if the women tore when they were having the baby?

Mary No.

Interviewer 1 She didn't.

Mary She didn't. She always called a doctor. I do know that much.

Interviewer 1 She could have probably done a better job than them if she was good at needlework!
((Laughter))

Mary Yeah. And what did they used to have then? I don't know. Gas and air they used to call it?

Interviewer 1 Yes. Did she use that?

Mary Oh yes.

Interviewer 1 How did she carry it? It's heavy.

Mary I don't know but she used it.

Interviewer 1 Did she?

Mary Yes. Because I think there's, it's in there, the certificate where she got the certificate that she was allowed to use the gas and air.

Interviewer 2 Did she used to carry chloroform before she had the gas and air?

Mary No. What was that? No, no, wait a moment, no. Is it pethadine?



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Interviewer 2 Pethadine. The injection.

Mary That was tablet form, was it?

Interviewer 2 Yes, you can get it in tablet. It would be morphine.

Mary No, that was much about – I mean, I'm not a midwife – that was much about the same effect as gas and air.

Interviewer 2 Yes. And she used to carry that around, did she?

Mary Oh yeah.

Interviewer 1 That would have been in the 50s probably. But before that she didn't have... I expect she used things like ((Weldor?)), did she?

Mary I wouldn't know the names of what she used.

Interviewer 1 It's probably in the register actually.

Mary Yeah, she... I mean, um, in the register she used to have the times she was called and such like, and write along, you know, comments on the various visits.

Interviewer 1 So, did she used to do things like call the doctor out for forceps deliveries at home?

Mary Yeah, yeah, I should imagine so. I mean, the doctor would, if she had an occasion to call the doctor, he would know if he wanted to use forceps and such like.

Interviewer 1 Do you have any idea what she used to do with the placentas?

Mary Well, years ago, you see, it was everybody was, uh, fires; there were no electric fires and gas fires years ago.

Interviewer 1 Used to burn it?

Mary Used to burn them.

Interviewer 1 Didn't put it in the allotment or the garden?

Mary No, no, burn them.

Interviewer 2 But burn them at them own home. Elsie wouldn't bring them back to burn them?

Mary No, no, burn them there.

Interviewer 2 Get a nice old fire! ((Laughter))

Mary No, no, they used to burn them, yeah. And of course, um, as you know, um, years ago – I don't know what there is now – but, um, there was more miscarriages then, you see. And, um, uh, then the, the nurse was expected to save all that sort of thing until the doctor had been and examined it, yeah. Oh yes, I do know that.

Interviewer 1 So, she'd have to go out for that sort of thing. I expect sometimes it was women who'd tried to abort as well.

Mary Well, this is it. I think, uh, people had more miscarriages then than what they do know.

Interviewer 1 Well, they used to do terrible things to themselves, didn't they?

Mary Yeah. I mean, let's face it now it's an easy way out now, isn't it – apart from abortion – with the pill for them.

Interviewer 1 It must have been desperate for some of those women.

Mary Well, they were having children continuously. But, um.

Interviewer 1 And sometimes I suspect they did terrible things to their bodies trying to get rid of babies.

Mary Well I suppose it's like anything else: if you interfere with nature we pay for it because, um, I mean I might sound old-fashioned, I think in years to come people are going to suffer for the pill.

Interviewer 1 Sure.

Interviewer 2 They already are.

Mary Really and truly because well, this is the way it is, isn't it.

Interviewer 1 That's right. Do you remember whether there were any handy women around?

Mary Of course yes. What do mean by handy? Women who followed Elsie and did the, uh, the donkey work?

Interviewer 1 Yes.



Mary Oh of course.

Interviewer 1 Tell us about that.

Mary You see the point is that I tried to remember if, I tried to remember if I could remember anybody that was alive, but they're all old and gone. But no, there was one, Mrs Shian, she used to live down ((Abinger?)) Grove, and she used to take home washing and the mother's dirty linen and stuff like that. And she used to turn round and, uh, she'd go and get a meal for them if they had other children and such like, if there was nobody else. That was Mrs Shian.

And then there was another lady, she used to live down Church Street, you know down Church Street, in the flats down there, a Mrs Tedman, you see; she used to do all that sort of thing for Elsie.

Yes, always had... Elsie very, very seldom had to do her own donkey work.

Interviewer 2 Who paid them?

Mary The family paid them.

Interviewer 2 Did they?

Mary Yes.

Interviewer 1 So, they'd go to most of the births really. And would they sit with the woman in labour and things like that?

Mary Well, if there was any occasion for them to be I should imagine. They did the donkey work: get the water and all that, and clear up.

Interviewer 1 And look after the other kids.

Mary Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer 1 Interesting, isn't it? We could all do with those women, you know.

Mary Yeah, but you see who would pay them now? I mean...

Interviewer 1 That's right. It must have been a marvellous job.



Mary I think it's like, it's like midwifery: if you're interested in looking after somebody and looking after babies then you do the work accordingly, don't you?

Interviewer 1 That's right, yes.

Mary I mean, um, Mrs Tedman and Mrs Shian they both had families.

Interviewer 2 What did they do with them when they went and looked after somebody else? Did the kids come along too?

Mary They looked after themselves.

Interviewer 2 The older ones looked after the younger ones.

Mary Yeah, used to go down the whatsisname. Oh yeah.

Interviewer 1 Did they used to do the laying out of bodies as well, you know, those women?

Mary Well, I should imagine that they should do. Because people, when people you know, people had lost anybody, they'd go, "Ask Mrs So-and-So, she knows a lot more about it than..." A lot of the people couldn't do it, so they were obliged to ask other people.

Interviewer 2 Did Elsie ever have to deal with stillbirths or...?

Mary I don't know about stillbirths. Um, I think stillbirths, um, I think they were taken away, weren't they?

Interviewer 2 Were they?

Mary I think they were taken away. The only thing if the child – I don't know what they do now – but if a child was born and breathing then that child had to have a funeral.

Interviewer 2 That's right.

Mary And they put them in a coffin with somebody else.

Interviewer 2 That's right.

Mary But what they do now I don't know.

Interviewer 1 The same thing going on, that's right.



Mary I mean, um, I think, um, to be truthful, you get cremation for everybody now irrespective. It's better.

Interviewer 2 The handy women, would they come in before the birth as well, in the last couple of weeks to help with the birth? Or were they mostly just at the birth?

Mary They most probably come, uh, when, um, just before the woman was in labour or something like that. They used to come along. And it would be, most probably it would, um, the woman that's waiting on the lady after, they would come along and say to Elsie, um, "Nurse, I think you should come along and see Mrs Smith" you see. "I think you should come along and see Mrs Smith; I think she's started" that was the term they used, started, that sort of thing.

But, um, I should have asked Mrs Smith to come across because... I don't know whether she did have Elsie. She's 60. She came up here yesterday. Um, I don't know whether she did. Shall I ask her to come across?

Interviewer 1 That would be lovely.

Mary It will take time because she's not a nut case, she's a heart case. ((Laughter)) She's 60 years of age.

Interviewer 1 Is she?

Mary She's 60 22nd March.

((Respondent 2 joins))

Respondent 2 "Sis, have you got the show?" "No, Mary" Good, I'm glad. When I told my mother that it was going to be Maureen, I'm not being rude, my mother said, "She's not bloody Irish". I said, "No, but that's what it's going to be so that would be nice".

Interviewer 1 And Elsie suggested the name to you?

Respondent 2 Oh she named her.

Interviewer 1 Did she?



Respondent 2 Oh yes. When she delivered her she said, “Oh, we’ve got a lovely Maureen here”.

Because I had two boys; and Maureen was my girl. She would tell you something. When she came up she said, “Oh, she’s lovely”. I said, “Yes, it’s Maureen, mum”. “What?” So, I said, “Maureen” She said, “She’s not bloody Irish” I said, ((inaudible)) nice. She was named by Elsie.

Interviewer 1 Isn’t that lovely? Can you tell us what it was like having a baby with nurse Walkerdine?

Respondent 2 Well, I can’t express it. It was marvellous, marvellous. Nurse Walkerdine wasn’t – if I can explain it...

Mary I’ve already told them what she’s like; don’t you contradict me! ((Laughter))

Respondent 2 I can only say what I know. You’ve not had any babies. ((Laughter)) But she was an angel through and through. She was an angel.

Interviewer 1 And she really cared for you?

Respondent 2 Yes. And if you needed bed clothes that nurse found them. In them days you often relied on neighbours if you didn’t have enough sheets. But nurse Walkerdine always found them.

Interviewer 1 Where did she get them from? She just asked people, did she?

Respondent 2 I would not know that. But nurse Walkerdine used to say, “Well, we’ll see if we can find you some bits”. And she did. Of course in them days there wasn’t money like there is today.

Interviewer 1 Everyone had to share more, didn’t you?

Respondent 2 That’s it. You had more friends and neighbours then than you’ve ever got now, ever.

Interviewer 1 People mixed together a lot more and supported each other, didn’t they?

Respondent 2 Yes, yes. I mean, my first child I only knew the people next door, and they were Catholics. And when my husband was doing night work, when I was getting nearer the time, I used to... used to knock, “Come in with me, Mrs Smith, till about nine o’clock”. That was in Lewisham.

Interviewer 1 That was in Lewisham?

Respondent 2 Hm. I had Maureen down at the Terrace in Church Street.

Interviewer 1 Were they all born at home?

Respondent 2 Oh yes.

Interviewer 1 Oh really.

Respondent 2 Well, we never went to hospitals in those days.

Interviewer 1 So, what was the midwife like that you had for the other children?

Respondent 2 I had a bad time with my second time.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Respondent 2 Because Frank was born in the October. But in the August, the August bank holiday my husband was at work, he worked at Harvey's, and I'd arranged with my husband to go over and meet him. I walked back through the park with Frank... with Peter, and I was carrying Frank. And coming down the steps at my mothers, Peter jumped in front of me, you know he's a child, and I felt the pains. But I did have a bad time with him.

Interviewer 1 That's unusual for a second baby, isn't it?

Respondent 2 Well, he was fixed you see. As the French midwife told me then, instead of your womb opening like that to deliver it got fixed and only that side opened. So, she had to press in to open the other side. And he was a 12lb baby. ((Laughter))

Mary I had a niece and nephew, 11lb and 13lbs.

Interviewer 1 So, how big was your first baby?

Respondent 2 8lbs.

Interviewer 1 12lbs! And then Maureen was how big?

Respondent 2 She was about 7lb.

Interviewer 1 That must have been easier.

Mary Sis, um, did you know Mrs Shian that used to go round with Elsie?



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Respondent 2 No, I knew Mrs Porter.

Mary Oh, Mrs Porter, yes. And Mrs Tedman?

Respondent 2 I know her.

Mary Yes, they used to go round with Elsie, didn't they?

Respondent 2 That's right.

Interviewer 1 We're very interested in trying to find some handy women; women who used to do.

Respondent 2 Mrs Porter's dead now.

Mary Well, of course this is what I'm saying, you see. I mean, Elsie was 80.

Respondent 2 Older than Elsie.

Mary And they were all older than Elsie.

Respondent 2 If the patient never had no relatives she's always call on them women.

Mary Oh yeah.

Interviewer 1 Did she?

Respondent 2 Oh yeah.

Interviewer 1 So, they really supported her work.

Respondent 2 Oh good grief; they couldn't fault nurse Walkerdine. They'd drop everything to go
and work with her.

Interviewer 1 Would they?

Respondent 2 Oh yes.

Interviewer 1 So, everybody really loved her by the sound of things.

Respondent 2 Everybody, everybody.

Interviewer 1 She sounds very special.

Respondent 2 She was.



Mary If you speak about Elsie or something, “Oh, she was an angel”. That was the expression that you’d hear, even after today people...

Respondent 2 I was just saying, if you never changed the bedclothes she’d say, “Don’t worry dear”.

Interviewer 1 Do you remember Maureen’s labour, birth very well?

Respondent 2 Yes.

Interviewer 1 And at what stage did nurse Walkerdine come and see you?

Respondent 2 Well, when my first labour pains started, uh, I said to my husband, “Going to have her tonight”. So, he said, “Well, if was you I’d pop round to nurse Walkerdine”. I said, “I can’t go out now”. He popped round. And she lived in Prince Street, and she said, “Oh well, how often is she having this pain? I’ll be round in an hour”. She was round in, well, three quarters of an hour. And by the hour Maureen was born. ((Laughter)) By the hour Maureen was born.

Interviewer 1 That was quick, wasn’t it?

Respondent 2 And that was nurse Walkerdine. She never let you suffer long, never.

Interviewer 1 So, she got there and Maureen was born soon afterwards.

Respondent 2 About quarter of an hour.

Interviewer 1 Wonderful.

Respondent 2 Yeah. Nurse Walkerdine would time your labour pains. ((Laughter)) It’s true, it’s true
Mary because when...

Mary She was clever.

Interviewer 1 I wish I knew how to do that.

Mary She was clever; there’s no doubt. Do you know I told, I think I told Sis, when... after the war she went back to her friends like visiting in Clacton. Well, Elsie didn’t smoke, she didn’t drink; but she used to go down to Butlin’s, um, funfair and she used to love the bingo rooms. I mean, and, um, when we... I used to go down and I’d say, “Well I’m down so and so”. Anyway, we sat there and there was a lady and a gentleman that run this bingo – I



suppose they got it through Butlin's because it was a Butlin's centre – and this lady would be walking around and she'd get to know people, you know; at the seaside resorts they used to get to know the people that came down every year. Anyway this lady said to Elsie one day, she said, "Do you know" she said, "If I was the other end of the big country" she said, "I'd know it was you by your hands".

Interviewer 1 Really?

Mary She said, "I wouldn't have to look at you; I'd know by your hands it was you".

Interviewer 1 What were her hands like?

Respondent 2 Oh, very small.

Mary Small.

Respondent 2 Small, weren't they?

Mary Yeah.

Respondent 2 Although she was small she had the strength of a lion.

Mary I tell you what I was telling them about, when she used to say, "Let me finish a bit of bread and cheese, Elsie" because, as I said, they never called Elsie by her Christian name. The majority, 90% was nurse.

Respondent 2 Nurse.

Mary And it was Lizzie Hughes, and that was the one. And didn't she have lovely children, Sis?

Respondent 2 Oh gawd yes; her husband was a busker, wasn't he?

Mary That's right.

Interviewer 1 What did he do to busk?

Mary He played music.

Interviewer 1 Where?

Respondent 2 Anywhere; down the clubs.

Mary Mouth organ attached.

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Interviewer 1 And other instruments as well?

Respondent 2 Mouth organ and banjo.

Interviewer 1 Really? And he made a living for them with that?

Respondent 2 Yeah.

Mary I've been in their flat many, many, many times and helped him to count his money.

Interviewer 1 Amazing.

Respondent 2 They used to live in the flats in, that's right, buildings.

Mary I don't know.

Respondent 2 Next door but one to my mum.

Mary Then latter years, Sis, they lived been in King Street.

Respondent 2 I knew them when the children were young and they lived in ((inaudible)) buildings.

Mary But they used to have lovely children.

Respondent 2 Yeah.

Mary Lovely fair haired curls.

Interviewer 1 So, did you have any other babies after Maureen?

Respondent 2 Audrey.

Interviewer 1 Audrey. Is that with...?

Respondent 2 No.

Interviewer 1 Did she used to visit you after you'd had Maureen?

Respondent 2 Oh, for ten days. You wasn't allowed to get out of bed. ((Laughter)) Oh no, you wasn't allowed to get out of bed in them days.

Interviewer 2 What happened if you did? ((Laughter)) I mean, did you do it or were you scared to?

Respondent 2 Well, lots of people did.

Mary You always done as you were told! ((Laughter))

Respondent 2 Not like today.

Interviewer 2 I wish some of our mothers were like that!

Respondent 2 Going back to Maureen, nurse Walkerdine delivered me about four or five o'clock in the afternoon. Normally her first call was to the last delivery in the morning and that would be around about nine o'clock. But nurse Walkerdine never came; she never came till about four o'clock. "How's the mother and the baby? I know I'm late; but I've had no sleep all night". "Oh, I'm sorry about that, nurse Walkerdine". "Yes" she said, "you'll never guess what happened to me". I told you Mary. She said, "At 12 o'clock at night the police came". So, I said, "Oh, so you've been up all night?" "Yes" she said, "but not with babies". So, I said, "Oh". So, she said, "I delivered a baby at nine o'clock – I think she said – and at 12 o'clock the police came and they took me back to the house". So, she said, "But the funny thing was" she said, "the woman that was going to attend her had a family of children. And when I got there, when I was called out, the overlay was turned back and paper was on the springs. And I said to the lady, you've had a family of children; have you ever delivered a baby on springs? I didn't know what to do". "That off," She said, "And that" she said I delivered a baby. At 12 o'clock I had to go back with two policemen to the house to have the mother removed off the bed. And I said to them, "That's pretty dangerous. Mother never had that child till say nine o'clock last night". So, she said, "I'm sorry nurse, we had to call you out to supervise it".

Interviewer 1 Why were they taking her off?

Respondent 2 Nurse Walkerdine had to take her off the bed, lay her on the floor and they stripped the bed. And underneath the overlay was no end of stolen new clothes. ((Laughter)) I know, I know.

Interviewer 1 Oh my goodness. What a story!

Respondent 2 It's true, it's true. I said, "Nurse Walkerdine, did you see them?" She said, "The strange thing was" she said, "I spoke to the woman, I delivered her children and she'd put the overlay right back and just newspaper". She said, "So, it wasn't there then". But at the



same time the husband had been arrested for the same problem. All those clothes he'd brought in he must have had under the bed.

Mary And they turn around and say, "I'll look after them; you know where the money is". This is the truth because I mean Elsie used to tell me about it.

Respondent 2 The man died in prison.

Interviewer 1 Did he?

Respondent 2 Oh yes.

Mary I'm trying to think of his name.

Respondent 2 I'll tell you his name, Mary: Marshall.

Mary That's it.

Interviewer 1 Why did he die in prison? Was he a young man?

Respondent 2 No, he was a man in his 50s. But he'd always done it. And he worked in the docks.

Interviewer 1 Did he? Did most people work in the docks around here in those days?

Respondent 2 Oh yes, yes, yeah. My father was a stevedore; my two brothers were stevedores.

There was no... it was, it was a saying in those days: you'll always know a stevedore because he wears a gold watch in the summer and he's asking kids for a piece of bread in the winter – because there wasn't much work about. ((Laughter)) It's true.

Interviewer 1 So, when you had Maureen did you see nurse Walkerdine in the antenatal period before you had her?

Respondent 2 I used to go round there once a month.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Respondent 2 Well, just to pay half a crown off of me bill. You see it was £2, so if you paid it...

Interviewer 1 Bit by bit.

Respondent 2 That's right.

Interviewer 1 And did she listen to the baby's heart and do things when you were pregnant?



Respondent 2 Oh no. She used to say, "How are you?" and if you wasn't too good then she would have... "I'll be round and have a look at you". That was all.

Interviewer 1 And what would she do if you weren't feeling too good? Would she take your blood pressure and all that sort of thing?

Respondent 2 Oh yes. She was very, very medically... well, she was medical; but she knew every mortal thing what to look for.

Interviewer 1 She'd listen to baby's heart and everything?

Respondent 2 Yes, oh yes.

Interviewer 1 With the old trumpet?

Respondent 2 That's it. I never, thank god, I never had any trouble like that, never.

Interviewer 2 But in those days it was only if there was something wrong that they'd check you over before.

Respondent 2 That's right.

Interviewer 2 Yeah, it was only if you said something was wrong; otherwise they'd just assume that everything was okay.

Respondent 2 That's right, yes.

Interviewer 2 And the only reason you went to see her was to pay off the bill beforehand.

Respondent 2 That's right. I mean, and then she would say, "How are you keeping? Have you felt any movements?" And she'd ask you questions like that.

Interviewer 1 But you could go and see her if you were worried about anything?

Respondent 2 Oh yes, oh yes. When she was in, I mean, there was never, "Will you wait a moment?" There was nothing like that. You didn't wait a moment with nurse Walkerdine; if you went there you saw her. And I feel sure, on my own belief, that if you went there while that nurse was having her dinner and say, "I'm sorry, nurse Walkerdine, I didn't know you were having your lunch". "Well, come along in; it won't take a minute". You wasn't put at unrest, you know, that you'd disturbed her or anything.



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Interviewer 1 Lovely isn't it?

Mary Hm. She was a wonderful natured woman.

Respondent 2 I was just saying, if you never had any bedclothes to change she always found you something.

Mary You know that pawn shop down Flagging road?

Respondent 2 Yeah.

Mary You know I went there one Sunday morning when something was... I forget, it was somebody down the flats in Church Street, and I went down there and got a parcel out. Nurse Walkerdine sent me. She'd pawned the baby's, mother-to-be had pawned the baby's clothes and the baby had come along before she was born and went down on a Sunday morning.

Respondent 2 That's right, Mary.

Interviewer 1 Did you have to pay for them?

Mary If you didn't have the money Elsie would give them the money.

Interviewer 1 Did she?

Mary Oh yes.

Respondent 2 That's what I just said; I mean, if you had no bedclothes you always knew nurse Walkerdine is going to find them.

Interviewer 1 Wonderful, isn't it?

Respondent 2 Hm.

Interviewer 1 So, she used to visit you every day for ten days.

Respondent 2 Ten days. And then she'd give you a brief examination on the tenth day. If you behave yourself in the morning and you've been all right you can sit in the chair for a little while. You'd like that. ((Laughter)) Well, she was such an angel that you had to do what she... well, for your own sake. I mean...

Interviewer 1 When she used to come and visit you postnatally how long do you reckon she stayed?

Respondent 2 No, she never used to come and visit us.

Interviewer 1 She didn't?

Respondent 2 Oh no, no.

Interviewer 1 She used to visit you for the ten days though?

Respondent 2 Oh, to wash the baby and see to you, oh yes.

Interviewer 1 What did she do when she visited you then?

Respondent 2 Well, if you had the baby today, like after six o'clock tonight, you would be her first patient in the morning. Now, if there's any trouble, if you had a restless night, come and tell me. So, your husband would tell her; but thank god I never had any like that. But when she came the next morning it would be, "How are you?" "I'm fine." "And how's the baby?" "Bit of a nuisance during the night, nurse". "Oh, well, I'll have a look at her". Now, she'd have... because lady, as Mary was talking about, would be the lady there to get you hot water and the flannel and the soap and the towels and to wait on her, to wait on nurse Walkerdine.

Interviewer 1 Right the woman, she'd be in there?

Respondent 2 That's right.

Interviewer 1 Postnatal, I see.

Respondent 2 Yes. And she was like nurse Walkerdine's assistant.

Interviewer 1 Did she arrive with her?

Respondent 2 She was always there.

Interviewer 2 Did she stay with you or did she come with nurse Walkerdine?

Respondent 2 No, no; she was always there before nurse Walkerdine came.

Interviewer 2 So, she came in the morning.



Respondent 2 When she was coming you sent for Mrs Porter; she would be there. "Have you sent for her?" "Yeah". Mrs Porter would come round, "I'll get the kettles on" see. And she had everything ready. Come in and got our bits and pieces in a drawer what we had to have. But Mrs Porter would get all the hot water and wait on nurse Walkerdine. When she was finished, "Do you want a cup of coffee or tea nurse?" "No, I won't stop because I'm expecting another call" or she would stop.

Interviewer 1 And then would Mrs Porter go home after the visit?

Respondent 2 No, she'd stay and see to the other children.

Interviewer 1 Would she?

Respondent 2 Oh yes. And then at dinnertime she'd go home, but she'd come back at night after their dad had given them their tea, to make sure they'd had a wash and go to bed. That was £2.

Interviewer 1 £2.

Respondent 2 £2 and a pint of beer at night! ((Laughter))

Mary Walkerdine, she used to, um, if you were confined in the morning she used to have an evening visit.

Respondent 2 Oh yes, oh yes.

Mary She used to go twice of the first, first two or three days.

Respondent 2 Always twice for the first one.

Interviewer 1 The woman that came and helped her would she come every day for ten days?

Respondent 2 Oh yes.

Interviewer 1 That must have been very helpful?

Respondent 2 I could have done it sort of thing; I could have volunteered to go. But I don't think I could have watched a baby being born.

Interviewer 1 No?

Respondent 2 I'm saying that; when I lived at Greenwich we had a new tenant come and she could see that I was pregnant, and she asked me the nearest... who I was having. Because I mean you didn't go to hospitals those days. And then I told her. Mrs Doubtfire was her name; she went down and booked up with her. Now, when Mrs Doubtfire was about to deliver her baby her husband came down for me, because he'd gone for nurse Walkerdine, and I was up there; and Mrs Doubtfire wouldn't do what nurse Walkerdine told her to do. So, she said, "Well, I'll leave you" she said, "and you can call me when you want me. I am not wasting my time". Nurse Walkerdine came from just over the bridge to Prince Street, and within half an hour I was there and I delivered that baby. ((Laughter)) I am telling you when I went downstairs – my husband was night work one week and day work another – and this week he was day work, and I could not keep a limb still, I couldn't. ((Laughter))

Mary I think even now I could do that in an emergency.

Interviewer 1 What did you do? Did you just catch the baby?

Respondent 2 No.

Interviewer 1 What did you do?

Respondent 2 Well, the baby was born. I just got a towel and held it. I didn't know what else to do.

Interviewer 1 Good on you! ((Laughter))

Respondent 2 I came home...

Interviewer 1 Who caught it when it came out?

Respondent 2 I did.

Interviewer 1 You did!

Respondent 2 I had to run for the nurse. And when nurse Walkerdine came back she said, "You could have had this an hour ago if you'd have done what you were supposed to do". And when I saw nurse Walkerdine the next day she said, "I am sorry, Sis, that you had to do that" she said. "It was so unnecessary. She was being an obstinate patient".

Interviewer 1 And did the woman deliver the afterbirth straightaway afterwards?



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Respondent 2 I don't know. ((Laughter)) Had the baby.

Mary Can you understand why these midwives don't like liver and bacon? ((Laughter))

Respondent 2 I didn't know about that; all I know is you had to wipe the baby's eyes and mouth.
That's all I done.

Interviewer 1 Do you remember when your own children were born what happened about delivering the afterbirth? Did you just push it out?

Respondent 2 I don't know. They just said, after they'd said, "Now, just go steady and just bear down gradually".

Interviewer 1 And they didn't clamp and cut the cord till it was out, did they?

Respondent 2 That's right.

Interviewer 1 They waited until the afterbirth was delivered and then they cut?

Respondent 2 That's right, yeah.

Interviewer 1 They didn't cut before the afterbirth came?

Respondent 2 No. You always bore down. After you'd relaxed after having your baby.

Interviewer 1 Yeah, you then pushed the placenta out and then they cut.

Respondent 2 That's right.

Interviewer 1 Because that's quite important for us to know, because nowadays as soon as the baby's out they clamp and cut.

Mary That's right.

Interviewer 1 Which we don't think is necessary.

Mary And then of course according to the length of the cord you've got more opportunity to ease the, uh, placenta out yourself, haven't you?

Interviewer 1 But it's better if the woman pushes it out.

Mary Yes, I suppose so.

Respondent 2 No, my afterbirth was always brought out before the cord was cut.



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Mary That's good, isn't it? Very interesting.

Respondent 2 Oh yeah.

Mary And when you were actually in labour did you get much instruction on what to do from nurse Walkerdine? Did she tell you to push or anything like that? Or did she just let you get on with it?

Respondent 2 When I was in labour? Well, you were always told to lay on your left side.

Mary For the delivery?

Respondent 2 Yes. And, you know, "Steady, that's right; now bear down slowly. Now, the next pain is going to be very hard". Oh, the first one was bad enough. ((Laughter)) When it was explained to you after it's the shoulders coming out; the biggest part. And after that you might as well say it's all over. But for the head coming into the world that's painful enough.

Mary I should imagine really – as I say, I've never had a child – but, um, I should imagine it's the head that causes the worst pain because the shoulders can give; but the head, you can't make the head smaller.

Respondent 2 Yeah, but the shoulders are wider, Mary.

Mary Yes, I appreciate that; but you can manipulate the shoulders and move them more so than what you could the head.

Interviewer 2 Sometimes you can tip them, the head is much slower and the shoulders sometimes pop through and actually tear.

Interviewer 1 Did you tear for any of your babies?

Respondent 2 No.

Interviewer 1 Not with the 12 pounder either?

Respondent 2 No.

Mary Good heavens.

Interviewer 1 Midwives knew what they were doing.



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Respondent 2 I never had a doctor. Because I mean if it was a tear you had to have a doctor.

Interviewer 1 I wonder how they did it. I'd love to know what they did with tears.

Respondent 2 What?

Interviewer 1 How they managed to get 12lb babies out without tearing.

Respondent 2 No, I never had a tear.

Interviewer 1 It's really good.

Mary I suppose really and truly it's according to the patient's interior and such like.

Interviewer 2 Nowadays there's a lot more tears. It doesn't make sense because it isn't bigger, you know.

Respondent 2 They're not all bigger babies.

Interviewer 2 And obviously they were huge babies in your day and age, and it is a matter of skills; and those skills have been lost.

Respondent 2 That's right.

Mary Well, this is it: those medical skills have gone.

Interviewer 1 They have.

Respondent 2 You're right, why have they gone and they should be there. If the midwife is going through the practice or through the, uh, learning to be a midwife and such like...

Interviewer 1 That teaches that you cut the woman, and now what they teach is that you cut the woman; they teach that you cut the woman and therefore she's not going to tear so much.

Interviewer 2 We don't do that.

Mary I heard of someone just recently down in I think Dartford somewhere, and they don't take them into the hospital, them, they take them into something like a nursing home.

Interviewer 1 A GP unit?

Respondent 2 I don't know; it might be. Now, this poor girl has just had her second baby, and it was born on the day of the Grand National when she was in labour. And the, uh... she was calling

the nurse, and of course the nurses were too bloody involved in the Grand National sweepstake, you see. This is the truth. Anyway, cut a long story short, she had her baby. And I think it was the day after, or a couple of days after, she was home; she wasn't in hospital very long – she wasn't in the hospital, she was in the nursing home or something – she had a very bad flood. So, they took her back to the nursing home. This is true. She was home a couple of days again and it happened again. Now, this time they took her back there, but they had to transfer her to the local hospital. And do you know what it was? The placenta had not all come away. Lucky that she didn't have septicaemia with that for a few days.

Interviewer 1 Nasty.

Respondent 2 Yeah. She's getting on all right now. I don't know what your business is...

Interviewer 1 We're midwives! ((Laughter))

Mary Blimey, Sis, I told you they were coming! I did.

Respondent 2 You didn't tell me their profession. So, you read that in the Mercury?

Mary Yes. In my candid opinion the nurses and the midwives they don't give enough time when a woman is in labour. It's all got to be done by the time. And as for this when they say they're on a drip because they're a week over...

Interviewer 1 It's ridiculous.

Respondent 2 Nurse Walkerdine will tell you, "You never carry a minute over; you carry nine months to the day".

Mary Talking about this, do you remember the – oh god, the name was on the tip of my tongue – a little while ago, it was down Prince... Gail's?

Respondent 2 Yes.

Mary Down Prince Street, they had a daughter that went into labour, and Elsie had her transferred to Greenwich and District Hospital. She was in there a day or a day and a half and she died; it was her first baby. Do you remember?

Respondent 2 That's right.



Mary And Elsie went back, Elsie went back to the hospital to see how she was. And she told the sister at the ward – and I remember Elsie telling me about this – that she should never have gone so long without having that baby when she first...

Interviewer 1 A caesarean section?

Mary Yeah. She died. It was her first baby. She was only a youngster, wasn't she?

Respondent 2 That's right. I suppose she was in her 20s.

Interviewer 1 Did they do many caesarean sections then? Was it very rare?

Mary Very rare. As I say, I wouldn't know so much there; but Elsie didn't take many babies into... many patients into hospital, did she?

Respondent 2 No, no.

Interviewer 1 You see nowadays...

Respondent 2 Call the doctor if...

Mary Oh call the doctor, yeah.

Respondent 2 It went no further than your own home.

Mary I mean, I was telling them when she had that... them triplets in Hyde Street.

Respondent 2 Yeah.

Mary Never called the doctor then.

Respondent 2 No.

Mary And, um, uh, I can't think of that woman's name now. Funnily enough I saw the... I saw a picture, a photo in there a little while ago; and I was wondering, I know she had three girls.

Respondent 2 That's right.

Mary And, um, uh, I don't think that was the, the whatisname, the triplets that she had.

Respondent 2 But I can see that woman now, Mary, but I can't...

Mary Was her name Dolly?

Respondent 2 Yeah, but Dolly what?

Mary I know she lived in Hyde Street, next door but one to Lizzie Ash.

Respondent 2 That's right. I'll give you an instance of nurse Walkerdine. My son married a Welsh girl; she lived in Brecon. She lost her mother, and she's going to have her third child. To be truthful, I'm telling you the truth, we didn't get on very well, with Dorothy. She was Welsh. She come up when she was courting; she'd get to us about half past nine, ten o'clock at night, have her meal, "Are you staying, Dorothy?" "No, I couldn't stop here. No, I've booked in at a hotel". Well, we're only working class. In the end my son said to her, who she was courting, the second one, "You only come here for a good meal because you can't get it at home". ((Laughter)) Mary knows the family. So, she's having her third child. I got a letter on Christmas Eve morning: could she kindly come to London to have her baby because she couldn't find nobody to look after the two children. I'm going to Gladys' for the Christmas, so she gave me the address, which was Oxford. Well, when I read this letter I thought oh my god – February she was expecting the child according to the letter – I didn't know where I was going. Well, I started out. In the end I finished up at nurse Walkerdine's – and I've told you this before – I showed it to nurse Walkerdine and I said, "I don't know where to go." I said, "She can't have it at home, nurse Walkerdine, because I've got two children, I've got my own family". She wrote me a letter and sent me to the Greenwich and District hospital. And thank god they booked her in.

Now, I got back home at two o'clock. My Frank and my Maureen were in, "Where you been, mum? No fire alight". "Don't you start! I've had enough". ((Laughter))

[END OF SECOND AUDIO FILE, INTERVIEW AND TRANSCRIPT]