

**Interviewee: Lily Good**

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; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2013)

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Duration of audio: 2:22:06

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**Description:**

Transcript of an interview with Lily Good relating to her experiences of childbirth during the 1920's and 1930's, including baby clothing, nappies, recommended sleeping positions, her mother's training as a midwife for the council in East Ham, deliveries, multiple births, delivering the afterbirth, baby feeding, and laying out dead bodies.

**Topics include:** Midwifery; Maternity services; Childbirth; Antenatal care; Homebirth

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**[START OF INTERVIEW AND FIRST AUDIO FILE]**

Interviewer 1 This is 25<sup>th</sup> September 1989. Maybe today we'll get an interview with Mrs Goodhead; retired handywoman.

Interviewer 2 Babies. Not in things like that.

Lily They're not monkey suits. ((Laughter)) No, they never had monkey suits! First of all they used to have the navel covered; but we used to do it then with scorched linen and bandage. And then there was the flannel binder, flannel, about five or six inches wide, wrapped round and round and round them. And then there was a flannelette petticoat they used to call it; but it wasn't a petticoat really. It used to be shaped at the top and come wide down, and they used to put that on them, see, over the arm like, you know, and they used to be done up down, right down the front. And then there was a flannel one next, you see. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 All right till you come to change them!

Lily The first one next to the gown... no, next to the baby, that's right, that was flannelette. Flannelette, then a flannel one, then another flannelette one, and then a stiff binder, very stiff. That was about six inches wide and that used to be wrapped round and round and round them, you know. But, um, the things though they were long, you see, and of course they had to have a napkin naturally. They used to fold it all up, see, to keep their little feet warm, you see. So, they was in like a bag sort of thing partly, you see. Well then they had a white petticoat, as they called it, that was like... it used to be called ((inaudible)) in those days – that on there. But that one, the ((inaudible)) used to hang down inside the robe, you see. Then they had the robe on, you see. All those layers.

Interviewer 1 Bet they were hot!

Lily Well then after that they used to have a yard square of flannelette. And you used to fold it up a pocket handkerchief and put round their little shoulders.

Interviewer 2 Really?

Lily Yes, oh yes. They had all the comforts. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 2 What happened when it was 90 degrees?



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Lily Wouldn't want it now! That's true though; that's right.

Interviewer 1 That was a lot of washing to do.

Lily Oh yes, a lot of washing.

Interviewer 2 And no washing machines.

Lily Well, why not? ((Laughter)) Why not? Well, cleanliness next to godliness they say. You can't leave a baby dirty, can you?

Interviewer 1 No, you can't.

Interviewer 2 He's watching it spray!

Lily They don't like dirty bottoms, do they?

Interviewer 2 That's right.

Lily They like clean bottoms; they don't like stinky bottoms.

Interviewer 1 That's right.

Interviewer 2 He doesn't seem to mind, does he? He's fast asleep.

Lily And now, you see, they lay the babies over on their face.

Interviewer 1 Some do.

Lily No, I don't believe in it. We never turned our babies over on their face.

Interviewer 2 Mine used to sleep like this.

Lily They were on their back.

Interviewer 1 That's right.

Lily They had to lie on their back so they got the air. No wonder there's so many cot deaths, poor little mites. I think a lot of it is through that, you know, the rear. Of course I mean what sense has he got to turn himself over? Now what sense has he got? He's not that clever.

Interviewer 1 Not really no, not yet. ((Laughter))



Lily Children are clever these days; but they're not clever enough to save their own lives, not at this age. ((Agreement)) No. Here I go again. I'm off again! ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 Did you not have cot deaths?

Lily Huh?

Interviewer 1 You don't remember cot deaths?

Lily What?

Interviewer 1 You don't remember babies dying from cot death?

Lily No. They never died when I was, when I was younger.

Interviewer 1 No?

Lily We never had no cot deaths.

Interviewer 1 Didn't you?

Interviewer 2 No, I think it's quite a modern thing. I don't remember.

Interviewer 1 Interesting.

Lily Yes. They never, never done that. And we used to feed them like before they had a bath; you feed them, see that they were comfortable and lay them down on their backs. And that's what we used to do. And we used to lay a little pillow, it was only about that wide, for his head, you know, like that way on, just the shape of his head, lay that down. We never had a big pillow under them.

Interviewer 1 No.

Lily Only to lie on. Then we did, of course. Well, we had to; we had to make them comfortable.

Interviewer 1 Did you swaddle them?

Lily Huh?

Interviewer 1 Did you swaddle them?

Lily Oh yes, yes. ((To baby)) They're talking about you, love. Open your ears, love, and listen to what they're saying! ((Laughter)) Bless his heart. I wonder if he'll always be like this, quiet.



Interviewer 1 He's not always quiet! ((Laughter))

Lily Oh, lovely though. I don't know how you could hurt them, not really. Terrible things they do to babies, terrible. And when we used to put our babies out in the prams, you know, they used to have a very fine net like nylon stuff so the bees and the flies couldn't get in to them, you see. And then they used to have a bigger one, a bigger net over the top of that so the cats couldn't get into them.

Interviewer 1 I remember that.

Interviewer 2 I had a cat one.

Lily You see. So, that's how they used to do it. Because I mean that's the only way really that babies used to get suffocated: the cats would get in and lay on their faces, you see, so. Simple, wasn't it, then? He's picking his nose. At his time of life, ((laughter)), his time of life! Ooh, that's rude.

Interviewer 2 No respect.

Lily Oh, he says, don't you say that; don't care about me you don't, no. ((Laughter)) Same to you with knobs on, love. Don't poke your eye out and then say I'd done it. No, no. ah. ((Gurgles to baby)) ((Laughter)) Oh, he don't mind. He don't mind, do you love? Your mother might, though. You might. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 No, you're all right. I'll soon tell if you if I do.

Lily Good job I'm not with him all the time – he'd be as potty as I am. ((Laughter)) But when he begins to toddle he'll be in all your cupboards, "What's this mum? What's that mum?" You'll have to chase him round. You'll have to have roller-skates on then to get around to him, won't she?

Interviewer 2 She will, yes!

Lily Yes, she certainly will.

Interviewer 2 I tell you what, you don't see toddlers with reins anymore. I haven't seen many.

Interviewer 1 They have leads now.



Lily The throwaway nappies.

Interviewer 1 Yes. Sorry! ((Laughs))

Lily They throw their money away. ((Laughter)) They do.

Interviewer 2 They didn't have them in my day.

Lily I mean, they could get a couple of yards of roller towelling, Turkish towelling, make the squares, hang them round, and then they could wash them out. ((Sarcastic voice)) Of course they're so tired now; so tired they can't put them out. They couldn't. ((Laughter)) But they were fresher than these darn things they buy now. I mean, you used to wash them well and rinse them well. And they used to be nice and soft and comfortable.

Interviewer 2 Hanging on the line like washing.

Lily But no. You see, when they change the baby another ten bob gone bang, in the dustbin. ((Laughter)) That's right though. Honestly, I'm not kidding.

Interviewer 1 Things have changed a lot, haven't they?

Lily Pardon?

Interviewer 1 Things have changed a lot.

Lily Ooh, changed. Ooh, no wonder the mothers are going barmy. No wonder ((laughter)) But mind you, I do think the babies used to have a lot of clothes on.

Interviewer 1 Did they?

Lily Yes, they used to have an awful lot of clothes on. Well, of course children when they used to have petticoats on...

Interviewer 2 Boys or girls.

Lily Girls would have three or four petticoats on, lace chemise, liberty bodice.

Interviewer 2 I used to wear a liberty bodice! ((Laughter))

Lily Flannelette petticoat, all embroidery. Knickers all embroidered; loads of ribbon on them. Oh, a girl wasn't frightened to lift her skirt up then because you had pretty knickers. ((Laughter))



Interviewer 2 They were down to the knee, weren't they?

Lily Huh?

Interviewer 2 Down to the knee?

Lily Oh yes. And you had a knee full of lace down the bottom and a ribbon. But we mustn't wear our Sunday knickers for the weekday, oh no, dare not, dare not.

Interviewer 2 I used to have Sunday shoes for my children. Little white shoes for Sunday school.

Interviewer 1 Yes.

Lily I know I used to say to my mum, "Can I wear my Sunday knickers today?" "Certainly not!" Just like that, "Certainly not!" I said, "I only asked". ((Laughter)) "Well, you've been told, haven't you?" she'd say. ((Laughs))

He's quite contented, isn't he? He doesn't cry a lot, though, does he?

Interviewer 1 No, he doesn't actually.

Lily Not really?

Interviewer 1 No.

Lily He didn't ought to. ((To baby)) You'll make up for it when you grow older, mate. You'll lie on your skirt and he'll scream. ((Laughter)) Ooh, he says, ooh, scream, I heard the word scream. ((Laughter)) You heard the word scream, didn't you love? That's right. You scream hard so they hear you, love. Don't go in the corner and do it though; they won't hear you in the corner. They just shut the door on you. ((Laughter)) Oh.

Interviewer 2 Mrs Goodhead said every child she had she was in labour seven days with them.

Lily Of course they don't have the big shawls now, do they, with the big bows and ribbon; nor the fleece and capes, they don't have them either. They used to look ever so pretty. And they don't cover their face up with a veil now; keep the flies off.

Interviewer 2 That's a funny thing to do.

Lily No, they don't.



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Interviewer 1 When you had your babies who was your midwife?

Lily My midwife? Ooh.

Interviewer 1 Was your mother a midwife?

Lily She was a midwife, yes. She was a midwife for 50 years.

Interviewer 1 Was she?

Lily Yes.

Interviewer 1 Where?

Lily Huh?

Interviewer 1 Whereabouts?

Lily Over East Ham.

Interviewer 1 Was she?

Lily She, midwife at East Ham council for 52 years.

Interviewer 1 But she wasn't your midwife?

Lily No, no, oh no, nothing like that. ((Laughter)) Oh no, you mustn't mix pork with beef, never.  
((Laughter)) No. Pork with pork. Oh no.

Interviewer 1 Did your mother teach you lots of things about midwifery?

Lily Oh yes, taught me lots. She taught me a lot.

Interviewer 1 Is that why you decided to...?

Lily To take it on, hm.

Interviewer 1 To take it on.

Lily I don't think you can beat it really. It's nice to be able to bring somebody, bring another life into the world. But some poor little mites they're so deformed and terrible, aren't they? It's nice to know when they're perfect, isn't it? That's why I say if a baby is born healthy and perfect that's all you want. You can bring it up properly then.





Interviewer 1 That's right, yes.

Lily He thinks he's here for the day. He thinks he is. No harm in thinking is there, love? Poor little one. ((Laughter)) He's disgusted with me. Oh look at him, now look at him, now look. Now see, the picture of innocence. But when he gets another 20 years older I wonder what he'll be like. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 2 I don't think I shall be here then, shall I?

Interviewer 1 Of course you will. You're only 63 now.

Interviewer 2 I'm not 63!

Interviewer 1 62, aren't you?

Lily Christine? Nearly time you started again?

Interviewer 2 What did she say?

Interviewer 1 Nearly time you started again! ((Laughter))

Interviewer 2 It's easier the second time.

Lily You never know your luck.

((To baby)) She's round there mate. Can you hear her? I can smell me feed. He can smell his feed.

Interviewer 1 Mrs Goodhead, was your grandmother a midwife too? Your mother's mother?

Lily No.

Interviewer 1 So, how did your mother become a midwife?

Lily She was trained.

Interviewer 1 Was she?

Lily Oh yes, she was trained. Oh yes.

Interviewer 2 She must have been if she worked with the council.

Interviewer 1 Where did she train?



Lily Well, she trained several places. She trained at Woodbridge Hospital first because they lived up that way. And then she went to the London Hospital, London Hospital. She went to a hospital in the Midlands. She had a proper tuition, she did.

Interviewer 1 Did she?

Lily Yeah.

Interviewer 1 She was lucky. It was difficult to get training in those days.

Lily Yes, it was.

Interviewer 1 Very difficult.

Lily Very, yes I know, yes.

Interviewer 1 Did she have to pay to be trained?

Lily I know, yes.

Interviewer 1 You had to pay a lot of money, didn't you?

Lily Yes, oh yes.

Interviewer 1 To get your training.

Lily Yes, you didn't get your jam for nothing. ((Laughter)) Oh no, you didn't get your jam for nothing.

Interviewer 1 You had to buy your uniform and your books.

Lily Oh yes.

Interviewer 1 Everything.

Lily Everything.

Interviewer 1 Your equipment.

Lily Everything. Oh yes, you had to buy everything then. But as I say, they're lucky these days really, you know. Although I don't think the training is so severe as it was; I don't think so. It's a good job really for the woman's sake, the nurse I mean; they're run off their legs. That's why the nurses are all so short; their legs are run away with.



He said, what am I missing, what am I missing. ((To baby)) What are you missing, love? What are you missing, darling?

Interviewer 2 So, they did call for your mum whenever there was a baby being born?

Lily Oh yes.

Interviewer 2 And she went off. Did she have a little bag?

Lily Yes, a bag, yeah. They used to carry everything with them, you know.

Interviewer 1 Did they?

Lily Hm. Oh yes. But of course those days the midwife had to spend a lot of time with the mothers.

Interviewer 1 Did they?

Lily Oh yes, oh yes, they had to.

Interviewer 2 They used to move in with the mums, didn't they?

Lily They used to tie things on the bed for them to pull on, you know. Oh yeah.

Interviewer 1 They stayed with them all the labour?

Lily Hm?

Interviewer 1 Throughout the labour they stayed with them?

Lily Throughout the labour, yes, yes.

Interviewer 1 What sorts of things did they do to help?

Lily Well, they did lots of things really. They tested them, you know like, like you do do, you see. Well, there's something in the way well the baby won't come; it's got to be lifted, you see. We used to call it the shutter.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Lily Yes, we used to call it the shutter. Before the shutter was lifted the baby wouldn't come.

Interviewer 1 What did you do to lift the shutter?



Lily Well, you had to – like woman to woman – you had to use your fingers and push, you see, with your glove on. And you had to lift it.

Interviewer 1 Lift?

Lily Like inside, yes. Little, like I used to call it the square I used to, “We’re going to the square now!” ((Laughter)) And once that was lifted, you see, you used to ease them, you see, a lot. Yes.

Interviewer 1 What did you do when they came down on their backs, posterior, and it took a long, long time?

Lily Time, yes.

Interviewer 1 Is there anything you did to hurry it up?

Lily Well, there was not a lot you could do really.

Interviewer 1 There wasn’t, was there?

Lily But I supposed they all used to do it. When they was in real labour they used to lay on their beds with their legs a certain way, you see. And we used to massage their stomach like that, you see. And then when the pains got worse we used to press on the stomach.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Lily On the top of the stomach, see. And then we’d put our hands down like that, you see, and hold it.

Interviewer 1 Hold the baby down onto them.

Lily Hold it down a bit, you see.

Interviewer 1 And that helped, did it?

Lily Oh it did help, oh yes, it did help, oh yes.

Interviewer 2 They used to use chloroform, did they?

Lily Oh yes. Well, matters are different now.

Interviewer 1 Did you ever see breached babies?



Lily Bridge babies?

Interviewer 1 Breached, feet first?

Lily Oh yes. Bottom first they used to come. They used to have their little feet doubled up under their bottom. Breach, I think it was shocking.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Lily Yes, I thought it was dreadful. And it was very awkward if the baby laid sideways and all. You had to keep pushing it up, you know. But there you are; we had to help them somehow, didn't we?

Interviewer 1 And what about twins?

Lily Twins?

Interviewer 1 Did you ever see twins?

Lily Twins, yes. I delivered triplets. Yes.

Interviewer 1 At home?

Lily At home, yes. Well, she should have had triplets. Now, we had a doctor and another midwife, like, and they told her – she'd been in labour a long time – to get on the bed and lay down. I thought yes, that's right mate. ((Laughter)) When the doctor had gone, and midwife, they said, "If anything gets worse phone us and send someone down and we'll come straightaway". So, when they'd gone about 20 minutes I said to her, "What are you laying there for?" ((Laughter)) She said, "Well, they told me to lie down". I said, "You get up on your feet" I said, "That's it".

Interviewer 1 You were right.

Lily I was right. She got up and then her pains came on worse, you know. When they began to come on I said, "Well, you can lay on the bed now". She said, "Can I?" I said, "Yes". ((Laughter)) Of course the pain got worse and worse, you know. They thought she was going to have twins; but should have been triplets. Little girl came first – she's still alive, she is.

Interviewer 1 Head first?



Lily Yes, she came head first. Well, the next one was a little girl, but it was dead. And the other one had kicked it to death coming out, you see. Well, then the third wasn't a real baby; it was a conception, you see. And of course, oh the mess – don't talk about the mess. ((Laughter)) You don't think about the mess, do you? And, um, I got them all the way like. Of course a live baby you had to, you had to save it; had to cut its cord, you see. I don't know if they do that now, but they used to have to hold the cord for so long.

Interviewer 1 Did they?

Lily So many inches away from the mother to see if the heart was beating properly.

Interviewer 1 Oh right, to feel a pulse.

Lily Yes. Well, if that was all right then you were able to – I don't know what they do now – they used to hold it over like that, see like that, you see, and they used to bind it round with a flex like, you know. Then you see they had that loop there, they'd bind it round like that, you see, and then they'd leave it for a little while until the blood had run out of that part. And then they'd slip that off.

Interviewer 1 Oh really?

Lily Yes, see, slip that off; so she wouldn't bleed to death, and the baby, you see.

Interviewer 1 Isn't that interesting?

Lily Yes.

Interviewer 1 And when they snipped it off what did they do with the bit that was left?

Lily Oh well, that belonged... that was inside the mother, wasn't it, the other part of the tube.

Interviewer 1 Oh I see.

Lily Yes, see.

Interviewer 1 It's the bit on the mother you're talking about; not the bit on the baby?

Lily Yes, that's right.

Interviewer 1 I see.



Lily A bit about four inches away from the baby, you see. That's how you was able to double it over, you see, then wind the flex around it.

Interviewer 1 And then cut?

Lily And then they'd cut, you see, so.

Interviewer 1 I'm with you. That's interesting. And then they waited for it to fall off?

Lily Well, yes, but it didn't fall off till about ten days, you see. We used to do it with scorched linen.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Lily Yes, scorched linen. You had to clean it; you had to clean the mother first. And of course you had to, um, when the baby was born, as you know, you had to wipe the eyes out, wipe the eyes; and put the finger in their mouth and with cotton wool bring the flesh... the blood away, you see; otherwise it would have swallowed the blood and choked. But I don't know what they do now. They ((inaudible)) you see. But, uh, that's how that was, you see.

And then, as I say, she had the dead baby, this little girl. And of course...

((To baby)) don't scratch your nose! You're too young to pick your nose yet. ((Laughter))

And, uh, so that's how that happened. And of course after the little girl come I said, "There's something else, something to come" I said, "I don't think it's a baby; it doesn't feel big enough, you know". It was a false conception, you see. And then the afterbirth; you know how the afterbirth is. It was a little afterbirth like that. Like a double afterbirth; very small.

Interviewer 1 Interesting.

Lily But today I don't know what they do. But we was always taught when the afterbirth come we put it in a chamber or a bowl or something, you see. When we'd see the mother was safe we used to pick the afterbirth up, stand it on our hand there, and turn it inside out to see if there were any little bits of the afterbirth broke away. And if it was so we had to see that that came away, or else it would have mortified.

Interviewer 2 That's right.



Lily You see that's the thing, you see. But it's a lot; a lot of rigmarole really, ((laughter)) isn't it?

Interviewer 2 Yes.

Lily You know, all these; all the things. I think it's interesting work. Very interesting.

Interviewer 1 Did you ever have an afterbirth that wouldn't come?

Lily Oh well, of course, sometimes they take longer, don't they?

Interviewer 2 How long is long?

Lily Well, the afterbirth, the longest I had afterbirth is three quarters of an hour before it came.

Interviewer 2 Mine was three weeks! ((Laughter))

Lily It was all right.

Interviewer 1 Was it?

Lily Yes, it wasn't broken inside or nothing. That was all right, so.

Interviewer 1 Did you help it in any way?

Lily Hm?

Interviewer 1 Was there anything you could do?

Lily Well, there's not much you can do, only just press on the stomach. But no good pressing on the place where it is; you've got to press above it to force it down, you see. But of course different rules today, you see, that's the thing, isn't it.

Interviewer 1 Well, in hospitals today they give an injection.

Lily Oh yes, to make...

Interviewer 1 To make the uterus contract.

Lily It makes it looser, yes.

Interviewer 1 But they get problems with that.

Lily Yes, of course they do. Well, they get...

Interviewer 1 They get them trapped.





Lily Yes, they do get trapped. Yes I know, yes. That's very bad when they get them trapped, isn't it?

Interviewer 1 Not good at all.

Lily No. Very, very bad that is.

Interviewer 1 So, I only use that injection if the woman's bleeding badly; it's useful then.

Lily To prevent the haemorrhage.

Interviewer 1 But the mother will push the placenta out when she's ready if you leave it, won't she?

Lily That's right.

((To baby)) Yes, I know. I've got nothing for you, mate. Put his tongue out at me! You put your tongue out at me already! I've got a tongue too, yes I have! I've got a tongue. The way he's looking at me, one eye! ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 Hungry.

Lily Ooh, I haven't got none, mate. No, I haven't got any. You should tell mother couldn't wait.

Interviewer 2 Did you know, Mrs Goodhead couldn't feed any of her children?

Lily Ooh, going to wee now! Oh, he's going to wee! ((Laughter))

Interviewer 2 She delivered some in this room actually during the war.

Lily Is it his feed time? Mind you don't fall.

Interviewer 1 I'll sit here.

Interviewer 2 Do you fancy a choc ice? ((Laughter))

Lily How often do you feed him?

Interviewer 1 When he wants it. ((Laughter))

Lily God help you when he gets a bit older! ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 In your day did all the mothers breastfeed?

Lily Not all, no; some couldn't. I never fed one of mine.



Interviewer 1 Didn't you?

Lily I never had a drop.

Interviewer 1 Isn't that amazing?

Lily Yes, they send all over the place, different hospitals, sent abroad for hospitals to see if it could make my milk. No, never had a drain.

Interviewer 1 Isn't that a shame?

Lily Sad, wasn't it? Still, never mind.

Interviewer 1 So, what did you feed them on? Cow's milk?

Lily No... well, it was really, but I fed them on Robinson's Baby Growth. Of course you made that with milk, you know. But you mustn't make it too thick; you made it thin so they could drink it through the bottle, you see. That is the finest thing to bring a baby up on – well, I think so, yes. We weaned little babies who have been starving; and you make... feed them on that they build up quickly, very quickly.

Interviewer 1 Did you ever have any premature babies, any very little ones?

Lily Oh yes. I've seen them as big as one and three quarter pounds.

Interviewer 1 And they survived?

Lily Yes, some of them did. Of course some of them died, you know. All depends I think on the upbringing by the mother, you see what I mean.

Interviewer 1 It's a lot of work, isn't it, getting the little ones...?

Lily Oh yes, yes. No, the only one down here – you remember the ((inaudible)) don't you?

Interviewer 2 Yes.

Lily Well, you know Vera?

Interviewer 2 Uh huh.

Lily Well, when Peter was born he was a little skeleton. She came along to me and she said, um, "I've brought along Peter, my baby, to show you". I said, "What?" She said, "I brought him



to you". I said, "Vera" I said, "that baby's starving to death". She said, "He's not". I said, "He is". I said, "Give me that baby". And I fed him a tin of Robinson's Baby Growth. I said, "And the bottle". She said, "What for?" I said, "Look at him!" ((Laughter)) And I made him a, I made him half a bottle, about that much; of course sweetened it for him, you know. And you know that baby drank every drop out of that bottle.

Interviewer 2 He was hungry.

Lily Well, in three weeks, in three weeks he'd picked up two and a quarter pounds. He was just like a little old man.

Interviewer 2 I can remember that, you know. Wizened he was.

Lily Shocking, shocking. Did you ever see him when he was...?

Interviewer 2 Yeah.

Lily When he was a little old man? Ooh, horrible.

Interviewer 2 Like a little gnome.

Lily Ooh he was, ooh, terrible, wasn't he? Ooh, great wrinkles around him. His little neck was wrinkled and his little hands, you know.

Interviewer 2 That was the one she went to church with when she got married, wasn't it?

Lily Pardon?

Interviewer 2 In white. A bouquet covered him. ((Laughter))

Lily But I mean, it's a simple thing: you can save life if you know how, you see. But you can't bite it in the bud, well. He would have lived another week; it would have died.

Interviewer 1 So, did your mother teach you lots of these things? Your mother taught you?

Lily A lot of things, yeah.

Interviewer 1 Did she?



Lily Oh yeah, she told me lots of things, how to do things, you know, and that. But she said, “Never be frightened. Whatever comes never be frightened.” She said, “You never know what’s going to come”. Well, you don’t, do you?

Interviewer 1 No.

Lily Never know. You know something’s coming but you don’t know what. Might be a lifeboat, mightn’t it? ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 Never had that happen! Did your mother also get sent for to lay out bodies when people died?

Lily Don’t talk about that. I’ve laid hundreds out.

Interviewer 1 Have you?

Interviewer 2 She laid my grandma out.

Lily I laid your grandma out, didn’t I? Ooh yes, all times of night and day.

Interviewer 1 Who taught you to do that?

Lily Either to get a baby to come in or to take one out. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 Who taught you how to lay out bodies? Your mother, was it your mother who taught you?

Lily No. I laid a body out on my own. My mum said that was the best way to learn.

Oh, I’m going to tell you a joke. You’ll never believe this; you won’t never believe it. Now, when I was about 24, 24 or 25, I was staying at Craven with my sister, and the man next door to her he died about, about half past eight I suppose it was. She came along; she said to my sister, she said, “Can you come in?” she says. So, she said, “What for?” So, she said, “There’s something the matter with Jimmy” she said, “I don’t know what it is”. So, she said, “No good me coming” she said, “I couldn’t tell you” she said, “because” she said, “I’d run away”. Well, anyway I went in; I went upstairs. I went back, “Sorry” I said, “can’t help him now”. He was gone; he was dead, you see. ((Laughter)) Well, the funny part, this is the funny part – this is the funny part now – ((laughter)) well, of course I had to wait for a doctor to come to certify the death before I could move him, you see. And he was rather a tall man; he was about 40

I suppose. Anyway, after the doctor had been and gave me the registration of the death – you see, because the undertaker won't come until you get that – anyway I got him along the passage, the landing; I got him along the landing all right. I put him on a blanket and pulled him along. Dead. Honestly, I pulled. ((Laughter)) Funny thing though...

Interviewer 1 Wait for it. You've heard this one, have you? ((Laughter))

Lily Anyway, I couldn't get him down the stairs. ((Laughter)) And his wife wanted him brought down and put in the front room on the table. Well, they used to do that at one time. I got him along the landing to the top of the stairs. I thought I can't get him down the stairs. So, I walked passed him like on the stairs. I went down. There were two men come by ((laughter)) so I said, "Excuse me" I said, "Would you be kind enough to come and give a hand?" They said, "Yes, madam, yes" they said. Of course there was this dead bloke on the stairs. Well, I'd got a blanket under him, you see, so we could pull him on the blanket. Well, we got halfway down. I said, "Look" I said, "I'll take his shoulders, you see" which meant I had to bend over him, you see. I said, "You two men take the weight from his torso to his feet". I said, "Go each side of him" I said, "one take one leg and one take the other. Put your hand up his back like, so his back don't break". It wouldn't have mattered because he was dead. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 2 Did they know this?!

Lily But this is the funny part about it: "Ooh" I said, "I think I can manage". They said, "Can you manage?" I said, "Yes, I'll hold his shoulders to save him bumping on the stairs" you know. Because the dead they bruise, you know. And these two mean they stood each side of him. Of course the staircase is not very wide. And I think we got him down about three stairs after that, about halfway down – I laugh myself...

((Door knocks)) I won't be a minute. Sit down. There's my old friend, my neighbour.

Interviewer 1 Oh, that's nice.

Lily And we got halfway down the stairs, halfway down the stairs, and of course moving the body brought up wind, you know. "Oh! What happened?" The two men run! Talk about... talking about dead men now.



Female Voice I know. I moved in time!

Interviewer 2 I've often told her she could write a book, you know?

Lily They never...

Interviewer 1 I told her that years ago, she should.

Lily And run, you see, out the door. Well, of course them dropping him through me over the top so I was laying on top of him! ((Laughter)) And he wouldn't make love to me! He wouldn't make love to me at all! Now I said now I'm in a pickle. I got him down in the end.

Interviewer 1 On your own?

Lily Yes. I pulled the blanket down, you know, like slowly.

Interviewer 1 It went bump, bump, bump!

Lily I got him into the front room, you see. I took one of the panels out of the table and put it down like that, you see. I laid a blanket on that and I pulled him up onto the blanket. Then I went the other side of the table and pulled the blanket, pulled him up on the table. I said, "You're all right now, mate" I said. ((Laughter)) His wife says, "Have you got him on the table?" I said, "Yes, he's on the table. He's all right". "Ooh" she said, "that looks better, doesn't it?" I said, "Yes. Ooh!" She said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Oh, my arm!" My chest was aching, you know, the weight.

But fancy two men running away! ((Laughter)) Isn't it daft? I mean, you can understand women running.

Interviewer 2 Why?

Lily Women run; you don't know what they might have missed, do you? Don't know, so. Oh so I've told you my story; the story of my life.

Interviewer 1 Chapter one. It's a wonderful story.

Lily Have you seen the baby?

FV I can see it from here.

Lily You've seen it before?



FV No. Fast asleep.

Interviewer 1 He laughed then, smiled.

Lily So, there you are; that's that.

Good as gold.

FV He's wonderful.

Lily ((To baby)) It's all right you should laugh; you ought to have been there.

Interviewer 1 Bit before my time I think!

Lily You'd have run off. You're early.

FV No, I got the bus, you know, the usual bus.

Lily The ladies have brought me money for me, to get my pension for me.

Interviewer 1 That's good.

Lily Oh, it's very good.

Interviewer 1 So, when was the last time that you delivered a baby?

Lily The last time I delivered a baby: that was Sandra, wasn't it, my granddaughter.

Interviewer 2 I don't know.

Interviewer 1 Really?

Interviewer 2 Over the road; house opposite.

Lily Yes, I delivered two of my grandchildren.

Interviewer 1 How lovely.

Lily Teri's baby, didn't I, Teddy, I delivered him in the room upstairs. Sandra, I delivered over the road.

Interviewer 1 Wonderful.

Lily Oh yes, I believe in keeping it in the family.

Interviewer 2 You had one in this room, didn't you?

Lily Oh a German woman, that was. A German girl.

Interviewer 1 What was she doing here? Was she living here?

Interviewer 2 Just popped in for a baby.

Lily No, she wasn't living here. She was ((inaudible)) when the war was on. So, they said would I put her up; I said, "Yes, I'll put her up". But I didn't know she was expecting like that, did I? ((Laughter)) So, I said, of course I had another bed in here then, I said, "You have that bed, lay on there". I said, "What were you expecting?" She said, "I don't know". I said, "Well, don't tell anybody". All of a sudden the fireworks began to go. I thought I don't know. I sent for the doctor, you know. That was in this house; this room.

Interviewer 2 This very room.

Lily Anyway I said to her, "Come on" I said, "You'll be all right". Finally of course we knew it was coming. I said – I only had to look at her, "Ooh," I said, "it'll soon be here". She said, "No!" I said, "It will, you know". Pulled the bedclothes back like you would, you know, and the baby shot out ((laughter)) like a torpedo. Like a gun, it did. Good job my bedclothes were there else it would have gone on the floor. I said, "If this is what the Germans" I said, "God help me!" I said. ((Laughter)) Good you're going home!

Interviewer 2 Must have been one of those things with the light on its tail.

Lily Yes. Anyway, nice little boy though; lovely little boy. Lord, when we told her husband, cor blimey. Amazing they lived here at Shelton, really. And when her husband bought a pram, folding pram, they put a damned baby pillow in the bottom, laid the baby on it and put another pillow on the top of it. ((Laughter)) I said, "You'll suffocate it". "No" she said, "We always do that in Germany". No wonder they're all there ((Laughter)) So, that's that. That's another one of my stories.

Interviewer 1 Wonderful.

Lily Yeah.

Interviewer 1 When you did the births you didn't always call the doctor though, did you?

Lily No.





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Interviewer 1 Usually didn't, no.

Lily Not unless they were awkward customers. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 Did they do any caesareans in those days? Caesarean births? Caesars?

Lily What?

Interviewer 1 Where they cut the women?

Lily Yes.

Interviewer 1 In hospitals?

Lily Oh yes. They used to cut, they used to cut them twice then.

Interviewer 1 Did they?

Lily To lift the flap up.

Interviewer 2 Hey?

Lily They would be out cold, wouldn't they? Lift the flap up. Never mind, hey? ((Laughter)) Never mind.

I won't give you a bit of my ice cream now.

Interviewer 1 Wasn't going to get it anyway!

Lily So, there you are. We've eaten it all.

Interviewer 1 We've all had one.

Lily I know. ((To baby)) What's the matter love? Do you want an ice cream?

**[END OF FIRST AUDIO FILE]**

**[START OF SECOND AUDIO FILE]**

Interviewer Did you go and visit the mothers and babies after they'd had their babies? Did you go and see them?

Lily Sometimes, not always. Some come and see me now when they're grown up.

Interviewer Do they? That's nice, isn't it?



Lily Oh yeah, it's nice, it is nice. I wouldn't be without them. I've seen them in dustbins and everything. Put the mother in the dustbin take the baby out then put the lid on so she can't get out – that's what I would do. I think that's the best plan. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 Did that used to happen in your day? Were there lots of unwanted babies?

Lily No, not really; not like today, no.

Interviewer 1 What about young girls who weren't married?

Lily Weren't married? Well, of course they had to go into homes, didn't they?

Interviewer 1 Did they?

Lily And take their babies with them.

Interviewer 1 What happened then?

Lily Well, when the baby was born the girl used to have to go out in service.

Interviewer 1 Leave the baby and...?

Lily Then they had to look after the baby, feed the babies, you know. And we had to. They had the sweets same as sours, mustn't they? That's what I say. ((Laughs)) Can't have sweets all the time, no.

Interviewer 1 Was there a lot of that went on? Were there a lot of them?

Lily Oh yeah... well, a good few. I don't think there were as much as what there is today though, oh no. Because we weren't allowed to show our ankles then, never mind our bodies. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 Do you think that makes a difference?

Lily Well, I don't know. I wouldn't have liked to have my bottom smacked when I was young. ((Laughter)) You went up the road, and of course you used to wear low skirts, and if you had your skirt above your ankle they'd look round at you. We'd drop our skirts, you know. We'd have clips on a chain on our belt to hook our skirts up, you see. If we saw a man looking down at our ankles we used to undo the clips and let them drop. ((Laughs)) I don't suppose it made any difference. ((Laughs))



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Interviewer 1 Did your mum used to wear a big apron?

Lily Oh yes.

Interviewer 1 When she did the babies?

Lily Oh yeah, always wore aprons.

Interviewer 1 A white one?

Lily Well, all the young women used to wear aprons then. Never walked about without an apron on.

Interviewer 1 Wouldn't they?

Lily No, had to mind their Ps and their Qs. Yes. They had to do as they were told.

Interviewer 1 Yes. Did you do as you were told?

Lily Sometimes. ((Laughter)) I used to tell them to do as they were told and all.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Lily Yes. I used to say to the father sometimes, you know, I'd say, "You mind your own business; you've had your share". ((Laughter)) I used to say to them, "You mind your own business; you've had your share".

Interviewer 1 The fathers weren't there at the birth, were they?

Lily Never.

Interviewer 1 Never?

Lily No. I think... well, I don't know; but still there you are. If he puts it there why can't he see it? See what great work he's done. ((Laughs)) True, isn't it? See the great work, oh yes, the father. Still things are different now.

Interviewer 1 Yes, everything is different.

Lily Everything's different now to what it used to be.

Interviewer 1 What about the other children, were they ever around when the babies were born?

Lily Not in the room, no.



Interviewer 1 A neighbour took them off or something?

Lily Well, it depends what type of place you had, you see. If you had plenty of room the kids would go in the other rooms and play, you see. There you are; that's how things go.

Interviewer 1 Were there more neighbours to help?

Lily Well, not really.

Interviewer 1 You don't think people helped each other out more?

Lily No. They'd say get on with it. You have to get on with it, don't you? They don't make a fuss when it's there; but they make a damned fuss when it comes away. It goes in a beat and comes out a dead weight. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 It's true, yes, it is true.

Lily They smile at the first beginning, ooh yes, grand. But when it starts ooh ah, ooh, ah, yes. Never mind about the ooh ah; shoot it out. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 What did you do to help women with pain?

Lily What did I do?

Interviewer 1 To help them?

Lily I used to do lots of funny things. I used to put my arm around them sometimes and say, "Now, you're going to the toilet, aren't you? There's a good girl. That's right". And I used to press their stomachs, you know.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Lily And say, "Where's the pain? There?" ((inaudible)) You know. I used to say, "Right, how long are your pains? How long between?" Perhaps an hour, half an hour; I'd say, "You've got some more to go through first". I'd say, "You must have a Lincoln pain before you have the baby".

Interviewer 1 A what?

Lily A Lincoln pain. That's got your guessing.

Interviewer 1 It has!



Lily A Lincoln pain – they might call it a different name now – so, a Lincoln pain, you have a pain and just as you think it's going back it comes, double fold.

Interviewer 1 Double peak?

Interviewer 2 Linking.

Lily Comes back, you see. And of course when they have their second pain with the Lincoln pain the head starts to show, you see.

Interviewer 1 I know what you're talking about.

Lily I don't know whether they call it the Lincoln pain now.

Interviewer 1 They don't.

Lily Perhaps they call it good old England. I don't know. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 I've never heard that before.

Lily Pardon?

Interviewer 1 I've never heard it before, Lincoln.

Lily No, I don't suppose you would; but it was always you had to have a Lincoln pain.

Interviewer 1 Where it goes in peaks? Yes, I know.

Lily You had a double one. Just one going on is all this, "Ooh, here it comes again". ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 I wonder why they called it Lincoln.

Lily Pardon?

Interviewer 1 I wonder why they called it Lincoln.

Lily I don't know.

Interviewer 2 I should think it's linking; linking together.

Lily Always a Lincoln pain.

Interviewer 1 And then they'd start pushing.



Lily And then the head starts to come through, you know. That's if they lift the shutter, you see. But of course if the shutter don't lift the baby can't come, can it? It's like a person cuts your tongue out: if you cut your tongue out you can't talk. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 2 Sounds a bit drastic.

Lily That's true, isn't it?

Interviewer 1 So, when you pulled the baby what did you do to stop tearing?

Lily The what?

Interviewer 1 Stop them from having a tear.

Lily Well...

Interviewer 1 Did you just hold the baby's head as it came?

Lily Well, not always.

Interviewer 1 If it came slowly?

Lily We had, um... let the baby's head come through, and then you hold the baby's head of course, you see. Then you say, "Well, how long have you got, mate? You going to lay there all the time? Come on, get cracking!" Yes, we used to massage the woman's stomach, you know; just give her a press down again, you know. Then I'd say, "Come on, don't lark about with me. That's it." ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 And then what did you do when the baby was out?

Lily What did you do?

Interviewer 1 Yeah.

Lily Well, you had to wipe the mouth out, don't you? Then before the afterbirth comes, you see, you have to time the pressure, the blood pressure. You hold it too.

Interviewer 1 The cord, yeah.

Lily Yeah. And you hold it and you count the beats. When it's so many beats you think it's okay. You hold it about four inches away from the baby, you see. And you should hold it. And then



you double it over like that, you see. And you hold it like that for a while. I don't know how they do it now; but then you used to use flaps in those days. You'd put it round like that. But you don't cut in that loop; you cut in the cord.

Interviewer 1 I'm with you. Is that before the placenta comes out? Before the afterbirth?

Lily Before the afterbirth comes?

Interviewer 1 Yeah.

Lily Oh, you would cut the cord before the afterbirth comes, yeah.

Interviewer 1 What did you do if the afterbirth didn't come?

Lily The afterbirth didn't come? It had to come; you had to force it, didn't you?

Interviewer 1 How did you do that?

Lily Well, press on the stomach. Say, "Come on, go to the toilet, quick as you can. Not the front; the back". ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 You got them to push?

Lily Yeah. And not only that, in those days they used to fix towels to the bottom of the bed, you know, a roller towel. They used to put them on the bottom of the bed and they would give it to the mother in her hand, and they'd say, "Now, hold that, and when you feel a pain coming on think you're horse is going to have a jump and pull" and that would help to pull it down. So, there you are.

Interviewer 1 Did you ever have any problems with the afterbirth not coming?

Lily No, not really. Of course, I mean, well you know, when you have the afterbirth come you have to see it's not broken. Because if there's a bit broken off you've got to find that in the blood when it comes out; otherwise it mortifies and then there's trouble. So, that's it; that's how it goes on. You're not going to have another one!

Interviewer 1 No!

Lily You might. You'll have two next time. You'll have one, then two, then three and then four – altogether.



Interviewer 1 Oh no!

Lily Oh yeah.

Interviewer 2 There's a woman going to have eight, isn't there, in the paper.

Lily Keep the tights on girl; keep the tights on!. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 Do you remember ever having any problems around babies?

Lily Not really. The only thing I used to laugh about, one woman I used to go to she had four little ones, and all her babies, believe it or not, they were born hand first; all hand first. I always used to shake their hands. I used to say, "They are polite; they do shake hands to you". Yes.

Interviewer 1 How do they come out then?

Lily Oh, with their heads like that. Alongside their heads.

Interviewer 1 Alongside their heads.

Lily As the head comes out, see.

Interviewer 2 Well, I've never. That's unusual.

Lily You wouldn't know what to do?

Interviewer 1 No, you can't do anything, can you?

Lily There's nothing to do. You can't put their hand back you see, because you might break the shoulder, you see. That's the thing.

Interviewer 1 And all her babies came like that, did they?

Lily Pardon?

Interviewer 1 This woman, all her babies came like that, did they, with the hand first?

Lily All of them did. Three of hers did, she had four, but three of them came like that. I said, "Look at him" I said, "he's polite, going to change hands". ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 And were the women always lying down when they had the babies?

Lily Not always.





Interviewer 1 Were they always lying down when they had the babies or did they stand or...?

Lily Oh no. I've had babies drop in my apron.

Interviewer 2 From a great height!

Lily There used to be a lady lived opposite me, name of Draper, and she never had no labour.

Interviewer 1 Really?

Lily Yeah. She used to be cleaning her, cleaning her windows one... she'd be on the chair cleaning the windows and the boy came up to my door, he said, "Lady over there wants you". I said, uh, because I looked out, I'd say, "All right", you know. I'd take my apron and go over, you know. And in fact I just had a chance maybe to get her sitting on the chair. As soon as she sat on the chair baby came: didn't want it no more. ((Laughter)) It's surprising how some people don't have labour.

Interviewer 2 Lucky, aren't they?

Interviewer 1 Very rare though, isn't it?

Lily Oh very rare. They have the bearing down; but they don't get a lot of pain. She said she never had much pain.

Interviewer 1 Funny, isn't it?

Lily Yes. And she had three little girls, she had. That's how they come.

Interviewer 1 I knew somebody like that once. I did three babies for her and each one the same: no warning until she started pushing.

Lily Funny, isn't it?

Interviewer 1 Yes strange.

Lily Mysterious really, isn't it?

Interviewer 1 Yes, it is.

Lily Because it's good job, it's good for the midwife and the woman.

Interviewer 1 What about very, very long labours that went on and on?



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Lily Oh some of them, yes.

Interviewer 1 Was there anything you did?

Lily Some were nearly a week.

Interviewer 1 A week?

Lily Yes.

Interviewer 1 What did you do?

Lily Well, what could you do? Couldn't do nothing; just get them to walk about and that's it.

Interviewer 1 Walking help, doesn't it?

Lily Yes, walking and keep going. Some people say, "Lay on the bed" so of course the baby goes to sleep, doesn't it? So, the mother's got to go all through that again. ((Laughs)) Yes, that's how it goes, isn't it.

Interviewer 1 Did you often spend a lot of time with women when they were in labour?

Lily Pardon?

Interviewer 1 Did you spend a long time with the women sometimes?

Lily Once we started we stayed; we stayed with them. We wouldn't hand them over to somebody else.

Interviewer 1 That's nice.

Lily Because you need them; you had to see them. Then they used to say really, "What the hell have you sent for me for?"

Interviewer 1 Did they?

Lily "That little baby belongs to you". ((Laughter)) I was a terror.

Interviewer 1 You only called the doctor if there was a problem though, didn't you?

Lily No, why would you call the doctor? Couldn't have one there, could they?

Interviewer 1 Did they do forceps at home?



Lily Well, they can use forceps; but they're not really liked in the medical profession because you see it bruises the brain if you put the forceps on.

Interviewer 1 Not very nice.

Lily It bruises the brain in there. They haven't got a lot of brain, bless them, when they start, have they? Good job too. Good job they don't go out here. ((Laughs)) I don't know. That's how things go though, isn't it? Never mind. Nice when they come.

Interviewer 1 It's so quick and easy for some women and so difficult for others, isn't it?

Lily Oh yes, very difficult for others, very, very difficult. But what we used to do when it was difficult we would always get an orange and cut it in half; put half in a glass; put a dessertspoonful of castor oil and then squeeze the orange on the top. Then they don't taste the oil because it goes down.

Interviewer 1 And that will get them going, will it?

Lily That's very good. ((Laughter)) Then they, then they want to go to the toilet, of course, if the baby was bearing down as well, you see, wasn't it. There's not much problem.

Interviewer 1 Did you use to break the water bag?

Lily Sometimes yes.

Interviewer 1 When?

Lily Well, when it was well advanced. You used, to, when you examined you could feel the bag of course. Well, when you think they'd gone far enough, you see, you'd just used to put your fingers up, or your thumb and your finger, and most women ((inaudible)) because it's awkward to put the thumb up; you just get hold of a little bit and give a little bit of pressure. It's soon done. Then you get drowned! ((Laughter)) But still, I mean, it's simple when you know how, isn't it? It's about learning; you've got to know what to do, isn't it?

Interviewer 1 Was it your mother that taught you?

Lily My mother taught me a lot, yes. I had the training you see. I used to like it, you know.

Interviewer 1 I bet you were good at it?



Lily Oh yes. I never used to take no notice, you know. The only thing I didn't like if there were children about, you see, and the mother left it too late and, you know, you'd have ((inaudible)) to the children. I used to say to them, "Go on, clear off, I've cut my finger" I'd say to them. ((Laughs)) And they'd say, "All that blood come from you?!" I'd say, "Bugger off!" ((Laughter)). You don't know what to say for the best, do you? You can't open their eyes too much, can you? No. ((Laughter)) They used to laugh at me some of them.

Interviewer 1 But sometimes – people grew up very ignorant, didn't they – and sometimes the women didn't know where the baby was going to come out.

Lily Some do, yeah. But they knew where it went in, didn't they? It's got to come out the same place!

Interviewer 1 But I don't think... some women didn't understand.

Lily They're so dense some of them. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 2 That was me! ((Laughter))

Lily I think some of them think it comes out in the bladder, you know, like a balloon.

Interviewer 2 Or through the bellybutton.

Lily They think it do, yeah. They think the belly opens and it comes out like that. Silly things!

Interviewer 1 It's very common.

Lily Huh?

Interviewer 1 Lots of women thought that.

Lily Oh they do believe that, I know. It's got to come out where it went in, mate. ((Laughs)) They say, "It won't come out there". I said, "Oh yes it will".

Interviewer 1 It was frightening, wasn't it?

Lily Frightening. I suppose it was for the first one. You can understand it really. I'd always say, "Don't be frightened. What are you frightened of?" I'd say, "If you're frightened don't sleep with your husband anymore" That's it; won't have too many more. ((Laughs)).

Interviewer 1 Did they used to ask you how to stop babies coming?



Lily How to stop them?

Interviewer 1 Yeah.

Lily Well, it's not right, is it, though to stop them coming? ((Laughter)) You can't stop them really. Once they start they will come through.

Interviewer 1 No, I meant did they ask you how to stop the babies from being started in the first place?

Lily Oh yeah. They had to go to the doctor and had it done, didn't they?

Interviewer 1 Did they?

Lily For a lot of people it's stupid, because it's a very stupid thing, once the seed is there to try and...

Interviewer 1 Dislodge it.

Lily It's stupid.

Interviewer 1 A lot of women did though, didn't they?

Lily Oh they did.

Interviewer 1 But a lot of women died trying to stop...

Lily Oh they do, yes, yes.

Interviewer 1 They'd haemorrhage, didn't they?

Lily That's right, they'd haemorrhage.

Interviewer 1 They died.

Lily The only thing is, you see, with haemorrhage you have to tap them, you see, tap them well. And you put the feet up above their head, higher than their head – the head's down there and the feet are up there – and you can do that ((tapping)) under their, under their bottom. You hold them up so the blood flows back, you see. Sometimes, not always, sometimes the nose will bleed of the baby, you see. But that's nothing to be afraid of. Shouldn't stop that; let it come. "Let me wipe your nose boy". ((Laughs)) "Wipe your nose boy". ((Laughter)) We

know all the tricks; you have to learn them, don't you? No problem really once you got used to it.

Interviewer 1 Did any women haemorrhage after the babies?

Lily Oh yes, they do do that.

Interviewer 1 Sometimes they do, don't they?

Lily They do, yes.

Interviewer 1 We have an injection that we can give.

Lily To stop it, yes.

Interviewer 1 Stop it. You didn't have that, did you?

Lily No, no. we had to take the chance. I think there is... well, I think quite a lot of babies born perfect and whole, you know, so.

Interviewer 1 Were the women frightened of dying in childbirth?

Lily Pardon?

Interviewer 1 Were they frightened that they would die in childbirth, the women?

Lily Caesarean you say? No.

Interviewer 1 Did the women, when they were pregnant, were they frightened that they would die having the baby?

Lily Oh they thought a lot about that, yes.

Interviewer 1 Because some women did die, didn't they?

Lily Oh yeah. Well, you expect that sort of thing, don't you?

Interviewer 1 Not any more, no. ((Laughter))

Lily Well, you've got to take it as it comes, you see. Sometimes the women they die with exhaustion, you see, that's the trouble. They're frightened, you see; they're frightened to bear down in case they're going to split something, so. You can understand it really. But



considering, I don't think not so many people die in childbirth as what they make out there is. That's what I think.

Interviewer 1 Do you?

Lily Yes, and I think it's a good thing.

Interviewer 1 Did you ever see anybody die in childbirth?

Lily See them die?

Interviewer 1 In childbirth.

Lily Of course I've seen them die! I've seen them die with the baby half out and half in.

Interviewer 1 Have you?

Lily We've had to pull it out.

Interviewer 1 Really?

Lily Oh yeah. Ooh, you couldn't let the baby lie there like that, could you?

Interviewer 1 No.

Lily So, there you are; you had to pull it away and that was it. Used to see a lot of funny things, a lot of funny things. You hear a lot of funny things and all. You hear good words and swear words and all with some of them. ((Laughter)) Talk about friends and foe all mixed up. ((Laughs)) Still though.

Interviewer 1 Sometimes that helps, doesn't it?

Lily Oh yeah.

Interviewer 1 It helps them to make a lot of noise.

Lily Yeah. I mean, no good saying, "Well, never mind, never mind". That's no good at all.

Interviewer 1 That's right.

Lily Say, "Come along, of course you can get it out. Course you can. Don't be stupid!" I'd give them. "I'll put your head in a bucket of water in a minute if you don't shut up!" ((Laughter)) They used to laugh. Pass their time, you see. Well, it's no good trying with them, is it? Well,

fancy a midwife when a woman's trying with a babe you're sitting on there wiping their brow – isn't that stupid? ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 Yes, I suppose so.

Lily I just say, "You're not ready for the asylum yet, mate. Shut up!" I used to say. I'd say, "Any more of this and I'm going to leave you. Get on with it!" "Oh no you won't, will you?" "Oh, won't I? Try me, you try me". ((Laughs)) Oh you laugh. It's the only way to keep them cheerful if you can. But of course some people are terrified.

Interviewer 1 Yes, they are.

Lily But I think it's other people talking to them before the baby's actually going to be born; they frighten them you see, and that's it. So, there we are.

Interviewer 1 Were you frightened when you had your babies?

Lily No. Why should I be? I know where it went in, didn't I, and I knew they had to come out! That's all there was, isn't it? No good being frightened. I had big babies.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Lily 12lb. All the more to see you, my love! ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 Gosh. Were the labours difficult?

Lily Well, no. Some of them I had a lot of stitches with, but still.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Lily I said, "Well, you may as well stitch me up, may as well make me dependable, mightn't you?" You never know. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 Who stitched you up, the doctors?

Lily The doctors. Oh I had the doctor stitched me. One of my babies I had 28 stitches. You know now! ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 I'm glad to hear it.

Interviewer 2 Did they have to have them removed or they disintegrated?





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Lily Quite a lot of them they tear half an inch.

Interviewer 1 Yeah, you don't worry about that.

Lily Not so bad really.

Interviewer 1 What did you use for stitching? Was it silk?

Lily Silk?

Interviewer 1 Stitches?

Lily The stitches, in those days they used to use ((Tapgap?)).

Interviewer 1 And they dissolved?

Lily That's to do the stitching, you see, so.

Interviewer 1 Did you have to take them out afterwards?

Lily Oh, afterwards you take them out, yes. But it's not so bad taking them out as it is putting them in, is it?

Interviewer 1 That's right.

Lily Bad enough, I suppose. I suppose people think you're torturing them. I say, "You wouldn't go to near the woods and be frightened, mate". ((Laughter))

Interviewer 2 Did they ever give the women anything?

Interviewer 1 I don't think so. There wasn't anything you gave the women to help the pain?

Lily Well, not necessary really, not really. I mean, if they're very, very bed with it maybe the doctor will come and give them ((inaudible)) Otherwise they've got to go through it just the same because the pain is there... ((Laughter))

Interviewer 1 It's a different attitude these days.

Lily Huh?

Interviewer 1 People have a different set of attitudes towards it, don't they?



Lily Oh yes. Some are very nice and some are very nasty, you see. Some, I used to say to me, if they swore at me I'd say, "I talk that language too". I used to say. ((Laughter)) "I speak that language". They used to... you know.

Interviewer 1 What did you do with the placenta, with the afterbirth? Did you burn it on the fire?

Lily Burn it. Look at it, you examine it, turn it inside out and see if it's broken. Because if there's a bit broken off you know that's inside the person, don't you? You've got to find that bit. And you've got to watch when the bleeding comes that that lump is there. If it is it's okay. But if it isn't you've got to find it. But you still burn the afterbirth, you see, burn it. That's the best way: get rid of it.

Oh, it's where the little kids were made in. That's their house; that was the home they were brought up in. it was a shelter given to them by nature.

Interviewer 1 We grow roses and bushes on top of ours.

Lily Pardon?

Interviewer 1 We put them in the garden.

Lily Garden? What for?

Interviewer 1 Grow things on top of them. It makes good manure.

Lily They'll grow thousands of maggots. ((Laughter)) And the maggots will all come indoors.

Interviewer 1 No!

Lily Good luck to them, I say. You have to be careful where you put your meat. ((Laughter)) That's a truth though; I'm not kidding. Never mind. Takes all kinds to make a world.

Interviewer 1 It does, doesn't it?

Lily You all live and learn. Yes, never mind. Well, I say it's a good job it's over.

Interviewer 1 When your mum worked as a midwife did the people have to pay her?

Lily Pay her, yes.

Interviewer 1 She wasn't paid by the health or someone?



Lily Some of the time she was paid by the council because she worked for the East Ham Council for donkey's years.

Interviewer 1 And when you went did they pay you?

Lily No.

Interviewer 1 You just went out of the goodness of your heart.

Lily Yes.

Interviewer 1 That's very nice, isn't it?

Lily Yes. And my mother, when the war was on, my mother was very old then, she was getting old, she went to the church – the church was bombed – and my mother crawled under all this stone and all that and delivered a baby boy.

Interviewer 1 Did she?

Lily Yes.

Interviewer 1 Amazing.

Lily She was getting on in years and the baby came, yes, she went and delivered it. She said, "I'm going to get a baby out" she said, "There's a mother crying in here about a baby and I am going to get it out". And she went in and she brought a little boy out.

Interviewer 1 Was it all right?

Lily An 11lb baby boy.

Interviewer 1 Was it all right?

Lily Yes, he was all right.

Interviewer 1 Was the mother all right?

Lily Yes. Of course they had to go straight to the hospital, you know. Marvellous, isn't it?

Interviewer 1 Yes. So, when people asked you to go to lay out a body...

Lily What?

Interviewer 1 When they asked you to come and lay somebody out because they were dead...



Lily If they were dead I laid them out; course I did.

Interviewer 1 Did they used to pay you to do it?

Lily Oh yes, of course; they had to pay me for that.

Interviewer 1 They did?

Lily Oh yes, some people paid, you know. The dead can't hurt you! It's the live ones you've got watch, not the dead ones!

Interviewer 2 Mrs G, tell them about the lovely present you had from Stanley.

Interviewer 1 Oh! ((Laughs)) She's talking about the dead now. A man lived down the road here, he thought he was a gentleman; he thought he was but he wasn't. And, um, his sister died, going from one thing to the other; died on Christmas morning at half past seven. He came here, he went, "Are you having a party?" Well I was going to. And my granddaughter was here and she was playing *Show me the Way to Go Home* on the piano. When I opened the door this Stanley is stood on the step crying. I said, "What's the matter, Stanley?" He said, "Jessie's gone". I said, "Where's she's gone to?" ((Laughter)) He said, "She died". I said, "Don't talk rubbish". He said, "She's dead. I think she is. Can you come down?" I said, "I'll come". And when I went down, of course you know like in hospital for birth when you put a nightdress on you can't put it on the front way; you have to cut it up the back and put it on the front. So, of course I had to go and do cleaning you know, I had to wash her. I rolled it up in paper and I took it down and I said to her daughter-in-law, I said, "Would you burn this please?" So, she said, "What is it?" I said, "Mind your own business. Can you burn it please?" Of course it was this nightdress; didn't want that laying about.

So, the next day ((laughing)), the next day she knocked at my door, she said, "What did you do with Jessie's nightdress?" I said, "Ask your daughter-in-law. She burnt it". "What?" she said, "A new nightdress!"

Interviewer 1 Oh dear.

Lily We still talk about it. Fancy coming and asking for... a man, what do you want a nightdress for!



Interviewer 1 Might have been one of them!

Lily Bet he used to stuff it in his drawer and pretend he was a woman. ((Laughter))

Interviewer 2 How about the present he gave you?

Lily Oh yes. He said to me, he said, um, "You know, Lily" he said, "I'll give you one of the souvenirs from Jessie because she thought a lot of you" he said. I said, "I don't mind" I said, "What is it?" So, he came up and said, "Will you come down my house?" I said, "Of course. I'm not frightened of you". And he said, "Come upstairs". I went upstairs, you know. He had a little cupboard besides his fireplace. He said, "Now, I've got nice things in here". ((Laughing)) He pulled out an old pair of corsets, the old-fashioned ones, the old-fashioned ones, the ones that had the lace up the back. So, he said, "A lovely pair of corsets now" he said. I said, "What do I do with them?" He said, "You could wear them". I said, "You wear them!" I said. ((Laughter)) "I don't want the damned dirty things" I said. "I've got enough dirt on me now; I'll have a bath". "Used to be good ones". "Yes, no doubt they are". But, um, oh he was right mad because I wouldn't wear them or take them. I said, "I'm not taking that dirt out of your house into my house. Not likely!" ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 What an idea.

Lily He still talks about how I refused his sister's corsets. ((Laughter)) He comes round; he does still. That's 17, 18 years ago. He comes to see me sometimes. I say, "What's your Jessie die of?" He says, "Nothing, nothing" he says. "Oh, I thought she died in a pair of corsets". ((Laughter)) He said, "No, Lily, no" he said, "you refused you refused the others". I'm not going up and down in a corset. Oh no. Poor Jessie. I ((inaudible)) and all. But if you spoke to him you'd think he was a gentleman, wouldn't you?

Interviewer 2 Oh yes! He showed me his embroidery once.

Lily ((Posh voice)) "Hello Lily. How are you today?" I used to say, "None the better for you asking". ((Laughter)) I can tell some stories in this room about me. ((Laughter)) I don't care. That's what they say; didn't do nobody any harm. Still, never mind. I'm still here to tell the tale.

Interviewer 1 Did they used to come to you if people were ill?



Lily III?

Interviewer 1 To get advice, you know, to get advice about what to do?

Lily I used to go to them at night time.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Lily Yes. I mean, if they were a bit barmy I'd go; I used to go with them.

Interviewer 1 That's nice.

Lily I wasn't frightened of them. What's the good of being frightened of people?

Interviewer 2 How about that young boy up the road?

Lily Who?

Interviewer 2 I can't think of his name. The one that's been in the paper; he's been all the way around the world?

Lily Oh, he wasn't a bad little chap. Little dwarf, he was. Nice though, wasn't he, Margaret?

Interviewer 2 Yes, yes.

Lily Nice little fellow, wasn't he?

Interviewer 2 I didn't mean him.

Lily Oh, did you not?

Interviewer 2 No.

Lily Who did you mean?

Interviewer 2 The one whose mother brought him in with... he'd hurt himself.

Lily What?

Interviewer 2 His mother brought him into you because he'd hurt himself.

Lily Oh...

Interviewer 2 I can't remember what...

Lily The one who went around the world on the boat?



Interviewer 2 Yeah.

Lily When he had a good scalding?

Interviewer 2 Yeah.

Lily Oh yes. She said, "Mrs Goodhead..." I said, "What's the matter with him?" She said, "He poured a saucepan of soup over him". I said, "Good". ((Laughs)) I said, "All right" I said, "Don't worry. Bring him in". I set him on the table, you know. Cut the back of his shoes. I said, "Not hurting, is it love?" He said, "No" ((Laughs)) He was good. He said, "No, not hurting". So, I said, "That's all right then". So, I done it all up for him. I said, "Bring him back tomorrow morning and don't you touch it". "All right" she said. So, she brought him back oh, about every morning for a week. Anyway I got it better for him and he was all right, you know. He was quite happy about it. And every time he saw me as he grew up he said, "My foot's still better". ((Laughs)) "You're asking for trouble boy!"

Interviewer 2 Of course people couldn't afford the doctor, could they?

Interviewer 1 No.

Lily I thought you were talking about ((Bertie Collier?)).

Interviewer 2 No.

Lily There's been some funny people down this road, hasn't there?

Interviewer 1 Still are! ((Laughter))

Lily There are some funny people in this road. Never mind. It makes, it makes a good story.

Interviewer 1 It's lovely to hear about it, yeah.

Interviewer 2 She's been doing it 50 years.

Lily ((inaudible)) ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 Who taught you what to do about laying out bodies? Did your mum tell you what to do when you laid out a body?

Lily Yeah, I used to go with her sometimes.

Interviewer 1 Did you? So, you learned from her?

Lily No trouble laying a body out. The only thing is you've got to be careful how you take the clothes off. You can't take them off the front, like open the front and pull them off, because you've got to twist them over. You turn them on their side, cut them up the back, turn them back on their back and then you can pull them off the front. Simple as that. When people say how difficult it is; it's not. It's very, very easy.

Interviewer 1 So, did you just used to wash the bodies?

Lily I washed them all over, yeah. Put a clean shirt on them or nightdress, depending if it was a man or a lady. You have to put them, you see. Put a clean pillowcase on, you see, and put a clean sheet on. When I laid them out, when I laid them out I always used to leave one hand out of the bed, laid there, and I put a bible or a flower in their hand.

Interviewer 1 That's nice.

Lily That's how I used to do it. Some people they go, "Ooh!" ((Laughs)) Frighten the death out of people. I said, "What do you cover their face up for?" People do that though. Stupid. I never cover a dead person's face. Why should you?

Interviewer 1 That's right.

Lily They're not doing you no harm.

Interviewer 1 No.

Lily They can't pull faces at you, can you? ((Laughs)) So, why worry?

Interviewer 2 She came to my house and laid grandma out.

Lily I've had no complaints with any of them.

Interviewer 1 So, you'd wash them and just make them look nice?

Lily Yeah, you'd wash them, you see. You wash their face of course, naturally; you wash their face and their front, see. Then you put a towel on the bed, turn them over and wash their back, you see. You do that. Well, then you get, if it's a man, you get a shirt, you see. Well, of course you can't put it on him because they're awkward, men; awkward size, you see. You





had to snip it over their back, the same; then you slip it over their arms, you see; then you turn them on their side and then you can just draw it with a bit of thread through the needle, you see. So simple when you know how. But it's no trouble once you lay a dead person out.

Interviewer 1 Because we're not taught these days. We don't know about these things.

Lily You're never taught.

Interviewer 1 No.

Lily You might in your lifetime though, as you grow older, you might be taught to do it.

Interviewer 1 I'd like to learn how to.

Lily But there's one thing they nearly always do; and they nearly everyone passes a death motion. They do that mostly. So, I always used to put a napkin, any old towel or anything, you know clean, put it around like a nappy, see.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Lily Then if there's anything there's nothing for the undertaker to put his hands around them. You have to think of all these things.

Interviewer 1 You do.

Lily It's amazing what there is to be taught in life really. There's an easy way and there's a hard way, you see. Some people say, "Well, how can I wash them?" "With a soap and towel" I say. ((Laughter)) and I always put a clean sheet over them; but never over their chin. I used to put it under their chin always. I used to comb their hair and make it look nicer. And I push the jaw up because that would be down. And you have to hold the eyes down, you see, till you think they're closed, you see. Even if they're not quite closed you put a bit of cotton wool on each of them for a few minutes. And if the jaw won't stop up you get a bit of bandage and you tie it round onto their head, you see, while you wash the other part of the body. Then you can take it off and of course then it's set. You see what I mean?

Interviewer 1 Yes.

Lily Some people when they lay a person out the serious thing they do they put their arms across them.



Interviewer 2 To burn.

Lily Now, that's a stupid thing to do because sometimes the undertaker has to break them to get them down, you see. Now, people can't see that. That's why I always leave one out, one hand out with either a bible, a prayer or a flower in their hand so they look natural.

Interviewer 1 It's good.

Lily Nothing to be frightened of, nothing. They say, "Don't they look nice? Are they asleep?" I say, "Yes, having a good sleep now". I say, "No good looking at them; they won't talk to you now. Come on, come on". ((Laughter)) The way they go. ((Laughs)) But still, as I say, you live and learn, love, as you go through life. You can't expect to learn everything at once; you've got to gradually learn.

Interviewer 1 But it's hard for us to learn those things because we're not... there's nobody to tell us anymore.

**[END OF SECOND AUDIO FILE, INTERVIEW AND TRANSCRIPT]**