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The Impact of the Second World War on Women in Belfast and Dublin: An Oral History

Volume II of II

(Interview Transcripts)

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The Impact of the Second World War on Women in Belfast and Dublin: An Oral History

Volume II of II (Interview Transcripts)

Mary Muldowney

Submitted for the Ph.D. degree to the Department of Modern History, University of Dublin, Trinity College

October 2005

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Volume II

Interview Transcripts

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Anne, Saintfield. Interview: 12th August 1999 and 20th September 1999

1 MM: Could you give me a few details about yourself please – your full name, where and when you were born, and maybe what sort of family you were born into?

2 AD: Well, my name is Anne D. That's my married name, of course, my maiden name was S., Anne S. and I was born in Belfast. My father died when I was only two years old so my very young mother, twenty-three, was a widow. My brother was born after he died and she brought the three of us up. In those days, there was no widow's pensions or anything like that so it was all hard work.

3 MM: How old was your sister when your father died?

4 AD: She would have been three.

5 MM: So she had three children under four?

6 AD: Yes, she was three, I was two, and my brother was born three weeks after my father died. Well, that was where we grew up in Belfast and when I started work, I started a very interesting job. I loved it, making chocolates. I started with a small firm, first of all, Thompsons of Belfast, but I moved from there to the Ormeau Bakery in 1939, the war years, you know and I was there from thirty nine to fifty three, when I got married and went to Canada. And then we stayed in Canada for four years, which I loved. We'd good jobs, everything went well, but I couldn't stand the humidity and the heat in the summer time so we came back. However, my time in the Ormeau Baker I would say were amongst the happiest years; they were all happy. They were very special years. I think it was because it was wartime.

7 MM: How old were you when you started work?

8 AD: I was twenty-six when I went into the Ormeau Bakery and I was forty when we left to go to Canada. And you see I wasn't married until I was forty.

9 MM: Sensible woman, you waited. [Both laugh]

10 AD: Well, in the war years you know, nobody could get married because there were coupons, and everything was rationed, and jobs were queer, people were having to go and work in ammunition places. I was one of the fortunate people who had a nice job and a job that I wasn't very willing to give up to go to Canada. But then, I wanted to go and the time was right. So once the war was over, you see, and a few years over, things got on and got back to normal. But the war years in the Ormeau Bakery were very very interesting years indeed, because it was food, you see. I mean my speciality was making chocolates, which of course involved the parcels for troops and all that kind of thing, because all the sales went through the bread servers. So they would place orders with me for maybe several dozen half pound boxes of peppermint creams. These were all going into different packages for soldiers, you know people sending them, but the bakery itself, the bakery supplied the bread when ships came in, but it was all very hush hush, you see. The names of the ships were never known and of course, the bread had to be ready and special deliveries, and everything was taken. So that was one of the things that the Ormeau Bakery did.

11 MM: How would they have managed, with rationing, to produce things like sweets?

12 AD: Well, sweets weren't, it was a fondant type of thing, you know, and chocolate wasn't rationed. You see those things weren't rationed – that came in, what I'm talking about, I'm not talking

about bars I'm talking about blocks of chocolate, the big fifty six pound blocks. But to get back to the rationing, once dried eggs and margarine came on the scene all that stopped in the Ormeau Bakery. They had very high standards and they wouldn't bake anything unless the ingredients were completely pure, wholesome, and fresh. You know, fresh eggs, pure better, everything. So all cakes, all fancy shortbreads and all that sort of thing, they were put off immediately and I mean, soda bread, wheaten bread all that, all kinds of bread were still baked but because there was no fresh eggs or margarine involved. They were stopped immediately and that meant a lot of people in the fancy cake departments, it meant they were jobless but Ormeau Bakery had very high standards and they chose their staff very carefully too. So when that happened they didn't pay anyone off, they spread the staff over the different departments, of which I received two into the chocolate department, you know. So that was all part of the war there. Another thing which it was involved very much in [pause] I'm not quite sure but I think it was the Enniskillen Fusiliers, the Ormeau Bakery, we did all the knitting for them. The bakery, the owners of the bakery, it was privately owned I should say, the Ormeau Baker – the Wilson family – and they had, as I say, very high standards. You were almost into heaven with the reference you'd need to get into the Ormeau Bakery, you know, but they [pause] I was going to say something else about it but I went off my story, they spread the staff, they didn't pay anyone off, they spread staff right round the whole place and that meant that no one was ever out of work. But standards became higher and higher because in Ormeau Bakery, you couldn't start work any day without first having a shower.

13 MM: That was unusual?

14 AD: Yes, without having a shower and woe betide you if you didn't and you were told on, you know. You were as good as gone. Their standards were absolutely terrific. So that was the type of place I worked in all during the war and anything that could be done was done to help the troops and that, you know. Different things - you see it was the blackout years as well and very often in the work that I was doing, I had to leave. In the summer time for instance, it was difficult to temper chocolate in the middle of the day if it was very hot, so I would be away on my back at six o'clock in the morning, you see. I would only work until two if I started at six, but em, that was blackout. Well, six o'clock in the morning in the summer wasn't blackout but for me to be alone on a bicycle leaving home at half past five, the police would stop me and want to know where I was going and what I was doing?

15 MM: Did you have far to go?

16 AD: Yes, I lived on the Donegall Road, that was another thing [pause] right up opposite it was Maguire and Paterson's Match Factory, a big big building, just opposite to it on the other side, which meant that as soon as the sirens went we had to get out immediately because if an incendiary had hit the match factory, well it would have blown the Donegall Road to kingdom come. I mean it's full of sulphur for making [pause] so as soon as the sirens went we were out. I don't know if you know the Donegall Road, you do? Well we lived right up at the top at Celtic Park, at the front of the road and as soon as we got out, we had to walk on up, up the White Rock Road and on the up the Black Mountain and we used to watch the bombs falling on the city the night of the big blitz, up on the mountains and they were praying all around us, you know. It was just one of those [pause].

17 MM: Did you always go up to the mountains - you didn't go into shelters?

18 AD: No, we didn't go into shelters; we always went up. There was no shelters; really. If there was any danger and you thought there might be something and you didn't have to go out [pause] everybody had something. We had a place underneath the stairs, for instance, everybody had something; but with the match factory being so close, we had to get out, so we had. And actually, you were nearly safer up the mountains than in a shelter because if a shelter got hit; so that was another side to it and coming up if you'd worked late, which I very often had to [pause]. Different things cropped up when the war was on; things had to be done in a hurry, you know, maybe a ship coming in or something like that. So we you couldn't walk in the blackout then, alone, you had to be in twos and threes because again, everything was pitch. You were allowed a flashlamp but you could only switch that to the ground because any light at all, you see, if there was anything overhead. So it was pretty weird but there was a lot of fun during the war as well because there was canteens set up in different hotels and different places and different church halls for the troops, which meant a party and a dance and a date, possibly. [Laughs] More often than not. So, as I say, there was the good times, you know, and it was all done to try and make a bit more liveable for the fellows who were so far away from home.

19 MM: Were these British or American troops?

20 AD: Both, yes, we had quite a bit and it was all - the airforce, the navy and the army, the whole lot. Oh yes, we had the lot, so we had.

21 MM: Can we just go back a little bit [pause] how old were you when you left school?

22 AD: I was only fourteen when I left school.

23 MM: And you went into the chocolate factory then? Did they train you?

24 AD: There were older people there who were doing it and they trained me and I was apparently pretty quick on the uptake and I think I was about sixteen and I was put into different [pause] I'm not talking about the Ormeau Bakery now, I'm talking about the first place I went, Thompsons. They put me into the different - they'd beautiful big places in Belfast, one in Donegall Place, a big one in the Antrim Road and one on Anne Street and these different shop windows. I was sitting fork dipping chocolates, white cap, white coat, and everything. I was quite young and dare I add it, easy to look at [both laugh] and I was put in the window, apparently for that reason. And I remember on one occasion having to come out of the window in Anne Street because the pavement was so crowded the people weren't getting by on a Saturday night. So I had done all that before I went to the Ormeau Baker so when I went to the Ormeau Baker I was fully conversant. They did things a little bit differently but I knew how. I was very fortunate there because the gentleman who was the - what would you call him? Well, he was the boss of the whole show and he made the wedding cakes and everything and he did that kind of work in the chocolate room on lovely steel-topped tables. He got promotion and of course, was taken out, and I was very fortunate to have been given then the complete charge of the chocolate room. So I usually had maybe six to eight girls, usually you know, and they'd be there and we were all a very happy bunch.

25 MM: What way was the workforce structured? Were there mainly women in the workforce?

26 AD: Do you mean in the entire [pause] ?

27 MM: Yes, well where you were working?

28 AD: Well the chocolate room was women but the Ormeau Bakery had hundreds of people. I mean, there was hotplate workers, the fancy cake people, the wedding cake men, the travelling biscuit machines, everything was automatic, even the chocolate digestive biscuits were done in the chocolate room. I had to work to get the chocolate ready and we fed the biscuits in and they'd pass through you know all the chocolate and then were turned at the other end, you know. Oh yes, and then there was the flour loft where all the flour was prepared and there used to be men up there.

29 MM: Was there any division in the sense that - a lot of the women who have spoken to me, in a lot of factories the women did the less skilled work and men got into the better jobs. That doesn't sound like it was the case for you?

30 AD: No, it wasn't like that at all. In the Ormeau Baker, women's work was women's work and men's and there was no mixing because the standards were very high because they didn't only train you specifically in your job. Discipline was very strong and manners were everything. I mean when we met our lady superintendent in any department, if I had've said Good morning she'd have turned to me and said, my name is Miss Grahame. You see, we had to say Good morning, Miss Grahame and this for me anyway, I thought was a wonderful way to grow up.

31 MM: Did you get a corresponding courtesy from the management? Would they say Good morning, Miss S.?

32 AD: Yes, they called me Anne, they didn't say Miss S., but they were absolutely - they treated the staff wonderfully, so they did. If you had a day when you were not feeling very good, you just had to go to Miss Grahame and we had what we called an ambulance room and you got a lie down, you got a couple of aspirins and a cup of tea and maybe within the hour you were back at your job, you know. Oh yes, it was such a wonderful place to work, I couldn't speak highly enough of it. It was a family called Wilson, from Derramore Drive on the Ormeau Road. There's still two – Mr. Ian was the son and Mr. Elliott – they're there still. Now they're not in the business because after the older people passed on it passed on to these two, I think it's all part of the Ranks Organisation now, something like that and of course, it's not the same lovely place it was. Oh no, they were a marvellous [pause] it was such a wonderful place to work and as I say, even in my own kitchen yet, if I do something, I'd say to myself well it's well Miss Grahame's not watching. We used to serve in the shop on a Saturday morning, to help out, and in those days bread wasn't wrapped. You know you had these sheets of paper, you know, when you covered them up and I can remember one Saturday morning, one girl, she couldn't get the paper to separate, you know that sort of paper, she did that [licked her finger] and she was taken off the counter immediately and she was asked how would you like to buy bread with paper that someone had licked? You know, it was a wonderful place for me, I would add at this stage, I was a girl guide all my life, and I always say that the Guides and the Ormeau Bakery made me what I am. I know we all need the three Rs when we leave school, which I had no problem with, but the things that really matter - that's where I got them.

33 MM: And would they have paid well as well? Were the conditions good?

34 AD: Yes; that was why I changed from Thompsons. I immediately had [pause] it wasn't a lot of money now but in those days to get 10s. a week more than where you were leaving was a lot of money, especially during the war years. And then as I told you when the gentleman who got his promotion was moved out from the chocolate room and I got the job, well my wages went up and I had sort of managerial standing. You can see I'm sitting beside a silver tea service that I got for a wedding present when I left, and that - you always got a gift from the works, you know they always gave [pause] which I did, I got a canteen of cutlery but no one up to that stage had ever got from the management, which I did, so that was really something, you know. Oh, it was a wonderful place to work.

35 MM: And did you leave when you got married because you had to leave or because you were going to Canada?

36 AD: Because I was going to Canada, yes.

37 MM: Was your husband Canadian?

38 AD: No, no, my husband was an accountant but I had cousins in Canada and we had waited so long here with the war and one thing or another, and we'd always wanted to go. So we said we'd get married and go. So we went the day we got married, had our honeymoon on the liner. [Laughs] Moonlight on the Atlantic and sunset on the St. Laurence, I used to say. [Both laugh]

39 MM: Just to go back again, I'm interested in - you left school at fourteen, was that because money was so tight?

40 AD: Well that was the school leaving age then. You see, there wasn't the opportunities then there are now. I mean when I was leaving school the president of our public elementary school came to my mother and said that they would pay half the fees if she could raise the half to allow me to go on to be a teacher. And my mother said I'm waiting for her to go to work – that's just what it was. There was no choice in the matter; I mean it wasn't a case of doing your GCSCs and getting into university and everything. I mean we had the potential, I think I would say our potential was far higher in those days than they are now but the opportunities weren't there. I had gone through right through to the seventh standard and I was still only thirteen and very often when the school-teacher in the lower grade, they talk about P1 and P2 now, you know, would be out sick, I would be sent down to take the class, you know. So the opportunities just [pause] as I say, my mother was a widow, she was waiting for me to go to work.

41 MM: And did your mother work outside the home while you were at school?

42 AD: Yes, every day.

43 MM: So she had three small children and had to go out anyway?

44 AD: Yes that's right, she had to go out and work. She used to say that was her proudest boast (looking at her hands) That's what I raised you with. She was a widow when she was twenty-three and her first widow's pension she was fifty-five, which was 10s a week. She thought she'd got a fortune.

45 MM: And what sort of jobs did she do?

46 AD: She worked in the Ulster Spinning Company in the dining room, she did the meals for the staff and she also did the offices – all the office work, you know the cleaning of the offices.

47 MM: So when you went into work in the chocolate factory, what sort of hours were you working?

48 AD: What kind of hours? I worked from eight o'clock, then we had a half past twelve to half past one for lunch and then half past one to five o'clock.

49 MM: And did you work on Saturdays?

50 AD: Saturdays to lunchtime, yes.

51 MM: So when you got home from work in the evening, then, would you help out your mother with housework?

52 AD: Oh yes, the note was on the table what you had to do. Tell Anne [pause] maybe you had to go shopping, go for butter - that was another thing, you see, during the war you got two ounces of butter per person, which was a half a pound to our house, there was four of us. Well my mother just could not stomach margarine so we let her have the half-pound of butter and we used to mix the cream of the tops of the milk with the margarine. You did all those things during the war, you made butter that way, you know.

53 MM: And did your sister go into a good trade as well?

54 AD: My sister was in the Ormeau Bakery shop for quite a while but previous to that, she had been in a clothing [pause] yes, she was stitching in the Albion Clothing Company so she was then. She came out of it and she went to the Ormeau Bakery shop. She spent about five years there and then she went into Anderson and Macauley's the big fashion store on Donegall Place, where she spent the rest of her working days.

55 MM: And what about your brother, did he have to leave school early too?

56 AD: Sadly my brother died last year. But he left school at fourteen, yes. He didn't like school; he left at lunchtime on the day he was fourteen.

57 MM: And did he get a chance to get into a trade or do an apprenticeship?

58 AD: Yes, Frank went as a painter for quite a while and then he went into Fords, the motor place, so he did, yes. That was our family. My mother died in 1963, she was only seventy-two.

59 MM: And were you still living with your mother when you got married?

60 AD: Yes. Well, in those days people didn't go out and get places on their own. Everybody stayed at home.

61 MM: And what sort of house did you have?

62 AD: We had a terraced house, with three bedrooms and a big attic, you know. We had two rooms and what you called the parlour in those days. The parlour and living room.

63 MM: And would your mother have had any kind of household gadgets, a washing machine, or anything like that?

64 AD: We had a mangle and I had to turn it while she put the clothes through. Thursday was ironing night and I had that to do. We had pulley lines, you know, for the clothes. Oh no, as I say, they don't know anything about hard work now, so they don't. My mother had a really hard life but we all had to help, our jobs were all laid out for us. She had to go back to do an office always on a Monday night. She washed on Tuesday nights, so Thursday night was ironing night, and that was my job. I had the

ironing to do, even when I would be eighteen, nineteen and maybe I used to say to my mother I've got a date and she'd say that's all right, after you get the ironing done.

65 MM: So when you started getting paid at work, did you bring home your pay packet?

66 AD: Oh yes, we had to bring home; we had to hand in our pay. We got so much back, you know, but it was never [pause] there was no stress about it or difficulty. We were glad we had got to the stage where we were working and of course, in those days, you could buy material and somebody could make you something to wear. It wasn't like, everything was so cheap. It was cheap but then wages were tiny, they were just a fraction of what you get. I used to say to my mother If I save up, mother, and buy the flowered voile, will you pay for the making of it? That was the sort of thing; you used to get round it this way. But I'd have taken a child out, you know, and wheeled it for a day and minded it for somebody. Maybe I'd have got [pause] I was going to say fifty pence but it wasn't fifty pence in those days, you'd maybe get two shillings or something like that.

67 MM: This was while you were still at school?

68 AD: Oh yes.

69 MM: And in either Thompsons or the Ormeau Bakery, as well as the pay, did you get extra benefits like pension schemes or sick pay schemes?

70 AD: Well, we didn't have [pause] they do have now what we called a Trust Fund. Say I allowed two shillings to be deducted from my pay every week, the firm put two shillings to it, and we got - when you would retire you got a lump sum. When I left, like, after fifteen years my lump sum was £50 you know. Well, under the circumstances in our house, I had to put that on a book for my mother to keep her until I would get work in Canada, so that's where that went. Then we got jobs. We went to Canada and we were all working. When I say all, my husband's nephew, he had gone too and as I say, we got through the first year but in that time, early fifties, a lot of people were going and we always say you'd have thought Canada was waiting for us. You know, everything just turned out so good, you know and then once I got earning, I was able to send my mother money.

71 MM: I take it you had no difficulty getting emigration papers or anything?

72 AD: None whatsoever. I had wonderful references from the Ormeau Bakery, you know. Not that that really counted in Canada. You get everything on your merits there, which I think is a far better way. Of course, it's not a welfare state, you see and that, in my estimation, makes better citizens.

73 MM: Right, although I would feel that a welfare state, if there had been welfare before the war at least your mother wouldn't have had to work so hard. You know, there are people who should be looked after.

74 AD: That's right, but in Canada the dollar is the mighty thing and they go after the dollar. There's no sentiment, I mean, working in the Ormeau Bakery, I speak with love of the Ormeau Bakery and I never cried leaving home because if we figured well, if we don't like Canada we can come back. But I cried leaving the Ormeau Bakery. I just thought what am I doing, you know. I could have gone back into it.

75 MM: Would you not have gone back?

76 AD: I could, but I probably would have been subordinate to some of the people I had trained and that didn't appeal to me at all. So, my husband went back to the firm that he had left, they were glad to get him back. He was in Downpatrick, Stewart's Motor Works – it was a big motor works place – so I fortunately got into the County Council and that was in Downpatrick so we were able to come and go together.

77 MM: Was that clerical work?

78 AD: Oh yes, it was clerical work there. Well, with having been in charge of the chocolate room, you see, I had to be responsible for books, for time, for the time keeping you know. You see, apart from making lovely things, you had to polish shapes, pretty flower shapes and all, if you were get the result you wanted the shapes all had to be perfect. For Easter eggs, when you were doing those, you know, so there was a certain of time, you know, when I would say we have to cleaning this morning and I would have to fill in all the time for all of the different jobs. As well as that, if I went to the general store and ordered say twenty-eight pounds of chocolate and maybe fourteen pounds of fondant, that would be forty-two pounds of ingredients, while I might have been allowed about two pounds of a loss. Like, I would have to produce forty pounds of the finished article so I had stock control as well, so that going in and sitting down at a desk was no problem whatsoever.

79 MM: How did that arise, as you were moving upwards in the job, were you learning on the job or were you given training as you went along?

80 AD: We were given training, yes.

81 MM: For yourself, before you took over as manager of that area were you trained?

82 AD: No, when I went into the Ormeau Bakery I was - apart from the gentleman who was the boss, I would have been ahead of any of the girls from an experience standpoint and then the work that I had demonstrated in all the windows and the other places I was telling you about, and then I had worked with Mr. McHendry for a couple of years, you see, before he got his promotion. There was no question of who would take over, apparently.

83 MM: And did people tend to stay in the Ormeau Bakery a long time?

84 AD: Once you got into the Ormeau Bakery - getting in was the thing. Getting in [pause].

85 MM: So it wasn't like a lot of factories where neighbourhood people would introduce their family and friends to get in?

86 AD: No, that's another thing they did not do, employ family people. There wasn't two out of one family. My sister worked in the shop but the shop was not the bakery and she was only there for a few years and it was during the war, because they were being paid off where she was working and she got into the shop. But if it hadn't been the shop, they wouldn't have put her in the bakery with me already being there.

87 MM: Why was that?

88 AD: I don't know but there was never two or three or one family ever in.

89 MM: Well, you obviously considered them to be good employers but were there trade unions in the bakery?

90 AD: Oh yes.

91 MM: Were you ever active yourself?

92 AD: Well, we had to pay whatever, there was always a certain of payment you know for trade union membership but oh yes, it was all very much above board, indeed very much. Everything was right about the Ormeau Bakery; I just felt, no matter where I ever worked after that, I was always looking back. Many's the time I used to say, dear me, you wouldn't get them doing that in the Ormeau Bakery. I used to have to shut up at times.

93 MM: I wouldn't say it made you very popular. [Both laugh]

94 AD: Oh yes, it was a wonderful place to work and the owner himself was a lovely gentleman, thoughtful and interested in the people.

95 MM: Even with such a large workforce would he have known all the people individually?

96 AD: He may not have known then just by name but when he would come round, many's the time we used to say Mr. Wilson's on the flat, he's coming along by the hot plate. You know, you'd be checking your hair, because you had to wear caps, no hair out, anything like that. When it came to the end of the day, when you'd been working hard all day, you started off from your shower with hair and everything tucked in nicely – you know at the at end of the day and maybe it was coming out a bit. Miss Grahame, I can remember on one occasion Miss Grahame coming in and she did look along the whole table and she admired the work and all and gave us due credit. And she turned to Constance, she had beautiful hair this girl and she'd awful trouble keeping it in her cap, and she just did that [pointed to her head] and said to Constance come with me. So Constance was taken into the cloakroom and told to take her cap off and put her hair back up and get it all back in. So when she came down, she looked at the rest of them and she said I think you all need your hair tidied and she was so diplomatic, when she came to me, she said and Anne, I want you to be the example. Talk about diplomacy – she was wonderful, they were marvellous people to work for.

97 MM: The showers were in the premises?

98 AD: Oh yes.

99 MM: And literally everyone who went in had to have a shower?

100 AD: Yes. Even the cleaners – we all had different colour uniforms, we all had lockers and towels were provided. Every Monday morning you picked up your own laundry.

101 MM: And was the shower during working hours or would you have to get in early?

102 AD: I started work at eight and I had to be in and be showered and punch the clock so that I was ready. And if you didn't punch for maybe a couple of minutes after eight there'd be a red mark on your card and if it went to five past, there'd be another one and if it went any further than that, you were called in.

103 MM: And would money be deducted then from your ages at the end of the week?

104 AD: No, I've never known that to occur. Just you'd be told that you - that the starting time was eight but if everybody had to wait for somebody else to punch - well, you might be waiting for somebody to punch the clock on time but somebody else was punching, you know to get in. But the discipline was

very, very high but you had to learn to live with it. And I found the better you did that, the happier you were in the job and you got a better standing, in your wages and everything. And I used to help with boiling the jam; this was for the department like. I'm talking about fifty-six pounds of raspberries, like, and fifty-six pounds of sugar…

105 MM: Was this for cake fillings and that?

106 AD: Yes, it would be used you know for filling. Well, this would be in a big copper thing with a big, big spout. Well, you volunteered, you know, because it would be after hours and maybe in the summer time, you know it was a very warm job type of thing. But I remember when I got my pay one Friday and I remember I said I'm overpaid and I went back to the accounts and I said look, it was ten shillings or something which in those days was a lot of money. I said there's an error in my pay packet, there's extra money in it and they said oh well, I was given that instruction, you'd better talk to Miss Grahame. Which I did, and she said that I had more than earned it. You know, you got it that way.

107 MM: That wasn't formal overtime? It was a kind of a bonus?

108 AD: Oh no, it wasn't formal overtime; it was because of the work you had done. They showed their appreciation of it. That's why I say, I mean, the discipline and manners and everything and a proper way of speaking were very important too, you know, because she was very strict you know, but she just would have stopped you and said no, you say it this way. That would have happened maybe to younger people more often, you know young newer people when they were growing up in it. But even your first interview, really and truly I can remember as if it was yesterday, you'd have thought you were trying to get into heaven instead of the Ormeau Bakery. [Laughs]

109 MM: How many people interviewed you?

110 AD: Oh, just Miss Grahame. She was a maiden lady, very very highly educated woman. She just demanded the very best, the very highest of everybody and she got it, she got it. Many was the time behind her back we laughed and we'd say here's Miss Grahame. I have friends still and when we get together that's what we talk about, and if you say something, I'd say you didn't say thank you or you should have said please the way she used to say to us you know.

111 MM: Would you know anything about Miss Grahame's background? How she came to be working there?

112 AD: I didn't know anything about her background as a young person but she lived in Balmoral Avenue that was up at the top of the Malone Road. She was a maiden lady and lived with her maiden sister and she was [pause] where was she educated now - but she was a very highly educated lady and she educated everybody she came in contact with too, you know. But she did [pause] when I came back from Canada the first time, she entertained me in their home, which was another thing that was practically unheard of, you know. Oh, Anne S., as I was in the Bakery you know, Anne S. was up in Miss Grahame's. I don't know what it was, I always think that the years that I sat in those shop windows, you know, sixteen and of a Saturday night, shops were open to ten o'clock in those days. And I'm sitting in the window and everybody's looking at me, and I think that gave me a confidence that I might never have had as I got older. Because I've noticed that throughout my life, I'm pretty active in church and the choice – my husband was

organist and choir master – that if I've ever been asked to do anything, for instance read or talk, it doesn't bother me. I often think it was that, it got me over a hurdle of being afraid to face people.

113 MM: It was quite a big thing for a sixteen-year-old to be put on public view like that?

114 AD: Yes, wasn't it?

115 MM: Were you given a choice?

116 AD: No, I was told that I was going to have to do it and that it was because I was the right person. There was a lot of compliments, you know, when they were choosing me for this reason, for various reasons, how I looked and the way I worked and I was capable of it. No there wasn't anyone else, like.

117 MM: Was it just one shop where they did this?

118 AD: Oh no, it was different weekends I would be sometimes in Cornmarket, sometimes Anne Street, very often Donegall Place and they had a lovely big one on the Antrim Road and I was there once or twice. I was always enjoying it, it never was a chore to me, you know. I think if you're good at something, it makes all the difference. If you're struggling, it's different, so it is.

119 MM: Well, it wouldn't have been much of an advertisement if you were making a mess of it in the window? [Both laugh] But that must have created more pressure?

120 AD: Yes. I did need a lot of patience when I was training younger people, but we always had a [pause] the chocolate room had a nice atmosphere and we were always just like family.

121 MM: In terms of that, did you socialise much with the people that you worked with? You say you have friends now who worked with you back then?

122 AD: Not a lot of them but one of the girls, she was a fancy cake baker and whenever they were paid off, when their work all went off when the fresh eggs and all [pause] dried eggs, they wouldn't even entertain the thought of margarine or dried eggs coming into the Ormeau Baker [pause] so this was one of the girls, she asked could she get down to work with Anne in the chocolate room. So that was considered, and she got down and actually, the man she married was the gentleman I was telling you about who was the boss of the chocolate room, that when he moved out I got the promotion. So she and her husband when they were sort of boy and girl going together, my husband and I were the same, and we had a foursome many is the time. Her husband is dead as mine is too and she and I are still good friends.

123 MM: And was there an organised social life? Was there a sports club for instance?

124 AD: There wasn't a sports club but we had a table tennis table in the canteen, which I was on every minute I could get, you know. And even Mr. Wilson, he used to watch us in his lunch hour, you know, on the table tennis table. We did have a choir, of which I was a part also, and we did enjoy that a lot and every year what they called the Trust meeting, you know business were discussed and all that and the choir would perform, you know, after tea. It was a lot of fun, you know, but work came first in the Ormeau Bakery, it came first. And there was no half measures and no short cuts, everything had to be done to Ormeau Bakery standards. But having said that, that's what made it all so worthwhile and so good to be part of. But there was a lot of fun and they were all lovely people because they chose their staff very carefully, so they did.

125 MM: And were there ever people who didn't reach the standards, who might have been let go for some reason?

126 AD: There would have been; there would have been. If people didn't [pause] if for instance, people didn't shower and they were found out, in anything unseemly of any kind, they would be let go. But I think a part that was very good too because the wool used to come in, you know all this dark green wool and so many of us, you know we'd take lots of it home and we'd knit around the table tennis table. You know the table tennis had to stop because you had tea, and you know you were eating and you were knitting because they wanted a dozen pairs of socks and so many pullovers and balaclava helmets, you know all that and we used to bring it home too. My mother used to knit and my sister and all. I remember one weekend they needed [pause] we were one pullover short and I brought the wool home and my sister knit the back and my mother knit the front with the vee neck and I knit the two sleeves, in a weekend. We got it all together you know to get the parcel ready for the troops, so we did. There was lots of things like that. There was a lot of fun during the war, as well as a lot of sorrow, because there was so many nice young fellows in the Bakery went into the services and some of them didn't come back, sadly, you know.

127 MM: Would there have been more women than usual working there, because of that sort of thing – men going off to the services?

128 AD: No, I wouldn't have thought - no, women would never have put into a position that a man had vacated.

129 MM: Even on a temporary basis?

130 AD: Well, maybe on a temporary basis. Very often, I would get my own stock up, for instance we moulded a lot of the little Daddy Christmases and that sort of thing, you know you'd moulds and everything for Easter Eggs and everything. And I used to get that all up in good time for Christmas and then we would be available to go out and help in the pastry room or at the [pause] we used to call it 'catching' at the hot plate, you know so it was caught coming off. You were always available, because naturally at Christmas there was extra everything needed, you know. So you could have moved around and the more you made yourself available to the various departments, well then, the more popular you'd be, the more you were appreciated, the more use you were too.

131 MM: When you were having contact with the troops, in the canteens or wherever, I take it you tried not to talk about the war?

132 AD: We did, because it was always a fun thing, you know, more a fun thing. Many was the time you'd have taken an address and written to them.

133 MM: Were the dances organised?

134 AD: The dances, well the dances – now I'm not talking about the Ormeau Bakery and I'm talking about other dances. No, well I had a friend who was - she was in the army and she was in the Holywood Barracks, on the Holywood Road and she was a sergeant. She happened to be one woman who had plenty of men [laughs] sort of under her thumb. But she lived along with her dad, he was a widower and very often she would have brought some of the boys up to her home and I would have been there to help. Some of them were married men, they brought us and showed us pictures [pause] young married

men, there were first babies and they were left home and left, you know and they used to really a enjoy a night in a home, you know out of the barracks and that. And it was with her, and her company, we would go to the dances in the barracks, you see, and very often there would be other ones organised in the vicinity and we would all go, you know. But you know you were dating and seeing them, and you were allowed to bring them home because it was the war. People used to say about my mother that they never knew how she did it but she was always able to put something on the table, even with all the rationing. Boiled egg, toast, type of thing, you know. [Laughs]

135 MM: Would that, your whole area would have welcomed the troops in that way?

136 AD: Oh yes, during the war people would have done that. And we danced a lot; they were all lovely dancers. The only thing about is was there was no cars; there was no petrol, even for people who had a car and it was bicycles and if you hadn't a bicycle, well you were walking. And one of the boys of the Holywood Barracks, he was a lovely musician and a beautiful singer, one of these gorgeous big piano accordions, you know and I had them all up to mother's, to our house, one night. Actually, it was Easter Tuesday night, it was the night of the big blitz and everybody had gone for the early bus but Derek and he just got up to go and we just got out to the door and the sirens went. I said, you can't go, with a piano accordion, you know the size of that, I said, you can't go. Oh, he says, I have to go because if he hadn't gone he would have been what do they call it? AWOL – absent without leave. So he had to go and he walked from the top of Donegall Road to the Holywood Road, with the blackout and all, through that blitz that night. He said the times he ran into air raid shelters, whenever there was one, and then to another but he had to go, otherwise he'd have been in trouble.

137 MM: Even in special circumstances, like a bombing raid?

138 AD: That's right, if you had to be back in the barracks, because they never knew what they would be called out to do, you see.

139 MM: Would they have been involved in, you know, trying to help people in the ruins of houses?

140 AD: Yes, they would. That's what they would do when they were there in that particular barracks. But we did a lot for them, we gave them a lot of fun and a lot of meals in houses, you know that helped - for them to get anything home-baked, for instance a home-made apple tart. Oh dear, you know they'd get tired of barracks diet, you know whatever it might be, I suppose potatoes and such. And where Dorry lived, you know the gentleman next door to her was a baker in Inglis's Bakery, and as soon as we'd say the boys were coming, he would have baked a big apple tart you know, I mean a big one, you know. [Laughs] So things like that, we did but the war - as I say nobody wants a war but there was a great lot of fun. There was a great side to it, you know. I suppose I can talk like this because I didn't lose anybody close to me in it, but I mean, to set it beside what we're going through at the present time, for the past thirty years, give me a war.

141 MM: Well, I suppose the issues were much more clear-cut?

142 AD: Yes, they know what they're fighting for, where they're fighting and all about it but apart from sirens you weren't afraid to go to bed at night, you know what I mean. You just had to hop up and get out and that was it.

143 MM: What about feeling about the South being neutral? Was there resentment?

144 AD: Oh well, I was very happy about it, because we couldn't get out of Ireland for holidays, you see. I never would have known the South or saw all the beauty of it if it hadn't been that we could go there. My husband and I, we cycled the whole of County Wicklow during the war. We took the bikes of course on the train, then you see to Dublin. And there were a lot of Dublin fellows, you see, came up to work in the aircraft factories and all here. And there was one - that friend of mine who as I said was a sergeant, a man from Dublin was living with her daddy, just from Monday to Friday like, he went home to Dublin at the weekends. But his wife had a nice boarding house in Bray, so that's where we went for our holidays and we left every morning early and we would cycle so much of Wicklow. Sometimes we stayed over and sometimes we came back and I wouldn't have missed those holidays for anything. And we went to Dun Laoghaire every Easter, we used to stay at the Royal Hotel, is that it? It used to be. [Laughs] So we saw a lot of - kissed the Blarney Stone and all those things we'd never have been able to do.

145 MM: A lot of the women I've spoken to said they got round the rationing by going South to pick up things. Smuggling was a great game for a lot of people.

146 AD: I never was without silk stockings, so I wasn't. [Laughs] Fashion was always very strong with me and I just couldn't bear the thought of not having fully-fashioned stockings, you know with the back seams and all the rest of it. I used to tie them in my husband's braces here in the shoulders and let them hang down the back of his coat. [Both laugh] And I bought a lovely fur coat in Clerys and it was all those years ago - I'd have been put in gaol. The wife of the gentleman who stayed up with Dorry's dad, she wore it up for me. Like she lived in Dublin, you see, and it was an Indian lamb coat I bought and she wore it and I bought a hat to match it and shoes. And I can remember going down to the Great Northern Railway to meet Rose, and here she was coming walking along in all my finery, you know. [Both laugh] So I did it too, believe you me, I never was without my silk stockings. People were putting colour on their legs and everything but I didn't need to, I always had my stockings. Oh yes, and lovely handbags and everything and shoes. I used to go away like some pauper with the oldest sandals maybe I had and I used to throw them in the Liffey and get new ones. [Both laugh]

147 MM: There were probably lots of things like that sailing down the Liffey at the time. [Both laugh] I read a diary that somebody wrote during the war years and they used to come from Belfast down to Dublin and remark on the lights, that it always struck them. Because having seen the Belfast blackout when they got into Dublin, they just couldn't get over the fact of how much the area was lit up.

148 AD: We loved it too, you see. Oh yes, we loved it, so we did. You see we went for a fortnight every summer and then we went every Easter down to Dun Laoghaire but we always took the bikes and had a great cycle all around. Oh yes, we loved it, so we did.

149 MM: During the Emergency, as it was in the South, censorship was very strict and a lot of Southern Irish people wouldn't have known too much about what was going on in Europe or the rest of the world for that matter. For you, I mean the censorship was quite strict in newspapers and cinema and everything in Britain as well, would you have been aware that there were things you weren't being told?

150 AD: With reference to the war? I think we were fairly well acquainted with everything. I daresay there may have been things that we didn't know about it, but they were always coming up did you hear such and such a thing?

151 MM: Would that have been from soldiers talking to people?

152 AD: I couldn't say that I ever heard the soldiers [pause] you may have heard the odd thing from them but you see they were so strictly [pause] they'd taken care of themselves. Many was the time you'd have wanted them to stay or go someplace with you but oh boy, if we did that, we'd be in trouble. Either that, or they wouldn't be at a dance for another six months, they'd be grounded you see. It was sad, because you would get to know them very well, knowing all the time that they would soon be moving. And that boy who had the lovely piano accordion - there were three Scots fellows, the last time we saw them we had a night in Dorry's house and they were going up to Ballinamallard, that's in Enniskillen, but that was where they were leaving for Dunkirk and we never heard of them again. So we don't know if they [pause] an awful lot of people were lost crossing to Dunkirk that time so we never knew because [pause] We feel they must have been because if they had come through it all, even afterwards like when they'd have been home, we feel they'd have got in touch, so they would. Like, they knew our mothers, it wasn't just dates, you know what I mean, because you brought them home and I used to say to my mother I'm going to bring Derek and John and some of them in tonight. I'll try and get such and such a thing and I would have got something in the bakery, maybe a crusty loaf or something like that, whatever you could have got.

153 MM: Could you get your bread ration from the bakery directly or did you have to queue?

154 AD: Well you didn't have to queue but you had to have your BTUs as we called them, the coupons. Like, we couldn't have got it from the bakery without them. They were very strict about that, they were. There was no difference made because you were working, you know. Because they were depending on the public and they couldn't do that, you know.

155 MM: Would there have been much involvement from the Ministry of Food in running the bakery? Like having to change the recipes to suit the conditions?

156 AD: I don't think they could have done that in a privately owned place like the Ormeau Bakery because they had their own standards and they wouldn't lower them. They would not lower them; they put the thing off completely, you see, which was devastating at the time because people would have willingly bought them, even done with dried eggs and margarine. But no, they wouldn't. As a matter of fact, just to show you show strict they were about the standards – I was waiting one time for a little chocolate cases that you put chocolates in, for a box of chocolates. And they were finally delivered and left at the door of the bakery but they were in a big margarine carton. You know it was just a cardboard carton that they put them all in and they wouldn't let them in because they said how could they tell the people they were not using margarine for the people who had seen this. And they sent the chocolate cases back and I was waiting for them but no, they returned it. Nobody could have dictated to them really, because as I say they were a privately owned concern and the standards were unimpeachable, you know. It was a privilege to have been part of it.

157 MM: Certainly the standards of hygiene and everything seem to have been most unusual - did they have people monitoring, were there Miss Grahame's in many departments?

158 AD: Well there was only the one Miss Grahame, but as far as I was concerned I was the one to monitor the girls in the chocolate room, you see, and of course, having been monitored myself by her for so long, I knew. Well, I would have been the one who would have taken the rap if any of my girls had of fallen short. She would simply say, did Anne not tell you such and such a thing how that should be done? But thankfully, I had a very high standing in it and as I say, this was the proof of it [indicating silver tea service in cabinet].

159 MM: It really is beautiful.

160 AD: Usually, the staff and the management would contribute to what was being collected in the work place, you know. But apparently when they went to one of the director people for the donation they were collecting for Anne, you see they said management are doing something for Anne and that was the first time. And Miss Grahame, it was unheard of also, she called me to her office and she gave me a ten-pound note, which ten pounds, like you know, in 1953! And said Anne, I want you to buy something for your breakfast table so that you can give me a daily thought. Wasn't that lovely? And I still have bits and pieces of a breakfast set that I bought.

161 MM: You were obviously highly thought of.

162 AD: Yes.

163 MM: You mentioned that there was an ambulance room if somebody became ill. Would there have been a doctor and a nurse or medical staff there?

164 AD: There was a doctor, not on the premises but just in the next block. Dr. Young, he was the bakery doctor and another [pause] I've put it down here [checking notes] what did I say about the doctor? This is not about the bakery actually but one night coming back over the Albert Bridge on the bicycle, you know there were tramlines in those days. Well a land mine had fallen on Cromac Square; do you know Cromac Square? It's a square and a landmine had fallen in a massive hole and I'm coming on a rover bike, you know with the dropped handlebars. My mother used to say could you not have got a bicycle where you could sit up and look where you're going? [Both laugh] But I had this racing type bike coming over and the front wheel, the narrow wheels you see, went in to a tram line, into the dent the tram line made and I shot over into the hole the landmine made in Cromac Square. And the army you see, they were all there, and so a few of the soldiers got in the hole and got me out. And I didn't even know where the bike was - but I could see the soldiers with the bike between their knees taking the buckle out of the wheel and everything. And I always say, if they hadn't of put me back on that bicycle that night, I don't suppose I ever would have rode a bicycle again. But I had no option, you know and the funny thing about it was when I came home – you see it was double summer time and it would clear till nearly twelve o'clock at night in summer time you see.

165 MM: You didn't have the daylight saving time then?

166 AD: No they didn't change the clock, you see. My mother was standing at the door, quite dismayed looking, when she finally saw me arriving and I had gone on from work you see. It was a cycle

run and she said if you had come home for your tea tonight, Anne, you would not have gone out on that bike for I had dreamed the whole night that something had happened to you. Well that was when I burst out crying for the first time. I couldn't cry in front of the soldiers and all the rest was shock and then, I had it all in my hinchbone was all skinned and everything. My face here was black, you know, you should have seen me. And I was just doctored in the house and made nice and comfortable. Put to bed when the sirens went. I was so ill after the fall that the fellows, the air raid wardens said I would have to get out, but when my mother explained he said, well, if you're staying, you're doing it at your own risk. We were supposed to get out, well, we knew that, but I could go nowhere that night. But we stayed anyway and just hoped for the best. I was so scared I wouldn't get out on the bike again I got up and went to work the next morning. When I went in and Mr. Curson, one of the managers, came in on business into the chocolate room and he saw me. So when I told him what had happened he sent me to the ambulance room and then Dr. Young was sent for and I was sent home. I was concussed, he said, that was my experience of one of the landmine holes, over the handlebars of the bike, so it was. But I was well taken care of in the bakery – it was in the middle of the week and they told me to stay off until the following Monday.

167 MM: Would you have been paid while you were off?

168 AD: Yes, I was paid for that, I was. Everybody wouldn't be, but if you were running a department like myself, you know, yes, you would be.

169 MM: So when you were going, when you did feel able to be up the Black Mountain to get away from the bombing, were there many people there?

170 AD: Oh yes, hundreds, hundreds of people.

171 MM: Were they sleeping in the open?

172 AD: Well, they weren't sleeping really, just all standing, watching out. They had put up sort of tents, sort of pole things with what do you call them, big tarpaulins over them, because it would be raining sometimes, you see. And people were just all crowding in, just standing, keeping one another warm, type of thing. And then the All Clear. As soon as the All Clear would sound, we'd go the way back. When you got back down it was hardly worthwhile getting into bed because the first thing you'd want was a cup of tea and then it was work time. You'd been out half the night.

173 MM: And even if there'd been a raid, was there any allowance made for people being late or anything?

174 AD: Oh well, in the Ormeau Bakery they were very thoughtful and considerate. If you had of, you know, said what had happened, they would have been understanding, they would. Yes, they would. Oh it was a marvellous place to work, and as I say they did their part in the war effort in every way, so they did. And any boys of the bakery who had enlisted and gone away, like they sent them food parcels and everything you know.

175 MM: Did they keep their jobs open for them after the war?

176 AD: They did yes; though sadly, as I say some of them didn't come back. As I say, nobody wants a war but there were some happy days and happy times and you met lovely people and you made a lot of friends.

177 MM: They say the experience of shared danger brings people together.

178 AD: That's right, it did that's right it did indeed. As I say, with the South being neutral, we just could hardly wait for summer to come, to get down, you know. I love Co. Wicklow, I think it's gorgeous and do you live in Dublin?

179 MM: I do, but in the city.

180 AD: Yes, I was down a couple of years ago, just for the day but we went out, I never hear it mentioned that's why I put it to you. When we used to go cycling you know, in Wicklow, to Glendalough. We went to a place called Glenmalure. I'm overcome, because at last I meet someone who knows what I'm talking about.

181 MM: My family, we would have spent long weekends during the summers when we were young. It was a favourite place to picnic.

182 AD: It's funny, now, Miss Grahame now that I'm talking about - when I told her that my husband, though we weren't married then, we were going down there. She said well, you'll be going to Glendalough. Well I said we've been in Glendalough before but she said, go to Glenmalure and she told us about a little hotel and all that was in it. And we went, and it wasn't as picturesque as Glendalough. Was there some sort of mines, copper mines or something?

183 MM: Yes, there's a quarry quite near and there's also a firing range for the Irish army. I don't know if that was there then but it has been and that's at the top of the Glen.

184 AD: Well we went down with the bikes to it – we used to say we walked as much as rode but sometimes it was uphill, you know and you had to get off and push.

185 MM: Unfortunately, in recent years it's had quite a big car park put in and it spoils it.

186 AD: Well, it was the war years that I was in it. So when people say isn't Glendalough beautiful, I say yes, but did you see Glenmalure. I try to say it, am I right now if I'm looking at Glendalough, if I went up the mountains there on that hill at Glendalough and down the other side, I'd be into Glenmalure.

187 MM: The road branches off and if you're going to Glendalough you come to a little village called Laragh and the road to Glendalough - well it does go to the right and the road to Glenmalure goes to the left but it's actually about two valleys on. There's Kelly's Mountain and another one in between. But I must say I've never cycled there – I wouldn't be that fit. [Both laugh]

188 AD: Well, I certainly wouldn't now but we did then. Oh yes, I did all my shopping too in Dublin. Many's the time I laugh at the shoes I threw in the Liffey. [Both laugh] People seeing me going out must have been thinking there she is going to Dublin without a shoe on her foot. But I'd have a new pair on me and a new pair in the case and I'd have worn them day about the whole time I'd be there, you know, so I would. I think that's all the wee notes I've put down about the blackout, and walking in twos and threes and the bread.

189 MM: This is the second interview with Mrs. Anne Douglas on Monday [pause]

190 AD: 20th September.

191 MM: Now really what I wanted to do was just - one very important question that I didn't ask you, and I hope this wouldn't be painful, but you said your father had died when your mother was very young. What did he die of?

192 AD: Typhoid, there was a typhoid epidemic apparently at the time.

193 MM: And how old was he?

194 AD: He was only twenty-seven or something like that.

195 MM: I hadn't heard anything about that. Could you maybe tell me a bit more?

196 AD: Well apparently there was a typhoid epidemic at the time. My mother used to say that they suspected some kind of poisoning because he worked a lot - he was a painter and decorator and they figured it might have been lead poisoning as well but it was typhoid. He died in the fever hospital.

197 MM: And before he died, was he being treated by a doctor or was he just taken very ill very suddenly?

198 AD: I don't know a thing about that.

199 MM: So your mother wasn't inclined to talk about it – was that because it was too painful?

200 AD: No, she didn't because we were babies and as we grew older we realised that we'd no dad and she told us what happened.

201 MM: One of the things that also struck me was that you were saying that your mum, she brought the three of you up by herself virtually, with no help from the state. Would you know anything about when you were born, were you born at home or in hospital?

202 AD: At home, we were all born at home. That was the done thing then, yes.

203 MM: And she never probably told you very much about that time?

204 AD: No.

205 MM: I've been reading about the Belfast City Hospital and the changes around the 1930s and 1940s and it seemed in the earlier period it wasn't very well set up. You never had any experience of how - you were never treated there?

206 AD: No, I'm afraid I hadn't. The City Hospital is one of the best and biggest hospitals today, you know, in the North of Ireland. I know it that way but I didn't know it when I was a child. Fortunately, we didn't have much hospital problems, you know, none of us were ever needing the hospital as we grew up.

207 MM: What about the ordinary childhood illnesses – did you experience those?

208 AD: Oh yes, we did.

209 MM: There was no vaccination programme presumably?

210 AD: Not to my knowledge, no. I remember my mother saying we all had it, like, one after the after type of thing, you know.

211 MM: You don't remember yourself?

212 AD: No, I wouldn't. We were very young. My sister doesn't remember anything either, you know, of those years. We remember having to go to school very young, and my mother being at work and always waiting for her coming home.

213 MM: How did you manage that? Did she leave you to school in the morning or did you just get yourselves there?

214 AD: No, a neighbour's daughter, you know, she might have been fourteen or something like that, she used to take us with her and bring us back.

215 MM: So when you got home your mother was still out at work?

216 AD: She was still out at work, yes.

217 MM: Can you remember what time of day you'd have gotten in?

218 AD: We'd have come home from school around three o'clock, between half past two and three and a neighbour just who lived beside us, she was very kind and we'd have gone into her, you know, until my mother came.

219 MM: So she would give you something to eat?

220 AD: Yes, she was really nursing Frank, my brother; he was the baby. He was born three weeks after my father died.

221 MM: That was another thing I wanted to ask you - when a baby was born there was there a lot of help from neighbours, particularly in a time of tragedy like your mother had.

222 AD: Oh yes, there was, yes. Then my mother brought a lady friend of hers who worked, home with her to live, you know, to give her a room in the house. She was always there too for help.

223 MM: She was a lodger?

224 AD: Yes, to help pay the rent type of thing.

225 MM: Was the house rented or owned?

226 AD: Oh rented.

227 MM: Was that from a public authority or a local landlord?

228 AD: Just a local landlord in those days, yes.

229 MM: You were saying in the first interview that you had three bedrooms and quite a few of the women that I've spoken to, that were working the most they could manage was a two-bedroomed terraced house. So you were quite well off really [both laugh].

230 AD: Yes, we had two bedrooms and then another one upstairs again, a big one, you know.

231 MM: And do you know if your parents had moved into that house when they got married?

232 AD: Yes, I think that was my mother's first dwelling, that's right. Because Nora was born there, my older sister.

233 MM: And you all stayed there then until you got married and moved away?

234 AD: No, we left that house, what age was I? About twenty-six - it must have been the 1930s, we moved up to the top of the Donegall Road, like where we all lived together until my mother died and I was married.

235 MM: And why did you move?

236 AD: Well, it was a nicer - it was a nicer locality, right up on the main road. And we didn't have a bathroom in the first house, and we did when we went to the Donegall Road.

237 MM: Was that possible because the three of you were working at that stage?

238 AD: Oh yes, we were working and grown up and things were better for us. We were all working and [pause] my mother wasn't. She was at home by that time.

239 MM: In terms of paying the rent, would you still have given your pay packet to your mother and she'd have paid the rent out of it?

240 AD: We had to pay [pause] we'd have given the money and we had so much given back to us, you know.

241 MM: To go back again to your childhood, you mentioned that you had been in the Girl Guides. Was that attached to the local church?

242 AD: Well, guide companies usually are, but we just happened to be a company not attached to a church. We met in a hall on the Donegall Road and we had a very good captain and lieutenant from a very well known school, Richmond Lodge on the Malone Road. They had come from there and we were very blessed with gifted, two gifted girls who were musical - singers - and we entered competitions. And then when we were [pause] you had to be eleven before you could go to camp and from when I was eleven we were camping up right until our early twenties. Very keen on guiding all through.

243 MM: Where would you have gone camping?

244 AD: Locally. We went you know to different - like for instance the demesne at Killalea and we went to a place called Eglantine; it was a country sort of big resort belonging to a wealthy man, you know and just around the coast to Ardglas at Easter time. We would have gone there.

245 MM: The two girls, you say they came from a school. Were they still at school themselves, in secondary school, or were they teachers there?

246 AD: No, they were teachers.

247 MM: And this was voluntary work on their part?

248 AD: Voluntary work, oh yes. All part of the guide movement which was very strong in those days. Still is, the guide movement still is. My sister's still a member of the Trefoil Guild, which is an old girl guides association. They say once a guide always a guide [laughs].

249 MM: All my siblings, my brothers and sisters – I'm the eldest of six, they were all in the sea scouts, I was the only one who wasn't. And they've never severed the connections. But what other activities would you have done, you know when you say they were musical?

250 AD: They entered us for musical competitions, you know, taught us to sing properly and taught us some lovely things. Things I only hear people singing now and I can recall having been taught them.

251 MM: Is that where your interest in choir came from?

252 AD: Well it would be I suppose part of it, yes, because I was quite young then and automatically went into the church choir.

253 MM: What about your mother – would she have any involvement in guide activities or anything else you were doing?

254 AD: No, my mother didn't. She had grown up - her mother died when she was quite young. She was left with three brothers so there was no time for organisations for her, sort of living at home and then going to work when she was the age. So she had a pretty hard life, all told.

255 MM: Was it expected by her family that she would look after her brothers?

256 AD: Oh yes, she did.

257 MM: What about home social activities? I know you were saying that during the war years you had a great social life, entertaining the troops, but when you were young, did you have friends in and how would you entertain yourselves in the evenings?

258 AD: In those days, you stayed young much younger than boys and girls do now. I mean a skipping rope was my full joy until I was maybe fourteen or something, you know. And I walked a lot and when we were with the guides you see, although it was only one night a week, we were meeting for nature study, which I loved, you know. Going out and looking at trees, listening to the bird song. We had to recognise them by their song, you see.

259 MM: That's something I've always wished I could do.

260 AD: Yes, and then we would stop close up to where the song was coming from and try to spot the bird and then know if we were right, you know. There was badges to do; I did my nature study badge because I was keen and it stayed with me right until now for I love the change of seasons and everything now, you know. I learnt to love the entire creation through the guides.

261 MM: And when you were older yourself were you ever tempted to go back and become a leader?

262 AD: I sort of - I think I started to go with a boy, I think that was what it was [both laugh]. And I came out when I thought I was past uniform you know, and black stockings and all that sort of thing. And of course I was in the church choir by that time.

263 MM: What about earlier? Were your family churchgoers?

264 AD: Yes, we were.

265 MM: Your mother would take you to Sunday services?

266 AD: Yes, she did. When we were young we all went together.

267 MM: Were there any other activities associated with the church?

268 AD: We were so much in the guides - there was a girls club you know and all that kind of thing but it didn't attract me like the guides did, so it didn't. Except Sunday School, of course.

269 MM: How long did you keep that up for?

270 AD: I was going to Sunday School until I was about seventeen and then the conditions that I got leaving on was that I would go to an afternoon service in the City Y.M. on a Sunday afternoon. It was all part of growing up; that was what we did.

271 MM: That was a condition your mother laid down?

272 AD: It was yes.

273 MM: So she was quite strict about it?

274 AD: Oh she was, yes, about Sunday.

275 MM: And how about your friends, would they have come from similar backgrounds?

276 AD: Yes, we were. Some of them were better off, you know, from the standpoint that they had fathers, mothers, working and that. But you sort of made a friend in the class you were in and that was it, you know.

277 MM: What about - as far as I can tell from talking to people in the Catholic community, they didn't really go outside of their immediate neighbourhood. They didn't really see the other side, for want of a better description. Would that have been true of your experience of childhood?

278 AD: You mean from a Protestant/Catholic point of view?

279 MM: Yes, you know that you were going to school in a Protestant school and you went to a Protestant church, did you see Catholic children at any point?

280 AD: Well, strangely, my mother's closest friend when we were young children was a Catholic lady and we went as a family and visited each other's homes. There was a [pause] my mother must have known her before she was married, I think they must have lived and grown up in the same street or something. But when my mother got married so did Mrs. Mulholland. She was Mrs. Mulholland when she got married. Smith was her maiden name. And the first year that my mother was married, Nora was born and the first year Mrs. Mulholland was married, her first daughter was born so they had - then I was born and she also had a second girl. So these were Catholic girls and a Catholic family and Mrs. Smith's husband died and by that time my mother was expecting Frank. So you see my mother had the third child but they were both left widows. They were very young. But I remember walking - it was quite a walk to where they lived, you know, to visit. We always went to visit their home, so we did, there was never any Catholic/Protestant thing much, we were all people, and we grew up with them and knew them well. And I think with me it has been like that throughout my life because not in the Ormeau Bakery but after I was married I drifted into full-time office work and it was Catholic girls and boys all the time, you know, and I never had any of those problems [laughs].

281 MM: The Ormeau Bakery was mainly a Protestant workforce?

282 AD: It was completely Protestant.

283 MM: It seems very similar to the Guinness's Brewery in Dublin where there was a large Catholic workforce but all of the management positions were filled by Protestants. I suppose it's natural that a minority group would chose to look after each other. With the Catholic women who never went outside of their own area - it wasn't so much that the Catholic women had any prejudice but that all of their activities were so connected with people in their own area that they never actually met anyone outside their own community.

284 AD: We knew the Smiths - I actually call them Smith Mulholland, that was her married name but because Evelyn and Norah were about the same age and then Molly and myself, you know and my mother kept up the friendship for years until Mrs. Smith died. But I can well remember walking - you see, you walked everywhere in those days. I mean with my mother's hand, we were as young as that when we went to visit them. They both went into teaching; I don't know where they are now. We just lost touch throughout the years but right up until I retired [pause] well, you'd have heard of Eddie McGrady the Nationalist M.P., well Eddie's sister was my closest friend.

285 MM: So you had long hikes with the girl guides, did you have any other sporting activities?

286 AD: No there wasn't a lot of sport of school in my day. Maybe exercises like drill, you know that type of thing, you know.

287 MM: You didn't play hockey or anything?

288 AD: No, I played table tennis but that was in church days, you know the church club. The lawn tennis club, I played there and then, I loved - table tennis would have been my favourite. I played on teams you know and matches.

289 MM: It does strike me that it's very different now in that schools at least recognise the value of having children involved in sports and teams. Though I suppose the educational system was considerably more primitive then?

290 AD: That's right.

291 MM: When you were going into school, was the school attached to the church or was it a state school?

292 AD: Yes, our school was attached to the church. You see, it was an elementary school.

293 MM: And what sort of classes, what size classes would you have had?

294 AD: We didn't talk about P1, P2 and P3 and all in those days, you know, we talked about the infants and then a second, third and fourth class which we talked about, was downstairs. Then when you were seven maybe or eight, you went upstairs to the senior school and then you went there for second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth was the height of the school, you know. I remember arriving in sixth standard, I was just thirteen and I had two years there before I could leave school. Actually, they would - I told you they would have liked me to go on to be a teacher but money wasn't available, there wasn't the opportunities in those days that young people have now.

295 MM: You mentioned too that sometimes you would taken the class in the teacher's absence – how many children would there have been?

296 AD: Oh, there would have been - I'm sure twenty. The classes were big, you know, so they were.

297 MM: In the South - I did my primary education in the late 1950s and I can remember when I first went into school when I was five there was a class of sixty. It was quite common.

298 AD: Oh yes, indeed.

299 MM: What sort of lessons did you have? Was it just the three Rs or were they broader than that? You know, the reading, writing, and arithmetic?

300 AD: For myself, do you mean?

301 MM: Yes, when you were going through school were there any special classes other than doing the very basic education?

302 AD: No, I never remember there being any special class for anything, but as far as the three Rs were concerned I had no problems ever at school. You know, I was maybe the head girl for a while in different standards, and my writing was on the wall and had been framed at one time. You know when you would write copies you know, I can remember it well, it was Cease to do evil, learn to do well. That got the prize that time.

303 MM: They obviously recognised that you were talented but there was no possibility of a scholarship or was it that your mother needed the money you could earn?

304 AD: No, as I say there was nothing then and people were waiting, all parents were waiting for their children to go to work in those days, you know. There wasn't the wealth around that there is now. You see that would have been just after the First World War, you know, we'd be talking 1920s sort of thing, you know. You went to school - there was no talk of homework, you did your exercise as we were taught and once you did that, attendance was very important, like, you'd be in trouble if you missed school. But for me, school was no problem. I enjoyed school, enjoyed everything about it.

305 MM: What about things like school lunches? Did you eat in school, did you bring a packed lunch?

306 AD: Yes, we often took a packed lunch, probably bread and butter and jam, very often it was sandwiches and you carried that with you. We only got half an hour then, anyway, you know, at school. It was a break just of a half hour, so it was, like from twelve to half twelve or thereabouts and then coming back from one to three.

307 MM: And would they have been single sex, were the boys separate from the girls?

308 AD: No, it was a mixed class. The boys sat of course together and the girls together but there was a mixed class.

309 MM: And what about teachers? Were they male and female or were they predominantly one? Generally, statistics show that now most primary teachers are female whereas as children get older they're as likely to have male teachers.

310 AD: Well when I was at school the teachers were all female except the headmaster. There was one man, he was very clever and he was the headmaster but all the other teachers would be female.

311 MM: Would he have much to do with day-to-day teaching or he would have simply an administrator?

312 AD: Oh yes, he did, he taught.

313 MM: Was this the older pupils or all?

314 AD: Yes, he did.

315 MM: What about schoolbooks? Did you have your own or did the school supply them?

316 AD: Well yes, you had to get your own schoolbooks but I mean you were talking in those days of threepence and sixpence and things like that, you know.

317 MM: But then wages were very low.

318 AD: Yes, wages were very low. And jotters, I remember when you got a jotter you had to use both sides of the page, you know not to waste any.

319 MM: And would you have been able to get books from your sister or they have changed from year to year?

320 AD: I can't really remember much of that. I'm sure at the time I probably did. We were very close on one another you know, she would just be a class ahead of me.

321 MM: I love haunting second hand bookshops and I found a geography book a few months ago and it had obviously been passed on because the flyleaf started off with one name and then there were six

names after that and they'd just been crossed off but they all had the same surname. So I think each child who got it was putting their own mark on the book. It was lovely.

322 AD: Yes.

323 MM: Obviously, given the help your mother got after your father died and Frank was born, there was a good neighbourhood network.

324 AD: Oh yes. Neighbours were very good in those days.

325 MM: How would that show itself, what sort of things would they do for each other apart from minding children?

326 AD: We had a very good neighbour. It was a case of her door was always open for us, you know, it wasn't that she did - she did mind Frank, she did, she nursed him until he was school age and would have taken us in there you know when we would come home. When we were maybe six, seven, eight years old, we came home to the house, and there was a note with what your job was, that you had to do, so there was.

327 MM: Your mother didn't want you to be idle at home?

328 AD: No, people were different in those days, it was a very close community you know. You could have gone into one another's house and everything. That was before we moved to the Donegall Road but we were all working then and grownup.

329 MM: It does sound much more appealing because now you have to go to quite a lot of trouble to make sure that whoever is looking after your children can be trusted if you go out to work.

330 AD: I know, indeed, it wasn't like that in those days. You weren't afraid to go out at night even in my teenage years we used to wait for a full moon to go for a walk over the hills. I mean, who would ever go out now?

331 MM: You can't go out in the full moon because all the lunatics come out. [Both laugh]

332 AD: We loved the moonlight, and lovely nights and everything, but you can't do it now, I'm telling you.

333 MM: Do you think the quality of life has changed for the worse?

334 AD: Well it has, it's changed a lot, but I would say in most ways for the better. It's a pity that people aren't neighbourly like they were in those days. There was a lovely comfort to be got from knowing who was next door and whose home you could go into and you could have them in. Or if you were short of something you could run next door to see - but I think the standard of life is better now for everybody.

335 MM: Materially, anyway?

336 AD: Materially, yes, that's right.

337 MM: It's something I'm conscious of myself in recollection of my childhood and I think of my daughter's. She's twenty-two now and very independent but I had to protect her a great deal more than my mother needed to protect me when I was young. My mother tells me about her childhood – well, she was much like yourself and would have been able to roam fairly widely.

338 AD: Yes, we were out on the street playing for hours at a time, indeed. And as I say, we went off to the parks and did our own thing. Played ball, threw skipping ropes, all this kind of thing. That doesn't exist any more.

339 MM: Was there a - you just knew when you had to come back in?

340 AD: Oh yes, you just knew that you'd better go home, type of thing. You were in trouble if you were late coming in.

341 MM: What about discipline? Being a single parent I'm aware that it can be difficult trying to bring children up by yourself. Would your mother have found that she had to lay down fairly strict rules?

342 AD: Oh she did, we used to tell her when we were growing up how strict she was with us but she'd say you know, I had to be father and mother both. So there was no time for sort of nonsense of any kind, you were always on orders [laughs].

343 MM: Would you remember, I know maybe it's not something you thought about at the time, would you have seen the man's role as being the authoritarian one. When your mother said she'd to be father and mother both that she was the wage earner and the disciplinarian yet she was there comforting you.

344 AD: That's right, she was both. We must have missed out a lot in not having enjoyed having a father, being you never could remember saying Daddy or Dad or anything like that. It was always Mother and when we saw her coming, if we hadn't our jobs done [pause].

345 MM: Would you have any kind of relationship with your parents' families?

346 AD: We never knew my father's father but my mother's father, yes, he came often to see us but we were never really close, you know.

347 MM: You obviously didn't feel that you needed him at the time?

348 AD: No, not at the time, no. We had most things that all children had. We were fortunate to have an auntie who was very good at making clothes and things. She sewed quite a bit for us you know. We used to buy the material and get things made.

349 MM: What about special occasions like birthdays and Christmas? Would that have been a source of stress for your mother, trying to make extra money to make ends meet?

350 AD: Oh yes, she did everything she could to make money. I mean she was working out, as I told you and we had - we took in work, you know linen work, you know clipping from different warehouses, there was a big one in Great Victoria Street where we had to take it back and sometimes do it again. Pillowslips and tablecloths, you'd clip the threads off and fold them and it was so much a dozen. So we did that and my mother took in washing for other people as well as being out working, yes.

351 MM: And did she have a washing machine to do that?

352 AD: Oh dear no, there was no washing machine. It was all hand wash and we had a mangle.

353 MM: Did you help her with the mangle?

354 AD: Oh yes, we had to turn it and Thursday was ironing night. I had to do the ironing. We all had our jobs, you see.

355 MM: Would you feel that in later life that it stood to you, that it made you more self-sufficient?

356 AD: Yes I do, I think it if good for you really. I mean I often think that a child, who grows up spoilt, with maybe grandparents and parents and all, it must be hard for them to get started to do things for themselves or leave home. Even get married and start keeping a house. I mean we had done all kinds of housework, house cleaning and we had to do it the right way [laughs].

357 MM: In addition to the housework, what about maintenance of the house? Would the landlord have looked after that? The bigger things like painting and maybe fixing things?

358 AD: I can't remember much. I think my mother used to do quite a bit of painting herself, she did most things maybe with getting a bit of help from someone but I can't ever recall any painter and decorator being brought in you know, to be paid type of thing, you know.

359 MM: That would have been quite a luxury?

360 AD: It would have been.

361 MM: What about in the neighbourhood - I love the old photographs where you see all the women out on the doorsteps and they're chatting or scrubbing the doorsteps or there's some community thing going on. Would you remember that from one when you were young?

362 AD: Yes, I do remember when we were quite young people standing at the doors, on summer nights you know, talking, chatting, maybe finally ending up all in the one house. When we were children you were skipping or swinging on a lamppost or something and they were all out watching us, you know. But it was a very close-knit community when we were growing up, I must say that. I mean, one of the neighbours' daughters took us to school when we were young, you know, and saw us home and the lady who lived next door who nursed Frank also looked after us. We always did what we had to do you know, before Mother coming home.

363 MM: What about when you moved to Donegall Road then, was it different?

364 AD: Oh well, we were working then. We were all working at that time and we were so pleased about getting out onto the front of the road, a nice house with a bathroom, that was great.

365 MM: And would you have known your neighbours there?

366 AD: Yes, we did. We knew the girl who lived next door. My mother died in that home and that's where I was married and away from. The next-door neighbour, she was wonderful. My sister was working like although she was still at home with mother and when Norah couldn't be there, Muriel was there for my mother too, you know. Yes, we had lovely neighbours there. Actually, on the other side there was a lady who lived in the street where we were born. She came to live beside us again so it was [pause].

367 MM: Was that because she knew your mother was there?

368 AD: Yes, she did.

369 MM: Do you think that the war changed any of that? You know, that so many houses were destroyed in the old areas, or very badly damaged?

370 AD: Oh yes, people were living everywhere and the houses were blitzed. They were in ruins and they were in halls. We fortunately, we had to get out every time the sirens went, as I told you, but we never were moved from home, you know. People had to take houses wherever one came so it did break up neighbourhoods quite a bit, so it did, yes.

371 MM: And do think the neighbourhoods recovered after the war?

372 AD: Well, it took a long time but when they recovered they were far better places. I mean homes were improved and I think - they were. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive came on the scene then and they built lovely estates everywhere. This [indicating own home] is a Northern Ireland Housing Executive home - these are. Cosy wee places for one person, I mean for two, my husband was here with me. Two people can live quite comfortably in one of these houses.

373 MM: A bit of thought went into their design.

374 AD: That's right, there's a place for everything and then you're all right.

375 MM: Well that seems like a good place to finish.

376 AD: I hope it was some good to you.

377 MM: Oh absolutely, thank you again.

Catherine and Betty. Interview: 24th October 1995 and 22nd January 1996

1 MM: Mrs. O'T. when were you born?

2 COT: 1906.

3 MM: What a good age.

4 BOT: She'll be ninety in January.

5 COT: I have seven children. I had one little girl when I lived in another house, far away from here, and she died. Well, actually, through neglect - the doctor - she got scarlet fever and he left me to look after her and I was expecting another baby at the time and the little girl, four year old, she died.

6 MM: When was that?

7 COT: That was years back, before the World War [pause] somewhere around 1937. Then she was buried say this day and I got the scarlet fever and of course, I was expecting a baby that very day. So when, they took away the hearse and the funeral went off I was taken in the ambulance to Cork Street fever hospital and I had a baby girl. Of course, I had to stay there till the scarlet went off, the scarlet fever. They treated it and that, and then when I come home there was a couple of the other children after getting it too. They were taken to hospital but what's this I was going to say there before that? [pause]. But I worked in Dollards, anyhow, it was a printing house opposite the Dolphin Hotel, Dollards were, a big printing place, my father worked in it too. I was on a machine, printing, you know, and feeding the paper into it and it would all come out the other end.

8 MM: Was that counted as skilled work?

9 COT: Oh yes, it was, yes.

10 MM: Did you have to do an apprenticeship? Were you trained?

11 COT: No. Well, I was very young at the time, I was really only [pause] I wasn't really the age to be working, I was thirteen only.

12 MM: So you left school early.

13 COT: In those days, you had to go to work, sort of, you know. It was a bad time.

14 MM: What about your own family? Were your parents alive then?

15 COT: Yes, they were. And you see my father worked there too and he was on the machine I was on, he was working at it and I'd be doing the rest of the work, sort of. I was nine years there and then, of course, I left to get married. But anyhow, I had, as I tell you, seven children when their daddy died. Betty was the eldest, and the youngest was a boy, three. Three and a half, was he, three? Well now, he's married and he has five, boys and one girl married. He was the youngest, but I [pause] now Guinness's gave me no offer, they were treating my husband for five years with a duodenal ulcer. Dr. P., he was doing no good for him, he was going out in pain in the morning. He had to go out and work and he'd be coming home, in pain all day, and all this doctor would give him was a bit of stomach powder, to ease the pain, you know.

16 MM: And your husband worked in Guinness's?

17 COT: He worked in Guinness's, yes.

18 MM: What did he do there?

19 COT: He was making barrels. He was a cooper, a cooper yes. He worked very hard. But [pause] he was after being out sick for a week and when he went back this Doctor P. took him out and I went in and I gave out to the doctor. I said I don't understand you Dr. P.. My husband is in pain every day, going to work and back and I think you should let him go to hospital, to get something done. There's no need for that he said, I'll take him out and I'll treat him. After a week he was no better and he was, he came back home on the Friday and that night, at 11 o'clock, he took bad. It was a November night and talk about tonight, the rain and the storm, there was nothing like it and we couldn't get a doctor or an ambulance or anything until 5 in the morning. Eh, doctors in those days didn't have big cars like what they have now. I had, the two young boys, one was ten and the other was eleven, they had to put coats on, it was lashing rain, they had to put coats and go out to get a doctor. They went to Sackville Road, and that doctor, a very nice man, they had to go down there [pause] I forget his name now [pause]

20 BOT: O'Connell.

21 COT: Dr. O'Connell, he came up by a bike, he had a bike, he came and he was drowned and the two children were drowned. And he was in an awful way over it. He said this is terrible and he cried, really, when he saw all the young children. And to think that he was getting treated all that time and they could no nothing for him, you know. Anyhow, the ulcer had burst and that was 11 o'clock on the Friday night and by the time the man next door came in and sat with us and by the time we got an ambulance [pause] he went to the Adelaide Hospital and they never done a thing for him until the next morning, they brought him up to the theatre for an operation [pause] left the poison going through him all night, instead of operating immediately, you know.

22 MM: Why was that?

23 COT: Well, in those days they hadn't what they have now, well they hadn't got [pause]

24 MM: And this was in the 1940s?

25 COT: 1942.

26 BOT: 1943. We came here to live in 1942 and my father died in 1943, November.

27 COT: We lived in an old house before that.

28 BOT: He never got over that operation.

29 MM: Had you been able to go with him to the hospital or did you have to stay here?

30 COT: Yes, the children stayed here and the man that was with them, and my own, one brother I had at the time, he came with us too, but we were sitting in the hospital there all the night and they brought him to the theatre about 11 o'clock the next morning and they operated on him then, but he was very bad, he only lasted about three days.

31 BOT: They operated on him on the Saturday morning and he died the following Saturday.

32 MM: How old was he at the time?

33 COT: 40 was he? I was 39 myself but anyhow, when things happened I went in to Guinness's to see Dr. P. and of course I told him off, that he was responsible for his death and he should have had him in hospital and having the operation when he was able to have it. Oh, he said these things happen, you know

they make excuses. So I said well I've six young children, now what do I do? Well, he said, you can come into work, he said, at six every morning. I used to leave here at half past five.

34 MM: Doing what?

35 COT: Cleaning. Scrubbing and cleaning.

36 MM: That's all they offered you?

37 COT: That's all they offered me. Of course, if I hadn't had something to buck them up and say well, you've got to do something, you're responsible for him. Of course, I get a small pension from them every fortnight.

38 MM: Is that because you worked for them or because your husband did?

39 BOT: Because my father worked for them. Daddy worked 25 years in Guinness.

40 COT: I get 60 something pence every fortnight

41 BOT: £68.

42 BOT: When she started there first she had something like £2 a week.

43 COT: That's all.

44 MM: This was to keep yourself and six children?

45 BOT: And £2 from the government.

46 COT: Yes. I got £3 for myself and 2/6 for each child.

47 MM: This was because you were a widow?

48 COT: Yeah. Widow's pension but I got it tough really, because I had to get up in the morning and leave them. And Betty was the eldest, of course, and she used to have them [pause] I'd be back at half nine and Betty would them ready to go out to school, you know.

49 MM: And how old were you at the time?

50 COT: She was 12.

51 BOT: Now Mammy was in that job then for, she was in it for about two years. And the mornings were getting too hard for her so she brought home the laundry from Guinness's, the roller towels and table cloths and serviettes, and she used have to wash them.

52 COT: I used to be here washing them until three in the morning.

53 BOT: Because at that time there were no washing machines.

54 COT: And I had to carry them, in a big parcel, down.

55 MM: Did you have to get them dry as well?

56 COT: And dry them, winter, summer and I only got two days to do them, every two days, and the roller towels were like a board, you know, you had to have them rolled and I used to iron them damp, and you know, there'd be in those jobs, all the towels, roller towels.

57 MM: And did you get paid a fixed rate for that? You didn't get paid per piece?

58 COT: No, no. It was a flat rate. Just a few bob, you know.

59 BOT: I can't remember now how much she got for that, but it wasn't an awful lot.

60 COT: But anyhow, I had to get through and carry on. In those days, but, you got nothing like what they're getting now. You know what I mean [pause] child allowance and all that. There was nothing like that in those days.

61 MM: It must have been quite a struggle.

62 COT: Oh, don't talk. It was terrible.

63 MM: And how long [pause] when you went in first for the cleaning, you went in at 6 o'clock in the morning. How did you get to work?

64 COT: I'd be in at 6. I'd leave here at half five and I'd have to walk down the Canal, walk into James's Street and round by the harbour.

65 MM: It's a good walk.

66 COT: Yeah, all around from the Black Jar.

67 BOT: In the winter we'd, my brother and I or my two brothers, we'd walk some of the way with her, you know.

68 COT: Because I used to be afraid in the dark.

69 BOT: Only in the winter.

70 MM: And when you got in, you were cleaning, what sort of area?

71 COT: I might get two flights of stairs to scrub, and eh, all the usual, kitchens, washing and cleaning all the time, you know, whatever was there. I got home by about half nine, to see that the children got out to school, you know.

72 MM: And then you had to do your own housework?

73 COT: Oh yeah, I'd have a load of work to do, maybe for them too. They might say to me, will you bring home the towels and do them, because we're short of towels.

74 MM: Did they never use a laundry service?

75 COT: Never. I'll tell you how I used to [pause] I used to wash sheet, pillow slips and all, because there was a night staff of number one clerks, and they used to stay, they'd be the night clerks and some of them would be sleeping there and of course, they'd beds in James's Street there.

76 BOT: In 101 James's Street they had a place for night clerks, they slept there.

77 COT: And I'd have to wash the bed linen, iron and wash and there was a big bath I had here but that's all changed. I have a daughter in Australia and before she went she furnished the place, I took all her stuff. She went and her hubby and her two children to Australia.

78 **(224 words removed)**

79 MM: Well, the doctor's attitude was obviously pretty awful. Did you think that was typical of the management in Guinness's?

80 COT: There was an awful lot of men died from neglect in Guinness's, at that time. Pure neglect, you know. They were supposed to be getting treated and they weren't getting treated. They'd tell you anything to keep you going.

81 BOT: Well, they didn't know much about duodenal ulcers, you know, and they could only treat it with what they knew.

82 COT: A bit of stomach powder, that's all.

83 BOT: I think it was just magnesia powder.

84 MM: But there wasn't any question of having disability or going on sick leave? You had to work?

85 BOT: There was nothing like that.

86 COT: Oh yeah, you had to work.

87 MM: Were you treated well by the people in Guinness's? I mean, you obviously worked extremely hard.

88 COT: Oh I did, you had no time to talk or anything. You were watching the clock, with them at home, you were worried about everything, you know.

89 MM: And who gave you, did you have a supervisor?

90 COT: Well, no, you just knew what you had to do.

91 BOT: No but you had a woman to tell you what to do.

92 MM: And would you have gotten on well with her?

93 COT: Oh, I got on very well. That's why they said to me, if there was too much for me, to go home and have the worry of the children. That's why they gave me the chance of the washing, they said they'd put me on and you could take home the washing and do it for us. And I'd be here until three in the morning I needn't tell, especially when you only got such a short time to have them ready.

94 MM: It sounds like you were working harder that way.

95 COT: Yeah.

96 BOT: We had to help, you know.

97 COT: The thing is, I was home, like you know, and it helped me to look after the younger children, you know.

98 MM: And would there have been other women in the same position as yourself?

99 COT: Ah yes. God, there was women used to walk for miles. There was women used to have to walk from the South Circular Road, down, you never got any help in bringing it in or anything.

100 BOT: When we'd be leaving Mammy down in the morning we used to meet this man out of Guinness's, he worked on the jetty. And that man had to walk from Bluebell every morning, down at five o'clock, and he was an old man then, he was well [pause] well to me he was an old man, I think he was in his forties or fifties, but we used to meet him in the mornings, walking down along the road.

101 COT: It was the early mornings [pause] that you know, having to be up.

102 BOT: She had to be up at five to be in.

103 COT: Oh God, I used to be up before five because [pause].

104 BOT: After years, Guinness used to send out a car, like a van, to pick up the women to bring them into work, but was much later.

105 MM: And were you still working for them at that stage?

106 COT: No, I wasn't. Things changed, like. The work my husband had, he was a tradesman, and it was a very hard job, the cooperage. You know, making the barrels that the drink was put into, you know.

Making those, and all he had was £5. Just image, pay rent, pay everything, feed them, dress them, and pay all the bits of bills, gas, electric, that you get, out of that. That was the hardest part of all.

107 MM: So you were finding it hard then, before he died?

108 COT: Oh, yes, indeed I did, hard all the time it was.

109 MM: I talked to another lady who was very badly paid as well and she said it made her careful of money for the rest of her life.

110 BOT: Well, it's funny you should mention that, when I started to work I got like that. I always, I was always so afraid I wouldn't have maybe fivepence for tomorrow, you know that kind of way, so it did make me careful of money when I was younger. Until I got on in years, and then I realised [laughs]. But of course I had more to spend then than when I was younger.

111 COT: When you think of the girls now the way they spend money and all, of course the wages, they've got big wages, they didn't then. It's awful; it's terrible the way the widows were treated though. They think they're bad now, God, those days [pause]

112 MM: At the time [pause] you'd had a skilled job before you got married. Did you ever think of going back to that?

113 COT: Well, no, because I'd be out all day. I wouldn't be in me home looking after my family, you know, like they were very young, you had to watch them coming from school. And meet them and bring them home, afraid anything would happen them and all that sort of thing, you know. What I used to do, I used to go up to school and bring them home and all that. It wasn't easy, like you know.

114 MM: I'm sure it wasn't.

115 COT: In those days, there was no help in any way. Now sure, look at the way they're treated now. My God, they're treated with kid gloves.

116 MM: What about the children's education? You were obviously keen to make sure they got to school.

117 COT: Oh, they all went to school. The boys went to the Christian Brothers up in Inchicore, St. Michael's, and I lived in Old County Road [pause]

118 BOT: Before we came to live here, we lived in Kilmainham, and Maureen and I, we went to Loreto College, the national part, and my other sister, the one in Australia, she went to Goldenbridge school in Inchicore, and both my brothers went to Inchicore.

119 MM: Yes. When you came here in 1942, was this a Corporation house?

120 COT: Yes. It was only finished.

121 BOT: We were the last tenants in here. Well, we were the first tenants in this house, but the last in the estate.

122 MM: Yeah. Was that an improvement on the house you'd had before?

123 BOT: Ah no, we had a beautiful house before.

124 COT: Ah it was lovely.

125 BOT: But we couldn't afford to keep it up, because the rent was always high and Mammy couldn't manage it. So that's why she had to give that up when Daddy was sick. So when we came here, the rent was better, it was like 10 shillings a week.

126 MM: And when he was sick, he didn't get paid?

127 COT: Only sick pay, he got. We weren't able to cope on his wages. I had my poor mother and father then, Lord rest them, and they were good, they'd help me out, you know, a few bob.

128 MM: Did they live close by?

129 COT: They did, they just lived down in Kilmainham.

130 BOT: They had a little grocery shop at the bottom of Kilmainham Road.

131 COT: And they'd help me out, give me a bit of stuff to feed them and that, you know.

132 BOT: My grandad had a market garden at the back of the shop and they always gave us fresh vegetables and that. He was ninety-five when he died.

133 COT: They were very good.

134 BOT: My grandmother died three months after my father died. She was sixty-four. My father died on the 16 November and my grandmother died in January.

135 COT: My mother had a big family, there was twelve of them. Four died when they were young, different, you know those days [pause] it was different. They'd fevers and all things going, you know. Scarlet fever and everything.

136 (152 words removed)

137 MM: And before your husband died, during the war when there were no increases in wages, did you find that had made a difference as well?

138 COT: Oh yes, of course, yes.

139 MM: What about prices at the time?

140 COT: Well, sure, the food was very cheap. The butter, all that [pause]

141 MM: Still, if you were only getting half a wage?

142 COT: That's true, you had to manage.

143 BOT: You could get a quarter of tea for sixpence or ninepence, the packet of tea now, the cheapest you'd get would be, what, one pound fifty nine or sixty-nine pee.

144 COT: All the food was very cheap then.

145 MM: What sort of things would you have fed the kids on?

146 COT: Well, whatever I could manage, you know. I'd give them porridge every morning; that was cheap. I always made porridge; even now, I make it for Betty and myself. But I've arthritis in me knees and I'm not able to walk. I haven't been out in four years.

147 BOT: The only day she'll, we go out, is Saturday and Sunday and I bring her in the car but otherwise she's at home. We always had plenty of vegetables. My grandparents had a grocery shop, they had a food shop, so we always had plenty of vegetables and we often went to the [pause] what do you call those shops with the ration, where you got the rationed food, tea and that, sugar, during the war years. There was a shop down there in O'Connell Street where you went.

148 MM: This was especially for the things that were rationed?

149 BOT: You had a ration card, you see, a ration book.

150 MM: For each of you?

151 BOT: For each of the children and you'd so many ounces of butter, so many ounces of tea, sugar, and then the bread then was like, it wasn't white bread it was brown bread because they hadn't got the flour. But I often went to Thomas Street for maybe two ounces of butter or tea, or maybe a half-pound of sugar. Well that would have to last you maybe for a week. It all depended on how many coupons you had left, you know.

152 MM: What about fuel for heat?

153 BOT: Well, we had turf or briquettes then, there was very little coal and we had a voucher for turf. We had to go and collect the turf ourselves in a little pushcar or whatever we had, you know, to collect it.

154 MM: And do you remember this thing of the turf being stacked in the Phoenix Park?

155 BOT: I do. Because I had an aunt, my Daddy's sister-in-law, she lived over there at the Royal Hospital. You see, we lived in Kilmainham when I was very young, just down from the Royal Hospital and my, this aunt of mine she had no children of her own and of course, we lived round the corner and we were always with her, my two other sisters and myself. And when we'd come from school, sometimes my aunt Marie would meet us outside the school and she'd bring us to the Phoenix Park to collect sticks or branches of the trees and turf in bags. Oh, I remember the turf was stacked in the Park.

156 MM: So, you all chipped in.

157 COT: They had to.

158 MM: And apart from the scarlet fever, would you say that generally as children you were healthy?

159 BOT: Very healthy indeed. We all got the scarlet fever together. My sister got it first and they didn't treat her properly for it. Now my brother, my eldest brother that's away, he was ten years old then, and he was about, about twelve months before she died he fell off a wall and broke his neck and he was in plaster of paris from here to here and all you could see was his two eyes, his nose and his mouth.

160 COT: He was chasing a cat on a wall and the wall went up that way, you know.

161 BOT: Now the day he got the plaster off his neck my sister died of scarlet fever. That was on the Saturday, and she was buried on the Monday morning. And my sister that's away now, she was born in Cork Street fever hospital, she was the only baby ever born in Cork Street [laughs].

162 MM: That's marvellous [laughs].

163 COT: It's a home now for old people.

164 BOT: But then the following Sunday, John, that's the boy that broke his neck, he got the fever and I was brought then the following Monday to Patrick Duns. I was there for Christmas. I always remember Santy Claus coming around, he was one of the doctors, Dr. Thompson, I always remember him, and he did Santy Claus. I was seven [pause] I was about eight, and one of my brothers, Peadar, he didn't get it, and my sister that was born and my father, he didn't get it, but I had to be locked up, I had to be in quarantine.

165 MM: But you were allowed be quarantined in the house?

166 BOT: No, we had to move out. We had to be quarantined; we weren't allowed to stay.

167 COT: It was raging at the time, the scarlet. Raging. Well, how my little one died, Gertrude, she was a lovely girl, a beautiful child, only four, the doctor I had, Dr. McCabe, he's dead now [pause]

168 BOT: Mammy had engaged him for the birth. Mammy had a few of us were born at home. Two of us.

169 COT: Three and I had five in the Rotunda.

170 MM: How did that compare?

171 COT: Well, I was, it was handier to stay at home.

172 BOT: Why did you stay home to have the other two?

173 COT: Well, it was more or less handier with the others, to have them in the house.

174 MM: So it was your youngest two you had at home?

175 BOT: No, myself and John were born in the Rotunda, Paddy was born at home, and Maureen [pause] Gertie, where was Gertie born, was it in the Rotunda?

176 COT: No Gertie was born at home and Maureen. So Gertie and Maureen and Paddy, three were born at home.

177 BOT: My brother Paddy was born, he was a breech birth - you tell this story [laughs].

178 COT: I was going out into the yard this night and the bin was outside the back door. You know the way kids pull things around when they're in the back. And when I opened the back door, it was right up the door, the bin and didn't I fall right into the bin and eh, that's what happened me then.

179 MM: The baby started to come?

180 COT: He was a breech birth.

181 BOT: It was a funny thing, John was born on Christmas Day, Paddy was born on New Year's Day the next year, New Year's Eve rather the next year [pause] and the doctor that Mammy had engaged for the birth, he was a lovely doctor, and when she sent for them, they were arrived in their dress suits.

182 COT: They came out in their dress suits, and got into their white coats and things and I was eh, I had the pains and all but [pause] what happened was [pause] the doctor didn't realise that it was a breech birth and they had to wait for an hour before they could do anything because the, Paddy had to be turned, they had to turn the baby in me before it was born. So, I could write a book on me life [laughs].

183 BOT: She always remembers them in their lovely dress suits and their white shirts and bow ties [laughs].

184 MM: And they kept them on, did they?

185 BOT: Yes, they put their white coats over them.

186 MM: So Paddy came into the world in style.

187 COT: They were at a ball, at a ball, the doctors. There was two doctors, Dr. McKay and his cousin, oh from London, with him and he came with him that night.

188 MM: Did they stay the whole time?

189 COT: They were there the whole time, yeah, until the baby was born.

190 MM: And was your husband involved in the birth?

191 COT: Well, he was there all the time really [pause] God, he was never well.

192 BOT: He was probably looking after us. I was three years old when Paddy was born.

193 MM: So you really had your children one year after the other?

194 BOT: There's a year and three months between John and I and eleven months between John and Paddy. Two years between Paddy and my sister Gertrude, who died. And then there was three years between her and Maureen. Then three years between Maureen and Colleen and five years between Colleen and Will.

195 COT: In those days you went by your religion to have a family, you had to have a family according to your religion. That's if you were married, whether you wanted to or not, like you know. The priests, you couldn't go to confession, unless that you were living a proper life to have your family and not avoid it but it's different now, of course.

196 MM: So, when you got married you just assumed that you would be giving up work?

197 COT: Oh, yes.

198 MM: You gave up straight away?

199 COT: Oh yes sure. I was exactly ten months married when Betty was born so I had no, I didn't get a chance, and then I had all the family, I had one every year [pause] or like every two years. It's just the way it was [pause].

200 MM: Times have changed.

201 COT: Yeah, indeed they have. Changed for the worse, not for the better and its getting worse.

202 BOT: On the whole we had, now I know now my father died at that time and, we really never, we had enough to keep us going and we were never without a meal, I have to say that and there [pause] I had my father's sister, she was very good to me, she was my godmother and she always made sure I had things, that I was well dressed and that, you know. And then my grandfather, Mammy's father, he helped with the rest of the children, with different things.

203 MM: So it was really the extended family that made life possible?

204 COT: I would have had to, make ends meet, like you know. That's why I took other jobs up like, going to work in those hospitals, you know. I left Guinness's, and finished with the washing, I gave that up then and I was at home and I look for work and got that, in the hospitals. I could have, now, in the - what do you call it the Adelaide, no, it wasn't the Adelaide, it was [pause] no, I was working over in Baggot Street.

205 BOT: Baggot Street Hospital.

206 COT: Baggot Street, well I could be there. I was there and I was getting on very well but there was a few, a couple of people working there and eh, they were very rude and you know, I was always very clean and I'd be doing things. Now, I, there was a press there and there was nothing there only dirty jars, the big brown jars that Lambs used to have years ago, big jars, there was a press full of them, filthy dirty, this big press, and I said to the forewoman that was over me, I said I'd like to clean out that press there. Oh God, she said, you wouldn't be able to do that and I said I will. She said, what'll you do with the jars and I said I'll take them out and wash them, which I did and the other women were all jealous and they'd be made and

they'd try and injure you when they'd see you so anxious to do this type of work, because they wouldn't do it.

207 MM: It was extra?

208 COT: Well, it was in the day's work. I took all the jars and washed them and had them all ready on the floor and the forewoman couldn't believe it. My God, she said, you're a great woman, you really are. I washed out all that press and left the jars and she rang up Lambs and they came out to collect them and brought them all away. And there was a table and the legs on it were all broke, you couldn't put anything on it and I said is there any man here that works, I said to the forewoman, is there a man here that does jobs? That table shouldn't be like that, I said. Could you get some man for to do this. We've a carpenter here. Well, get him over, I said, and I'll talk to him. He came over and I said will you do something with that table and fix those legs? Oh certainly Mrs. he said and he took the table and it was life new when he brought it back [laughs]. You know, I could see things that'd want to be done and I got going anyhow and I was very clean and any dirt that was around I'd clean it all up. I used to love work, like that and they couldn't believe it, but those woman, I couldn't work with it, couldn't cope, couldn't work with them. This is now the type they are. There was a nice girl over there and they told lies on her, those two women told lies on her and got her sacked. So I heard them on the phone ringing up Patrick Duns hospital. She had gone there and got a job, my forewoman was telling me. We'd a lovely little woman here, she said, but they told lies on her and she went to Patrick Duns, she's gone over to Patrick Duns. Now I said I heard them on the phone, I said, now it's no business of mine but I said it's not fair to sack a good girl. And she was so good and I said they rang up Patrick Duns and told lies to the supervisor there about her for to sack her that she used to steal things and all. Now, she was delighted, she rang immediately and told them in Patrick Duns that there was all a makeup lies and stories and to take on the girl, she was great, and they kept on the girl. But these two women, those two particular women, they were dangerous; how they were kept there I don't know. This forewoman was afraid of them, afraid of them. They used to have their husbands outside and they'd be bringing out bags of stuff to them, out of the hospital, butter and anything they could get. But I believe all the hospitals the same, still today.

209 MM: Well, you were obviously a great worker. Would you never think of going for something where you might be in charge? Did you ever try to be a forewoman yourself?

210 COT: Oh well, do you see, the way it was, with my young family I couldn't do that, I'd have to spend too much time, you know and like, I was kind of quite satisfied with what I had.

211 BOT: Well then, of course, when we started to work there was really no need for her to go out, you know, and we wanted her to stay at home.

212 COT: The boys got [pause] the eldest boy was a great mechanic, he was great but the money was terrible small - that's why they went to Australia, the money was hopeless here.

213 (91 words removed)

214 BOT: My mother has never had a holiday. One holiday she had, she went to her sister in London and that's the only holiday she's ever had. She doesn't like going anywhere.

215 MM: Was that because you prefer your home or [pause]?

216 COT: I'd live in me home, I love me home, I don't want to go outside the door, I love me home. I don't mix; I'm a bad mixer. Well I'd do anything for anyone else like, you know, I'd do anything for anybody. But I'm no good for mixing or going anywhere.

217 MM: So what did you do to relax, if you ever did get time?

218 BOT: Back horses; she'd back a horse [laughs].

219 MM: Did you go to the bookies?

220 COT: Oh no.

221 BOT: Well, she hasn't been in a bookies office for about five years.

222 COT: I don't know what she's talking about, sure I haven't been outside the door for that, Betty.

223 BOT: That's what I mean. You have been in a bookies office, well up to that, what she would do, she'd go into town an odd day during the week for her messages and she'd go to the bookies. You have to tell the truth when you're telling this girl the story [laughs]. She has to be acting [pause] but she'd go in and back a few horses in the bookies, when she'd be in town. Now, she still backs a few horses.

224 MM: Are you a good judge?

225 BOT: Yes. Now I'd put on the bet for her now; she usually wins a few bob.

226 MM: How do you decide on what you're going to back?

227 BOT: She follows the jockeys.

228 COT: Well, I follows the jocks. I know some of the jocks like, by looking at the paper and knowing how good they have been, and what they can do with horses and rides. I'd follow them up, you know.

229 BOT: At one time she went to bingo, when my uncle was alive.

230 COT: He'd bring me one night a week.

231 MM: And when did all this start [laughs]?

232 BOT: Oh, this is going back about thirty years ago, or more. Well you see all my grandparents were great [pause] my grandmother was a great backer of the horses.

233 COT: They were all kind of like that.

234 BOT: They were all gamblers.

235 MM: My own grandfather loved the horses. He died when he was eighty six but right to the last minute, he was out - he lived in Sybil Hill and he used to walk down to the nearest bookie to place his bet. And that's what kept him very hale and hearty.

236 COT: Oh yes. It does keep you occupied.

237 (220 words removed)

238 BOT: No, I'd say Mammy is backing the horses, you're about 25 years backing the horses. Well, as the years went on, she backed quite a lot; she backs every second day now.

239 MM: When you were younger, when you first got married, what did you do for fun?

240 COT: Oh, we never went anywhere only working, washing and cleaning them, cleaning the house. I went to see my mother [pause] well actually, I was in hospital myself about five times. I was in Patrick Duns, I was in Mercers [pause] I got the jaundice three times I got the jaundice.

241 (66 removed)

242 BOT: Well as you were saying, like, what did she do, well she probably went to the pictures with my father, like when we were younger and that.

243 MM: When you were courting?

244 COT: Yeah, we went to the pictures an odd time.

245 BOT: Well I'll tell you, she had to be in at 10 o'clock because my grandfather wouldn't let her out.

246 COT: We had to be in at 10, for God's sake, the boys even had to be in before 10.

247 MM: And this was when you were working?

248 COT: They were very strict our parents, on us, those days you know.

249 MM: And when you started work, did you have your own money to spend or did you have to give it up to your parents?

250 COT: I had to hand up me bag, and I got a few pence back. About two bob.

251 MM: This was sort of your pocket money?

252 COT: That's all.

253 BOT: Sure, you only had about ten shillings a week then.

254 COT: Oh yeah, sure you got nothing. You had to do with what you had, a few coppers.

255 MM: What did you do then; did you get engaged to be married?

256 COT: I got engaged to be married and [pause].

257 MM: Were you allowed to save out of your wages at that stage, for getting married?

258 COT: In those days you got nothing really. You know the way, my hubby, Lord rest him, his mother died and his father.

259 BOT: His father died when he was six months old, my father.

260 BOT: And he left six or seven children, my grandfather.

261 MM: So your mothers had hard lives as well?

262 COT: Well they all worked, there was three of them worked in Guinness's, a smeller and two coopers.

263 MM: What did a smeller do?

264 COT: Yes, a smeller. He used to test the drink and [pause], and they were very comfortable like, you know. But I forget what I was going to say there. No, you had no money anyway.

265 BOT: Mary is asking you about did you do, did you get engaged or what?

266 COT: Oh yes, you know the way, when you would be getting engaged, my husband's sister, an only girl, she was a very stylish person, very grand, she had a great job and of course, she was the best dressed woman in town. She was always kind of for herself, a lovely tall lady she was and eh, she never married. She could have married but never bothered. But she wasn't very good [pause] now she'd come up an odd time to see me.

267 BOT: Now before you were married, Mary's asking you about. When you got engaged what happened?

268 COT: You know the way, when the family, some of the family are getting engaged, well they'd kind of help and give them a few bob, they'd help them out putting money by for the wedding, you know, but it wasn't so with us, we had to just hang on to what we had and save a few bob every week to get married.

269 MM: Would you save out of your wages?

270 COT: Save a few bob, but you hadn't much. Then my parents were good. They helped us out, you know, but Daddy's parents wouldn't.

271 BOT: They were dead.

272 COT: My parents helped out in every way you know, they never helped out in any way.

273 MM: And what sort of things were you saving for when you got married? Was it to buy household goods?

274 COT: Well, we got a flat on the South Circular Road, next door to the doctor that was attending me, Dr. McKay, and we got a flat there, because we'd nowhere to go only to look for a flat and get it. And we were there for a good while, six months or seven months, and of course, I was pregnant then and eh, on my first, I went home to my own home to my mother, and I stayed there. I stayed there for about two years and we got a house, over in Kilmainham on the High Road. My hubby knew him and he had those houses and he had this one left and he gave it to us, so we moved out over there.

275 MM: Did you rent it from him?

276 COT: I only had Betty then and I was expecting John, my eldest boy, when we moved over there.

277 BOT: Before we went there, Mammy was living in a flat.

278 COT: I was telling her about that. Sure, God, when I think back, I could write a book on my life [laughs]. If I was able and had the patience.

279 MM: Well, if you could start at the beginning, we'll go through it. Write it out for you [all laugh].

280 (159 words removed)

281 COT: Well, the war period. I remember De Valera, up in Kilmainham Jail coming out in the lorry and he covered over in sacks.

282 MM: Why?

283 COT: Because he was an old IRA man. He was no good.

284 MM: So you're not a Fianna Fail supporter?

285 COT: Oh, De Valera - if he had have [pause] the times that he was splitting up the country then, if he had of carried on and fought the British while he was at it, we would have no North, and wouldn't have all that trouble. We would have the North and the South, all one, but it had got so much involved and they did start, you see, and the government's fault for allowing them to go on so far, killing people. When they started off first they should have been stopped.

286 BOT: She remembers the Black and Tans.

287 COT: The Black and Tans used to come into where I worked in Dollards looking for [pause] there was a few men there, IRA men in those days, you know. And they used to come in and look for them. Peadar Doyle, poor old Peadar Doyle, he was the foreman there and they used to come in looking for them.

288 MM: Would they have hidden the IRA men?

289 COT: Oh no, they wouldn't know they were, you see. Because, they'd fight up against it, sort of, they'd say we don't know what you're talking about and all that. You know, they'd ask me, they'd ask

where's so and so, they used to ask me where Peadar Doyle. I said I don't know, I said I'd never heard of him and he was there, Peadar Doyle was.

290 BOT: What did Peadar Doyle do?

291 COT: He was the foreman, Peadar Doyle.

292 MM: During the war, how did you feel about De Valera keeping Ireland out of the fighting?

293 COT: Oh, he was the cause of all the trouble. It's that man that has the North as it is today.

294 BOT: He kept us out of the war for all those years ago.

295 COT: Kept us out of what war?

296 BOT: The second world war. Only for Dev we would have been in that year.

297 COT: If he had of carried on and got the North signed over at that time, he could have done [pause] with Britain [pause] he could have done it.

298 BOT: We were in the Old County Road, when the bombing of the South Circular Road and the North Strand. My father had a brother living there and he went over the next morning to see how the family was. His house was bombed. They got a house out of that then and they went to live in Crumlin.

299 MM: And were any of the family hurt at the time?

300 BOT: No, they weren't. It happened about, it happened some time early in the morning. It just blew, I think, the roof off their house, but they weren't injured.

301 COT: Of course, we were all frightened, we thought there was a war going to start, you know.

302 BOT: But I remember that, the bombing there.

303 MM: How old were you at that stage?

304 BOT: I was about nine.

305 COT: Kilmainham Jail there, we could here the poor fellows getting shot in the morning at five o'clock.

306 MM: This was after the Rising, was it?

307 COT: Yes. That had nothing to do with the North then. Oh, it was terrible. Lovely lads shot. Very respectable, lovely fellows.

308 MM: Was there very strong feeling in the family about that?

309 COT: Ah yes, because we knew them, we knew the lads, they lived on the South Circular Road down there. Very well reared and all, you know. I can't think now [pause] I'm not anyway used to this, me ould brain is going [laughs].

310 MM: Anyone who can still pick a winning horse at ninety is doing all right.

311 BOT: She has a very long lived family. My uncle, he died two years ago, and he was ninety.

312 (203 words removed)

313 BOT: The only thing, like, in those days, everything was so tight as regards money, it was a struggle for her. Of course, today, it would be different like.

314 COT: Of course everybody was in the same boat. I say everyone was in the same boat. That woman had nothing and she'd ask me or I'd ask her, we'd help one another, you know that way.

315 MM: What about at work, did you come into contact with other Guinness workers, from other grades?

316 COT: We would just talk there and that's all. Talk about what we were doing.

317 MM: What about the office workers and managers. Did you see them?

318 COT: Oh, you'd see them; they were very nice.

319 BOT: You used to go on outings. You never told her about your outings you'd go on, Mammy, when you were working.

320 COT: Where?

321 BOT: In Dollards.

322 COT: Ah yeah, well every year they'd have an outing.

323 MM: And where did you go?

324 COT: Well, you'd go down the country, some place in the country.

325 MM: This was for all the staff, was it? Everybody?

326 COT: Yes, the whole lot. We'd go out in a big car, in a bus.

327 BOT: But you didn't go on the buses in those days. Like, when you were working there only trams, no buses.

328 COT: No, going on a coach, a big long coach, you know.

329 MM: It was the twentieth century. She thinks you're really, really old [all laugh].

330 BOT: I often remember hearing of the charabanc and I didn't know what she meant by that, it was a big long car or something.

331 MM: Something like a very long bus?

332 COT: Yes, yes. You know, it brings them to bingo now.

333 BOT: Oh that's a coach, but you didn't have coaches in those days. It was a bus.

334 MM: So, you went off on picnics anyway.

335 COT: We used to go from work, once a year, that's all. To different parts of the country, you know.

336 MM: And would your bosses go as well?

337 COT: Oh the bosses would go and all, you'd go to a hotel and you'd get meals and all, you know.

338 MM: And you were engaged at that stage?

339 BOT: Were you going with Daddy then?

340 COT: Well I really wasn't, no [pause]

341 BOT: She was going with somebody else.

342 MM: You're very discreet about it.

343 BOT: Go on, you have to tell the story [laughs].

344 MM: [Laughs] I want to hear about this.

345 BOT: What was the man's name that wanted to marry you and you wouldn't?

346 COT: Oh he was a Protestant.

347 MM: Would your parents not have let you marry him or did you not want to yourself?

348 COT: Oh no, his father left him pretty well fixed.

349 BOT: What was his name?

350 COT: He worked in a shop, drapers in Parliament Street.

351 MM: And how did you meet him?

352 COT: I just met him [pause] I worked in Dollards and I used to meet him.

353 BOT: You worked around the corner from him.

354 COT: I used to meet him the odd time. But his father left him very comfortable. He was an only boy and he had a shop, in Thomas Street, but then he went out on his own and worked in Sloans a clothing place and of course, I wouldn't change my religion and he said well there'd be no use for us to be married because I wouldn't change my religion either. So that was the whole thing.

355 BOT: So they parted.

356 COT: Well, we had to part. No, your father, Lord rest him, was after me at the same time and I used to go out with him and more so, than I'd go out with the other young man, the odd time, but there was a girl in work, I worked with, called Martha Carroll, and she'd say, well Connie, if I were you stay with Leo, because he's your own religion and [pause].

357 MM: And your religion was very important to you?

358 COT: Well, it was, it was so. It was like, you know. So I did, I let him go anyhow and I stayed with the one that I met. They were all I was ever out with, like, you know. And I used to visit his mother and things like that, his mother was alive then and we'd just go out an odd time, the pictures if we had money.

359 BOT: Was Granny O'T. alive then when you were going with Daddy?

360 COT: She died before we were married.

361 MM: And was your husband religious as well?

362 COT: Oh yes, he was very good. Well you were that type those days. You done your duties and all that. It's different now, of course, the clergy has made it different.

363 MM: Well, when your husband died did you find were the local priests helpful or was the Church helpful?

364 COT: Not at all.

365 BOT: The main thing I remember about it, the night before, the night before my father died, I went to confession in the church and I was always remember the priest, I asked him for forgiveness for my sins and I asked him to forgive my father and he muttered some prayers then. My father died on the Saturday night and the priest came down here and I always remember that, he was a lovely young man [pause]

366 MM: Did you know [pause] when you were struggling to work and look after your kids, you were friendly with your neighbours? Were there friends from work that you kept up with at all?

367 COT: No, no. And the neighbours are still the same neighbours here, as then. And this woman here, she's over 82 and her health is very bad. And I used to, if I had something more than she would, I'd call in the eldest girl and I'd say, is your Mammy in, you know, Philomena, and she'd say no, she's gone in to town and she'd be cleaning and all, the eldest girl, she had eight children, the eldest girl, she'd say she'd be trying to clean before Mammy comes back. She'd say it to me. So I'd come in and in those days, you'd get a box of cheese, and I'd have cream crackers, and I'd say, here Philomena go on in and make yourself a cup

of tea and have a piece of cheese and some cream crackers. She used to be starving. But if I had anything I'd always give it in, and if I wanted anything from her I'd always ask her, you know that way. But there wasn't many neighbours, shifting around, there was a couple, always moving on and moving in, you know that kind of way.

368 MM: When you came here, you were the last to move in, what sort of people were here before you? Young couples like yourselves?

369 COT: No, this whole road was only after finishing being built, and this house and that house was the only two houses that were left. So, the man got this house for my husband and she got that house. He's a very nice man, my husband was a very good friend of his, you know, and he knew the situation we were in for a house so we got this. But everything turned out then all right, by degrees. Ah yes, the neighbours were all right, we all pulled together.

370 MM: So you just, you know that one of the things that struck me about the area around James's Street and Kilmainham is how people knew each other for generations. Was that true of here as well, do you think?

371 COT: Well, not really, because they were all new around, you see, they all come from town, places that were condemned and they got those houses, with the result that we were all kind of strangers, you know, more or less, and people then didn't mix, you didn't mix very well.

372 MM: The community spirit that helped you, do you think that's gone?

373 COT: Well, around here, it hasn't changed. It's grand, there's never a word. Never a word, we're very lucky to get here. Because I think if we were living in a new area where there'd be trouble with people and noisy people, you know the way where there's families fighting and arguing, I wouldn't have stayed here, I'd have got out of it somewhere. We were very lucky, you never hear a sound, it's just like now, you'd never hear a thing. Those people are very quiet and you know she had eight children and she was like myself, got it very tough, because her hubby wasn't too good to her, you know, he was very hard on her.

374 MM: In what way?

375 COT: He was a man that didn't want to give up any money. He was a boot repairer, he had a shop, he hadn't his own shop, but he worked across town and he used to repair shoes, and boots and all, you know, and he'd get extra work to do that would make him a few bob for himself but he wouldn't give it to the wife, because he used to say she was a waster. Now, I'd put on a pot of potatoes, and I'd mash them with butter and milk and I'd cream them, cut up a small onion, very fine and put it in, parsley and a bit of parsley, chop it all up and make a kind of a nice meal, like, fry a couple of rashers, a bit of black and white pudding and a few sausages or something. But the way she was, I was always great at gardening, I was a great gardener; my son took those two photographs because I want to send them out to Australia.

376 (790 words removed)

377 MM: Were you sorry that your sons had to go to Australia, would you have preferred them to stay here?

378 COT: Oh God, I was sorry they had to go. I really was.

379 (261 words removed)

380 COT: But it's changed too, it's not the same. It's just like here, drugs, there's drugs and everything everywhere, though they're doing good here in catching a lot of them, aren't they?

381 MM: Why do you think that things have changed so much in Ireland?

382 COT: Well, I'd say it's the government's fault. They're not taking enough of interest in the public, they don't care once they're right themselves. That's just the way it is; they should be tougher. They're not tough enough, because they shouldn't allow the children, the boys and the girls, to carry on the way they do. There's one thing that I'd just say to whoever brought it out, should be shot, women having babies and the government keeping them up. Unmarried mothers. Now, up around the corner there there's some girls and they have three and they're not married, and the government paying all that money out. Look at the amount of money they're paying out, I think it's disgraceful. Because the mothers, their mothers are minding the kids while they're out having a good time, once they give the mother a few bob out of whatever they get, the mother is all right. They're all around you, here. And all through the scheme, young ones having babies, I think it's terrible.

383 MM: And is it, it's mainly older women then who are looking after them?

384 COT: The mothers will look after them, once they get a few quid, because they're getting plenty of money. But what I don't understand is why the government doesn't make the girls that have the first one, make the fellow who owns the child pay.

385 MM: Well, they're doing that in Britain.

386 COT: Yeah, make them pay. For the damage they done and they wouldn't be having them as quick as, as often as they are. And look at the upset of the divorce now, look at the poor kids are going to be upset now with this divorce. I mean, the father leaves the wife and whether there's three or four children, they might be kept up all right but, if she gets married to another man, those kids are not going to like that man. They want to see their own father, they're running back to see their own father. Same thing with the mothers, they'll be going back to see their own mother. It won't work out, it won't work out at all.

387 MM: Did you ever get involved with politics at all over the years?

388 COT: God, I wouldn't be interested.

389 MM: Well, did you vote?

390 COT: I'd vote, yes, I'd vote. I'd vote for whichever I thought like would be going to do something, but sure they don't do anything.

391 MM: On the basis of local issues?

392 COT: Sure you wouldn't know who to put in or who to vote for, because things are changing all the time. The government, they don't do a whole lot. Now, I remember when my husband died, really I was in a bad way, and I rang up Vincent de Paul and explained my position and a man came out, an awful lot of country men worked in it, the Vincent de Paul, he was a country man, and he came out and I told him the way I was fixed. I told him about the children. Ah, says he, sure my God, says he, well I hadn't all the furniture and things I have now because the girl that went to Australia, Colleen, she gave me most of her stuff, you know, and he said sure you can sell this and you can sell that, he said I can't do anything for you.

The most I could give you is a pound. A pound! Well, thank you very much, I said, keep it, you might want that for yourself.

393 MM: [Laughs]. How did he take that?

394 COT: I could have hit him, sell your [pause] sell my home! I've a family, I said I have to have a home [laughs]. [Betty re-enters from kitchen where she was making tea.] I'm telling her about Vincent de Paul, they're the biggest chancers going and do you know what? They're millionaires ten times over, because they're left businesses, and they're left property and they're left people dying leaves them in their will, there's no end to the money Vincent de Paul has.

395 MM: And were there many people do you think that went to them for help?

396 COT: Oh God, yes, there are, but they don't give them the help. The poor man up the road here, and he's dead Lord have mercy on him, poor Mr. Fife, and a fellow came one day here, he was in a car, and he gave me a little bit of a cardboard box [pause] [Betty re-enters with tea and sandwiches.] But anyhow, what was I saying there now? They do help people now because they can afford to help them, there's loads of money going to them now, loads of money into the Vincent de Paul. They can afford to help people, but they could do better, you know.

397 MM: Well did any of the women that you knew in Guinness's, for instance, ever go to them?

398 COT: Well they would, yes. They might get something out of them and maybe they would and maybe they wouldn't.

399 Second interview

400 MM: Now one of the things that I was interested in following up [pause] you know I was asking you all about your working life, the work you were paid to do [pause] what we didn't go into very much was the work that you did at home, the work that you had to do but you didn't get paid for. So, you know, you were saying that you had to come home from Guinness's early in the morning to get the kids out to school? What would your day be like?

401 COT: Oh my day would be like, washing the children's clothes and cleaning the house, cleaning the rooms, dusting and hoovering and do as much work as possible.

402 MM: Yes.

403 COT: For the next morning, to be ready for the next morning, you know. And have the children's clothes ready for the next morning for school. I'd have ironing to do and things like that, you know.

404 MM: So you had to do that on top of the work you were doing in Guinness's?

405 COT: Exactly. If it was a wet day, I'd have to put a line up for to try and dry the clothes and light the gas and the heat to try and dry them, iron them with a hot iron, you know. I had to do for Guinness's, because I had the [pause] my nerves got the better of me and then I was at home and they gave me washing to do.

406 BOT: Excuse me for interrupting. Mary just wants to find out what you had to do because that's all in this here now [indicating transcript of first interview]. She doesn't want to go back over that. She just wants to find out what you had to do when you came home from work.

407 COT: Yes. Well, I had to do all my own work here. Well, the eldest were good for giving the help. They'd go out and I'd give them a slip of paper to get me a few messages, save me from going out. You know, I'd tell them what to get for me and [pause]

408 MM: Did they go to the local shop?

409 COT: Yeah, well, as local as could be. It's all changed now, like you know. Years ago you could go in next door to get a quarter of butter or a pound of sugar, but there's nothing like that now. It's all supermarkets now - you'd want a pile of money going in, you know.

410 BOT: Mary's talking about then! We had no supermarkets then.

411 COT: No, that's right.

412 BOT: There was just a shop there, where you'd go [pause]

413 COT: That's it exactly. Now what I done [pause] clean up all the rooms and change the bedclothes and anything that had to be washed, throw them off to be washed. And things like that. And I had no washing machine, the washing all had to be done in the big sink bath, and a scrubbing board which I still have, for washing, which I still have and I'd do the clothes in that.

414 MM: And how did you heat the water? Was it coming from a tap or did you have to heat water in a kettle or something like that?

415 COT: I'd have to heat the water.

416 MM: So you were lifting pots of water as well.

417 COT: Exactly.

418 BOT: Mammy, I'm turning off that television, because you're looking at that and you're not listening to what Mary's saying to you.

419 MM: [Laughs]. Well. I know nowadays we have lots of different washing powders and everything, what would you have used?

420 COT: Well, Persil. I think I used Persil or Rinso, they were the washing powders, them two.

421 MM: You'd dissolve that in the water?

422 COT: I would, until I'd think there'd be enough for the clothes. I'd rub them up and down, and leave them for a while to soak in, you know, and keeping putting in more hot water and rub up and down, like [laughs].

423 MM: And would you wear rubber gloves?

424 COT: Not at all. I never used rubber gloves in my life [laughs].

425 MM: That might have contributed to the arthritis?

426 COT: No I wouldn't say so, sure the arthritis is in my knees I've got it, in my knees [pause]

427 MM: Of course.

428 COT: I used to do a lot of gardening too. I used to do a lot of gardening and I would be kneeling a lot, but my poor father, lord rest him, had a great big garden and if I had an hour or so to spare, I'd go down and give him a hand, for the stuff for the market for him, you know. I suppose that had a lot to do with it, too.

429 MM: Can I just ask you, to go back a bit, you were saying that he'd worked in Dollards and that you'd worked with him. When did he move into the shop and the market garden end of things?

430 COT: Oh, he was there all his life.

431 BOT: They'd always had the garden.

432 MM: While he was working in Dollards?

433 COT: Oh yes.

434 MM: So you were always a very hardworking family?

435 BOT: Yes, even now, even my uncles, mammy's brothers, she had two brothers, they worked in the shop and then, my uncle Peter he worked in it [pause] the shop they had, Peter stocked it out from the garden.

436 MM: Right.

437 BOT: And, my grandfather always had the garden, from the time he was younger he did it, although he worked in Dollards, he did that as well.

438 COT: He'd get up at five o'clock in the morning and work until about half seven. Then he'd be down to get his breakfast and get into Dollards at eight o'clock.

439 MM: And then presumably when he finished in Dollards in the evening?

440 COT: He'd be up there the whole evening, that's like, when the weather would be better like, when the evenings got long, he'd have his dinner, he'd go up there after his tea and wouldn't finish until dark.

441 MM: When you went up to help him, what sort of things would you do?

442 COT: I'd be putting down lettuce, young lettuce and that, rows of lettuce and I'd be pulling that and putting them into a place where they'd be growing bigger and the same with cabbage, cabbage plants, you know and they'd grow into big [pause]

443 MM: So you were doing it summer and winter?

444 COT: Summer and winter, exactly. There was only [pause] you see, I had four brothers [pause] I had seven brothers, they're all dead, lord rest them. I'm the only girl, there was no girls, all boys, and they all gave a hand at the work too. We all worked hard at it. When they came home they'd give a hand, you know. They're all dead and gone, now.

445 MM: Well, were you treated sort of like one of the boys in that you helped with the garden or were you expected to do help at home as well?

446 COT: No, I wouldn't, I'd be dying to get down to help my father because I knew it was hard work. He was very strong, very good, never drank and just a pipe, he used to smoke a pipe but [pause] he'd never [pause] he was great.

447 MM: What about your mother? Did she help out?

448 COT: Oh my mother, lord love her, she had seven boys, I needn't tell you she had [pause] and she'd be kept going cooking and everything else, shopping, she used to bake her own bread, she was a great cook, you know. Sure, that's the way, I suppose, with life, isn't it? They don't do things like that now [pause] sure they don't stay in even.

449 MM: I can't remember the last time my daughter helped out in the house [laughs].

450 BOT: When I was about seven, my uncle Paddy got a shop and he was on the South Circular Road and he'd sell the vegetables from the garden. I used to help out on every Saturday and I used to go with another cousin, Kathleen and myself used to go on a Saturday, and both of us went to deliver the vegetables to the houses and [pause] I spent a lot of my childhood in the market garden.

451 MM: So you weren't too much a city child?

452 BOT: Oh no.

453 COT: They weren't allowed out to run around the way they are now [pause]

454 BOT: We got out a lot, we'd always go with someone [pause] (indecipherable sentence) [pause] my grandmother used to take us [pause]

455 COT: Or out to Tallaght [pause] all those places have changed, you know.

456 MM: I remember when I was a child, my aunt used to take me to visit people in Tallaght - it was a little village in the country then.

457 COT: That's right - there used to be cottages, little cottages. It was much better, all those times were better. It's all money now, it's no good, all money [pause] drugs, it's all going on drugs.

458 BOT: Times were poorer, but I think they were better then.

459 COT: They were hard times.

460 MM: Do you think people didn't have such high expectations?

461 BOT: They didn't [pause]

462 COT: The children weren't ruined, the way they're ruined now.

463 BOT: I think that [pause] I think I can look back on a lovely childhood. I mean, I think most of the children today can't do that [pause]

464 MM: Well, I notice myself [pause] I remember spending whole summers on Dollymount beach. We cycled down and we just spent the day. We played around in the sand and we went swimming [pause] but I couldn't let my children do that [pause] you had to be with them all the time.

465 BOT: Well that's like my auntie Marie, she had no children [pause] and she used to bring us up to Howth. We'd spend the whole day [pause] it was lovely.

466 COT: And it was so cheap to go [pause] you could go out.

467 BOT: The tram with no top on it, going up to the Head.

468 MM: I was on the last one that went up to Howth, with my grandfather [laughs].

469 BOT: Were you?

470 COT: I used to love that [pause] you could sit in the breeze.

471 BOT: And the summers were beautiful, I think, it was better.

472 MM: Do you think they actually were beautiful or is it because childhood was good for you that you remember it as being so?

473 BOT: Well, you could be right there. I know we didn't have as much but we enjoyed ourselves.

474 COT: Well, you got your wages from your work and you had to come home and hand it up the way you got it. You might get two bob out of it. That had to last you the week.

475 MM: What would you do with the two bob?

476 COT: Well you'd buy maybe a pair of stockings for sixpence in Crannick's in Thomas Street. Oh you wouldn't get much, I'm telling you.

477 BOT: One night's pictures out of it, maybe.

478 COT: We never went to the pictures, we never used to go anywhere, no pictures or dancing or anything like that.

479 BOT: You must have gone to the odd dance when Daddy was alive?

480 COT: But now I think they've ruined the country with those discos. The children, the boys and girls out until all hours, that's where they get the drugs [pause]

481 MM: Do you think parents don't know what their children are up to?

482 COT: Parents now don't seem to care. They'd say to you, sure she's eighteen, she's old enough to know what she's doing. Well, I wouldn't say that, I'd still tell her what to do at eighteen. I wouldn't let her do it at eighteen.

483 MM: I think it's become harder because children are aware of their rights and they'll tell you very quickly what they want to do.

484 (451 words removed)

485 MM: Your children seem to have worked very hard; you were saying they helped you out with the washing.

486 COT: Two and a half, the youngest, and Betty was the eldest, she was about ten. And I'd no trouble, not five minutes trouble with them. Whatever they were told to do, they'd do without answering you or anything.

487 BOT: Sometimes reluctantly, but we'd do it just the same [laughs].

488 MM: Well, do you think that was because you knew your Mam was on her own and she needed you?

489 BOT: Well yes, I'd say it was.

490 COT: They knew what I had to do, get up in the early morning, you can imagine the two boys, one was ten and one was eleven, there was only a year between those two, they used to get up in the morning and leave me half way nearly down to the job where I worked.

491 MM: That's very impressive, because they'd have to walk back again, wouldn't they?

492 COT: Yes, they would, they'd walk back, because they were afraid, it was so dark that someone would attack me or something would happen me.

493 MM: Yes.

494 COT: They were very good. But sure, I think that's the way to rear them, isn't it? Make them realise what life is all about. What can you do? That's the way it was.

495 MM: Just to go back a little, you were saying that you would have to wash and iron the children's clothes, to have them ready, did you make their clothes or did you buy them?

496 COT: I'd buy them. I'd buy what was in the sales, you know. In Georges Street, there was Winstons in Georges Street, or Cassidys, they were great you know, all them cheap sales, you know, cheap and they'd get a long time out of them because they'd have to, sort of, you know what I mean? I'd always keep them clean, wash them and have them ironed.

497 MM: And would you be able to pass things on, one to the other, or did you try and get them new?

498 COT: No, if they fitted them I would, or if I got [pause] maybe someone would give me something, you know. The woman next door, maybe some of the kiddies would have grown out of them and she'd give them to me. She's dead, Lord rest her, she was very bad, she used to be dying of her kidneys [pause]

499 BOT: My daddy's sister, she [pause] after he died, she used to buy me things.

500 COT: She was her goddaughter. She never married, like, you know and she was working. She bought quite a lot of things.

501 MM: Did the others mind that you were getting those extra things bought for you?

502 BOT: Not really, I don't think so.

503 MM: Because she was your godmother it was okay?

504 BOT: Yeah, that's right.

505 MM: And what sort of things would she have bought for you?

506 BOT: Well, she bought me a coat [pause]

507 COT: She'd buy the best things.

508 BOT: The coat was lovely. She bought me, this is a very funny story [pause] she bought, she got a dress made for me for my confirmation, and my uncle Peter bought me a lovely coat and gloves and Mammy bought me shoes. My auntie Margaret, she wanted to buy the dress as well, and Mammy didn't know what to do about it, she didn't want to hurt her feelings so she let her buy the dress. And the one she bought was beautiful and the one my auntie Gertie bought, it was nice, it was white, really nice, but the one my auntie Marie bought was blue chiffon with all kinds of little flowers [pause]

509 MM: And how old were you at this stage?

510 BOT: I was, I think I was nine, nine or ten.

511 MM: So the blue chiffon would have had a lot more appeal? [All laugh.]

512 BOT: Yes, but anyway, on the day of the confirmation I wore my auntie Margaret's dress. My auntie Gertie wouldn't [pause] she wouldn't have seen me in the dress on the day I made my confirmation so the day after, the day I was going to visit her I wore her dress [all laugh].

513 MM: Very diplomatic [laughs]

514 BOT: And of course, I couldn't let either of them see, Mammy couldn't let either of them see the dresses the other one bought.

515 MM: I take it they never got together, that they were likely to say what a lovely dress [pause]?

516 BOT: Oh no, that's right, they didn't [pause] although they were sisters in law they never [pause]

517 COT: They were never very great with one another.

518 BOT: They didn't talk to one another. But they were two lovely ladies.

519 COT: She was a German.

520 BOT: My auntie married [pause] her name was Budweiser [pause] my daddy's brother married her.

521 COT: They were an old family.

522 BOT: They were watchmakers in Dublin.

523 MM: Was she German-born herself?

524 BOT: Yes, she was born in Germany and her father came here to live. His wife, she was his third wife, was an Irish woman and they had a jeweller's shop in Aungier Street. It's called Green's now, I don't know if it's still there. Well, that was their jeweller's' shop, Green's, and they lived above the shop, with her father, and she had one sister and she had stepsisters and brothers from his other marriage.

525 MM: And did she ever have problems during the war because she was German?

526 BOT: No, not here, funny enough, not that I remember anyway.

527 COT: No, never.

528 BOT: Because they lived on the South Circular Road when they got married first, and then they got a house over here opposite the Royal Hospital and they lived there until she was 92, when she died.

529 MM: That's a great age, isn't it?

530 COT: People are living longer now, because they seem to get more food and all like, making a difference. Years ago people couldn't afford big meals [pause]

531 BOT: Although my grandfather was, he died in 1954, and he was 95.

532 COT: There's not many worked as hard as he did. He worked very hard.

533 MM: He seemed to have a very healthy diet, with all the vegetables [pause]

534 COT: Yeah, that helped a lot, it really did.

535 MM: Would you have eaten much meat?

536 COT: No, no, even now I don't like meat.

537 BOT: Well, we, the family did, but Mammy was never a great meat eater.

538 MM: Well, I must say I'm not myself.

539 BOT: Well, in those days the meat was different. Now a lot of people would buy ribs and [pause] although, I often buy ribs here now because I like them and maybe pig's feet or [pause] you know that kind of thing, that kind of meat. You'd get some pig's trotters on a Saturday night and have them for supper [laughs].

540 MM: And what about [pause] for protein, did you have plenty of vegetables, eggs or cheese maybe?

541 BOT: Oh yes, I remember as a child I used to take a bucket and, there was a little farm up the road from us here, and the man actually, there was a brother and two sisters who ran the farm and I used to go up there for the milk and I'd get a pint of buttermilk and buy eggs. I did that for years.

542 MM: Were there no deliveries?

543 BOT: Not at that time. Well, I'd say, going into the fifties I think, they might have started then.

544 MM: And what about buying bread, would you have made your own, or would you buy it from the baker?

545 COT: I used to bake a lot of bread.

546 BOT: Well, we had a baker, we had Johnston Mooneys [pause].

547 COT: Johnston Mooney [pause] he'd come every day. I used to bake bread myself, white and brown.

548 BOT: She made nice soda bread. White soda bread.

549 MM: And brown bread?

550 BOT: She'd make brown cakes.

551 MM: What about your mother's griddle cakes? Did you ever do those?

552 COT: I never had kind of a way of doing the griddle cakes. At the fire, we had the range [pause] it's a certain kind of fire you need for that.

553 BOT: She'd put them in the pan first, and then she'd put them on the top of the stove and brown the sides.

554 BOT: I was here last week [pause] I never bother buying liver much, but my sister comes here every Thursday and I had it then for her [pause] and whatever happened, it brought back a memory from when I was a child and Mammy used to make it for me and I could really taste the liver [pause]

555 MM: It's incredible the way a scent or a taste like that can bring back a memory that you thought was completely lost.

556 COT: They say you should eat liver once a week.

557 BOT: I really thought that, I really enjoyed that bit of liver.

558 MM: Was that because it brought back the memory of your childhood?

559 BOT: Well, I think so, because I could actually get the same taste.

560 MM: My mother was a great believer in liver and other things that would build up my iron, and I used to hide it rather than eat it. I never liked meat [all laugh].

561 (60 words removed)

562 MM: Anyway [pause] when you were having the babies, you were having them one after the other, nearly one a year. What did you do for baby clothes? Did you knit things?

563 COT: Well, I [pause] well, they were very cheap then, you know, and then you'd have one thing that belonged to the others that were after growing out of them. You'd have a pile of small things, you know, that the other children would be growing out of them.

564 MM: I presume you had the towelling nappies in those days, as well.

565 COT: Yes. You'd have to tear up old clothes, and square them out and stitch them and make nappies out of them.

566 MM: You'd have to boil them then?

567 COT: It's different now, look at the way they have them now. These disposables, throwing them out, throwing out and throwing out. The disposables, they're very handy but you need money for them. They're very expensive, you know.

568 BOT: Although the towelling nappies were dear at that time.

569 COT: They were, but you'd get a lot of wear out of them. You could wash them for years, for God's sake.

570 MM: But it was a lot of work?

571 COT: Oh yeah, but you didn't mind. When you wouldn't have the money to buy them you'd have to try and dry them, on a horse, a wooden horse and put them round the fire, you know. And they'd dry overnight, you know, by the fire. You'd have to be careful, of course, and they'd dry overnight. But you'd have to have your wits about you. I don't know how the fires now are happening, with the people [pause]

572 BOT: The small house that we lived in, it had a grate, an open fire in it, and it had two little hobs on the side and Mammy used to put the clothes around them to dry. And make her porridge on one of the hobs.

573 COT: I always made them porridge for breakfast. Porridge is great. I still have to have my porridge; I make it every morning.

574 MM: My mother was a great believer in all these things but she could never get me to eat them [all laugh].

575 BOT: Funny, isn't it?

576 COT: Well now, the mothers, I don't know, they really kill me. They go into the supermarkets and they might have two or three or four kids with them, and one kid [pause] they wouldn't ask the mother, they'd walk over to the shelf and pick out the packet that he'd want, cornflakes [pause]

577 BOT: Oh yes, they get what they want themselves.

578 COT: And the other fellow would say, I don't want them and he'd pick out what he wants. The mothers are crazy now, they really are. So they give them [pause] instead of having the one packet, they all have their own. Sure that's the way it is.

579 MM: Well I suppose there is more choice so people will want the variety.

580 COT: Terrible, all those drugs, they're desperate aren't they? Oh my God tonight, this country is reeking with them, reeking with them and the other crowd making an awful lot of money at it.

581 MM: When your children were growing up, were there ever children around who maybe started drinking or something like that?

582 COT: Oh God, no fear.

583 MM: I know your own didn't but would you have been aware of maybe neighbours' kids that had problems?

584 COT: No, no, never. It wasn't the thing at all. You'd never see that in the houses, anywhere. All the mothers kept them really well under control, you know.

585 MM: Do you think it was the mothers, rather than the fathers, who were in charge?

586 COT: Well, the mother was always there with them more or less. The fathers were for asking [pause] you'd say you'd better talk to him if they wanted something, this or that, he'd get it coming home. You know what I mean? The men were good then.

587 MM: Did you find it was a problem for you not having somebody coming in the evening that you could hold over the children?

588 COT: No, they were good; even after their father died, they were no trouble. I never let them run around the roads, or let them out. When they came in they did their lessons and things like that and they'd have to do bits of things.

589 BOT: We had each other.

590 COT: Exactly, yes [laughs]. You couldn't be that way with a family, I can tell you. Oh God, I couldn't rear someone. When I see the way they're going round here, singing and going home at all hours, we'd be asleep in bed and they'd be going home singing, drunk and everything because the pubs are all

around, you know, and they take a short cut down here to that place down there, the flats, what do you call them, Fatima Mansions. And of course, there's a lot going on down there, you know.

591 MM: Does that ever worry you?

592 COT: Ah no, never, never. You'd be home in your bed and lock your door and that was that.

593 BOT: I really think, I don't care what anybody says - they should do the same thing to them and let them feel what it's like to be hurt. I honestly do, it's terrible what they get away with. I was reading an article in the paper the other day about a youngster, he was sentenced to four years in jail and the judge sentenced him and they brought him to Lachan House or somewhere and they told him when they brought him there they can't him in, that they'd no room and he's actually back on the streets. It's awful.

594 COT: I heard there last week that a fellow got two weeks for cutting a girl with a knife. Two weeks in prison! No, two years I mean and the girl died anyhow.

595 MM: Have you any idea, I know you were saying earlier that it's too easy, but why it is that things have changed?

596 COT: Because there's too much; there's too many young people now. I mean there is an awful lot [pause].

597 BOT: I know there aren't many jobs and when young people come out of school, but what did we do years ago?

598 MM: Well that's why I'm interested because in terms of unemployment, the war years were very bad.

599 BOT: Yes, I mean the fifties, it was terrible, there was no work for anybody and I think the drugs and the drinking, it's just all an excuse. Quite honestly, they have far too much now.

600 MM: Would there be any point where you could see a particular shift? I remember the sixties the way you remember the forties and things certainly seem to have gotten much worse since then?

601 COT: I think television has ruined an awful lot. Television really has destroyed everything.

602 MM: Why is that?

603 COT: Because there are things shown on television that shouldn't be shown. I mean they show boys and girls, even young boys, very young [pause].

604 BOT: You don't even have to look at television; you can just pick up the newspaper.

605 COT: But they're looking at these things, and the expressions, the four letter words out of some of their mouths, I think it's disgusting. The television.

606 BOT: I was listening to some young people the other day and the whole lot they were saying was four letter words. Every five minutes they were using the four letter words.

607 COT: And beating up girls and beating up women and children, everything. There's things on television shouldn't be shown. They'll tell you that they're only shown at the certain time but they shouldn't be on it in the first place. Parents are out and leave the kids there. They don't care what they're at. You see the thing is now, there's an awful lot of women drinking now, an awful lot of women with young children drinking and at the weekend, they have their pals and their husbands go out with their pals and the kids can do what they like.

608 BOT: I think they have too much - young children. For instance, I have a friend, she worked with me and she has two children. She's separated from her husband and she spent a fortune on her kids for Christmas and when she came in after the holiday, we were asking about it, and she said when I think of what I spent on them, they got more pleasure out of the cardboard boxes. I said to her well Maria aren't you a stupid woman to go and spend all that because she'd spent money she didn't really have, and she said they really wanted the things.

609 MM: And how old were these children?

610 BOT: One was four and the other was five, or three and five.

611 COT: They didn't know what anything was.

612 MM: At four and five, where do you think they got the idea they wanted these things?

613 BOT: Oh from television. Or maybe from being in the shops where they could see them, I don't really know. I know mothers who go into debt at Christmas. I don't think [pause] surely you can sit down and explain to them that you can either have one thing or the other but you can't have both.

614 COT: That Vincent de Paul now, and different places like that, they're handing out money. They're handing out money at Christmas to people who have spent it on the children, buying big presents for them to be as good as the kids next door. You know that kind of way, the kid next door has a lovely bike and that woman is going to beg and she's going to try and have as good as that child. That's the whole problem.

615 MM: Do you think people are more embarrassed by being poor than they used to be?

616 BOT: No I don't, I think they just want to be better than the next person. I don't think that they're embarrassed about it.

617 COT: They're not embarrassed at all. They get themselves into debt, there's no doubt about that. A fortune, this Christmas there was a fortune spent on children. This was the biggest Christmas of all.

618 MM: Could that be anything to do with the generation now having small children being a product of television themselves?

619 BOT: Yeah, definitely. They were brought up in that. Like I've heard parents today talking and like, I'd like to give them something better than I had, we never had that when we were children, and to me that's a guilt complex, I mean I don't think a parent should think that if they haven't got it that they should go into debt to try and do better for their child.

620 COT: I think the telly is terrible.

621 MM: I suppose it comes back to the question of contentment - you had a very happy childhood, you have no regrets about it?

622 COT: You see, a mother must be in the home; you must be always in the home with young children. I was always in the home, I never went out and got anything out of life but I was satisfied. I never had a holiday.

623 MM: How would you feel about the father staying at home and the mother going out to work so long as a parent was with the children?

624 COT: Well I think the mother should, if the father is earning enough, if he's getting enough, he should try and manage and get more and let the mother look after the home and the children.

625 BOT: Well some fathers are very good at looking after their children.

626 MM: I know some people where the mothers are earning more so it makes sense for the father to be the person at home but it would be nice if they could both enjoy their children if they wanted to.

627 MM: Do you think that women are better at looking after children?

628 COT: Well, I'll tell you, I think women, now I think they're very rude, even with their husbands. [Betty laughs loudly.] You'll see that yourself, you know what I mean.

629 BOT: She thinks they have no respect for their husbands.

630 COT: I don't think they have much respect for a man that's good and he'd be working.

631 MM: Well what about a man who didn't?

632 COT: Oh well, he'd have to be treated differently [all laugh].

633 BOT: It's funny, my mother, she'll always stick up for the men.

634 COT: Yes, the man, if he's good.

635 MM: Is that the way you were brought up to think or is it because you had six brothers?

636 COT: I think that's because we were brought up that way. I think it's the way, you know what I mean, if you were brought up right, and in your own married life.

637 MM: My mother in law would share your opinion - she's 82. Although she's very fond of her grand-daughters, she always favours the grandsons.

638 BOT: Mammy's the same. Once a man comes in the door first put the kettle on and make him a cup of tea and give him a dinner [laughs].

639 COT: I think they should be treated better.

640 MM: Why?

641 COT: A man comes home and their dinner wouldn't be on the table. Now I love the men when they come in from work, to have their dinner ready for them because a man looks forward to that when he comes home, and has his dinner, and everything is right. He can get home and there's no sign of food, it's the children they're seating.

642 MM: And you think that the father should be put before the children?

643 COT: Oh yes, by all means. I'm not saying now that you'd neglect the children but the fathers come first and the children after, second.

644 MM: You wouldn't approve of my house then at all, because when I come home from work my son has my dinner ready for me. He's a much better cook than I am [all laugh].

645 COT: Well he's not spoiled, that's the proof of it, he has to make do with what he gets. That's the way it is.

646 MM: I've read a lot of women, not recently, but in the period that we're talking about, where if there was a shortage of money in the household they'd feed their husbands and feed their children and whatever was left, they would have. You probably agree with that?

647 COT: I would, yes.

648 BOT: My mother does the same thing still, Mary. The other evening my brother came in, on his way home from work. I'd just fried a rasher for her and he was sitting here and she insisted he took it even though he didn't want it.

649 MM: Would you have been insulted if he didn't take it?

650 COT: No, he said I'm going home but you know the way you'd feel when you see them, because men are always hungry. Men love food [Betty and Mary laugh very loudly], men love food.

651 MM: I was intrigued when you were talking about your family having the enormous garden, and doing market gardening. Were they Dubliners originally?

652 COT: Oh yes, all from Dublin. That'd be just on a Saturday now.

653 BOT: Well Mammy's family was from Inchicore and grandfather, his father was a Welshman, and I don't know how they arrived in Dublin [pause] you don't know that story do you? [To COT]. You don't know how they met?

654 COT: Well, he was Irish.

655 BOT: No your father's father, my grandfather was a Welshman.

656 COT: Oh yes. Well, I don't know, I suppose he had to meet somebody here.

657 (412 words removed)

658 MM: Your daily life at home, what was your routine like after coming home from work?

659 COT: My daily life at home? Well I'd do all my own work that I'd have to do. When I wasn't out working I'd have to be here doing the stuff, I'd just pull up my stockings and get stuck in here.

660 MM: You must have put in a very long day - you started very early?

661 COT: I never used to worry. Thank God I was always healthy, I never got colds or anything. You know, I'd be always wanting to work and work and work, and wash and clean and scrub and polish; I'd polish this floor now, the oilcloth that was on this floor that was there. I'd kneel down and I'd polish that oilcloth, you could see your face in it. You know what I mean; I wouldn't do it now.

662 MM: Did you have any labour saving devices to do all this work? You didn't have a washing machine did you?

663 COT: No.

664 BOT: We didn't get our first washing machine until 1959 and that had a wringer on the side. Actually, it was a sink unit and a cabinet with a washing machine and a little mangle on the top. That was in 1959 when we got that and it was very good, it was a great washing machine. And we got a hoover [pause].

665 MM: That would be one of the upright hoovers?

666 BOT: No, it was what do you call it, an Electrolux, you'd pull it along.

667 MM: Would the iron have been an electric one?

668 BOT: Yes. Well, in the beginning Mammy used to use a gas iron.

669 COT: I used to use a gas iron.

670 MM: How did that work?

671 COT: All right. You'd fill it up with gas and you'd have a little silver shield to put it into when you were ironing.

672 MM: I remember seeing in old films when a woman would be ironing she'd spit on the thing and I always wondered why you did that.

673 BOT: That was just to test it, if it sizzled it was hot enough [laughs].

674 BOT: Before the gas iron, we had one, we had an open fire down there and we'd put it on the little hob to heat it.

675 MM: And was an open fire a problem with young children?

676 COT: We had a guard on it. You'd have to watch. Some people are careless but I was always very particular, you'd have to be of course when you'd young children.

677 MM: Betty, you were saying that during the war years you remember pushing a pram to collect the turf, was that something that you shared among you?

678 BOT: Well maybe Maureen might come with me one day or John and Paddy would go the next day, that way we shared.

679 MM: The cleaning out the fire, did you that?

680 COT: The boys, they'd clean the fire for me sometimes.

681 MM: Would you have to do that before you set off for work?

682 COT: No, you wouldn't have time, really. At any rate it would be too dangerous to leave it on, you know.

683 MM: So when you all got up in the morning then, it would be quite cold in the winter?

684 BOT: Well, when Mammy was working I used to get up. Mammy would be gone about half past five and I'd get them up for nine o'clock.

685 MM: What time did you have to be in for school?

686 BOT: Ten o'clock and we'd be home at half past twelve.

687 MM: And you all came home for your lunch?

688 BOT: Yes. We'd go back then from quarter past one until four o'clock. We'd have our dinner then when we'd come home.

689 MM: And would you help each other with homework?

690 BOT: No, my brains were limited [laughs]. But Maureen, my next sister and my brothers, they were very good at school. Although I didn't go to school all that long, I just wanted to work. I left school at fourteen. Sorry, I left school at fifteen and I was working then.

691 MM: Right, well, did it change very much for you when Betty started working after school?

692 COT: Well, it did, well I had Maureen of course; I had the other girl.

693 MM: How old was she at that stage?

694 COT: Maureen, how old was she?

695 BOT: Well, when I started work, my wages was fourteen bob a week, for the whole week I got fourteen bob. Well, it was around that, because I went to work in 1944. I was fifteen and [laughs] well, I left on the Friday, I couldn't stick it. I don't remember my wages but they wouldn't have been much. My grandmother had died and [pause] she decided to go back to England with her parents and I went to live with my grandfather and then it got too hectic for me, I wanted to leave. I had a shop to look after and two,

three men and a house and I was only fifteen. So I decided that I wanted to go back home and my aunt, she got me a job in Henry Street. I was working, then my brother went away, I was the only at home who was working for a few years, because my brother John, he was next to me, he went to Australia and then my brother Paddy, he was working here. Paddy and I were working and Maureen finished school.

696 MM: When you started work, did you bring home your money to your mother?

697 BOT: Yes, I handed my mother my wages the way I got them and [pause] when I was twenty four, my wages were £4 [pause] the pay was £4.50 but I handed it to her and got the 50p back. We all did that and then the money would be given back to us if we needed anything. But after a few years, I started keeping the money and gave Mammy housekeeping.

698 MM: And how did that go down with her?

699 BOT: [Laughs] it didn't go down well at all. I dressed myself out of what I had then, this was when I was about twenty eight [pause]

700 COT: Well she bought things for herself, clothes and that [pause] Maureen worked in a jewellers in Grafton Street. It was O'Connell's Jewellers in Grafton Street [pause].

701 BOT: She went there to work and then Tommy was working in the Dublin Wholesalers in Abbey Street [pause] he was about sixteen or seventeen [pause].

702 BOT: Well she always bought their clothes for them.

703 COT: Even my son that's married that has five children, William, he has a good job, where is he? Yeah, well he was; he was very good, looking after me. I even went with him to buy his wedding clothes, in O'Connell Street. I always went with them when they were buying their clothes.

704 BOT: I was thirty-two when I went for the job in Lyons and Mammy came with me.

705 COT: I used to go with them everywhere.

706 BOT: She always used to come [pause] even the first job I ever got and my friend was with me, and Mammy got both of us jobs on the same day, and Mammy was with us.

707 MM: When you say that you got the job, did you do the talking at the interview as well?

708 COT: Well, more or less.

709 BOT: We were probably afraid to say anything, you know [laughs]. But the job in Lyons, I didn't talk myself, she just told them I would be suitable [laughs].

710 MM: Did it get to the stage that you helped decide how the household budget would be spent?

711 BOT: Oh no, Mammy always [pause] I never interfered with Mammy over, regards spending money on the house. She bought what she wanted and the money I gave her, I would buy an odd thing for the house or I'd save for something [pause]. But I was never a person for spending a lot of money on clothes [pause].

712 COT: Well the lads would do this, they'd do the garden, they'd cut the hedge and everything you know.

713 BOT: Well it was a case that you got so used to doing it, it was a regular thing every week; we did our own chores. It was funny when Maureen and I were here, we used to have more rows. I'd be ready to do

one part of the house and Maureen was to do the other, but I decided I'd do upstairs but Maureen was determined.

714 MM: But it never occurred to you to just down tools.

715 BOT: No, funny enough, it never did.

716 COT: I was very strict and I never let them out around. They weren't out around.

717 BOT: Well, it wasn't that you were strict, it was just that we automatically did things, if we didn't do it, she'd have to do it so we were taking her part.

718 MM: You said you had a friend at the interview with you [pause] did you make friends at work?

719 BOT: We were school friends [pause] we're still friends actually, although I don't see her now so much. But we're still friends as much as we were when we were only fourteen years old.

720 MM: And did she come to the house?

721 BOT: Oh yes, she'd be invited for tea, or for Sunday dinner, you know.

722 MM: And what about boyfriends?

723 BOT: Oh yeah, quite a few, well Maureen always had more than I had [pause] she always had the pick of them. And did you vet them?

724 COT: They were all welcome, welcome to the house.

725 BOT: She'd be talking to them, making sure they were all right. As I say, it was Maureen mostly [pause].

726 COT: She went to Spain; she went to Spain to work. She had a grand job in Spain but she got sick and she came home and she met her husband. He was right to her and all. She used to do language [pause].

727 BOT: No English.

728 COT: She was very clever at school, Maureen, very clever.

729 BOT: Now if she heard me saying a word wrong, she'd have to let you know.

730 MM: And would she do this in a pleasant way?

731 BOT: Well, she'd sit there and she'd look at you, and you'd know, you'd know you'd said the word wrong, you know. Oh no, she can be very [pause] I told her off here, I told her off one evening. We were up in her house and my cousin was home from America and Maureen said to me: Do you realise what you're after saying? I said yes, but don't you dare pull me up on it. At times I have let her away with it, but I was annoyed that night and when we were in the kitchen, I said you shouldn't say that to me [pause] she is, she can be a bit overpowering at times. Well now, Maureen, she would never interfere in the things that you'd do, but that is one thing that annoys me about her [pause]. I don't know, she can be a bit standoffish at times, you know. Well my aunt, she never married, but everything she did had to be perfect, even in her dress, her speech, she was always perfect.

732 COT: She used to be called the best-dressed lady in town, wasn't she?

733 BOT: She was a bookie's clerk in a very old-established place.

734 MM: Was that a common job for a woman?

735 BOT: No, not at that time. The man that owned the shop, she was a clerk and they were opening the shop and she got the job [pause]. She was a very intelligent lady, she was.

736 COT: Maureen was like that; Maureen was very intelligent.

737 BOT: Although Maureen now, Maureen could speak Spanish fluently [pause] if she puts her mind to do anything, she does it. She's done those two paintings there on the wall behind you. She only started painting; she started about five years ago. But no matter what she puts her mind to she'll do it [pause]. I know I haven't got the brain to do what she does.

Clare, Dublin. Interview: 6th July 2002.

1 CK: My name is Clare K. and I was born in 1928, so I was eleven years old when the war started. I lived in Phibsborough, in Dublin, and spent the war years in the Drumcondra area until [pause] I lived in that area until the war was a long time over.

2 MM: I'm going to ask you a little bit about what you can remember about how the war impacted on your home life and particularly, what you can remember about how your mother would have coped. Were you, you were obviously going to school, did the war have any impact on the day to day life from that point of view?

3 CK: No. I lived fairly near my school so it was only a matter of walking but one thing always stuck in my head. We had a little dog who loved bananas and almost immediately, bananas were not available and that poor little dog went without.

4 Now, I do remember the day the war broke out. I remember being aware of Danzig, Gdansk in Poland, and we must have read the paper and heard the radio. It was shocking but we never thought it would go on long. We had no particular affiliation to any party. Many Irish people were sympathetic to the Axis and did not mind if England was bombarded or anything else. My parents were apolitical and just took it as it came.

5 From the beginning, we were aware of shortages of certain foods. When rationing began, I expect it was a little later than 1939, we were given our portion of butter and there were many rows in my house because I managed to keep it for a week, unless it was stolen on me. My brother reminded me of this recently. I was a source of great envy because I did not like margarine. I had a friend who was a girl with two brothers and in her family, as rationing went on, the brothers were given the butter that came to the household and she got beef dripping. Now she grew to be a beautiful girl so obviously it didn't do her any harm but I think she resented it or she wouldn't have ever mentioned it. Fruit became very scarce. We didn't have oranges so there was, I'm sure, a certain vitamin deficiency. We almost immediately transferred to brown flour, which was the native Irish flour, which proved to be quite nourishing and not damaging, but when white bread became available through friends in the North of Ireland, say, it was like getting cake. We became accustomed to this restricted diet, if you like, but unless you had family outside Dublin, in the countryside, the butter was the main thing that was missing. Tea became scarce so my mother would ration it strictly among the adults. There weren't any adults really, at the time, she had some houseguests and the tea was kept for them. We drank a terrible concoction from South America, shell cocoa, which formed some kind of a hot beverage. This is now used to keep down weeds in gardens, you can buy it in the garden centre in big, big bags and when I saw it, it brought it all back to me what a horrible drink it was. We did not make the ersatz coffee.

6 MM: Can I just stop you a second? Would it not have been as difficult to get that, coming from South America, as tea?

7 CK: It was imported as a substitute for tea. Tea was very scarce because of the distance it had to be brought from India and Ceylon.

8 MM: Surely the distance from South America was equally far?

9 CK: I cannot imagine what the difference was except that maybe the North Atlantic was not so vulnerable to U-Boat attack.

10 In this period, children developed a disease called scabies and every family had to go to the Iveagh Baths to be washed down with a white liquid, immersed in the public bath, to our absolute shame and horror to be stripped down in front of everyone. We had to be immersed in this solution because scabies became rampant. It was a condition of the fingers and toes and perhaps it was due to a vitamin deficiency, I'm not sure.

11 During this period, my mother was very skillful at cooking in unconventional fashion with what we called a 'sawdust' cooker. It consisted of a strong biscuit tin, which was actually square. It was given out by Jacobs Biscuits through shops. You would try and find one of these and you would fill it with sawdust. In the middle while you were filling it with sawdust you would put down a very strong bottle. My brother reminded me it was a champagne bottle; we didn't drink champagne but that's what it was. So then the sawdust was packed tightly around this bottle in this twelve-inch square tin and dampened and through some method, it became congealed, I suppose, and then it was ignited and it burnt very slowly, in a manner like a slow cooker and it was extremely efficient. Apparently, there were other systems known as hay box cooking, for keeping food warm, because gas was rationed in the Dublin area. You got one hour for cooking and then you must turn off the system and people [pause] the glimmermen went around checking for gas, whether it had been used in the off period. It was extremely limited in the amount you could use every day so this haybox system would keep food warm where people came in for a late dinner or whatever.

12 We didn't make the ersatz coffee because we were not coffee drinkers; it was made from roasted parsnips but it was not part of our diet. We missed the fruit because we had been accustomed to it, growing up to age eleven, but eventually it came back towards the end of the war.

13 My mother worked quite hard to feed the houseguests. Now she had only two but she wanted to make sure they were nourished, I suppose, to keep whatever they gave her to supplement our income.

14 As far as I know, many people went from my area to England to work. They worked in the munitions factories. One of my contemporaries, towards the end of the war, went to the WAAF, the air arm, but that was very unusual. Many men went - that was a girl - but many men went for a career in the English services.

15 The bombs that fell near the North Strand in Dublin, I think were about 1941, were an absolute horror to us. We all went down to look at the damage, principally because one of the main houses hit, my mother had lived in for quite a time when she was young, but it was such a rare thing to see such devastation that we went. We also went to the south side of the city, which was the Jewish quarter, where some bombs had landed and we also wondered why that area was selected, whether it was deliberate. There was quite extensive damage in that area.

16 MM: You were saying that you were eleven when the war started. How many other children were in the family and how old were they?

17 CK: There were six. My sister was nearly two years older, my brother was about a year younger, another brother was a year and a half younger, the youngest would [pause] 1935, four years old. We were all ages and we were well nourished at the beginning of the war. We had no problems with local food. It was simple but we all attended schools comparatively near so we didn't have to pay bus fares, or anything extra like that.

18 MM: What about things like having vegetable patches in the garden, that sort of thing? Did your family do that?

19 CK: My father always had an allotment, where he worked on his only day off in the week. He worked very hard, grew potatoes, cabbage, they were the main choice vegetable. My mother was more adventurous in that she would grow runner beans, parsnips, carrots, a lot of different vegetables, but we had quite a lot of vegetables.

20 MM: Were other neighbours doing that sort of thing as well?

21 CK: I don't think so. It was a mixed neighbourhood, there might have been no children, [pause] or whatever.

22 MM: What about your mother's daily routine? Was she going out to work or at home with the children all day?

23 CK: When the war broke out we had a shop and we had only just taken it on and unfortunately, commodities became scarce and it was not a good time to open a shop. It was a small grocery, dry goods, I don't think they ever had to go to the market or anything.

24 MM: So, if your mother was going to the shop, did you have to do anything, looking after the younger children, or was there somebody to help?

25 CK: There was, yes. There was a woman who came in to work at washing and cleaning. We would go to the shop, we did a little help as two or three years went by but it was a very bad time because of the rationing. I remember seeing what they called 'penny packets' of tea, where people would just buy enough tea to do maybe the husband and the wife and they would ask for [pause] they couldn't ask for 'best butter' as we called it, they would have to take margarine mostly. It was not a good time to own a shop, a small shop.

26 MM: And was this because of the rationing or because people's incomes were very small?

27 CK: In the area where the second shop was – we had a second shop afterwards – it was a poor area where they lived from hand to mouth, with just buying per meal. I remember them asking for 'best butter' but that wasn't so often. But their diet would have been quite limited and they were in an area where it was tenement property. I remember one family, they were living in a large room and I remember going in and seeing mattresses piled on top of each other which were taken down at night. They were young adults, they were not small children, a very large family.

28 MM: Where in Dublin was this?

29 CK: That was in what's now Sean McDermott Street. It was an area where my parents had started originally in a shop and they went back to the same shop, which was very strange, but the whole circumstances of the area had changed over a period of about fifteen years.

30 MM: And why would you have needed to go there, was it that you had a school friend or something living there?

31 CK: No, we used to go to help in the shop after school.

32 MM: No, I mean to the tenement building.

33 CK: Oh, just because they were regular customers. I must have been invited in or carrying a message or something but I was invited in. I remember, I can still see the woman's face but they considered themselves very lucky to have a huge room in an old Victorian house, whatever it was. But we walked to and from our house to this shop, which was not a viable proposition at the time. So, my father's income was not a very big one and my mother was extremely energetic and she tried to boost the family income by doing this. In the First World War, she had been a manager of Lipton's store, when the men were all gone away. She was a very capable woman but the timing of the rationing devastated the shop.

34 MM: And would she have considered any other kind of work if she was concerned about the family income?

35 CK: No. She boosted the income then by having two houseguests and that was it, but she couldn't do any more than that.

36 MM: These were people who were paying for board and lodging?

37 CK: Yes. They were the same people that she'd had in a previous home and they were quite happy to follow her.

38 MM: In that case, was it not quite difficult for her to make the money to pay someone to come in and help with the housework?

39 CK: She probably worked for very little. She was with us for years and years. She was very capable and very nice. She used to bring her little niece with her and I remember my mother giving the child bread and jam. Jam in those days came in a 7lb. jar, a stone jar, which people prize now as antiques. I have one out there. And I remember there was a mixed fruit jam, we were told afterwards it was made from mangolds, which are fed to cattle, but it tasted like jam, it was quite acceptable. So gradually, towards the end of the war, almost overnight the white flour became available and nobody went back to the brown flour. But nobody was any less healthy because of the dark bread.

40 MM: Was this like rye bread rather than the Irish soda bread?

41 CK: It was grey, it wasn't quite what we're used to do. It didn't do people any harm.

42 Then there was another thing, coal could not be bought. So houses were getting fuel from the turf banks which were in the Phoenix Park. These were cut turf, stacked in yards long piles in the Phoenix Park. The distributors would bring it to certain areas of the city where you would buy it by the bag. So this was brought to the house and you sometimes had a little trivet on your ordinary fireplace. When there was no gas available you would have a kettle always on this metal trivet in the fireplace. And the fuel, the turf did not burn very well, it burnt away very quickly, it was soft fuel but there just wasn't coal available. But with the turf came fleas, by the million. Everybody suffered from the fleas. We became expert at checking our blankets at night. We would look at them before we got into bed and you might find two or [pause].

43 MM: Would this have been from fires in the bedrooms?

44 CK: No, they would have been in the house from the turf. No, I don't think we lit fires in the bedrooms, it wouldn't [pause] because Irish people were not accustomed to heat in the bedrooms. But the fleas would get into the bed, probably on our clothes. They were just endemic. Because of this turf, they lived in it, and everybody suffered from them and we used to squash them between our thumbs and fingers, our thumbnails. We became expert at finding them because otherwise you would be bitten. So you just lived with them and I remember, I was about fourteen visiting a distant cousin in a big old house in Rathfarnham and I was supposed to stay [pause] I went on my bicycle from Drumcondra to Rathfarnham, never having taken the journey before and found her in this house with her four children. So we went to bed and I couldn't sleep. They virtually ate me all the night long. They'd obviously got them [pause] they were in a feather mattress or something, they thought nothing of it. I came home the next day.

45 MM: What about things [pause] you know you were squashing the fleas but, soap and toiletries?

46 CK: Our soap was very basic. Sunlight soap that we buy today, that was the main soap, you'd to wash your face in that. Then there was carbolic soap, that was like a red soap and the soap for washing floors, that was supposed to be, that was called 'Dirtshifter', a grey soap. You could wash the clothes in it if you hadn't got the other one. Then to boost our meagre diet we were all given cod liver oil and a drink called 'Parrish's Food' which was iron, mixed every morning and we swallowed that dutifully. We didn't like the taste of the iron but they balanced each other. Nobody said they wouldn't have it, they were just given it.

47 MM: Was there a widespread feeling that it was a meagre diet, because apart from maybe a shortage of tea and fruit, the vegetables and the rye bread and everything were quite good for you.

48 CK: Oh yes, if you had your own vegetables you were quite well off. I don't know how people managed. Now there weren't many imported vegetables, it was mostly very basic Irish vegetables that were available. Broccoli hadn't arrived on the scene at all; cauliflower would have been expensive. Peas were the Sunday vegetables because they didn't have a strong smell. My mother would never cook cabbage or onions on a Sunday. She had good meat, Irish meat. We had pork steak, which would have been stuffed, that was expensive even then.

49 Then there was the problem of another area, personal hygiene. Because there was no gas for the geyser, you couldn't have a bath more than once a week, which was normal and in some families, they would only have a tin bath and they all got in the same warm water because there was so little of it. In turn, you know, I suppose the eldest got in last, there was only children up to that. We had a bath all right, we were okay, but I don't know how the water system worked because the gas wouldn't have been available. Now there was always the dreadful problem of the head lice, which were endemic, and they're back again now, it seems. Our method of treating them was a Saturday morning combing, to remove the lice, and a treatment with an item called 'Harrison's Pomade'. It stung the head after the fine combing and that was diligently done. Our hair was kept cut very short for hygiene reasons. Nobody in my family had long hair, it was not allowed. My mother did her very best to keep us free of these creatures. They would be found every day from school.

50 MM: This would have created a lot of extra work for her?

51 CK: Well, no, it was the same for everyone. Everyone had the same, we were laughing about it in the swimming pool this week, and we all had the same experience, people of my age. We all had the mothers working on the lice, we all had the cod liver oil and the Parrish's Food, so we all got the same. It was normal. And the fleas, we all had to do the fleas. We were laughing over this; it was no problem.

52 If you lived in the country, it was a different story because there would have been more plentiful butter and milk and cheese. Well, milk was never scarce, but milk was not pasteurised, it was from the dairy, wherever your neighbourhood dairy was. People didn't appear to suffer from it. There had been a very serious epidemic of tuberculosis, about 1935, but I suppose by the time the war broke out they'd brought it under control by creating new housing. They moved from the congested areas. But this TB didn't appear to be around during the war period, as far as I know.

53 Other than that, well I think shoes would have been rationed. So you got a pair of shoes [pause] I got a pair of shoes at Christmas, when I was eleven, well the war wouldn't have broken out at that time, but I remember Confirmation Day for me was in February, the 1st of February and I was disgusted I did not get another pair of shoes. That was the normal thing, unless you were really rich you didn't get a full new outfit. The shoes were varnished to make them look like new. Well, you got hand me down clothes, everybody worth their salt could do 'make and mend', which meant cutting up adults' clothes for children, because the clothing coupons were very rationed. If there were a special occasion, like a wedding or something in the family, a First Communion or something of that nature [pause] I remember being given quite adult dresses by one my mother's friends and I wore it very happily. It was a grown-up's dress, I was about fourteen at the time, but I never protested and clothes were passed from one member of a family to another.

54 MM: I presume then if you were the oldest you did better?

55 CK: Yes. When my husband bought his first car, it had been on blocks all through the war period. It was a Wolseley and it was in mint condition. It had never been used because petrol was not allowed for private cars. It wasn't our problem, we didn't have cars, we used bicycles. And I got a bicycle when I was twelve, a big old-fashioned bicycle, second-hand and I was delighted.

56 MM: I presume the roads were safer without the cars?

57 CK: Oh perfectly safe, because also, it would have been after the war [pause] there was still a blackout for a long time and a kind of a curfew that the lights went off at half past nine. And I remember, I must have been [pause] it was after the war, walking home at about ten o'clock, and no street lighting. I don't know why at that time there was no light.

58 MM: I've seen a lot of references, in fact one or two of my interviewees from the North said that one of the things that struck them when they came from Belfast to Dublin was at night, the brightness.

59 CK: Of the lights?

60 MM: Yes.

61 CK: Well now, in the early part of the war, 1941, 1942, my brother reminded me that a man knocked on our house one night and said 'I can see a splink of light'. We had blackout curtains made of very black material, I think possibly dyed, commercially dyed twill or something like that, and the window had to be

screened with blackout and if a splink of light showed, you would be warned to correct it. It mustn't show. You couldn't even have a light in the street; apparently, it would have been visible. I don't know at what period lighting would have come back in the city. After 1945, I expect.

62 MM: Well, these references to the light were quite explicit.

63 CK: Maybe it was the summer? I remember walking home in pitch dark, at maybe half past ten. Well, I would have been sixteen so [pause] but there was, buses went off at night and if you didn't catch that bus, you would walk it. Nobody minded walking. It was perfectly safe and of course, there were very few cars on the roads so everybody did it. I used to cycle to school on this big bike, it was an 'upstairs model', we used to call them, with a high saddle.

64 MM: What about going to secondary, was there any difference that you think, you know, listening to other people's experiences of the later period when the war was over. Had there been much impact on your school life?

65 CK: Very little really, but it was very unusual to be in secondary school. We had moved to another house and in that area people went to work at fourteen. They all went to work and I remember getting some kind of a scathing remark about me still being at school. It was only up to age seventeen, anyway, but it was not usual then. But then, in other areas, people stayed on to Leaving Cert. Some went to university but my contemporaries and friends went in to jobs at age eighteen or so. They took jobs in the Civil Service, they used to get into that, and there were bank jobs and then all sorts of retail marketing and that kind of thing. People didn't seem to be left without a job, there was plenty of work.

66 MM: And yet there was a lot of anxiety about getting a job.

67 CK: Of course, I'm talking now about 1947 onwards, when it would have been easier. I think most families had a regular income. Mostly, the fathers would have been around, not like nowadays when there are a lot of single parent families. People survived quite well. The Children's Allowance was non-existent. I don't know how widows managed. I think, perhaps, there was a very small pension, very, very small. Most widows went out to do work, like cleaning, because they had to keep their children somehow. Another widow I know did dressmaking. She almost blinded herself working away at night. So people just had to fall in and we were grateful that we were not involved in the war. After the initial bombing, there was never any further attack outside.

68 MM: I know it was very strictly censored but would you remember any discussion in the family about the possible course of the war and events outside Ireland?

69 CK: I don't remember any strong political discussion. We just took it day by day. The reports of the VE bombings were very frightening, because of the impact and they could travel such long distances. That was in 1944 or so and we always hoped they wouldn't overfly Ireland but I don't think Irish shipping was in business then, they wouldn't have been on the high seas at that time, yes, it was after the war. But Irish men, a lot went into the merchant navy and some didn't come back, so there were many women keeping the home fires burning, as they said in England. Waiting for the cheque every week, whatever the husband was doing, however it came in to the post office and that was the payment.

70 MM: Did you know anyone personally who went to England for work?

71 CK: Not during the war, no. My friends all had their parents in Dublin and they had various ways of life, and they were full-time mothers, of course.

72 MM: What about breaks away from school? Did you go on family holidays?

73 CK: We didn't take family holidays. My father took us once, before the war, to Balbriggan, took three of us and after that, there were no long holidays. We used to take days out, mystery tours. Now the mystery tours would have been before the war as well, to Northern Ireland, which were lovely. We all went on a train, we didn't know where we'd end up but no, I don't remember any special holidays. We just weren't [pause] my sister went to England, that was during the war, to work in a convent, but that was very unusual in Dublin. People from the west of Ireland went to England, that was normal, but in our family it was unusual.

74 MM: What about people coming to Dublin from the country, looking for work, would you have been aware of that?

75 CK: Yes, yes. As I grew up and took a job, after the war, many people came from the country. They honed in on Dublin and as I worked in the Civil Service I knew many people from the country.

76 MM: Actually, there was quite a significant migration to Dublin from the country in the pre-war period. But to go back a bit, the woman who came in to help your mother, what would her daily duties have involved?

77 CK: She would come in for the day. She had lived with us in two or three houses because my mother kept moving, and in the first house there were three stories and she would clean, I presume, there wasn't carpeting, it would have been linoleum. I presume clean the bedrooms and wash those floors that needed to be washed and she would do the washing.

78 MM: Did she actually live in the house with you?

79 CK: No. Before that, we did have a maid living in, we were all very young, but she didn't stay long. No, this person came, she would have come two days to do this main cleaning, and she took care of us. I don't remember her ironing. My mother must have done the ironing herself because I don't remember this woman ironing but she was a good natured lady, she lived in Eccles Street. She was in a house there, I can still remember it. She can't have been very young but that was her income, to do house cleaning. She did it well, I presume.

80 MM: How would she have done the washing?

81 CK: In the sink, hand washing everything. Oh, all the bed linen went to a laundry and it got what they called a 'full finish' which meant it came back ironed and starched. The bed linen went and table clothes, and I think, maybe towels, anything of that nature. The rest then was just personal clothing. I remember even my mother using a laundry [pause] laundries must have been available all through the war, with the scarcity of soap and the limit on water heating, laundries would have been normal and possibly expensive, I don't know. We had a big linen load. One laundry was the Metropolitan Laundry, that we used all the time. You would have a number and a tape would be attached to your sheets, pillowslips, towels and you got back most of them. Occasionally, something went missing. And it was collected from

the house, in a van and brought back, fully finished, beautifully laundered. I don't know whether that service is still available.

82 MM: Of course, through those years some orders of nuns were running the so-called 'Magdalen' laundries.

83 CK: Yes, the Magdalen Laundry, that could have been one of the laundries, yes.

84 MM: And the women were paid virtually nothing so it would have been cheap to run.

85 CK: Yes, I remember being in Hyde Park Laundry, that was some years ago, it could be like ten years ago, and some of those people who had lived there all their lives were there running these ancient machines. They were totally institutionalised, there from their late teens, and they were still laundering big items that wouldn't fit in an ordinary washing machine, like a big cotton quilt, but it was available. And I think most people used it because laundry was normal, even if it was expensive. So that we always had very smooth sheets, that's once you got over the fleas in the blankets (laughs), but you see, the fleas were easily, you were easily aware. You could see spotting because you see all the bed linen was white, there were no coloured sheets in those days and you could see spotting on the sheets.

86 MM: This was because the fleas had bitten you?

87 CK: Oh yes, absolutely. The sheets would have to be laundered, but we accepted it, everyone had them. It wasn't a problem, like everyone had head problems and you just got on with it. I don't know how bad it was, I know head lice are endemic again in Ireland, so it can't have been the diet. It was just that they came in from the turf. Well, the head lice from personal contact in the classroom.

88 MM: What about childhood illnesses, things like measles and mumps, how did your mother cope if they ran through six children?

89 CK: Before the war I got mumps and chicken pox, diphtheria, which was endemic. I remember getting it, I was aged eight, I sucked a lollypop from my friend, she handed me the lollypop to lick and I took a lick. She was in the hospital the next day and I was in two days later. I was in for eight weeks. It was isolation, in the Hardwicke Hospital. I was in it for seven weeks without contact with my family. I thought they had died in a fire in the house and they were all gone. After one month I used to be allowed to go down to the garden where my father could see me. My mother never came, because she might have brought it back to the rest of the family. And two years later, my sister, who was two and a half, got diphtheria and was isolated for fourteen weeks, which was [pause] she was isolated in Ben Eavin Hospital, which was in Finglas. Her hair was cut short, she had lovely long hair, it was cut short and she had no contact with her family, which must have been very damaging. My mother could go and look at her through a window and we never went near that hospital. So diphtheria was treated effectively. It's very rare nowadays but scabies was the worst experience for all of us, because the whole city must have had it because we had to be treated. It went with this one immersion.

90 MM: What about less serious illnesses? How were they treated?

91 CK: Oh, we had a family doctor and he was on a retainer rather than per visit because with six children it was likely that he would be called. He was a lovely man, Dr. Shepherd was his name. He was very kindly. I can still see him. So we would all have these minor ailments but he was on a retainer, it

wasn't a payment per visit and he was quite happy with that. And there were no seriously infectious conditions, except the diphtheria. My brothers [pause] there was another thing that was quite common, impetigo. It was probably from hygiene or something, I don't know why it would have been around. But one brother had gashed his elbow and cut it and he got impetigo. It was a terrible thing to get because you couldn't get rid of it. It didn't go up the arm but it was very difficult to heal this condition and people dreaded it. It would come on the face, around the mouth, and it was very obvious that you had caught impetigo. Eventually, with the elbow, he had to be brought to Hume Street Hospital and it took, like, maybe a year and impetigo was the dread disease. So how you avoided it, I don't know, but he was the only one who got it.

92 MM: Was it because it was obvious that people were sort of shunning you?

93 CK: Well, it was just that it was so infectious, it was seriously infectious. It would come around the mouth here, it was ugly and it wouldn't go away, and as I say, the elbow was a long time being cleared. A hit of the elbow, he must have fallen, but life was very simple.

94 In our family, we didn't attend the cinema very much, because there wasn't much spare money. We weren't given the fourpenny rush every Saturday like some people did. I didn't go to the cinema until I saw 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarves' when I was about eight and I didn't go again, I can't remember when I next saw a film. We were not cinema people because it would have involved six cinema tickets on a Saturday but I knew people who went every single week. They had small families, maybe.

95 MM: What did you do for entertainment?

96 CK: Long walks on a Sunday, all eight of us we walked from Phibsborough to the Phoenix Park or to the Canal at Finglas. Broombridge, were we saw Lord Norbury's house with his skull on the wall. That was a landmark, we'd go as far as that and walk back again. It was quite a long walk on a summer evening. We would take a tram from the city centre to Dollymount. It was not expensive, I don't think, it wouldn't have been even four pence. And as sure as we'd be on the beach the rain would come tumbling down and that would be the end of the day out. That was considered a great day, going to Dollymount with a picnic and have a swim. But I remember flooding on the sand, with the heavy rain as it is now, but that was the extent of our outings. The mystery tours to the North, the trip to the beach in the summer, the long walks – I remember seeing bats flying at Broombridge in the evenings, and there wouldn't be much else.

97 MM: Did the mystery tours finish because of the war?

98 CK: I think so, yes. They went to various places before that but I don't remember going through the war but for our family, life was simple. My brothers didn't play contact sports, I think my mother was afraid of them. They didn't have to play them in their schools, they went to the Christian Brothers. We were very simply dressed because the coupons were so scarce. If you got a dress, it was for a very special occasion and you kept it for as long as you could fit into it.

99 MM: Presumably most people were in that position, having to deal with that problem?

100 CK: Yes. Now, if they were wealthy people, on the south side, I don't know what they did, maybe they went abroad and bought it, I don't know. Flights were not even considered at that time, it wasn't normal to fly out of Ireland, so holidays abroad were very rare in our circle.

101 MM: I suppose the major impact of the war so far as the South was concerned seems to have been the rationing and certainly, employment opportunities for women were enormously restricted compared to the pre-war period.

102 CK: They were restricted so much as the men had gone away in a lot of cases so the women just stayed at home. Now it was rare for women to go out to work, that was rare. I really don't remember any career people who were married.

103 MM: Yet there were a lot of women who, not necessarily having careers but like your mother, who were supplementing the family income, who had jobs. Those opportunities, as manufacturing got restricted because of lack of raw materials, they got restricted as well so people were worse off.

104 CK: I think factories probably functioned up to a point, there wasn't great unemployment. I wasn't aware of it myself, as I didn't have anybody in that area. My father worked in the same public house for years, working very long hours but obviously publicans' business didn't suffer.

105 For fun, we read a lot, we didn't have personal radios, that was not usual. There would have been one radio in the house. We had access to the library from a young age and we went regularly. We'd leave the house and go to the local library.

106 MM: What sorts of books were you reading?

107 CK: Quite a wide variety of books, from the age of about eight. Mysteries, all sorts of things, anything that would interest us we could bring home and read. I mean, I always remember having a book when I should have been studying. I'd be in my room and supposed to be studying in isolation but I'd be reading. So I was lucky. I read less now than I did then because I had access to the library.

108 MM: What about your school, was that all girls?

109 CK: Oh yes, it was never co-ed in those days. My friends and I all attended a Holy Faith Convent in Dublin. We had been at a primary school before that and we formed strong friendships, enjoying being there. I was very sad when I left, I would have liked to have gone further, but I had to leave for money reasons. I finally finished school at seventeen, after doing a commercial course, and I then went into the Civil Service. But some of my friends stayed on and took training courses – radiology, medicine, things like that. Oh yes, the fees were very high.

110 MM: Were you told from an early age that you would only be going to primary school?

111 CK: No, but I won a scholarship. Only for the top level of each class there was a scholarship and then I won another scholarship for the commercial college and that was the end of it. If I had not had scholarships I wouldn't have been at secondary school.

112 MM: Was there ever any thought that you would try for a scholarship to university?

113 CK: No. I was steered into the Civil Service. My mother recommended that I should do that and I was the only member of my family who stayed in Ireland. My sisters went to England and my brothers went to Canada.

114 I was very happy in the Civil Service. I had a good level of Irish and I remember trying for various exams to get in, while I was in the commercial college, and my friend and I went neck and neck – she was one place ahead of me in each exam – and we became firm friends, starting in the same office. The people

there would possibly all have leaving certs or a lot of them. I didn't have the leaving cert and they would have been from the country.

115 MM: Which office were you in?

116 CK: This was the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. She was from Dublin, she was the lady who was given the beef dripping, a beautiful lady. She had lovely hair, it never did her a bit of harm. We stayed together as firm friends and we formed a lot of strong friendships at that time. We would have been more or less on the same wavelength, as the saying goes, and we all married, except one, and we had families but we stayed in touch.

117 MM: Was there a marriage bar?

118 CK: Well, we had to leave, that was the way it was. I left after six years.

119 MM: What about at school, would there have been an emphasis in your education on your post-school career being subject to the expectation that you would get married and have children?

120 CK: Yes, that was accepted. So to have to leave your job on marriage was understood. You couldn't protest and very people were employable anywhere else because we didn't have the mainstream skills for the commercial world. If you had to leave - now unless you had worked in a bank or something - if you had to leave the Civil Service you were not considered employable by some commercial firm because the training was different. And at school, you just went as far as you could afford the fees, and my scholarship was only for two years and then the commercial school. My younger sister did the leaving at secondary school but no other member of my family went to secondary school.

Colette, Dublin. Interview: 30th October 1997

1 CR: My full name, the one that is on my registration, is Frances Marie Colette. I just call myself Colette. I've always been called Colette.

2 MM: Is that because you prefer the name?

3 CR: No, that is what my mother and father called me. I don't know where the Frances came from. But my official documents, now, and anyone seeing my name there, I would always be referred to as Frances and I found it very hard to adjust to being called Frances [laughs].

4 MM: Yes and are you a Dubliner?

5 CR: Yes, I was born in Dublin and my parents were Dubliners with, I think, perhaps semi County Wexford/County Dublin connections. I was never quite sure about that.

6 MM: And when was that? When were you born?

7 CR: I was born in 1919, in the autumn of 1919. My mother was staying out in Bray at the time, on a little holiday, and my father was either away or maybe on night duty because my mother was in a bit of a panic when she was taken short [laughs] unexpectedly, and I gather it was pretty difficult at that time to get transport into the city. I was born in the Rotunda, which I'm very proud of, I think it gives me a real Dublin heart.

8 MM: I was born there too and my whole family, my mother before me.

9 CR: Oh good, good. Well, my mother wouldn't have gone anywhere [pause] they were, my mother lived on the North side and my father lived on the south side. He was a Liberties man, really, he lived on the old South Circular Road.

10 MM: Right. And did you have brothers and sisters?

11 CR: I have one brother, one brother yes. Do you want to know about him?

12 MM: Well, not for the moment. Can you go on and tell me about yourself?

13 CR: Well, he's quite well known. My father was educated in Synge Street. He had brains - I don't know where he got them really, his family I suppose but I don't know too much about them, I don't think my mother like them terribly [pause] and my earliest recollections are of standing on the kitchen table in the basement of their house and hearing some sort of row going on with the brothers. They were a very mixed family, my father I think was the eldest, but the others were [pause] there was one of them a Free Stater and another was a Sinn Féiner. I discovered recently, quite recently, through my brother through somebody who was claiming cousinship; that the other one was in the British Army, so I think that was the reason for the distance.

14 MM: And would your mother have had strong nationalist views?

15 CR: My mother had vacillated. She was an extraordinary woman. She was extremely volatile; she hated the British [pause] when I was very young she had a stillborn baby and she never forgave them, it was in England. It was their fault of course [laughs]. She had a few friends; they were people with whom they stayed when they were there. My father was working for the government but I'm not sure of the details. It's all terribly nebulous. They never talked about themselves, to that extent. He never talked about his work. I think he was reticent because he felt too much in [pause].

16 MM: Was he a civil servant?

17 CR: No he wasn't, but he was very much involved in the political campaigning of the time. You'll appreciate that Home Rule was being pressed forward and then the war came and all the business of the Redmondites going out and [pause] I'm terribly vague about it but I know that he was, he was very much involved in because he was secretary to a parliamentary [pause] a member of parliament. That's all extremely mysterious because we don't know why he stopped being a secretary. I think my mother probably had something to do with it, she just doesn't didn't like him being away, and there was an awful lot of coming and going and toing and froing involved and knowing her, she wanted him close by [pause] and, well, we often say it's a pity he didn't talk to us more, because he could have told us a tremendous amount about the facts, the facts of what happened with the Redmondites. He did talk to my next-door neighbour, because she said there were one or two copybooks full of stuff that he told her, she used to come and visit him. But unfortunately, she died and I never heard; I never got any details of it. The odd thing he would say now and again, which was surprising, but never - my brother might know a bit more but I don't know. It was always a great mystery; we'd love to have known a bit more.

18 MM: So do you remember as a child, as a child were you conscious of the fact that you weren't being told or was that something as you grew up?

19 CR: Oh not at all. In those days, children were just belted around the place if you said the wrong thing. There was always some sort of a trauma going on, I mean I was aware of anxiety. My mother was an extremely highly strung woman. She developed, she had very bad health at about the time I was around four or five, she really did suffer. You know the older I get the more I realise how much she suffered. But she was a difficult woman to live with [laughs] and I got the brunt of it, very much so. Very volatile. She should have been an actress, or she should have been [pause] she had tremendous, she had great personality but she fought with everybody. She had very strong opinions about everything and other people didn't have any of those opinions.

20 MM: Did that influence you?

21 CR: I never uttered, believe it or not, I never uttered until I was about thirty. No matter what you'd say she'd just have to contradict it. She had to stay in a lot because she was very bad. She had very bad ulcerated legs and she had very bad arthritis and she had very, very bad health really. But, the result was that she wasn't out very much and as a gregarious person, it must have been hell. Well anyway, she'd mull over everything you'd say and you'd have it brought up about three weeks later [laughs].

22 MM: And where did you go to school?

23 CR: I went to school in the St. Louis Convent in Rathmines. I was one of their earliest pupils there; they started the school in the 1920s. I can't remember the exact date but I know it had only been open a few years. It was a great place, small, very small, and now it's vast. But then I was always a loner in so far as, we lived in Ranelagh, and most of the school, most of the pupils came from Rathgar, Rathmines, Harold's Cross, like there was one, there were two came from the South Circular Road. I was at right angles, everybody else was on this side and I was away from the others. There were only two others didn't come the Rathmines area. I really should have gone to Muckross, which would have been only down the road from us. I don't quite know why I didn't. One of my mother and father's contacts used to sing in the church choir and their daughter was going to St. Louis - that may have been it.

24 MM: Was that where you started your musical studies?

25 CR: I didn't really, that was an extra, and we couldn't afford extras. We had very good music teachers - Sister Clothilde, she only died about two years ago. She was a marvel; she had a very good choir. She trained us and we did quite well at singing. We went to a Grade A school in 1930 or 32 which meant we were taught all in Irish. We went enthusiastically in the Dublin Feis and the Feis Maitiú. We had a very good choir; we had an excellent choir in fact. We also had an excellent orchestra. I remember going to an audition and being told to hold out your arm and see how long it was and I was given a viola to play. Now, I was about eleven at the time. [Both laugh.] I started to learn music at home when I was about nine, on the violin. There was a lady who lived in Upper Beechwood Road, she was one of the genteel poor and she had been a pupil of Senior Esposito [pause] and she was quite elderly. She really was because she died before I was finished being taught by her. She lived with her brother and sister in law in a Victorian house. It was a terraced house, but it was a Victorian cottage, it was called. She was very good; she was a very good teacher. She wore black, all black, I don't know if it was bombazine [laughs] but it was always black and they had a very strange piano, it was like tortoiseshell, I don't know if it was tortoiseshell but it had a pattern, a fretwork kind of pattern on the front and pleated green silk on the back and it was lit up by candles. She was a very good teacher. I did that and then the school music was the choir and later the orchestra. I think it was one of the first that was set up, Loreto had one too. It was quite interesting, whenever the examination came up - we were good enough to have an examination - Mr. O'Reilly, from the College of Music in Chatham Street, came to see us. We used to do quite well really. Rathmines was a very good school, I must admit I always felt that about the place. They had tremendous educational focus, they always concentrated on education.

26 MM: What sort of subjects would you have done?

27 CR: We did everything, Irish, English [pause] my father said I should do a bit of Latin when I was in my fifth year. We did Science, which was rather basic.

28 MM: It was unusual for a girls' school to do Science at that time?

29 CR: Well, we had a science lab and we were taught it in Irish so let me tell you I have no recollection whatsoever. [Both laugh] And we did French and Home Economics, it was called Domestic Science then. Oh and Music. It was a good range, a good all round range.

30 MM: Would the girls have been prepared to go on to university from your class?

31 CR: Oh yes, they were. A few had gone ahead of us, in my time, now I finished in 1937 and before that there would have been [pause] I know that in the year I left quite a few went in to College. I would like to have gone but I had no idea what I wanted to do. In those days there was no such thing as career guidance or counselling, we were being educated for matrimony or the civil service.

32 MM: Did neither appeal to you at the time?

33 CR: Well no, I just lived. I just lived from day to day, I had really no great thoughts of life - and there was always an atmosphere of anxiety at home so that I really just hoped that I would get something to do that I would be able to pay my way and contribute to the household. But no, I didn't, I recall one of my classmates, who hadn't come right through - she had come in [pause] there were a few girls who came in, they were sort of in their teens, who had gone to other schools before who came in to be prepared for

College and they did very well. There were a few well known names, of the female population, very well known names, who had been ahead of me. In fact, I saw the other day, a programme, or play or something, and Petronella O'Flanagan's name was associated with it. Petronella O'Flanagan was about, I'd say about three years ahead of me, it's difficult to know when you're a youngster how much ahead, another one who was ahead of us was Bernadette Plunkett, who was one of the first broadcasters in radio, one of the news readers, she played in Trilby, in the 1930s and she was remarkably good. She had great French, and she was sort of the Head Girl then and I remember getting up the courage to go to her one day and say that she was very good [laughs].

(82 words removed)

34 CR: No, after I left school, I learned shorthand and typing and secretarial skills. I went to the University Tutorial Institute, which was in Harcourt Street and I went there for two years, on and off. We did all the government examinations, and the ESB and the Corporation, and so forth. It had quite an interesting cross section. I met a few people there who became very good friends for years and years and some interesting people. Seamus Ennis was in the class. His sister had been in my school so that I felt on nodding terms.

35 MM: So it wasn't just women then who were taking the course?

36 CR: No, no it was a college, just like the colleges that are there now. Oh no, in fact one of the classmates he went on, I think he ended up a brigadier general or something in the army. And of course, the Darragh boys were there. The Darraghs were two brothers, one of them was a brilliant teacher, brilliant, and he taught in the Institute and of course, they had other teachers who came in to do particular subjects, they were very good.

37 MM: What subjects would you have been doing?

38 CR: Well, you did English and Irish, and you learned shorthand and typing. The shorthand was difficult, well you got into it eventually, the typing was an exercise, it was quite an effort. We had, I remember one time, we had a lady who taught us, I remember her name but I don't remember what happened her eventually. She set us up, we all had our instruments, box typing it was called, and she'd set up a gramophone and we'd type to tunes [pause] I can never hear the *Liberty Belle* or one those tunes that go da dee da dee da dee without going to A B L E [pause] [laughs]. It was an interesting way of learning typing. I was a good typist because my father was an excellent one and to me, typing meant going quickly, so I couldn't understand [pause] just making a sound every ten seconds wasn't the sort of thing I was used to hearing so it never occurred to me not to be quick.

39 MM: It was quite hard labour, with the old manual machines, wasn't it?

40 CR: Well, it is. I have an old manual somewhere, but I wouldn't use it now because my shoulders are gone but I think I ran through quite a few typewriters in my working [pause] my working life. I remember we had a, we had a typewriter working and then we went to electric typewriters, which was a great innovation. A mechanic used to come round, belonging to the firm that supplied them, to check everything, a maintenance engineer if you like, and I got a new Remington electric. At any rate, up to that time I had a lot of typing to do, throughout the working day and I had this and it kept on going out of order, stopping in the middle of the work. And the engineer said these aren't meant to do the work you're doing

and I said what was the use of having them if they weren't meant to do the work. It had a nylon cog-wheel and it didn't, it looked like plastic, you know creamy coloured, and it looked to me like something that would break. So I said to him, get me one that works [laughs]. Well anyway, the main idea when we were in the College, in the Tutorial Institution, was to get an examination and get a job. We all were anxious about that and we applied for everything, from writing assistants to clerical officers, clerical assistants, junior executive officers, the lot. The ESB, the Corporation. It was very difficult, because the intake, they didn't take many in. I don't think people realise now, they all talk about unemployment, but in unemployment in the 1930s and 40s, there was no facility for getting any [pause] if you didn't work, you got nothing, you couldn't earn anything. The greatest horror of my childhood was what people would do if they were out of work, and my mother and the neighbours, there was a family across the road from us, we all grew up together, and the husband was often what they called 'idle', and it was catastrophic. People nowadays, well if a person if unemployed they can go and claim unemployment benefit or assistance. It might be hard to go and look for it perhaps, though I don't think people bother about it now but in those days it was the absolute end and there would be awful hugger-mugger if someone had to go. It was a terrible disgrace, a terrible disgrace, and you know the expression, I don't know whether you hear it nowadays, but it was very common then: oh God is good and Jack's working. That is, to my mind, a recollection of what it meant to be out of work, work was very hard to find and to the men coming back from the Great War, they were all, and a lot of them would have been injured or wounded or had disabilities, it would have been very, very hard.

41 MM: Had your father found it hard to keep in work?

42 CR: Well, he had his own difficulties because of the period. After he left the London [pause] I still don't know the reason for that [pause] we had just moved into a new house which was far too grand for us but which they had bought, and which they hadn't been able to [pause] they couldn't get possession of it because the incumbents wouldn't move out. I don't quite understand it, I think they were strange but they left it in the most dreadful condition. At any rate, he lost his job. He had moved from being Secretary to the M.P. to being on the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Freeman's Journal* folded in a few weeks so that he was again out of work. My mother was in the course of having another baby, she had a miscarriage, she didn't have it but she was very ill for a long time, and of all the times that I ever saw him furious, he had a very bad temper but he always controlled it, but it was then because he went berserk and nearly killed her mother, who had told her about him losing the job. And it was absolute hell, then, that was a hard time. At any rate, I know the reasons for my continued budgeting and contemplating whenever there's an expenditure to be made and how to pay for it. She kept the household going on what savings they had - she always had a Post Office account and that's what kept us going in the 1920s when my father was out of work. He got another job then in 1924 and he never lost it after that and he stressed work to us. It would never occur to me not to work or not to go to work. I never even [pause] I remember when I was sick, I wasn't well and are you not going to school today, what's the matter with you? He worked at night-time, so he was there in the mornings, and I was always sent out.

43 MM: What was your first job when you eventually left College?

44 CR: My first job, eventually I got a job in, what were they, it was an importer's agency, it was one of these things you got by word of mouth. One of my parent's friends in the local choir was marrying a girl who was secretary to one of the Board members of T. & C. Martin's. But she was moving because every girl had to leave whatever she was working at when she got married, and her sister, who was also working there, was going to get her job. So the sister's job was going to be vacant and I was told to report to the agency and they took me on and that was in 1938. Actually, it was run by a man and his partner, I think, and they had two businesses really, they had a flooring business and they had the importing agency. The importing agency was chandlery, importing from the Continent, and it was in Middle Abbey Street and I'll always remember, I was given a bicycle for my eighteenth birthday, cycling in to work and I could put my head out through the window, it was a narrow window and I could see the clock on the *Independent*, it was the same block. Whenever there'd be anything exciting happening and there'd be a Stop Press, I don't know if you know what a Stop Press is, well, the boy would be shrieking up and down the street with the Stop Press and we could find out what it was instantly. Well, there wasn't all that much to do, answer the telephone, write a few letters. The business, they used to take orders for glass, you know plate glass and mirror glass, and it was interesting enough. I got to know a bit about office work. And the other one was for flooring, parquet flooring, and I think it was 'Sorbo' rubber flooring that they got from France. But the first place that was bombed in 1939 was the factory that produced the flooring, in Charleroi, I'll always remember that because although Charleroi was quite a small place, it was the first place that was bombed and I lost my job [laughs]. That was in September 1939, and there was great excitement then because of all the anxiety and the worry about it. My brother was away in Lourdes on an Augustinian pilgrimage, and there was absolute panic worrying about how they were going to get back and whether they could travel. They eventually did get back; I think it was the last boat out of wherever they were. He doesn't often talk about it but he has from time to time, and the bus trip up through France from Lourdes to the Channel and we had great anxiety until he got home. There was great relief when he got back although the anxiety about the war went on. Then in the early part of 1940, my mother had the flu and she was sick in one room and I had congestion of the lungs in the other room. I hate this time of year, from Christmas to Easter is always a bad time with me, I don't know why but it always has been. At any rate, I had a note to say that they didn't want my services anymore and I was very upset. It didn't do me any good, I'd say, and then there was a fair amount of bother about getting unemployment.

45 MM: Was there no question of redundancy payment?

46 CR: No, I don't think there was [pause] I was there for, it was about eighteen months, so no [pause] anyway, when I went down eventually it was a dreadful experience. It was painful for me to have to present myself anywhere, to begin with, and secondly, when I did get into the Unemployment Exchange, which is where the men's Unemployment Exchange is now, in Lower Gardiner Street, it was a horrible experience altogether. One of the first people I saw behind the desk was, in this place where we all got our information or whatever, was a class-mate, one of the girls in the tutorial college. That was an awful [pause] I was terrified, I really was terrified. I was a stupid creature in those days; I was completely unready for the world, altogether. But after that, I remember my father was covering the Feis Ceoil in Sligo, which was at the end of March or the beginning of April, and he'd take me down to give me a break, a sort of

convalescence and we were there for a few weeks. But then I went back to the college, to keep up with the classes in shorthand and typing, to do more exercises and book-keeping. My father was making any kind of contact, or connection or investigation as to where [pause] I don't know now where I applied for, but I applied for the Brewery and I was sent for, they sent for me for an interview. I was terrified, but my father said to me to buy myself a new hat, we wore hats and gloves in those days, we were always very formally turned out. Even when you were riding a bicycle. There was no such thing as slacks [pause] that was quite unheard of. Well, it wasn't quite unheard of but it was certainly unusual. Well, I had my interview and then I heard no more about it and I was offered a job in a solicitor's office.

47 MM: Did Guinness's normally set up a panel of people, something like the Civil Service for instance?

48 CR: Did they? I don't know, I don't think so, but they hadn't taken any lady clerks in for a few years and I think they suddenly discovered that they needed them so they held an examination. There was quite a big number of lady clerks who attended for the examination [pause] it was quite formal, like the Leaving Certificate or something like that, and out of that so many were picked. In the event, there were 21 of us, which meant there were quite a few they did take, and it was very unusual. I think I was probably one of the oldest. I must have been 22, and you were supposed to be 21, 18 to 21 I think it was. A colleague and myself discovered that we were both – well, we were over the 22 mark anyhow. But they got great value out of us anyhow, because we both ended up as very senior ladies so it was no great harm. It was very interesting [pause] actually the Brewery was a very interesting place. Mind you, I had been in the solicitor's for about two years, that was interesting though how I managed to get into that - it was a madly republican place and I'm not a republican, I'm not a political animal - I'm not a political person [laughs]. At least I don't think I am, but it was very interesting. They were very much involved with a lot of *habeus corpus* cases and things like that, for a lot of IRA people and people like that who were [pause].

49 MM: Were they interned?

50 CR: Yes, it was very interesting indeed. We did a lot; we worked hard. There was a girl out sick who used to do the files, and that's where I came in, and there was the senior clerk, and a young fellow who came in as an apprentice and is now a very senior person altogether [laughs] and three others. We had interesting people came in, the senior counsels now who pleaded the actual court cases.

51 MM: What sort of duties did you have?

52 CR: Well [pause] mainly copying deeds, or conveyancing, and answering the telephone, it was a busy office, well busyish [pause] it had its moments, I think most solicitors' offices in those days did, it had spurts of activity and when there was anything big on you could be working all night. In fact, I remember we'd been busy about something, I can't recall what it was [pause] Tomás Mac Curtin [pause] is that a name? I think it was, I wouldn't like to stand on oath for it, but we had to go [pause] we'd been working hard and I thought now they won't want me later and I thought I'd go off and see my friend over in Rathgar and when I got home, at about 10 o'clock on my bicycle and my mother said they'd been over there looking for me. We hadn't a phone, either we hadn't a phone at the time or we had just got our telephone, but anyway there they were with a taxi and we had to go back in.

53 MM: And you would literally work all night?

54 CR: Oh yes, and we ended up [pause] they had got another lady in, she was in another office, she wasn't in the clerk's office but she was a typist, and she was there and we were all there and we ended up going up to Mountjoy to deliver this whatever it was, probably a writ for *habeus corpus* or whatever it was. Sean MacBride was the barrister. It was interesting; it was really quite interesting.

55 MM: Did you get some sort of compensation for working those hours? Were you paid overtime?

56 CR: Oh no, I don't think so, not at all. We might get a couple of hours off or something like that. It was 17/6 I started working there for, I dropped my wages, and after a while they gave me a rise to £1. That was a promotion and when I told them later I was going to leave, he said I thought you might have continued on and become a clerk, an articled clerk [laughs]. I might have if somebody had said something to me, but the Brewery was interesting. I went in there in 1942. We had interesting times in the solicitor's office. We were [pause] the bomb that fell on the North Strand in 1941, I think it was 41, yes, I had to [pause] we must have had the telephone all the same in those days because they couldn't have contacted me otherwise. Anyhow, on the Bank Holiday Monday, they were having the inquest on those remains that had been picked up on the North Strand and I remember having to go down for something that Mr. MacBride - he was standing in for [pause] for one of them, I think it was a McGlinchy there. But in the North Strand I often wondered how [pause] but at any rate we did have interesting moments, there were interesting people used to come in there. Mr. McCarthy, the counsel, the Senior Counsel, very volatile he was and he and Mr. MacBride used to spout French at each other, madly. They were great, real theatrical types [both laugh]. And then they had the light of my life, Seamus Healy, he used to be in broadcasting, he used to be an announcer. He had a beautiful voice. He started with An Bord Drámaíochta, the Irish play people.

57 MM: What were the attitudes of the clients and the solicitors to you as a clerk?

58 CR: They weren't too bad; they were all right. They treated us like human beings. They were friendly. One of the partners was a very taciturn man, we could never understand what he said, the words were completely incomprehensible. But his health was bad, and he was out, he was in Jervis Street for a long time and people would bring him books and when he came out there was a whole window full of books that had been given to him. What I gathered was that when people came he would give them back the books that they had lent. But it was during the Long Vacation which went on forever, and I used to be sitting there with nothing to do because everybody was away, it was holiday time and they were all gone and the people in all the other offices had gone away. You know, the Law Library was shut and there was nothing on. I used to knit, I liked knitting, and then I got fed up knitting and I used to read the books, I remember that Joyce's *Ulysses* was one of them and there was something by Zola was another one. I remember saying I don't care for that very much. But yes it was very funny, but as I say, in the Long Vacation everybody shut down.

59 MM: But you were expected to stay on?

60 CR: Well you had to man the phones and take messages but there wasn't that much to do. Well, you'd get your typing done or whatever it was but it wouldn't be much.

61 MM: What sort of holiday entitlement did you have?

62 CR: Well, I don't recall any holidays. I did have them all right, well I must have, but I don't recall any holidays. Before I went to work in the Brewery we did have time off. It would be that time of the year,

you know, the August or September. My parents used to go down to the West of Ireland so I think I probably went down with them, in fact I did, down to Salthill in Galway. That would be 1940 or 1941, in 1942 I started work in the Brewery and you weren't entitled to any holidays until you had done a stint. After six months in it you were entitled to two weeks' holidays, you got two days for the wintertime to be kept after October. Another girl and myself were started together and as a great concession we were told we could have time off at the same time if we liked. So we did like and I think we went down to the West and we had a couple of days holidays there and it was quite pleasant. I remember we picked two saddle bags of hips, not hips, haws, that's right, and she said her mother would make jam out of them if we could get the sugar. So we brought back the two saddle bags and she did actually, we managed to get a little bit of extra, you see the rationing was on and there was always a great deal of calculation as to where you, as to how you could stretch things. Sugar in our house was [pause] and tea, because both my parents were tea drinkers and my father liked sugar with his tea and he liked a lot of sugar. That created a great deal of anxiety all the time as to where you could get the sugar, or a bit of that or bit of the other. I often thought that it was a great godsend that we got our main meal in the Brewery, we were fed. We were very well looked after the in the Brewery, it was a marvellous place in those days. We often talk about it, we have a little group and we meet, about four, five or six of us. I'm the youngest so you can imagine how the others are. We were well looked after; it was a good place to work. It was like a small town, with the gossip and the chatter and so on and so forth, not a bit like it is now, where it's all computers and I don't know if they've any permanent staff at all left, or just very few.

63 MM: Would you have had friends among your work mates?

64 CR: Not very many, as I said, I'm a loner. I get on with people but I haven't any closeness with anybody in particular. Now, of course, I have more but in those days it was, you went to work and that was it, and you went home and that was it. It was like living separate lives, separate compartments. Except in the autumn of 1940 my dad said would I like to join the R & R. Now I was a very shy creature, I wasn't a bit outgoing. I wanted to be but I couldn't. But they were joining and myself, we went over and joined. There were people in it that he knew, so we joined it and I must admit it was a great experience altogether. It was a great experience and then about a year or so after that, it might have been 1941, I think it was, I went to have singing lessons and that was a tremendous help to me. It made my life quite different. At least, looking back on it I realise that it did, it made me much more confident. The R & R was great. We used to practice in Rathmines in a hall up the stairs at the back of a teashop. Actually, it was in the house next door to where the infamous Nurse Cadden had her nursing home. And actually she had lived up the road, not too far from us, and she had the reputation of being a very flamboyant person altogether. She lived about six or seven houses up on the opposite side and then she had this place over in Rathmines. She was very notorious altogether. At any rate we rehearsed in the hall at the back of the cafe that was there, I don't know if it's there now. We were very enthusiastic; we put everything we had into it.

65 MM: What sort of parts would you have played?

66 CR: The ladies chorus in *The Gondoliers* or the fairies in *Iolanthe* or members of the household in the *Yeomen of the Guard*, things like that. It was mostly Gilbert and Sullivan in those days and then there was great excitement about 1942, I think it was, in February 1942, and in the summer of that year, July I

think it was, or June, members of the R & R had been asked if they would supply a small group to take part in the *Beggars Opera* which the DMS were putting on in the Gaiety, produced by MacLiammóir and Edwards, and May Derritt was playing Polly Peachum and Eire O'Reilly was Lucy Locket and it was at the time when the two ladies were jointly involved with Joe Locke, he was Joe McLoughlin then, and the DMS, they were the rag, tag and bobtail, they were the beggars and there were definitely two layers, it was very funny [laughs]. I think there were six of us went down to be ladies of the town, in the Peachum ménage. And about a month before that there was a scare about smallpox and we all had to be vaccinated, especially those of us who hadn't been vaccinated before because we were supposed to be vaccinated coming into the Brewery, I don't quite know why. It was one of the stipulations, you had your medical examination and then this thing broke out and we all were vaccinated. July was quite a warm summer that year and we were rehearsing for the show, I think it was put it on for about a fortnight, and we ended up in a big thing [pause] there was a tableau at the end of the first act, with the ladies of the town having swarmed in and sort of bending up [pause]. Mac Liammóir was very keen on pictures, it was right up - they started on the bottom with the beggars out on an outside proscenium, and then this second layer, and then there was a table and there we were up on the table, not all of us, there were two or three of us on the table. There we were, and I was in a fever, I think I was reacting to the vaccination, it was two weeks after it and I should have been passed over. I remember saying at the time would it be all right and I think the doctor said yes, it would be okay, but anyway, over I went [pause]. I'd forgotten totally about that until about three weeks or a month ago when somebody died in the district and I discovered she was the sister of one of the male clerks, one of the juniors, he was only in a year or two ahead of me, and he had been on holiday and sent a rude picture or something [pause]. I had forgotten totally about it and my friend, who was at the funeral, reminded me of this [pause] and I said I hadn't seen him for ages. He lives in the parish now, he's extremely crippled with arthritis, but he remembers you all right [laughs]. He said does she remember 1942 at the Gaiety [both laugh]. The Brewery was very much like a girl's boarding school, very much and it was very hierarchical and very class conscious and you didn't speak until you were spoken to. Now I worked in what they called an outside hut, right from the start, another girl and myself, we were despatched to the lower levels to take up for two ladies who were retiring, they were getting married or retiring, I can't remember which. So we were there and as an outside department, it was almost slightly in a different place altogether.

67 MM: Does that mean it was off the main Brewery?

68 CR: It does, it was down on the river. The Traffic Department was down on the river and we were cut off from the upper level, which was Thomas Street/James's Street on the main Brewery, which was up on the top level. It had its own jargon and its own expressions and things, very interesting. I loved my time in the Brewery.

69 MM: Would you have had much to do with the other workers, the people who came in apart from the office with you?

70 CR: Well in fact we had a fair bit because we went down we were junior clerks and we just made the entries, clerical work, keeping the records. Every cask that went out had to be recorded. I don't know what they do now, they'd probably be absolutely horrified to think there was so much manual work but anyway, we entered up the casks as they went out. Each district had its own sheet and the beer was

despatched by train, or by boat, though that was a separate section, in shipping, that involved the transport and the staffing and the customs. My colleague, she went in there eventually but we started off in the ordinary traffic office and we recorded all the traffic that went out and it had to be recorded from each section of the country. The Great Southern Railway, the Great Northern Railway, the Midland and Western which was the west, and the Dublin 'Slow and Easy' down to Wexford. And then there were the 'own car' customers, they were people who'd buy their own beer and come in and collect it. And there were also the 'hack' boats, the canal transport. There were quite a lot to deal with, because they were, the casks were all filled in the Traffic Department; they were all filled outside our door, so to speak. The noise was tremendous, because there were casks being rolled around the place all the time and then when they went over to metal casks after the war the din was unbelievable. There was a great deal of activity around that place all the time. There was a big staff of men, workers you know the manual workers, and the Cooperage Department was just a little adjunct, it was where the casks were made and maintained and looked after. I was sent over after a year or two to learn the relief work there, for the girl clerk there, she used to keep the records of the hours the men worked and that sort of thing. Traffic was quite a large department really with the freight and the shipping and customs, and the dispatch section. The Traffic Manager used to sit in his office, it was quite a good size office, with the books out on one side the Assistant Manager on the other side, and in the centre was the staircase down on to the what we called the 'floor' which was a vast area, with the machines which filled the casks. The men clerks used to come every morning to be interviewed by and report to the manager, and eventually it would be translated down to the junior clerks [pause]. I would never get instructions directly from the Traffic Manager; he wouldn't talk to us.

71 MM: Was that because you were a woman?

72 CR: No, because I was young [laughs] and I was a Catholic, which was considered to be [pause]. but I didn't mind, I didn't utter in those days.

73 MM: Well, was there a policy in the company to promote Protestants?

74 CR: No, no, it was a question of being long enough there. I got promotion after five years, which was considered to be very quick. It was very much a world of its own, very much a world of its own and we always said that we were cut off, we had a world of our own in the Traffic Department but the main building had a bigger number of lady clerks. Actually, when I speak to my pensioner mates I realise that there was quite a different way of living there altogether, a different attitude altogether.

75 MM: In what sense?

76 CR: I don't know, it was very much [pause] like the school attitude. They all knew each other; there was a greater camaraderie. But then they all did know each other. It was very interesting actually; the Brewery was a great place to work. You either worked very hard or you didn't work at all. We worked very hard and there only about fifteen ladies - in the Department. There was a big staff but they had all sorts of facilities, I mean they were very good - they had a medical department and then they had the athletic union, which didn't survive, they hadn't [pause] they didn't keep it going during the war. In fact the other day I met a friend who's in the choir and he'd come back to [pause] we were giving a memorial concert for our founder and a mass for him, and there were a few of us who were there. Anyway, he said do you remember the tennis club? The tennis club brought over a team from Park Royal, which was the English

branch, to play and needless to say there was great excitement. There was a fair round of inter-brewery competition. They had hockey and they had cricket and they had the tennis and they had football, they had a very good football side which was sort of, I think you'd say semi-professional and I know there was tremendous uproar, I'd only just gone into work at the time, but I remember whatever they did the whole St. James's Gate team was disbanded. I don't know if they play now, I'm out of touch. But we had that and then they had the Fanciers. The Fanciers was an association, which was set up. The lady staff was usually hounded by the senior ladies to come and produce things for it. It happened in July every year and the Fanciers were originally pigeon fanciers, pigeons and then dogs and they had a show and then [pause] the Fanciers and Industrial Association, that's right. The Industrial Association was for home crafts, they made jams and cakes and bread and handicrafts, sewing and knitting and embroidery and there was a flower show, flowers and vegetables. Tremendous excitement - we all went and did our bit. They'd have very senior ladies from the Department of Education and Cathal Brugha Street who would come to judge the exhibits and the Horticultural Society would judge. It was very well run, very well run. It sort of, it faded away after a few years, it just died which is a pity but they're trying to revive it in the last few years and they have what they call Family Day up in Crumlin. They have new grounds and they have these new buildings I believe, I haven't seen them yet, they have a good time there.

77 MM: What sort of hours were you working:

78 CR: We worked nine to four.

79 MM: Was that five days a week?

80 CR: No, we did it for five and a half days - nine to four or half nine to half four, depending on what your manager wanted or the head of your office. I say that from knowing what my colleagues in the upper level did. We all did nine to four and we had half an hour for our lunch, which was from twelve to half past twelve or from half past twelve to one. There were sittings - there were two dining rooms - they were fairly good too, you don't realise how good they were and we got a good lunch, we got a three-course lunch. How they managed it during the wartime I don't know but we did have a three-course lunch in any case and it was marvellous, it really was marvellous.

81 MM: Did you have to pay for that?

82 CR: No, we didn't have to pay for it. We were extremely well looked after - the Brewery was a wonderful place to work and I think of those of us who did work there, most of us appreciated it. There were of course always a few people who would play on it or wouldn't pull their full weight but you get that everywhere. They were very good and well the men got clothing, the workmen who had to do the heavy work. They got a certain clothing allowance or clothing - well the safety regulations then were sort of minimal. Nowadays, it's very much more advanced and it's tremendous - they have competitions for people to make suggestions for safety, which I think are pretty well received but in those days they got protective footwear, particularly for the men in my department who were rolling wooden casks and they could roll them on their feet. They got heavy boots with a reinforced toecap - the toecaps were reinforced, they were metal and they had those and they also had corduroys. Corduroys, that reminds me, I said to you before that we didn't have much in those days in the line of slacks and things but at any rate, the corduroys, they were genuine corduroys made out of moleskin, the 'mouldskin' trousers, at any rate I remember saying to my

manager, who I think was very kind to me, a fiercesome man altogether but [pause] I was too terrified to say anything but apparently he thought I was thinking things [pause]. I remember approaching him, one of my mates was keen on getting a pair of moleskin trousers and she said they'd be marvellous and I laughed and when they were getting them for the men we measured ourselves [pause]. I had them for years and years. They were vast around the [pause] they went sort of straight down, but my friend went off to live in South Africa after a while, but I had them and eventually I used them for covering cushions. They were genuine moleskin, such a heavy weight, marvellous. Anyway they got these trousers and they got oilskins and then the ship's men, they got uniforms too. In fact, last month I saw where one of the ship's captains had died and I thought he was dead years ago. He must have been a very good age. He retired in the fifties, I'm sure it was fifties anyway - he was a very distinguished sort of gentleman altogether, he was tall and thin, very gaunt. They were all characters in their own way, some of them. There was another one of them who was forever running into the locks in Manchester and crashing into them. You'd get a message saying 'stormbound', 'lockbound', 'damage to eastern lock'. Whenever I hear eastern lock I still think of him [laughs]. It wasn't so funny then, I mean it was very bad but he lasted. He had a drink problem I think but there were an extraordinary number of characters but nowadays I think they [pause] there's no special characterful people. No, that was the way, we got our lunch and we had medical attention, we got treatment and we had physiotherapy if we had to have anything in the line of massage or em, strapping up or not just sprains, but if you had rheumatism or anything like that, they were very good to us.

83 MM: And were the wages as good?

84 CR: They were, they were I suppose. When I went in it was £2 a week, which was double what I was getting. But you were paid by the month so that you didn't always get £2 a week, you know. If you had a five-week month it was different but it was good, well I thought it was great. I wasn't complaining but I was living at home, of course.

85 MM: Well, I was going to ask you about that. How did you work out the domestic arrangements? Did you hand money up to your mother?

86 CR: I handed money up, yes, I gave my mother, I don't remember how much it was but I think I had five bob a week, that was what I would keep for myself and I wouldn't use it all. Because you wouldn't have [pause] you couldn't get stockings, for instance, silk stockings were unheard of and then of course, when the nylons came out first of all, somebody bringing them in from Belfast or something like that [pause] there was a lot of make doing and mending and remaking and we did a lot of knitting. There wasn't much to spend money on. There was black market food if you could but I don't remember my mother ever dealing with people who had any, we never did; we just managed on what was there.

87 MM: How did you manage the housework? Did she look after that?

88 CR: She looked after the house. I did my stint; well I always had because from the time that I was five she had bad health. Well I'd prepare a meal and I always did the washing up afterwards and the making up of your own room. The consequence is of course that I'm completely undomesticated as far as cleaning is concerned. I hate cleaning, I don't think I even did a clearup today and I had a meeting yesterday so I had to make an effort but I'm not [pause]. I was always a reader, I'd be reading or out in the theatricals, the amateur dramatics but we always did our share.

89 MM: Did your brother do his fair share?

90 CR: I don't think so, no, I don't recall him ever doing very much except under duress. He's three or four years younger than I am - he was still at school and then he went on - like that he had difficulty getting work and I can't remember whether he was trying to get a job or he was trying to study. He always did study but he studied at night-time and he worked, or he worked days. I can't recall, I know that he did a law degree and he was working in the newspaper world as well and he did a bit of writing then as well. He never practiced law and he worked, he did general editor for the magazine, the radio paper before the *RTE Guide*, the one before that. He worked for RTE but he does a lot now of his own, he's very fussy, actually he reminds me of my father very much, into doing everything. My father was very good, as I said my mother's health was very bad she wasn't really able to do much, but she was all right. She did all the things that one had to do like cooking and baking and she liked to do handiwork and things like that.

91 MM: Who did the shopping:

92 CR: She did the shopping, she'd go out and she'd shop. She'd walk up the whole length of Ranelagh to say twopence. I always said you only spent that on your heels but I think she liked; she used to meet people. In those days there were no supermarkets and the shops were all personalised and you knew everybody and you'd know the people in the district and the butcher and the greengrocer and the grocer and the mills. The Blanchardstown Mills had a very big branch in Ranelagh and she was very friendly with the assistant manageress there. They had her own little way of doing things. She read a lot and then I got her television and that was a great help, she liked it, she'd switch the radio on. Her health was very bad, she wasn't able to do very much and the older I get, the more I realise that she had a tough life. She was a difficult woman. She had very strong views about everything. In fact I'd come in after the day and she'd almost sort of be looking for something to fight about. You had to play things in a different way, if she was in good humour [pause] if she wasn't in good humour you had to be careful. She was like her father, he was that kind; he had a very searing tongue. I could never understand him; he was difficult to follow. He was an interesting character. My brother maintains that he was a great man, he could follow him; he could understand what he said. I could never understand what he said. I won't say never, but only occasionally. He'd been in the army anyway, I think I'd run away to be a soldier when he was about fifteen, which would have been in the 1860s, you know, he was always younger looking than he actually was. He ended up I think as an instructor in something or another, of his regiment. I don't think he got further than a sergeant instructor. But he had an interesting life. He was away in the North African campaign with Kitchener in Khartoum, and how I know that, I have his medal, he got the Star of Egypt, I have it, it's bronze and he was also in Salonika. Now I can't work out the times, you know, but he started off as I say at about fifteen or sixteen years old and what age he would have been I don't know.

93 MM: So he spent all his life in the British Army?

94 CR: He spent most of his life, he came out, he was discharged in 1917, I think it was and he was discharged as unfit for duty. He was pushing on and I think they had discovered his age. There was a very strange quirk, I have his parchment discharging him and it was signed by a subaltern, you know the young lieutenant who would do the clerking work, but it was signed in 1917, he must have been about 17 or 18 then, and he turned out to be one of our managing directors eventually. I thought that was the strangest

coincidence that I'd ever come across. He'd been away in the Indian Army and he was a fairly old man then, he was retired from [pause] he had been in India. He'd been in Malta, as far as I could tell he'd been everywhere but you wanted to take a certain amount of grain of salt with it, but I think he was.

95 MM: But your mother hadn't actually travelled with him?

96 CR: They didn't travel at all. I think it was difficult when he came back but he was quite old and he couldn't get any work. Then he lost a leg from his wounds during the war. He was in Leopardstown Hospital, actually, and he died there in 1942. She was dead a long time earlier, his bride, my grandmother. She died in 1931; she had a bad chest or something. A very gentle sort of person. I don't know whether they'd run away or not but she'd been cut off by her family because of him [pause] he wasn't a Catholic and he was a soldier. Oh the ins and outs, life is very strange. I've just finished reading a book by Barbara Vine which was geared about that time, you know, in those days you didn't do this and you didn't do that. It's extraordinary how attitudes and society's behaviour in Ireland have changed in the last fifty years. Quite extraordinary, for a person who is young they wouldn't believe the things, the taboos and the regulations.

97 MM: Oh they've changed very much in my lifetime. My daughter is eighteen and the world she inhabits is so different to the one I grew up in.

98 CR: Well this is it, its quite incredible. I wouldn't be young now for any money. I think it's very, very difficult life for them, very difficult.

Elizabeth, Belfast. Interview: 30th November 1996.

1 EI: I was born on the 28th April 1911. I'm in my 86th year. I was born in Waterford Street off the Falls Road and remained there during my married life and all because there was nobody else left in the house and I had to stay with my mother. We came up here to Hillhead in 1965.

2 MM: So you've always lived in Belfast?

3 EI: I spent all my life in Belfast and during the Troubles. I was the third of a family of six, one of them died. During the Troubles, we got out of Waterford Street because everybody left the town and the Falls Road was black with people getting out to lie out in the fields at night. You would hardly have got room to walk on the Falls Road, during the Troubles.

4 MM: Would this have been during the 1970s?

5 EI: Well, during the War. And things were very scarce. You got 2 oz. of butter to do you for a week and one egg and so much tea and so much sugar. And then you had bread units as they were called. You had to get bread tickets. You had to show that and you got so much bread.

6 Well then, you went away out and you picked your spot. Well, I was lucky enough that I had a sister living, Lord rest her, on the Glen Road, it was only her and her husband so my family was able to get all into the one house. You could lie on the floor.

7 MM: Where would this have been in relation to where you were in Waterford Street?

8 EI: Off the Glen Road, up high in the hills, up the Glen Road. And then you had to start off in the morning at six o'clock, again to go down to get walking because you never would have got transport and I had to walk away from that to the Co. Down railway because our office was blitzed in Chichester Street and we got an office, or a house, in Bangor, outside Bangor. So I had to run away down and get whatever transport you could get or it was Shank's Mare, as we called it.

9 MM: What was your office doing?

10 EI: Navy, Army and Air Force. We done the clerical work there. The canteens were supplied with stuff and the bills were all sent in to us and we had to check them to see if they got it in and to see if the amounts were paid in the office and all the rest.

11 MM: Had you done anything like that before the war?

12 EI: I was a book-keeper in a small firm and I was getting low wages so I left it and walked into this job when the war started and I worked with them till my father died in 1943. Then I had to leave because there was nobody to look after the business and I went in the shop then.

13 MM: What sort of shop was it?

14 EI: A little of everything. It was off the Falls Road.

15 MM: Can we go back a little bit? Before you went to work, what sort of education did you have?

16 EI: I went to the Sisters of Charity in Dunleer Street and then when it come the last year, my brother and myself, we were supposed to be the two intelligent people, so he had got a scholarship to St. Malachy's College and I went to the Dominican Convent up the Falls Road on a scholarship as well.

17 MM: Would any of your friends from junior school gone on with you?

18 EI: Well, people hadn't the money then to pay for education. A lot of girls left and went to England to nurse because you had to pay to get into the hospitals here to do nursing.

19 MM: Did you stay in the school for a full secondary education?

20 EI: No, I left because I was getting a job. After two years I left to do a clerical job. I was sixteen.

21 MM: What would your friends from junior school have done if they didn't go on to secondary school?

22 EI: Some of them were working in the mills from when they were twelve year old, ten, they went half time in the mills.

23 MM: I've read accounts of the women going into the mills in the early morning, singing as they went in. Did you hear anything like that?

24 EI: Yes, they lived around me and the mills were all around us. The Blackstaff on Odessa Street, the Clonard Street Mill and there was the Ross Mill, and Milford Weaving, they done all the weaving for the Irish linen. And I remember the day the war was over, the whole factory ran out, out on to the street, cheering and shouting. We just lived next door to it, ours was a kind of a continuation of the factory and above us on the same road was the dining hall belonging to the factory, and things were very scarce then.

25 MM: Would it have made any difference to your relations with the other girls that you were going on to school and they were out doing what was very hard work?

26 EI: No, not at all, there was no difference. We still had them in until we came up here. They're near all in Milltown now.

27 MM: So when you went in to work in your first job, how many hours a day were you doing?

28 EI: I started work about half eight and you had to work on Saturday too. It was a half day on Saturday, till one o'clock on a Saturday.

29 MM: What about finishing time during the week?

30 EI: From half eight in the morning until six o'clock at night.

31 MM: Did you get any time off for a lunch break?

32 EI: I suppose I got about an hour because I went home for my dinner.

33 MM: Was the office near your home?

34 EI: No, it wasn't, it was down at the Market.

35 MM: How did you get in and out to work?

36 EI: You got a penny for your bus fare or your tram fare up at lunchtime. You walked it in the morning going down and you come back in the tram and walked it back at lunchtime and walked it home at night.

37 MM: That must have kept you fairly fit. Did you walk so much to save money?

38 EI: Well, I was only a junior clerk and then when the head clerk left I got her job but the wages were nothing.

39 MM: What were your duties? Were you doing typing and shorthand?

40 EI: There was no such thing then - no typing. There was a telephone and the accounts and the boss, he signed the cheques; I wrote out the cheques and he signed them.

41 MM: Can you remember what you were getting paid at that time?

42 EI: When I left I was getting, from I started at 10s a week; you got a penny out of that to go home on the tram for your dinner, Shank's Mare the rest, and then when I left, £1.25 and went into the NAAFI and had over £7 a week. No wonder you'd want to change.

43 MM: Did you have a supervisor or were you left to get on with your work yourself?

44 EI: You would; I mean you got leave to work and nobody interfered with you.

45 MM: Was the NAAFI office easier to get to than your previous job?

46 EI: Our office was blitzed, the Navy, Army and Air Force office was blitzed in Chichester Street and we went away, we got offices in Ballymena, and from Ballymena we got a place in Bangor, just outside Bangor. So that was why we travelled from Belfast.

47 MM: That must have been quite a journey every day. Was there ever any opportunity to change to work nearer home or would you have wanted to?

48 EI: I wouldn't want to. There were more than me travelled from home and there was a bus for us for some of the way. Our transport was all paid for.

49 MM: How long would it have taken you every day to get to work?

50 EI: I've no idea now. We went by train and the bus lifted us at the railway station.

51 Going over the border was a day. Whenever I left, they used to run trips every Wednesday across the border and you could get butter, tea, sugar whatever you wanted, as long as you were prepared to hide it and didn't have it taken from you.

52 MM: Was this for the shop or just for the family?

53 EI: For all concerned, if I had got a wee bit extra, well that was fine, but Lord rest my father, when he was living, he never would eat anything to do with what was brought over, he said you never knew where that was hidden! They had ration books and you were only allowed 2oz. of butter and a quarter of margarine. We got them from the wholesalers and they got their supplies from the government. That's all I could get – that was the rations for what ration books I had.

54 MM: If you had extra to sell in the shop, would the local Food Officer have wanted to know where all the extra food came from?

55 EI: Well, you never would have extra for the shop, it was all for your friends, below the counter.

56 MM: Was it just foodstuff you were bringing?

57 EI: You could bring [pause] I brought home, I remember I was in nerves the whole time - razor blades. There was a shortage of razor blades and I brought home a box of razor blades and I had them in my pocket when the Customs men went round the train to search us.

58 MM: Would they actually do body searches?

59 EI: Oh yes, they had ladies there for that. They took the coat off me and I had the box of razor blades in the pocket. They didn't find them; one Customs man says to the other, that's not a new coat and it was a new coat. I'd left the old rag of a thing behind me in Dundalk.

60 MM: So you went to buy clothes as well?

61 EI: Of course, you were only allowed so many coupons for good clothes.

62 MM: I presume that because you had a better income from the NAAFI that you had more spending money. Would you have had complete control over that yourself?

63 EI: Well, I would always give Mummy my money when I got paid.

64 (Indecipherable section of tape due to interference from gas fire – approximately three minutes.)

65 MM: What about registration during the war? Did you have to organise that for the shop customers?

66 EI: Yes, we had a register. Whoever was going round to do the registration and then you would get your ration book. Nobody seemed to think about it, it just had to be done.

67 (Another indecipherable section – less than one minute.)

68 EI: I remember whole families being traipsed down the Glen Road and up in the hills. I done it for a couple of weeks and then I got so tired having to walk away from Arizona Street down the Glen Road, down the Falls, away to the northern county and down to the railway station.

69 MM: Was this when the air raids were coming?

70 EI: When the air raids were coming, yes.

71 MM: Were there any shelters you could have gone to?

72 EI: There were shelters but they were very dangerous. There was too many of them bombed.

73 MM: Would there have been any near Waterford Street?

74 EI: There was one on Waterford Street, there was one on Madison Street.

75 MM: Did people generally stick with their neighbours when they were looking for shelter? Would you have met people from Bangor when you were sheltering there?

76 EI: Well, we didn't mix with them because the house that we got was away [pause] sitting outside Bangor, and we were just coming in and out. You were too glad when another night finished that you just got into your bus to get back on to the train.

77 MM: Would you have thought of staying in Bangor to avoid all the travelling back and forth getting exhausted?

78 EI: My mummy wouldn't have liked it. She wanted me home. And the work wasn't heavy, it was mostly brainwork and you got on with whatever was to be done and you just done it.

79 MM: Would you have helped her with housework when you got home?

80 EI: Yes, and shopping and whatever else was needed. We did it between my sister and myself.

81 MM: What about your brother?

82 EI: Well, people didn't have the money in those days to buy big loads of coal so the boys would weigh out coal – maybe a stone of coal in the shop. That's how you bought that.

83 MM: When your father died could your brother not have done the work in the shop?

84 EI: No, he'd got married and he moved up to Cliftonville Avenue and there was a lot of bombs dropping around there.

85 MM: One of the good moves after the war was the slum areas that were so badly damaged in the Blitz had to be rebuilt immediately after the war and there was a big house-building programme. Do you remember that?

86 EI: Well they started building houses around the area and re-building the old shacks that were there and that made a big change to the people. They had a bathroom, a water pipe inside and instead of going out to the yard to draw your water.

87 MM: What kind of standard was the house you were in on Waterford Street?

88 EI: It was terrible.

89 MM: How many rooms did you have?

90 EI: Well, we had two bedrooms and two rooms downstairs. It was a small terrace. Now, when you talk about a terrace, it was just like [pause] they were all the same. You'd walk straight off the street and into a wee hall and off that was the scullery, with a wee room with a sink. And the room off that might be no bigger than eight by eight and the two bedrooms upstairs and a toilet out in the back yard. If you had a big family, which an awful lot of them had, they used one of the wee rooms downstairs as a bedroom. There was boys maybe living upstairs and the mother and father had a room and then the girls were down in the wee room so that you only had the one room as a living room to do everything. And when you opened the door from the street you were nearly in it.

91 MM: Would these have been built for mill workers?

92 EI: These were all [pause] the whole Falls was like that so it wasn't just for mill workers but everybody had those houses.

93 MM: When the post-war building programme began, did it make much difference to the area?

94 EI: The bombs had been dropped around one end of the Falls so those houses had to be built up and then developments started springing up around the outside of that area. But families still stayed close together, like.

95 MM: In your home you had six children and the parents in the home. I've heard that sometimes there were members of the extended family as well, if not in the house but very close by. Did you have relatives in the area?

96 EI: Two old aunts lived together, on my mother's side. On my father's side, they were away up at Ardoyne and we didn't see them so much.

97 MM: Would they originally have been from the community near your mother's family or was it she and your father who moved?

98 EI: Well, they always lived in the locality.

99 MM: Other women have told me about the friendly relations in the areas, that people would help each other out a lot.

100 EI: Oh yes, everybody's door was open.

101 MM: Do you find that the community spirit is the same in this house?

102 EI: No, my goodness, it's quite different because you could sit here all day and nobody would come near you or at least, there's a man and woman up the street, they're both retired and they never pass the door but to call in to see if I was all right or if I want any messages. But it's not like the days gone by. My son, after he got married, he lived out near Dunmurray and then he got a house the same as this up the street and now he's living near Maghera. It's done him an all awful lot of good by going then because he was being transferred to Ballymena so if he of being still living here he would have to have moved out to go to Ballymena. So he just has half the journey now where he used to travel to Belfast every day. She still travels.

103 MM: In terms of your own life, what are the most valuable lessons that you have learned, do you think?

104 EI: Well, my friends [pause] always getting my money in the post office, wanting to save and get your money safe, not being silly with it. I didn't work that long in the NAAFI when my father died and I had a right few pounds saved.

105 MM: So you wouldn't have been extravagant about spending on yourself? Did you have a social life attached to the NAAFI?

106 EI: Yes.

107 MM: But you didn't spend much money on it?

108 EI: Not at all, you walked to everything. We played tennis and camogie and I've still got a medal I got for that. I got that in 1932 and I've still got that. My grand-daughter, she's playing down in Maghera and I gave her mother the medal and Louise plays it for the school. She's going to St. Catherine's in Maghera and this year, if God spares her, to the Grammar School. They don't do the qualifying. St. Patrick's is the only one that does that so I give her mother the medal to keep it for her. So she asked the mother to give her the medal, she wanted to show it to the teacher because she was playing camogie. That weekend she was coming down here and she was showing everybody the medal so I said that medal is going to be lost and I'm going to take it.

109 So I have the medal now. I have it safe in my handbag, that must be a year ago, and so far as I know, the medal is still in the handbag. I think the teacher nearly had a fit when she saw it was 1932. We won the county championships [laughs].

110 MM: Congratulations, that's a wonderful thing to have, to pass on to your family.

111 EI: Well I thought it was right in taking it off the child because I'd really given it to the mother.

112 MM: She'll value it in the future.

113 EI: She brought it into school to show the teacher and put it in her schoolbag and then she forgot to give it back to her mother.

114 MM: So, apart from playing tennis and camogie did you do anything else for entertainment? Did you go to the cinema?

115 EI: Not very often. We were more out doors, walking and going to ceilidhs away in Thomastown.

116 MM: How would you get to them?

117 EI: Walk it.

118 MM: So you more or less walked everywhere? How old would you have been at this stage?

119 EI: I was well over twenty, probably about twenty five when I started going, myself and two friends, and then they went across the water to nurse.

120 MM: What about boyfriends?

121 EI: I didn't have time for boys, between working and playing. I didn't get married until I was thirty nine and I had two children. I had just the two.

122 MM: Going back to when you were single, how did you handle your wages when you got paid?

123 EI: I'd give it to my mummy and she'd take so much for the house and put the rest in the post office.

124 MM: Did you have any spending money at all?

125 EI: Oh yes.

126 MM: And how would you have spent it?

127 EI: On shoes – I walked that much [both laugh]. I could use a sewing machine so I always made a lot of things and they were much more reasonable. One of the neighbours, she was at the stitching and she always talked about it, would I not get a sewing machine so I got a second hand sewing machine. That done for years and years and she was a good sewer because she was used to it, in the factory, she was sewing garments. I would have run up curtains or anything like that for the neighbours. It was just a matter of one helping the other. I remember this woman, her husband was going to a wedding and she had to [pause] she was getting him a suit of clothes out of the pawnshop, with the three brass balls. You went with your parcel under your arm on a Monday morning and on Friday night, you went round and lifted it again when he got his pay. So this night, Lord rest Annie Toner, she wanted his trousers shortened and I couldn't do it because I had to go to the hospital, my husband had met with an accident, and Marie MacBride took on the job to shorten the trousers. She put the trousers on him and she cut the trousers just to the length and forgot there was a turn-up to go in them and she made such a mess of the trousers that they called me back from the hospital because they said I was on expert on them. I had to turn round and over-lock the piece of cloth and sew it back on again and make it into a double fold so it wouldn't be noticeable at all. Your brains told you what to do but you knew they were in trouble.

128 MM: What about during the war, was it difficult to get material?

129 EI: Well, when we were to go across the border, and it was very cheap excursion fare, you got to Dublin for five shillings return and you went to Clerys and there was another shop, you could get a bolt of material for maybe two and six pence, or a couple of shillings a yard, and you brought that back.

130 MM: So everyone who went to Dublin came back laden down?

131 EI: Oh yes, they were well improved. We had great fun going to Dublin. Protestants, Catholics, Hindus, anybody was on that train for Dublin. Monaghan was another place we went to, we went to three or four places along the border. We used to go there in the car on a Sunday.

132 MM: During the war? Was the petrol not rationed?

133 EI: You could always buy petrol coupons.

134 MM: Would this have been because you needed a car to run your business?

135 EI: That's right, you had to get the petrol.

136 MM: Would it have been easier or harder to smuggle things back from Dublin in your car rather than the train?

137 EI: It was six of one and half a dozen of the other. It depended on what customs men or inspectors were on duty. I remember going up in our old car and I had bought a new pair of shoes and we were stopped and they took the shoes off me. There was hundreds of people stopped and searched and things taken off them. There was a lot of stuff got done on the side roads. We always went the straight road, the main road.

138 MM: What happened to the goods that were taken?

139 EI: The customs, I think, would put them up for auction. They auctioned them.

140 **(Indecipherable section of approximately one and a half minutes.)**

141 EI: If anybody made a pot of stew the stew was brought round. You got your bowl and that's the way it worked.

142 MM: So in the sense that you all looked after each other extremely well, was there any feeling that was enough, that you didn't need to organise politically to make changes for the better? Were you or anyone of your friends and family involved in politics?

143 EI: No. We had a very good politician in the Falls during the war, Joe Devlin. He got the hours cut for children in the mills. I couldn't tell you much about it but he ran an excursion for the children every year and the buses used to come to the Falls, to the Dunville Hall. Every child got a ticket to go to Bangor; this was during the war.

144 MM: Every child from the area or was there any kind of means test?

145 EI: Well some people let their children go and others didn't because he was a nationalist and some of them were republican. So the republicans never let their children go.

146 **(Indecipherable section of approximately one minute)**

147 EI: People were all churchgoers then. In those days, the priest didn't get changed so frequently as they're changed now so people knew them well.

148 **(Indecipherable section of approximately two minutes)**

149 MM: Were there many weddings during the war?

150 EI: Ordinary weddings? Yes. You couldn't get a house or anything so your mother would give you the front room. There was no building then and even when they put up shelters and huts up the

Springfield Road, it's all built up now. The people went mad then when the war was over to get these huts, the American huts. They weren't what you'd call houses but it done them for a cover.

151 MM: Was the housing situation that bad?

152 EI: The housing situation was very bad then. After the war, then, they made them mixed localities before there was any [pause] before they'd move them from the areas. And then the Protestants, they just started because they thought the Catholics were getting too much of their own way.

153 (Discussion of the 'Troubles' from the 1970s onwards followed from this point in the interview.)

Frances, London. Interview: Friday, 5th December 2003

1 FS: I was born in Dublin on the 1st August 1926 and I've lived in London, in England for sixty-one years [pause] sixty-two years, but in between I did go home for a short spell for six years but then I came back.

2 MM: Why did you come to England first?

3 FS: My mother decided I should have a job in London, I think. I was the eldest of six children and the wages weren't terribly high at the time. She had a houseful of boarders as well. She worked very hard and I think I was a bit cheeky, maybe, and she probably couldn't handle me.

4 MM: How old were you?

5 FS: I was fifteen on the 1st August and I came to England on the 1st September and I didn't even have to have a passport, because I wasn't sixteen. My birth certificate was stamped at the emigration entry at Holyhead.

6 MM: Had you any arrangements made for your arrival?

7 FS: Yes. My mother had got a job for me. She looked in the advertisements in the Catholic newspaper, the Universe and there was a lady living in Ireland who was interviewing people to work as domestics in a girls' boarding school in Birmingham and she came and interviewed my mother and me and she agreed that I should go to this girls' boarding school in Birmingham and I went on the 1st September. I was to meet a cousin of my mother's, who was to meet me at Birmingham but I hadn't seen him for years and we missed each other. I was stood there for the longest time and eventually came out. It was wartime, there was a blackout and I asked people how to get to St. Bernard's Road and I had to get a bus to Acocks Green in the dark, with my gas mask and the big case and a Ministry of Work label on my coat. I eventually got to St. Bernard's Road and I walked up this long, dark road and I came to a police station. I went into the police station and asked them where the convent was. There was a policeman behind the desk and there was another gentleman outside the desk. I don't know to this day if he was a policeman but he said oh I'm going that way, I'll give her a lift. I was delighted to get rid of the load of the case. He was a decent man. He took me up to the convent gate which was about five minutes away and he said don't ring the bell until I'm gone and I did ring the bell. This was half past ten at night and I'd left Dublin that morning at half six. When the nun came and opened the door she said oh we thought you weren't coming, we waited for you.

8 There was this girls' boarding school at St. Bernard's Road and they were a French order, the Sisters of Our Lady of Compassion. A lot of them were Irish and I was made very welcome, they were nice. We worked very hard at the school, there were no dishwashers then and everything was done by hand but again, I was a bit cheeky and I used to fall out with the nuns. I'd be changed, or the jobs would be changed, I'd be put down in the laundry to stand up on a stool with these big massive tubs with these big paddles to stir the clothes. There were long corridors to scrub – no wonder I've arthritis in my knees. Mass every morning and polish the church and one thing and another. They had a Montessori school there and that had to be polished and when the girls went on holidays we used to clean all the paintwork and the curtains in the dormitories. But the food was very good and there was no shortage because the nuns cooked all their own food. And the gardener was the brother of the lady who came to interview me. He was Mr. Byrne, that was his name, and he was deaf and dumb. So we

were quite safe there. There were three of us girls who lived in the convent. We were up in the attic. There was no electricity and we had candles for light.

9 MM: Were the other girls Irish too?

10 FS: No, both Scottish. One eventually entered as a postulant in the order – Annie from Glasgow. The other girl didn't.

11 MM: Were they as young as you were?

12 FS: Annie was older, she was about twenty-one but Jessie, she was about sixteen. We got a half day a week on a Saturday, from three to six and this Saturday, Jessie and I went to the pictures down at Acocks Green and the picture was Nelson Eddy and Rita Stephens in 'Chocolate Soldier' and it was the last time I was let go to the pictures because one of the school teachers saw us, even though we were just at the pictures and walked home on our own, we were home about six. And the nuns were very cross. Now I'm older I can understand their worry, because there were a lot of soldiers and sailors around and foreign people, and we were under their care. At the time we didn't appreciate that but we weren't allowed to go to the pictures anymore.

13 And the wages were ten shillings a week, from which my mother stipulated she wanted five shillings. So once a month, Mother Juliana – she was an old French nun – we used to go up on a Sunday morning to get our wages and I used to get mine and we got a little lecture. Once a month she'd give me the postal order and I'd have to write the letter to send the one pound postal order home to my mother. We'd sit in and we'd go to bed about eight o'clock at night and we used to talk and there was one old nun who slept in the room next to us and she used to tell us to be quiet. One time she reported me to the other nuns and I was sent as a punishment to sleep down in the dark air raid shelter on my own, for talking in the dormitory. It's a wonder I'm not afraid of the dark but I'm not afraid of the dark at all but [pause].

14 MM: Did the schoolgirls and nuns have electric light?

15 FS: They had electricity in the dormitories, yes. In the convent – where we slept was in the attics. Well, as I say the food was lovely and when it was the nun's feast day – every day it was some nun's feast day, except when it was Advent and Lent – they'd always have great feast days, nice cakes and things, which Sister Gerard used to make in the kitchen. As I say, the food was grand. But that's where I learned to smoke, believe it or not, another girl came from Dublin – Margaret Nugent – and I waited up for her to let her in about half ten at night and the first thing is she pulled out a packet of Woodbine. I said oh you can't smoke here and she said I'm going to smoke and here have one. And that's where I had my first cigarette and I smoked then for fifty years [laughs]. I really enjoyed that cigarette.

16 MM: Can I just ask you – when Margaret came was she sent by the Ministry of Labour or her parents?

17 FS: I don't know really what her situation was – I didn't ask. But the other two, Jessie and Annie, were there before me. I think it was when Annie entered the convent as a postulant that they took on Margaret Nugent. She came from Camden Street. We used to have a good laugh but I don't know where she went to afterwards. One nun left while we there – a very pretty nun – and there were all kinds of bits of scandal, which I don't know whether they were true or not, at the time. But there was nun there, Mother John the Baptist – nuns who taught were called Mother and the others were

called Sisters. She was from Kerry, O'Connell was her name, Norah O'Connell and she was really sweet and we were great friends. I have some holy pictures still. They used to give you little holy pictures now and again. And there was one little Scots nun, Mother Clare – she'd be standing in the yard sorting out the clothes – they'd have their names on all the clothes for the big laundry. There was a big long red corridor to scrub every Saturday morning. The nuns used to supervise them in the bathrooms and wait outside while they had baths. There were curtains between the baths. It was a big old-fashioned house, really, I think the school was just attached to it.

18 MM: Did you have anything to do with the schoolgirls?

19 FS: No, you'd see them in passing really, you wouldn't be talking to them. But you went to Mass in the convent on Sunday morning at eight o'clock and then you went to the eleven o'clock – we were all marched, school children and all, up to the Friary, which was along the main road on the road to Sollihull. And we went to Mass in the Priory, sorry, that was it. The Franciscans. And then on another occasion, we'd go out to maybe, to a place called [pause] another convent, a friend of one of the nuns, it would be her feast day and we'd all be taken there. We'd all march there for a day out, kind of thing - that was the kind of thing that was done. They were great occasions in our little lives, you know.

20 MM: What about air raids?

21 FS: Well, we didn't have much noise or bombs but when we did, we'd all go down to the air raid shelter and you'd sort of just hear it in the distance, so I wasn't really affected by it at that stage.

22 MM: But you observed the blackout?

23 FS: The blackout, yes, you had to carry a torch and when I came, I had no torch and I was struggling along. I just think, compared to now, people weren't molested or anything and you asked people the way and they were helpful, they would be helpful.

24 MM: Did your mother not feel any anxiety about sending you off to a city at war?

25 FS: She didn't appear to, she thought she was doing the right thing. I think she thought I would have entered the convent to become a nun – that was at the back of her mind. She was very religious.

26 MM: Even for the times, ten shillings a week seemed very little in terms of wages, particularly for such hard work.

27 FS: No, but my father now, who was a father of six children, his wages were only three pound ten shillings a week in Dublin, as a barman so that was [pause] in comparison, the five shillings seemed [pause].

28 MM: Would you have ever thought of holding on to your money yourself?

29 FS: No, and the reason that I went so meek and mildly was that you did what you were told by parents in those days and in a way, because my mother and I, we didn't really get on, because as I say, I was a bit cheeky growing up, mouthy, and in a way I was glad to get away from her. And then when I used to come home on holiday, I came home on holiday the first time and I was just inside the door when I got a slap on the side of my face from her. How dare you misbehave in front of the nun and have her write to complain to me? I made a show of her. And she didn't even know them, really, this kind of thing. I also was wearing a pair of trousers, slacks, and my father said get those trousers off. He said only low, bad women wore trousers [laughs] but it was from an economical point of view

because we'd clothing rationing and clothing coupons and sweet coupons and that. We didn't have our ration books because the convent kept them because they gave us the food but you had your own sweet coupons. I can't remember how much sweets we got a month, it might have been half a pound, something like that. Then there were the clothing coupons, one coupon for a pair of lisle stockings.

30 MM: How long did you stay there?

31 FS: I was there for just over a year and they, I think they got fed up with me because I was cheeky. They got me another job at Grantham, with a Catholic family who were the Honourable Mrs. Holland, who was a relation of Lord Revelstoke, who lived, who owned Lambay Island. Strangely enough, with all the events that happened over the last few years, he also brought down Barings Bank, he was related to Barings Bank. He brought them down, the same as Nick Leeson did, a coincidence. But they were a very nice family. They had five children.

32 MM: What was your job there?

33 FS: I was house parlour maid there and the cook was Irish. They were evacuated from London - they were quite posh people, they had butlers and cooks and maids and all in London. They lived in Onslow Square in London and they were evacuated to Grantham during the war. They were a Catholic family. Mrs. Holland, she was a Daphne Baring and she was a convert and Mr. Holland – he was in the Air Force, he was an Air Force officer. And his son, Patrick was an architect, who also went to Dublin and lived and had a studio in Dublin for years. The eldest son was Francis, he went to Downside School and Patrick went to Ampleforth. The two girls Lucy and Cecilia, went to I think it was St. Mary's in Ascot and then she had another baby, Rosemary. The nurse came and lived in for a couple of months, I think and then the nanny came and lived in. Quite a big household they had.

34 MM: And would they have Irish staff because the English staff had been called up for war work?

35 FS: Well, they brought their staff with them from London, except me. They brought the cook up and the head housemaid used to come and visit and they'd have a butler come and visit.

36 MM: Were they not subject to conscription?

37 FS: No, the cook wasn't, Sheila wasn't – she was with them. The others [pause] the head housemaid, she was older, she was in her fifties but I suppose the butlers had gone to war then. Every so often they would go down to London on a shopping spree and have the car in the garage [pause] the food there was very good. I think I got one pound a week then.

38 MM: Did you get to keep any of that?

39 FS: I think I kept [pause] I can't remember. I'm sure I still sent some home. But they were a very nice family and they had the room there to wash the silver and the glass and all that and there was a woman who came in and did all the saucepans and the rough work. I remember asking the cook how old she was and she said you don't ask ladies their age – she was fifty-one at the time [laughs]. Sheila – she was from Killarney and her brother came over, he was paid to work in England and she asked Mrs. Holland could he stay and there was a spare bedroom at the top of the house. Connie, that was his name, he was allowed to stay there. They were a really lovely family.

40 MM: Were your living conditions better than the convent?

41 FS: Ah they were, very good. You had your own room, and all the rest of it. On the top floor there were four bedrooms. I had the first one, Sheila had the next one, Frances Holland had the next

one and Con, the boy Connie, he had the other one. And they had a sewing room in it and a back stairs down to the kitchen. It was a lovely big house, really lovely. But they were very nice people and the food was good. I was treated well. And then I took it into my head when I was seventeen and a half that I wanted to go nursing and I applied to Grantham Hospital, which was on the Great North Road, opposite Mrs. Thatcher's shop. I used to see Margaret Thatcher when she was a young girl, the same age as myself, standing at the door with her two blond plaits. There was a Dr. Martin in the hospital at Grantham and he was from Dublin. They were coal people, coal merchants, and he used to take me to Mass in his car. He was very nice. I stayed there for [pause] it must have been nearly a year. We had soldiers in and one day I was on second lunch but [pause].

42 MM: Was this as a student nurse?

43 FS: Yes, as a student – trainee nurse. At that time, because the war was on, they allowed you to enter at seventeen and a half without a good education, not like now. They took people – it was either that or go to war work, kind of thing. I would like to have joined the Air Force but I knew my mother wouldn't let me do that.

44 MM: And how did she take it when she heard you'd gone for nursing?

45 FS: She was delighted with it, she had great plans. She thought I would come home and she would buy a big house in Berkeley Road. I would be the midwife and she would be the housekeeper and we'd have these women having babies [laughs]. I was a great disappointment to her. I stayed there then [pause] this day, I was in the ward and my suspender broke. We had suspenders then and my stockings fell down and one of the soldiers chased me round the beds and my hat, my veil came off and who came back into the ward only the sister. And there was uproar. I was taken to the Matron's office and tore off a strip and moved to the women's ward [laughs]. The disgrace – I'll never live it down, I said to myself. I stayed there – I think they must have sacked me because I wouldn't have left otherwise. I can't remember. And I went to Boston. I got a job in Boston General Hospital and I loved it there. And I took my first exams up there. That was up in Lincolnshire. Grantham was up in Lincolnshire as well but Boston was a bit further east, near the Wash, where the planes used to come down in the water. We used to have the Air Force in and the soldiers in there.

46 MM: So you actually had casualties?

47 FS: The casualties would come in, yes indeed. That was a lovely cottage hospital. I failed the theory part of my exams – I was all right in the practical but I wasn't very good at remembering the theory. I didn't study enough, to be honest, I wasn't cut out for studying. I'm more a practical person. I think I'm the dumbest in the family but I've survived. And from there then, I left there then, and I went to the fever hospital and I was working there at the height of the polio epidemic from 1945 to 1946. I was in Boston General Hospital when the war ended in 1945 and at that time, you were locked in at night. Ten o'clock, you had to be in the home except if you'd got a pass till eleven, once a week or twelve, once a month, if you were going to a dance.

48 MM: Was this a standard thing? It was nothing to do with the war?

49 FS: No, it was a standard thing. And the night sister came over from the hospital and locked the main door of the home. If there was a fire you couldn't get out. And so the night the war was over, we were all locked in as usual and we heard the soldiers – there was a camp at the back and we heard the soldiers all coming back shouting the war is over, the war is over, so we all came down, over the

railings and down the town at two o'clock in the morning. There was a huge big bonfire going, it was the best night of my life. And there was a terrific atmosphere, back over the rails, back into the home for the morning. [Both laugh.] And at that time, we used to go to parties at the American camps. You were taken – a notice would go up that the American Air Force would invite six nurses to a party, from each of the hospitals, and if you were off you could go. You'd put your name down. I went to one – I managed to get to one of them. The stuff was beautiful – they had Christmas cakes, fruit, everything was really nice and we came back and I couldn't wait to get to the bathroom. I nearly made a show of myself at the front door of the home and the night sister said Nurse Flynn, couldn't you control yourself. I just said I'm very sorry sister but I was never so embarrassed in all my life. Then I went to the fever hospital at the height of the polio epidemic and they were so short of staff only one block of wards was open, only one ward with all – there were all cubicles. Babies with polio and that and even though I was only going into second year nursing, I was giving injections to polio babies and all this kind. You were nursing them all night and you were on your own.

50 MM: Was it mainly children?

51 FS: They were mostly children, and adults as well, and at ten o'clock the night [pause] he was the handyman used to come in. They were on duty by turn and he'd bring in fuel for the night, which was kind of wet coal or wet turf because you had stoves to keep going. You'd to keep the motor going all night and you were there all night on your own. You were locked in – he'd lock the door and take the key over to an office and you were locked in until the morning. But they were so short of staff you could only – there was only one nurse could do it at a time. They were very short of staff there. Then I left that eventually and I went [pause] some friends I had, I'm still friendly with this couple now, I met the lady when she was having her first child, who has sadly since died when she was fifty-six. They're sixty-three years married now. I went up to see them last year and they're a lovely couple. But I went to work in a printing factory, on a flat machine.

52 I met a chap and I got engaged to him but he wasn't very [pause] I took him to my friends one night, this couple – to their house and we had a lovely meal. But what did he do, at the end of the meal he took the plate up and he licked it. [Both laugh.] And I said to myself no way can I take you home to mother and that was the end of the romance [laughs]. I broke it off after that, I thought I can't handle this.

53 MM: And had you told your mother about him?

54 FS: No, and the excuse I used was that he wasn't a Catholic and that's why I broke it off.

55 MM: Were you still sending money home all this time?

56 FS: I always sent money home, yes, but Ma would never recognise it. In later years, she always said I'll look after those who looked after me. And then I came home to have an operation in 1947 before the National Health started. I was going to have to have a hernia done and my father said come home, don't have it done there, you can be looked after here. And I had it done in St. Vincent's in 1948 and I stayed then and I went to work in St. Kevin's Hospital in Dublin, as an auxiliary and that's where I met my future husband. I was working with his sister on the ward and he was working there as well and we used to socialise. That's where we met.

57 MM: Just going back a bit to the war years, when you were coming was it difficult to travel?

58 FS: No, but I forgot to put in that the fact that I was from Ireland, I had to go and register with the police. I think it was every six weeks, with my identity card, and if you moved out of the area you had to go and tell them. I forgot that part. And of course, you carried the gas mask everywhere with you.

59 MM: Had you registered with the British authorities in Dublin before you left?

60 FS: No, not really, no.

61 MM: Your mother got the job and she made the arrangements?

62 FS: She got and job and I think she must have taken me over to the British embassy, I think it was in Merrion Square, she took me over there but there was no passport. I have my birth certificate somewhere and on the back it has an oval stamp, 1 September 1941 and that was the entry thing to cover me. I was fifteen and I had five shillings that my father gave me to buy a cup of tea. And later, in later years, he sadly told, after my mother had died, he told me that morning he had broken up the gas meter to give me the five shillings. I thought it was so sad.

63 MM: So she had let you go off with nothing?

64 FS: No, she gave me nothing. My Da gave me five shillings – he was so good. I never really got on with my mother, but I loved my father to bits. He was a lovely man and funny, when I married my husband, he had the same birthday as my father, which pleased me very much because he was the same kind of man.

65 MM: Going over, I know you didn't chose to go but did you ever have the sense that this is where I'm going to be spending my life?

66 FS: Not really, I just wandered on, meandered on with life, kind of thing. I never [pause] it never entered my head that I'd go back to live in Ireland somehow and [pause].

67 MM: Do you think you might have associated your mother's cruelty with being in Ireland?

68 FS: I don't know, to be honest, but it never interested me. I used to come home on holidays to see them, to see the family and that, but I never wanted to stay. The atmosphere in England is completely different to Ireland, although you don't go mad it's just a different kind of life, really.

69 MM: During the war years you seemed to be mainly mixing with Irish people?

70 FS: Yes, I didn't meet many English people. I would like to have joined the Air Force but I knew my mother wouldn't let me and I also [pause] I really could have got away with doing it when I got to the age of eighteen and on my own but I didn't think of it then, it was past, the time had passed on when I started the nursing. And I loved nursing.

71 MM: Did you discuss it with her when you were on holiday, that you would like to go into nursing?

72 FS: No, never. I did that myself.

73 MM: How did you go about telling her?

74 FS: I probably wrote a letter but she was very pleased because she had great hopes [laughs] which I sadly ruined.

75 MM: It fascinates me that the nuns would write to her to complain about you.

76 FS: They wrote in a letter, they wrote and told her I was cheeky. I think that was why she sent me in the first place, because I was cheeky. You see, Mother Juliana never came out, she was bedridden, but reports went up to her. They were nice but the punishment – each night, one nun had to

take duty and walk me down to [pause] in my nightclothes. Walk me down to the top of the cellar steps, switch the light on, I went down and got into the first bed, which were camp beds, she turned the light off, shut the door and went away. I don't know why I'm not frightened of the dark, I was just left there until the morning.

77 MM: Were you locked in?

78 FS: I don't know, I can't remember. I don't suppose I was but I don't know. I don't know, I never came upstairs in the dark, I just went to sleep.

79 MM: And had you been to a convent school in Dublin?

80 FS: Oh yes, I know what nuns were like. Yes, I did, Kings Inn Street. I used to get slapped there for being late because my mother had a shop and I had to stay and get all the kids out to school, wash up, prepare the vegetables and the meat and whatever for my father's dinner before I went to school. I never got to school before half past nine. It was just being the eldest, you did those kind of things, you didn't query it, you know.

81 MM: In recent research about Irish women emigrating to England it shows there was a lot of discussion about the dangers for young Irish women living in England. Were you given any warnings about that?

82 FS: I wasn't even told the facts of life.

83 MM: So you had no idea what dangers there were?

84 FS: I didn't know. I was lucky I was enclosed in a convent, I wouldn't have known what had hit me. If that man hadn't been so good, my father always said to put my two hands together and thank God that man was a decent man. But if he hadn't been, I wouldn't have known the difference because I didn't know anything. But I think it was an absolute crime that I wasn't told.

85 MM: And when they were punishing you for going to the pictures, did they say why?

86 FS: Yes, we were told off, we were hauled over [pause].

87 MM: Did they ever explain why they thought you shouldn't have gone?

88 FS: No, they just said that there were a lot of soldiers and foreigners about, so yes, they did explain. But it was only when I got older and had children of my own that I realised they were right.

89 MM: And had you been told in advance that you weren't supposed to go?

90 FS: No, we hadn't because it was the first time we went.

91 MM: Well, it seems a bit harsh punishing you for doing something you hadn't been told not to do.

92 FS: Well, they were worried. I excuse them because I feel they were worried. I feel they had a moral responsibility for us.

93 MM: But if they hadn't told you that you couldn't do it?

94 FS: Well, we didn't see any danger, you see. They wouldn't talk about things like that, all they did was pray, and eat and sleep.

95 MM: It just seems very [pause] they said they were protecting you by punishing you because you broke the rules but they never told you what the rules were.

96 FS: No, I don't remember being told about the rules and we just wandered down, went for a walk in the afternoon and came to the cinema, like you would and saw the film was on and went in. Nelson Eddy was the star of the moment.

97 MM: What were you allowed to do for entertainment?

98 FS: Well, there was nothing. You knitted or sewed and there was no radio, no television, nothing. You didn't read or anything, just talked to each other. You could read the 'Universe' [both laugh] and just talk to each other. Things like that. Then we went to bed at eight and we were up at half past six in the morning.

99 MM: Were you working all day?

100 FS: Well you would [pause] in between there'd be a little break, maybe after meals and that and in the evening, then, when the school would close I'd have to go and sweep the corridors and sweep out the bathrooms and do things like that.

101 MM: Do you remember ever feeling envious of the schoolgirls because their lives would have been so much easier than yours?

102 FS: No, not at all. I've never been jealous of anyone in my life. I've never been jealous of anybody or envious – I might say, oh that's lovely, I'd love to have that – but not seriously jealous.

103 MM: It really was a very tough life and for such poor pay.

104 FS: Well, I think it was criminal, actually, you'd be put in jail for it now. But I said to my Da later, why didn't you stop Ma when she was sending me away and he said your mother was the boss. It was a poor excuse really, he was too quiet.

105 MM: As you were growing older how did you find out about the facts of life, so to speak?

106 FS: From other girls, that's how I did.

107 MM: Did your mother never speak to you when you came home on holiday?

108 FS: Never mentioned it, I don't think she ever told us about your monthlies, it just happened. We were in Holybank Road, I went from Holybank Road and we were in a room at the back, three of us girls in one bed and three boys in the other, because she had boarders in the house. I got up this morning and my pyjama bottoms [pause] I was hoping my brother Paul hadn't seen me because he was over there in the room, getting up. We were all in together like that but there was nothing wicked about it, you didn't take any notice of boys and girls, nothing was mentioned. So I think if things are not talked about, maybe they don't put ideas in young people's heads. We didn't know anything, whereas kids now experiment with each other and one thing and another. It never entered our heads that there might be anything evil going on, that we knew of.

109 MM: Well, I wouldn't call it evil but there certainly seems to have been a preoccupation in the Irish press at the time with the so-called 'evils' of sex. When you were in the hospital, when your suspenders let you down, clearly they put a wrong interpretation on what was going on.

110 FS: They did, yes, they didn't like it.

111 MM: Would they have been nuns or a religious management?

112 FS: No, it was a public hospital, NHS. They were martinets. They used to sit in the dining room, the Matron sat at the table and you couldn't eat breakfast until she said morning prayers. Then the toast was passed all the way down the table. You might get a bit, if you were lucky in the end, you'd have to send down for more bread or something.

113 MM: It was very hierarchical?

114 FS: Yes, and you wouldn't speak to a senior nurse unless you were spoken to, or a sister. Very strict. And you each had your own container for your butter, with your name on it and half the

time you'd come to get your butter and someone else would have eaten it. It was rationed, you know. Oh, it was a great hierarchy in the hospital, yes, very much so. And then when they came on the wards, the sister stood on the ward and the first thing she did was said morning prayers. She went around each patient and asked them how they were and in the evening, when she had finished her shift, she said evening prayers. And that was the norm.

115 But Christmas was lovely in the hospital. We sang carols the night before, walked all through with the candles and the red capes, with the candles, that was really nice, through the wards. And then on Christmas Day the surgeons came in and carved turkeys in each ward. They'd have a big turkey on a trolley. It was really beautiful. And then you had a staff dinner and then they had duck. Really nice, party atmosphere. And then when you went on night duty you had to move out of the day home completely and move into the night home. And you had to go to bed because the night sister slept on the ground floor and she'd hear you going in and out. If you were out in the day and that night you had [pause] you had to have dinner before you went on, we had breakfast before we went on duty. And she'd say, if you were out, Nurse Flynn, what were you doing out at half past twelve today, you should have been in bed. Very strict. And in the morning we came off and we had a hot dinner. Imagine eating hot beetroot with white sauce first thing in the morning.

116 MM: I can't imagine eating it at any time of the day.

117 FS: A full dinner before you went to bed. And you were in that – you did three months of that each time. It was a nuisance having to move everything out of your room and move back again. I worked in theatre. I did three months in theatre and on a Sunday, you did all the sterilising of all the drums, you had to pack all the drums with the trays, then autoclave them, which was the sterilisation. When they came out, they had to be all brassoed, silvoed and polished. That was the student nurses' job in the theatre on a Sunday afternoon and the staff nurse would be checking the instruments and doing that kind of thing. On the wards the nursing staff, two of the nursing staff would be doing the lockers, while the visitors were there, clearing out all the rubbish and that kind of thing. Cleaning the sluices, washing the bed pans, doing beds. When anyone left a bed it was completely washed in carbolic solution and there wasn't half the infection there is now. I think it's very careless now.

118 MM: So did you have to study then on top of all this work?

119 FS: I was just going to come to that. That was terrible because I wasn't one for studying and we did [pause] we had a horrible sister tutor who didn't like me, because I was cheeky again. I remember twice I had to write out 'I will not be rude again to Sister Tutor' one hundred times.

120 MM: And what age were you when you had to do this?

121 FS: I was eighteen [both laugh]. She was a little woman like Queen Victoria, and she had the white cap on tied under her chin and she made me write 'I will not be rude to Sister Tutor' one hundred times [laughs]. No wonder I couldn't study, but I loved the practical, and I've always been involved in nursing all my life. I ended up as a Care Assistant. We went to Nottingham for our first exam and we were overbooked into the YMCA hostel in Nottingham and they had to find us another place. We were in an awful old place and we were in Nottingham City Hospital but I failed the theory part of my exam. But I carried on then and if you wanted to register then you could automatically register as an S.E.N. if you had taken the exam but our wages were only six pounds ten shillings a month and it was three guineas to register, so you never registered. But I always got by being an auxiliary and that, but it's the

piece of paper that counts that says you're qualified, no matter how much knowledge you've learned, that doesn't count. But I was a good practice nurse in my own way.

122 MM: One of the other women who have spoken to me was a student nurse in Sellyoak Hospital. She qualified there but she got paid three pounds a week when she first went and she said that was more than the salaries of some of the qualified nurses. She referred to the Rushcliffe deal; does that mean anything to you?

123 FS: No, I never heard of it. I have a letter out there, from that 1947 thing when we had [pause] the snow was up to there and it was a really bad winter, a letter from the local Council, sending me five pounds as a thank you for working during that period when it was so hard. That was in Boston, because the fever hospital was in Boston as well. I remember on one ward the sister saying to me, nurse, will you wash that bed with carbolic, one in twenty and I thought what's one in twenty? I went to the staff nurse and I said to her she wants me to wash that bed in one in twenty. She said she's waiting for you to go and ask her how to make it, so go on, ask her. I said sister, I don't know how to make that so she said she'd show me and it was one portion of carbolic to nineteen of water and I never forgot that. But if I had made a fool of myself and tried to make it up not knowing – but I wouldn't. You always had to ask someone but this was what the nurse told me, she's waiting for you, it was a test really. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I only wish I was more academic and I could have got the qualification.

124 MM: Was there no chance of doing the exam again?

125 FS: You'd have to ask but I didn't want to because I was nervous. I knew I couldn't study, I wasn't able to study. My mother used to say that.

126 MM: What about when you were in school in Dublin, how did you get on then?

127 FS: My mother would say, Frances, go out and do those dishes, peel those potatoes for tomorrow. Clare, my next sister, go and do your studies. But it didn't bother me at the time, although I think it must have rankled at the back of my mind, that I was stupid. When we moved to Holybank Road she went over to Iona Road school to get us in there and Sister Magdalen said I can put Clare into third class but there was no vacancy for me in fourth and Sister Magdalen wanted to put me into fifth. And Ma said no, I wouldn't be able for it. And then she went all around to look for a school for me and I ended up in Scoil Mhuire in Marlborough Street, where it was all Irish. And then she went, I'd forgotten this until Clare reminded me of it, that she used to pay for me then to go and have English lessons in Stephens Green, of an evening. I remember going over to that college, Hume Street, I think it was, to learn English, in case I wouldn't be able to speak English from going to the all-Irish school. Ten shillings or something the lessons were.

128 MM: And all because she was convinced you weren't academically minded? And did she ever sit down and go over your homework with you?

129 FS: She made sure we had done our homework, you had to do it, but she was the same with Paul. She'd tell Paul [pause] he wasn't bright in her mind and that's why she took them to England because she said they'd only end up as messenger boys in Dublin. She was very ambitious. She should never have got married and had children; she was a business woman all her life. And funny, she comes from the Huguenots, the De Sales, and their tradition is they're business people and she had this shop twice. She had it before I was born and then they gave it up and then they had it again. She went

back again in 1939 or 1940 and she had it for a while when the war had started and she couldn't get the quotas of the food because she hadn't been a trader long enough and she had to let it go. That's when I was looking after the kids and going down to school late, because she was down at the shop at half six in the morning.

130 MM: When you were at school, was there was ever a suggestion that you should think about where you would go afterwards?

131 FS: No, not at all, there was nothing like that. She even came down to the school and said I wasn't to be allowed to sit with Angela Scott, that she was a bad influence on me, my best friend. Something wrong with Angela Scott – she used to pinch money from her sister's handbag, ten shillings at a time. The sister worked in - there used to be a shop called Lambs in Talbot Street, do you remember it? Nearly opposite Lenihans, Lambs was, it was a haberdashery shop and Nance got work there and Angela Scott used to be pinching ten bob at a time out of Nance's bag. I must have told Ma about this and she went to the school about it.

132 You weren't allowed to speak English in the school playground; you were supposed to speak Gaelic all the time. But we were in a few plays, we were in a play in the Abbey, the Faerie Queen, I remember that. It was all in Irish, a school thing it must have been – I think it was a festival with two or three days at a time. I was the Faerie Queen because I was the tallest in the class. I used to sit with my shoulders hunched.

133 MM: Did you look older than your age?

134 FS: I don't know, but I was tall and I stuck out like a sore thumb. I don't think I did.

135 MM: Did you ever get an opportunity to talk about being sent away, to consider whether there might be something else you could do?

136 FS: No, you were just sent. Getting the train and gone. I feel proud of myself that I survived all these little trials and came out on top and still be able to laugh. That's the main thing.

137 MM: You weren't an emigrant in one sense, in that it wasn't your choice to do it, but even though many people were forced to go because of personal or economic circumstances, at least they did arrange it for themselves.

138 FS: I was delighted, I think, at the time.

139 MM: Was there a sense when you got there that you decided this would be where you'd spend the rest of your life?

140 FS: No, not really, no. Now I enjoyed every minute of it, I never was homesick for one day and I can honestly say that. People think I'm mad when I say that but I was never homesick for one day. I think it's because I didn't get on with Ma. I missed my father, I loved Da.

141 MM: Did he ever come to visit you?

142 FS: Even when Aidan died, she wouldn't let him come over. She said she'll only fight with you, did you ever hear such rubbish in all your life? We often had rows, her and I, through letters.

143 MM: What about during the war? When you were coming home and you needed travel permits – did you have to arrange that yourself?

144 FS: I'd have to do that but I don't remember about the travel permits. I don't remember getting the ticket either, whether they must have done it for me, the nuns, I don't remember ever having

to get a ticket. I just got the train in Luce Street to Crewe, changed at Crewe and got on the boat. I don't remember that really.

145 MM: When you got back to Dublin, would you have thought that maybe you were better off in England, being reasonably well fed even with the hard work?

146 FS: Not really, no, I didn't connect it at all. Just do what you're told and get on with it and don't think about it, I think that was the way. That was the way I looked at things, anyway. It must have been the easiest way out, maybe.

147 MM: I know you were mainly mixing with Irish people but did you encounter any anti-Irish feeling because Southern Ireland was neutral in the war?

148 FS: No, I didn't. I met a bit of anti-Irish feeling in the sixties but I didn't meet it till then. Where I lived in Camberwell, this horrible woman said to me one day why don't you go back to where you come from and it was the worst thing I'd ever heard. I was very annoyed but as I say, other than that, I never used to meet many Irish people really until the latter years, when I got married and started moving into the community, going to the church with the school, mainly through the school, meeting other parents when I'd go to collect the children from the school. My husband was from Dublin as well and his family. His sisters were over here and we mixed with them, really.

149 MM: What about the Scots woman you met in the convent?

150 FS: Jessie, I don't know where she went. She came out of, I don't know whether she was illegitimate or an orphan or whatever, but she was reared by the Good Shepherd nuns in Scotland. She spoke very highly of them. She'd roaring red hair.

151 MM: Was she paid the same as you?

152 FS: We were all paid the same; that was the going rate at the time. And you had to pay sixpence insurance when you were sixteen, it was sixpence. Then it changed when the national health came in.

153 I remember a little baby, when I was in the hospital, and this little baby was dying and I kind of secretly baptised it myself. It wasn't a Catholic, it wasn't anything, but it was very tiny and it had kind of [pause] it had an operation to correct the stomach [pause] pylorrhic stenosis, it was called and the little baby had died. Before it died I got some water and just made the sign of the cross over it and called it a name. I was sort of proud of myself for doing that, because that was the way we were brought up, in the religion.

154 MM: What about the parents?

155 FS: I didn't ask them, it was in the middle of the night. I didn't ask them. In that day, there was no political correctness in those days. You just kind of did what you should do, kind of thing. You learned it in school that the religion was there and you knew the baby hadn't been christened so you just did it. Which was wrong probably? [Both laugh.] I'll go to hell. But that's the way we were. I never told anybody, I just did it myself.

156 MM: What about the patients? Would you have soldiers coming back as casualties?

157 FS: Oh yes, they would, they'd have come from other hospitals because if they lived locally they'd come to us. I used to [pause] I went out to the pictures with one, he was married, a nice man, and I was told off about that. Someone saw me, the sister tutor saw me, she was Irish as well, she saw me and I was hauled over the coals for that, Matron called me, because he was married. And we only

went to the pictures, never even gave me a kiss, gave me some of his chocolate ration. Ever such a nice man, he was, but that was wrong, you couldn't do that. It was very moralistic, in some ways. But you were told off and you accepted it and that was the end of it. I felt a bit of a fool.

158 MM: Were there ever any bombing victims?

159 FS: Not round there, not when I was there, no. It was coming near to the end of the war then.

160 MM: Did you get to see much of the area around the hospital?

161 FS: I didn't see much of the countryside, no, not really. One patient invited me for a holiday, they worked – I think they managed a farm. I don't know whether they were tenant farmers in Crowland, which was in Norfolk. Ruby, I can just see the woman, I can't remember what her other name was. But she invited me down for a holiday and you got a month's holiday and that time I didn't go home. I think I probably had no money or I hadn't enough money and I went down there and I picked potatoes and everything and carrots and things and the wages I would have got kept me. I hitch-hiked on a big lorry and I never told anyone that. And the case – I was fine – the driver was probably a decent family man because I'm sure girls got raped and everything then, just the same but you didn't hear about it. But I lugged this big case up on to the lorry and I never even told my kids that [laughs]. Talk about being the daring one. I must tell you this – this will give you a laugh. We used to go to Mass in the church in Boston. It was a community thing, with a welcome for soldiers and all this, and then we used to go to the dances. I had a friend who used to go to the dances and this chap who used to the church saw us at the dances and he'd been a patient. He was from Jamaica or somewhere like that, an air force man, and I was dancing with him round and that was it and he said he was going to Ireland. So me, my Christian attitude then, said oh you'll have to go and see my mother and she'll make you a cup of tea. Apparently, he turned up at the door and Ma nearly had a heart attack but she invited him in for a cup of tea and everyone was pulling the curtains back to have a look at him. I'm sure they thought I was going out with him, but I was never going out with him.

162 MM: I take it was just because he was black that it caused consternation?

163 FS: They'd never seen a black man before, unless the odd one in Trinity, but my mother wouldn't have noticed them even, she'd scoot into Henry Street and scoot home again.

164 MM: Did she get on to you about it?

165 FS: No, but when I got home I got how dare you send that man, who is he? I said well we were told to be good Christians at the church and I was doing my duty. That was all.

166 The fellow I was engaged to bought me a bike, it was a lovely bike, I think it cost twenty-six pounds and an engagement ring. But we only had a kiss and a cuddle, there was no sex or anything in those days – nowhere to go, anyway. And his sister had a lovely shop and I used to go down there to meet him and when I'd be coming away, she'd always give me twenty pears. She was really nice. This was the fellow that licked the plate, he was a bus driver. So when I gave him back the ring, I kept the bike, but I gave him back the ring. I put it in a cigarette box and left it in a café in an envelope, that the busmen used to use and I sold the bike for a tenner. Talk about being mercenary!

167 MM: Would the bike not have been more use to you than the tenner?

168 FS: It would have been but I think I was coming home and I just sold the bike. That was right.

169 MM: Did you ever hear from him again?

170 FS: No, but my friend used to tell me [pause] he got married afterwards, he was older than me, he's dead now. Phil knew him in Boston. No one knows all my secrets only you [laughs]. I'd an uneventful life really but I enjoyed it.

171 MM: I wouldn't say uneventful by any means [laughs]. Not entirely conventional either.

172 FS: Sure my mother was the same. She never went back to Ireland – at eighteen, she went to first work on munitions and she didn't like all the women around her effing and blinding and swearing. But she never went back for years.

Ita, Dublin. Interview: 18th January 2002.

1 IM: My name is Ita M. I'm 79 years of age. I started my education in Mountmellick and then went on to Tourmaceady, which was a college for training primary school teachers on the shores of Lough Mask. In 1941, I finished there and went to Carysfort and I was two years there when I was offered a job in the Civil Service as Executive Officer which my mother strongly recommended me to take, a bird in the hand being worth a lot more in that time [laughs] - a steady job with a pension. So I left the training college and went into the Department of Supplies, which was dealing with rationing, basically, during the war years. The offices were out in the old Sweepstakes, a huge big room in Ballsbridge. It was [pause] because it was a new department, it had no rigid structures; it was probably much more open than other Government departments. There was no particular discrimination that I was conscious of at that stage there, any sort of sex or gender differentials, which I did experience later on now in the Civil Service but not at that particular point in time.

2 MM: Sean Lemass was the Minister?

3 IM: He would have been but I wouldn't have had anything to do with him [laughs]. There were [pause] I suppose I was the only woman Executive Officer in the Department, I think there were only about [pause] there was one other, maybe one or two others, we were a rare enough breed. I was there [pause] to deal with rationing, issuing licences for leather or tea, sugar, that sort of thing, basic sort of work with a large group of people, very little hierarchical structures. We were [pause] a lot of female writing assistants and female and male clerical officers and then male executive officers.

4 MM: Would the clerical officers have reported to you? Would you have had supervisory duties?

5 IM: Yes, yes. But in a sense less so than in an ordinary Government department because people were doing their own thing more or less. They might perhaps consult you if there was some amount involved, but basically everybody did their own job, that's my memory of it. At the end of the war then, we were transferred to the Department of Industry and Commerce, which was allied quite closely to the Department of Supplies and I was there for a few years, still dealing with export licences [laughs].

6 MM: Would you have noticed much difference in the attitude to the work, going to a more established department?

7 IM: Well again, Industry and Commerce was a relatively new department, again, less structured than the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, which I finally [pause] finished in. But it got to the stage where there was nothing for us to do. I used to bring in a book with a gaudy cover and hold this up and read it when any of the bosses where walking around to indicate [pause]. So finally, I got fed up and I applied for a transfer. I'd a brother in the Department of Posts and Telegraphs and I applied for a transfer to Posts and Telegraphs on the grounds that I hadn't enough work and I was called up to the office and they told me they would forward this application but if I took out the reference to not having enough work, they would forward it.

8 MM: Internal politics?

9 IM: I mean, they didn't want it going around the place that they hadn't enough work for their staff so I accepted that. I mean, I wanted to get out and I wasn't going to make an issue of principle

about it and I transferred then to the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. That would be at the very end of the forties.

10 MM: Can we go back a little bit? When you were working on rationing, how did your average day [pause] were you given instructions by somebody like an Assistant Principal?

11 IM: Higher Executive Officer.

12 MM: And then did you allocate the work to the Clerical Officers?

13 IM: No, the Higher Executive Officer would probably have done most of that as well. I would have done a certain amount of it.

14 MM: So what was your role specifically, that you had the higher grade?

15 IM: I would have been responsible for the work, I suppose, for about six: two Clerical Officers probably and four Writing Assistants, something of that order.

16 MM: In terms of your responsibility, would you have had to check what they were doing, to make sure it was satisfactory?

17 IM: More or less. And see that their output [pause] make sure their output was satisfactory and that they were there when they were supposed to be there, that sort of thing [laughs].

18 MM: You would have been quite young [pause] just in your twenties at that stage?

19 IM: I was eighteen when I went in, in 1941 [pause].

20 MM: Did you get any training in supervising, how to tell somebody what to do?

21 IM: Not at all; no such niceties at that stage [laughs]. There was so much work you were just thrown in cold into it.

22 MM: Did you get involved in devising the rationing system or was that already operating?

23 IM: No, no, that was already there, this was '41. The system was already there, it was just that there were huge blocks of work, rationing tea, sugar, all those things, you know. Everybody had to get their ration card – it was just pure slogging work. There was nothing challenging. I mean, there'd be the odd query, somebody maybe forging, but it was all [pause].

24 MM: So from the point of view of relations with the other Executive Officers and Higher Executive Officers, was there any problem with the fact that you were a woman and that was unusual.

25 IM: No, not really. It was [pause] everybody there was very young, you see, most of the people, including the higher people, wouldn't have been that old, either, because of the needs of the situation. I don't remember being conscious of any [pause] problems because of being a woman. But then I was a very self-confident young woman [both laugh]. I moved from a solely female environment, full of confidence. I did extremely well [pause].

26 MM: It was a boarding school?

27 IM: Yes, and I had excellent results in my Leaving Cert., you know, I could have gone to the university.

28 MM: Did you choose not to because of your mother advising you it was better to take the job?

29 IM: That's right, yes. Couldn't afford it.

30 MM: Were there nuns teaching you?

31 IM: There were about two nuns and mainly lay teachers.

32 MM: Would they have helped build up that sense of confidence – that you could do anything you wanted?

33 IM: I think I had it before I ever went [laughs]. I had it, before I ever went there, I had, without boasting now, but anything that I ever wanted, I achieved, I had no problems academically. I was a bit better than most people; I had very little competition intellectually.

34 MM: Given that, would it not have been possible for you to go on [pause] would you have resented that your obvious ability might have been curtailed?

35 IM: I wouldn't have been conscious of it at that stage, no, I probably resented it a little bit, but there was very little feminism at that time. You were too glad to get a job. No, there were huge numbers unemployed at that stage; huge emigration and we had huge surpluses of teachers [pause] a totally different environment, totally different.

36 MM: I must say it's a theme that's come up in a lot of the interviews - that you weren't going to worry about conditions because having a job was bonus enough.

37 IM: That's right, that's right.

38 MM: It was only in later years that people look back and think it possibly wasn't fair.

39 IM: I do remember one thing, there was a young Writing Assistant, Angela was her name, and we used to write little notes to one other and reply. Angela, I'd say do this or what about that and she'd write back: Ita I have done this or something. And some of the higher people were a bit shirty about this. They used to write little notes to themselves; but to see two women writing notes to one another on files [laughs] this was totally unique.

40 MM: This was because you had female names?

41 IM: That's right, because it never happened before in the Department, I mean they'd never had a situation where there two women writing little notes to one another [both laugh]. They mentioned it to me and I totally ignored them and went on doing my own thing. It wasn't done in any sort of difficult way.

42 MM: They were just conscious of a change?

43 IM: Yes, that's it.

44 MM: What about your family circumstances – did your parents, could they afford easily to put you though boarding school?

45 IM: Well, my father was dead, of course, he died when I was about three, and there was a family of eleven. My mother was a teacher.

46 MM: Where did you come in the family?

47 IM: I was the second youngest.

48 MM: Did the others all go to secondary school?

49 IM: Yes, all of them went to second level, there were only two who went to third level.

50 MM: That must have been difficult for your mother?

51 IM: Well, we all got scholarships. That was the only reason she succeeded in putting us through, I think, because we got scholarships. My mother's comment was, when you got the results of your exam, no matter how well you did, where did you lose marks? [Both laugh.] You might get ninety per cent, you know, but what happened the other ten? Where did you lose those marks – that was the sort of attitude she had. Without being unduly fussed about it, you know.

52 MM: Was she working as a teacher?

53 IM: She was, yes.

54 MM: That was probably unusual enough, in itself, to have a mother who was out at work. You didn't have any sense of being different?

55 IM: No, no. But in fact we would have been the only people in the parish who got second level education. The only family. Later on, then it started but that was because of the scholarships.

56 MM: The scholarships were to various different schools, presumably? Would you have sat a series of exams or did you chose which school you wanted to go to and just try there?

57 IM: Well, the scholarship was open, you could take it any second level school.

58 MM: That was a local authority scholarship?

59 IM: It was, yes, it was what they called a County Council scholarship.

60 MM: And was there no possibility of doing that for university, for teaching training?

61 IM: Oh yes, I could have, certainly it was there. I certainly had more than enough marks to qualify for university but it was money.

62 MM: You'd have had to keep yourself?

63 IM: Exactly, yes.

64 MM: Did you ever regret that you left?

65 IM: Yes, yes.

66 MM: What about later on? I know people who went into the Civil Service and who were funded [pause] granted they were all men [laughs]. I don't know if that was a policy but could you have [pause].

67 IM: Well, that was just in some Departments. In Revenue, they did it a lot. I did start doing a commerce degree when I was in Posts and Telegraphs, but I was sick and I took a long time to get over that so I just left it.

68 MM: Going back then, when you moved from Supplies and the ration cards to Industry and Commerce, did that involve a promotion or was it simply that they were finding you a job at the end of war?

69 IM: Yes, they were finding me a job. And that was again a most unusual situation because in the particular section, the export section, there were two other female Executive Officers as well as myself in the Department, which again was absolutely unheard of. There was [pause] there had been one woman Principal Officer or Assistant Principal, but she had retired, and there were the three of us.

70 MM: And the other two, were they equally unchallenged by what was going on?

71 IM: They were. In my memory, there was no [pause] in fact, my memory of the men was that they were supportive and they said great things about us and they expected great things from us. That sort of attitude, but of course, they expected us to be leaving, the expectation was that you'd leave to get married. I remember asking for particular training [pause] I had done a certain number of years and the man in charge, the Assistant Principal, called me in and he said what would I want to do that for and I said I wanted to learn and he said sure, it's not worth our while, you'll just leave to get married.

72 MM: And there was no way you could say you weren't going to get married at that point?

73 IM: No [laughs], I'm not going to get married.

74 MM: And did you get the training, did you manage to push for it or were you just excluded?

75 IM: I was just excluded from it. Actually, I got it afterwards by sheer [pause] but it was the expectation that you had, or be conscious of discrimination, one just was not conscious of it at that particular point in history.

76 MM: Well, I suppose too your education would have been aimed towards doing well to get a good job but ultimately to get married and have children.

77 IM: Yes, that's right; that was the assumption then. That's an assumption I would have and of course, we did very well in the work, you know, we were recognised that we were good.

78 MM: And where along the line would it have been recognised, that people realised you were doing extremely well and that you had a good career prospect? Were you consciously going after the career and leaving aside the marriage part or was it just something that happened?

79 IM: I suppose it happened that way but I think if I really was keen on getting married I could have but I'd have had to leave.

80 MM: Would you have thought of it as quite a big sacrifice to make if the circumstances had [pause]?

81 IM: But of course at that stage one out of about three women didn't get married in Ireland and one out of every four men didn't get married at all – that was the marriage pattern at that particular time. So you weren't any way unique in not being married.

82 MM: But you were discriminated against in the expectation that you would?

83 IM: Oh true, yes.

84 MM: It was being held against you as a reason for not promoting you whereas [pause] Posts and Telegraphs [pause]?

85 IM: Then, it was a totally male dominated Department, totally male dominated. There had been one other female Executive Officer, in fact she became a Higher Executive Officer, but she retired on marriage, so I was the sole Executive Officer and I was a sort of [pause] [laughs]. Promotion outlets were fairly slow. To be fair now to Posts and Telegraphs they did promote me to Higher Executive Officer, I think it was a year or two after my going there. I think it was very much resented by a lot of the men because they considered my seniority should start on the day I joined the Department and I had previous seniority. There were objections by the Union but again, you know, that was the way it was. I was given the promotion even though I was a woman and I was only there two years. It's [pause] in that case, it was discrimination in favour, so where does one [pause]?

86 MM: Well I would have thought it was not so much discrimination as acceptance or recognition that you were very good at your job.

87 IM: Yes, but I think the Union argued that the normal procedure was that you would go to the bottom of the promotion list when you transferred from a Department.

88 MM: I don't think that's the case now?

89 IM: Oh no, not at all, you're talking back at the end of the 1940s, running into the early fifties.

90 MM: Would that case have gone to arbitration outside the Department, like the Labour Court or did the Union just accept it?

91 IM: No, I think they just accepted it. It was probably recognised that I deserved it anyway, I don't know.

92 MM: But there wasn't any bad feeling afterwards?

93 IM: No, not really, not that I noticed [laughs]. No, no.

94 MM: I know a friend of mine who's given me an interview, her first job was in Posts and Telegraphs and you were an example to her. She actually did get married and leave but she always said that you were known as the woman who had done well and people would point to you to say what could be done. Were you conscious of being that kind of example?

95 IM: Oh, I knew I was good, now, let's be quite clear on that and I knew I ought to get to the top, so I did. Well, I just missed the one, the Secretary, the top.

96 MM: That presumably wasn't because you were a woman?

97 IM: No, not at that point. Then of course, when I returned, I was on different boards – Telecom Eireann and the Bank of Ireland and others – I was fortunate that I retired before [pause] I was barely sixty when I retired. Then I got all these others.

98 MM: When you were starting on the ladder to promotion, did you feel it was your talent or because you worked harder than anyone else?

99 IM: Oh undoubtedly I worked harder because I knew [pause] I mean, I'd be put into a section where they had problems and I'd get it whipped into shape, in a relatively short time, you know. I was sort of a [pause] they used to use me as sort of a gofer in that sense, to organise things efficiently and to do things that they never thought they'd have to do.

100 MM: So you have an eye for organisation, you do have the capacity [pause] was that something you were born with or something that came with experience?

101 IM: I think I was born with it. I think it's something [pause] now obviously, it can be developed with training, you can get it, but I think it's innate.

102 MM: You weren't trained to it, anyway?

103 IM: No, no.

104 MM: What about others who were [pause] not necessarily fast-tracked, but obviously destined for higher things, men as well as women, were they given training?

105 IM: No, it wasn't done then.

106 MM: So really everybody learned at the job?

107 IM: That's right. Training would have started later on, now there were some talks and some special training, like telephonists, like I say for specific jobs that you had to be trained to do, but I'm talking about the general service, the general administrative and executive grades. But there's a lot of training now. I mean there were training courses for Executive Officers and Higher Executive Officers – you know, the sort of thing that people now would take for granted and you would regard [pause].

108 MM: But you personally, you didn't ever get specific training?

109 IM: I was sent on a training course when I was Higher Executive Officer, at the Institute of Public Administration, a three-month course, you went and spent two days every week or something like that.

110 MM: So it was within working hours?

111 IM: Yes, it was.

112 MM: Again, going back to when you first went in, was an Executive Officer's pay – the scales weren't too bad really, by the standards of the time?

113 IM: Oh no, it was regarded as a plum job, it was better than teaching now, better than primary teaching.

114 MM: Were you immediately put into the pension scheme or was that when you reached twenty-one?

115 IM: No, no, you were admitted immediately. The women automatically got a third of their pension and a lump sum and then later on women could get half pension and a smaller lump sum but that was the only distinction there was on the pension side; there was that distinction.

116 MM: There were quite distinct differences in the wage scales.

117 IM: There were, there were, yes, well of course, you had single men and women on the same scale and in that sense, it wasn't regarded as sex discrimination, although it was.

118 MM: I've seen some advertisements for single men where they were still getting slightly more than women although considerably less than married men.

119 IM: Well, they were on exactly the same scale for Executives because I remember that.

120 MM: What sort of hours would you have been working?

121 IM: The hours? Well, in Supplies it was probably nine to five but later on now, I would have [pause] from when I was Higher Executive I would have done longer hours.

122 MM: When you went in to Supplies, working in a big area, was there any kind of geographical distinction to show that you were in charge or was everybody in the same area?

123 IM: From Higher Executive down we were all in the big space. The Assistant Principal had his own room but there was no distinction that way, you were just sitting at a table and the other staff were sitting there too.

124 MM: So did any people have their own desks or were you all at tables?

125 IM: Tables, I think, big tables.

126 MM: The Writing Assistants – they were nearly all female, I think? I've always been fascinated by the idea of that job – offices are so machine driven now.

127 IM: That's right, that's right. In fact, a lot of the letters that were sent out were hand-written.

128 MM: Would you have had to deal with the public directly? Would it simply be in correspondence?

129 IM: No, there was an Inquiry Office all right but I wasn't involved with that. I mean, the phone was hardly used at that point, very few members of the public, in fact no members of the public would have telephones and the first time most of the members of staff would have used a telephone would be actually at work. I remember one poor man he was so terrified – he was an Executive Officer too – he was so terrified of using the phone that he used to walk out when the phone would ring so that someone else would answer it. He'd go red in the face at the thought of it. I mean, it's not surprising, no, no, because all of us were [pause] none of us had any experience of using the telephone. You sort of forget.

130 MM: Yes, I suppose it's so much part of our lives between mobiles and everything [pause] I was trying to imagine the physical layout because somebody was describing to me recently the office where they worked and it was a typing pool and there were eight typewriters going and she said she ended up slightly deaf. Now, you know, with computers, it would be phones that would be a problem in a large area but computers are relatively silent. It was quite a different world.

131 IM: It was, yes.

132 MM: What about social contacts within the office, did you make friends in the area you were working in?

133 IM: I did in [pause] well, not lasting friendships, except now I did in Industry and Commerce, the three Executive Officers we made [pause] and I still meet one of them regularly.

134 MM: Did they stay on?

135 IM: No, they both retired, they both retired on marriage.

136 MM: What about later on when you were getting promoted, did you feel isolated in any way because you were moving past the majority of the other women?

137 IM: I think it was one of the major impoverishments of my working life that it was a totally male environment, the further up I got on the ladder. Now I would have secretaries, female, but it's a different relationship, it is different, it has to be but it was a totally male environment, in that sense it was extremely impoverished. I wouldn't have been one of the lads, no, and that is [pause] I felt that I was always being challenged.

138 MM: It sounds like you might have welcomed that in some ways?

139 IM: In some ways, yes, I did, in some ways, yes I did, yes.

140 MM: And what about relationships with people, other than friends you made at work, would it have been a problem that you were clearly so focussed on work and were successful?

141 IM: I think probably it would have been later on that I made friends with women who were themselves achievers, people like Margaret Downes and Joyce O'Connor, I'm still very friendly with them. It was extremely difficult to maintain [pause] I have one very close relationship with a woman I'm also friendly with her husband, where there was no connection and they wouldn't be high achievers by any stretch of the imagination but I'm very friendly with them.

142 MM: Just the ordinary minutiae of life when you were living in Dublin at first, how did you manage?

143 IM: I was living in digs on Sandford Road with Neil Blaney's aunt, who was the landlady. Neil Blaney himself often stayed there and we had some great arguments. There were a lot of university students there as well [pause] and then my sister moved, one of my sisters moved up to Dublin and we took a flat and then, my mother retired and she moved up and she bought a house in St. Laurence's Road so we moved in with her and three, four sisters. We had a very widely flung family so I'd a huge social life within the family, which [pause] basically, it wasn't compelling [laughs].

144 MM: So in a sense too you probably didn't have to worry too much about the pressure of domestic chores?

145 IM: No, no.

146 MM: What about the arrangements with your mother? Would you just have given her so much housekeeping money and she'd look after things?

147 IM: That's right [pause] no, no, I mean, I would always have contributed both in work and in money. There was no question of [pause] you were brought down to size when I went from this very important job and I came back home again [laughs]. It was very good but I was expected to toe the line and do domestic work.

148 MM: From what other people have been telling me, daughters were expected to hand up their pay packets to their mothers but while daughters were expected to do domestic chores, the sons weren't and this was going on for years until they left home to get married. Your family didn't have that sort of arrangements?

149 IM: Well, none of the sons were working. One of them was a clerical student, both of them were students, we were keeping them more or less, with fees. The males never contributed much in our family [both laugh].

150 MM: What's the actual balance in terms of sons and daughters?

151 IM: There were seven daughters and five sons. One son died when he was a baby and my eldest brother died very shortly after my father and then there were just the three of them. Denis died then, some years after [pause]. We were poor in the sense that you remembered the first dress that you got that was bought for yourself, it wasn't a hand me down. It was a great thing to have a dress that was bought specifically for you. In that sense there was certainly no opulence.

152 MM: When you were going off to boarding school, were you having difficulty about it or were you just looking forward to the challenge of being out of the home?

153 IM: I know I was fearful of that, going off [pause] well, Sinead was there too, I suppose, so that was [pause].

154 MM: She went to the same school as you?

155 IM: She did, yes. She was there for about four years, going off every term.

156 MM: How did you get there? Did you have to take a train?

157 IM: We got a train to Athlone and then you had to wait there and get a bus and then you got a cab or a taxi or [pause].

158 MM: Would you get a chance to get home at weekends?

159 IM: Oh not at all, not at all. I mean, I wasn't even brought home for Easter, because it would cost too much. There wasn't the money. You knew you were there for three or four weeks at least, stuck there, with all the others gone home.

160 MM: During term time would your mother have been in touch with you, even to ask you why aren't you doing better? [Both laugh.]

161 IM: No, at that stage, no, she didn't. No, she didn't, that particular part she didn't, it was only at exam time that she did.

162 MM: Had she given up work as a teacher?

163 IM: No, she was still working as a teacher, although she was forced to retire at sixty. Women teachers had to retire at sixty.

164 (Incomprehensible section of about two minutes.)

165 IM: That's right, yes, and you wouldn't have the totally male dominated hierarchy that you have now. There are a fair few women at Assistant Principal and Principal level now.

166 MM: Do you think that made a difference to how the Civil Service operates, that there are more women at senior levels?

167 IM: Well, it makes it certainly easier for women working in it, in that sense that there are other women and you don't have this oppression, the totally male [pause] in that sense, yes. I'm not a great believer in women producing a different sort of culture, sort of thing, I think as far as culture

[pause] whatever qualities you have they'll develop. I'm not a great believer in a specifically feminine quality, culturally at least.

168 MM: On a practical level, the more women there are, the more likely it is to be less rigid about childcare arrangements and that sort of thing.

169 IM: On the level of self interest, yes, there would be more recognition of the need for that, yes. But other than that, this idea of different roles, male and female sort of qualities complementing each other, I think everyone has the same qualities, regardless of sex.

170 MM: During the war years, you were right in the middle of one of the most crucial areas, in the rationing section, would that have had a practical impact? Not suggesting that you would have a greater ration than anyone else but maybe in other ways? Would it have made life difficult if people knew where you were working, for example?

171 IM: The war? Oh yes, well of course, it did, oh God yes. The quality [pause] but then I wasn't used to much anyway. You know, I'd gone from a very modest, in terms of food, into a boarding school where everything was pretty minimal, so I mean my expectations would have been very very low indeed, in terms of food.

172 MM: I've had interviews with women in the North of Ireland who got around the rationing there by smuggling food up from the South, so obviously there was a much more generous ration here, or at least availability of rationed goods?

173 IM: Well, there was the black market, oh yes.

174 MM: Would you have ever been involved in dealing with that?

175 IM: No, no. In fact, I probably got a bit of black market stuff myself down in the country – eggs, or something like that. And of course, you had the glimmer then too.

176 MM: It's hard to imagine now.

177 IM: It's very hard even going back now, to imagine it.

178 MM: Coming from [pause] I know there was very little concrete information about the progress of the war, because of the censorship, when it was all over was there any sense of shock about what had been kept from you?

179 IM: Certainly, in Tourmaceady, the history teacher that we had would have been very [pause] so that I would have come out of school with the idea of any enemy of Britain being our friend, you know? I'm not conscious of ever having heard anything about concentration camps or anything like that, even for years afterwards. It would have been quite a few years after the war before I became conscious of all that had happened.

180 MM: It's become clearer in recent years that considerably more Southern Irish people enlisted in the Allied forces than would have been admitted at the time. Would you have been aware of that?

181 IM: No, no.

182 MM: Were your family very Nationalist?

183 IM: No, no, it wasn't a strong nationalist thing at all. It would have been more Fine Gael than anything, my mother would have been. It wasn't a strong nationalist, chauvinistic culture – just getting on with living and making the best of what we had. Really, it impinged very little. I remember the bombing of Dublin all right, I remember that – hearing about it. I was in Tourmaceady when that happened. But it is surprising how little it impinged. Of course, I was in an enclosed [pause] a small

village and really Ireland had very little influence from anybody, even from Britain [pause] and life was hard. Life was hard.

184 MM: When you think about it, part of that was it was still a new state with a history of resistance to colonisation and maybe it did account for a lot of the rather extreme nationalism but this insistence on Irish, would you [pause] on a practical level, would you have had to do things through Irish in the Civil Service?

185 IM: No, it was no problem because I had done everything through Irish in my secondary school, literally everything, we talked Irish, I mean, and then I'd go home and we'd speak Irish and I'd write home in Irish so I mean Irish was never any problem to me. In fact, English was a problem starting in the Civil Service because I was so used to writing and talking in Irish all the time so that my English wasn't as good as it should have been.

186 MM: A woman who worked in the Rotunda, she came from a Southern Protestant background and she was looking for promotion – she was a medical social worker - and the reason she was told she wouldn't be promoted was because she didn't speak Irish because the Protestant secondary schools didn't teach it. She felt that it was really her religious background that was the problem and the language was just an excuse. Would you have been conscious or did you know anybody from that background – there seems to have been a policy of exclusion of people who would have been candidates for the Civil Service before independence?

187 IM: Yes, yes. Well, this friend that I have now since back in the section where I was in Posts and Telegraphs, she was the daughter of a Protestant minister in Wicklow but she, as an adult, she converted to Catholicism so she had the dual sort of background. But I mean, I often talked to her about it and she never really felt that she experienced any discrimination on account of being a Protestant. Now her sister didn't convert, or her parents, so she would have a very [pause] she was never conscious of [pause].

188 MM: It seems to have been a suggestion, rather than a definite policy, it wasn't being stated explicitly but there was a definite attitude among senior civil servants that we look after our own and our own would definitely be a nationalist, Catholic ethos rather than a more pluralist approach?

189 (Incomprehensible section of less than one minute.)

190 IM: It's odd, really, because clearly there were Protestants who felt that it wasn't a good place for them to be, until relatively recently, but Margaret now, she just didn't have that sort of feeling but there were an awful lot of Protestants in Wicklow so they had a very strong community down there. Perhaps it was in small communities that they would feel [pause].

191 MM: Well, the woman who spoke to me was from the Methodist community in Gorey, so it would have been very small.

192 IM: Yes, they're a very small group, yes. In fact, there were all sorts of pressures that she felt when she went to Belfast where she was accepted for her religion but she was very definitely excluded from some aspects of work because she was a woman. She was working with victims of sexually transmitted diseases and the doctors tried to suggest that she shouldn't know about such things.

193 IM: Well, that figures.

194 MM: Mind you, that was linked to a wider government policy as well. In terms of [pause] you say the Union protested about your promotion when you went into Posts and Telegraphs, were you involved with the Union yourself?

195 IM: Yes, I was a member although I mightn't have been formally joined at that stage because I wasn't that long there, but I never took an active part in the Union, just a member, paid my fees and attended the odd meeting.

196 MM: Would you have been aware of various issues that came up?

197 IM: Ah yes, yes.

198 MM: Was it just that you were very busy doing your work, or that you didn't agree with what they were doing?

199 IM: Not so much that I didn't agree with what they were doing as I didn't have any great interest. I think there was once when I took issue with them, they were looking for more money when I considered that they shouldn't because of the state of the economy and the huge poverty and the numbers of people emigrating. I thought it was scandalous to be looking for more money – I was severely censured. I didn't go on some protest march, deliberately, and I was censured afterwards.

200 MM: Would your perception of that have changed now that we are aware of the kind of corruption that was really draining the country's resources when ordinary people were being told to tighten their belts?

201 IM: No, I still think I was right. The amount that they drained would have been [pause] it wouldn't have done all that much for a society when you had a huge amount of poverty, it would have been only a drop in the ocean. I suppose you're talking about Haughey and a few others?

202 MM: Not even specifically the personal corruption, but in the sense that if you're tied in with business you may direct your policies to benefit those who are likely to benefit most directly rather than thinking about what's best for the general well being?

203 IM: I wouldn't have said that [pause] I think, I mean I know that a lot of people talk about corruption now, but I think the extent of it is considerably less than the perception. I think it [pause] you have rotten eggs in every group in society and they had the capacity to do more damage because they were in power but other than that, I don't believe that, I don't think it was a corrupt society by any stretch of the imagination. It was the times - we nearly didn't survive as a nation because conditions were so bad.

204 MM: So many people would look back to the forties, and the fifties in particular, the forties were [pause] there was an Emergency, there was still developing nationhood – from the Free State to the Republic – would you have thought then about the direction that the Free State was going to? While I might not personally agree with the way people were doing things or the direction they wanted to take, there was a certain kind of rectitude in their attitude that seems to have been lost. What do you think?

205 IM: I remember being very proud of De Valera's speech after Churchill criticised Ireland for not being in the War, the way he dealt with it and his statesmanship. I wasn't conscious of [pause] I became involved in social matters at a rather later stage. I'm trying to remember now [pause] we set up a sort of social study conference. I used to run an annual summer school on issues that were crying

out for discussion and I was deeply involved in that and we dealt with all sorts of things, including the North. We were prepared to mobilise the Unionist case as well as the Nationalist case.

206 MM: This was while you were still an active civil servant?

207 IM: Oh yes.

208 MM: And was it part of your duties at that time?

209 IM: Oh no, no. It was totally [pause] in fact, we started that in 1950, I think. Well, my sister was involved with it as well. There was a small group, there were two – a man from Dundalk and a man from Galway and a man from Cork – they advertised this summer school and I went to it and after that. It had a different theme every year and we tried to get scholarships for people who couldn't afford to attend so that there would be a cross section of people at the school with different points of view.

210 MM: And were you consciously trying to influence people who could make a difference?

211 IM: Yes. And inviting speakers; very prominent [pause] we had a lot of very prominent persons in Ireland, including the North, they would have spoken.

212 MM: Who would have been invited to come?

213 IM: Well, we would have had people from Queen's University, we had all the politicians, Dukes, Conor Cruise O'Brien, all the whole gamut – McDowell. Then we would have had prominent economists [pause] people from Oxford [pause].

214 MM: And in the audience? When you offered scholarships was that to get any particular type of person or group there?

215 IM: No, no. It would be probably trades unionists, or unemployed people, who wouldn't otherwise get a chance of going to a thing like that or wouldn't have a voice, wouldn't have an opportunity.

216 MM: They might be active in their community?

217 IM: Yes. I suppose it's about ten years since we gave up on that.

218 MM: As a civil servant particularly, I would have thought you could have at times a fraught relationship with politicians, in that they change but the permanent civil servants don't and yet you have to implement what could be radically changing policies. Was that a source of frustration for you?

219 IM: No, it was part of your professional ethic that you accepted the policy of whatever Minister was in power. You see, in Posts and Telegraphs there wasn't that much scope for [pause] it was only in the broadcasting side that there was scope for change and there were big changes there and I was involved directly with them, with many of those. There was only one Minister that I felt from the very outset that it was very hard to deal with - otherwise I had great relations with most of the Ministers, I seemed to get on very well with them, for some [pause].

220 MM: Presumably they recognised that you were going to do the job well?

221 IM: Well, partly, yes, partly that. I was reasonably good at establishing relationships with people as well, particularly if I had to [laughs].

222 MM: Well, I know you were saying there were so few women who were senior, as the years went by, when you went in and there were all the Writing Assistants and Clerical Officers, would you have felt that perhaps they should be trying to do as well as you were?

223 IM: Yes, I did a lot to try and encourage them to go ahead and apply, do another examination, if there was a promotion coming up to go for the interview, that sort of thing. I would have made a point of that, and particularly for women. Mind you, they'd very little confidence – no confidence in themselves really.

224 MM: I know [pause] a woman who gave me an interview went in as a Clerical Officer and left when she got married. She married a senior Civil Servant and when he heard what I was doing with the interview, he wanted to know why don't you interview me, I'd know much more than her and it was her experience I was interested in and I was trying to politely tell him this. But he was extremely annoyed because he felt that I was giving her ideas above her station, that she wouldn't know as much as him. It was extremely instructive about their relationship [both laugh].

225 IM: That was par for the course. There was some interview board I was seeing, and some man on the board said to me haven't you done very well for yourself, why are you trying to get higher?. And he asked me how I could possibly expect to deal with men and with members of the public. And another experience I had, I'd a very snazzy hat on going into the interview and I heard one of the interviewers whistle. God [laughs] such ignorance!

226 MM: How would you have dealt with that, because presumably if you came back with a smart answer you'd immediately be written off?

227 IM: You would, yes. I think to be fair that the other interviewers were more open and I think I probably said to him that I'd succeeded up to then and I was a Higher Executive Officer and that if he looked at my track record, he'd see that I hadn't had any problems whatever. [Both laugh.]

Kathleen, Portstewart. Interview: 29th November 2003

1 KT: Well, I'm Kathleen T. I was Kathleen F. and I was born in Belfast. My sister and I were working in Portstewart and I met my husband when he was over here training. He was in the army.

2 MM: In the British army?

3 KT: Yes, definitely. Then it went on from here, you know, we got married and then we couldn't have a honeymoon. We only had a weekend because he had to go back to barracks. Then, this was during the month of January; it was towards the end, when we were able to get a pass. You had to get a pass to go to England, to go to his mother, because I hadn't met his family. He had met my mother and his mother had corresponded with my mother. She wasn't all that pleased that I was marrying an Englishman but she soon changed her tune when she met him and then, of course, I went to England.

4 MM: What year was this?

5 KT: That was 1941 when I was married. My husband was being posted back to England, you see, to train for going to Europe after D-Day and he wanted me to move over. I went to live with his mother and his family. There was only his sister at home, because his brothers were also in the army. We moved over then and I was very happy there. They were really lovely people. That was in Cookham, Berkshire, a very nice part of the country. Well, of course, he had to go back to the barracks to get on with the training, so I lived there with them. My father-in-law, he was in the police, he was the police sergeant and the village policeman. Then, of course, I had to register for work.

6 MM: Northern Irish women weren't subject to conscription. Did you have to register because you were married to an Englishman?

7 KT: Yes, because I was married, you see, so I had to register. I would have had to work in any case – I would have wanted to work. I would have wanted to be idle. It's different if you have your own home. My father-in-law knew somebody who had this [pause] actually it was attached to a very, sort of high-class jewellers. Queen Mary used to come down and shop there, the old Queen Mary. So they set up a small light industry. It was doing meters for aircraft. Well, he was in touch with somebody and managed to get me in there otherwise I was going to have to go on the buses. They were crying out for people and I didn't fancy that.

8 MM: Did you have to go through a local labour exchange?

9 KT: Well, I would have done other than my father-in-law getting me in there first.

10 MM: Do you remember the name of the company?

11 KT: Yes, Biggs, Biggs the Jewellers. They were very nice there. What they did [pause] they did it to keep their staff, more or less, because they had very skilled people. It was mainly I think to keep the staff, the men, so that the men who were older didn't have to go to war. But it was very interesting and we were well treated. You had to do fire watch and you'd stay on if it was your turn, it was on a rota basis. There was a small canteen attached to it, and she was very good. She used to lay on our supper for us, you know, and that sort of thing.

12 MM: What about the actual work you had to do? What were your duties?

13 KT: Well, I was doing the setting of the meters. You know, they were passed through the [pause], they were made up and then they were passed to me for inspection. Balancing and that [pause]

14 MM: So it was quite a responsible job?

15 KT: It was a responsible job, yes, it was. That was in Maidenhead, you see, and I travelled backwards and forwards by bus. My sister-in-law, she was in the office of a fashion shop, and she transferred to Boots, the chemist, and she was a secretary in Boots, the chemist. We used to travel together.

16 MM: How long did that take every day?

17 KT: Only twenty minutes, it wasn't too far.

18 MM: What sort of hours were you working?

19 KT: We started at [pause] I think it was nine and we finished at five.

20 MM: And did you get a break for lunch?

21 KT: Oh yes, we had the canteen there. It was quite a small canteen, just for the people working there.

22 MM: What sort of people were you working with? Were there other women?

23 KT: Yes, quite a few were women. There were some men – the men were on the assembly line. They were really watchmakers for the jewellers in the first place.

24 MM: They were skilled workers?

25 KT: Very skilled, yes. They tried to keep their staff. There were two Miss Biggs, their father had died.

26 MM: What kind of training did you get?

27 KT: Well, I watched someone else and then I got to know it. Of course, I was on the last stage of it. If they weren't right, I had to pass them back because you could never send out a piece that wasn't right.

28 MM: Were you balancing them with a machine?

29 KT: No, by hand. I just had some tools.

30 MM: And then they went into the aircraft?

31 KT: Yes. Where we lived near Maidenhead, there was a small airfield close to us. I think it was called Ferries, the Ferries Field, something like that. They used to fly planes from there and it had been a base for aircraft for a long time. Amy Johnson flew from there – you've probably heard of her?

32 MM: Yes. Did you ever have the opportunity to see the aircraft in action – to see the end product of your work?

33 KT: No, I never had that opportunity. No, it was very much in wartime so there were no jaunts or that sort of thing. You made your own pleasure really, we used to go for bike rides and walks and simple things. I was speaking to my sister-in-law last night to see if she could remember much about those times. She said well we couldn't really go anywhere; we couldn't go down to the coast or anything, because it was all blocked off. You couldn't go down and take a trip to the coast because it was all sealed off.

34 MM: It's something you forget about, that side of things, especially the security.

35 KT: Yes. My husband went over to France; it was D-Day plus five that he went.

36 MM: That must have been a very stressful time for you?

37 KT: Well, it was, yes. We corresponded and I seemed to get most of the letters but of course they were censored, they knew very well they couldn't put anything in them to start with that would say where they were. We sort of gathered where they were because you would hear the news about the

different regiments. He was transferred to a Scottish regiment, the King's Own Scottish Borderers and they were in the thick of the invasion.

38 MM: What about when you first went over to England, in the years before D-Day, where would he have been then?

39 KT: Well, he was down in [pause] we didn't really know quite where he was, but he was down in training but I don't know exactly where they were.

40 MM: Did you get to see him?

41 KT: Well, occasionally he would come up for a weekend but it was only very occasionally.

42 MM: How did you manage – it must have been quite difficult living with people you hadn't known before?

43 KT: We got on very well. They were very nice people. My mother-in-law made me very welcome. My father-in-law – he was actually just retired in 1938 from the police and of course, he had to take up a job and he became a night watchman, somewhere where they were doing some secret work. He was on nights, which was a great strain for my mother-in-law because of the dog barking and the least little thing that woke him up during the day. So we all had to [pause] we were all under a bit of a strain trying to keep quiet. At weekends, he used to go in so we were able to let go a bit at the weekend [both laugh]. We used to do the housework when he went [laughs] he was a lovely man but he just had to sleep. That's right; we couldn't let the dog bark or anything.

44 Is there anything else you want to know? I feel very inadequate over this, really.

45 MM: Oh, no. I was fascinated by the fact that you were living with two women that you didn't know and that you managed to get on together. How did you manage the housework – did you share it out?

46 KT: We did. At weekends, I always helped and sort of did a few things. My mother-in-law didn't go out to work because she was over the age for going out but we used to share the chores. Unfortunately, my sister-in-law was [pause] I mean she always was delicate, if you know what I mean, and didn't really. She was rather cosseted, you know, whereas I was always used to helping. I had to help at home. When we came in from school we had jobs to do so that in itself was a help to my mother-in-law because she was then suffering from arthritis and she found some things difficult. I used to keep my own room neat and tidy and also I'd help her with the chores. My father-in-law used to grow an awful lot of vegetables and food in the garden, because they had quite a bit of ground and he used to go shooting for rabbits, then. My mother-in-law used to make a lovely rabbit pie. Mind you, I wouldn't have eaten it now [laughs] but we used to love it. We used to love it [pause] she used to make a lovely rabbit pie.

47 MM: That would have been a very good way of supplementing the rations.

48 KT: I know. Fruit and everything were so short. Of course, we had to queue up for everything, for different things, you know. In your lunch hour, if you heard somebody had some bananas or something you just gave up your lunch hour and queued to get the few bananas, or nylons, or whatever. If you wanted makeup and you heard Boots had something in, you just had to queue up and to get it.

49 MM: Would this information come through word of mouth or was it advertised?

50 KT: No, it would be through word of mouth. Someone would say they saw something and they would say it to somebody else and so on that something was going. Of course, the rations were very meagre, you know, sometimes it was only two ounces of butter for a week. Fortunately, I didn't like butter very much then but my mother, she always sent parcels over and we always got them all right. She used to send butter and tea. I don't think she sent sugar; it was too scarce, dried fruit for making a cake.

51 MM: But they were rationed here [Northern Ireland] as well, weren't they?

52 KT: Yes, they were rationed here but not to the extent that they were over there. You could always get the bit extra here, you know, if somebody didn't want something they'd give it to you in exchange for something else; probably sugar, or something like that. My sister-in-law told me that I made her twenty-first birthday cake. That was with stuff that my mother had sent over.

53 Queen Wilhelmina, you'll have heard of Queen Wilhelmina, she was in a house in Maidenhead. She came over with some of her bodyguards and we used to meet them at a sort of village hop, you know. The village hop – somebody would play the piano and there was a bit of dancing and that sort of thing; that was about the only pleasurable thing we had. Apart from walking and cycling.

54 MM: Was there a cinema in Maidenhead?

55 KT: No, we didn't go to the cinema. There was a cinema but we didn't used to go. But even then that was [pause] that was Cookham Dene, there was Cookham village – Cookham Rise and Cookham Dene, and they had three bombs dropped there. I think they were trying for the airfield nearby. We had the doodlebugs too, you'll have heard of the doodlebugs?

56 MM: Oh yes. Were they over there as well?

57 KT: Yes, we had one or two down there. We heard them going over as well.

58 MM: Were there many soldiers stationed in the area?

59 KT: Quite a few, all round.

60 MM: Would you have been conscious of them being there? Would you meet them locally, in the village?

61 KT: No, they were out dancing and that sort of thing. The women's [pause] the W.V.S. ran a canteen, so they were in there and that's where I met my husband actually, in a W.V.S. canteen. Also my sister, as well, she met her husband in a canteen. We were both married within about a month of each other and she moved back to England to Reading, which really was only about twenty-five miles away from where I was. We were [pause] it wasn't too bad but she had to go into industry, not light industry like I was but quite heavy industry.

62 MM: Would you have [pause] obviously the fact that you didn't have children yourself made it easier, but would you have been aware of any arrangements being made for childcare for the women who worked with you?

63 KT: I don't know. No, we didn't really want them that much during the wartime and my husband wasn't back that much really and it just happened then that I didn't have children. I was very sad for my husband because he would have liked to have children.

64 MM: A lot of women now are having to put off having children because of various pressures and then they find they can't have them. It must be very hard.

65 KT: That's right, they waited too long. You don't know do you but it wasn't established that it was because we waited. My twin brother died at birth and I've often wondered if that had anything to do with it.

66 MM: My brother and sister are twins and they have a very special bond between them. She would know immediately if something is wrong with him, although it doesn't work both ways.

67 KT: Yes. I've heard of that sort of thing.

68 MM: So where was it in Northern Ireland that the W.V.S. canteen where you met your husband?

69 KT: Well, that was down in Portstewart.

70 MM: And were you working at that time?

71 KT: Yes, I was working and looking after an old lady and my sister was looking after her daughter. She had come over from Sheffield with her two children and so we were both working in the same house, which was down the coast.

72 MM: Was that what you had done since you left school?

73 KT: Yes, that's it, more or less, we just went straight from school to get those jobs.

74 MM: When you were in England, how did you keep in touch with your family here in Ireland?

75 KT: We used to write because not many people had phones then. My in-laws didn't have phones so we used to write and then sometimes we would visit.

76 MM: Were you able to come back and forth? Was it possible to get travel passes?

77 KT: Not very often. My sister and I did it on our own. We got a train up to Crewe and then on to Stranraer and over to Larne. She did it once on her own when her husband couldn't get a pass to come over. People didn't really like travelling across the sea at that time.

78 MM: I suppose there was still a fear, that people were still anxious about the possibility of u-boat attacks?

79 KT: Oh yes, very much so. Sometimes when my husband was off we got a train up to London and we'd go round the shops, although there wasn't much in the shops, and see a show. Sometimes there would be air raids but you just had to get on with things.

80 MM: I suppose people were determined not to let the war take over everything?

81 KT: I think there were good times, that in wartime there were good times, everybody helped each other. People thought nothing of helping one another with rations and exchanging things.

82 MM: Do you think that the sense of shared danger had anything to do with that?

83 KT: I would say so, yes.

84 MM: The sort of work that you were doing – was that the kind of thing that would have been done by men before the war?

85 KT: No, I don't think so. The industry was just set up for the war, it was a jewellers before then.

86 MM: I presume that it closed down after the war?

87 KT: It closed down, yes, as things got back to more normal way of going on. The contract was finished then but I was still eligible to go to work and they were going to put me on the buses.

88 MM: As a driver or a conductor?

89 KT: As a conductor, but anyway, I said no to that and then they put me up to Slough, which was the nearest town, it's a very industrial area, Slough in Berkshire, or is it Buckinghamshire? So that was working with [pause] I presume it was things to do with aircraft but they never really said. It was like a small television and you had to work on those and assemble those. There was always people there to help you. I didn't like it much because it was a different class [pause] I'm not a snob but it was a different class of people up there, they were more factory people.

90 MM: They were people who'd always worked in a factory?

91 KT: Yes, they'd always worked in factories.

92 MM: Were these women who were used to working outside the home, not just for war work?

93 KT: Yes.

94 MM: What about women who had families? Were arrangements made for childcare for them?

95 KT: I don't think so because there were no crèches or anything in these places. Not like they are now so I think they just had to leave them with relatives, that's the way, or make sure they were in school. Or they just had to work part-time and manage that way.

96 MM: Shopping must have been difficult when you had to rely on your lunch hour to queue for goods? It must have made the day seem long?

97 KT: It did, it did. Fortunately, my mother-in-law knew the butcher and the grocer, he was just down the road, and the butcher was [pause] he knew the whole community and if there were anything going, he'd let her know.

98 MM: What did you do, did you share the cooking or did she do it?

99 KT: No, she did the cooking. I used to help with the washing up. She was used to doing thing her way. There's no room for two women in a kitchen [laughs].

100 MM: My son used to do the cooking; he was very good. I'd be quite happy to give it up to anybody [both laugh].

101 Can you remember what sort of money you were being paid? Was it weekly?

102 KT: Well, I think it was about £4 a week.

103 MM: That wasn't bad, compared to the average wage at the time.

104 KT: No, it was not bad; I think it had increased when I left to about £5. Yes, they were very fair payers but of course, nowadays you would think that was terrible but even then; that was very good then.

105 MM: Did you pay your mother-in-law for your keep?

106 KT: Yes. She only used to take [pause] I think it was 10s. I'd give her 10s and she didn't want any more. I would have paid her more but she was getting the rations and she said, the more rations you have, the better it went round.

107 MM: How did you manage to save when you were buying your house? You were saying you bought a cottage at the end of the war?

108 KT: Yes, we managed [pause] I was getting an allowance for my husband from the army and I managed to save all of that. Then we rented this cottage to start and then we had the chance to buy it. I think it was a case of scraping everything together but we managed and then we moved on to a semi-detached house in Maidenhead. That was a nice house, very comfortable and then we moved out to a

nice bungalow. We've been in bungalows ever since. We were in a bungalow when we retired down to Dorset.

109 MM: Even though you lived in England for so long, you still have a very definite Irish accent.

110 KT: Have I – I don't know about that [laughs].

111 MM: Oh yes, but was there ever at any stage the suggestion from people that you were alien, being Irish?

112 KT: No, not at all. I think that in the sense that I was working with a nice lot of people and I made some great friends. Some of them are dead now, unfortunately, but I did make some quite good friends. No, I didn't feel that. On the whole, I was very happy with my mother-in-law. She was a very nice lady and having my sister-in-law there. She wasn't married [pause] we hoped she would have married one of the Dutchmen but she didn't like the idea of moving away and having to leave her parents.

113 MM: I take it there was no question that he would move permanently to England?

114 KT: No, they were very dedicated to Queen Wilhelmina and they would go where wherever she was. The Dutch people were very nice, very blond and tall.

115 MM: You were saying at the beginning that your mother wasn't thrilled about your marrying an Englishman until she met him. Was that because of nationalist feelings or because she knew you would leave and go to England?

116 KT: Possibly, I don't know – but I suppose it was more the thought of us going away; I think it would have been one of the factors until she met him but she took to him straight away when she met him. I mean she had the same situation with my sister's husband as well; he was in the forces as well. She corresponded with my mother-in-law but they never did meet.

117 MM: Was that because of the circumstances of war that travelling was difficult?

118 KT: Well, people didn't travel as much then, not like they do now. My mother was home with my brothers and she wouldn't leave them. I think women were more dedicated to their families then than they do now.

119 MM: How many were in your family?

120 KT: Two brothers and two sisters. My younger brother [pause] the reason I came over here was that my younger brother, his wife had died suddenly and my husband had died suddenly as well so I came over here to sort of be company for him. And then he died of cancer.

121 MM: That must have been difficult.

122 KT: Anyway, I did think of going back but then I thought it would be such upheaval to go back and I stayed here.

123 MM: It sounds as if you had a good circle of friends in England.

124 KT: Yes, they've been very good. In fact, I've just had a six-page letter from one of them [laughs]. Then I've got my niece here, the daughter of the brother who died. She's got two boys, seventeen and fourteen.

125 MM: One of the themes that have run through other interviews is the belief that although materially people in Ireland and England are much better off, that as you said in the war the capacity of people to help each other, that in Ireland now that is being lost.

126 KT: Yes, there has been tremendous change but I think for better.

127 MM: Would that be because people are so much better off?

128 KT: Well, I think people are more broad-minded now, oh yes, sure people travel more now, don't they?

129 MM: A lot of people have remarked that the closeness that was there in the war years that you don't see much of that now.

130 KT: No, you don't see so much of it. But things are better now here than they were, with regards to religion. People are not so fanatical about being Protestant or Catholic. In England, of course, you don't get that. They don't care what their neighbour is. I think it's a big improvement here.

131 (Last five minutes of interview dealt with local conditions in Portstewart.)

Letty and Mrs. Josie, Dublin. Interview: 2nd December 2002

1 LC: I was born at 26 Northbrook Terrace, North Strand. Yes, the North Strand, and in nineteen hundred and eighteen I was born.

2 LC: Okay, my full name, my marriage name, that's Mrs. Letitia C., Letty C., whatever you like. [Laughs]. That's what I was christened anyway, Letitia. If you like now, I'll give you Letty.

3 MM: It doesn't matter – whatever you're most comfortable using. When you were born in the North Strand, where did you come in the family?

4 LC: I was the first. There were four of us, four, three girls, and a boy.

5 MM: And what did your parents do?

6 LC: Well, my mother didn't work – she was a housewife and my father was an electrician, on the trains, yes.

7 MM: Did your mother ever work outside the home?

8 LC: No, she never worked. People never worked in those days, you'd be looked down upon if you were working at that time [laughs] that was the attitude at that time, you know. [Laughs].

9 MM: Well, I really meant had she done paid work after she was married, because she probably worked extremely hard in the home.

10 LC: No, she worked in Jacobs, the biscuit factory, you see, and that was all. Then she got married and she had four children. Josie was the youngest of the four children.

11 MM: Josie, perhaps you'd introduce yourself for the tape, please?

12 JW: Well, I'm Josephine W. and I was born in the Rotunda Hospital in October 1926. I lived in Northbrook Terrace, yes, for a long time, and then moved to Dowth Avenue in Cabra in 1937.

13 MM: Were they the new houses?

14 JW: They were, yes, they weren't long built at the time. They were built [pause] after the war they got rid of all the tenements, although we didn't come from the tenement houses, there was a lot of clearing out of the city, you see, and all those houses were built at the time. Through Sean T. O'Kelly, he was the man that forged that all along. They rid Dublin of the tenements because there was such devastation in them. So that's how that we moved up there, it was a purchased house in Dowth Avenue. There were other cheaper kinds of houses too, on Attracta Road.

15 Well, then, I went to the Holy Faith Convent school in Glasnevin and I left, as usual, at fourteen and went to work at the sewing and during the war, then, the years during the war, we remember the blackout.

16 MM: Can I just hold you there for a minute and we can move on to the war then? Letty, did you leave school when you were fourteen as well?

17 LC: I did, yes. I went into the sewing as well.

18 MM: Did you go straight from school to work?

19 LC: It was in Abbey Street, the Abbey Clothing Company. Well, I went into the Tech first, when I left school I went into the Tech. That was what was done at that time. How long was I there? Two years, I think, and then I got into the Abbey Clothing Company. I was put in [pause] they were looking for workers then [pause] I was called in by the forewoman there.

20 MM: Was this for men or women?

21 LC: It was mixed, kind of, it was ladies and gents worked there at the clothing.

22 MM: One thing I know about the clothing trade at the time is that men were paid much more than women for the same work. Would you have been conscious of this at the time?

23 LC: I don't really remember that. Where I worked, it was a huge big place and it was mostly all women. There was only a few men underneath. They used to be doing the cutting, they used to cut out all the cloth but we didn't have much to do with them.

24 JW: It was the wages, like that.

25 LC: Well, the wages were like; the men's were much more than the women's weren't they?

26 JW: Women didn't earn as much as men in those days. There was a big distinction in the wages.

27 LC: Well, there had to be because the wages – the men would have to give them up for their families and everything.

28 MM: Would the women not have to do the same thing?

29 LC: Well, the women didn't work, you see? Once they were married.

30 JW: Well, they worked in the home.

31 LC: Nobody worked in those days. You'd be looked down, if he hadn't work, like that, a woman would, oh yes. It'd be: she married that fellow there and she has to go out and work for him. You got all this [laughs]. It was a different world altogether than now.

32 MM: In the sewing factory would you have had a supervisor, telling you what to do?

33 LC: Oh gosh yes, a forewoman. We had a very stiff forewoman, Miss Tobin, she used to be chasing us, watching you going into the toilet, you know, she was a terror.

34 JW: She'd keep an eye on how long you'd spend and when you came in and that.

35 LC: Yes, the terrible hours you'd have to start work. You'd clock in at eight o'clock in the morning and then work to half past six at night. It was an awfully long day. The only thing was that we didn't have to work on Saturdays. You'd have Saturday off and Sunday but the hours were very long. Half six, I wouldn't get home until really well after seven o'clock.

36 MM: Did you get breaks during the day?

37 LC: Oh, they had their break of course, an half and a half. You'd work till a quarter past twelve so it was an hour and a quarter, yes.

38 MM: And did you stay around for lunch?

39 LC: I used to go home.

40 JW: Well, you were gone to England, Letty.

41 LC: Oh, that was the war, the war years. That was a different time altogether, going into the war years, everything was rationed and it was a different world altogether.

42 MM: How long were you in the sewing factory?

43 LC: Let me see, I must have been in it about three years before I went to England. And I was about four years in England, nearly four years in England. And then I came back then, the war was over in England, and I came back then and I went back into the job that I originally started in. They were all getting in all the material, it was all coming back then so it was starting up again because the war was over.

44 MM: What made you decide to go to England?

45 LC: Well, I had to go. There was no work.

46 JW: You were laid off.

47 LC: We were laid off, yes, there was no material coming in, you see, there was nothing coming in. Everything was stopped. You see, the people that didn't live through it, they don't know how bad it was.

48 JW: Everything was stopped, it was very hard. There was no coal, and wet turf.

49 LC: That's right. The winter was very bad.

50 JW: The glimmer man was there and you'd only an hour or so for the gas, it was watched, and your mother would be sending you out to watch if he was coming.

51 JW: Oh yes.

52 LC: And he'd come in then and he'd have to feel the gas to see was it hot.

53 MM: That was the glimmer man?

54 LC: [Laughs] Yes, that's it, the glimmer man. We'd be all amused but that was the name because he was checking for a glimmer, you see. [Laughs]

55 JW: And the shell cocoa because there was no tea.

56 LC: [Laughs] And my mother used always have her kettle on the glimmer – she was a devil for the teapot.

57 MM: Someone was telling me that the shell cocoa that was used in the war to make drinks is now used as a fertiliser and you can get it in garden centres. [All laugh.]

58 JW: Saint Anthony, when I think of all the shell cocoa we boiled, and we're still here.

59 LC: So there you are. [All laugh.]

60 MM: So how did you go about getting a job in England? Did you apply from here?

61 LC: Oh I went to [pause] at that time they wouldn't take you from here, because there was a war on, so you had to be thoroughly examined before you went.

62 MM: So what did that involve?

63 LC: Oh, I had to be thoroughly examined, back and front and everywhere [laughs]. I'll never forget it. If I knew what I'd be going to go through, I'd never have gone near them.

64 MM: Was this at the British Embassy?

65 LC: Here, no, it was our own. Though it was probably through them, like, you had to be [pause] it was probably the Patrick Duns but however, anyway, as time went on I was three and a half years there, or four.

66 JW: You were four.

67 MM: What part of England were you in?

68 LC: I was in Reading, it was forty miles outside London. I was in a lovely place. We never heard bombs in it and London was about forty miles away. Oh, I was three and a half years in it.

69 MM: And why did you leave, was it the end of a contract?

70 LC: Well, I was sent by the Labour Exchange here. That was the way you'd go. You couldn't go tiddling like, just go over yourself at that time, you had to be sent.

71 MM: So the British Labour Exchange worked through same one here?

72 LC: Yes, that's the way they worked at that time. I went with a couple of other girls I was working with. I think a whole lot of us, like, we were only in our twenties when we went. And we said there's no sign of this war being over so we had better go and do something, you know? There

was no work and you only had about 12s. a week coming off the Labour that was the money at the time. And my goodness, sure you'd give that up to your mother so you'd no money left, like, you know? And so I decided to sign up and some others, you know the way the word goes round, and they took our names and so we were signed on. And I was sent then for a thorough examination. And then, so anyway, we all passed. Most of the girls who went were all passed. It was a lovely time we had. When we went over we were welcomed and everything and when we went we couldn't believe it, we were brought into a beautiful place. It was like a hotel, but it wasn't, it was fixed up just for the girls.

73 MM: Like a hostel?

74 LC: Kind of a hostel, yes, that's what you'd call it. Everything was great there; it was just like that things were rationed, like, but we got our three meals a day and of course the canteen where we worked was wonderful, you know. You mightn't get what you liked, what you fancied, but it was all there for you, you wouldn't starve.

75 MM: What sort of work were you doing?

76 LC: It was just like [pause] I had a handy little job, it was just at a little bench and you'd be sitting there. It was a machine, a small machine, and there'd be powder in it, of course, that was the dangerous part and it was for bullets, of course, so you'd have to be careful.

77 MM: So you were actually making munitions?

78 LC: Oh munitions, yes, we'd be cutting the thing – one machinist would set the charge and another one would press it. Well, I was always the one would press it.

79 MM: So if you pressed it too hard, it could be dangerous?

80 LC: Oh gosh, yes, oh it did once or twice [laughs].

81 MM: What happened?

82 LC: Nothing really, it would just give a bang, you know [laughs].

83 MM: Now did you get any training for this?

84 LC: Oh yes, you were shown how to do everything.

85 MM: And who would do the training?

86 LC: Ah, there was a forewoman of course, and there was men there and all as well and they'd go round watching that you were doing it right.

87 JW: It was a dangerous job.

88 LC: It was, it was a very dangerous job, yes, it was. Because I was on high explosives, I was on TNT, yes, that's right. I was on one of the highest explosives in it [laughs]. Well, I wasn't the only one, there were crowds of girls around me. But you had to be well, your health had to be good, you had to be passed by the doctor.

89 MM: I suppose you'd have to be able to stay calm, at least.

90 LC: That's right, you had to be passed by the doctor.

91 MM: And were you doing that work for your whole time in England?

92 LC: We were transferred from Reading right up to the north of England, up to [pause] what do you call it, Lancashire. We were up there when I finished up there.

93 MM: You weren't given a choice about staying on?

94 LC: Oh no, when you were finished you had to leave.

95 MM: Were there English people working in the factory as well?

96 LC: Ah yes, we were mixed with them, we just the same as them.

97 MM: And how was that?

98 LC: Oh that was fine, there was never any bother.

99 MM: Was there any resentment that Southern Ireland was neutral?

100 LC: Oh not at all, there was nothing like that. We all just had a laugh together, sure they'd say anything [laughs]. No, there was never anything like that. They were very nice, a bit cheeky.

101 MM: And what about the pay? Was that good?

102 LC: Oh well, it was good considering what you'd get here [laughs]. It was really. I used to send Mammy home money, I know that.

103 JW: Always, every Tuesday, she used to get the money every Tuesday.

104 LC: That's right. It was marvellous.

105 MM: Who was at home still? Your Dad, your Mum and you, Josie?

106 JW: I was at home, yes. And my brother went too. He joined the air force, he got sent to Palestine. And I was still here.

107 LC: The RAF.

108 JW: I'd another sister, and there was nothing here at those times and I remember her going off all around Crumlin and she'd go from door to door and she selling pipe cleaners. That was all she could get. In the summer she went out and she picked strawberries. That was all she could do: things were so hard in this country at that time.

109 MM: What about your father?

110 JW: He was working, but he was away. He was an electrician and he used to go down the country, like that, at times, you know, and he'd be away for a long time, you know.

111 MM: All through the war, then, even though you were in England, did you ever get the chance to come home for a holiday?

112 LC: Oh yes, we did.

113 JW: She used to come home for about two weeks and my brother was the same, in the air force. And Lilly, she was out in Crumlin selling pipe cleaners.

114 LC: But she was at the sewing too.

115 JW: But sure there was no sewing, it was awful, she wasn't working at the time.

116 LC: Sure they were doing all the army work, for the army, that's right. Do you remember? They were earning great money that time.

117 MM: This was the Irish army?

118 LC: The Irish army, yes. And the Americans. Ah yes, they were doing sewing for the Americans - they always wanted very fancy work.

119 JW: It just kind of took a turn after that, that things got better.

120 LC: It was the first year or two that was very hard. You know, everything was off. And then the bombing of the North Strand.

121 JW: And then the bombing of the North Strand – it was very close.

122 MM: Were you still living down there then?

123 JW: I remember that night. No, no, we had moved.

124 MM: Did you know anyone who was bombed?

125 JW: No, we didn't, we weren't in that part of the North Strand, we were down over the bridge. We weren't living there at that time, we were in Cabra at that time, 1941.

126 MM: It did a lot of damage.

127 LC: Oh yes, it did, bless us and save us. I remember that night well. I was on the landing when I heard Mammy. Well, when I looked out, I pulled back the blind and looked out and all you could see was lights, you know, big lights.

128 JW: So she heard the bomb, like she woke me up.

129 LC: She did, I'll always remember. We were all stood on that little landing in Cabra and I'll always remember, she put her arms around us and she said, now, said she, if we're going, we'll all go together. I can still see her that night.

130 MM: And was your father away at the time?

131 LC: He was, yes.

132 MM: So your mother really held you together?

133 LC: She did yes, my mother really reared us, she did, yes.

134 JW: It was hard but everyone seemed happy and I remember going to the ceilidh, in the Mansion House. That went on in the blackout, and no one then was afraid of anything.

135 MM: It must have been quite difficult in complete darkness.

136 JW: Yes, and nobody [pause] you must have, everybody had to have a navy blind on the window, you must have that. Everywhere was pitch dark but we used to go to the Mansion House on a Saturday night to the ceilidh and we'd come home. We'd walk all the way from the Mansion House and nobody had any fear, no bother, nobody would touch you or say a word. And today everywhere is lit up and everybody is terrified.

137 LC: You know, they'd come on bikes and we'd get crossbars. If fellows had a few bicycles, we'd get on to the crossbar coming home because there was no transport.

138 JW: You couldn't get transport.

139 LC: Unless you had the money for a cab, you could get a horse and car [both laugh]. That's all there was like, at the time.

140 MM: And your bicycle lights, did you have to keep them dimmed?

141 LC: Oh yes, we did.

142 JW: I don't remember that.

143 MM: They couldn't shine up, they could only shine down on the ground so they probably weren't much use.

144 LC: Oh yes, you had to keep them dim, they could just shine on the ground, yes. That was the order of the day, I know that, and everybody had the black blinds. When I got married, we still had the black blinds and the whites.

145 LC: It was well for young people going through it. I wouldn't want to be going through it now.

146 MM: After your mother had seen what could happen after bombing raids, in the North Strand, how did she feel about you going to England where it was much more likely to happen?

147 LC: Oh, she was very upset, she was. When I told her, she was very upset, she was crying. She went out to Dun Laoghaire with me and she was crying. But she knew I had to go because of the work. After we were finished, like, when you'd got what you were paid back like, your social welfare, well that only lasted for six months so you had to go after whatever there was, like, there was no choice. At that time, the labour was only a few shillings and that's when I went, like, when I was cut off the labour and there was nothing else coming in. There was a few other girls went and they were cut off. We went over anyway to the Labour Exchange and told them we were at the sewing. So we went up and signed and we went over, even though there were the blackouts and the rationing and everything.

148 MM: Was that your first time away from home on your own?

149 LC: It was.

150 MM: It must have been quite frightening really, in a strange country in wartime.

151 LC: I don't know; I kind of got used to it after a few days. I was very much homesick for the first few days, and a couple of the girls said to me you won't stick it, we know by the look of you, but I did [laughs]. I couldn't go back, what was I going back to, you know? [laughs]

152 MM: So it wasn't that you were getting a better job, it was that it was a paid job when there was nothing here.

153 LC: That's it. You had to work and at that time, there wasn't anything. But I think it was a couple of months after that they started getting in, they got a big contract for the army, where I worked, and it kind of kept them going. I could have stayed or I could have went at that stage, but I was happier where I was. I liked England. So I stayed there until the war was over and then I came back.

154 MM: I suppose you knew the money was sure to last there?

155 LC: That's right, yes. So I stayed there till the war was over and they didn't need us.

156 MM: What was it like coming back?

157 LC: I didn't mind it. I went back to the job I was in before so I knew all the girls in it, like. Then I met my husband and got married [laughs].

158 MM: Coming back, was it hard after living away to come back and have your mother telling you what to do?

159 LC: No, I had a good [pause] no, it wasn't hard. She wasn't telling me really, and you could bring anyone in, she made everybody welcome, like. I made a few friends, like May, that were working with me and they used to come up regularly and we'd go out.

160 MM: Had they gone to England with you?

161 LC: Yes, where I worked in England.

162 MM: Have you stayed in touch with them?

163 LC: Well, she died and I don't know, I've heard the husband is bad but I don't know. You lose touch.

164 MM: Were you at school during the war years? [To Josie]

165 JW: I was at school, well, for a good while I was at school and then I left like that and went into the sewing, like Letty, that was all there was, like, when you left school at fourteen.

166 MM: What year was that?

167 JW: I would have left school about 1940.

168 MM: So it was still wartime?

169 JW: Oh yes, definitely.

170 MM: And were you able to get a job when you left?

171 JW: No, no, I wasn't. A bit of a job in Grafton Street and then it closed down. There was no work.

172 LC: There was no work.

173 JW: No, I was at home, most of the time, you know.

174 MM: So were you entitled to the dole or social welfare or had you not enough stamps if you hadn't been working?

175 JW: Oh, I was entitled to it, yes, but it was very small. I think it was something like about thirteen shillings at the time. Yes. That was all it was at that time. That was the social welfare, or whatever they called it at that time.

176 MM: So you were both very aware of the need to contribute to the family income?

177 JW: Yes, indeed, no doubt about it.

178 MM: And were you doing, as well as doing your job, were you doing work at home, in the sense of housework?

179 JW: Well, I wouldn't have been so much because I got very sick with TB at the time, and I was about four years in the sanitorium, which at the time [pause] there was an awful lot of people laid low with that, as you might know at the time, with the result then that I was four years away so I wasn't doing much at home. I had it in the hip and I was away four years there. I had to learn to walk again, after that. I would have been about eighteen when I got that, you know. Thank God I made a great recovery. I had wonderful care but at the time it was very hard.

180 MM: They were very important years?

181 JW: They were, it would have been from when I was about 18 to when I was about 22 or 24 I was there and it meant I'd no job or anything. But I got the thirteen shillings social welfare, whatever it was at that time, you know but I never worked after that. I got married and had four children after that. So that's Joan [laughs, indicating her daughter].

182 LC: You've five children [laughs] you're forgetting that, she's five of them [laughs again].

183 JW: I was married in 1953 and I never looked back. But at that time, there was an awful lot of people with ill health and at that time, in those years, when I was out in Crooksling – I think it's an old person's home or something now, it's closed.

184 MM: Did anybody else in the family get TB:

185 JW: No, nobody. You see [pause] I hadn't it in the chest even though I was sent out there, they were afraid, but it was in the hip, I had it in the hip. But that's how I wasn't working. I would have wanted to get a job but I just had to stop and when I came home then it took time to get back into everything after being away such a long time. But I pulled through, I got over it and as I say, for the time I got the best of care, the best of care.

186 MM: And were your family able to visit you?

187 JW: Oh golly, yes, every Sunday and on a Wednesday.

188 MM: It would have been hard enough without being isolated as well.

189 JW: I was on a frame for a year or two and after another year, I was kind of coming through it and I was learning to walk. I'd no power in the legs after being tied so long, you know? I spent about four years, four Christmases in it, and I never could get home. The other patients could get home but it depended on the way you were, you know, but like that now, I got great attention, I must say. Wonderful attention at the hospital, I really can't say enough for them. I really thought I could just get up off the frame and I'd be all right but it hadn't got any better, it had got worse. So they decided to operate then, in Jervis Street.

190 MM: Would you have been aware of the all the efforts of Dr. Noel Browne in relation to TB and trying to fight it?

191 JW: I was, yes, certainly it was all the talk of the place out there. And give him his due, he was a wonderful man, he got a pension then for the TB sufferers. They'd had nothing before that, nothing at all, and he forced all that through. He was a wonderful man, really, he was a wonderful man. He never stopped trying to help people. Really and truly, a grand man, he was, he deserves great credit. It's only people that had suffered like that and realised, realised what a great man he was, you know, really and truly.

192 MM: So you remember him clearly?

193 JW: Oh yes, he died there about two or three years ago. It could be more than that, the way time goes by, you know, but I remember that man well, coming out to see us and everything. He was a great man. And another great man was Mr. Murray from Jervis Street. He was wonderful man, too, the way they looked after us. Great people, they were, really, no doubt about it. Wonderful people they were. I had the operation in Jervis Street at the time and then went back there again for treatment.

194 MM: For physiotherapy?

195 JW: Yes, treatment. They were great because there wasn't much in those days, you know, everything was kind of rationed and scarce, you know, and only certain people got a bit of butter. I got butter on my dinner [laughs] and I got an egg every morning. Well, other patients didn't get that, you know.

196 MM: I've never understood, to be honest, why butter had to be rationed since there was so much of it being produced at home.

197 JW: Yes, well, there you are, at that time. I was lucky because I got the bit of butter for my dinner and I got the egg in the morning. Well, there was other people didn't get it, you know, and then I got a bit of chicken and other patients used to say, oh did you get chicken? [laughs] That was a sign you were going home, that meant you were dying, you know? [all laugh], Oh Josie, did you get the bit of chicken, you must be going home. There were all these kinds of jokes, I must say, they were all very happy people, I must say that, they were wonderful.

198 MM: I think people seem to have coped better with hardship then.

199 JW: They did, people are not able for hardship now. No, indeed, it was tough enough. We made a joke of it, like, you know.

200 LC: Yes.

201 MM: In one way, while things might have been bad, it seemed that people appreciated more what they had. Would you agree?

202 JW: It does good to some having it hard. It didn't worry you, like, you'd no money and that was that. Yes, and you'd to join a shoe club to buy a pair of shoes. You'd join the shoe club in Bolgers or somewhere, and you'd have to pay in over ten or twelve weeks to buy a pair of shoes. You'd be waiting on the shoes and then the club would start again. You'd join it again, maybe at 2s a week, then your number would come up again and maybe in another ten weeks you'd get another pair of shoes [laughs].

203 MM: So you expected that when you went to work your money would go into the family budget, that you wouldn't just have it for yourself?

204 JW: Oh yes, well that was the way it was. Oh, you came home with your money intact. I had 10s when I started first, and I'll always remember the 10s note. And I walked straight home, I wouldn't even get the bus. I'd walk from Grafton Street. I worked up in Grafton Street at a place called Tysons, and I'd walk from there right home to Cabra and I'd hand up that even 10s because I wouldn't even take the bus fare out of it.

205 MM: That reminds me of one of the women I interviewed in Belfast who told me the story of when she worked in Woolworths during the war. They used to work very late and one Christmas Eve she was there until one o'clock in the morning and she walked home. She wouldn't break her money to get a taxi home and she walked home in the dark. She wouldn't [pause] even though her mother said she should have broken it; she wouldn't do it without asking her.

206 JW: No, we were the same. I always remember, I would walk sometimes from Grafton Street at lunchtime down to the, like, it was the Pillar that was there at the time, and I'd get the number 10 bus as far as Doyle's Corner. I'd have to get out at Doyle's Corner because I wouldn't have the extra halfpenny to bring me up to Cabra. It was three halfpence to Cabra - a penny and a halfpenny and your penny would bring you to Doyle's Corner and if you hadn't got the other halfpenny, you'd get out and you'd walk. And then I used to meet Paddy Tracey and get a crossbar home [laughs]. I used to be delighted to see Paddy, and you know, I met him there after a couple of years and he said to me, ah Josie, I'd kiss you only I'm afraid I'd be arrested. You see the way things are gone. You know now, you can't even embrace a person, in case there was something weird or something. Says he, I'm afraid I'd be arrested [laughs].

207 MM: I take it he'd have given you a crossbar the rest of the way?

208 JW: Yes. Like, money was so scarce - it was so scarce.

209 MM: Yes, even people who were fairly well paid have remarked on how much more difficult it was to manage then.

210 JW: Yes, and that time you see, if people had houses or anything, you see there was mortgage and there was rates, and there was ground rent, you see.

211 LC: There was an awful outlay on a person's purse, there was really.

212 MM: Would you know, between your parents, how was the decision made to move to a purchase house?

213 JW: Oh it would have been my mother. She was in bad health in the North Strand, it was too damp for her and she suffered from her chest. She'd get very bronchial colds she'd get, and it was the doctor, Dr. Ryan who said she'd have to get out of the low lying district to get any relief. Which

she did, when she moved up to Cabra she did improve, you know, didn't she, Letty? Health wise she did, yes.

214 MM: How would they have gone about getting a mortgage?

215 JW: Oh she paid the rent, she paid the rent to the Corporation whatever it was at the time, eleven shillings I think, at the time, and she'd be paying it that way.

216 MM: One woman I've heard of, she was buying her house from the Corporation when her husband got very sick and just had a small disability pension coming in but she wouldn't give up because she wanted to buy the house out.

217 JW: Oh yes, she was buying it too, it was a purchased house, that was the way it was, you know. She bought the interest off [pause] there was another family in it before her, you know, and she took it over from them. An uncle left her a little bit of money and she put it down on the house, so it would be her house.

218 MM: And how would she have gone about furnishing it?

219 JW: Well, she had her own furniture from the other house, oh lord yes, from the time she was married.

220 MM: So when you two got married, how did you go about setting up your own homes? I take it you were still handing up your wages to your mother?

221 JW: Well, Mammy died in 1950, she died before I got married and Letty's still in the house. She and her husband went in there when they got married.

222 MM: So what about you?

223 JW: I moved out.

224 MM: Was your mother still around then?

225 JW: No, no, she was dead. I got married in 1953 and she was dead then. I moved down to Great Western Square, where I am still. My husband's father was an engine driver and they had one of the railway houses and that went like from father to son and eventually they sold the houses, the railway sold the houses, so everybody owns them now.

226 MM: Was your husband an engine driver?

227 JW: He was a fitter, in CIE, but still like those houses were only allotted to people who worked directly on the railway and he was more like the buses end, you know, but in the days before that the people had to get out. When they came to retirement they had to get out. Oh indeed, it was dreadful, they had to get out. They only got six months, six months and if they weren't out in six months their furniture was put out on the street. I remember seeing that as a young one, their furniture was put out if they weren't out in the six months. That's the way it was. Then eventually then the railway sold it to the people that were in it. So, I suppose the railway now is regretting it because they're getting any amount of money for them now. [Laughs] And CIE is always broke as you know. So they sold their gold mine. People are getting four hundred thousand now for them.

228 MM: It must have been very difficult when people were in that situation – social welfare was tiny and the old age pension was very small.

229 LC: Very small, yes, indeed, very small. The old age pension was very small.

230 MM: It was about ten shillings at the time.

231 LC: Ten shillings? Imagine trying to survive on that. It was a struggle.

232 MM: One difference that's become obvious to me between Dublin and Belfast is that at the end of the war [pause] where before the war conditions were much the same for ordinary people but there was more building going on down here, well all that stopped then and the situation changed and reversed.

233 JW: Exactly.

234 MM: And then after the war, it changed because Belfast was better off as Northern Ireland did better with social welfare and a huge building programme and new schools. Where we were going into the late 1940s and 50s with high unemployment and very little in the line of help from the state.

235 JW: It was nothing, nothing. But then, we were such a young country, you know, the money wasn't there after the British pulled out. And you know, the country is still very wrong. But some people, the older people weren't very much for the independence, they were more or less happy with the British. Some of the older generation, my mother's generation now, would say, and my husband's father's generation would say - my father-in-law would say, if they get their freedom they'll fight among themselves. And like, he was right, it happened in 1922, you know. And that's the way they thought about it. A lot of that age group thought about it like that.

236 MM: What do you think of Ireland's neutrality during the war and part of the reason that De Valera kept us neutral because it was a new nation and still trying to make a separate identity?

237 LC: De Valera used to come out against them and they'd say burn everything British but their ships and their coal [laughs]. There were all these sayings, you know, and the song about Sean McEntee and his half ounce of tea [laughs].

238 JW: He kept giving us the brown bread with the half ounce of tea, yes, and I'll always remember there was no fruit. I'll always remember the first time I smelled an orange, I thought it was the loveliest thing. I thought it was magnificent. Everything was gone, there were no oranges, no fruit of any description. And then the oranges came in and I'll always remember the smell of the orange, to this day, I remember the smell of the orange and I thought it was the loveliest smell I ever got.

239 MM: A woman who was talking to me was telling me about a woman bringing lemons into hospital and she remembers the smell and even now she remembers how she felt and it brings it all back to her.

240 JW: I remember I was in the Mater Hospital at the time and somebody came up to me and brought me the orange and it was absolutely wonderful. I hadn't had an orange for a couple of years, you know, and the bananas, they were wonderful. We had apples, we were all right for apples because we'd our own applies.

241 MM: The diet was probably healthier with such low fat, it was much better.

242 JW: There was no fat. Probably better.

243 LC: But there was no nourishment in it, that brown bread, there was no nourishment in it. People didn't want to eat it and the butter was rationed. Like the butter was six ounces each and there was six ounces of sugar and the ounce of tea.

244 JW: I remember on a Friday my mother would give all the rations out. Now make it do, she'd say, because you're not getting mine and we'd all get our little piece, you know. There was no much rationed. Were the sausages and rashers rationed?

245 LC: I can't remember, but probably.

246 JW: Letty had plenty of food but we hadn't here.

247 MM: The rationing was much stricter in Britain than here.

248 JW: And yet Letty had plenty over there, it was much better than here.

249 LC: I don't think so, because we used to have beautiful white bread, yes, we did. Anything I could get.

250 MM: Was this maybe because you were working in the munitions industry?

251 LC: It could be that - that we were getting the extra, like. It probably was that, because of the war work.

252 JW: Letty used to come home loaded for Christmas, you know.

253 Indecipherable section – much laughter.

254 MM: And were you able to travel every year for Christmas?

255 LC: Twice a year, yes, I was paid for it. I didn't have to pay, I got it twice a year. But if you went more than that you'd have to pay yourself, you know.

256 MM: So you'd no problems getting travel permits?

257 LC: Ah yes, you could but people didn't like travelling because of all the submarines. People wanted to stay at home. Like, you were all right coming across but a couple of times coming across, you'd be worried and you'd see the planes. It was just some times that things were bad. Everybody had someone who was bombed in England at that time, you know? They might be working or their families [pause] they were in the army.

258 JW: A lot of people like, just went off and were killed, you know?

259 MM: And was your brother okay?

260 JW: Oh like, he was great, he was three or four years in Palestine and he came back after. They were very good, he got a lot of money coming out and looked after him very well.

261 MM: Was he a pilot?

262 JW: No, he wasn't a pilot, he was on the ground, the ground staff, you know.

263 MM: So he got a good training?

264 JW: He did, yes, and he wanted for nothing. He came home and he was in the Holy Land and everywhere. He saw a lot of places and it was grand, you know.

265 MM: Did you know many people who joined up?

266 JW: There were a fair few. They went off and never came back, like, you know?

267 MM: And were they mentioned in the papers when this happened?

268 JW: No, I don't think so.

269 MM: I'm just thinking that the censorship here meant that war news didn't get into the papers, that the war was barely mentioned.

270 JW: Oh well, this was it, but it was all mentioned about Dev when he wouldn't give them the ports. I remember that he said they told him if he would give the ports … [Indecipherable for three minutes of tape]

271 MM: I was just wondering if, when you went to England, or anyone like your brother went to join the British forces, if they met any prejudice here in Dublin against doing that?

272 JW: No, not at all, they went off and they joined up and they have this memorial now and everything for them, do you see?

273 LC: Only lately, as you know. Most of them at that time they were glad to get the jobs. My brother now, most of the time he was out in Palestine and they had the sunshine all the time. He was always talking about that, he loved it, he loved the air force.

274 MM: Did he leave it at the end of the war?

275 JW: He did, he did after he came back. He got married to an Irish girl and had a family. He's still here.

276 [Indecipherable for five minutes of tape]

277 MM: Going back a bit to when you were still in school, what kind of education and training did you get in preparation for going to work?

278 JW: None, we just learned our lessons. The Irish was there and anything about work was never mentioned. We were all leaving at fourteen at that time but you looked after yourself from that on. We all left at fourteen. You could go to Parnell Tech.

279 LC: You could go to the Tech. That was over Parnell Street way and most of the people then went from that into the factories. A lot of them went into the factories because they had to pay at that time.

280 JW: There'd be very few going because you had to pay and they wouldn't have it, you know.

281 MM: A few of the women who've spoken to me tell me that they had done well in school and wanted to go on to secondary school but the money wasn't there.

282 LC: That's it.

283 MM: But if the money was there maybe to send one, the boys would be sent, on the basis that the girls were bound to be getting married and wouldn't need to work.

284 LC: Only girls went on to secondary school that were well off. Some got scholarships.

285 JW: Well, that those that got scholarships could go on but now, my two sisters in law went to secondary. They went on to secondary in Dominick Street, got their inter cert and everything, they did, and the two brothers, went on to Vincent's School.

286 MM: Would they have gone into office or white collar work?

287 JW: No, Michael went into [pause] he served his time as a fitter with C.I.E. and the other fellow went to serve his time as an electrician. They went on.

288 MM: And what did their sisters two following their secondary education?

289 JW: Well, they went on to be nuns after. But like, they had now [pause] one is a reverend mother now and the other girl died during the war. She was in Scotland and she went out to [pause] she was always out helping people in air raids and all that and she got pneumonia and never reported it. She remained out on duty, looking after the people that had been bombed, and then she went into a coma and she died. Now the other girl now, she's still now in France, in Rouen, she's a reverend mother there. But right, they had the education to pursue all that, you know? I still have their Inter certs and all at home, even though that's a long time ago. Forty something.

290 MM: Well, one woman [pause] in her family, the elder two girls had to go straight to work from primary school but the younger two went to secondary and got the education. The older two contributed and made it possible for the younger two to go on in school and they got better jobs.

291 JW: And easier jobs, you see. When you left at fourteen you only got hard jobs, like hotel work and all the sewing and that type of jobs, you got. You wouldn't even get into some of the shops, the drapers or anywhere. Otherwise you had to have the fees. I remember I had a friend, May Winston, and she went into Pyms and I remember her mother giving £50 and it was a fortune in those days. I'd another friend, Eugene Jones and the mother had to give £80 for him to get into Brown Thomas. He was at the linen counter and the fee that time was £80. It was a fortune in those days. And to get into C.I.E. to serve your time, you had to have £10 for your tools. My husband had to pay that, and that was in 1937 and £10 was a good bit of money at that time. You had to have £10 to make sure you had all your tools for the trade. I often remember the mother telling me that she had some kind of a policy with one of the insurance companies and she forfeited it to give him the money to get into the service. He went in first and he was only on the engines, and he gave it up, he said this is not for me. So he went into the fitting and he was a test fitter then in C.I.E. until he retired. He used to test all those buses; the country buses, he would test them all. [Pause] It's surprising the ups and downs you meet in life, but once you have your health you have everything. Once you have your health, things fall into place.

292 [Indecipherable]

293 MM: Would you have expected to have children soon after your marriage?

294 JW: Oh yes, Joan was born [pause]

295 LC: She never got a minute [laughs]

296 JW: I was married in August and Joan was born in the following July and then I had [pause] well, three years after, I had Willy, I think, then Mary, then Pauline, then Linda. And now they're all gone, married, left me. You know, they're all out on their own now. And as the time went by, you could see, like, times are much better now, they've got their own homes and as time went on, life got better for everybody. Better jobs, Joan went into the service and Mary's in the bank and Pauline is Health and Safety Officer in Beaumont and Willy was a printer. So the jobs and all came, the jobs seemed to come better. Everyone was better [pause] the jobs were better than what I had when I was young.

297 MM: It seems as if we're going backwards in that regard, though, that young people are back not being able to get their own homes.

298 JW: It's going back, nearly, to what we were. Now, Joan is lucky to have her house here [pause]

299 MM: We might have more money but many things are still out of reach.

300 JW: That's right, it's very hard to get established, very hard. Now Joan is here in Castleknock, and Linda married a farmer, she's out in Ballyboughal. He does Premier Milk, you know, but they're all [pause] they all got on well, you know, because there's a big difference from the way I was. Like the country has come on wonderfully, really, you know, everybody has improved. This generation – they're marvellous, really.

301 MM: One of the big differences that I'd be conscious of is that women in the 1940s accepted a very inferior position.

302 JW: They did.

303 MM: It was written into the Constitution but they laugh now at some of the things they accepted then, and think they were very naïve.

304 LC: But that was life then.

305 JW: And De Valera said he wanted a country of 'comely maidens', loads of children round the fire.

306 LC: [Laughs] When I said to that to Mary, what she said about De Valera wasn't worth saying. [Laughs] Mary's a big career woman. You'd want to be a comely maiden with your children with you, round the fire [laughs].

307 MM: She'd probably have been quite sympathetic to the debate that went on about the 1937 Constitution when it was being written. A lot of women's groups objected to the provision that put women into the home as if that was their only position but they were ignored at the time.

308 JW: Oh, that was your place there, at the cooker and the sink. [Laughs] The Children's Allowance came out, when the Children's Allowance came out. I don't know what year it came out in and it was 2s. I got – I didn't get anything for Joan. I got 2s for Willy, then I don't know what I got [pause] it was 1s and 6d after that for the rest. That's all the Children's Allowance was. Joan got nothing, she wasn't counted and Willy got 2s. 2s or a half a crown, that's all it was. Very little.

309 [Indecipherable]

310 JW: Then you see the credit unions got started around that time, which brought people up out of the poverty trap. They started to save in the credit union and they were able to borrow a few pound and pay it back at easy rates and things like that, you know? When I got married, I remember I had £6 - Michael gave me his wages and I thought it was marvellous [laughs]. That was 1953 and I'll always remember the browny kind of £5 note. He'd put it on the table and it was £6 a week, I remember.

311 MM: Did you discuss managing the money with your husband?

312 JW: Not really. He'd just put it on the table and say do your best with it. And out of that, then, I'd have to pay the mother the rent. I remember always giving her a £1, a green pound and a 10s note out of that, for the rent, because the loan had to be paid on the house. And the rates had to be paid and ground rent and that was a help, like. The mother and father were there. I remember when I got married, I went in to live there, you see, and that was the way it was.

313 MM: How did you manage then with your mother in law, sharing the house?

314 JW: We managed all right. Her and I got on very well, very well. We were happy there. It wasn't that everybody else had houses with washing machines and everything else and I hadn't that but I managed. I was happy and I'd five children and got on with it.

315 MM: Do you know the way your ration coupons were for particular shopkeepers, did you find that very difficult, that you couldn't search around for bargains?

316 JW: When she wanted tea my mother would go down to Moore Street and she'd go to the dealers. She'd hide behind the corner in case there was [indecipherable] …

317 You could get everything on the black market, everything.

318 LC: Outside your ration, anything you'd buy outside your ration.

319 MM: Even though it was a very small allowance?

320 JW: She'd still go down and get the tea. Then she'd measure that bit of tea out.

321 LC: When I was in England during the war, I'd be saving up the tea and I used to bring her over the tea [laughs].

322 JW: She used to bring it home because we'd no tea. She used to have to go down to Moore Street and watch around the corner until everything was clear and the tea would be given.

323 LC: And she'd write to me don't forget the tea [laughs]. That's when I'd be coming home, don't forget the tea.

324 MM: I thought mail was censored?

325 LC: Oh it was, I know. Sometimes I'd write to her and half the letter was gone. It might have been something [pause] just something about the war.

326 JW: Do you remember she sent, I always remember this, she sent you elastic for your knickers [laughs].

327 LC: [Laughs] And it was opened and she was sent for.

328 JW: Mammy was sent for to the Custom office or something. I'll always remember the Customs man and all. She said don't be ridiculous, it's only a bit of elastic for the girl's knickers [all laugh].

329 LC: There was such a commotion. [Laughs] They wouldn't open the parcel and she had to come down and open it and whatever. They knew what was in it but she had to open it and declare it. In front of all the men and she had to tell them what it was for – the girl's knickers had no elastic [laughs]. There was no elastic over there and they could it here, you know.

330 MM: I saw one document giving the different rations that were allowed for things, including women's underwear, and there were different points for different kinds of corsets. So if you were a very big woman and there were loads of bones in your corset, you were in real trouble with the points.

331 JW: And they wore the corsets at that time.

332 MM: They did, yes, but they went into incredible detail about how things were rationed.

333 LC: They had to be like that. The letters would be opened, and parcels, like that. I'll always remember the elastic, the way she was sent for and she was saying, what do they want me for, you know? And like, she had to go down to some office and declare it because they wanted to know what was in the parcel.

334 MM: I'm sure it was very worrying.

335 JW: Yes, at that time and that's all it way, the elastic. And is that all you brought me down for, she said [laughs] a bit of elastic for my daughter's knickers [laughs].

336 [Indecipherable]

337 MM: And do you remember the turf stacks in the Phoenix Park?

338 JW: Oh yes.

339 MM: And did you have to go up there to collect it or was there some arrangement for delivery?

340 JW: I don't know now, I think it came around with a man on a cart. It was always soaking, most people couldn't use it, it would be so smoky.

341 MM: I believe it was flea ridden as well.

342 LC: Oh yes. I remember a man, he worked in C.I.E. and whatever part of it he was in he'd pick up the bits of coal from the trains, and I remember he was using the lining of his coat, to put bits of coal down the lining of the coat and he'd be walking from side to side with the coal.

343 JW: He'd be bringing home the coal from the railway for a bit of fire. That's the only way he could get a bit of coal and everybody used to see him coming.

344 MM: They'd all know?

345 LC: Oh yes [laughs].

346 JW: It was the way that people would manage, you'd have to provide.

347 MM: And did you use the straw box for cooking?

348 JW: No, we didn't use it but people did, people used them. They used to be smoking out in the gardens; they were terrible. It was nearly like [pause] they'd try to cook on that and the gardens would smell like I don't know what, outside, from the burning of the straw. I think they used to let us use the gas on Sunday. I always remember the smell of the roast on Sunday, a bit of roast beef. I think they used to allow a certain amount of gas extra on Sunday. Even though we weren't at war, we might as well have been.

349 LC: Sure we'd have been better off at war.

350 JW: You see, nothing was coming in, the boats and that. I think most of our foodstuff was going to England. Things were so scarce.

351 MM: Well, I must say I've never understood why some things, like butter, for instance, were rationed, when they were produced here. I know a woman, who was working in the Ministry of Supplies, and mainly she was dealing with shopkeepers and people who were licensed to sell rationed goods, but she said they had to be very strict about keeping people within the limits.

352 JW: Oh yes, that's right. The shops and all were terrified to give anything extra, you know.

353 MM: I've gone through a lot of the documents where they set out the various rations and I can see why petrol would have been rationed.

354 JW: Yes, that was rationed too. There was a lot of other stuff, like nylon stockings, now, there was nothing like that until the war ended. And fruit, that was very scarce. Then they started to come in, you know - because the boats weren't coming in during the war.

355 MM: One woman told me a story of how her mother had dried fruit to make a Christmas pudding, and she'd left the mixture to stand overnight. But the children were picking out the raisins and stirring it to hide what they took. Then when it was boiled she just said that she thought she had put much more fruit in it – they'd all eaten nearly all the dried fruit out of it.

356 LC: Oh yes, of course.

357 MM: It stuck in her mind because it was so difficult to get fruit.

358 JW: You would remember that, of course, it would stick in your mind. I've never forgotten the smell of the oranges. And now, I often have orange juice in the morning and I'd squeeze a fresh orange every morning and that scene comes back to me all the time. [Indecipherable]

359 JW: You'd never not do what your mother would tell you, never. And your mother would only have to look at you. My mother would only have to look and you'd know you were doing wrong.

360 MM: Your mother was obviously a very strong person, standing in for your father as well when he was away. Would that have been true of other families as well?

361 JW: Well, most of them, yes. The mothers kind of [pause] they were at home but they kept things going. [Pause] You had to be in early and you had to say where you were [pause] although when mine were growing up they had to do it too and that's not that long ago. Michael, their father, would watch everything. Watch the clock, watch everything, he wanted them to do their best in everything. He was like that, very much so, yes. I used to think he was a bit hard and I remember my sister in law used to say to me, well they have to be afraid of one of you. He'd come in at five o'clock and he'd look where they were, and if they weren't there, he'd go out around the square looking for them, especially in the night was dark. He wouldn't even take a cup of tea, he'd go round and see where they were. They'd be in then after that. We'd a little park in the square, you know, and they'd say now, they remember the night when they were climbing on the railings and someone would say, quick, there's your daddy, quick [laughs]. And you know, he caught them climbing over the gate of the park and there was murder over it, they weren't to do that. I think today with the kids, they're not corrected enough, I do. They're not corrected enough, the children; they're very spoiled.

362 LC: They're let run wild.

363 JW: I remember he used to say them, when they'd be doing their exercises, and he'd say don't be bothering about these languages, he'd say, you must concentrate on maths, Irish and English and after that, it's pounds, shillings and pence. [All laugh] that was philosophy.

364 MM: And do you think that the mother plays an important part in the children's education?

365 LC: I do, yes, because the mother watches them all the time, she's there all the time with them. It's the mothers they run to when there's anything wrong with them, if they're in trouble and all that, and they're afraid of the fathers. I always imagine the father seems very strict to them, they'd rather have the mother. The mothers are softer.

366 [Indecipherable]

367 JW: Because the fathers are gone more.

368 MM: I suppose that could make them seem a bit remote.

369 JW: Yes, yes. I don't think being strict did them any harm, they've never done anything wrong, you know? They studied and they did well and they're out on their own now. You're always afraid of boys getting into rows, you know, but lately it has gone very vicious, with the rows.

370 LC: The young people are gone very rough; I think the drink goes to their heads. That's the trouble with boys, they don't know their own strength and if they start fighting, it's very hard [pause]

371 JW: And they're able to get the drink, even if they're young. Even teenagers, they're able to get the drink. Like, they're not supposed to be served but they get it. I think the trouble is they can get those cans very easily and they don't know what they're dealing with. I think those cans are too easily got and know one knows what they are and [pause] they react to them.

372 LC: Sure, they're just water.

373 JW: No, they're not, divil the water.

374 MM: Do you think that Ireland has changed a lot in the sixty years since the war?

375 JW: Oh yes, an awful lot.

376 MM: Would there be any single thing that stands out for you in that time that might have caused those changes?

377 JW: Like for the good of the country do you mean?

378 MM: Well, for good or bad.

379 JW: Well, I think there's too much freedom to drink and I do think those cans are dangerous because children can get them and it's so easily got, no one can watch them. I think that was an awful mistake, letting children have access to drink.

380 LC: Our generation didn't have a drink.

381 JW: You'd lie down dead if your parents thought you were having a drink. I think too what really was a sad thing was the dance halls going. I do think that.

382 LC: Yes, the dance halls were lovely.

383 JW: Where are the young people to go to now?

384 LC: They've nowhere to go, only the pub.

385 JW: That's the only entertainment now, the pub. And I think the dance halls were lovely, you know? It was a lovely night's entertainment. It's a pity, but when the dance bands went [pause] but even then, there were still bands [pause] the Arcadia in Bray, the Balalaika, all these. And there was never any trouble, no rows or anything. And there was the Mansion House, the ceilidh on the Saturday night.

386 MM: That's a restaurant now where the Round Room used to be.

387 JW: Oh dear, I never knew that.

388 **[Joan enters with tea and interview ends.]**

Elizabeth (Lily) and Nancy, Falls Road, Belfast. Interview: 30th November 1996.

1 NM: My name is Nancy Murphy. I was born in 1921, on the 2nd December. Tomorrow's my birthday. We were born in Serbia Street off the Falls Road.

2 EC: My name is Elizabeth Collins and I was born on the 28th August 1924. I was always called Lily.

3 MM: When you were growing up, was it just the two of you?

4 EC: No, here were six of us - three boys and three girls.

5 MM: The same as my family. Where did you go to school?

6 NM: I went to Guildford Street.

7 MM: How long did you stay there?

8 EC: Until we were fourteen years of age. You stopped school on Friday and started work on Monday. You went into [pause] the Blackstaff Mill, yes the Blackstaff.

9 MM: What sort of work did you do?

10 NM: I was a winder, in the Blackstaff.

11 MM: Did you get training when you went in there?

12 NM: Just somebody was put beside you and taught you [pause] you were always put beside somebody to learn you, you know. It depended on yourself really.

13 MM: And when you started work, were you in the same place?

14 EC: Yes, we were in the same place.

15 NM: Then I went into the Queen's University, just to clean and we were cleaners in the Queen's University. I would start at seven.

16 MM: When you were in the mill, did you have to start early in the morning?

17 NM: Eight o'clock. You started at eight and went to six o'clock and you worked from eight to twelve on Saturday. We got a lunch time from one to two.

18 EC: You'd see the whole road down, all the girls coming home for their dinner. Then you finished for the day at six o'clock. You worked from eight to twelve on a Saturday.

19 MM: That was a long enough week. Did you get any holidays during the year?

20 NM: Just the one. We got one holiday, the twelfth of July, you got the twelfth and thirteenth. We just got the two days and you weren't paid for them. [Laughs] They were queer times then.

21 MM: I presume that living round here [the Falls Road] that most people were Catholics?

22 EC: Oh yes, they were.

23 MM: Well, how would you have felt about having to take the time off without pay for an essentially Protestant holiday? The twelfth of July of all days?

24 NM: You had to take it off. There was no way you could pick your holidays now - you just had to take the twelfth and thirteenth.

25 MM: Was this true of the 1940s?

26 NM: During the war? Oh aye.

27 MM: Did you work the same hours then?

28 EC: We worked till nine o'clock at night. Aye that was for the war, you know, for parachutes, stuff for parachutes, nylon, things like that.

29 MM: When you started work when you were fourteen, what were you paid?

30 NM: My first pay was seven and eight pence.

31 EC: Mine was the same. We were paid the same rate.

32 MM: So was there any difference between the rates paid before and during the war?

33 NM: Well, you made your own pay then. You could be doing six or seven hours overtime whenever there was a big order on for the war. Lord have mercy on my mother, she used to say the men weren't much for bringing in the money. The men on the street were working for the Relief and then they got a chit for boots but they weren't bringing much home for the children.

34 MM: So did you bring home your money?

35 EC: You handed up your money. [Laughs} You wouldn't not hand it over.

36 MM: Were you given anything to spend for yourself?

37 NM: Oh aye, you got maybe a half a crown, you were lucky if you got a half a crown. After all, you had to buy maybe a wee smoke then, you know what I mean? Well, cigarettes were cheap, they were five for three pence.

38 MM: Did your mother decide how the money would be spent?

39 EC: There'd be no nonsense about it. Not like now. You gave your mother your money and if you were lucky you got some back.

40 MM: How old were you when you were doing this?

41 EC: Nancy was a married woman [pause] my mother died when I was fourteen. So my mother's sister took us over. She reared us then from when I was fourteen. You [Nancy] weren't married a year when my mother died. She died on Christmas Eve and my aunt Marie took us over. You got your pay and you'd give your money in. You didn't open it; you'd have been afeared to open it. You know what I mean? Now don't get me wrong, she was the best, my aunt was the best and my mother, but I mean it wasn't that they were strict but you knew not to do them things. You know what I mean?

42 MM: And your brothers, would they also have handed up their money?

43 EC: Oh yes.

44 MM: How long did you stay living at home.

45 EC: I wasn't married.

46 NM: I was married. I was at home till then.

47 MM: And up until that time had you never managed your own money even to give you experience of doing it?

48 NM: The week before you were married you gave your mother your money. She'd give you back a wee bit of it.

49 MM: So what did you do about saving to get married?

50 NM: Well, he saved. He had to save. And then there was no houses and I went to Leo's family and they let us have a room with them. And Leo found [pause] a week before I was married his brother got a house and he wanted to share it so I went into two rooms in that. You were very lucky when you got two rooms. I was very lucky the way things happened that I got the two rooms.

51 MM: Were you still working at this stage?

52 NM: Oh yes. I worked for a year after I was married and up to the time for my baby. I had four children.

53 MM: And were you still in the two rooms with the four children?

54 NM: No, eventually Leo's brother went away and we got the house. And Leo was able to pay the rent then.

55 **[Indecipherable section]**

56 MM: Lily, you stayed at home?

57 EC: I stayed at home. My aunt lived till she was ninety and I stayed with her. I left seven years before that to mind her. I never got a halfpenny, I never got a halfpenny from anywhere. You couldn't, see, when you were looking after people, you couldn't work.

58 MM: Even though you were saving the State the cost of caring for your aunt?

59 EC: You wouldn't have got nothing. I looked after her for seven years.

60 MM: How old were you ?

61 EC: I must have been in my thirties. Seven years I was with her. I just looked after her and the house. But then I went back into the mill again after the seven years.

62 MM: Seven years was a long time with no income.

63 EC: Anything she had, she kept for me for they had disallowed me, you know, for looking after her. She got her pension and then I had to go down every few weeks and renew it, you know, and get a stamp off the pension.

64 MM: So that means that you had no savings for yourself either?

65 EC: No, because I'd nothing coming in. Your mother, she'd kept your money, or your aunt, there was nobody else there to do it, you know what I mean?

66 NM: People didn't have much then so you got your wages and that just kept you. People didn't have over and above that, you just lived under it.

67 EC: Everybody, you were all the same like, everybody's troubles the same. They're all keeping up with the Joneses now - you know what I mean? Now we were just [pause] always to good food on the table, and always a good fire and always a good bed. All was comfort and all was clean, no grandeur now, there was no style but you were always comfortable.

68 NM: My man was only earning twenty two pounds eighty a week when he died in the seventies and we had that for everything. He was always sure of what he spent and nothing over.

69 MM: Would that have been different to your neighbours, what they could earn?

70 NM: No, not really, no. We were all the same and we shared what there was. It was very, very often that you'd get help from a neighbour one time and then you'd return it another when they needed it.

71 EC: They'd close the door on you now. But we now [pause] we looked out for the neighbours and they looked out for you. If your mother had been making soup, she'd have brought us in a bowl of soup. If we had of been making soup, we'd have brought you in a bowl. Oh yes, it was just sharing and everyone did it.

72 NM: My mother would have loaned money if she had it and then when they got their payday they've give it back and if she needed it, they'd lend it to her. That was the way people went.

73 EC: They were better days than what they are now.

74 MM: Do you think people everywhere are more selfish now?

75 EC: Oh yes. They're all, if you have that I'll get bigger than you. I see it that way. You're younger than me; I see it that way. I see a terrible change in the people in the world now. Everybody's out to get one another, they'd shut their door on you now.

76 NM: In those days, if anybody couldn't help a neighbour they'd send you on but with a good word and then after that, if they could help you or do you a good turn, they would remember.

77 **[Indecipherable section]**

78 MM: What about the wider community? If that was how it was in your street, would it have applied to neighbours in the area but maybe further afield?

79 EC: You'd stay in your own area you know. Although maybe there was some man died and people would know he wasn't in a society and they'd come round the door and lift it for them. The burial wasn't as dear as it now.

80 NM: My mother had no grave. She was the last of her family and they couldn't afford to buy a grave so she would have been helped to buy a grave.

81 MM: Who would have helped with it - he neighbours or the church?

82 NM: The Church would have helped you out then. There was the St. Vincent de Paul. They helped people out.

83 MM: Who was in the St. Vincent de Paul? Was that local people?

84 EC: They were local people - that's right.

85 NM: They were a cut above everybody else, of course. No them people only came if you were in dire need [pause] they'd give you money for groceries or give you money for clothes or anything.

86 MM: Was there any suggestion that people would get together to change conditions in the area rather than just helping out in times of dire need?

87 EC: No, not in our day. If you'd had a collection then people knew you were poor and you maybe wouldn't want that.

88 MM: What about in the workplace? Were you members of a trade union?

89 NM: There was one woman, she was a Union woman and she was taking money for the girls ... she was sacked. She went somewhere else. Her forewoman was against it.

90 MM: She got fired? What did she do after that, could she get another job?

91 NM: She went somewhere else. There was foremen that was for that and there was foremen that was against it. Well our man was against it – he didn't like the Union. But I'm sure she got a job somewhere else.

92 MM: Was it a well known thing that your employer was against union membership? What about the men, did they ever try to get unionised?

93 NM: There was never no men, there was all women working in our mill.

94 MM: Would there have been women managers?

95 NM: Just forewomen, there was forewomen over us and there was the boss then.

96 MM: Could women from the shop floor have been promoted? What did you have to do to be made a forewoman?

97 NM: Maybe a worker would have been promoted, that's right, but that was all, they didn't get any further.

98 EC: You could be a forewoman but like, you didn't just walk into that job like. You had to know so and so, to get that job, you know what I mean? You didn't just automatically go onto that. I think they didn't really get enough money for that job either. They didn't get much extra money and you were always being called an old so-and-so for doing that job. You weren't one of us [laughs].

99 MM: I've read accounts of the mill girls singing as they'd walk up and down the road to work? Do you remember anything like that?

100 NM: Oh aye. I remember going up the Falls Road and they sung going down the road, didn't they, a row of them. It was very good right enough. Some lovely girls there were, too, there were some lovely girls and always with a song. And always with a song: You'd easy know a dopper. That was a mill song, so it was, and they sung going down the road. That road was black, you wouldn't see anything in the morning.

101 EC: But they were all from the spinning end of it, you see, we were a wee cut above them, see, we weren't spinners. But the spinners did that, going along singing.

102 MM: Did you feel that your work was easier or why did you think it made you better?

103 EC: Well, we worked in a dry place. You see the spinners went in their bare feet and all, you know, but our place was always dry.

104 **[Indecipherable section]**

105 MM: Were you affected by air raids during the war, I mean did you have to be evacuated?

106 EC: We were up here; we were evacuated up here. We'd come up after nine o'clock at night and walk from here down into the mill in the mornings.

107 MM: This was the end of the Falls Road where you're living now? That must have been tough going. Was there no public transport?

108 EC: No. Just walking and you had to be in at eight o'clock. You had no choice. We just wandered off down, that was all. You had to work and that was all.

109 NM: My first child, my daughter, she was born on the 3rd May and the last blitz was the 4th May. And she was born in Arizona Street [pause] well I wasn't in my own house; I was in another house. I couldn't stay there - it was frightening but you didn't look at it like that, everybody done it. We went into the street but like, it wasn't you.

110 MM: Did your husband help at the birth?

111 NM: He was working; he was a barman. In fact, we were evacuated just before the birth. He got home and he was in the bar the night before and he didn't know about Hannah till the next morning.

112 MM: Did you give birth to your other children at home?

113 NM: You never went to hospital. I never went to hospital, I had four, five. You booked your midwife after you knew you were pregnant and after that, she would come. Only in strict circumstances, you would call a doctor. You couldn't afford a doctor.

114 MM: Would your mother also have given birth at home?

115 EC: Yes. Everybody did in those days.

116 **[Indecipherable section]**

117 EC: We were reared comfortable but there was hunger too.

118 MM: Were you ever aware of any moves by politicians or other public figures who might be trying to improve things in the neighbourhood? I'm thinking about Nationalist politicians like Joe Devlin, for instance.

119 NM: We didn't bother about politics, no, you'd be too busy trying to look after the children and keep the house, you know. I never heeded it till the Troubles come.

120 EC: You'd know the people come to visit you and you'd pay your respects to them like, but you'd never ask them what they come from, no.

121 MM: Were there any particular aspects of the war that had an impact on your lives, apart from the bombing raids?

122 EC: The rationing – I'll never forget the rationing. You couldn't get anything.

123 MM: Other women I've spoken to told me about smuggling things up from the South? Did you ever do anything like that?

124 EC: We went to Dublin on the train once. We were up there one day and her young lad [Nancy's] - the curtains, you couldn't get curtains here, she wanted a door curtain for one of the wee houses, down where we used to live, and we wrapped a bit around him, ended up we were coming from the train

and he was going along with a big lump of curtain hanging down. And the men seen him, the Customs men was looking at him, as much to say look what you left behind. Oh aye, lots of stuff was brought through at that time. That was all, you bought it and they took it off you and that was that.

125 MM: You mean that they confiscated goods at the Customs?

126 NM: Yes, you'd have people coming in with all sorts of things wrapped round them and if the Customs caught them they'd have to take off all the coats and skirts they were bringing and leave them.

127 MM: Did you ever smuggle food – like butter and other things that didn't seem to be as scarce in the South?

128 NM: People did that all right.

129 EC: My friend got tea for her mother. But the blackout was awful. You weren't allowed out, I was allowed out because I had a pass for work, but you couldn't see a thing in front of you.

130 [Remainder of interview (about ten minutes) was indecipherable because of the noise of the washing machine.]

Marie Rea, Castlewellan. Interview: 6 August 1999.

1 MM: Could you give me just some details about yourself, where and when you were born and what sort of family you were born into?

2 MR: Well, I was born in Belfast. You want when - 1930. So I'm 69 and I was born into[pause]my father was a master slater, a roofer. My mother didn't work. She was originally a handkerchief stitcher but she didn't when I was born.

3 MM: Where in the family were you?

4 MR: I was the oldest of eight, I have four sisters and three brothers.

5 MM: Okay, well, you're[pause]was your father always in work?

6 MR: He was mostly in work. Now, during the war there wasn't a lot of roofing going on so he did work building air raid shelters and eh, he did go to London to work for a time, during the war. He actually was in London when the doodlebugs were coming over [laughs] I remember that, you know.

7 MM: And in terms of your own education, when did you start school and what kind of school was it?

8 MR: Oh, I went to [pause]well, I suppose you would call it primary school, I can't remember now. I started school around five, I think, and left when I was fourteen. Then I went into a job as a stitcher, making ladies underwear.

9 MM: Was that in a local factory?

10 MR: It was, yes, in a local factory.

11 MM: And how did you get into that? Did somebody introduce you?

12 MR: Yes, a friend of ours brought me in as a trainee.

13 MM: And would that have been the usual thing for girls who went into the factory?

14 MR: Yes, mostly girls went into the mills or the stitching factories.

15 MM: Before your mother got married was she working in one of the factories or had she done something else?

16 MR: My mother worked in a handkerchief factory; they made handkerchiefs. She was doing the same sort of stuff, yes.

17 MM: So you were fifteen and you presumably did do a full day's work.

18 MR: Oh yes.

19 MM: What were your hours?

20 MR: Nine till five.

21 MM: Were there many people from the area who were going into the factory?

22 MR: Almost all of my friends were in the factories, as stitchers.

23 MM: What sort of training did you get?

24 MR: We were taught to use the machines. The factory I worked in was as I said, making underwear, ladies underwear. We were taught to use the plain stitch machine; we were also taught to use the overlocking machine, the buttonholing machine and buttoning machine.

25 MM: When you were in and you were trained, were there different rates of pay for before you were trained?

26 MR: Oh yes, we were trainees.

27 MM: How long did that last?

28 MR: I think about a year, and then we were put on to whatever product was being produced.

29 MM: The rates of pay for trainees – was there much of a difference when you were fully trained?

30 MR: Well, actually, when you were a stitcher, a qualified stitcher, you were paid according to the work you'd done. You got so much per dozen.

31 MM: Piece work?

32 MR: Yes, piece work.

33 MM: Were there male employees in the factory?

34 MR: There were, but not on the machines. They were mechanics and cutters, cutting out the garments, they were men, and the managers were all men. But the stitchers were all women.

35 MM: Was there ever a possibility that a woman could become a cutter?

36 MR: No, they were all men.

37 MM: Did the women resent that?

38 MR: I don't think so. I think it was just accepted. It was just accepted that the men did the cutting and the women did the sewing. [laughs]

39 MM: So would cutting have been considered more skilled than sewing.

40 MR: Oh yes.

41 MM: So they would presumably have been paid more.

42 MR: Oh yes, they were.

43 MM: Would you have any idea of the difference in the rates?

44 MR: I wouldn't have any idea what the men were paid but it was always more than the women.

45 MM: I've come across some industries where the difference was as much as half again what the women were paid.

46 MR: Oh yes, it would be.

47 MM: Were there any benefits in addition to the basic pay? For instance, was there a pension scheme?

48 MR: Well, we paid our national insurance which was the sick pay scheme but there was no pension scheme.

49 MM: In the workforce, would there have been women with children?

50 MR: There were married women, but not very many. They were mostly single women.

51 MM: Was that a management policy, to hire single women?

52 MR: No, I think they chose to leave when they got married. I don't think they were encouraged to leave.

53 MM: Did you become active as a union representative in the factory?

54 MR: No, I got married and then I didn't work for quite a while. Then I went into the Royal Victoria Hospital to work and it was then I got interested in the trade union.

55 MM: Back in the factory, was there an active union?

56 MR: I don't think so. I don't remember but I don't think so.

57 MM: You don't remember ever being asked to join a union at that time?

58 MR: No, no.

59 MM: How long did you stay there in the factory?

60 MR: I was a stitcher for seven years.

61 MM: And then you left to have children?

62 MR: Yes, yes.

63 MM: You made a conscious decision to give up work?

64 MR: When my children were coming. Well I did work for about two years after I got married and then the children were born.

65 MM: Was there an option for you to continue work? Did the factory provide childcare?

66 MR: Oh no, there was nothing like that.

67 MM: Who did look after children for women who were unable to give up working?

68 MR: I think in those days, mostly grandmothers looked after the children. I don't remember ever hearing about childminders or that, you know. Mostly family looked after children.

69 MM: I know there was a push during the war to provide nurseries.

70 MR: Probably, I would think in the munitions factories during the war, they had government childcare provided so the women would go into them, the factories, you know to do the war work. But other than that, I don't remember.

71 MM: When you started off, did you have to walk to work or …?

72 MR: Oh yes, you had to walk to work [laughs].

73 MM: Was it near or did you have far to go?

74 MR? Actually, when I worked in my first job, we went on the bus.

75 MM: Did you get many breaks during the day?

76 MR: Just lunchbreak, I think. Half an hour for lunch.

77 MM: Were you able to get home for lunch?

78 MR: No, we just brought a sandwich.

79 MM: Was your mother still at home?

80 MR: She was, yes.

81 MM: And you were the first out to work of your family?

82 MR: I was the first yes.

83 MM: When you started work, did you have control of your pay packet?

84 MR: Oh I handed it over to my mother. Unopened! [laughs]

85 MM: And did your mother give you back anything?

86 MR: Yes, I think she gave me a shilling. [laughs]

87 MM: So you were mother was still the one who decided what would happen with the money.

88 And your father was working at this time?

89 MR: He was working, yes. He gave up his pay packet unopened too.

90 MM: When you were finishing school would you have liked not to have to go straight to work? Would you have liked to go to secondary school?

91 MR: Well, actually I would have loved to have gone but I was the eldest of eight so I had to go out to work.

92 MM: Of the eight, was there was any difference made in terms of boys and girls, whether they went on to work?

93 MR: No, the boys were put into trades. Tom, the one that came next to me[pause]I was first then there were three boys then the four girls. Tom, the oldest boy, he became a roofer like my dad. Then the next one he became a heating engineer and the third one became a roofer as well. The girls all went into factories.

94 MM: Did they stay there until they got married?

95 MR: They did, yes.

96 MM: When you say you would have like to on to school …

97 MR: I would have loved to have gone on.

98 MM: This would have been, what [pause]about 1944?

99 MR: 1945. No 1944. I left school at fourteen.

100 MM: Was it a while then before you went into the factory?

101 MR: No, no. I went in the next week [laughs]. Finished school then went straight into work, yes. I actually did an examination, which was called the elementary examination back then, I was thirteen, thirteen and a half and I got honours in it and I would have loved to have gone on to school but there wasn't any choice. The money was needed.

102 MM: What about later? When the eight were taken care of, was there any opportunity for you to maybe go back to school at night?

103 MR: No. Well I never thought [pause]I got married then I was bringing up my family but I did a lot of summer schools and things with the trade union and I went to art class at night. You can see some of my work here [laughs]. And I did do some classes. Even now, I'd love to do languages, you know. My son lives in Germany and when I'm over there I want to learn German [laughs].

104 MM: I tried but the grammar was beyond me [laughs].

105 MR: Yes, I know.

106 MM: Would any of your girlfriends at school would they have been in the factory with you. And did any of them consider not going out to work?

107 MR: No, everybody went out to work.

108 MM: So, the area of Belfast where you were living, would it have been in the morning, all the doors opening and everybody going out to work. And there were linen mills in the area?

109 MR: Yes, my house was actually quite near the linen mill.

110 MM: How would the work in the factory compare to the linen mill? Would it have been much harder in the mill?

111 MR: Well, I have always been told that it was much harder to work in the mill so luckily yes, I've never had the experience. But people say that it was quite hard to work in the mill.

112 MM: I've spoken to two women who worked in the mill and they say it depended on where you were put.

113 MR: Yes, which department.

114 MM: Would that have been the case in the sewing factory, that some areas would be harder than others?

115 MR: No, not really, no. I don't think so. It was all stitching. There was the cutting, of course, but the men did that. There was the stitching and then there was examining. There was a squad of people who examined the work when you had finished it. And there was the ironing and the packing.

116 MM: They were all quite skilled?

117 MR: They were, yes. There wasn't any nasty jobs really.

118 MM: Would you know if they were regulated by trade board, or anything?

119 MR: I wouldn't really, no.

120 MM: So you said the bosses were male. What sort of numbers are you talking about? Was it a big factory?

121 MR: The first factory I went into, yes, it was a big factory. Now we had maybe the ones were over you, in the team, were women but the managers, all the managers were men.

122 MM: When you say the team, would there be maybe, what, ten or eleven workers and a supervisor?

123 MR: There would be a row of sewing machines, and then you know, one row[pause]I actually worked in a shirt factory after I worked in the underwear factory and em, there would a row doing collars and there would be someone over that row. There would be another row doing front and another row doing backs and another row doing sleeves. You know, so there were supervisors over each piece of the garment that was being made.

124 MM: If a woman went in as a sewer and she was put on sleeves, would that be where she would stay so long as she was working in the factory?

125 MR: Yes, if you were on sleeves, that's where you were. Maybe, you know, if you asked, you could go on to fronts or collars, but it was all the same work, really.

126 MM: So who put the whole garment together, was that another job? Was it at the same level?

127 MR: Yes, that was still the same level.

128 MM: And would you remember if any woman ever applied for a managerial position?

129 MR: No, I wouldn't if any woman ever applied. I think then, you know, it was just accepted that the men were managers and the women were the workers. [laughs]

130 MM: Would you know where the men came from who were managers? Would they have worked their way up through the factory or were they hired in from outside?

131 MR: I think they probably were employed from outside. Now I have a brother in law, he was a sewing machine mechanic. Actually a sewing machine mechanic in a factory that I worked in making ladies underwear, and he worked his way from being a sewing machine he went to classes to learn to make garments and then he became a manager.

132 MM: So it was possible to do it?

133 MR: It was possible to do it, yes, but not for women. [laughs]

134 MM: When you went back to work after having your children, in the hospital, what work did you then?

135 MR: Catering.

136 MM: And did you get the job because of your experience in the home?

137 MR: Yes.

138 MM: Were you otherwise qualified?

139 MR: No, no. I knew how to do it because I had cooked at home.

140 MM: And how did you come to be involved in the trade union?

141 MR: Well, I was always very involved in people getting their rights, even though they weren't in a trade union and then I was asked to become a shop steward and [pause] I was very shy [laughs]. I really was and but then I said I will, I will do it so I became a shop steward.

142 MM: Was there a family background of trade union activity?

143 MR: Funny enough, there wasn't, but my brother in America, he became a trade unionist and his two sons are both trade unionists.

144 MM: But you're not aware of any history?

145 MR: No.

146 MM: Of your family, did many of them emigrate, go to America?

147 MR: My brother and sister.

148 MM: Would that have been straight out of school?

149 MR: No, no.

150 MM: What about the others, what did they do?

151 MR: Well, they're all in Northern Ireland. I've one son who is in Germany but his brothers and sisters are all here.

152 MM: Just going back, in the[pause]when you were going out to work in the sewing factory, would that have been the total range of occupation available, the factory or the linen mill?

153 MR: Some of the men went to England but they went as construction workers. A lot of women worked in the hospitals as domestics. I actually knew women who worked in the hospitals and in those days, they actually had to get down on their knees and scrub the corridors. The women, who lived in my street, you know, my friends' mothers worked in hospitals as domestics.

154 MM: Was there a good neighbourhood network in your street? Would people help each other?

155 MR: Oh yes, people were very good.

156 MM: It seems to be that working class areas were better at looking after each other.

157 MR: Yes, that's right. They were very good at looking after each other.

158 MM: If maybe there wasn't a grandmother to look after children, would neighbours do that?

159 MR: Oh yes, and you know there was always a woman in most streets and if anyone was sick you went for her. [Laughs] Childbirth and everything. Mrs. Craig it was in our in our street and when you were sick everyone went for Mrs. Craig.

160 MM: Was that because Mrs. Craig had some training or was she just trusted?

161 MR: No, she wasn't trained, but childbirth [pause] if anyone died, you know, everyone went for her.

162 MM: Was she an older woman?

163 MR: Yes, she was slightly older, but not much.

164 MM: Have you any idea how she came to be in that position?

165 MR: No. Actually, she was a girl I went to school with it[pause]her mother. She was very good.

166 MM: Would she have come in[pause]would women have given birth at home?

167 MR: Oh yes, we were all born at home. Yes.

168 MM: And what would have been the procedure? Would a doctor come in or just Mrs. Craig?

169 MR: Or a midwife. My mother always had a nurse came in. If there was complications, probably a doctor would be called but usually the nurse would come in when you called her.

170 MM: Did your father help out with the birth?

171 MR: Oh no. He just stayed downstairs. [laughs]

172 MM: Can you remember when you were growing up, did your father get involved in the housework?

173 MR: I can remember on a Sunday morning, he always made breakfast on a Sunday morning. And he did cook but I don't remember him ever cleaning.

174 MM: Like my father. (Both laugh). How big a gap is there between you and the others? You're the oldest, were they close together in age?

175 MR: Yes. There was only a year and a half between most of us.

176 MM: So when you were fourteen, going out to work, and you had a twelve and a half year old brother, would he have been asked to do the housework the way you were?

177 MR: Oh no.

178 MM: And when you were handing up your whole pay packet were you still expected to do domestic chores?

179 MR: Yes.

180 MM: And did the boys help at all?

181 MR: No, boys didn't help round the house, just the girls.

182 MM: Did you ever question that?

183 MR: No, we never questioned it really. We didn't.

184 MM: One of my sisters[pause]it's like your family, there is less than a two year gap between us, and she has a twin brother. He was never asked to do anything but we bitterly resented it. We couldn't see what the difference between him and us was. [laughs]. In an earlier generation, you obviously didn't think twice about it. What sort of work would you have had to do in helping your mother?

185 MR: Oh, washing dishes, tidying our room. Remember we only had two bedrooms and eight children and mother and father. It was quite squashed.

186 MM: How did your mother manage – presumably she didn't have a washing machine?

187 MR: Actually my mother did have the first washing machine in the street. [laughs]

188 MM: Was that one of the twin tubs?

189 MR: No, it was a weird object. It had a handle which revolved around the top and then it revolved round again. [laughs] But she did hand wash and she had one of those[pause]Daddy was very good at doing things, carpentry work and that round the house, and she had a pulley line in the yard and she had a pulley line in the kitchen. She used to wash the clothes and hang them up on this pulley line.

190 MM: And you were in one of the terraced houses?

191 MR: Yes.

192 MM: I live in one of those now. Of course, it's been considerably modernised. The bathroom in my house is an addition – did you have a bathroom?

193 MR: No, we didn't have a bathroom.

194 MM: So did you have a shared toilet?

195 MR: Yes, a shared toilet.

196 MM: And was that backing on to a laneway?

197 MR: No, it was backing onto a hauliers' yard. We didn't have a laneway at the back.

198 MM: You see a lot of photographs at the time with women out scrubbing their front doorsteps.

199 MR: Yes.

200 MM: Would your mother have been doing this?

201 MR: Yes.

202 MM: I suppose when people were doing that kind of work, they were seeing each other and could have a chat, seeing what was going on.

203 MR: We had white, like cream coloured stone tiles on the floor and we had em, a black grate with a silvery coloured edging on it and that had to be black leaded and polished with brasso to make it shine.

204 MM: And the heating was from a coal fire?

205 MR: Yes, a coal fire.

206 MM: And did you have a coalman coming around?

207 MR: Yes. We had a coal fire; well we called it the kitchen then and then in the living room and a coal fire upstairs. That was always a luxury in the winter, light the fire upstairs and go up and sit and read. [laughs] It was nice.

208 MM: And in terms of just enjoying yourself when you came out of school and you were at work, would you have done things with your family or your friends?

209 MR: With my friends. On Sunday, Daddy and Mummy used to bring us to the park to have a picnic, or you know, when you think of children now and they're brought everywhere by car. Where we lived was on the Falls Road and we had a walk to the Falls Park which was quite a bit. But we didn't think of it in those days, it was terribly far, it must have been at least two miles and back again. And even you

know, when we were older and working, we used to work to Falls Park and play camogie and then walk back again and go to the ceilidh that night. [laughs] Thought nothing of it.

210 MM: So when you were working you got off at five o'clock and you went straight home. Would you have had to help out preparing the evening meal or …

211 MR: No, my mother used to have that ready.

212 MM: So would you go out during the week?

213 MR: No, just at the weekend, or during summer nights we went to the Falls Park and played camogie.

214 MM: Was that for all the girls in the neighbourhood?

215 MR: Yes, all the girls in the neighbourhood.

216 MM: And what about dancing or cinema?

217 MR: Yes, we would go to the cinema and as I say, we'd go to the ceilidh.

218 MM: Did your entertainment have to come out of the money your mother had given back to you from your pay? Say if you were going out on Saturday and you wanted to go out on Sunday, would she give you extra money to pay for it?

219 MR: Well, according to how much money there was available. You know, if there wasn't, well you just didn't go.

220 MM: Who made the decisions about how money was spent in the family?

221 MR: Mum.

222 MM: Your father just handed in his pay packet unopened as well?

223 MR: He did, yes.

224 MM: And would you remember if most of your friends and their fathers did that as well?

225 MR: Yes. Though my dad was pretty lucky about having work. A lot of my friends' fathers in the thirties, you know they didn't have any work.

226 MM: How did they manage?

227 MR: Well, they must have got dole or something.

228 MM: It was very low at that time.

229 MR: It was very low, yes, it was very low.

230 MM: Say a father was out of work, would the neighbours help out?

231 MR: Well, I think that most of the mothers got jobs in the hospital or the mill and I presume the fathers looked after the children. Probably that's what happened, you know. You don't think of it really, when you're young. You take it for granted.

232 MM: If the neighbourhood had a lot of the same kind of problems, would there have been things that you did, round about the time of elections or anything, would you remember for instance whether there were politicians coming around and trying to make any difference in the area?

233 MR: I don't really remember. I remember my mother speaking about Joe Devlin, he was a politician and he used to run bus runs for under privileged children to places like Bangor and that.

234 MM: This didn't really make a difference to you?

235 MR: No.

236 MM: Do you remember when you first got your vote, would you have thought about how you were going to use it or would there have been expectations about your using it for the first time?

237 MR: I think in the North of Ireland people, unfortunately, vote according to their religion. You know …

238 MM: You would have voted for nationalist politicians?

239 MR: Probably, probably. We don't even have a labour party in the north here [laughs].

240 MM: Harry Midgely was quite active during the war. He was quite a good labour politician and he seems to have been less sectarian than most but he didn't get the Catholic vote [laughs]

241 MR: No, he didn't get a vote round here. I think even today, it's the same. You know, people vote according to their religion.

242 MM: Perhaps that's why things don't change?

243 MR: Exactly, yes.

244 MM: In the trade union movement, was there still a religious divide?

245 MR: No, I think the trade unions have cut across the religious divide, because I know Protestants and Catholics in the trade union movement who are very broadminded and I think they try not to make a difference between different people. I think they have tried to make a difference in the whole set-up, yes definitely.

246 MM: Going back to the war years, did it strike you that something significant was going on around you?

247 MR: No. You mean?

248 MM: Well, did you feel that something important was happening?

249 MR: Politically, or the war?

250 MM: Well, just generally. Northern Ireland was in the war and the South wasn't seriously involved. Did you realise[pause]?

251 MR: That that was happening? Oh yes.

252 MM: In what way would it have affected you?

253 MR: Well, em, I remember standing at the back window of the back bedroom and watching a dog fight in the sky and dropping[pause]they dropped flares; we didn't know what they were then – they were like red and then they came down and they burst open like fireworks which lit up the place so they could see where to drop the bombs. I remember standing at the back bedroom window watching.

254 MM: And were you evacuated?

255 MR: And then I was evacuated. At Easter, Easter Tuesday I think it was, or Easter Monday, there was a very bad bombing in Belfast and my dad went out and had a look round and came back and said, get packed, youse are going to the country. But Mum and Dad had already arranged with people we always went on holiday to, in Cushendun, that if necessary we could go to them, so Dad packed us all off to the country. [laughs]

256 MM: I've read accounts of people going from, particularly the dock areas which was very badly hit, up into the hills and nobody was worrying about what area they came from.

257 MR: Exactly. We were packed off to the country and we never did that, but I did know people who did every night, went off up into the mountains and slept in tents and things and then came back into the city in the morning. But we went to Cushendun and we stayed there for over a year.

258 MM: Was that very difficult?

259 MR: It was. We went to school and all there.

260 MM: And were you staying with friends or relatives?

261 MR: Well, my mother came with us and she stayed with us. We had a house there. Well, it wasn't our house but it was people we knew so I think the government must have paid for us to be [pause] I didn't think of it at the time but I presume that's what must have happened. I mean the government paid the people who owned the house so that we could stay there.

262 MM: And would any of your friends have had that experience?

263 MR: Some of them went off to different places. But em, but a lot of them stayed in the city and as you say, went off to the mountains every night.

264 MM: One woman was telling me she lived on the Falls Road and they went up in to the mountains at night and every morning she had to walk to work after coming down. She didn't want to do that but her father insisted.

265 MR: That's right. We used to go in under the stairs when the raids were on.

266 MM: When that was all over and you went in to work, was there ever any discussion of the IRA getting active in the South again or of the role they'd played in the war?

267 MR: Not in work, no.

268 MM: Was there a religious divide in work, as well as the gender divide? For instance, who would have owned the factory?

269 MR: I think they were mostly Protestants.

270 MM: Would that have been true of management as well?

271 MR: Yes, but I worked with Protestants and Catholics. We were all in the same boat.

272 MM: And that was true of the hospital as well?

273 MR: Yes. In the hospital a lot of the domestic jobs were done by Catholics and the porters were mostly Catholics from the Falls Road.

274 MM: Would that have been because of the network, when the job became available you would tell your neighbour and they'd go for it?

275 MR: Yes. Not now, but then. You know, people would get their sister or their neighbour a job if there was a vacancy.

276 MM: So when you were going to school, would you have been aware of what you were going to do or would you have thought about it?

277 MR: I wouldn't have thought about it.

278 MM: In the factories, with the sewing, was there any creative outlet? You had to do it exactly according to the pattern? So did you find that frustrating for an intelligent person to have absolutely no variation in what you were doing?

279 MR: It can be, it can be. Then again, you would have different kinds of garments to make, especially if you were making a whole garment. You'd have different kinds and there was a great camaraderie among all the girls, you know, they would sing as they worked? So it was all right, you know?

280 MM: It wasn't really like an assembly line, then?

281 MR: No, it wasn't like an assembly line.

282 MM: You didn't know exactly what you were going to do for every minute of every day.

283 MR: No, it wasn't like that at all.

284 MM: So obviously then, if you were chatting or anything it wasn't strictly forbidden. There were a lot of factories where staff weren't allowed to talk during working hours.

285 MR: No, we had time to chat and we would sing a lot of the time. [laughs]

286 MM: And were they songs about the work or the latest pop songs?

287 MR: Just whatever the pop songs were.

288 MM: Were there particular rules about working? Say if you were late, were their punishments or fines?

289 MR: You were fined if you were late. I can't remember how much.

290 MM: And were they strict about that?

291 MR: No, it wasn't very strict really. It was quite[pause]I quite enjoyed being a stitcher. It did teach you to make your own clothes. And all my sisters and myself, we all made our own clothes, we all made our own wedding dresses. And so we did learn something. [laughs]

292 MM: Your domestic experience when you were going to work later, the cooking and everything was useful but the early working experience was useful in your domestic life.

293 MR: Oh yes, yes.

294 MM: Can you remember[pause]material and things like that were rationed during the war, and that still applied for quite a few years after.

295 MR: Yes, quite a long time afterwards.

296 MM: So if you wanted to make a dress, what did you do about that?

297 MR: Well, when I made my wedding dress, I wanted lace and I went to the South of Ireland and smuggled it up. (Both laugh).

298 MM: I heard a lovely story about a lady who smuggled butter from the South and the train was stopped and it was so warm that the butter started to melt. She had also bought a coat and she had two coats on so when the train stopped the butter was sliding down her. (Both laugh) So nobody thought twice about going down?

299 MR: No, it was a regular thing. [laughs] It was a regular thing to go to the South and then smuggle things. But that's where I got the lace for my wedding dress, in Dublin.

300 MM: Can you remember were you stopped or was it fairly lax?

301 MR: It was fairly easy. They came on and sort of looked around and just got off again. Probably they knew perfectly well that people were smuggling things but [pause]

302 MM: What about, you know, getting fruit to make your wedding cake, that sort of thing? Was that difficult?

303 MR: It probably was but my uncle worked in Kennedys Bakery and he got my wedding cake made for me. [laughs]

304 MM: Would women normally have made their own cakes?

305 MR: Yes. But then I think people did bake, and sew and knit; more so than now. Well, I made all my children's clothes, their trousers, their jackets, their hats. Everything they wore. I had five sons and then I had a daughter and I made all her dresses and uniforms.

306 MM: How old were your children when you went back to work?

307 MR: Martina was about nine, she's the youngest.

308 MM: So they still needed a fair amount of attention. And were you still doing all the sewing and making clothes?

309 MR: Yes.

310 MM: And how long were you working? Was it a full time job?

311 MR: Well, I only worked for a while and then I stopped working when they were off on school holidays and then I went in full time.

312 MM: Going back to when you were growing up, would your mother have shown you what she was doing when she cooking and sewing?

313 MR: Oh yes.

314 MM: And would you have done the same with your daughters?

315 MR: Yes.

316 MM: Was there any kind of similar thing for your brothers, that your father was showing them?

317 MR: Yes. They would have been shown[pause]Daddy was good with woodwork and he would show them how to do different things.

318 MM: Your brother who became a roofer – did he do an apprenticeship with your father?

319 MR: He did. And my other brother - he lives in America now, he's just retired.

320 MM: Did he do that work in America?

321 MR: No. He worked for UPS for thirty two years, in America.

322 MM: How old was he when he went?

323 MR: He was twenty six. He was a driver here, and em, after he[pause]I think he was employed as a driver to drive some Americans round and em, he must have talked to them and thought it would be better. Like he was married with one child at the time and he went off on his own and then his wife and his little boy went about six months later.

324 MM: Would many of your schoolfriends have emigrated?

325 MR: Most of them stayed, most of them stayed. A few emigrated but most of them stayed.

326 I would have liked to have gone to America but my husband wouldn't go. [laughs] He was a bit of a home bird.

327 MM: I'd love to go off for a few years myself, it broadens the horizons.

328 MR: It does, it does indeed, especially if you go from the North of Ireland. I think it broadens your outlook.

329 MM: Obviously the experience of living through the Troubles would underline that feeling, but would you have felt that back in the 1940s, that you were very confined in one place?

330 MR: Oh yes, yes.

331 MM: What about going outside the area – people I know in the Falls and Shankill and different areas would have felt that you just didn't go outside your own area?

332 MR: No, that's true.

333 MM: Was it a case that you were told not to or that you weren't interested?

334 MR: You weren't interested really because you[pause]our activity you know would be going to gaelic matches, or playing camogie or going to ceilidhs. You know, we were very into Irish culture on the Falls Road. So you didn't think of going anywhere else. There was always a lot of things going on.

335 MM: Did that ever change?

336 MR: I think it did for a while, you know, but em, there's a lot now back to the same routine again. They don't go out of their own areas, for obvious reasons. [laughs] I think so, yes.

337 MM: When you're saying that you were always interested in getting their rights, was that based on anything in particular, because you'd read something or[pause]?

338 MR: No, it was just always that feeling that people should be treated better. They should be given rights as human beings and not be treated like "you do this, and you do that" you know. They should be treated with a bit more respect.

339 MM: Would you have seen people being treated in that way in work?

340 MR: Sometimes, yes.

341 MM: Do you think that was a policy or was it just some individuals who were responsible?

342 MR: I think it was a policy, yes, and I didn't think that was right. I thought that people should be treated with respect.

343 MM: Having become a shop steward and taken a stand against that policy, how long was it before you became very active in the wider sphere of the union? How did that develop?

344 MR: Well, I was shop steward for three different units in the Royal in the catering department, the children's, maternity, and geriatric unit and if anyone had a problem with the management, there was a really terrible manager [pause] in fact the saying goes that I had the worst manager in the whole of the Royal. They would ring me up and say, you know she's doing whatever and I would go over and see her and see if I could get it sorted out for her.

345 MM: And generally, did that approach work?

346 MR: Usually, em, if it was a bit more serious than I could deal with, I would get in touch with the branch secretary and he would come in.

347 MM: And were you ever tempted to become a full time official?

348 MR: No. Not really.

349 MM: Was that for any particular reason?

350 MR: No, I just never thought of being a full time official.

351 MM: I know in SIPTU we have a major problem now in that more half of the membership are women but there are very few women in top positions in the union. Was that true[pause]you would have come out of NUPE[pause]would that have been true of NUPE, that the men were chiefs and the women were the indians?

352 MR: No, Inez McCormack is the regional secretary and Patricia McKeon is her right hand woman [laughs] so they've always sort of led NUPE and then when they came into UNISON, they are still there leading. A lot of the branch secretaries are men, still, a lot of the branch secretaries are men.

353 MM: Even in areas where there are mainly women working?

354 MR: Yes. Now some of the branch officers – a lot of the branch officers would be women.

355 MM: Did you find that it was mainly older women who were becoming involved – who had left their child-rearing days behind or were younger women active as well?

356 MR: It was mostly older women but then it was good to see the young ones getting involved. I always liked to see the young ones getting involved in the trade unions.

357 MM: Given that there are so few young women who become involved, why do you think that is?

358 MR: I don't think they are interested until they get older and then they suddenly think well, things aren't right here, so they get involved. But I don't know[pause]in the Royal now, which is the environment where I was involved, there was a lot of good trade union women, a lot of them.

359 MM: Had they any characteristics in common, other than being active in the trade union? Do you know why some women came forward and others didn't?

360 MR: Just stronger women I think and saw that people needed someone to speak for them. Because people do need someone to speak for them.

361 MM: Were you involved with the project that NUPE did on women's health? Where they asked women about their experiences?

362 MR: Yes, I know a lot of the women who were involved – they did a book. I know a lot of them.

363 MM: Patricia McKeon came to the Irish Labour History Society and gave a lecture about how the book was done. Would you agree that the whole cycle of women's health, particularly the child rearing aspect, has a huge affect on their employment circumstances?

364 MR: Oh yes.

365 MM: Back in the forties and fifties, and even the sixties and seventies, maternity leave was by no means available, em, would you have been aware of women who so desperately needed the money that they were going back to work almost straight away?

366 MR: Yes, a lot of women did, but then I think it was just granny took over. Families were closer, some of them were just six weeks and they were back to work. Maybe some even less, but none that I knew.

367 MM: If grannies took over, would the granny be leaving with them or were the children brought to the granny as a rule?

368 MR: Well, when we were young you see, most grannies lived with you and aunties, you know, family. They all lived in the same street so they all could look after each other's children.

369 MM: How did that come about? Say you were getting married and you were looking for a house, was it that maybe some families died off that there were enough houses for people not to have to move away?

370 MR: Actually, there was a family facing us and the granny lived[pause]now I'm talking about two rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs. They granny lived downstairs and her son and his wife and children lived upstairs. So there was a lot of that of[pause]two families sharing a house.

371 MM: It fascinates me how people managed to stay in the same area when it meant if there were a lot of children in a family, how did they all get homes?

372 MR: I know.

373 MM: Was it easy to[pause]did they have to buy or did they rent?

374 MR: Oh no, they rented them. They didn't buy. They couldn't afford to buy. No, our house was always rented.

375 MM: Would that have meant extra pressure on the family income?

376 MR: Probably but I wasn't aware of it.

377 MM: Did you stay in the area when you got married?

378 MR: No. We moved out.

379 MM: Was that because you couldn't get a house?

380 MR: Yes.

381 MM: In terms of the close-knit community that still seems to be there, if you moved out could you come back on the same terms?

382 MR: Oh yes.

383 MM: You weren't considered to be an outsider?

384 MR: Oh no, no.

385 MM: A woman on the Falls told me that if there were times when a lot of people in a street were out of work that a big pot of stew would be made and would go around. Do you remember that happening on your street?

386 MR: No, I don't. My mother was an outsider, you see, she didn't come from the Falls Road, She came from Ballymakerrig, over the Newtownards Road direction.

387 MM: But she was still a Belfast woman?

388 MR: Oh she was still a Belfast woman but she wasn't a Falls Road woman. [Both laugh] And she was very reserved, she didn't mix a lot with the other women in the street.

389 MM: Was that she because she felt she was an outsider or just her character?

390 MR: Just her character. She was very reserved – she was that type of person.

391 MM: Would that have passed on to the children?

392 MR: Yes, I can see it in my sisters and myself.

393 MM: And how about your neighbours – would they see you differently because you mother wasn't a local woman?

394 MR: We were considered sometimes to be snobs [laughs]. Because Mummy was very particularly about we dressed and on Sunday, you had to wear your hat and you had to wear your gloves and you know, people thought who did they think they are? [Laughs].

395 MM: What about Sundays, going to church, was there much connection with the local priest? MR: Oh yes.

396 MM: What about involvement in religious rituals? Did you have to make communion and confirmation and all that?

397 MR: Oh yes, you did that all through the school and em, every[pause]all my friends were involved in the Children of Mary. You went there once a month, I think it was, and the boys were all the Holy Family Confraternity. There was a lot of connection with the church.

398 MM: Who would have organised that? Was it local people or the priest?

399 MR: Oh the priest.

400 MM: In the South, the local parish priest is generally the manager of the Catholic primary school. Was that the case here?

401 MR: Yes that's right.

402 MM: Would that mean he kept control?

403 MR: Yes, he'd have control over the school.

404 MM: How did that affect people's attitudes? Maybe a young woman getting pregnant before she was married, how would the community have reacted?

405 MR: When I was young, people just didn't talk about that kind of thing. I don't remember ever having known anything about that.

406 MM: So if it happened, it was kept very quiet.

407 MR: Probably. You know, it wasn't discussed or made public.

408 MM: And would you know any people who grew up in the Protestant working class areas of Belfast?

409 MR: No.

410 MM: The experience you're describing is so like the experience of people in the South that, in spite of the fact that there's supposed to be such differences in the communities and yet women I've spoken to in the Shankill also talk about the same kind of thing.

411 MR: Really?

412 MM: Yes. It just shows that the communities aren't that different.

413 MR: That's right. I think the people in the Shankill and the people in the Falls are very very similar. You know, the people in the Shankill [pause] all right, some of them might have had better jobs, their men may have had better jobs, but they all had the same problems. There was a lot of poverty about and a lot of control. Maybe the Protestant churches didn't control as much as the Catholic churches [pause] our lives

sort of, you know, were going to Mass, going to the Confraternity, you know. Going to the ceilidh at the parochial hall.

414 MM: So for instance if you were playing camogie through the local GAA club, would that have had connections with the church?

415 MR: No, it was just the GAA.

416 MM: Looking back at sport and everything else, it sounds like you had fairly busy lives. Do you look back on yours as a happy childhood?

417 MR: Oh yes. I think so. I knew[pause]when we were very young we were playing a lot of games in the street, like[pause]peery and whip and tig and rounders and[pause]you know we actually played in the street then. All the street games, you know, they didn't have television, obviously. We didn't have a radio until my youngest sister was born and she's fifty one. We didn't have a radio until she was born.

418 MM: On cold winter nights you couldn't play camogie, what would you do? Would the family sit together?

419 MR: Sit together, yes, around the fire and knit or[pause]my mother used to make rugs out of pieces of cotton.

420 MM: In addition to these activities, would you read together?

421 MR: Yes. My father was very insistent that we read and he bought us[pause]he used to cut vouchers out of the newspapers and send away for books. Although he wasn't[pause]he could read and write but very limited, but he was very insistent that we had a good education as far as he was able and em, he bought us a range of Dickens's books and he used to send away to the newspapers for different offers that were on, of books.

422 MM: Can you remember what sort of books they were?

423 MR: Atlases and educational books. It was him that started me off. And he used to teach us to draw. He was very good at reading plans even though he wasn't a great reader, he could read plans. You know, for roofs, for buildings and that. So he would buy us books and teach us. I remember him teaching me how to draw an open box, you know?

424 MM: Would your mother have taken part in this?

425 MR: She was always very busy with the children. Daddy used to take us [pause] he loved the theatre and the pantomime or any shows that were on. He was involved in a dramatic group. I used to wonder [pause] I wonder why my mother never goes but in later years I thought, it was because she was too busy. She always had a busy. She didn't have time.

426 MM: Your mother must have put in an incredibly long day.

427 MR: Probably.

428 MM: So can you remember, while she had the washing machine, she still had cold water that she to heat. Did she have a range or a cooker?

429 MR: She had a cooker and the open fire.

430 MM: So when she came down in the morning she would have had to get the fire going and[pause]was it a gas cooker?

431 MR: Yes, I think it was a gas cooker.

432 MM: So would you remember did she make breakfast for everybody?

433 MR: Yes.

434 MM: So presumably that was breakfast for eight as well as herself and her father? Would anybody have been able to come home in the middle of the day or did she have that time to herself?

435 MR: Well, when we were at school we all came home at lunchtime. The school was only a few streets away and then she would make, maybe[pause]she used to make a thing called 'bread and milk'. Probably she made that because she hadn't the money to make anything else. We used to have that sometimes at lunchtime.

436 MM: That's bread and hot milk and sugar all mixed up? We used to call it 'goody two shoes' and we got it when we were ill. (Both laugh). I don't know where the name came from. And were the shops local shops?

437 MR: Yes. Well, my grandmother had a shop, a grocery shop, and she did her shopping there.

438 MM: Would that mean walking out and carrying the groceries home?

439 MR: Yes.

440 MM: What about deliveries of vegetables[pause]did they have them?

441 MR: Well, we had people coming around the streets with carts, with the milk and with vegetables and oh yes, with bread. My Uncle Tommy was her breadman. And eh, they came round the street with the big cans in the back of the cart, two big cans and you'd do out with a great big jug and fill it up with milk.

442 MM: So that jug of milk would do for the day?

443 MR: Yes, probably.

444 MM: How did she keep that cool?

445 MR: I can't remember. I don't remember us ever having a larder. I don't remember how she would have kept it cool.

446 MM: We take fridges and everything so much for granted.

447 MR: That's true. I remember she used to make potatoes and butter and fried herrings. I always loved that.

448 MM: And they were caught locally, were they?

449 MR: Ardglass, Ardglass herrings. The man used to come round the street with them on the cart as well [laughs].

450 MM: So most things were brought into the area?

451 MR: Yes, brought around the streets in carts.

452 MM: So, as she was making your clothes she didn't have to go to the city centre for shopping?

453 MR: No, not a lot, not a lot.

454 MM: Would there have been special occasions when you might have gone into town? Say, like for first communion?

455 MR: Yes, they were celebrated and I remember my first communion day, I got sixpence and I bought a pink parasol with a red rose on it. (Both laugh) I can still remember that.

456 MM: Was that, you know, people seem to go to such excess now, would that have happened?

457 MR: Oh no. No, everybody just went and usually you had your dress made and you just went to the chapel and home and that was it.

458 MM: Confirmation was a big day as well?

459 MR: Yes, but you wore a white dress for confirmation and now they don't. Yes, you wore a white dress and a veil for confirmation.

460 MM: You know the way, particularly in recent years, there's been such controversy about the parades for the Orange Lodge, would you in the Falls area have Corpus Christi processions?

461 MR: Oh yes.

462 MM: Did everybody take part?

463 MR: I belonged to St. Peter's Cathedral, it was a pro-Cathedral then and we had processions around the church, round the streets, you know, and if you had just made your first holy communion you wore your first holy communion dress and veil or your confirmation, you wore the outfit that you wore. And they were big days, they were very big days.

464 MM: And all the bunting in the streets? Do they still go on?

465 MR: I don't think they go on now. If they do, it's on a very minor scale. They used to be great big days that you really looked forward to, getting dressed and walking in the procession.

466 MM: And would you have been aware of people who stayed out of them, in the area, or did everybody join in?

467 MR: Everybody joined in. I think anything that was going on people joined in because it was sort of the only entertainment they had, you know it was something to look forward to. They didn't have television or going away on holiday. Well, we always went to Cushendun for our holidays.

468 MM: Were you exceptional in that?

469 MR: Yes, we were. Now we just went for a week and eh, we always went for a week to Cushendun every year and then we started going to Glenard.

470 MM: Was that because you wanted to get out to the seaside?

471 MR: Yes. Daddy used to bring us to Helen's Bay on the train. That was a treat.

472 MM: Did your Mum go along on those trips?

473 MR: Oh yes, she did.

474 MM: One of the things I remember when I was growing up was I used to swim competitively and we would come up to the North for galas and the facilities were so far superior to anything we had in the South. Was that the case just for later or would there have been such good sporting facilities when you were young?

475 MR: We used to go to the swimming. It was the Falls Baths and they had hot baths, because nobody had[pause]no one had a bathroom. So you could go and have a hot bath in this building as well and there was part of it had baths and the other part of it was for swimming.

476 MM: Was that a common practice?

477 MR: Oh yes, it was the only way you could have a bath really.

478 MM: I have visions of the tin bath in front of the fire.

479 MR: Oh yes, we had that, we had that as well. But then when we were older we used to go to have the hot bath.

480 MM: Would your parents have done that or would they have had a bath at home?

481 MR: They'd have had a bath at home but sometimes they'd go for a hot bath too.

482 MM: I imagine it must have been very hard to heat enough water to have baths at home.

483 MR: It was, yes, very hard.

484 MM: How did you manage when the girls were getting into teenage years and the boys getting older, in terms of keeping them separate?

485 MR: Well we all had to sleep in the one bedroom. There was four of us in one bed, girls in one bed and four boys in the other bed. [laughs] Three boys in one bed and four girls in the other and then the youngest one, she slept in Mum and Dad's room. We thought nothing of it really.

486 MM: Well I suppose everybody had the same conditions.

487 MR: Yes, everybody had two bedrooms, so you know, no matter how many they had, that was just the way it was.

488 MM: I only moved into my house fairly recently and most of my neighbours are quite elderly but the house that I live in now, I share with my daughter and I've been told that at one stage it had a family with nineteen children. (Both laugh). We can't imagine where they all fitted but they obviously managed.

489 MR: People have so much more now, so much more space and everything now, don't they?

490 MM: I know one of the women who spoke to me in Dublin felt that[pause]she felt very sorry for young people now because she said, that while materially they are much better off, she felt that their lives are much emptier.

491 MR: They are. We had a great time when we were young. We were playing together in the streets. We used to play all the street games and the women used to come out and sit on a chair outside the door and just watch all the kids in the street. And in some streets, they used to play bingo, but it wasn't called bingo it was called 'housey-housey' and eh, there was a few streets and they used to come out to the doors and I suppose they paid a few pence and then, they got these cards and they played housey-housey in the streets in the summer time.

492 MM: Who did the calling:

493 MR: I suppose one of the men. I'd forgotten about that now. I remember them doing that. You see this was all the sort of home-made entertainment that people had and then there was more companionship and people, everybody knew everybody else. Whereas now, you could live in a street and not know anyone.

494 MM: You know, people always remark about Ireland and the number of pubs in every street[pause]Belfast obviously had different licensing laws but were pubs places[pause]now, you see kids going in on Sundays nearly for the day (and I don't agree with that at all) but em, within the[pause]would women have gone into the pubs or was it a male preserve?

495 MR: Oh it was definitely a male preserve.

496 MM: Were there any forms of entertainment other than church activities and sports, where men and women could do things together?

497 MR: The cinemas. There were four or five cinemas near where we lived, but they were only really once every couple of weeks, people couldn't afford to go. Although it wasn't very expensive to go – it was a 1d to go to the matinee. The Saturday matinee, which was a great thing on a Saturday, all the kids went to the matinee.

498 MM: You could go by yourselves?

499 MR: Actually, it was just in the street right behind us, we went to.

500 MM: And would the parish hall near the church have had dances?

501 MR: Yes.

502 MM: And would your parents go to them or was it just for the younger people?

503 MR: For the younger people, really.

504 MM: I know a woman who worked as a counter girl in Woolworths and she had to walk two miles to work and then she was on her feet all day and had to walk home but she said that every Friday and Saturday, even though she worked all day Saturday as well, as soon as she got home she got into her fancy dress and she went off dancing until one or two in the morning and she was still up for work the next day. Her sheer energy was amazing but dancing was a very important part of her life.

505 MR: Oh yes, it was, yes.

506 MM: In that part of the whole Irish culture thing, the ceilidhs were regular, were they?

507 MR: Yes.

508 MM: And who organised them?

509 MR: The churches.

510 MM: Did you learn Irish dancing at an early age?

511 MR: I did, yes.

512 MM: Was that at school?

513 MR: No, I went to a class.

514 MM: So would your parents have had to find the money for that?

515 MR: I don't suppose it was very expensive, but it was an extra expense.

516 MM: And would all the children have done this?

517 MR: Yes, most of them went to Irish dancing classes.

518 MM: And what about your parents, did they speak Irish?

519 MR: No. We learned it at school.

520 MM: Was that because you were in a Catholic school?

521 MR: Oh yes.

522 MM: Were they state-funded schools?

523 MR: No they were Catholic schools. In the Catholic schools we learned Irish, and Irish history. The Protestant schools don't, they learn English history.

524 MM: What about Northern Irish history?

525 MR: They haven't a clue. [laughs]

526 MM: Is that true even now?

527 MR: Even now, yes.

528 MM: It must make it very difficult to take a balanced view of things if you don't know anything about your history.

529 MR: They don't know anything about it. It is very hard.

530 MM: If you were starting work now, for the first time, compared to when you started back years ago, would you feel that you were going into a better environment? Would the changes over the years strike you as for better or worse?

531 MR: It's a bit better, really, especially if you've a trade union behind you. Again, I always think I'm a little prejudiced about the trade unions because the Royal Victoria Hospital was very well serviced by the union and all the hospitals are. Whereas I hear my sons and son in law and they're saying "och, why would you join the trade unions, they do nothing for you" and I'm amazed by this because we were so[pause]we serviced our members so well in the Royal and I can't understand why the big unions aren't helping the people so much.

532 MM: One thing I must say I find among union activists is that they ask all the time what are they going to do for us and I always well the whole thing is that we come together to do things for ourselves. And I wondered if that's something the trade union movement is losing. Would you remember, you know, when you first got involved was the attitude that the union was there for people to be looked after or was there more about working people sticking together for their own protection.

533 MR: It was about working people for their own protection. People who aren't activists, they expect activists to stand up for them but they will let you down very badly at times. They won't back you; they won't back you up.

534 MM: I'm sad to hear you say that, because I rather hoped that it was something that maybe was developing with modern attitudes to work, that it could be changed back, but I suppose people are people. [Both laugh] There'll always be those who lean on everybody else.

535 MR: Oh that's true. I always think that in everything, trade unions or anything, it's always the same, or even committees and that, it's always the same people who do all the work and all the others follow. And the same people are left to do all the work. And I think it's the same in every community, you know, a few people do the work and the rest sit back and take the benefits.

Meta, Guildford. Interview: 6th December 2003

1 ML: My Christian names are Martha Josephine, they're my baptismal names, but I was always called Meta in the North of Ireland, which is quite a common name for Margaret or Martha. My husband, being English, had never heard of it so he said I will call you Meta and that is how everybody in England calls me Meta, from the North of Ireland diminutive. I came in 1937 to Liverpool to do nursing. I had got my Northern Ireland Commercial Certificate and that was a full two years at the technical college in Coleraine. Then I stayed on another year because my mother had died just then and I hadn't got a job, so my father said you might as well go back another year. So that was shorthand, typewriting, bookkeeping, commercial arithmetic, English literature. We did a lot of English literature – Shakespeare's plays, very good education we got there.

2 MM: Was that straight after primary school?

3 ML: Yes. I went there at fourteen and I got my Pitman certificate for fifty words per minute then, and I have forgotten what it was for typing, but then the other year, I did ninety words per minute for my certificate. So that when I came to Liverpool to do my training, I was head and heels above the English girls in education, because they had probably just gone to secondary, or whatever, left school at fifteen perhaps. But we had a lot of essays to write and we had, of course, business letters to write so that we were very *au fait* with the English language and punctuation and everything else like that. A lot of Welsh girls were there as well and some from Ireland and some from the North of Ireland.

4 MM: Why did you choose Liverpool rather than training in the North?

5 ML: Well, I had a sister there who lived at a place called Parbold, which is between Southport and Wigan, and that was why, so that I could go there on my day off. That was the reason why I went to Liverpool.

6 MM: You applied from the North, did you, or directly from Liverpool?

7 ML: No, when I came to my sister's, my sister had got a little boy of three and then she had a little girl and she had to have a repair and my father said well, as you are not working you go and help Greta. And so I had visited Greta in the hospital in Liverpool on a Sunday with her husband and somebody looked after the children and she had been talking to the student nurses. I said to her you know I think I might do nursing. I said at least I will have my food and lodgings and I will be looked after that way and I will be working with a nice sort of person. You see, we were conscious of the sort of people we were mixed around with.

8 MM: So it wasn't a great vocation to care for others?

9 M: [Laughs] No, it wasn't, absolutely, because I mean in Coleraine in those days it was just a little market town and there was very little in the way of jobs for shorthand typists. There would be one or two solicitors and there would be a couple of potato merchants and coal merchants, just sort of sending out bills and that sort of thing, but I mean we were all doing this shorthand like mad for an hour every morning and after lunch, I suppose. He was dictating, the master, and we were doing it all as though there was a job waiting for us when we finished, and we all knew that there wouldn't be, so that was how I came to do nursing, why I went to Liverpool, it was because of my sister originally.

10 MM: At that stage I presume you thought that would guarantee you work?

11 ML: That's right.

12 MM: So when you qualified, did you stay in Liverpool?

13 ML: When I qualified, this is where the war came in, I started in the May of 1937 and I took my finals in June of 1940. Then I went on from there and took my midwifery but we used to have what we called a hospital examination, three months before your finals. It was a run through of what the final would be and according to how you passed, those who did well and were doing midwifery, and you couldn't get out of it, you had to do your midwifery, went on to maternity ward. And if you had passed, you had done six weeks of your training. If you hadn't, of course, you waited to do general nursing, but anyway, I had passed it quite well so that when the results came out and I had passed, I had already done my midwifery so that I finished by the 23rd December. Then I went to stay with my sister at Parbold and applied for all sorts of jobs, but because I was going to get married, I wanted a staff nurse's post. No one would employ a nurse getting married, and marrying a soldier. They thought, you see, that you'd always be wanting leave and I think in those times, I think when soldiers were given leave they were expected to let the wife have that time off. And someone suggested to me to try the Civil Nursing Reserve and that's what I did. I applied to the Civil Nursing Reserve with Lancashire County Council and their headquarters were in Preston.

14 MM: So it was like an auxiliary arm of the forces but you were a civilian?

15 ML: That's right, yes. I was called [pause] I went to Preston and I was interviewed by the Medical Officer for Lancashire County Council, a very nice man, a Dr. Gaughan. Actually, his brother was the dental surgeon at Bolton Hospital, where I'd worked in the dental department, so I knew Mr. Gaughan well. He was a very nice man and he said there are two opportunities; a first aid post in Manchester, with the bombs falling around you, or a sick bay for evacuated children, which was in Blackpool, so I chose that. When I first went there, there was what they called a Matron in Charge and then I did night duty for a little bit because all these evacuated children from Liverpool and Manchester, they had impetigo and scabies and they were in their billets you see. And aneuresis, which is bedwetting. And of course, the lady couldn't cope – in those days, they might have had two or three sleeping in a bed, I don't know – and so there had to be someone on night duty to potty the children and things like that. One day I was there for about six weeks and it was January or February and there was snow on the ground and one of the nurses came up and said Dr. Gaughan is here from County Hall and he wants to see you. So I hastily got dressed and went down there and anyway, to cut a long story short, there had been an episode there with the Matron and another older assistant nurse. I didn't know anything about the sort of relations, in my education there had been no mention of lesbians or such things, and of course, they left right away. So he said that anyway, she was leaving and he would like me temporarily to take charge. Well, I said I'm only just qualified and all that kind of thing and he said I will send someone out from the Accounts Department in County Hall to show you about the petty cash. Because it was a huge big house out in the country and with its own vegetable garden and all that, there was a cook came every day from Preston, there were three women from the village who were cleaners and general work about and I had to pay them every week.

16 MM: It was a very big responsibility.

17 ML: It was but I didn't tell Dr. Gaughan that I had commercial training [laughs]. But you see, it was responsible because I was only twenty-one or twenty-two, something like that and apart from my training, I hadn't much experience.

18 MM: Would it have been because of the war that there was no one else to step in to the Matron's shoes?

19 ML: Yes, well you see that anyone who was available, they wanted them to go into the forces. We'll come to that later on but anyway, what was the important thing was the ration books. Everything was rationed and we had to account for all the meals. We had the ration books for these children and all the staff who were living in, we had their ration books. Because the children had to have education, there were one or two ex-governesses, I suppose you would call them, rather mature women but very nice women and we had all these ration books. Well, I had to go every Monday morning into a town called Kirkham, where eventually we were married in the Methodist church there in Kirkham, to see the Food Officer and I had to account for all the meals. You see we had coupons as well, I don't know if you know anything about it but the like of sardines and jelly and tinned fruit and Spam and tinned salmon were so many points. Biscuits, everything had points and so I had to account for all these.

20 MM: And were you still doing your share of nursing on top of the administrative work?

21 ML: We did the treatments at night. They were bathed and given the treatment for scabies or impetigo. I supervised that, the treatments for them, and I supervised all that.

22 MM: You must have been working very long hours.

23 ML: Yes, well, you would have a break during the day because if the children were in the class, you were free. There were no children under five. They were aged five till about twelve or thirteen and sometimes you had two or three in the one family. I remember a family called Lloyd and there were three of them, one of them barely five. Near there, there was another house about two miles away called Primrose Lodge, I think it was, and that was for expectant mothers and this Mrs. Lloyd was in there. About once a week or once every ten days, by ambulance, she'd be brought to see the children but it was out of school hours. Well, then, of course, when she came we gave her a cup of tea and we told her about the children and perhaps their father, you see, who was in the army, when he would come on leave of course, he would want to come and see his children.

24 MM: Was that the case for all of the children in the hospital, that their parents would have access?

25 ML: Yes, that's right.

26 MM: Maybe just not see them very often?

27 ML: Yes. But they were from poorer homes because of course, the more affluent ones were evacuated privately and some of them even went to America. But I often think now of all those little children marched down to the railway station with just a label on them and it must have been terrible for the mothers to part with them, not knowing where they were going to. But the gardener worked very well and he supplied us with vegetables. The cook, she did very well and she would see the butcher. The butcher called her every day and she would order what we needed for the staff and for the children.

28 MM: You had the staff ration books as well?

29 ML: Yes, I had to account for everything. But it was really quite easy. But then the doctor – it was a local doctor who was on call – he would do a round once a week and come to see that they were all healthy and everything was all right.

30 MM: Were you made [pause] actually formally appointed as Matron?

31 ML: Yes.

32 MM: Even though you were very recently qualified as a staff nurse?

33 ML: After a time – Dr. Gaughan would come out about once a month and of course, I was probably in touch with his department every day. There was another nurse – a Lancashire woman but I've forgotten her name – and she had a little frilly cap with a bow underneath here [indicating chin].

34 MM: Would the hospital originally have been a private house?

35 ML: Yes, that house was requisitioned and all the equipment and everything was set up when I went there. Well, then I got married from there.

36 MM: When did you meet your husband? Was that while you were in Kirkham?

37 ML: I met him in Liverpool during the second year of my training. Actually, he was nearly three years younger than me, he was only seventeen when I met him. He came from Warwick but his father had been [pause] he was a sailor but he was born in Warwick where his mother came from, but his father had been a Bootle man and he persuaded her to move up to Liverpool. After coming from a little, quiet county town like Warwick to Bootle, of all places, it was such a shock.

38 MM: There was a lot of bombing in Liverpool, wasn't there?

39 ML: Yes, and unemployment and the poverty there. She'd never known anything like it. She only lived about ten years. I think he was about ten when they moved up and of course, he was a bright boy. They said in Warwick that they were sorry he was leaving. I've got his headmaster's report, you know, that he would have got what they called a scholarship in those days, so of course, he got a scholarship to Waterloo Grammar School and he was the only boy that they'd ever had from this school in Bootle. And then, when he'd been there about six months they discovered that he was sort of over the border, he shouldn't have been at Waterloo Grammar School and he had to transfer to Bootle Grammar School.

40 MM: Was that not as good?

41 ML: No, and the area wasn't so good, but you see, he was an only child and his mother had two or three maiden aunts who were in service in those days in Warwick. The Countess of Warwick – everybody worked at the castle and they were rather nice people, very nice. His mother was very upset then. When he came to sixteen and got his higher certificate they said now you're sixteen you've got to get a job, we can't let you go on for higher education. And so the head of the Chemistry Department got him into what was then – it's now Evans Medical but it was Evans, Fletcher and Webb, the manufacturing chemists and he was in the laboratories there. And that's where he was when I met him.

42 MM: So he wasn't a soldier at that point? Did he join up because of the war?

43 ML: Well, he was called up.

44 MM: Were you conscripted as well for the labour force, because you'd married an Englishman?

45 ML: No, not at all, because I was in England doing my training anyway. I wouldn't have gone back to the North of Ireland. After my training, I wouldn't have gone back.

46 MM: Why was that?

47 ML: There were so few hospitals there. I liked the bright lights of Liverpool [laughs]. There were tramcars, and pictures, and the theatre and the river and all that. Liverpool, in those days, with the overhead railway - in 1937, Liverpool was a lovely place to be. And the people were so kind. I was in the Municipal Hospital. There were two sorts of hospitals. The Voluntary, which was like the

private hospital, and then the Municipal one. We were fairly near the docks and we got a lot of sailors from the docks. It was a very good training. Then in 1940, October, just a year after the war started, his mother died. She never knew that Godfrey was conscripted but by this time, with the war being on, his father was no longer going to sea so he had a shore job.

48 MM: Presumably he would have been a bit older at that stage?

49 ML: Yes, he would. I think he probably was in at the end of the First World War.

50 MM: Just going back to your own position, as a staff nurse, being promoted overnight to Matron, were any of the other staff resentful that you were the one being promoted, despite your inexperience?

51 ML: No, because I was the only trained nurse. There was another who was fever trained but the fever training is a shorter [pause] it's only a two-year training as compared to three. She would have been further down the ladder. Children's training was further down the ladder too.

52 MM: Did it make much difference to your pay?

53 ML: It probably did but then the pay wasn't much in those days and we would had lovely food and everything was done very well.

54 MM: And they would have been fairly self sufficient, having the garden?

55 ML: Yes. We didn't have any chickens or anything like that, but everything else, all the vegetables.

56 MM: It was probably a healthier diet than most of the children had had before.

57 ML: Yes, it was, and of course, meat was very severely rationed and sausages were an extra. They might have been on points, and liver of course, that was difficult to get.

58 MM: And were you completely away from bombing or the more immediate dangers of war?

59 ML: Oh yes, absolutely. We were on the bus route between Preston and Blackpool and on my afternoon off I would go into Blackpool. And of course, there were a great many Polish airmen there at Blackpool.

60 MM: Was there an aerodrome or something nearby?

61 ML: There was, Wheaton it was called. Nurse Ellen Gibbons, she was the fever-trained nurse, she was Scottish and her husband was actually stationed at Wheaton. He was an airman but she lived in with us.

62 MM: You said you got married from the hospital? How did that work?

63 ML: That worked out very well because either my husband or I, we had to be married where we were resident and he was up then, he was in the Royal Engineers, he eventually ended up in R.E.M.I. when it was formed but he was in the Royal Engineers and he was up in Keswick. He was apt to be moved around so his wasn't really a permanent address so that was the one [pause] and I was married in the Methodist church at Kirkham, where the Food Office was.

64 MM: And did you have a traditional white wedding?

65 ML: Yes, I did. Before that, he was the in Isle of White and when he was there, in Cowes, there was a firm of tailors that made military uniforms and for the navy and all like that, and he had that suit made. There is my wedding photograph [laughs] and my sister helped me out with coupons for my dress. It was a lace dress.

66 MM: Did you have it made up?

67 ML: No, I got it in Liverpool. It was something like three guineas or something like that, you know?

68 MM: That was nearly a week's wages?

69 ML: Oh yes, of course, it was, probably more. He was twenty-one and I was twenty three. There was a red stripe down there [pointing to photograph] and these were brass buttons and that. I'll show you one of him more recently – that was taken before [pause] it's about ten years ago that he died. That is a more recent one when he was Professor of Chemistry at the University of Surrey.

70 MM: So obviously he did at some stage get on to his third level education.

71 ML: Yes, he did, he was determined to get the degree and [pause] well, then I stayed there until a couple of years, I suppose, and I left to have David. I left about that September or October. My sister was still living at Purbold so I went to stay with Greta when I was expecting David and he was born in Southport. My husband was transferred down here and he went on various courses. Of course, he worked very well and very hard and got good marks and he eventually ended up as an instructor at the army radio school at Petersham, which is outside Richmond, between Kingston and Petersham. I was up there and David was a baby, about nine months, and he said I'm in billets down here in Petersham, I'm going to look out for a flat and David and you will come and join me. And we did that. David was about fourteen months when we went to Richmond and we had a flat in Petersham and we lived in the Richmond area. Two years in Petersham and then ten in Richmond. He was never moved from the army radio school. He was instructing officers that were going out to France, on radio, because of course, it was very early days for radio then. This was 1943 or 1944 and anyway, I got a letter from the War Office or somebody saying you are very valuable as a trained nurse. Would you come back and do nursing in a hospital and you could relieve a single state registered nurse to go in the army, for a military hospital. You see, I wasn't suitable because I had to care for David so anyway, I went along and I saw the Matron at Richmond Hospital and so she said yes, and there was no problem at all. David went to a day nursery – he got priority in a day nursery.

72 MM: This was a government run facility?

73 ML: Oh yes, it was government run and we didn't have to pay to put him in the day nursery. Now those day nurseries were very well run in those days. It was an S.R.N. who was in charge of it and David was quite happy there. Well then I started work.

74 MM: Were you doing a day shift?

75 ML: I was staff nurse and I could only work nine to five because they were the hours of the day nursery, probably half past eight to five, and I was on the [pause] they had a private ward there attached to the medical ward, it was called the Archer Wing, named after Sir John Archer who'd been the architect of it. And I was the staff nurse there for about a fortnight and then Matron sent for me and she said because you're not there to relieve Sister and write the reports in the evening and that, she said I think it would be better if you were on Casualty and Outpatients.

76 MM: You hadn't done that kind of nursing before?

77 ML: No, only just in my training, as we do, but it was just for a short time. So anyway, I went to Casualty. There was a Sister there and my goodness, she was a strict one. She trained at the Edinburgh Royal and the Simpson Memorial and the discipline, my goodness, I don't know what she'd say if she were around now. There were no Christian names or anything like that. I liked it very much

in Casualty and I got on very well with Sister. It was a very busy department. The clinics were very big. You see, in the morning [pause] you had Casualty all day long, of course, and there would be about four or five student nurses on as well as myself and Sister and we had clinics in the afternoon. I might be doing the Orthopaedics here while she would be doing the Medical one up there.

78 MM: These would be follow-ons to people who had come in through Casualty?

79 ML: Yes, they were referred from the doctors to the consultants. They were all consultants at the clinics, you see. With Richmond there, it covered a very big area because there was Kew and Mortlake, right up to Hammersmith, there was Chiswick, there was part of it over the bridge in what was Middlesex, Twickenham, St. Margaret's as far as Hampton and half way to Kingston on that side. We covered a very, very large area and the clinics were very busy.

80 MM: What about [pause] were there more Casualties coming in than during peacetime? Doodlebugs and that sort of thing?

81 ML: Yes, that's right. There was one incident at Kew where one of those doodlebugs was a direct hit on Chryslers car factory and there were a lot of casualties in there. That was a dreadful episode.

82 MM: How would you have managed – something like that obviously wouldn't stop at five. Were you able to stay on?

83 ML: Yes, you'd have to carry on but you see, my husband – the army radio school, apart from where he was on what was called fire watching which would be maybe once a fortnight, as he was staff sergeant at this time – he could collect David.

84 MM: So you did have a bit of flexibility?

85 ML: Yes. Wednesday afternoons, Sister took the day off and in the mornings we had the dental clinic, my goodness, that was like a madhouse, because there were a lot of – let me say it, the Irish labourers – who'd never been to a dentist in their lives and they were total extractions. They had to have gas and air and of course, the teeth were flying like this [laughs] and then in the afternoon, of course, Sister would march off at one o'clock and I had lunch from twelve to one, there would be minor ops. They were circumcisions or cervaceous cysts and I was in charge of all that.

86 MM: And this was on top of all the people coming after accidents or whatever?

87 ML: Yes. The casualties were more at the weekend. I'll tell you when we had a lot, particularly at weekends, remembering that all the seaside places were all closed and Richmond's proximity to London on the District Line, you got a lot of day trippers. A lot of people paddling in the river got cut feet, we always had about a dozen cut feet at the weekends.

88 MM: They were paddling in the Thames?

89 ML: Yes, in the Thames, because of course, the Petersham Meadows was still there and the river runs all the way along and there were pleasure boats going up and down. And people would go there, they would picnic; on the bank holidays on those meadows you couldn't put a pin down. People were sitting with their sandwiches and they were flocking out of the station in the morning.

90 MM: It gives quite a picture of life going on as usual, even though it was the height of the war.

91 ML: That's right and a lot of them were women on their own with their children or Grandma would be with them because of course, the fathers were away. There was also the Orthopaedic clinic

and the Surgical clinic where you'd have instruments to get ready and bandage rolls and that kind of thing.

92 MM: The particular incident you were telling me about, with the Archbishop, this was while you were working at Richmond?

93 ML: Yes, that's right and you see, Richmond hospital had been the London home of Lord Shaftesbury. It's on Shaftesbury Avenue and it was, it had been just a great big house and it was the side entrance was the Outpatients and Casualty, the main entrance was the administrative part and where Matron's office was and Lord Auckland, who was the Hospital Governor. They would come in there and it was like a great big open hall and in one corner was the receptionist taking their names and giving them an admission card and telling you where to sit until you were called in for your treatment. And then also there was the Dispensary, with a Dispenser there and an X-Ray Department was just along the corridor. We had quite a few volunteers, Red Cross volunteers, and they would do [pause] escort patients to X-Ray, you see casualties would come in and their arm or their leg and they would have to be pushed in a wheelchair to the X-Ray Department and wait and bring back the wet plate to be seen.

94 MM: Would these have been older people who hadn't been needed for the main labour force?

95 ML: Yes, but all age groups really, not so many as you mention, like middle-aged. At the back of the hospital there were the playing fields and there was the rugby team. They were a well-known London one and on a Saturday afternoon they were playing rugby there and of course, the casualties would come in regularly. But of course, Sister always took the weekend – Saturday was her day off as well and of course, I was always left on a Saturday. Well, the day nursery finished at one o'clock on a Saturday and there was an overflow of children in the day nursery so they opened another one at Ham, which is Petersham, two miles out. So what I used to do in the morning, David was getting on for three at this time, and we took them to the Town Hall and downstairs was the basement and that was sort of a waiting room for them. And the ambulances would come and they used to take the children off in the ambulances and that and then you would collect them there at a quarter to six in the evening. But I knew the ambulance men, you see, and they knew me so on a Saturday afternoon at one o'clock they would bring David to Casualty and I would sit him in the end room with toys and of course, he would hear these casualties being stitched up and that kept him very quiet [laughs].

96 MM: He must have had a very peculiar idea of what you might do if he misbehaved.

97 ML: Some of the nurses would say, Staff I'm off this afternoon and I'm going up the town, would you like me to take your little boy? So David was going and having his tea in Fullers with coffee walnut cake and he had a good time.

98 MM: That was very good training for him.

99 ML: Yes, he enjoyed it. He can still remember some of that. But he didn't kick up a fuss, he never came out of that room and bother me at all and I used to just check that he was all right and people were going in and out all the time, so he was fine. You see, this big hall was divided up and then there was just cubicles. Well, of course, my Lord the Archbishop was in the first cubicle where casualties came in first because there was a couch there with the lights and then the doctor would examine them and see what was wrong and say whether it needed an X-Ray or that and then they'd be

transferred to another cubicle to have their treatment. But they were only very thin walls so you could hear what was going on in all of them.

100 MM: Would Sister have been aware of your arrangement for David?

101 ML: Oh absolutely, that was all right with the Matron and the Assistant Matrons and that, they'd do a round of the wards and they would do a round of Casualty as well and they would go in and talk to David. Oh yes, they all knew and it was agreeable.

102 MM: I can't imagine it happening now but Casualties now – they can be quite violent places.

103 ML: No, you couldn't do that now. You see, they couldn't spare me on Saturday afternoon and that was the only arrangement [pause] if my husband happened to be off, if he wasn't on guard or on duty or anything, then he would come down to Casualty and collect David at three o'clock.

104 MM: How many days a week did you work? Was it six?

105 ML: Now, I worked Saturday and I had Sunday off. It was five days [pause] yes, it was six days a week.

106 MM: Quite a long week.

107 ML: Yes, it was but then you didn't mind in those days.

108 MM: Well, I suppose because so many people were much worse off.

109 ML: Saturday normally wasn't very busy, apart from the afternoon in Casualty and then we used to take that time for clearing out the instrument cupboards and putting re-lining – you know we had lint on a glass shelf for all the instruments, re-sterilising them all and putting them away. Seeing the needles were all sharpened, the scalpels were sharp and all that – that was the time for a sort of spring-cleaning on Saturday morning. And then the Plaster Room at the end, well, that was chaotic [laughs].

110 MM: How did you manage your own domestic routine? It was probably a help to have your husband around occasionally but it always struck me that life must have been much harder for women who were doing shopping when you couldn't really get things very easily.

111 ML: During that time, of course he was working nine to five, he had a bicycle and he had a seat on the back of the bicycle that he put David on but he went to Kingston Technical College in the evenings, two evenings a week, maybe three. He got his Intermediate B.Sc. so when he came to be demobbed, he applied to the army for a grant to go to university and he went for the first interview and he was turned down. They said no, you were working during the war, your education wasn't interrupted and he appealed and at the appeal he said my education was interrupted as if I had been full-time at the university. I was a poor boy and had to leave school and working in a laboratory and studying five evenings a week at Byron Street Technical College in Liverpool so my education was interrupted. I have now been going to Kingston Technical College and I have got my Intermediate B.Sc. and of course, he got it the second time. And then he called me up one day and he said can you use your telephone and he gave me the telephone numbers of colleges in London to which he wanted to apply. I rang one or two and he wanted to go to University College London which was one of the very high ones and so I rang University College and they said we've just got a few places left but they're for ex-servicemen only. I said send me the application forms [laughs]. And he applied and do you know, they were so impressed that he had got his Intermediate B.Sc. when he was a serving soldier from his school certificate that he got in. After three years, he worked very, very hard and he got First Class

Honours and then there was no problem getting the grant for his Ph.D. He worked under Sir Christopher Ingold who was one of the very well-known eminent chaps at University College and then when he got his Ph.D. [pause] I'll tell you what happened [laughs] he started at the university in October and that December, I had a second son. So of course, that meant that I couldn't work all the time he was an undergraduate. David was already five and starting school and so I gave up and we had this flat in Richmond. The grant was £360 a year and you don't need a lot of education to know that's a pound a day or seven pounds a week and the rent of that flat was two guineas a week. It was 34 Lancaster Park off Richmond Hill and there's a private school on the corner, the Old Vicarage. The landlord never put the rent up in the ten years we were there but he didn't do anything. So it came about that we were in a ground floor flat but it was leaking everywhere and trees were falling and that but we didn't mind because we knew we would be saving up for our own house. Donald was born in the December and I had a lot of trouble. I was fine but at the end of October, it was about thirty-four weeks and they couldn't hear the heartbeat. Both my boys were under five pounds, which as good for me for the delivery because I'm small, with a small pelvis. I went down to the clinic and I had an arrangement with Mrs. Marshall, the Matron of the Day Nursery, because we were both S.R.N.s and I said to her you know, when I go to the clinic, it's difficult with David and she said he can come here at any time when you need to attend the clinic. And that was very good so of course, when I was admitted to the hospital I rang Mrs. Marshall and she said that's fine, I'll have a place for him until you come out. Well you see, it was very awkward, my husband had just started the course at university, he couldn't be missing lectures and so it was very good to have the place. He would take David down to the Town Hall and collect him at night and I had no pressure in the hospital. Then when I went in for Donald, he was due at the end of November and he was actually born on the 5th December. Anyway, he was born very small and very weak. He had to have a haematologist in and I got out on Christmas Eve, he was three weeks old. So my husband was holding the fort with David at that end so it was very difficult. But somehow, we managed. So long as my husband could get on with his study he didn't mind. David would play and he would get up at five o'clock in the morning and work. Well you see, what helped him as well, he had the practical experience in the laboratory and he always did well at exams. But there were one or two on his course who were ex-service but they didn't last the year. The pressure of being home and family life, they couldn't do it. As I say now, Mary, I am educating my grandchildren. I have educated my husband, I have educated my own boys and now I'm doing my grandchildren, and I'm eight-six years of age [laughs].

112 MM: Quite a set of achievements over the years.

113 ML: That was the end of the war, of course, and then his first job was at Battersea Polytechnic and then it became the University of London.

114 MM: Did you continue working yourself once things eased financially?

115 ML: Yes, I did. I didn't work because Donald was a very difficult baby and he needed a lot of attention. He didn't gain weight – he wouldn't suck but he had to be breastfed. They wouldn't [pause] I had a lot of trouble breastfeeding because I hadn't got a big supply of milk and Dr. Cunningham from Londonderry was the paediatrician at Kingston Hospital and he said the only way to save this baby's life was breastfeeding. And I said well I'd great difficulty five years ago with the other one so I didn't work until Donald was [pause] perhaps he'd be about three and then I went to the West Middlesex

hospital. I went back to Richmond Hospital and I saw the Matron and I wanted to do night duty because my husband could look after getting them ready in the morning. Donald was at a little private school and he was there until he was eight and a half and David was at the ordinary school. Godfrey would get their breakfast in the morning and when I came in from doing my night duty and cycling from the West Middlesex to Richmond, which was about six miles, they were all out so I just had to get my breakfast and get to bed. So then I had to get up at half past three to collect Donald and then David in the local school. They both got their 11-plus which was good.

116 MM: Going back to the very early stages when you were leaving Ulster to go to England, would you have thought – I know you were taken by the bright lights and everything – but when you left would it have occurred to you that your life from now on was going to be in England. Were you thinking of this at all?

117 ML: No, I turned my back on Ulster, if that's the expression, because I thought I couldn't get a job here when I wanted it and I'm not going back. England is where I'll live.

118 MM: But you knew that when you first left?

119 ML: Well, probably. Do you know we have Ulster societies here? They're few and far between now but they have got one in Kingston and they like to think of Ulster people coming here and doing well and boosting Ulster, but as far as I'm concerned, Ulster did me no good other than I had a good education.

120 MM: Would you think that was partly [pause] was it because of the school system or because of your home circumstances as well?

121 ML: Well, home circumstances as well because I was the fourth daughter, we had only one brother, and I was the fourth daughter and my sisters, we used to have a big table in the middle of the kitchen and I remember sitting there and doing my homework.

122 MM: What about your own education and prospects – when you were going to primary school, would you have any ideas about your future?

123 ML: I went to the country school until I was eleven. I started when I was three because I was the youngest and my brother was next to me and he was a lovely brother, he would have given me anything. And one day I was missing and my mother and father were searching and eventually I was found and there was I at school with my brother. I'd gone down and wandered into the school and from that I sat with my brother and I used to go every day with him.

124 MM: And nobody objected?

125 ML: No, no, I would play with bricks and everything and I remember there was a girl called Lily McNeill and she was stealing the bricks from me and Willy was smacking her, you know, and we started there. You see, we started with our tables and with spellings and with writing - we had a copybook. That was a much stronger foundation and then I sort of [pause] it seemed then as though I was ahead of the others and you know, when we used to do mental arithmetic and things I always did very well. I wanted to do well , I didn't want all the others farmer's children doing better than I did. You know there was that element of competition then that you wanted to do well.

126 MM: Did you have to do the 11-plus?

127 ML: No, there was no 11-plus then but at the age of eleven my mother sent Willy and I – the other three had all gone to what was called Coleraine Model School, it was called the Model School –

and we went at the age of eleven. Well, Willy left at fourteen because my mother got him an apprenticeship as a carpenter so he did five or six years apprenticeship as a carpenter and that was good for him. Then I went to the Technical School at fourteen. I shouldn't have gone until I was fifteen but that was another story [laughs]. My mother knew the Principle because two of my sisters had been there before. He was the Elder in our Presbyterian church in Coleraine and my mother knew him well. I did not like being at that Model School, I didn't like that Dr. Forbes; he was a horrible man. So she said to him that I was fourteen and he said well, she's a year young but I'll tell you what I can do. She can take the entrance exam, which is a fortnight on Saturday and if she passes, then she can come. So I passed and then when it came to September and going back to school. Vicky told me this, my friend Vicky Thompson, she was then Vicky Carr, she said Dr. Forbes was calling out the register and called Martha McKay and she said we shouted out she's gone to the Tech. [Laughs.] That is how I came to go early [laughs]. That was just how it worked out.

128 MM: And would you, even at that early stage, have decided that you were going to knock the dust of Ulster off your shoes?

129 ML: No, I never thought about that. We had cousins in Glasgow and we used to go to Scotland for our holidays, my sister and I, and I never thought [pause] I never thought anything about it, we just took it as it came. We had a very happy life there. You know, the farmer's children messed in with all the other children. We always had a week's holiday in the country school in October for gathering potatoes, but whether you were a farmer's child or not you all went there. And we loved being out gathering those potatoes. It seemed as though the sun was always shining and the blackberries were always ripe on the hedgerows.

130 MM: I think that is an indication of a happy childhood, you know, that you convince yourself that the weather was much better then, all evidence to the contrary. The past assumes a glow.

131 ML: That's right. Then we used to go out into the fields in the spring and gather primroses. There were always primroses in the hedgerows and we would bring in a big bunch of primroses.

132 (573 words removed.)

Minnie, Dublin. Interview: 15th July 2002.

1 MOR: I'm Minnie O'R., I was Minnie W., and I lived in Donnycarney from 1929 until 1952, and we moved to Clontarf then. I have very happy memories of Donnycarney and I remember the day the war started. My Dad was in the army.

2 MM: Was this the Irish army?

3 MOR: In the Irish army, yes, and he joined the Irish army in 1922. Money was very scarce and during the war years he was a non-commissioned officer. He was a sergeant, a non-commissioned officer and he stayed on then for the Emergency, until the war was over. He stayed on until 1946. You see, he was to leave the army during the war but he was asked to stay on, so he stayed on until 1946.

4 MM: Was it an army house you were living in?

5 MOR: No, we were renting it from the Corporation, as far as I can recollect it was sixteen shillings a week rent. It went up and down as [pause] sometimes it might be less, but I remember distinctly going down to the rent office, it was every Wednesday, with the sixteen shillings.

6 MM: Was your mother working outside the home?

7 MOR: No, my mother wasn't working outside the home. She did sewing, for the neighbours, if anybody wanted anything made, she did a bit of sewing, and knitting.

8 MM: Your Dad's income was all that was coming in regularly?

9 MOR: Yes, my Dad's income was all that we had.

10 MM: How many children were there in the family?

11 MOR: I had five brothers, and one sister but my sister died when I was eight years old. She was three when she died. She died before the war started?

12 MM: Was that from a childhood illness?

13 MOR: Measles. She was three years old when we went down the country for our summer holidays. Every year when we got our school holidays Mam took us down to her mother's and Catherine, as she was known, as with us and she got pneumonia and died. She got measles and took the pneumonia from the measles. She died down there, she's buried in Castleblayney.

14 MM: That must have been very hard on your mother.

15 MOR: It was very hard on Mam and on my Dad too and on the rest of us. I thought I had a sister, but I didn't. There was just me and the five brothers then, that's it.

16 MM: Was it something in particular that made you remember when the war started?

17 MOR: I remember my brother was going on for the priesthood and he was home in September 1939. He was to go back to College in Cork and he went to Mass on the first Friday and he came back in the back door of the house and he said war has been declared. I remember those words as well and that was the first Friday in September 1939.

18 MM: You understood that this was serious?

19 MOR: Oh, I knew what was going on, like I got afraid then. I was anxious but then I understood that we weren't in it, that we wouldn't be going to [pause] that there wouldn't be anybody in Ireland going to the war, unless people were in the English army. But I had aunts in England and when the war was on I remember Mammy telling me and I'd one aunt in particular that lived in Coventry. She was saying she was bombed out and there was a picture of a statue of Our Lady on one wall of the house and that was the only wall left standing. The whole house was demolished, that was the only wall left standing. None of her family got hurt, nobody was killed but my Dad's sister lost two sons in the army. One was in the army and one was in the navy, I think, and they were killed. They lived in Birmingham.

20 MM: And when the war started, were you anxious about any particular aspect?

21 MOR: No, no, it just was fear more than anything else and then food was beginning to get scarce, you see. Ireland was selling England what she could and then food started to get rationed here then. There was seven of us in the house then and a pound of butter, maybe not a pound of butter, maybe it would be a block of butter with two clappers and you'd go into a shop and they'd make up the pound by clapping it together. And they'd give you just the fourteen ounces, no more and no less, you'd get exactly fourteen ounces and that had to do for one week for seven of us.

22 MM: My mum was telling me about a friend of hers, she was the one girl in the family and she got beef dripping while the boys got the butter.

23 MOR: Yes, well, the thing is that some mothers preferred boys to girls, for what reason I don't know and that was it. But, we didn't get tea, we always got cocoa and you couldn't get the ordinary cocoa, shell cocoa we got and it was boiling and boiling and boiling, and it was woeful. And as for the bread, it was getting rationed too; it was getting very scarce. It was a greyish colour and it was terrible. You got a big loaf when you got it in the shop but by the time you got it home it was down to nothing.

24 MM: I suppose there was no question that you could get flour to make the bread yourself?

25 MOR: No, everything was scarce. I remember my mother, I don't know where but every time she saw raisins or currants she'd bring home as much as she could towards Christmas and she was in the process of making her Christmas puddings one year anyway, when she took a cold or flu or something. Anyway, she took to bed and the big, round enamel basis that she was mixing the whole stuff in - all she had to do was put the wet from the eggs or whatever she was going to put into it. But every morning – she was in bed for a week or so – and we [pause] she had the basin down in the scullery covered with a big towel. And of course, we'd shake the basin, the fruit would come to the top and we'd scoop a handful and eat it and that was that. [Both laugh.] I didn't know my brothers were doing it and they didn't know I was doing it, so when Mum got better anyway, she came down to make the puddings. She made the puddings, and said nothing, and she made the puddings. When she saw the pudding being cut, she said I wonder where all my fruit is? – when the pudding was cut it was like the map of Ireland with railway stations, a raisin here and a raisin there, and she said nothing. All she said was I thought I had more fruit than that, so she didn't blame any of us for it but we were all at fault. But she did her best for us anyway.

26 MM: Was your Dad away much?

27 MOR: Dad was away a lot. Dad was in – I don't remember being in Finneran, in Donegal, but I do remember being in Gormanstown in Co. Meath.

28 Mam was doing [pause] this was 1941 and Mam was doing some work concerning the Army – putting names in rotation and I was helping her to do it, sorting them out. And one night we heard the drone of an aeroplane. Aeroplanes were rare at this time, there were very few, but anyway, these were very loud, at two o'clock in the morning this was, and we looked out the window and we saw two aeroplanes in the sky and my Dad thought they were taking photographs. That was two nights before they bombed the North Strand. We were still working at this thing on the Friday night when the bombs did fall and we heard them, and we saw the planes. The house shook, we heard them and the bombs fell and the house absolutely shook. Every pane of glass in the windows shook. I was terrified, terrified. Donnycarney was only about a mile and a half from the bombing. Every pane rattled and I remember Mum going off to call my brother, to tell him about the bomb and she couldn't wake him, just couldn't. So that was it, we didn't know what to do.

29 MM: Were many of your brothers living at home then?

30 MOR: All my brothers, well, Bert now would have been in Monkstown, but all my other brothers, yes, four brothers were at home. It was very frightening, yes.

31 MM: Were you like a lot of other people, going to see the damage the next day.

32 MOR: Oh definitely. My brother that was asleep, when he got up and Mam told him what had happened, he got up on his bike and he went off. And he said there was a huge crater, just on the far side of the canal, on the canal, he said, a huge big hole in the wall, with the houses all gone. There was a row of houses there, a row of shops, there were good shops there – a jewellers and all – but one family was completely wiped out. I remember there was one shop called the Red Star, and Mammy would [pause] we used to walk into town every Saturday and we'd buy something in the Red Star and it was bombed. Then there was another bomb fell over near O'Connell's School, between the orphanage and O'Connell's School and the funny thing about it is that there wasn't a pane of glass broken in the windows of the orphanage or the church. No glass was broke, like, it was a miracle that no glass was broken either in the church or the orphanage.

33 MM: Was there a lasting effect from that?

34 MOR: There was, like we were always afraid going to bed, wondering were we going to be bombed. Then the rumours went round that the Germans bombed us because we were taking refugees from Belfast and they were trying to get the railway line to keep the refugees from coming from Belfast, you see. And another story was that they just dumped the bombs into the sea but they made a mistake. It was hard to know what was true and what wasn't true; we'll never know.

35 MM: What about school? Presumably you were at school while all this was going on?

36 MOR: I was at school, yes.

37 MM: Did the war have any effect on your schooling?

38 MOR: No, no. The only thing is that it came in that we got our free schoolbooks. We had to take good care of them, you couldn't take them home at the end of the year, they had to be left for the class coming behind us, like the third years would give them to the next third year people coming on. We weren't able to write on them or anything else.

39 MM: That was a new scheme, was it?

40 MOR: That was a new scheme then. When you went to school, all the books were put on your desk, and you sat down and what you wanted was there. But you had to keep them clean, if you soiled them in any way; your parents had to pay for them.

41 MM: What about school? Was it an all girls' school?

42 MOR: When I went to school first it was boys and girls, in babies, infants and senior infants. Then you went into the girls' school. It was upstairs and the boys' school was downstairs. When you went from first school to primary school, it was only girls.

43 MM: What subjects were taught?

44 MOR: Oh, it was English, Irish, Arithmetic, History and Religion, Sewing – that was our curriculum. We did sewing every week, and we did knitting every week.

45 MM: What about secondary school? Did you go to that?

46 MOR: I went to secondary school but I didn't stay too long. When my Granny died my mother had to go down to look after her [pause] it was my grandfather died and Mammy had to go down to mind her. I was taken from Dublin down to a secondary school in Castleblayney, then I didn't go back to secondary school, and I went to a technical school, where I did some more sewing, and cooking. One thing in life I would love to have done and that was to be a chef. I'd love to have been a chef but at that time, girls couldn't do it.

47 MM: Was there actually a bar on women doing it or was it just that it wasn't something that was encouraged?

48 MOR: It just wasn't the thing, women always [pause] the thing about girls were, they didn't get the education that boys got because they were supposed to end up at the kitchen sink, as the saying goes and why waste money educating them if they're going to do that.

49 MM: And would you have ever discussed it with your parents, that you might be a professional chef?

50 MOR: No, I often said it but nothing came of it, you know. And then I left school then, and I got a job in the Sweeps office, just a temporary job, just called in a few times a year. Then I left that in 1953, that was it.

51 MM: During the war years, how old were your brothers?

52 MOR: The older brother would be, in 1939, he would have been sixteen, I think, no, he'd have been eighteen at the time the war started. Then the next one was sixteen, or maybe seventeen and then

Henry would have been fourteen. There was only about two years between us, and then there was a year and a half then between myself and the next and Louie would have been about seven.

53 MM: Did they go to secondary school?

54 MOR: They went to secondary school, they all went to secondary school. Nicholas went into a trade, he became a mechanic in Broadstone, and he was going to be a priest and he went to college to go on to the priesthood. He was going to be a priest but he got sick with TB in the college and that left him that he didn't go on for a few years. So Hughie, that was the youngest brother, he went to Broadstone to take up a trade.

55 MM: Really, what I'm trying to get at – a lot of the women I've spoken to said that it was assumed that education was for their brothers and there wasn't any effort put in to their schooling.

56 MOR: Yes, that was it.

57 MM: But they said that they didn't feel there was much point in arguing about it, that it was just the way it was.

58 MOR: Well, you see, you did what you were told to do and what they said, and you didn't [pause] what they said had to be done and that was that.

59 MM: The opportunities just weren't there for women?

60 MOR: Yes, like you daren't back answer them or anything else. It's not like today, when children would give you cheek and this, that and the other. You daren't answer back; you were told to sit and be seen and not heard, that was what you were told to do, be seen and not heard.

61 MM: And did the war change that at all?

62 MOR: No, no, the war didn't change that at all. By the time, after the war anyway, it was beginning to be a bit better, and women could see that it wasn't the right thing, you know, that there was something missing. Why can't we be [pause] I suppose they saw elsewhere, you see, women getting into jobs and that and thinking why can't we get there, you know, their rights, as they say, their equality. They'd want to be as equal as the men and they started the whole business then. Getting jobs that men did, you see, women started doing, drivers, things like that.

63 MM: What about [pause] to go back a few years to the war years, you were saying that the uncertainty about bombing was worrying. Do you remember the blackouts?

64 MOR: Oh yes, you daren't have a light on. You had to have black blinds, or black curtains, that would keep out the light. And I remember all the lamp posts, they had kind of hoods on them to shine the light down onto the road, kind of in a straight line down on the road, and everything had hoods on them, even motor cars. There weren't many motor cars, but everything had to have little hoods to shine the light down on the road, but you daren't have a light. There'd be someone at the door saying you can see a sliver of light at the window and you'd have to make sure the curtain was folded not to see it. And even like, some of the lamps like, if there was a lamp in our keyhole it wouldn't be lit because they were trying to

save electricity. And the only lamp would be on the main road. It was pretty dark, you know, if you went out at night. There were very few people out at night, you know, like kids were in bed by eight o'clock.

65 MM: What about things like the restriction on gas?

66 MOR: Well that was another thing, you just had gas on for one or two hours in the morning to get your breakfast, and maybe about twelve o'clock to get the dinner, until maybe half one or so or two, and then an hour in the evening to get your tea and no way could you use it then.

67 MM: How did your Mum manage with these restrictions?

68 MOR: Well, she seemed [paused] she had a primus stove and she was able to get a bit of cooking done on that, that'd be it, and that way we'd be able to manage for the rest of the day. If we wanted to make a cup of tea, you'd no electric kettle or anything like that, and you could use the stove to boil the kettle to make a cup of tea. Or if the fire was lighting, which we would [pause] it was very hard to keep going because of England wouldn't give us any coal because we wouldn't let them use, give them the use of our ports. It was wet turf that we had, you used to leave your turf standing on the range to dry before you burned it and logs were the same.

69 MM: Did you get the turf delivered or did you have to collect it?

70 MOR: It was brought around to us, like, a coalman used to call; like, he brought the turf instead and then you bought them from, you got them cheaper then if you bought them from someone in town. Doherty's was where Mam used to get hers and she would get turf from there, a few bags of turf and a few bags of logs. And it would be wringing wet, that was it, you had to leave it on the range. We'd all ranges and if the range was hot at all, you had your kettle on it that it would have been heated from when the gas was on in the morning and it wouldn't take that long to boil.

71 MM: I've been told the turf was full of fleas.

72 MOR: Oh, don't talk about the fleas, there were fleas everywhere, everywhere.

73 MM: It seems incredible now.

74 MOR: Oh it is, they laugh at you when you say – I do take a pound of butter out of the fridge and I cut off two ounces off it and I say that's what I had during the war for one week. I'd put that much on a slice of bread at the moment, you know, like that, I'd put that on my potatoes. As for the sugar and tea, there was [pause] they gave us two ounces of tea per person, and then they took back an ounce and a half, this was later on, and the half pound of sugar. That was three and a half ounces of tea, fourteen ounces of butter and the half pound of sugar, and that's what you got. You were given so much tea – as the song says, I'm not going to sing because I can't sing [laughs]: Bless them all, bless them all, the long and the short and the tall. Bless De Valera and Sean McEntee for giving us bread and two ounces of tea. They took back a half, to give the rest of the staff. We're nearly gone loco from drinking shell cocoa. So cheer up now lads, bless them all [both laugh].

75 MM: Yes, my mother was telling me that she saw shell cocoa in a garden centre recently and it was being sold as a weed killer.

76 MOR: Yes, Mammy used to have it on the range, like in a pot, just the shells of the nuts and you'd a big pot and it'd be boiling and simmering away there goodoh and it was woeful. You couldn't even get the real cocoa.

77 I remember then in 1945 I was in hospital, I had a gall bladder operation. I had it done at a very young age, I was only seventeen when I had the gall bladder removed. And the girl in the bed beside me had her appendix out the same day as I was operated on. And she was from Belfast and people from Belfast came down to visit her. What did they bring but six lemons and when her visitors had gone she gave me one lemon and she said ask the nurse to make a lemon drink because it's great for thirst. You see, you got the real ether at that time and I was very sick and dry. You'd be dying for a great so she said, ask the nurse to make a lemon drink for you and it was, it did the drink, you'd just wet your lips, just every so often wet your lips and it was marvellous. It was one of the best [pause] I'd never have thought of bringing lemons for a person in hospital but it was really good.

78 MM: It's a wonder they were able to bring them because they were even worse than us in regard to rationing.

79 MOR: No, I don't think so, you see, England was keeping Northern Ireland supplied with stuff. We were able to get [pause] I remember another aunt coming over and wherever she got them, she got bananas, and she had a young son and she was stuffing the bananas into him and my little brother looking on and she didn't give him that!

80 MM: A lot of the women I've spoken to, from Belfast, they remember coming South to get round the rationing, it was more butter and some clothes, stockings and stuff like that, but the rules were very severe for rationing.

81 MOR: Well, clothes were rationed here, like, we hadn't nylon stockings here or silk stockings until after the war. I remember when I started work in 1946, and I bought a pair of silk stockings for 17/11 in old money, and that was old money before decimals, and it was a half week's wages. I started work in an office in Fairview, an electrical place at a pound a week, and then when I went to the Sweeps Office, I got two guineas.

82 MM: Did you get to spend your wages?

83 MOR: No, I had to hand them up. I got so much back for my bus fare every day and I had to hand up my wages.

84 MM: And did you save?

85 MOR: I saved, well my mother saved for me, she saved my money for me. If I wanted to buy a coat, she saved the money for me then and I'd take the amount and go into town and she'd come in with me. I remember the first coat I bought in 1946 and it was a red coat, bought in Guineys for 4/19/11 and it had the 'Utility' mark on it. It was skimpily made, it never fastened properly, there was always a vee at the bottom. Material was scarce you see, and then I got another nice coat in 1949 in a place up in Mary Street, called Sydenhams, and that was 4/19/11 but a far nicer coat. It was an olive green coat. It had more

material, like it closed over properly but the price of clothes fell sharply after the war with all the 'Utility' things but the material was skimpy.

86 MM: Would you ever have seen remaking of old clothes?

87 MOR: Well, my mother made all my clothes for me, from the skin out. She made all the boys' trousers and all, like that's how handy she was. Even if she was sitting down for a while, she'd be knitting socks for us all, and that was it. She made all our clothes and any neighbours that wanted clothes, she made them too. But this particular red coat, I remember turning it and getting it dyed because even after the war, money wasn't plentiful. Like that, people were very careful. When I see the waste today, it makes me shudder to think of what we went through and they're throwing out jeans with a hole in the knee of them; we used to patch things, the boys went to school with patches on their trousers. You don't see patches on anything. The only thing I see patched now is jeans and the more patches on them today, the better, tattery. You know, I never wore slacks as a child, I never, it was always dresses or skirts I had on me and when I see children in jeans nowadays, and they're trailing on the ground, and wearing them [pause] I think it's an awful waste. That's the fashion, Granny, that's the fashion. I say I know what I'd do if that was the fashion.

88 MM: I think women especially had much harder lives then, with no machines to do things, like washing machines.

89 MOR: They had, but no washing machines or anything. That's what I was trying to tell Rachel [Minnie's grand-daughter], how many times a child had to be changed, I mean, they're talking today about the waste, the rubbish piling up. How many times a day had a child to be changed, I said, six times, at least six times. And that would be six nappies that would be put into a bucket and left steeping. They were washed the next day, but with all the other clothes, you did your washing on a Monday and you ironed on Tuesday, and you were a bad housewife if you put washing out on Wednesday. Of course, nappies had to go out every day but as regards the main, like sheets on the bed; we didn't change our clothes every day, to start off with we hadn't got them to put on. What you put on Sunday morning came off on Saturday and another clean set went on on Sunday, and everybody was like that.

90 MM: What about using the laundry service for big stuff, like bed linen?

91 MOR: Yes, the Swastika used to do what they called the 'bag wash'. I don't know whether, I forget what it was, whether it was a one shilling or half a crown, and they used to give you a huge big bag, and you'd put all your sheets and heavy stuff into that and they'd wash it for you, but you dried it yourself. They would spin dry it for you and they brought it back to you and it was great to do that. Like Mam used to have [pause] we'd come home on a Monday from school and you could always smell the washing before you saw it. When you'd open the back door, before you'd open the back door, you'd know Mam would be washing because you could smell it, and the sweat would be pouring off her.

92 MM: Would you have been expected to give her a hand?

93 MOR: Oh yes. I remember coming home from school and making bread, griddle bread.

94 MM: Was that just you, or did your brothers do it as well?

95 MOR: No, I had to do it. They had to do their lessons, I had to do the bread. [Both laugh.]

96 MM: That seems to have been common at the time, that the boys didn't help with housework.

97 MOR: Yes. Very seldom they helped; but they used to go for messages or anything like that. I wasn't made a skivvy or anything; it was just that I helped. I took delight in cooking and I loved cooked. Like, I wasn't [pause] I didn't have to do housework but I'd help.

98 MM: It wasn't just because you were the one girl, then?

99 MOR: Oh no, no, it was just I suppose that Mam was training me to be a housewife and she'd tell me to make the bread. I remember one time she had to go down to her mother, in the country, I think I was about fourteen, maybe sixteen this time, and she told me, you go into town, she says, and get a half stone of gooseberries and seven pounds of sugar and make gooseberry jam. That was my first time to make gooseberry jam and I was sixteen. She made all sorts of jam, strawberry – but I got instructed to go into town anyway and get a half stone of gooseberries and a half stone of sugar and make the jam. Like, she always did very well by us, you know, taught us what she could.

100 We used to sing then, we used to sing at nighttime. Dad would be away in the army and he wouldn't be at home and we used to sing in the dark around the fire. We'd have a singsong at nighttime. Bert wouldn't be here because he was away in college but the six of us anyway, that would be it. I cry every time I hear 'Slievenamon' because that was her favourite. [Interruption while a neighbour comes in.]

101 MM: Was that quite common, for Irish boys to go to England for work?

102 MOR: Well there was nothing here for them like; a lot of people went to England. Even girls went to England, for nursing and all, in England and my aunt wanted to take me over to train me as a nurse but Mam wouldn't let me go, why I don't know. She didn't, she thought I wouldn't be fit for it, somehow. That was that but there was definitely no work here.

103 MM: Would you have thought of doing nursing?

104 MOR: I would have loved to have done nursing. There was always one thing I wanted, I'd love to have been a chef, own a cake shop or go to nursing or do sewing and none of them. I didn't get doing any of them.

105 MM: I bet you got to do them all when you were bringing up your family.

106 MOR: [Laughs] I got to do them all at the latter end, but that was it anyway.

107 MM: Would you have been conscious in your teens that you would have fewer options maybe than your brothers?

108 MOR: No, I wasn't very conscious of it at that time, but later on in life I realised that they were getting a better education than I was. Maybe it was that I didn't want to go [pause] I liked school but I didn't like the teacher I had in Marino. She was cruel, very cruel.

109 MM: Was this a lay teacher?

110 MOR: A lay teacher and I remember one day [pause] now, you daren't tell your mother you got slapped in school, or your father for that matter, you got slapped in school.

111 MM: Was that because they'd assume you deserved it?

112 MOR: Yes, you were bold and they would give you another clatter for misbehaving in school. Like, you were warned that you were to behave in class. So anyway, the teacher told us to sit down and fold our arms and whatever she was doing, I don't know what she was doing, and we sat down and unconsciously I started doing this [twirling a lock of hair around her finger], curling my hair around my finger. And she called me up and said I told you to sit down and fold your arms and she got my four fingers in her hand and came down on my fingers with the side of a ruler. I must have got about twenty slaps and my fingers were sore and I was crying when I went home and I was terrified to go home because my mother would ask me what I was crying for, what did I do. So I told Mam what happened and she was down the next day to Marino, had the head nun and the teacher out in the corridor and I was taken out of that school and brought down to Fairview the next day. She said she wouldn't have that, that was uncalled for but that was what went on in the schools.

113 MM: It's really hard to think about children being treated like that but a lot of people didn't seeing anything wrong with it.

114 MOR: Oh, it was very hard, very hard but the world has changed an awful lot.

115 MM: When you were growing up and finishing going to school, how did that fit in with your family life, which was obviously very happy? Did you have a social life outside the home?

116 MOR: I had a good family life, but the only thing is I had to be in early. There was no going out until half twelve at night or not coming home until the morning. I had to be in the house before half nine and that was up until I was married. Then if I was going to the pictures I got to eleven o'clock but after that I wouldn't be let out and that was just it.

117 MM: What about going out with boys, for instance how did you meet your husband?

118 MOR: Oh yes, well, he happened to come [pause] Mam took in – there was no boys at home then, there was only myself and Dad was away and Mam took in two lodgers, two boarders and it was one of them that I married. The minute I saw him I said that's it [laughs]. So it was easy enough, she knew I was with him and we came back to the house together. We didn't have much entertainment unless some aunt or somebody came over from England and we'd have a bit of a party for them, you know, we'd have a singsong. I remember one time we'd a party out on the street, it must have been after my brother's ordination in 1949. You see, we lived in a circle, what they called 'keyholes' in Donnycarney. It was a circle with twelve houses in it and I remember being out on the road, dancing and singing and all, doing the hokey pokey and my aunts from England and all were out in the keyhole, doing dancing. So it must have been that time when my brother was ordained. That's the only time I can remember that the aunts were there like that, with the whole street out.

119 MM: Was the church much of an influence on your life, growing up?

120 MOR: The church was an influence. I remember being, as a child, now this was 1939, early in 1939, I might have been only ten at the time, no, I would have been eleven and my uncle died and my Mam took me to Castleblayney for the funeral. Mammy took me then and she left the others at home with my Dad, she took me with her and the aunts and all came home from England. And I remember it was snowing this day and my granny only had a range that time, she used to do all her cooking on the range, and she had the remains of a pot of stew and she says to me Good Friday or no Good Friday, get up in your grandmother's chair and eat that. I never thought of it being Good Friday but it had a chicken's heart in it and being the good, obedient little girl that I was taught to be, I ate everything on the plate. But I knew I had to go to Confession for eating meat. So the next Saturday, I went to Confession and I told the priest what I had done. Well, he made a show of me. He screamed at me and everybody in the church knew what I had done and ever since, I've hated going to Confession.

121 MM: That was a very out of proportion reaction, wasn't it?

122 MOR: It was. I put feel my face like a beetroot in the church. I could see them all looking at me in the church when I came out of the Confession box. They all knew what I had done. You know that our Lord died for you on Good Friday and you turn around and you eat meat on it at the top of his voice. It left me that afraid. Then another time, I was married and had two children and my sister-in-law was getting married, this was in 1957, July 1957 she was getting married. And we went to her wedding and Phil [Minnie's husband], being the only fellow with a motorcar at the time, had to drive every Tom, Dick, and Harry to the church. He'd drop one to the church and then he'd go off to collect somebody else. And I had Bertie and he was only two or three, and I had him sitting on one side of me and Rose sitting on the other. Well, Mass had started anyway and the door opened and Bert looked around to see who was coming in and he said Daddy is here [whispering] and that's the way he said it. And the priest stopped the Mass and told me to take the children out of the church. I said they're not bold but he wouldn't go ahead with the ceremony unless I took them out. So I had to go out with my two children and I swore I would never, ever set foot in a Catholic church again. And to make matters worse, there was a Protestant man waiting for my sister, my other sister, and it was only spilling out of the heavens this day, the 17th July, and he was in the car and I had to tell him that I'd had to leave the church with the children. So, you see kids nowadays and they're running wild round the church.

123 MM: There were a lot of problems because the priests had so much power and not all of them knew how to handle it.

124 MOR: No, they were made gods of, they were made gods of, and that was that. If they were coming to the house and you got wind of it, you had to clean the house spic and span before they'd come. You'd nearly put the red carpet out for them.

125 MM: And they didn't have much idea of what women had to deal with?

126 MOR: No, and they'd be telling you have children, have children, have children. The whole Catholic religion has gone haywire but I think Confession should be done away with, you shouldn't have to tell your sins to somebody else, tell them straight to God. You're sorry, the rest doesn't matter.

127 MM: One of the women I've interviewed, she had six children because she believed she had to, even though she was very poor, but before she was married, she'd gone out with a Protestant man whom she loved but she stopped because her friends told her it would be against her religion to stay with him and they wouldn't be able to get married.

128 MOR: I remember one Protestant girl getting married to a Catholic boy in Donnycarney and his family shunned him because he became Catholic and it was a holy terror. Now it can happen nowadays, the Catholic religion has changed so much since I was a child. You daren't go to Holy Communion if you'd eat since the night before but that's all gone.

129 MM: Would you generally feel that improved material conditions have contributed to the change?

130 MOR: Oh it is, definitely, people are better off, but there's still an awful lot of waste. Like, children have too many toys, no matter what a child wants today, it gets it, no matter what debt the parents go into to buy it. They go into debt to buy it and all the children know what they're getting for Christmas. Christmas today for children is not the same as it was for our kids.

131 MM: Most kids have a list.

132 MOR: No, my kids never gave me a list, all I'd hear would be I'd love to get this and I'd love to get that, I hope to get this and I hope to get that but they never got anything they hoped for, but as Rose says, we always enjoyed what we got. It was really a surprise what they got, you know like, it wouldn't be a doll, or it wouldn't be [pause] it would be something else out of the ordinary that they would never dream of but they enjoyed what they got. I think it spoils the Christmas nowadays when kids know exactly what they're getting.

133 MM: I know that most of the women I've spoken to would share your opinion and they all feel that while times during the war were hard, it did teach them how to manage money and appreciate the value of what they got.

134 MOR: Like, I got a few sheets from my mother's house and when I used them, they were patched and I'm not ashamed to hang them out on the line today because that reminds me of the war years. Like, you turned your sheets from centre to outside, you put the one side, you split your sheet down the middle, and you sewed the two sides together. Double sheets and then you could use them on a single bed because you see what would be worn would be gone off them. You see, that's how [pause].

135 MM: And would you done this, you know, if you were doing that kind of thing would that have been on a sewing machine or by hand?

136 MOR: On the sewing machine, yes. That was the first piece of furniture I bought for my house, nearly had a row with my husband. I had no furniture coming to this house. We had the bare boards and I

had a bed, a pram and a cot, when I moved in here in November of 1956, and I met a women the following day, she was a neighbour of mine in Donnycarney, she moved to Foxfield and she met me outside. Minnie she says you've moved into a new house, I'm selling up, and moving to England, she says, I'll give you first choice of my furniture. Says I, Mrs. Walsh, says I, there's one thing I want from you, says I, and that's your sewing machine because I knew it was never used. It was her neighbour in Donnycarney got it as a wedding present from her father and she never used it and she gave it to this woman.

137 MM: It's not electrical?

138 MOR: No, it's not electrical, it's a manual with a foot pedal, so that was my first, and I offered her £10 for it. All I had in the post office that time was £27. My husband was a taxi driver but that was in case anything happened the car, you know, that I wanted ready money and I had to come home and tell him. I bought it on the spur of the moment without telling him and I came home and he said to me what have you done, what in God's name do you want a sewing machine for. It wasn't as polite as that [laughs] but I said I'll make the children's clothes. You will in your behind, it'll sit there and be doing nothing. So I couldn't go back on my word to the woman anyway but I met her again and she says to me if you give me another £10 I'll give you the contents of my sitting room and my dining room so I came back and I told him and he said well, that's a bit better. [Both laugh.] Well, whether her husband said I was giving too much for the machine or not, I don't know, because I remember my own mother saying she'd paid £7 for a sewing machine.

139 MM: Well, they were always expensive.

140 MOR: They were, yes.

141 MM: So your mother then would have had a sewing machine?

142 MOR: Mammy had a sewing machine, sure Mam made all my clothes and she made the boys' clothes as well. She sewed for the neighbours as well.

143 MM: Did she get paid by the neighbours?

144 MOR: Well, she'd get a few shillings, like, it would be pennies at that time, it wouldn't be an awful lot, not like nowadays. Sure, I did sewing too for the neighbours; anybody wanted anything made I made for them. You see, I'd been a machinist you see, but anyway that was it, but I only got it overhauled there recently and it cost me £32 so it only cost me £32 for all those years.

145 MM: Well, if you think of the rate of inflation? [Both laugh.]

146 MOR: No, well what we did, we used to get a bit of white bread in the North. Henry used to go to cousins in Newry and he used to go on his bike, cycle up from Dublin, yes, and he had people then in Gormanstown, you see, that he would stay. He'd cycle to Gormanstown then stay the night and go up to Newry and then come back to Gormanstown and break his journey. But he'd always bring back two white loaves and they were a treat. They were really a treat.

147 MM: So it wasn't, the bread you were getting wasn't like Irish brown bread now?

148 MOR: Oh no, not like that at all. I don't know what it was, it was grey. The flour was never the same. I remember baking bread and it was snow white with a lovely brown crust on it. Now as regards today, it's a yellowy colour, a creamy colour.

149 MM: It might be something to do with all the preservatives that are put in it?

150 MOR: It might be, and the rashers are not the same today.

151 MM: What about things like vegetables?

152 MOR: Well Mum had a plot during the war, now, over where what we call the new Donnycarney is now, over there between the Malahide Road and Killester. She had a plot there, just at that, with a little river running behind it and it was ten shillings [pause] it was five shillings a year, I think, for the plot. It was – they let it out and it was just that she had such a small plot that she got it at a smaller price but she grew everything in it. She did it all herself, on top of everything. Well, we'd all go over and help her, you know, I remember her doing the potatoes, and cabbage, and runner beans. But she took pride in doing it because everybody had – were doing it, and one tried to be better than the other, with the rows of beetroot and everything. She'd everything in it.

153 MM: And what about your Dad? Was he living in army barracks?

154 MOR: No, he'd be home every weekend. That was the way it was, he was away most of the time. I don't know what, before the [pause] he used to be in the Portobello Barracks and I remember him going off every morning, washing and shaving and polishing his buckles and everything else and his boots and going off to Portobello. But that was long before the war.

155 MM: So he'd be home at night, then?

156 MOR: He'd be home every night and then we had the parties up in the barracks at Christmas, Christmas parties for the soldiers' children, and we'd go to them.

157 MM: It was a tough life for your mother.

158 MOR: It was a tough life for Mam, yes.

159 MM: People complain about the pace of life now, but it seems like it was pretty hectic then, particularly for women.

160 MOR: Oh, it's not now, people don't have time to say hello to you today, you know like. No matter when you go into a person's house, especially in the country, the kettle was always singing and before you'd know where you'd be there'd be a pot of tea made, there'd be eggs put on, baked bread and everything else on the table, sit over, you know, like, unexpected. Nowadays, you go into houses and you're not even offered a cup of tea, it's not the same at all. Everybody is rushing, rushing, rushing. They haven't time to do this and they haven't time to do that and when somebody says that to me, I always say when God made time, he made plenty of it, so take your time.

161 MM: [Laughs] I'm going to wind it up on that wise note. Thank you very much.

Nancy, Dublin. Interview: 9th October 2003.

1 NO'B: My name is Nancy O'B.

2 MM: You were saying that you wanted to be a nurse and that this was something of a family tradition.

3 NO'B: In one sense, yes. I was in secondary school in Carysfort Park in Blackrock and after I did the Inter. Cert., they weren't going to have a class for the Leaving Cert., for the simple reason that enough of us weren't going back to continue. We went back but there weren't sufficient numbers. Then it was decided that because I couldn't go to another secondary school, not having languages or other things I should have done – I did commerce and other such subjects at school – I went to a commercial college, Miss Regan's Commercial College.

4 MM: Where was that?

5 NO'B: In O'Connell Street. Two sisters set up that school and they'd been there for years.

6 MM: And when you went there, were you intending to go into the world of commerce?

7 NO'B: Well, my mother thought I should have a secretarial background and then try for civil service exams and so on.

8 MM: Did the college prepare you specifically for the civil service exams?

9 NO'B: That was included in it, but for any job in the secretarial world – we did shorthand, typewriting, business methods, and English [laughs] we had to improve our English. And so on, those kind of subjects, we had Irish there as well, in the business college. But I think after the first year, when I went back then for the second year, I suddenly thought one day, no way am I going to spend my life hitting a typewriter and writing shorthand, so what should I do? I suddenly said, I'll go nursing, just like that.

10 MM: And it wasn't anything you'd ever thought about, you know, playing nursing as a child?

11 NO'B: Well, at that time I'd read a lot of novels, you know Annie M. P. Smithson and that, where there was a nursing background so I suppose it was a bit glamorous. But it was always at the back of my mind that there was something [pause] and I was encouraged by a friend of the family who had actually trained with my aunt in England and she encouraged me then, once I had made the decision that I should really do it.

12 MM: And how did your parents react to that?

13 NO'B: Well, my mother was absolutely appalled when I went home and said that I wasn't going back, nobody had ever said anything like that in our house before, and she said well I'll have to speak to your father. You'd think my father was somewhere else, the way she said it, but she came good, she came back when she had had the discussion with my father. She came back and she said he said you can go and do the nursing and you can go to England, if you want, which I thought was very good of her.

14 MM: I must say that it sounds unusual, by modern standards, that the discussion would have been had without your presence.

15 NO'B: Well, it wasn't a matter of discussing it without me, I mean, it was about whether they would permit me to go, I don't think I came into the discussion, that part of it. My mother didn't say I couldn't do it but she was so flabbergasted that I think her way out for the time being was to say well, I'll have to talk to your father.

16 MM: What about the funding?

17 NO'B: Well, there was no funding required.

18 MM: But even the money for setting you up, travel and that sort of thing?

19 NO'B: Well, the fare to England in those days was very little, you just got the boat and that wasn't a problem, that wasn't a problem at all.

20 MM: So how did you go about applying?

21 NO'B: Again, Miss Regan. She suggested that I apply to Sellyoak Hospital in Birmingham but my mother, of course, thought I should go to a nuns' hospital so I applied to one London hospital and there was no answer from it. I applied to another and they said yes, everything was approved, but I'd better wait until the end of the war. But that wasn't for me so I went into Miss Regan and I said what was the name of that hospital and she gave me the name and address. I applied there and I was accepted.

22 MM: And this was in Birmingham?

23 NO'B: In Birmingham, in 1943.

24 MM: And what were the conditions like there?

25 NO'B: Well, actually, I never heard a bomb fall in Birmingham. The only bomb I heard during the war was the one that fell on North Strand. It had been bombed pretty badly before I got there, but most of the bombing at that stage was down in the London area and the south, the doodlebugs and that sort of thing. Coventry was flattened and Birmingham had been badly damaged also.

26 MM: So how did your mother react when you were obviously quite determined to go?

27 NO'B: Well, there was no [pause] my mother was very good like that [pause] once it was decided, that was it.

28 MM: So how did you go about getting ready?

29 NO'B: Well, I packed my bags and went by boat to Holyhead. We had to wear our life jackets all the way over, because of the possibility of being bombed from underneath and then by train. Well, I just followed my nose, I suppose. I'd been told I had to change trains at Crewe so I went down, and of course, I missed the first train so I was late getting into Birmingham where a cousin of mine had come from Coventry to meet me and to take me to Sellyoak but she had asked a friend of hers, because she had been in school at Birmingham so she had friends there. So she met me and put me in a taxi at Birmingham and sent me out to Sellyoak.

30 MM: So you weren't completely alone?

31 NO'B: No, there was no problem there.

32 MM: It must have been fairly daunting, nevertheless.

33 NO'B: No, I don't remember that.

34 MM: How old were you?

35 NO'B: Eighteen and a half. But it was like a sort of [pause] I don't know, I don't remember any problems about it.

36 MM: I know one or two people I've spoken to who went away had been at boarding school and felt it was very good preparation, but you hadn't that experience?

37 NO'B: No, certainly not. With eleven children, there would have been nothing like boarding school [laughs].

38 MM: When you got there, what sort of regime were you introduced to?

39 NO'B: Well, first of all, when I landed, of course, the others had all been [pause] the new ones starting had already been sort of dealt with, but one of the senior nurses had been assigned to take me and go over what was done. How to wear your uniform, make up your cap and she was very good. She was very friendly and very good. So I went up to my room – I was sharing it with another Irish nurse and she was from Dun Laoghaire. We had not been told that we were both going at the same time, by the hospital. It would have made things easier but I do remember asking her had she unpacked, and she said oh no, that's too much like staying. So she just stayed the three months and she did actually [pause] I don't know what happened to her after that.

40 MM: You don't know why she didn't stay?

41 NO'B: I don't know, I don't know what happened to her at all.

42 MM: She just stayed the three months. So what was it? Three months that you [pause]?

43 NO'B: Well, we had three months of what we called a probationary period and up to that, you didn't have to sign a contract to remain with the school until the end of the three months and then we were given an exam. Then you could choose to go or not, as you wished, and she chose to go.

44 MM: And during that three months, would it have been all academic work?

45 NO'B: No, in those days you went on the wards. The first day we were shown around and brought around the wards and actually, on the afternoon of the first day, we were on the wards. Now, I don't mean that we were doing things but we were there with the staff. You were always with somebody who was senior, of course, you never did anything on your own for quite a while. For me, that was the best way of learning, by doing the practical part and the theoretical part. Not just doing theory and then the practical work. I was very glad that that's the way they did it because when you were getting your lectures later on, you could relate it to the cases you met on the ward.

46 MM: Yes, of course. But I presume you weren't actually allowed to do anything to the patients?

47 NO'B: You were but you were doing it with somebody. Like, if you were making a bed you were doing it with somebody senior and they were teaching you. All the time, the one above you was teaching you.

48 MM: Was it a fairly heavy regime in the sense of long hours?

49 NO'B: Well, we were on duty at seven o'clock in the morning and we had two hours off during the day, except for one day when you could finish at six fifteen we finished at eight thirty at night and one day off in the week.

50 MM: I know that one of the women I've interviewed, who did her training here in Dublin in the Adelaide, she said it was a very strict regime and that really just about every hour or the day was accounted for.

51 NO'B: Well, you see, when you were on duty you were accounted for but when you were off duty you were free to do whatever you'd want.

52 MM: Well, they found that the ward sister had kind of life or death power over whether they got any time off.

53 NO'B: No, you were completely free.

54 MM: Where were you living? Was it in the nurse's home?

55 NO'B: In the nurse's hostel, yes, which was across the road from the hospital actually, it wasn't in the hospital complex.

56 MM: And were there mainly English girls there?

57 NO'B: Well, there were a lot of Irish, a lot of Irish girls there and Welsh, various, you know, there was a mixture.

58 MM: And would those girls have been there for the same reason, that it was too expensive to train here?

59 NO'B: I don't know, it wasn't discussed at all.

60 MM: Was that because you didn't mix much or because it just didn't arise?

61 NO'B: No, it just didn't enter our heads. We were here and that was that, why we were here didn't come into the equation at all.

62 MM: It's probably pretty hard to remember every conversation sixty years later.

63 NO'B: No [laughs] but I don't think it dawned on anybody to think why.

64 MM: What about the interaction with the patients? Were they conscious of you being Irish and was there any difference because of that?

65 NO'B: There was no difference. I never, ever met any problem about being Irish and with a name like O'Brien, you weren't anything but. But my accent was not, it wasn't Irish as such because the sister tutor on the first day, when we were going back – she'd taken us up to the hospital to introduce us and then took us over to the classroom to give us some basic information – and she said where did I get my name from and I thought she meant Nancy, because I thought it's not Eileen or Kathleen or [pause] but I thought that's what she's referring to. And she said, no, the name O'Brien and I said, well I'm Irish and she said how long have you been here and I said well I came yesterday [laughs]. But it was because a lot of the girls were from the west of Ireland or the south of Ireland or even some from the north of Ireland and the Welsh girls all had accents and the Scots girls had accents but my accent didn't fit in anywhere for her, whereas people who came from Dublin knew, if I met them anywhere in the world, they'd say you're from Dublin. But for the English people, no, they associated being Irish more with the Galway, the west accents or the south accents.

66 MM: Again, trying to establish any comparison with the Irish training, the woman I've spoken to said it was very hierarchical, that the women who were training tended to lord it over the newer intake, not bullying necessarily, but the person who was senior would not consciously help the junior and remember what it was like when they came in, but that it seemed that the little bit of power they got went to their heads.

67 NO'B: No, that wouldn't be my experience. You might get one person who was in a little bit of a bad mad or something, but generally they were very helpful. Everyone was helpful to the new ones coming back because you'd had your say, you didn't have to prove [pause] because you got one stripe when you first started and when you finished your first year you got a second stripe and then so on you got a third stripe. So everybody knew who was who, even the patients would know that this one was senior to the other one, but not because they were bullied or anything like that. You might find somebody who was a bit off, but generally speaking, no.

68 MM: And how did you find relations with the ancillary staff, for instance the clerical or the cleaning staff?

69 NO'B: Well, you see, you didn't have those sort of things in the hospital. They were – the ancillary staff wouldn't be on the wards, we wouldn't have any direct [pause] except when we were going for our salary or something like that [laughs]. Generally speaking, we wouldn't, although there was one man who was a very nice man, one man who used to look after us very well and another man who would come up to talk to patients. And then we would have what was called the Almoner, like she would be coming up to see patients but we wouldn't have so much to do with each other. We'd speak to each other, all right, but no.

70 MM: The other lady told me that the hospital porters had a huge influence because if they liked you they could be extremely helpful, but that they knew so much, they'd picked up so much medical knowledge that sometimes they'd help them out when they were clearly at a loss.

71 NO'B: Well, we only had two porters so far as I can remember [pause] those were the theatre porters, there were more than that. They were all very helpful, they would be helpful and if they saw you were doing something, that you were going to get yourself in to a bit of trouble; they would help rather than the other way round. They would more look after you than be against you.

72 MM: How did it work – were you paid from the beginning?

73 NO'B: We were paid from the beginning. Well, it would be more or less pocket money because you see, we had three meals a day, we'd full board and lodging. You know, bedding, the whole lot, plus our education, plus everything else. I think it was about £3 something a month that I got, when I first started, which would have been a lot, especially in comparison that I didn't have anything to buy. Clothes or stockings, whatever you went over with, would have lasted you at least a year before you would be replacing things so that really your stockings and your pens and your pencils and your books – you did have to buy your books, textbooks and things. But they were much cheaper then in comparison to today, when you think of books today [laughs] so that the [pause] we were well off really. In a sense, we were better off with the City of Birmingham than many of the nurses who were training in other hospitals such as the voluntary hospitals, or even others. The City of Birmingham was very good but that was just chance because there were no [pause].

74 MM: That was a public hospital?

75 NO'B: There were no [pause] we didn't call them private hospitals. The nearest would have been the voluntary hospitals but they took in patients other than [pause] private patients *per se*, whereas we didn't take private patients. Not at all, no. But when the Rushcliffe rate of salaries came in, because some of the nurses were getting very little, they brought it up to, actually not quite what we were getting at that time, but because we were all getting the higher rate, we continued on it. Whereas those coming in after me, in fact about three months later, they were getting according to the Rushcliffe scale. So we were [laughs] I was well off in comparison.

76 MM: How did the rationing situation affect you?

77 NO'B: It didn't because, you see, the hospital took your ration card. If you were going on holiday, say, somewhere in England or say someone from England was going home, they got their ration books to take home with them for the month or whatever it was. But the hospital, we were not short of food, you understand, because all the patients handed in their ration books when they were

admitted but some patients wouldn't be eating or would be eating very little so on the whole – the type of food – but we were never hungry. And also, the people I knew who were living in homes, like, I had friends outside, they seemed to manage all right. People learned how to get this and that and how to make up for things. They weren't hungry as you had in Europe, in places like Holland or Denmark, like that. We didn't have that but I didn't [pause] some people might have felt they were badly off but I didn't.

78 MM: Were you sent parcels from home?

79 NO'B: No.

80 MM: I know people who had [pause] not quite a black market trade but certainly a barter system with hams and things that were coming from home and probably not in the greatest condition by the time they arrived but they were swapping them for stockings or such things.

81 NO'B: No, I never heard of anything like that. I don't remember any of my Irish colleagues doing it either.

82 MM: When you were there, did you feel in any sense conscious of being Irish or were you just a nurse and it didn't matter where you were from?

83 NO'B: I think that's how it was, yes.

84 MM: Was there any anti-Irish feeling, because of neutrality?

85 NO'B: Well, you see, people could make trouble for themselves by trying to be Irish, in a sense. For instance, we couldn't go to Mass every Sunday so that what happened was Sunday morning you got to go to Mass once in three weeks, when you were junior, every three weeks because one Sunday morning off, one Sunday afternoon off and Sunday evening off. We had to take it in turns because somebody has to be in the hospital. But they felt that they should go to Mass every Sunday. They'd go to the Matron, and she said I have quite a number of staff here who feel they should go to church on a Sunday morning. She said I can't possibly let them all off. These would be people who were Church of England or whatever. But they would, they would make trouble for themselves by feeling that they were against the Irish, which was not true.

86 MM: It was just the practicalities of the situation?

87 NO'B: Yes, yes. You can't close the hospital [laughs].

88 MM: As you moved up through the system, how many years did you actually take to complete your initial training?

89 NO'B: Three and a half years for the [pause] to become a registered nurse.

90 MM: And what did this mean in terms of your conditions?

91 NO'B: Well, it didn't mean very much to me because I went on to do midwifery. I went down to London, which was in 1947, down to North Middlesex Hospital in London. Four of us went together and we did six months. Of course, it was done in two parts – part one and part two – and then at the end of the first part, I thought, oh my goodness, I'm not going on to the rest of it. The other three went on and I came back to Ireland and went to the Cork Street Fever Hospital. I did training in communicable diseases.

92 MM: What was it about midwifery that you decided you didn't like it?

93 NO'B: I don't [pause] I didn't really get the hang of it, really, because I suppose there were too many of us at it. Then my aunt came home from Scotland once, and she said to me, I knew you'd

never finish your midwifery. Nobody in this family ever did it [laughs]. So, what did my aunt do? Six months later she went back and did her midwifery, the second part [laughs].

94 MM: So when you came back to Cork Street, did you find there was a difference in the way the hospital was run?

95 NO'B: Oh a huge difference, I couldn't believe it, I couldn't believe how difficult it was. Nor could some other girls who were with me, who had trained in England, who had worked in England. The conditions were terrible.

96 MM: What were the conditions like?

97 NO'B: Absolutely appalling. You know, the facilities for the children and the rest of it [pause] but I don't know what other hospitals in Ireland were like because I didn't know them and I couldn't compare at all.

98 MM: In relation to your own position as a fully qualified nurse, were you treated with the same respect as you had been in England?

99 NO'B: Well, we were used, well, the fact that we had got our S.R.N. but the funny thing was that we were supposed to be in by ten o'clock at night, the same as those students who didn't have their qualifications, so it was very funny.

100 MM: Who was running the hospital, was it nuns?

101 NO'B: No, it would have been the public health department, administrators, I suppose. From the Department of Health, I don't know, it was just called the House of Health and Recovery from Fever Hospital. It had been there for donkey's years. It was in very bad shape and the Medical Superintendent of the hospital, he said [pause] you know, there was a diagram in the front hall of the new [pause] a model of the new hospital. And he said that do you see that laundry down there, and all that steam going to waste up the chimney there, that should be piped up into the hospital for poor children with the croup and what have you. But he said, I'll never live to see that. But they started building soon after I left, out at Cherry Orchard. The poor man had a heart attack so he didn't get to see it.

102 MM: Right, so the hospital was transferred.

103 NO'B: Yes,

104 MM: Was that one of the T.B. hospitals?

105 NO'B: No. Well, we had meningitis patients, T.B. meningitis patients, but we didn't have pulmonary tuberculosis patients. They built Crooksling, I think it was, and you had Peamount and you had St. Mary's in the Park, I don't know when that opened. That was originally T.B.

106 MM: In terms of pay, how did that compare to England? Was it lower?

107 NO'B: It was lower, much lower here. Of course, again, we were being paid as students, not full registered nurses, for the first year here.

108 MM: Was that because you'd qualified in England?

109 NO'B: No, because we were getting our training. We weren't as good to them as say a nurse who had completed her training. So from that point, yes.

110 MM: When you came home, were you living in a nurse's hostel?

111 NO'B: Yes. Right up beside Cork Street hospital, there was a graveyard at the side of it. I've forgotten now what the house was but I lived in the nurse's home there.

112 MM: You'd have been in your mid-twenties by this stage? How did that affect you? I mean, my daughter is twenty-six and she would find it very difficult to live in those sort of regimented conditions. Did that matter to you?

113 NO'B: Not at all. You were working and on your day off, you were out, you'd do what you liked.

114 MM: What about having to be in by ten o'clock?

115 NO'B: Well, that was a bit trying but you know, you got around it, you managed [laughs].

116 MM: The Matron in the Adelaide used to vet the boyfriends of people who were invited to dances there. Did anything like that go on?

117 NO'B: No, well, we didn't have dances there. The only thing, there was one I remember during my year, I did a year and then some exam and then I stayed on for a few months while I decided what I was going to do next, and that was a temporary not as a full [pause]. But the only dance was one that was held in the Gresham Hotel, I think, it would have been an annual dance, you know. There were the senior staff there and I suppose they were looking around, but you weren't bothered [laughs].

118 MM: Were there differences [pause] I know there were differences in conditions but would there be differences in the techniques that were used in Cork Street and the ones in Sellyoak?

119 NO'B: Not a lot, no. Not a great deal of difference, but then again, the techniques were slightly different because of the kind of nursing we were doing and the people we were dealing with. The vast majority were children and mostly from the slums, and they were the best patients I ever had. When they were well they were very well and when they were sick, they were very sick. But when they were getting better, they were an entertainment [laughs].

120 MM: My mother got diphtheria when she was a young child and she was quarantined for two months during which she was not allowed see her family.

121 NO'B: Nobody was allowed in the hospital, there were no visitors at all.

122 MM: It must have made children quite distressed?

123 NO'B: Not at all. They came from [pause] if you saw some of the houses, because they were all infectious diseases, or reputed to be infectious diseases, we had to go out and collect them in our own ambulance from Cork Street and there we had two drivers who also were a pantomime [laughs]. So we had to go out and bring them in and you couldn't even bring in their clothes because you might [pause] so you had to wrap them in a blanket and bring them in so that nothing came in.

124 MM: So you saw how bad the slums were?

125 NO'B: You might have to mind a hole on the stairs, sometimes, going up the stairs in a tenement.

126 MM: One of my interviewees was a Medical Almoner in the Rotunda and she told me one story where she had been visiting a patient in her home and she had twenty children and like that, she'd had to skip over the holes in the stairs to get up to the top of the house.

127 NO'B: And you had to have a torch with you. But the funny thing was, you'd come along at night and there'd be nobody there and when you came down if you could open the door of the ambulance they'd all appear from God knows where, just to see who it was that was being taken away [laughs]. No, do you see on our children's ward in Sellyoak there were no visitors allowed for the simple reason that the children were more upset when the visitors went. And we also had to think that

if someone comes to see the child and a day or two later the child develops measles, then the ward has to close and they are all in quarantine. Children being admitted were admitted to the adult wards and you could hear the children yelling when their mothers and fathers were leaving so it was really [pause] I only saw one child, when I was in Australia, who really shouldn't have been in without a mother. They all settled down, put their fingers in their mouth and looked at the others because you see our children's ward was very nice, we had all sorts of things in it – there was a motorcar, there was a tricycle, there was [pause] seven dwarves, paintings on the lamps. I think it was Mickey Mouse and that sort of thing, so it was really [pause].

128 MM: Was that common then, to have specially decorated children's wards to make them as pleasant as possible?

129 NO'B: Well, that happened to be in Sellyoak and they were dressed, when they were recuperating, they were dressed in hospital clothes and they could get up and get around. Every morning they were washed and changed into day clothes and then they were able to get about but you wouldn't have found that here. But I can only talk about that hospital because I don't know about the others.

130 MM: Did you get to see much of the Birmingham area or were your hours too long?

131 NO'B: Oh you had your off duty and you know, you had your two hours off. You might also have time off for lectures or you might have to go to a lecture in your off duty time. It would just depend on how short they were of staff on the ward but you could be off and then you had your one evening, you were off at half past six in the evening and then you had your day off. You did what you liked on your day off. You could be out all day.

132 NO'B: Well, mostly we went into town or we went to the theatre or we went to go – it was very easy, Birmingham was very easy to get out into the countryside – to go out into Warwickshire or the hills, to go into Shakespeare country, it was very easy to get out of the city.

133 MM: Presumably there was a blackout at night?

134 NO'B: At night, yes. We wouldn't be out late at night, on your own. I did once have to walk – an Irish dance, the only one I ever went to, at one of the church halls and I missed the last tram and had to walk from the city centre almost out to Sellyoak.

135 MM: How far was that?

136 NO'B: It would have been about three miles we were out. We were beside Bourneville. Do you know what Bourneville is?

137 MM: The chocolate factory?

138 NO'B: Yes, the factory was very near us and the model village of Bourneville, our nurse's home was on the south side. It was beside Bourneville so you could always smell the chocolate when it was going to rain and you could smell the chocolate most of the time. The Cadburys lived somewhere near. They were Quakers and they lived in this sort of Quaker settlement, some of them.

139 MM: Was that in an area with other families?

140 NO'B: With them, yes, all of the Cadburys lived there. They were very good, the Quakers, very good in their various enterprises.

141 MM: I think Quaker families did tend to make very good employers but Cadburys has long been in multinational hands.

142 NO'B: Yes, when it belonged to Cadburys, they tell me, you were allowed to eat as many chocolates as you liked and after you did that, you didn't want any more anyway [both laugh]. So it was very wise. You could eat what you wanted to when you first went.

143 MM: And did you make friends with any English girls or families?

144 NO'B: Yes. When you went in, you see, you had a certain group, and that group, wherever they came from remained fairly good friends.

145 MM: Do you remember ever discussing what was going in the war?

146 NO'B: I don't remember at all. I remember discussing it far more here when I was going to school before going to England, around 1938 and that, and discussing it far more then than we ever did there.

147 MM: I know censorship was quite strict but since they had been bombed and the war was quite definitely still going on [pause]?

148 NO'B: I suppose we just got so used to it, it was just a way of living.

149 MM: Did you ever come across any casualties, from bombing or fighting?

150 NO'B: No, it was too late in one sense but in 1944 when they were bring up the [pause] after D-Day, after the landings, the special landings, all the hospitals in Birmingham were taking in casualties except ours. Ours was the one hospital which was to remain only for civilians. But even then we had to give up a ward but we didn't really [pause] the patients we had had already had primary treatment so there were casualties but they were walking casualties, the ones we had. It was to bring them away from the south, which was still being bombed, that's why they came up to us. The only thing too is that in 1944, when I wanted to go home, I couldn't go home. I couldn't come to Ireland in 1944.

151 MM: You couldn't get a travel permit?

152 NO'B: There was a ban on all travel between Ireland and England in 1944, just before D-Day but our hospital had a rule that if you started on the 1st June you had your holiday in May and you came back on the 1st June so that [pause] it was May and I couldn't [pause].

153 MM: Was that relaxed after the landings had finished?

154 NO'B: I don't when it was relaxed because my holidays had gone and it wasn't until 1945, when actually I was in Dublin when peace was declared.

155 MM: It is interesting because I've seen records of the numbers of people who acquired travel permits to go to England and they're not awfully accurate but certainly in the mid years of the war from about 1941 to 1943, the numbers really were very high of people travelling from here to go to war work and then they dropped right off in 1944. There's a lot of speculation about why that might have been, whether people were returning because the war jobs were finishing?

156 NO'B: I don't remember that because well, two of my cousins, well one finished her training and she came to live in Monaghan and then another one left because her mother called her home from London. She came home during the war, she was home just before I went because I got a lot of her books. I took them with me but she came home, I don't remember any problem about it but for me, it was just that particular time there was a ban. But they made provision for me because there was a place up in Shropshire where nurses who couldn't go home – it was for convalescent nurses who were sick. There was one Irish girl and she had her tonsils out and she was going up and I went with her. I

paid for myself but they made arrangements for me to go to this farm in Shropshire so I had a holiday. It was like being in another world it was so quiet. There were American soldiers nearby and it was really funny to see the difference between the Americans and the British. The Americans were – well, if you were going past the American barracks the guns would be up on the post and you'd see the sentry with his elbow against it leaning over [laughs] in comparison to the British soldier who'd be standing like this [at attention].

157 MM: Did you have any direct contact with the soldiers?

158 NO'B: Not really [pause] well, there were a few who used to come out, to come out to where I was staying. The family had invited a couple of the soldiers out. They would always say hi as you were going past – they were very relaxed [laughs] but I didn't have anything in particular to do with them.

159 MM: One of my interviewees in the North told me the American soldiers were much sought after because they had access to so many extras, they could get nylons and chocolate and such things. They were not only better paid but better supplied.

160 NO'B: That was true too in the North.

161 MM: One of the things that struck me about accounts of American soldiers in the North was that Northern men resented them because their manners were so much better and they thought they were showing them up.

162 NO'B: Yes, but I suppose Americans can put on the manners and they can take them off again. When you're an American far from home, I suppose, you go out of your way to try and make friends.

163 MM: I've seen one of the handbooks that the soldiers were given before they landed in Ulster and they were quite definitely told to have manners on them.

164 NO'B: Well, they were friendly – they were much more relaxed. But whether that's really good discipline, to be so relaxed, I don't know.

165 MM: Would you have been conscious of a different atmosphere in the run up to D-Day?

166 NO'B: Yes. Funny enough, you could hear at night the rumble – I was back in Birmingham now. It started when I was in Shropshire but I came back and you could hear during the night, the rumbles of everything going south, south, south.

167 MM: I know it's difficult to remember exactly but would you have been conscious that there was something momentous going on?

168 NO'B: Well, you would know that something was coming up. What it was you didn't know but you would guess that something was coming up as they were all going south and that was the easiest way across, to go across from the south of England, coming down from the Midlands. What it was, you know, I mean something was going on all the time so that there was troop movement everywhere, even across Europe and that, so that you were aware of that from the news but what this was going to be, we didn't know.

169 MM: So you were just on holiday here when the war ended?

170 NO'B: Yes, I was on holiday. Yes, it was May so it was my time for a holiday again [laughs]. I was in Dublin, this time, that was two years.

171 MM: What was the atmosphere like – were people glad it was over or did it make any kind of impact?

172 NO'B: I don't remember any kind of fuss. I remember my brother coming in – he told me, actually, that peace had been declared when he came in for the dinner, as they used to do in those days. He came in on the bike from the office, come home for their dinner, but the only thing I remember is my friend not understanding me. I have a very bad habit of speaking like the person I'm talking to and the Birmingham accent was so bad I could even hear it myself. It was like my Aussie accent, I could hear that one too.

173 MM: Were you the only one in your family who had gone away?

174 NO'B: Gone away to England? At that time, yes.

175 MM: Where do you come in the family?

176 NO'B: I'm the seventh [laughs].

177 MM: So there were six ahead of you. And did they find it easy to get work here or did they eventually travel too?

178 NO'B: Well, they're civil servants, the whole lot of them. Well, one of them died at eighteen, just before his Leaving Cert., and then there was Kitty, Dermot, Kevin, Jimmy, they were all in the civil service. Kitty was a Writing Assistant and Kevin was Junior Ex. I think Kevin went in as a Junior Ex., and then he went on.

179 MM: Did Kitty stay on as a Writing Assistant or did she get promoted?

180 NO'B: No, she didn't. She remained a Writing Assistant for a very good reason – she couldn't speak a word of Irish. Every time she went up for it [laughs] she flunked the Irish. She tried to learn it but she really didn't put her heart into it. She was born in England and Dermot was too. I was the first one actually born in [pause] after the family moved back from London. My mother and father got married in London. She was a schoolteacher there and my father was in the civil service and he got a chance to come back to Dublin when somebody from Britain in Dublin wanted to exchange, so they exchanged and came to Dublin. He was in the Land Commission.

181 MM: You were saying that you had no languages, did that include Irish? When you wanted to change secondary schools?

182 NO'B: Well, no. You know the way they do French and that sort of thing, well, we didn't do French or German or anything like that. Most of the other schools did but they didn't do Commerce so to get another place in another school, it would have been difficult. But anyway, I suppose my mother thought I should be a secretary, or whatever [laughs].

183 MM: Was there an expectation when you became independent that you might contribute to the family income?

184 NO'B: No, never. I was fortunate to have all my brothers ahead of me.

185 MM: Did they stay at home or were they living independently too?

186 NO'B: Well, the first wedding was in 1961 and it wasn't the eldest one and I remember very well at the wedding, some woman, I can't even remember who it was but she was just chatting to my mother and she said well, never mind, Mrs. O'Brien, you've lost a son but you've gained a daughter. And my mother said what? I thought they were never going to move [both laugh].

187 MM: A friend of mind has two sons living at home who are obviously with her for life so quite how your mother managed, I can't imagine.

188 NO'B: You see my mother brought the boys up to look after themselves and there was no difference between a boy and a girl in the family. There were only two girls, you see, and nine boys and she was determined that no way were they going to get away with the idea that the girls would look after the boys so that she [pause] they were no bother. Everybody did whatever was to be done in the house, yes. But you see, as the older ones were growing up and the younger ones were coming up so you see, they sort of got out of the jobs as the younger ones were coming up for it.

189 MM: Your father was in the Land Commission?

190 NO'B: He died in 1943. The year I went away, six months later, he died. He was ill when I went.

191 MM: Did you come back for the funeral?

192 NO'B: I didn't know anything – my mother didn't write until much later.

193 MM: That must have been very distressing?

194 NO'B: Well, I suppose it would have been difficult anyway. Anyway, I don't want to go to funerals – I still don't like them.

195 MM: I'm not too fond of them myself. So, when your mother [pause] I presume with so many children your mother wasn't working outside the home?

196 NO'B: No, she wasn't. In those days, they didn't. Some mothers had to but they weren't really in full time employment, a lot of the women who were working, they were doing jobs where they went out for a few hours, waitress jobs, things like that, unless [pause] there were women working but they usually had a servant in the house. Like, a lot of our teachers in Marlborough Street were married but there was somebody at home.

197 MM: Was your mother tempted to go back to work at any point?

198 NO'B: Well, she couldn't go back to work because you see, again she didn't have Irish and you could not get a job without Irish. Kitty got into the civil servant by being coached terribly well by one of the teachers in Marlborough Street and she managed to get into the servant, but then she didn't manage to get up.

199 MM: I've seen job descriptions from the forties where there were outlines of the different jobs from Writing Assistant through to Principal Officer and it was quite clearly gender based. It was expected that Writing Assistants and Clerical Assistants and Officers would be mainly women because they were expected to marry and leave. Was it like that in nursing in the sense [pause]?

200 NO'B: Well, you see there were no men in nursing when I first started. Male nurses only came in later but it wouldn't have mattered at all because there wouldn't be enough male nurses to take all the posts anyway. And Matrons were always – I never met a male Director of Nursing, as they call them now, but all the Matrons I knew of were female.

201 MM: There seemed to be a marriage bar in public hospitals but I'm not so sure of the private or voluntary hospitals. Would you remember anything about that in Sellyoak?

202 NO'B: There were very few married people at all and mostly those who did marry left but whether they had to leave or they chose to, I don't know, whether that was a requirement. But I know one of the ward sisters was married out of I don't know how many in Sellyoak, but none of the senior sisters were married. There were a lot of the women who were married and who would look after the

home for them, when you think in terms of what was available. I think the man also expected the woman more or less to be there when he got in [laughs].

203 MM: There still seemed to be an element of almost Victorian attitudes to families that a man's status was recognised by his not needing his wife to support him economically.

204 NO'B: That he could support her, yes.

205 MM: Times have changed quite a bit [laughs].

206 NO'B: They have and I don't know whether it's really for the better. It depends. Now there are females who seem to manage very well and do everything but it's an awful [pause] when I see them outside the school here, bringing the children in the morning and coming back for them at noon and bringing them back for something in the afternoon, do they ever stop?

207 MM: My sisters – their children are much younger than mine and no, they don't.

208 NO'B: They don't stop and if they have a job as well?

209 MM: Despite a lot of changes, it still does seem to be largely expected that the mother will arrange the childminder and look after the domestic arrangements.

210 NO'B: Yes, and it all costs money. How much do they get out of it at the end of the day?

Olive, Dublin. Interview: 3rd December 1996

1 MM: Could you introduce yourself for the tape and tell me your maiden name, and when you were born and what sort of family you were born into?

2 OC: Well, my name is Olive and I was born in 1925, just after Christmas in a provincial town and I was the second child. I have a sister almost two years older than me and that completed the family. I grew up in that provincial town and went to school in that provincial town. Now my people were not from that provincial town because my father was working there when I was born and he continued to live there until his old age but he did not actually come from that part of the country, but I went to school there and then I came to Dublin, when I started nursing, as a student nurse.

3 MM: What did your parents do for a living?

4 OC: My father was in the motor trade and my mother, well, in those days my mother had been, had worked in England during the first World War in the ministry of something or other in London [laughs] but she was a house wife, a full time housewife.

5 MM: Yes.

6 OC: And my grandmother, my mother's mother, and my mother's sister also lived there, so, my father was in a house with five women, and it was quite interesting. He coped very well really. But do you want to hear more about that?

7 MM: Yes I would like to, it's interesting.

8 OC: My grandmother, my mother's people come from Wexford and after my grandfather died my grandmother and her unmarried daughter came to live with us in our town because they were left very badly off and so we were all five together in this old Georgian house. As I say, my father was in the motor trade. He didn't have his own business, he worked for somebody else. And the wartime period which you're interested in was, looking back, a very anxious time because petrol was rationed, cars went, as we used to say "off the road" but of course nothing was said to us children, he was the last of the old Victorians really, he had been brought up and my mother had been brought up by parents who were Victorian, which I think makes a great psychological interest

9 MM: Do you mean?

10 OC: Because it backwashed on to our generation, you know.

11 MM: And they wouldn't have told you that they were concerned about money

12 OC: Oh no.

13 MM: Would you have been aware of it yourself in any way?

14 OC: Well, our expectations were quite low, really, in one sense, and yes we were aware of it but when I said we weren't, we weren't so badly off, really badly off, you know but things were a struggle and my sister and well, of course, in those days secondary education had to be paid for, so in the middle of the war we had to leave school quite early and after my matric, which would be sort of fifth year and my sister because there just wasn't money there. But nobody said anything; we sort of took it in our stride. On the other hand, my mother managed through good [pause] she had us taught the piano and we got to ballet lessons and my sister learned to play the organ. She

managed awfully well now looking back on it to give us quite a good general education for the amount of resources she had

15 MM: And what sort of school did you go to?

16 OC: I went, both my sister and I went to different schools which is quite interesting, we both went to co-educational schools [pause] and we had the benefit of a very liberal co-education, education which was good for us because we didn't have brothers just these two sisters and quite a lot of sibling rivalry between us.

17 MM: Yes.

18 OC: It was very interesting; I could go on for hours [laughs].

19 MM: Do you think your parents took that into account when they sent you to those particular schools?

20 OC: No, well I don't really know. I think they, my sister was sent as a weekly border to X because it was probably the nearest secondary school and we were Church of Ireland people and in those days education perhaps was more segregated, you know, and then when I became secondary school age, the Grammar School re-opened and I was popped along there to support it. My school days were so, so terribly happy, I had wonderful school, and looking back now we had a jolly good education in that place even though it was small.

21 MM: Was it a very academically inclined education or broader?

22 OC: No, broader. We were educated for life there, I still remember, things there that I value now, like having a wonderful Irish and French master who gave me a wonderful love for the Irish language which in those days among the Church of Ireland people, it was a kind of a political thing, we all had to do it. Our parents were brought up under a different regime and didn't know it and my father, even in the First World War, it was the political aspect of having to learn it, he found very difficult. But I just loved the language. We had a wonderful teacher who was a friend of Jack Yeats and I remember meeting Jack Yeats and all of these interesting people. It was simply a great place, looking back now on the resources.

23 MM: And would it have approached the education of boys and girls on an equal basis?

24 OC: Oh yes, yes. I know, I know like when two girls' hockey teams played hockey, they came to play hockey against us like, it was quite interesting to see what girls were like without boys. We thought they were quite silly [pause] there was equality, there wasn't the roles that girls should do things, it was quite forward looking really, looking back on it.

25 MM: You were living in a household dominantly female. Would that have made a difference to how you saw things? Was there any difference in your outlook on life that you were aware of in comparison to your contemporaries?

26 OC: Well of course I went to an ordinary National school with boys, but I didn't really know anything about boys, you know really because I didn't have brothers, only had friends who had brothers but I didn't, in those days, I didn't think very much about it really. And what I thought was great about going to school with boys was that we went through the "spots" and everything together. The worst was over by the time that you came out of secondary school. You know there was no mystique [laughs] because it was all you know, you got passions for fellows and they wouldn't [pause] in those days it was all so kind of innocent really.

27 MM: Yes.

28 OC: It was really, so that I didn't have any hang-ups.

29 MM: Well, in your earlier days of school before you had to leave for financial reasons, would you have expected to go on to third level?

30 OC: Well, it never occurred to us, our expectations were quite low in a way because, maybe I should have liked to have, probably. But at the time, I would never even think of saying it, because there just wasn't money there and while my sister, she was, I'm not sure, but we wouldn't have been scholarship girls, quite near the top of our class but we wouldn't have been scholarship girls

31 MM: And would have other girls from your class gone on to third level?

32 OC: Yes, yes, my best friend went and she was very [pause] we were great rivals in class even though she was my best friend. But she went on and did awfully well in languages. But we didn't feel any deprivations for not having gone, you know.

33 MM: So what age were you then when you did leave.

34 OC: I left school at about seventeen. I was late enough going and I left school at seventeen and then I got an idea about doing nursing into my head. I had an aunt who was a nurse but I didn't have any of these wonderful games minding people, caring for people or any of that sort of nonsense. I don't know, my sister had, she had done a secretarial course and I just said I'll do nursing without having any road to Damascus about the decision or anything [laughs].

35 MM: There wasn't any pressure to go into a specifically female occupation? Your sister did this secretarial course?

36 OC: No, no, no, it was a matter of that then of course was 1944 and I mean, things were pretty tight still and that.

37 MM: Would you have been aware of the high unemployment?

38 OC: No, my father, he was never out of a job and in his own way he was much revered in his provincial town. He was a very straight man in a sense. We managed, we managed quite well I think. When I think of my mother [pause] we used to get places and do things.

39 MM: Did she get so much money from your father each week?

40 OC: She would have housekeeping every week and that's it, but when I say that we were badly off, we weren't badly off compared to some people but we were badly off. My mother's people, I think, were very well off and they were from Wexford, but her father, you know, was a frightfully bad businessman. He always wanted to go to sea. He was stuck into a family business in Wexford and he never sent anybody a bill or did anything like that. A wonderful person but the biggest fool in Wexford. Anybody who owed him money walked behind the hearse because he had never looked for his money. So my grandmother was left very badly off. The relics of auld decency [laughs] but you know what I mean. My mother had been brought up with governesses and maids but not [pause] they would be Irish Protestant merchants, you know.

41 MM: She coped very well with slightly straightened circumstances?

42 OC: Oh yes, they just were happy to adapt

43 MM: What would her domestic routine have been like when you were young?

44 OC: My mother?

45 MM: Yes.

46 OC: Well, my grandmother kind of ruled the house, a very forthright person, yes, very forthright, my grandmother and my mother didn't get on particularly well because they were very alike and then this little unmarried aunt was the buffer but my father always had great respect for my grandmother. My mother would always be sort of to him, "oh mother did this or did that" and he'd say "oh, she's an old lady", we had great respect for old people, and she had the best seat. We lived in this old Georgian house. She had the best seat beside the fire and the rest of us were frozen. It never occurred to us that she wouldn't have that best seat.

47 MM: And would your grandmother have reciprocated that respect to your father?

48 OC: Oh yes, yes.

49 MM: As a person or because he was a man?

50 OC: Oh no, as a person

51 MM: Yes.

52 OC: My mother was an extraordinary character because she was a great wit and she had a great sense of humour. She was a kind of restless spirit and really, never really had scope. I don't know, what she would have been because my aunt told me that while they were children, they used to all play in this lovely garden and they'd all be fixed playing something, and then my mother would uproot them all, drag them all off to do something else. She was restless.

53 MM: Yes.

54 OC: And there she was stuck in the town of D. right in the town, very little garden and she didn't enough scope for that restless spirit but she came out with great wit and a marvellous sense of humour.

55 MM: Is that something that you are aware of in retrospect or that you would have sense at the time?

56 OC: It's hard to say, it's hard to say, I think that we probably realised it at the time, not that she was a restless spirit but that she had a great sense of humour, could make up doggerel at will and you know, we had great laughs. There was no television or anything like that. We had great laughs with her and that sort of thing but she, I think she might have been discontented no matter where would have lived or what she would have done but that was vital. It wasn't apathy, discontent was better than apathy. You've got the picture [laughs].

57 MM: So then did you decide to go to Dublin to do your training or was there a choice about it?

58 OC: Well no, there wasn't a choice then because there was only the little hospital in D. It was the cottage hospital where I was born myself; there certainly wasn't a training school, so of course it would be Dublin. So then I decided to apply to the hospital. Have I got to name it, if I want to talk about it?

59 MM: No.

60 OC: I started off there and before I left one of the local clergy in the town, he was a wise character said "you'll be back in a fortnight" and that was what made me stay. I was determined I wasn't gong to be back but I was nervous. I hadn't been away before and the school was all so happy and lovely. I didn't say anything at home about it.

61 MM: It must have taken some courage to go on with it.

62 OC: Well, I don't think I was great but I don't think anybody would have understood [pause] I think we were brought up not to expect happiness. That was never said, but like, we were brought up to make the best of a situation. There was no big deal to do it, and you hadn't to be a marvellous person to feel like that, it was just the way it was.

63 MM: Well, thinking about your friends at the time, do you think this was something that was peculiar to your family or did everybody [pause]?

64 OC: No, everybody trudged along. We all trudged along because no, I think it was a general thing. People's expectations wouldn't have been so high and I mean, the word, teenager, had only just barely arrived when I was a teenager, and like, we never sort of thought about our identity. You know of, you know, when you were at the menarche, that was explained to you and that all went on and then, oh you were at the spotty stage and then you were seventeen or eighteen and there was none of this, you know, of you're on the brink of adulthood or this sort of thing. In a way it was better, you just went on with things.

65 MM: Yes, suppose sometimes if you think things are going to be difficult, it's almost inevitable that they will be.

66 OC: Yes.

67 MM: so, when you went to Dublin, did you go by yourself or did you go with any of your friends?

68 OC: No, I went on my own, because my pal had gone to Trinity and I went on my own and you know, it's good for you and I always did do it, I never minded going into strangers, into places, because when you can start, not exactly alone, but it's kind of a challenge. But of course, there would have been about ten or twelve of us who started together but we only met the first day we went.

69 MM: And were you in a nurse's home?

70 OC: I was in a nurse's home, yes and it [pause] we were there for all the years we were in training and em, do you want me to talk on now about the conditions?

71 MM: Yes, please.

72 OC: You know, you think of things afterwards.

73 MM: Well, if you could just tell me a little about the nurse's home and your reactions to it.

74 OC: Yes, well, I was called for in January, we went in and I realised that there were about ten of us girls in the same group, or maybe twelve and in every group, after a day or two, you find friends and there was three of us became friends. It was very interesting, one was from Dublin, one was from the country and had been to an awful boarding school, who thought that after the awful boarding school she was in, the nurse's home was like freedom personified, we thought it was dreadful, dreadful because of all these rules. So it was also quite interesting and we sort of had six weeks in the classroom in this nurse's home before we were let loose anywhere near the wards. But, we had to, my parents had to pay for me to train and that was the rule then and it was quite hard to get in. There was quite a stiff interview and all that sort of thing, some months before.

75 MM: Did you have to do an examination:

76 OC: Oh yes, we did and we had a medical. So we were on, kind of, for three months we were on probation and at the end of the three months then if they were going to keep you, they signed you on and you signed a contract for the four years of your training and that an anxiety in case you wouldn't be accepted. Do you want to hear about my daily routine?

77 MM: Oh yes.

78 OC: We had a lot of domestic work to do, looking back on it, and when we were in this school, the nurse's school, the sister tutor looked after us and in the mornings, we would all be sent down through the hospital, each one of us, to clean the bathrooms. We were told that the object of cleaning the bathrooms in the morning was that when we were staff nurses and we would be in charge of wards, then we would know exactly what to look for in a clean bath. Maybe it was true and maybe it was false but we all had to clean these bathrooms every morning and then go back into the classroom for the rest of the day and do lectures and things like that, and then we'd stud. This was the first three months, with anatomy and physiology and things like that, after three months we would be launched onto the wards.

79 MM: Sorry, just to go back - your routine then while you were in the nurse's home, while you were in preliminary training, what time in the morning would you start?

80 OC: We'd start in the bathrooms at half past seven, we were called at half past six, breakfast at seven. The night sister would come and say 'Grace' and you couldn't be late for 'Grace'. We were all starving all the time you see, and we all put on a huge amount of weight because we were hungry all the time and we ate like mad then when we'd get out and we were abysmally poor. Anyway, then we'd start and we'd be on all day until five, quite a long day. And then at the weekend of that six weeks, it was really very nerve-wracking because you could be sent on to a ward and you could be told to do this, go here, do that, and you hadn't a clue, you know, and it was all very strange. Now, the whole thing, the main attitude to you was, we didn't ask you to come, you asked to be here and that still pertains to this day and that really annoys me about it. It was true of course but really we were [pause] and there was the hierarchic structure of course. But after six weeks, for three months, we'd do a report from each ward. Go to a ward for a month and sister would give a report, another ward for another month and then if those reports were satisfactory, we'd be signed on and then we started our training as such, after the preliminary training. Uniform was provided, our laundry was done and we all shared cubicles in this nurse's home. It was like a dormitory and the conversations at nighttime, before we went to sleep, they were terribly entertaining. But anyway, then we launched forth on those three years, almost four years. Because we had to do three years, we had to do a minimum of two years to our finals and we had to give a year to the hospital.

81 MM: Working as?

82 OC: As a staff nurse.

83 MM: Would you have specialised in any way?

84 OC: No, well we had to, we were all moved around, two months in this ward and two months in another. Well now, the sister's reputation from one ward to another would go ahead, so there was more to be dreaded going to, because the sister would be quite frightful and when we got there, she might like us and that would be fine but you might go to a ward where the sister was

lovely, but then she wouldn't like you and it wouldn't be fine. But that's human relationships, isn't it? Well, it was all very hierarchical, there was always a hierarchy even in the nurse's home so anybody who was six months ahead of you in your training, on the stairs in the nurse's home, if they were coming down and you were coming back, or going up, you stood back and let them down. That was the pecking order. Then if a crowd came in six months after you well then you'd be on the first rung of the ladder and somebody would be coming up, you'd come down and say 'thank you' because they were six months behind you.

85 MM: And who passed on this instruction or was it something that was assumed?

86 OC: I don't know really, we were terrified, terrified of the staff nurses and they were four years older than us but they were finished and they were doing their year in the hospital and they were something great, we hoped to be like them. But our off duty, we worked 104 hours per fortnight, I remember that, I'm sorry I haven't the old brochure to show you. 104 hours a fortnight, now sometimes it would be a split shift, sometimes from half past seven to five, or sometimes half past seven in the morning until nine o'clock at night with a break between two and five. We got two days, two consecutive days off a month. You didn't have any choice about it, maybe when you got towards your final and your sister was getting married, well you might have a hope of getting off for that wedding. Now, if sister was decent she'd give you a half-day before the two days but she didn't have to, in other words you'd be off at two o'clock before your two days off, but she didn't have to, so you might have the first two days in January off and the last two days in February. But everybody was in the same boat. I know there was another hospital, under the religious in Dublin, and the poor girls there on their days off, had to go back and spend every night in the nurse's home. But at least we got away for two days.

87 MM: Did you go home:

88 OC: We went home. We had to say where we were going for the two days and we would go home. Well, we would mostly go home, with the dirty washing, go home to get fed again and all that sort of carry on. Then on the night duty, you'd be put on night duty when you had done about six months. I much preferred it to day duty but it was very long. Half past eight at night until half past eight in the morning and if you were a junior, you weren't to be seen sitting down during the night, you wouldn't be if you were a junior. So if sister was on the rounds and it was quiet, you went into the bathroom and shut the door and you'd sit on the loo [laughs]. Well, we were very busy but you weren't to be seen sitting down. You were to be busy with other things if the patients were asleep, there would be something to be done in the bathroom, or for some reason work went on and at one stage, we had lectures during the night. That didn't last too long, it was very tough. We had to go down for classes in the night. So it was all terribly busy, we were very understaffed. Now we didn't have the turnover but because we were so repressed and all the rules were so dreadful, we had great fun. We had great fun breaking these rules. I mean, the breaking was so harmless but we were like children in school really.

89 MM: Was that true of the other hospitals, did you hear?

90 OC: Yes, more or less, more or less, except we were not, under any account, allowed to wear cardigans during the night.

91 MM: No matter how cold it was?

92 OC: No, we had capes, dreadful capes which would go on for night duty but we weren't allowed wear them during the night. Now this was in 1944/45 and some girls got chilblains on their upper arms from the cold. No cardigans, it was unprofessional. Short sleeves [laughs] it was dreadful but you see, everybody was the same.

93 MM: And was the bad food due to policy or the rationing?

94 OC: Well, you see they had rationing mostly. Now the sister tutor, who had us under her wing for a few months, she was awfully good to us really, and she would shove a bit of extra butter on. The ration was quite good here in Ireland compared to England but she'd shove a bit of extra butter on to the table for us. You know, she looked after her girls but when we were out on the wards, it was every man for himself. The dining room, it wasn't a canteen it was a dining room, and there was a top table where the sisters sat and they always the cream from the milk. Little did they realise then that it was much better for our health to have skimmed milk but we got the skimmed milk, and that sort of thing. You know, it was quite unfair because the rationing was all level, we should each have been getting the same, but they didn't want that. The rationing in Ireland was quite different, because I did work in England later and there, that was something else.

95 MM: That was when you were qualified?

96 OC: Yes, I was qualified. But anyway, Christmas was another time. Nobody was allowed off duty. Everybody in the hospital was on duty, all over Christmas and in the heel of the hunt I think it was quite a good idea, because it meant that there was no unfairness about letting people off, you know, letting certain people off.

97 MM: But when you say that nobody was allowed off, was that just the nurses or would it have included the doctors?

98 OC: Oh no, the medics, well of course the medics were a race apart. They were a race apart and the medical students and we had great fun. We really did have great fun and great friendships with the medical students and that sort of thing but of no, they wouldn't, they would be under a different auspices altogether, much higher social order [laughs] for all that. But another thing was sick leave. Now, you were allowed so much sick leave a year, I can't remember, perhaps a week, and if you went over that you had to make it up at the end of your four years, which was I think, fair enough. But, it was all very much your duty to the hospital. I remember one girl, a contemporary of mine, and like, her brother got meningitis and he lived down in Sligo. There were different sorts of meningitis but this was a serious one and she went and asked Matron could she go home and Matron said, I'm sorry you can't. And she said I must see my brother, he's got meningitis and I'm going and she said well, you've lost your vocation then. The girl's father had to come up from Sligo and beg Matron because you know, the girl couldn't go home for two days because she'd had her days off that month, even to see her brother. I mean, it was inhuman when you think of it, a case like that.

99 MM: Would this have simply to enforce discipline or because they worried about her bringing the infection back to the hospital?

100 OC: Oh no, it was to enforce discipline, a power thing, I presume. I suppose that Matron, somebody had done that to her. She was just part of the system, it wasn't personal at all.

101 MM: This is something that interests me; the way the system perpetuated itself. Instead of

people seeing how awful it was and wanting to change it, as soon as they moved up, they were just as bad.

102 OC: You might have wanted to change it but it was just not possible. You conformed and if you conformed, you got on all right, and if you rebelled, you did not get on all right. I was one of the people who conformed because I didn't have any guts although I could see that things were wrong. But I was there to get through my training and get out the other side. Like, expediency was all and at times, now, I consider, I don't admire myself for having been like that but [pause].

103 MM: You didn't have much choice, really.

104 OC: No, I didn't have much choice but on the other hand, there were others who rebelled.

105 MM: Did they survive?

106 OC: Yes they did, but of course, you had to get a reference, you needed glowing references and all the rest of it, you know, and the cute ones kept the nose down and got on with it. The brave ones did a bit of fighting for us, you know, in a way. But anyway, the hierarchy [pause].

107 MM: And what was the attitude to marriage and boyfriends? I presume you weren't allowed to have boyfriends in the nurse's home?

108 OC: Oh well, there was a couple of nurses dances held in the year in the boardroom and you sent the name of your partner you wished to be asked to Matron and she would send him an invitation, having vetted him out, vetted that he was suitable.

109 MM: And how did she go about doing that?

110 OC: Well, there were various ways. I mean if somebody wanted to ask a rather wild medical student as her partner, she was told he would not be suitable at all and like, really it was funny. The Matron would stand in the hall and greet them going in, it was very formal, and then we'd be waiting for them instead. It was like a convent really, as regards men.

111 MM: It does sound a bit like that [laughs].

112 OC: Anyway, then of course we had great fun breaking these rules because the main aim during the dance was to get into the students resident because if you were found in there, there'd be dreadful trouble so the thing was to get in and have drinks and that and there wouldn't be anyone drunk or anything in those days, it was just for the gas of making it in there and having a drink or two and get out and you had done, and you'd had a bit of fun. We used to entertain students a lot on night duty in the hospital kitchen, they'd come up and have coffee and sit around. They'd be up every night and yet we got all this work done.

113 MM: What was your level of responsibility like?

114 OC: Quite a lot. When you were junior, when you were senior you were responsible for a couple of wards, like a landing, and while people, the turnover, there was no intensive care or that in those days, you would have very ill people. Oh yes, it was a big responsibility; you wouldn't want to think about it.

115 MM: And at what level would that have started?

116 OC: Well, I did a senior night duty at only two years in but then the night sister was ultimately responsible and you'd ring for her to come up, but by jingo, you had to have an eye, you had to be smart. Although you had the feeling somebody mightn't be very well, you didn't

have all the technology but I mean, she was your baby or he was your baby, you know, and night duty was v very responsible. Day duty too, but then you would have interns and things to call on, but we didn't call on the interns nearly as much in my daughter's day. And we took on much more responsibility.

117 MM: Was that, do you think that the training emphasised personal responsibility where now it's an emphasis on teamwork, or was it just the way you were?

118 OC: Just the way we were, yes, just the way we were.

119 MM: This part of getting on with things?

120 OC: Yes, I mean, we managed to have fun as well, but not to the neglect of the patients. I don't know how we worked it, but then what we thought was exciting and fun. I went back to the hospital years later as a patient when I was married, and the place was just dead because everybody could do everything so there was no [pause] I can't explain it. It was a different era and then there was a landing that was supposed to be haunted and you know, this sort of carry on, and we just enjoyed it.

121 MM: Did you get paid at any stage?

122 OC: Oh yes, we got paid once a month, on the last Tuesday of the month there would be a board meeting, so on the first Wednesday after the last Tuesday of every month, we would be paid. And we'd all go down to the medical office – there was a great gulf between office staff in hospitals and nurses, and we'd all meet at this office to collect our pay and the people would say here they are again, they think of nothing but money and the ones that smoked borrowed from the ones that didn't, and as soon as they got paid the people they owed money to were turning round, saying you owe me this, you owe me that and we got paid, yes, once a month. And incidentally, the office staff too sat with sisters and they got cream. So I hope the ones of my age have all had really bad coronaries (both laugh).

123 MM: So they were higher on the pecking order as well?

124 OC: Oh yes, definitely. Anyway, once a month we got paid and when we finished, I remember, as a staff nurse. Now we got paid that and our keep, we got our keep, bed and board and laundry and then my mother sent me 4s. every week and my sister, who had a good job as a secretary of the managing director of a firm, she sent me 10s. every month and I blessed her forever for it because that was a great lift-up. But as a staff nurse at the end of four years I got £8 a month and that was in 1947.

125 MM: That wasn't really too bad - £2 a week.

126 OC: Yes, and then you had a sister's holidays like when you were in charge.

127 MM: It compares reasonably well to the average industrial wage, on which people would have had to keep a family. It's not princely, but what sorts of things did you do with your money?

128 OC: Well we used to go to the pictures a lot and we used to go to the Theatre Royal a lot. And tea was at four o'clock in the after noon, which was bread and jam, and supper was at half past seven, so if you went to the Theatre Royal – everyone was cold because there was very little heating – if you went to the Theatre Royal and sat through two shows to keep warm, it meant that you went hungry until the next morning unless you had a bar of chocolate or something. It was terrible.

129 MM: Wasn't there anywhere beside the theatre that you could get something to eat, or could you not afford to?

130 OC: Oh well, this was the Theatre Royal and you had this long show, they had a film and the dancing girls and Noel Purcell, and oh yes, you could go to Roberts and have coffee or something like that, but we didn't have much money to spend. My father was wonderful, he came up every week and every week he called to the hospital and whoever was off duty, myself or any of my pals, he'd bring us for tea in the Savoy, he fed us for four years. And also brought us a cake every week. So he came up every week and some of got to eat tea with him and if I wasn't off, then he'd take off my pals and we had a regular slot in the Savoy Café. He was very good to us.

131 MM: And did rationing affect catering in somewhere like that?

132 O: Not really, the Irish rationing was very mild.

133 MM: Just anything that had to be imported?

134 OC: Well, of course, fruit but that was more less, I started in 44, I started in January 44 and the war was over in May 45 and I remember the day that, VE day, I remember somebody brought champagne into the men's ward and I remember we went in to the bathroom of the men's ward and we all had a drink of champagne out of [pause] well the only thing we had to drink it out of was the jampots the flowers were put in on the wards. Of course, if we were caught we'd be killed, just one drink of champagne but on the ward! Oh dreadful, but those memories are very vivid. But we had to sign in and out, of course, when we went out. We had to sign out, if we had a half-day or something, wed have to sign out and we had to sign in. And the nurse's home door was shut after half past ten, so it was locked and if you were late you had to go to matron the next day. When you were a staff nurse you were allowed one quarter past eleven leave once a week and you would for that. The night sister would come and let you into the nurse's home and one two o'clock, two a.m. leave, once a month, if you were going to a dance.

135 MM: Did you have to explain where you were?

136 OC: No, not really, because by that time you were finished but we weren't allowed out after we came off duty. We'd be off at nine and we weren't allowed out. But before I finished, we were allowed out. We just wanted to get away, we were there all under one roof all the time, you know.

137 MM: And what about girls who came from Dublin? Did they have to be in the nurse's home as well?

138 OC: Oh yes, they used to go home a lot during their off duty and in a way, some of them didn't settle as well as we did because they managed to get home and then they'd have the horror of coming back. But I had a good friend here in Clontarf, a friend of my mother's, and I used to come out to see her and her great sop to me was to make me lovely big plate of chips and fried egg and say to me "Well, cry away there, you'll be all right in a minute now. I'll make you some nice chips and a fried egg and you'll feel better." And she saved me, because I couldn't go home. I wouldn't have the money to go home. You could be very unhappy, there was a lot of bullying, still is of course, but there was a lot of bullying and psychological warfare went on. Women together, unfortunately. And you'd be very unhappy at times and you couldn't do anything about that.

139 MM: And did anybody ever give way under that sort of pressure?

140 OC: No and the way to cope with it would be, of course, we had one awful sister, she was a terrible coward really, she was really ancient, she was probably about 45 (both laugh) no she was 50, but her great saying was "who dragged you up?". And there was one girl, she was peeling an orange and she said "who dragged you up, you can't peel an orange" and this girl turned to her and said "the maid always does it for me" and from that day forward, that sister never said a word to her. Another thing, we did these bed baths, people were in bed much more and would need to be washed, and it was the inventory day on the ward and I said to her, that the sheet was wet and she was such a coward really and I said to her could I have a bucket to do the bed bath and she said "no you cannot have a bucket, the inventory will be wrong and if I catch you doing a bed bath without a bucket, you'll be in Matron's office tomorrow." So now, how you figure that out? That was typical.

141 MM: You were wrong no matter what you did. What sort of backgrounds did the girls come from?

142 OC: Well, all backgrounds. There were girls who had brothers who were medical students, and there were sisters who were medical students. There were Dublin girls, rather posh Anglo-Irish girls, there were girls whose fathers were in the bank; there were grammar school girls like myself. Ah, there were so many [pause] mostly middle class. Mostly middle class because you had to have a secondary school education to get in, you see.

143 MM: The fees would probably have been beyond most working class girls at that stage.

144 OC: Probably, yes. Another very powerful person was the ward maid. When you were very junior you had to make sure to get on with her. There weren't contract cleaners – there were ward maids. I remember one, she was from Wexford, and if he liked you she could be a tower of strength, but if she didn't, heaven help you. It was as important to get on with her as it was with sister.

145 MM: And what would her duties have been?

146 OC: Well, she would clean the ward and she would have to wash up dishes and things like that, domestic duties. And another very powerful person was the theatre porter because you might be sent down to the theatre with the patients and the theatre sister would rattle off to you what was done, so and so, so and so, and you mightn't have heard quarter of the terms. She would not repeat it, you had to go upstairs, you weren't allowed write it down and repeat what was to be done. Now if you missed anything of that you were in trouble because it could be important. So the thing was to get on with the hospital porter, he'd great flat feet, and he knew all the orders you see, and you'd ask him and he'd repeat what was to be done. That is if you got on with him, it was important, because he would help you out. You spent your life on the edge of a precipice.

147 MM: You were pleasing everybody?

148 OC: Yes, but those people were great to us, that's if they liked you. That was their power and the hospital porter was another one. If the boyfriend rang you and he didn't like you he wouldn't bother telling you. But that was the game, you know, it wasn't that bad.

149 MM: It sounds awful (both laugh).

150 OC: We all survived, we all survived [laughs].

151 MM: Would you have been aware of what was going on in terms of the Second World War, did it affect you much?

152 OC: Well this was started when I was in school. The war started when I started secondary school and yes, I was very much aware of the war, because at home every news bulletin we'd listen to it on the radio, and we had, my pal's brother was in the RAF and my parents would listen and when they say so many bombers were missing and all that, my parents would look at each others.

153 MM: Were you picking up the radio from Northern Ireland or was this Radio Eireann?

154 OC: Yes, it was the BBC but it would be on Irish radio too and I remember, I remember hearing Lord Haw Haw yes. This is Germany calling, Germany calling and that horrible man. We would be very, I suppose pro-British, in the sense that there were so many people around who volunteered and that, and then I remember when Belfast was bombed, the trains, even the fire brigades from D went up to Belfast and I remember the training coming down with all these kids on it and had a whole gang of them in the School for a while, until everything settled down and they went back. I was fairly aware of it and there was no fruit and I remember at the [pause] having the flu when I was a kid during the war, and somebody knew somebody who happened to have a shipment come into D and I was quite sick, I think the flu or something, and he bought an orange he gave me an orange and we hadn't seen an orange for years. And I remember getting one banana and sharing it with people, things like that and I remember we were all fitted out for gas masks and of course, they were never used. But yes, the war was a great part of our lives and then when I was a teenager, there was RAF prisoners of war were in G and they used to go into the town of D and we used to ask them … they had a great time, they played golf all the time.

155 MM: And did you ever see German prisoners of war?

156 OC: No, there were none, they were in the Curragh. This was another army camp, you see, they would come in to the local dances, but now they would be church dances. They mightn't have been so, there was a great divide there.

157 MM: They weren't kept such close prisoners then?

158 OC: Really, they were on a kind of parole and of course, we thought this was very glamorous, these RAF fellows, like there weren't hundreds of them but there was quite a few and then they used to play golf every morning. Then one time, they'd all just disappeared and I think they were just pushed back over the border. They were all bored silly, they were trying to get back into the war again and that sort of thing. But I remember the war, the worry, the worry about people we knew who had volunteered and that sort of thing.

159 MM: Would you have known people in the Irish army, the southern Irish army?

160 OC: No, but there was a local force called the Defence Force and Security Force – we'd know people in that because they would be like 'Dad's Army'. No, because there were very few Protestants in that, like the divide was such, in D it was a very Catholic town and the divide was there. While we were respected, the divide was obvious.

161 MM: Were you aware of it in any adverse way?

162 OC: We didn't think it was adverse because we were [pause] my father was very well respected in the town, this was with the local monsignor and all that sort of thing. Perhaps, like

children come home from national school and passing remarks and we were always told we weren't to answer back. But another family was told it could and we were raging because we couldn't say anything. We didn't like that and I understand it all now but our parents just said, well just don't answer back and there was no discussion that way. Yes, there was, D was very - I do remember that and while I fully understand the reasons now and I have learned a lot, but they weren't very hostile about it or anything like that but there was a feeling that [pause].

163 MM: I've interviewed some Northern Irish women who came from protestant backgrounds who said they felt a strong resentment of the South for staying neutral and they felt that they were actually hostile because they weren't co-operating in the war effort. Would your community have felt that?

164 OC: No, because more people volunteered from the South than went form the North. There was no conscription in the North and we were terribly Southern people and very southern and doctrinaire republican. I mean I don't owe, while my father, he fought for king and country in 1914-1918, I didn't. I was born in this stage, it's the place I love, and I really feel strongly about it. Don't start me off, this is the place I love, I wouldn't live anywhere else, this is my country and I love it, and you know, the northern people are as foreign to me as Puerto Ricans in their attitudes. I hate to be perhaps even slotted in with their way of thinking of themselves.

165 MM: They identify their Protestantism with Unionism, at least the people I've spoken to.

166 OC: Well, yes, that's the pity of it and they, I suppose, have their own reasons, but I don't want to be a part of that culture. Absolutely. But the war, I know when my first child was born, I knew some people in D who were much older than me who had been in Japanese camps during the war, and it was when my first child was born, the Matron had been one of these and she was sort of strange so I saw what the Japs had done to people and that, and I think it was quite frightening but of course, by then I was in my twenties and that. I remember the bombing of Dublin. I happened to be staying with a friend in Clontarf and we heard these planes going over and we were having a lovely time running around Clontarf chatting up the boy scouts and that sort of thing, I was a youngster of fourteen or something, and my mother rang up. We didn't have a phone in those days but my mother rang to say I as to go home the next day and I was positively raging and I never forget going home and she said, "oh, you'll be safer at home" and I was so fed up I couldn't say anything to her, my lovely holiday spoiled. So I do remember.

167 MM: Did she have any sense of anxiety about your going to Dublin to work?

168 OC: Yes, out into the big world? Well, if she did, she didn't say. Odd wasn't it?

169 MM: Well maybe she didn't want to communicate it to you.

170 OC: I think people were probably more trusting. I don't know, when you look at now. I suppose there was always the danger of falling in love with the wrong people but I don't think it occurred to her. I don't know if it did but nothing was said. I was launched into the world without really, what's the word, really any education about what the world was like.

171 MM: So what was the time frame? You finished school in June 1943?

172 OC: I finished in June and I started in January 1944. I was just about six months at home.

173 MM: Would you have been helping out with domestic duties during that time?

174 OC: No, because my mother hated cooking and she always said, and I hated cooking, so

she said I'm not going to teach you to cook, you'll have to cook when you get married and you'll be stuck with it for the rest of your life so enjoy yourself now. Wasn't she great?

175 MM: But she still assumed that as a woman you'd be doing the cooking? (both laugh)

176 OC: Oh yes. It was interesting enough in that my grandmother did it, but my grandmother was a wonderful worker with her hands and she did the most beautiful knitting and crochet and eh, really did lovely work until she died. During the war there was no wool, no cotton, and we would only have clothes on us when she'd have them off us and rip them to make else. It was occupational therapy [laughs].

177 MM: So do you think that changed the hierarchical structure of your household I that your grandmother did all the traditionally domestic things?

178 OC: Well no, she only did it because she was the boss but she only did it for a few years and then she got too elderly, she just sat and got up late in the day and she did her knitting and then my mother sort of did it. But my mother always was stuck with cooking, even when they lived in R. My mother always seemed to stuck with the things she hated doing and the other sister seemed to, but she enjoyed her rebellion at the same time, you know, and in that way, it was I suppose it was tough.

179 MM: For the cooking, what sort of shopping would she have had to do? Going around all the local shops?

180 OC: Oh yes, my mother never did anything after two o'clock in the afternoon, one didn't, you see. No, there was no housework done after two o'clock.

181 MM: What was the afternoon for?

182 OC: The afternoon was for, well, my mother and aunt would go down town in the afternoon, shopping for the next day and we lived in a set of Georgian houses where there some fairly elderly people, quite an interesting social structure. A lot of clergymen's widows, and then somebody might call for a cup of tea. You arrived by four and had to leave by six.

183 OC: I gave my years to the hospital and then an extra six months. In the meantime, of the first three friends, I was almost engaged to the brother of one of them. She had six brothers and I hooked one [laughs] but we had no money. We knew we wouldn't be getting married for a while and in those days you didn't work after you were married unless you did private nursing. You see there were no jobs for married women, so I said I'm going off for a year, I can't bear to be hanging around, and do something else and come back and we'll get married.

184 MM: Was it an official marriage bar?

185 OC: Well, you couldn't be married and work. I think there was, as regards hospital training and all that sort of thing. No, I don't know whether it wasn't available but the only thing I could have done after I was married was do private nursing through an agency, but that was a twelve hour day. There was no other work. Anyway, I went off to England to an RAF hospital to do plastic surgery, down in Sussex, and I had a great time there for a year and a half. They had all these RAF pilots who'd been terribly badly burned and wonderful plastic surgery. At that time, there was no plastic surgery in Ireland. Our surgeon was from London and I really enjoyed that year and a half. I wanted to do the course and get the qualification and it was a wonderful hospital. It was different from the training hospital – it had a piano in every ward and all these

RAF fellows with handlebar moustaches and things and then we had an awful lot of film stars used to come down to get cosmetic surgery done and it was a very exciting place after the parochialism of the Irish hospital.

186 MM: Was it a private hospital?

187 OC: No, no, the N.H.S. had only just started and I remember they had this sort of committee that went around to know what we needed. You know some of them were - this was far away from the coast, from the Battle of Britain time, they were still come back in 49 and 50 and we had these fellows who were blinded and for corneal graft and that was very exciting and wonderful work being done in it. But I was terrified going there. I went on my own. I was supposed to go with a friend and she discovered she couldn't leave her boyfriend so I had to sally off to the unknown over there and when you've got a qualification, your first job is quite a [pause].

188 MM: How did you apply for the job?

189 OC: Well, I applied, of course, the *Nursing Times* then was that thick with "jobs vacant", you could pick and choose wherever you wanted to go, they were all dying for us. And I went over and I was even quaking in my shoes and I realised that my training was more than adequate for me to do this course. I'd never been anywhere but my own training school and I really had a great year, almost two years there and really enjoyed it very much.

190 OC: And the rationing was frightful and I remember the first week I was there, we had one egg a week and my egg was bad. Oh, they said, hard luck and the next week my egg was bad again and I realised that everybody's egg tasted like that, they were so stale and after a while I was eating the bad eggs. We didn't even get, in those, there was very severe rationing and then everybody got points, which meant that you could use points for chocolate or you could your points for sweets but we even had to hand up our points so the only thing we could buy to eat, away from the hospital, the only thing you could buy to eat was either tins of soup or fruit and the rationing was absolutely fierce. We used to eat whale meat, which was dreadful. Another thing was rook pie, which was a bag of black bones in a sort of gravy, and I suppose they were out shooting pigeons, I don't know what was really in it [laughs].

191 MM: But it was a very low fat diet, it was very good for you.

192 OC: Yes, it was, and the kitchen there, they really did great work and we had a lot of Austrian domestic staff …

193 MM: Were they refugees?

194 OC: I think so, yes, they were very nice. I remember we had one girl, Maria, and she really was nice, I think she was Jewish, but they were refugees, and I'll never forget I sold her a brown coat for 10s. a winter coat I had and she was so grateful. And my mother, my mother used to send me the *Dublin Independent* and in it, in foil, she would post a quarter of cooked ham, and by the time the cooked ham got to East Sussex it would be past its pristine state but did we eat it. And I used to go home, there were no nylons in England, and I used to come home, maybe F would pay my far home, I'd fly home for £11 return and that was a whole month's pay but he'd pay my fare home to see him and I'd go back with several pairs of nylons and this was power, if you had nylons.

195 MM: Were they freely available here?

196 OC: Yes, and the only place you got them in England was out of suitcases with spivs in Regent Street. So I used to bring back nylons to the pals and do great trade in that. Really, when I think of it, and I still write to some of those people I was in the hospital with, it was very interesting. But the rationing was fierce, a shilling's worth of meat a week.

197 MM: What would that have been in weight?

198 OC: Well I suppose it might have been half a pound of meat, one egg a week. I don't know what we ate.

199 MM: Vegetables?

200 OC: Vegetables, oh yes, we seemed to do all right you know, but it was very interesting and nobody, now the place I worked in was very interesting because there were an awful lot of people wanting to do courses and there was a lot of Australians and New Zealanders there. And I loved seeing the interaction between the English and the New Zealanders and the Australians and they called them 'colonials'. Now they were grand to me and only once did somebody say something to me about us being neutral during the war and I said well I wasn't old enough, you know, but it was an RAF hospital and of course there were Irish fellows in the RAF but they used to called these 'colonials'.

201 MM: And was there a sense of superiority?

202 OC: Oh yes, and the Australians had such chips on their shoulders. I remember there was an election while I was over there and I had a vote and the colonials didn't. I don't know why, but the colonials didn't and I'll never forget it, parading around and I didn't know who I was going to vote for and there was this list of Conservative and Labour and everything and I was having a great time laying them all off, and the colonials didn't and I had a vote.

203 MM: It must have been bitter for them because they had really contributed in so many ways to the war effort.

204 OC: Well, of course, the English didn't like the colonials because they got invited to all the garden parties in Buckingham Palace and they'd go to their embassies and go up to these garden parties and they used to get to all these parties and go crowing about them after. But I never had a chance of getting to a garden party with the Queen [laughs] or having tea with the Queen or whatever, so it was all very funny. I enjoyed my time.

205 MM: How did the working regime compare?

206 OC: Oh much freer. The hospital had stretched ginormously on account of the Battle of Britain so the Canadians built a theatre; the Americans built a private ward. It had originally been a cottage hospital. We were all farmed out in houses around the town, houses were taken to rent. Oh it was much freer, because a bus would call and collect you and bring up to the hospital for duty, oh it was much freer. It was a revelation. It was wonderful to have there instead of another ordinary hospital because there was a complete contrast and yet, the hospital I trained in, the surgeons would say oh you trained in the A hospital, that's well known. That place is well know and I used to trade on it like mad. I'm sure they all thought it was about 500 beds or something but I never … I enjoyed that but the war was over, that was in 1948/49.

207 MM: So they were doing pioneering work?

208 OC: Well, they had been during the war because of the dreadful burns, you see, and they did wonderful hand surgery because the pilots, in the Spitfires, most of the pilots – their hands would be burned – and they used to do operations so they would come out of that with hands. And we did wonderful work, we did great congenital deformities, really wonderful.

209 MM: Were you nursing in the rehabilitation ward?

210 OC: No, I was sometimes in the theatre but I never enjoyed theatre, because theatre is different altogether. The patients; it's all technical but I like to be with people. But I did do theatre and they did wonderful pioneering work, I'd never seen anything like it before because, you know, this was the same as the Royal Victoria in Belfast, which is the best trauma hospital in the world because of the dreadful traumas they deal with in it, like field hospital, you know. So it was very *avant garde* and we had this New Zealander who was in charge, Sir Archibald McIndoe and he treated the patients very informally. The whole place was free and easy.

211 MM: Would that have applied to the admission policy, that if you needed medical treatment it didn't matter whether you were an officer or other ranks?

212 OC: Oh no, no.

213 MM: Everybody was treated the same?

214 OC: Oh yes, well, you know, most of them had twenty or thirty operations by the time they got there, because they were in the Battle of Britain, which was 1940, I suppose and they were still coming back and you know, a lot of them, their faces were burnt and they had remade their faces and they were coming back to get grafts over years and years. I still look at the Cenotaph every year and I see the "guinea pigs" marching by, and these were the men who were not much older than me and were in this place and were being treated and needed plastic surgery. What use was it all, you wonder, but there you are. But then I came home and that was the end of my nursing career. I got married and settled down [laughs]. That was that.

Pat, Dublin. Interview: 18th November 2002.

1 PK: My name is Pat K. I was born on the 25th November 1925 in Crosby, Liverpool. I have one sister and two brothers.

2 MM: And when did you come to Ireland?

3 PK: I came to Ireland on holiday when I was about eight and then we stayed here when I was fourteen when the war started.

4 MM: Was your family of Irish extraction?

5 PK: Yes, my mother was from Carlow and my father was from Longford.

6 MM: And when did they go to England, do you know?

7 PK: I think [pause] shortly before I was born, perhaps a year before I was born, yes.

8 MM: You're older than your sister then?

9 PK: Yes, I was the eldest, except for an older sister who died when I was about a month old. She was sixteen months.

10 MM: That must have been very hard for your parents.

11 PK: It was dreadful, yes.

12 MM: When you were coming to Ireland just on holidays, was that to family here?

13 PK: My uncle, yes, my mother's brother, he lived in Carlow. And then we came again in 1939 and while we were on holiday, the war broke out. My father had gone back to England to go back to work and he wouldn't let my mother or the rest of us return. So we went to school. I went – I had to cycle to Goresbridge to the convent, three miles every day. I didn't particularly like that.

14 MM: Was this because you missed all your friends in England or that you didn't like the school here?

15 PK: I think it was cycling to school [laughs] and I wasn't used to that, although I always walked to school and walked home but no, I didn't particularly like it.

16 MM: And it was a convent school?

17 PK: Yes, the Brigidine convent.

18 MM: Had you been at a convent school in England?

19 PK: No, I was to go that year, 1939, in Crosby.

20 MM: Being here and knowing the war was on in England, were you conscious of that as you went to school?

21 PK: Oh yes, because my father was there.

22 MM: What did your father do?

23 PK: He was involved in some sort of banking at that time.

24 MM: Was he called up?

25 PK: No, my father was older – he was getting on for sixty, I think. I can't remember but he wouldn't have [pause].

26 MM: Yes, he wouldn't have been called up.

27 PK: I suppose he was about [pause] in his early fifties.

28 MM: How did your mother manage? Did your uncle have a family?

29 PK: No, he was a bachelor. Well I suppose I quite enjoyed it except for me having to go to school [laughs]. And my brothers went to the primary school in Borris. I think that was it, otherwise we quite enjoyed ourselves.

30 MM: And did you get to go over to your father at all during the course of the war?

31 PK: Oh yes, we did. On one occasion, we returned to England and my mother wasn't very well, her nerves were very bad and my father sent us back again. So we came back here again and that time then, I went to Kilkenny to a commercial school in Kilkenny and I stayed with a family that my mother knew.

32 MM: How old were you then? About fifteen or sixteen?

33 PK: About that, yes.

34 MM: And would the intention have been then that you would stay in Ireland to get a job?

35 PK: No, when the war was over we were going to return to England and so I stayed in Kilkenny most of the time and I enjoyed that.

36 MM: Was your father able to travel over?

37 PK: Not really, no, and [pause] nobody was and we had these identity cards and it wasn't very pleasant travelling between England and Ireland and it was also very unsafe. This was because of the submarines and being bombed, it was very risky.

38 MM: Of course, Liverpool was heavily bombed.

39 PK: Well, it was the sea, Mary, travelling on the sea. Nothing ever happened to my knowledge, but there was always that danger. And of course, then it was about three or four hours travelling to Liverpool.

40 MM: Was it the threat of being bombed in Liverpool that made your mother so nervous?

41 PK: Well, she was rather a nervous person anyway and she hadn't had very good health and that used to worry my father, of course, when he was out and he might have been called out to [pause] I'm just trying to think what they called it. The ARP.

42 MM: Air raid precautions?

43 PK: Yes, air raids and he didn't like to have to go out and leave us either so that was all decided that we would go back. And the second time, well, we did return to England and then I got a job. I was a shorthand typist.

44 MM: This was following your commercial course?

45 PK: After returning, yes. Well, I did continue with that in England as well and then I got a job and it was quite a good job – a nice place to work. So, when you were eighteen, when one became eighteen it was either – you were conscripted into the factories or you could volunteer for the forces. So I pleaded with my mum and dad to let me join the forces. So, reluctantly, they did because I said I didn't want to go into a factory and I didn't either.

46 MM: Was that because of the nature of the work or did the excitement appeal to you?

47 PK: Well, I wouldn't have liked the work but it did, yes. So they gave in, they had to.

48 MM: Which arm of the forces did you join?

49 PK: I joined the ATS. The Auxiliary Territorial Service or something like that [laughs].

50 MM: And was that [pause] were you based in Liverpool or did you have to travel?

51 PK: Oh not at all, they sent me to Scotland and it was the coldest winter. It was a dreadful time. We all thought we were crazy for volunteering because to go from comfortable homes to chalets, yes, wooden chalets. You'd all go into the ladies room ([laughs] and there'd be all the hand basins and you'd to get on and get washed. Oh, we often cried at night because you couldn't do anything. The last weekend, I think, we went to Edinburgh and that was the highlight. And we had a lot of Polish camps around there too.

52 MM: Were these people who had escaped from Poland?

53 PK: Yes, people who had escaped from Poland, yes and then I was sent down to the south of England and that's really where I enjoyed myself from then on.

54 MM: What was the training like?

55 PK: Pretty hard – being dished out with uniforms and everything was thrown at you and maybe what size are you and skirts and tops and bras and pants and stockings, and your greatcoat and cap. And then we all slept in a chalet. I can't remember how many of us were in the chalet.

56 MM: Were they from different backgrounds and different parts of the country?

57 PK: Oh completely, yes, oh yes, definitely and of course, you wouldn't like some of them but you had to put up with it. But on the whole we enjoyed it. Of course, the weather was so cold.

58 MM: And what were you being trained to do?

59 PK: March, exercise, get up early in the morning and go out to the [pause] get washed – we hadn't any showers. I think we were so tired, Mary, that we were just glad when it was all over [laughs].

60 MM: And what were they expecting you to be able to do when you finished training?

61 PK: Well, you would be sent to – everybody was sent [pause] even though some were very different, I think. Actually, I was very friendly with a girl from where I came from. She was an only child and I think she was quite shattered with the whole thing [laughs], she really was.

62 MM: It must have been quite a shock to the system.

63 PK: It was. We were crazy but anyway, as I say, we finished there and I went to the South of England. I went to Farnborough, in Hampshire.

64 MM: Was that the RAF station?

65 PK: Yes, right beside it. It's for training – you know, not the ordinary RAF at all. Testing planes, that's it. There were all kinds and all shapes and lots of young men worked there. I mean, civilians. It's still a famous place, Farnborough.

66 MM: What work did you do there?

67 PK: I was secretary to a major. He was the second in command of the regiment. There was the colonel and then he was the second in command and I did his work. He was a man, I think he must have been about fifty, and I got on very well with him and I had a very good time there.

68 MM: So the work was based on what you'd been trained to do before you went in to the army? I mean, the army training wasn't really related to it?

69 PK: No, oh sorry, yes, I see what you mean. But you had to be trained; everybody has to do that training, because you all had to march at some time or other. At the training centre, we used to have to take our mugs, knife, fork, and spoon with us [laughs]. So at the station, then, I lived in a large

house with about thirty girls, an old rambling house with grounds, and a couple of cooks and I enjoyed that. It was all bare boards but very nice. It wasn't like living in a chalet. [Both laugh].

70 MM: What about the social life? Did you make friends with the people you were working with?

71 PK: Oh no, not those pilots at Farnborough, you'd never get to meet those pilots but yes, we'd have a couple of dances on camp and the RAF or the army, they'd come. Or perhaps some Yanks occasionally and it was quite good but everything was finished, all the dancing was finished at ten o'clock because of blackouts and maybe an air raid. But fortunately, that never happened there.

72 MM: So you were being [pause] you'd decided on the forces but you still hadn't been given much of a choice about joining up. Did you feel that it had the better choice, rather than the factory work?

73 PK: Oh definitely, definitely. As I say, I was eighteen and everything was a bit of an adventure and I made some very good friends and really got to know people. I could say I never met anybody I didn't like, really, and I had a very good friend who was from Dublin I met later on.

74 MM: She had joined up from Dublin?

75 PK: From Dublin, yes. She had joined up in Dublin and [pause].

76 MM: Did she say why she'd wanted to do that?

77 PK: No, although we were very good friends, I always felt that she wasn't telling me something. I did have some address and try to find out later but no.

78 MM: You lost touch with her?

79 PK: Yes. She married an Englishman and she had always liked some Irish boy in Dublin but he never asked her to marry him. She was quite upset about that so when this English boy asked her, she married him. She went out to Germany and so that's how I lost contact with her but she wasn't happy. I think she found out afterwards that the other boy liked her, the one in Dublin.

80 MM: Irish men often don't know how to say what they're feeling.

81 PK: Probably, probably.

82 MM: And did you ever meet any other Irish women who had joined up?

83 PK: No, no.

84 MM: And what about Irish men?

85 PK: No, I don't think I ever really did.

86 MM: What about the pay and conditions? Would the money you were getting in the ATS compare well with what you would have been paid before joining up?

87 PK: I think we were getting something like 25 shillings a week.

88 MM: And was that all right?

89 PK: It was all right because we had our keep and all our food and everything else so I suppose it wasn't bad.

90 MM: I've spoke to a woman in Belfast who went to work for the NAAFI about halfway through the war. Northern Irish women - Northern Irish people weren't conscripted but she had chosen to go because the money was about three times what she would have got in an ordinary job in Belfast. Would you have been conscious of that in England - that the pay in the forces was better?

91 PK: Not really, no.

92 MM: The kinds of [pause] did women stay on afterwards then, when the war was over, did any of them make a career of it?

93 PK: Not that I knew of. A lot of older, much older women, some of them were sergeant majors and when the war ended they were quite sad because they would have had no authority in civilian life, like they had in the army. They really had quite [pause].

94 MM: It is something that a lot of people that women experienced in wartime, that they were given to do things they were well able to do, that they were doing work that they would previously have been told was only men's work, like in the factories.

95 PK: That's right, yes, but I hated this thing of – now even now, anything mechanical, it doesn't interest me but if I was to be quite honest, it was a chance to get away from home [laughs]. Spread my wings [laughs].

96 MM: Well, doesn't everyone want to? Had your parents any particular concerns about your joining up?

97 PK: Oh they didn't like it at all.

98 MM: Was that because they wouldn't be able to see what you were up to or were they more generally worried?

99 PK: Oh worried, they were quite worried. That I would be caught out, maybe in an air raid and be killed, that was the thing. But whether I lived at home or whether I was away, all dances finished at ten o'clock and you just came out and nobody would believe it, but it was just totally black. And that was an awful worry for parents. If I was about three minutes late my father used to be in an awful state about me. I can understand all that now.

100 MM: From the point of view of a parent, of course, but at the time I'm sure you thought he was fussing.

101 PK: Of course I did, yes. You have no fear at that age, whatsoever. But it was marvellous to meet so many nationalities. On a few occasions in Liverpool, I used to get tickets to go to this club in Liverpool and it was very interesting with all the different nationalities. There'd be Danes, and the Poles, and some French; it was very, very good, yes.

102 MM: Were these people who had come to England to escape the war or to join up?

103 PK: They were, yes. They had actually joined up and they'd wear say the air force uniform with the country on the shoulder band, that's how you knew what they were, yes. They were always very nice.

104 MM: Would you have had any opportunity to go abroad?

105 PK: I was asked at the end of the war to go to Canada and [pause] my junior commander, she asked me would I like to go to Washington. Washington where? I said [both laugh]. Washington DC. So I said I'd have to ring my parents so I rang home that night and my mother said, oh, this is very short notice. I just knew she didn't want me to go so I went back the next day and I told the junior commander. I've often wondered what would have happened if I had gone there. It would have been very nice.

106 MM: Was this working with the embassy or just [pause]?

107 PK: I never worked with an embassy.

108 MM: No, I meant was that what the job would have entailed?

109 PK: I don't know. I couldn't ask her any more. She just – that was it.

110 MM: And I suppose once you'd said no, you weren't asked again.

111 PK: No, definitely not. But it was also coming to the time of demobilisation as well and I'd say it was about a year after that, I was demobilised.

112 MM: What did that involve?

113 PK: Oh, you'd go to a camp and hand all your uniform over and I suppose you'd get some pay. Really, I don't remember very much about it. We were all wondering what we were going to do – life was going to be so different again [laughs].

114 MM: And did you have to go home then to live with your parents?

115 PK: I did, yes.

116 MM: And was that difficult after being independent?

117 PK: A little bit, yes. But there was that much [pause] I mean, there really was quite a bit of discipline. I mean, you couldn't stay out all night or you couldn't [pause] I suppose I was more disciplined there than I was at home [laughs].

118 MM: And what about finding work? Were you given help with that or were you just left to fend on your own?

119 PK: Well, you couldn't pick and choose. You had to take what they offered you and I worked locally and I didn't like it and then after that, I went to work for agents of the Board of Trade in Liverpool and that wasn't too bad. But I wasn't there very long when I decided to get married – to my childhood sweetheart.

120 MM: So you met Louis when you were in Ireland?

121 PK: Yes. I met him when I was about sixteen. My mother didn't know [both laugh].

122 MM: And had you kept up a correspondence?

123 PK: Yes, I used to write and tell him what I was doing, who I was going out and he used to do likewise [laughs].

124 MM: So how did you get together again, then?

125 PK: I came over in [pause] I had a week's holiday and I decided to come and see my uncle. We met the following day and we got engaged before the week was out. And I went home to tell my mum and dad. That was September and we got married the following June.

126 MM: So it looked like you were going to marry somebody you'd only known a few days?

127 PK: No, my mother knew [both laugh].

128 MM: To go back just a bit to when you were an English girl in an Irish town, given the background of the war and the history of Ireland and England, were you ever made to feel alien at school?

129 PK: Oh, not at all, no. The only subject I didn't do was Irish.

130 MM: But you were never made to feel that you weren't wanted?

131 PK: Oh no; not at all, no.

132 MM: Because another one of my interviewees – when she was at school, she was given a very nationalist view of Irish history by her teachers and really, they'd been told, effectively they'd been told that England was the enemy and she had to get over this, to start accepting that it wasn't true.

133 PK: Yes.

134 MM: Were you conscious as a teenager the fact that Irish news of the war was being censored? Would you have been frustrated by the fact that it was hard here to find out what was happening, especially with your father still in England?

135 PK: Well, all our correspondence between England and Ireland was censored but my uncle, he had a lovely radio and he was always turning to stations trying to get English news and we'd have a large map on the wall and we used to follow the war. Really, I don't know anything about war in that, Mary, I saw anything very bad. I was very lucky. Because at the end of our garden in Crosby, a bomb did drop there one night when we were away and there were about four houses demolished and in one air raid shelter, there had been eight children. They came out of it okay but the bomb was as near as that [indicating wall of the room] and a couple of times, my father [pause]. Oh that's right, I came back to England before my mother, that was it, and I was in the air raid shelter with him and you'd hear the doodlebugs going off and the ground, you'd feel the vibration. My father used to go in for the lady next door. There were two ladies living there; one was a teacher and the other lady was stone deaf and he'd go in. He didn't like it but he'd try, he'd make a lot of noise so that she'd see him and she used to come into the shelter. She never heard anything but she knew when the ground was vibrating.

136 MM: I understand that the most dangerous point was when they stopped – that the silence warned you it was going to drop.

137 PK: Yes, that's right. They had seven nights in Liverpool, on the docks, and they dropped [pause] I forget now what they were but they were frightening things and they just ripped up all the homes. Oh yes, Liverpool was very badly bombed and Coventry, and London. I mean that was absolutely dreadful. But they did say, I knew a few pilots, and one of them I knew said that they bombed Dresden and it was absolutely horrific what bombs they dropped on Dresden.

138 MM: I think it was one of the worst bombing raids in the war, with no military target.

139 PK: That's right, that's right. But that was all revenge.

140 MM: I suppose it's understandable, if not excusable.

141 PK: It is, it is understandable but I agree, it's not excusable. There were times, I suppose, when I did wonder are we going to win the war and if we weren't, what was going to happen to us.

142 MM: It would have been a very different world.

143 PK: Oh it would, of course it would, yes.

144 MM: I know that [pause] some of the women I have interviewed in Belfast, some of the women felt that the South of Ireland should be blamed for staying neutral – they resented the fact that they didn't get involved. Would you have had any feelings about that during the war?

145 PK: Yes, I used to wonder, perhaps, why they didn't. Yes, I did think that at times. My mother used to say that De Valera was right in not involving the country in it and I'd say she was asked quite often, that question. But she was always well able to give her answer. Yes, and I believe that, something that was written about all the ships that were bombed during the war, that if they could have got shelter around the coast of Ireland but of course, that was going to bring Ireland into it then.

146 MM: Well, I'm not sure it would have made that much difference. If a ship was being attacked out in the Irish Sea, the ports wouldn't have been much help.

147 PK: Yes, that's right, yes.

148 MM: I think one of the reasons De Valera put forward was that we were too newly independent to risk any kind of alliance with Britain. But then there were tens of thousands of Irish people who did join the war effort, or went to England to work. So they clearly sympathised with the Allies.

149 PK: Yes. My sister in law was in the South of England and she was in insurance and she had to go into the factory. I don't know whether she liked it or not, being in a factory, but she was there for quite a while.

150 MM: Would you remember whether you had to sign up, as what was called an alien, anyone who wasn't from – wasn't a citizen of the South of Ireland? Of course, your mother was an Irish citizen.

151 PK: And my father, yes. I was always put down as British/Irish. I don't ever recall discussing anything like that with anybody; no, I don't really.

152 MM: Were you [pause] people here did have rationing and they were very conscious of it.

153 PK: Not like in England [laughs].

154 MM: Exactly. But was it a bit of a shock when you got to England and discovered how severe it was there?

155 PK: Well, I remember when I came over to Carlow after that many years and they took me to a sweet shop in Carlow and I hadn't seen so many sweets in years and I just didn't know what to ask for, because you had a ration card in England you handed in the ration card and they just handed you out four ounces or two ounces of something. You had no choice – you took what they gave you. I mean, I don't know of any hard times. I didn't have any hard times in the forces but my mother, and all the women had a hard time trying to keep a family fed. It went on for a long time, even up to the time I got married, it was still there but, oh no, they were very hard times for the mothers.

156 MM: I know some of my interviewees, from Belfast, thought that things were much easier in the South than anywhere else. They'd come over the Border to stock up on things that weren't as hard to get but the first thing they remarked on was light, because they thought it was very bright here. So, although there was a blackout, it wasn't anything like as strict as in the North and the U.K.

157 PK: Well, it was quite ironic really, but while we were in Burris, bombs were dropped on Mount Leinster; German bombs and actually, what the pilot was doing was unloading the bombs. He wasn't quite sure where he was and a couple of people were killed and my father was saying my God, and I sent them away to keep them safe [laughs]. And then there was the bombing of the North Strand.

158 MM: I don't think it's ever been made clear whether that was a mistake or what was behind it. I've seen photographs and I understand that bystanders came from all over the country to have a look.

159 PK: I'm sure, yes.

160 MM: Would you ever have travelled past Carlow when you were staying in your uncle's place, on your own or with your mother?

161 PK: No, I didn't, except to go to Kilkenny when I was doing the course.

162 MM: And in Kilkenny, would you have been on your own, looking after yourself?

163 PK: No, I stayed in [pause] what was the term? Digs, I stayed in digs.

164 MM: So you weren't really conscious then of the extent of rationing?

165 PK: No, not really but I would have thought it was very bad.

166 MM: Well, compared to England it wasn't so much.

167 PK: Well, when I went over to England after that, it was. Everything was restricted. Of course, I would hear them talking about when the flour was very bad, in Carlow, that it was very black, but I don't remember that.

168 MM: I think it was a sort of grey flour.

169 PK: Yes, it was in that area but I don't know.

170 MM: I think it was that they weren't using [pause] refining it as much.

171 PK: Yes, that was it; that sounds right.

172 MM: I've seen letters that were written about rationing during the war, particularly in Belfast and the North, and they really resented the rationing, especially of fatty foods like butter.

173 PK: Yes, I don't know how the women managed to feed a family. I remember my mother used to save up the coupons and she would get this tiny roast and that'd all be gone and there were no more for the week.

174 MM: And did your family have an allotment?

175 PK: Yes, my father did. He had it during the war and it wasn't too far away and he had it growing vegetables. I suppose it meant a lot.

176 MM: Well, at least it was fresh food.

177 PK: Yes, it was, but butter, and margarine – my uncle, I don't know how but he used to get margarine, maybe on the black market and my mother was just delighted – he brought a pound of margarine with him.

178 MM: One woman told me a story [pause] she was a nurse who went to England towards the end of the war, her mother had wrapped her up a ham and sent it to her to the hospital where she was working. By the time it reached her it was totally battered but she and her colleagues all fell on it, it was like a feast. [Both laugh.] But the rationing also extended to clothes. Can you remember how that affected you?

179 PK: Well, in my case, you see, I had the uniform and it was okay because I had that but it was always very nice to get into civvies. That's what I got when I was demobbed, I got £25, which was my demob money and I bought two suits with it.

180 MM: Wow [both laugh].

181 PK: And they weren't cheap, I can assure you, they were beautiful. When you think of the price of the clothes now and the inferior quality.

182 MM: You wouldn't get much for £25 now, that's for certain.

183 PK: Oh not at all, not at all. But there was always drink, there was never a shortage of that. Always. The pubs were always pub and I'm sure there was everything you'd have ever wanted.

184 MM: Would that have been because pubs were a good focus for social life; that people could get together and forget about the war to some extent?

185 PK: Oh yes, that's right. Even at the dances in the camp, there'd always be a bar, but there again, as I said Mary, that was over at ten o'clock and I had to be in at ten thirty. You were never out late.

186 MM: Were the social occasions egalitarian occasions? I mean, did all the soldiers come and mix with officers and so on?

187 PK: Oh yes, all the dances were, oh yes. None of that sort of thing. They all came to the dances. There was no such thing as the officers' dance or the others, no.

188 MM: What about catering? Were there separate arrangements for meals? PK: Yes, the officers had their own mess but there again, as I said earlier, when I was in this lovely old house and we had a couple of cooks there, so it was very nice altogether. Bu then towards [pause] before I left the army I went to Wiltshire and they were all chalets, right out in the country, and we were very isolated, quite isolated and we had a long distance to walk for a bus. We were about seven miles from this town, Marlborough, which has a very well-known public school there, and on a Saturday, about six of us would get the bus into Marlborough and have chips and eggs and this was heaven to us.

189 MM: I suppose eggs seemed more special since they were rationed?

190 PK: Oh yes, but we'd then sit there in this lovely bay window and have the chips and the eggs and bread and butter and I think it amounted to 2/6. [Both laugh.] So, my husband, when he retired we went over and we went to those places again, revisited them and I went to this little tearooms and it had changed. I was so disappointed that it had changed.

191 MM: It was a long time ago.

192 PK: It was a long time ago but it was much nicer when I was young [both laugh]. It had this old curiosity shop look about it.

193 MM: Sometimes it's better not to go back.

194 PK: It's better not to go, yes. My brother was with me, and his wife, and he was saying you used to come here every evening? and I said yes, I thought it was heaven [laughs].

195 MM: Sometimes it's hard for me to imagine because we're living in such prosperous times now.

196 PK: Yes, I can see that.

197 MM: One of the things that has come across to me is the extent to which women's view of themselves has changed. You were talking about the older women who wanted to go back, because they wouldn't be in charge anymore, would you have felt [pause] been aware that maybe you were getting opportunities to do things that you mightn't have done otherwise?

198 PK: I don't think so, no.

199 MM: Well, most of the women, when they're looking back, and it's clear they were discriminated against in terms of pay and everything [pause].

200 PK: Oh yes.

201 MM: Well, they just accepted it.

202 PK: Oh yes, but you see, I suppose I had a cushy number where a lot of the girls went to be ack ack and those girls, they had very tough lives where they were out, with some of the men too. They were very hard.

203 MM: Would this be because of the conditions themselves or because they were working with men who mightn't have wanted them?

204 PK: Well, of course, all the men were being sent away. Really, the men you'd meet, they were either coming back from the war or about to go out. But the women who drove the lorries; they drove them in convoys; they worked hard too.

205 MM: Were you ever asked if you'd like to go into that area of work?

206 PK: Well, I couldn't drive. But I could have been trained. That I would like to have done but it didn't come up.

207 MM: They were using the skills they knew you had, perhaps?

208 PK: I don't know but I would like to have done that, I know.

209 MM: When you joined up, I take it that really you handed yourself over body and soul and you were told what to do after that?

210 PK: Well, I think they sort of put you in what you were good at, perhaps. Then when I went to the second camp, I still did the same kind of work but I didn't work for any specific person, which wasn't as nice. You see, I was waiting to be demobbed so it didn't really matter.

211 MM: Were you asked if you wanted to stay on after the war?

212 PK: Would I have liked to stay in the army?

213 MM: Yes.

214 PK: Well I suppose you could if you wanted to but everybody seemed as if they wanted to leave, yes. It was actually where I was the second time that they were getting a college going and they were going to be there.

215 MM: I know most of you were probably young and fairly healthy, but what provisions were made for health care for you?

216 PK: We saw a doctor every month, a lady doctor every month.

217 MM: Was there ever discussion of specific aspects of women's health – for instance, was contraception discussed or pregnancy? I know there was a lot of concern about sexually transmitted diseases, for example.

218 PK: I don't know anything about that.

219 MM: Well, I know a lot of families had concerns, in fact it was even said in Parliament, that being in the armed forces would undermine a young woman's reputation [both laugh].

220 PK: All I ever knew was that if somebody was discharged under Paragraph 11, we knew then that they were pregnant. That was it but that only went up after they'd been discharged.

221 MM: What about women who got married in the course of the war? There seems to have been far more marriages.

222 PK: One of my best friends, Joan, she met this young Canadian officer and they were married and shortly after that, he was sent out to France and Germany. He was one of the first to go into Belsen. Well, she used to just sit and write to him every night but when he did come back, his impressions of Belsen were very bad and I think it took quite a lot out of him, really. But, I lost contact with her over the years and I wonder if their marriage broke up.

223 MM: Do you think the experience changed him too much?

224 PK: Well, I don't think so. I wouldn't think that had anything to do with it but that was the only girl I knew; she was one of my best friends. They were married in London.

225 MM: Was it a problem if you wanted to get married while you were in the forces? Did you have to get permission?

226 PK: For getting married? I don't think there was any problem. I wouldn't have known anybody else that got married; really, it was just the fact that she was one of my best friends.

227 MM: Was there anything about that whole experience that you think might have changed your life, even on the level of how you thought about things?

228 PK: No [pause], I suppose it thought me discipline.

229 MM: Were the hours of work demanding?

230 PK: Oh not at all. We started about nine to ten in the morning, in the office, and I suppose we finished about five o'clock. It was more or less like civilian life that way.

231 MM: Did you come across women who were going to be involved in more front line work- nurses, for instance? Did you come across any of them who might have been shipped overseas?

232 PK: We had what we used to call a sick bay and I had a very bad cold, I think, on my chest and I had to go there and they were nurses, they were the W.V.S. which was very nice when you were sick but [pause].

233 MM: It sounds like it wasn't that different from ordinary life, in many ways.

234 PK: Oh yes, for me anyway, I had no complaints whatsoever. When I went to the second place in Wiltshire and they were getting together this formation college and trying to get people ready for civilian life, we met artists and all trying to pick up where they'd probably left off, but that was good. It was quite good.

235 MM: Was there ever a point when you thought you might have been better off staying in Ireland until the war was over?

236 PK: No.

237 MM: Even though you knew you would be conscripted?

238 PK: No, that didn't worry me at all. I suppose because up to then that had been my life and my home and actually, all my father's relations were there and I was fairly close to the cousins too. I met a lot of people and I thought I'd seen it all. [Both laugh.] Which I hadn't, of course.

239 MM: And when you married Louis then you came here.

240 PK: We stayed in Carlow for about two and a half years and then we came up to Stiles Road – that was our first home in Dublin. So we're fifty two years married [laughs].

241 MM: That's quite an achievement.

242 PK: Quite an achievement, yes [laughs].

Rose, Belfast. Interview: 30th November 1996

1 RM: I was born during 1918 and I was 42 years in Woolworths and I worked all during the war.

2 MM: And have you always lived in Belfast?

3 RM: Always Belfast. I was born in the Stranmillis Road.

4 MM: Did you go to school there?

5 RM: I went to school in St. Johns Public Elementary School on the Springfield Road. I left school at fourteen believe it or not, in 1932 I left. I was born in 1918 and I left school in 1932 and then I went to tech at night and I did all right there. So then I was a supervisor in Woolworths for 42 years.

6 MM: Did you go in as a supervisor?

7 RM: No, I went in as a counter girl then I was promoted to charge-hand and then supervisor. I was supervisor for quite a few years before I left. I'm eighteen years retired nearly. I retired when I was 60 - just before I was 60.

8 MM: So when you left school at fourteen, you went into Woolworths as a counter girl?

9 RM: No, I went into Woolworths when I was nearly eighteen.

10 MM: This was being in the tech?

11 RM: I was just at home really then from when I was fourteen to eighteen and then I went into Woolworths just as a counter girl. Then I was made permanent in 1937 and from counter girl, then charge hand, then supervisor. That was it.

12 MM: When you started as a counter girl, what sort of duties did you have?

13 RM: Just serving the customers and that, you know. In those days, in my day, my younger days, I mean there was nothing over sixpence as you know, in Woolworths in those days. You just served. And you got to know your customers coming in. And there was three and four girls to a counter in those days.

14 MM: Where was this?

15 RM: In High Street, High Street Belfast, that was one of the big superstores and then there was a smaller one in North Street but I had nothing to do with it. It was quite a responsibility, like, being a supervisor and you had to order merchandise for your Department and that. But again, I have quite a good pension from it now. They've been very decent. Now Kingfisher have taken it over now, it's not Woolworths any longer and Kingfisher have taken it over and all us pensioners, a few years ago got a big increase, according to your service and your age. So I've got quite a wee bit, I've got £127, nearly £128 a month. I get that as a pension, over and above my own State pension.

16 MM: Were you well paid while you were working there?

17 RM: Woolworths was reckoned as one of the best paid firms and when I reached eighteen [pause] when I was twenty one, I got 27/6 per week, which was big money in those days. That would be about 1939 and as I say, 27/6 was a terrific wage because things were very cheap in those days. Now, when I came out as a supervisor in 1978, my wages were, in my hand I had £45 in my hand. Well, when you compare that to today, an ordinary counter girl [pause] of course, things are an awful lot dearer now but a counter girl today is getting £150 and I had the responsibility of a whole big section, maybe about eight counters and hundreds

and hundreds of pounds, giving change out to staff and all. When you look at the responsibility we had, you know, we were very poorly paid when you think of today.

18 Now, whenever I worked in my day, in my early days, there was 432 staff in Woolworths. They had a strike here about three years ago and there wasn't a 100 of them. They've cut down staff so much. Now you go in now [pause] not that I'm in Woolworths very often but a girl friend and I worked together and we meet every fortnight and go in and have a cup of coffee or something and a bit of a chat, and Sally and I many a time we talk about it. Sally retired a year or so before me but when we think of the responsibility and the work we had [pause] you look around you know and you can't even see a supervisor. Honestly, you can't see anyone to ask even for directions. In those days, we knew the number of every counter in the store and if a person asked you for anything - people are short sighted and all, you realise that as you get a bit older, are short sighted and can't see too well, can't hear too well, and you see these young ones and it's up here or down there [laughs]. I remember many a time I used to say, not that I was terribly hard to work for, but I used to say remember people are older and they can't always see and sometimes they can't hear or they can't see too well and you must understand that up there or down there is not enough. You tell them the number of the counter and exactly where to go.

19 But in those days you could have bought a yard of ribbon if you wanted a yard of ribbon. Now, it's multi pack and if you want a pink ribbon you have to take three or four yards of it.

20 Well it was [pause] well you had great times, you know. Everybody worked very hard and everybody was very dedicated to their job. Not too much now - we notice it now, us older staff, when you go in [pause] any shop, it's not just Woolworths but they couldn't care whether they serve you or not. I mean there's an awful difference in the staff today and the staff in our day, because we needed it, we needed the money in those days. Jobs were very hard to come by in my younger days and when you had a job, you sort of stuck to the job.

21 MM: Would your family have been dependant on your wages coming in?

22 RM: Well, I would say yes, every penny was needed at home. Now, not so much now, I look at my nieces and nephews, it's not £1 or £2 for any of them. We had to walk everywhere. They have everything. They have washing machines, they have tumble dryers, they have fridges and fridge freezers, you name it; they have everything. We didn't have those things and they say they were the good old days! I think if you look back they were the bad old days.

23 MM: When you started work, what time was that?

24 RM: Nine o'clock, it was nine o'clock in the morning and we finished at half five.

25 MM: Used you walk to work?

26 RM: No, you took the transport; you took the bus, but bus fares and all that wasn't that expensive then. I wasn't always living here then, I was living in the Springfield Road and well, you'd have got by I suppose for 1d or 2d, you know, in the mornings.

27 MM: Did you come home at lunchtime?

28 RM: Well, we had a canteen and you bought your lunch and it was reasonable for staff, we got it at a reduced rate. Before the canteen was there we used to go down, there was a cafeteria then and we used to go down to the cafeteria and you'd have steak and kidney pie or chips or something like that, for a snack. Well, you could get that for a couple of shillings, you know.

29 MM: What about during the war, with rationing?

30 RM: Well now, we weren't too bad now during the war. Of course again, my Mummy particularly, got things on the black market - everything was paying extra money, for eggs and butter, and things like that you needed. Essentials, and tea I can remember, and tea, and I can remember going to Rome in 1957, was it, we went to Rome and they were delighted with the tea. And that's how we paid our way with a half pound of tea and they were delighted. To give them a half pound of tea was a novelty to them, you know.

31 But I don't think I would like to repeat those days again. I mean, you had a bomb scare and next thing you were told to get out. You had a certain point to go to and you could be there, you could stand for two hours. I was on the ground floor and the paint was upstairs, directly above where I was, and they'd put the bomb in the paint so it would burn through. And if I'd been standing where I was a few minutes before I would have been gone but as I say, we just had time [pause] and it was during the stock taking time and we were all taking the stock in. Somebody came up and said there was a bomb scare, you'd better get out, so then the supervisor came up and said you'd better get out quickly. We just had time to run across the stock room, down the back staircase and in to Anne Street. We'd just got out of Woolworths when the bomb went off. The place was wrecked. Now I had three different experiences like that.

32 But during the war, from 1939, when you were at home, there was bomb scares at night. And I can remember us going up the Springfield Road, my mother and father, Lord have mercy on them, we got up the Springfield Road and I remember my mummy saying there's bombs falling, the Germans are bombing. We got as far as the Mount Mullen, it's all built up now with houses, we got as far as the Mount Mullen and we were glad to sit down there and then my daddy had to go and find this man that he knew and see if we could get a place off him to sleep there at night. That could happen maybe two or three, maybe four nights in the week and there was another night, I remember, and my mummy had got new shoes and you know the way you're trying a thing on, she was trying them on and the sirens went over. There was a bomb so out we had to go and we walked the whole distance, for about four miles, up the Springfield Road away to the quarries and my mother had the new shoes on and I remember her saying: I'm crippled with these shoes. She just had to [pause] and we got so frightened, so scared with the bombs dropping that we were up and away. But you couldn't go through all those things again.

33 When I think of it now, that you're working and bombs go off and we always had to make sure we'd put away all the money and lock the registers and all that sort of thing. The supervisors were always last to go and customers would be jumping over the counters and everything. I mean you couldn't go through all these things now.

34 MM: Do you think you were able to be calm during the Troubles because you'd been strengthened by the experience of the war?

35 RM: I don't know. I think maybe I'm that wee bit stronger. I mean I'd take risks now. I was in town this morning – I'm not long home. I was meeting my friend that her and I worked together and she lives in the Antrim Road so we meet in town now and have a cup of coffee and a bit of a chat. But my sister, she rarely ever goes out, she's afraid to go out. Her daughter takes her out in the car to do her messages whereas I would take the risk. I would just go out and get a taxi. But I do go earlier in the morning now. I wouldn't be down waiting for the bus, you know. But when I think of how active I was now when I was working [laughs].

36 MM: Do you think conditions are easier now?

37 RM: Well, in those days, you needed your job and you just had to take a risk and go out, you know.

38 MM: Would you have felt like that during the war years too?

39 RM: I was living with my parents, thank god, during the war [pause]. It was the 1950s when they both died. I was living with them but in house alone [pause] I did a lot of voluntary work with the Credit Union and I was working in the Credit Union when all of a sudden the lights went out. It was a bomb and it hit the transformer or something. When I came down, there was no light. I couldn't even see where I was going it was that dark and when I came to my house, we had a sitting room and two windows down stairs and two up and there wasn't a window in my house. It was wrecked. So the Credit Union boys, decently enough, came down and they started all they could do to cover the windows and they asked would I be all right. I said I'd be all right [laughs] actually, I had a nice electric blanket and I'll go and switch that on. When I got into bed the bed was freezing, no electric blanket and I couldn't even make tea, there was no electric, no anything. So then eventually, the Housing Executive came then and boarded up all the windows and that but one night when I was up visiting my sister and she said sleep over in the baby room but I needed to get to work in the morning so I left. And there was this lady who came in from next door and she said where are you going? I said Springfield Road so she said I'll give you a lift, so she gave me a lift to the top of the street and I walked down and I was the only one on the street that night that wasn't burned out. There was a man across the street from me and he said, you'll be all right, I'll tell the army and the army will keep an eye on you. So with that two or three soldiers came up and they said where do you sleep and I said I sleep in the front room. They said well we'll keep an eye but I didn't realise that Mr. Conlon and I were the only two who got any sleep that night.

40 But you couldn't do those things now. I don't think the neighbours would let me do those things now. But as I say, you needed your job, and you just had to take a chance. But it was dreadful when you had to get out and you were standing in all weathers, you had to get out because of a bomb scare. Maybe not in our particular store but in the vicinity and sometimes you'd be put out and it would be very frustrating in those times, you know. But on the whole, we got through it but I wouldn't like to be doing it again.

41 MM: While all this was going on during the war and you were out at work during the day, would you have been expected to help with housework when you got home?

42 RM: Yes, you had to; you had those things t do. Wednesday was your half-day then, you got a half-day on Wednesday and Wednesday was cleaning day and scrubbing day. You started upstairs and came downstairs.

43 MM: Did you have any sisters and brothers?

44 RM: I had one brother and one sister. Well my sister's married now. But boys didn't do very much then. Men didn't do very much. My daddy wasn't too bad like, my daddy used to open every door in the house like; you were freezing when he was cleaning up, you know. So you would just tell him to sit down and leave it alone. But you couldn't, you just had to do all those things. You had to work and you had to keep house and do everything and as I say, your parents were waiting on the money. Every penny was needed then because [pause] I handed up my wage packet.

45 I can remember one Christmas Eve, in those days you worked until all hours and I can remember a Christmas Eve and I was coming out of Woolworths, this was in my very early days, I was very young at the time, I was only a counter girl. One o'clock on Christmas morning and rather than break my pay I walked the whole way from Woolworths to Springfield Road. And my mummy nearly [pause] why, she said, why didn't you take a bus? I said I had no money. I didn't want to break my pay. It wouldn't matter, she says, a penny or whatever, and I walked the whole way home and I got into the house at nearly two o'clock in the morning and ended up with the flu. But as I say, you needed every penny and the very first year that I worked in Woolworths, my first Christmas, and when you think of it, you wouldn't do it today. You started at nine o'clock in the morning and you worked then to half past ten or eleven o'clock at night all during the Christmas period and you got a quick cup of tea over at the tea-bar. A cup of tea and a biscuit about half four and that was you until you come home and my pay, working all those hours, was 18/11 into my hand.

46 MM: Did you not get a Christmas bonus?

47 RM: They gave you a bonus after the first year. You started off with £1 and every year you got ten [pause] fifty pence now, it used to be ten shillings. Well they put that in our wages with the result that they took income tax off it. There was one year, I had two pound something, but the tax was gone off it. They should have given you a Christmas bonus as a cheque separately. I mean I wasn't the only one complaining, everybody complained.

48 MM: Did you have a union to take up complaints?

49 RM: They didn't have the union until later but the union was very good. Then it got better and the Co-operative upped their wages and at one stage the Co-op had more than we had and so then there was a strike. But it wasn't until there was a strike at Woolworths because the Co-op was getting more and it was in England the strike was, but the particular manager we had [pause] it was up the manager, the manager could have promoted you or demoted you. I had added responsibility; when I went in first I had responsibility for the toiletries section but then they asked me to take another department and he said, the deputy manager was a very nice fellow, and he said are you not getting any more money for this and I said no, I don't think so. And he said you should get more money so I went in to the manager and I said to him, I'm getting extra responsibility and I'm not getting any more wages. He said why do you think you're

entitled to it and I said I'm getting added responsibility and I think I'm entitled to more money. So he came back to me the next day and he said to me he'd give me [pause] he offered me five shillings. I said I wouldn't be satisfied with five shillings because the income tax would take it anyway. So the next day he said to me I've reconsidered and I do think you're entitled to a bit more and I'll give you seven and a sixpence and I'll backdate it. So the next day he took me aside and he gave me an envelope and said I didn't want the income tax taking it from you and what had he given me but fifteen shillings. Two weeks, and I'd had the responsibility for two months! But when you look back you tolerated a lot in those days that you wouldn't tolerate now. The young girls now wouldn't put up with that.

50 MM: Was it because you were worried about keeping your job?

51 RM: You needed your job so therefore you had to just tolerate it. They went out on strike then, as I say, in England and this was then how we all joined the union. So we joined the union because they upped our wages then, we got the increase, and they upped it to the same as the Co-op, maybe about a shilling over the Co-op. But at the time, that wasn't too bad but when you look and think of how hard you worked in those days.

52 Now we used to have to [pause] well, there was no escalators and all sorts now that we didn't have in those days. When I look back, many a time, when you finished at night from Monday to Friday, from Monday to Thursday you finished at half five. Six o'clock in those days and on Friday, half past six. That extra half hour was a [pause] well on Saturday night, you worked to half past nine. Half past nine was closing time for the shop. We were told to carry stock then, down to the counters because there was no lifts, as I say, in those days. The stock room was on the fourth floor and maybe you had a load of stationery, which was heavy books and exercises and all that to carry or maybe crockery, and you had to carry that from the fourth floor down to the ground floor and maybe the well would have went then when you were half there, you were half way up the stairs and the bell would have went to go home at ten o'clock and you were lucky to get out at ten o'clock or half past ten on a Saturday night. It was really hard work, really you know.

53 MM: What sort of holidays did you get?

54 RM: In those days, we only got one fortnight's holidays in the summer. If you were a junior, younger, well you maybe got your holidays in May and you just had to take it. As I say, you had to bite your lip because you needed your job. Well, that went on then and we only got a half-day on Wednesday. When you had up to ten years service you got an extra week, a winter week as they called it but you had to have ten years service before you got that. Sure then it went on to five years service and then you got a wee bit of spring, or the winter as I'd call it, and a wee bit in the autumn. You had four weeks holidays then by the time I left it. But things were improving as I left.

55 MM: When you were working there was it all female staff with you?

56 RM: It was all women, well there was men in the stockroom, men looked after the stockroom. All female counter girls and all female office staff but in the stockroom, it was men who handled all the heavy trucks and that you know.

57 MM: Could you have moved over to the office if you had wanted to?

58 RM: You could have and you could have started as office staff, in those days.

59 MM: What about the management – were there any women managers?

60 RM: Well, our managers now were all men. In the strike, I think it was in 1967 there was a horrible manager then, Mr. Scott and they went on strike over him because I believe he treated the staff very badly. This Mr. Scott was terrible. If he didn't like the colour of your hair or the colour of your eyes he sacked you but the others were all right. I'm retired since 1978. I had mixed feelings about retiring at the time – I thought I was going to miss it, because you do make friends and that, good friends and so I had mixed feelings about leaving it and retiring. But I adjusted myself in about a month's time or so, it wasn't too bad, but for the first month it was long enough and I didn't where I was going but then my niece, she had a young family and I started occupying myself looking after her children and that type of thing.

61 MM: So after all your years of hard work, you started doing voluntary work when you retired?

62 RM: That's it [laughs], I did voluntary work in the Credit Union. I must have been about twelve years doing that when I was working – two nights a week I did. Tuesday night, I was on the loans, I gave out the loans and that, and then on Thursday night, the committee all met on a Thursday night, so I did that two nights a week as well as working. I thought nothing of it. I couldn't work in the Credit Union now because it's all computers and that now, it's all automatic. But I liked it, really; I did that for years.

63 MM: Going back a bit, during the war years what did you for entertainment when you weren't working?

64 RM: Dancing. I was a dancer in my day [laughs]. I was a dancer and many a time, many a week I was four nights dancing until one o'clock in the morning and daddy was a very strict man, and I would say the dance is on until twelve and he'd say you be home here at twelve. Well, in those days there were no taxis and you walked everywhere and it was quite a wee distance. I used to dance in a club, which was in King Street, the centre of the town and I had to walk to Springfield Road. You thought nothing of it and I was out Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, the three nights and if there was anything special on I'd be out on a Wednesday night and I was dancing until one o'clock in the morning. I wouldn't dare to say I was tired the next morning but I was called because I had a job to do and there was no use complaining. But that was my entertainment, dancing.

65 MM: When you were out dancing, did you come across American soldiers or sailors?

66 RM: There were a lot of Americans. The Americans were here and I didn't bother very much now. They used to come into the shop but I never went out with them but there was a lot of girls did go out and a lot of girls that worked with me married Americans and some of them made very good matches, very good husbands and others not so good, like. And because in the uniform they looked terrific but one, one girl and she married, Coffey I think they called him, and he was in tin cans and all that sort of thing, he was out travelling. But she thought he was marvellous and here, but she had a very bad time when she went out, way in the back of beyond somewhere. Another girl, Ann Nulty who married, she married an Italian and he was exceptionally good, she was very happy. Another girl, she worked with us, she was nothing to do with

us, but she went to visit them once and she said that Ann Nulty really had it good, that he was a marvellous husband and she felt sorry for Mary Prender, you know. And Mary Prender was a nice wee girl; she said Mary Prender had a very hard time of it, very hard.

67 MM: Were they very different to the men you were used to here?

68 RM: I'll tell you, in those days, they used to come in and give us lovely sweets that they brought from America, candies as they called them, and they'd come in and they'd give you candies over the counter there and ask you for a date, you know. And I remember there was a girl called Mary Spence, and she was awfully tiny, and she worked in the tea bar. Well they used to come into the tea bar and have a cup of tea or a cup of coffee and so, she was a lovely looking girl but she was terribly, terribly small and they had a big board behind the counter for her. And so, one day this fellow came in and said he'd meet her outside and whenever he saw the size of her he run! She was that small, where he thought behind the counter she looked so tall! He nearly died when he saw the size of her. [Laughs] Those were the kinds of things you laughed at the time, but they were quite nice, quite friendly. They used to come in to pass the time, when they'd nothing to do they'd come in to pass the time. And as I say, there were four girls that were behind the counter that went out with them.

69 MM: Did you never go out with any of them?

70 RM: No, no.

The interview ended at this point because Rose had a prior engagement. She told me she had a very active social life in the Falls Road area.

Sheila (Sally), Dublin. Interview: 8th June 2000.

(1,482 words removed at Sally's request. They dealt with the history of her family.)

1 SG: I was the oldest, yes. Then I had two brothers and a sister.

2 MM: So which school was it that you were going to?

3 SG: That was a private school in [pause] called Norfolk College. It was right up at the Church of the Three Patrons. You know the Three Patrons - in Rathmines. Well, we lived then just about six houses up. We moved further up nearer the top of the road later on. The boys went to the national school and I went to the private school.

4 MM: Why did that happen?

5 SG: I suppose [pause] I think it was because of distance really [pause] I was two years older than my brother and the nearest school was in Winton Avenue, off Rathgar Avenue there. It was a Methodist school, I think it was Methodist run but it was a national school and the two boys went there. And then my sister came along, and then she went to Diocesan College and I stayed in the Norfolk College until I was sixteen and then I went to Alexandra College to finish.

6 So, my father [pause] I wanted to be a nurse although I wouldn't dream of it now, but anyway I wanted to be a nurse and he said, you know, I think you're cut out to be a teacher. I used to love helping the others with their homework and I think he felt that I was cut out to be a teacher and he said why don't you do that but I wanted to be a nurse. So I went around hospitals and saw matrons and [pause] on my own, you know, you wouldn't do that now. Walk into the Rotunda Hospital and say you wanted to see the Matron. In the Adelaide you want to see the Matron! Well, I was put off.

7 MM: Really? On what grounds?

8 SG: I don't know. I began to think [pause] the atmosphere or something, I don't know what it was.

9 MM: I think it was quite tough. A lady who gave me an interview was a trainee nurse in the Adelaide. Now she did go through it and she actually went to Britain as a nurse during the war, but it was very, very hard and really they were treated pretty badly.

10 SG: Yes, I think they were. Anyway, I got a feeling that no, I don't think this is for me. Maybe it was the approach that the Matrons took, I don't know. [Laughs]

11 MM: It does seem to have really been quite hierarchical. You know, that those who were qualified could lord it over the juniors.

12 SG: I was very glad I didn't end up following that in the end. I remember at Christmas I got a little blackboard and chalk and I remember propping this up in my bedroom like a classroom and teaching. Then when I got my first job and I had the chalk in my hand and I went up to the blackboard, this was what I was dreaming about, you know. [Laughs] I don't know how it was that my father said go into the teaching, it was national school teaching, you see and I had no Irish but I don't know why I went [pause] I remember going down to Kildare Street and seeing the headmaster there and from being in college, Alexandra finishing, I went back to school and had to take exams. And in a year I had to cram in all this Irish. My father got me special tuition.

13 MM: Was this the State exam for primary school teachers that you had to do?

14 SG: Yes, you had to have Irish to teach in the national schools. Of course, I didn't pass it. I think my father was disappointed. So then I went to train in Alexandra, they were doing Froebel training, that's what I should have gone for in the first place. That was grand. I did the Froebel training and after the year, it was very comprehensive, we got all sorts of angles on teaching. It was lovely; I loved it. We went out to different schools and took different classes. I remember a little school up in a home in Ballsbridge or somewhere.

15 MM: Were there many schools using the method at that stage?

16 SG: No, it was really an English thing but most of the people who [pause] well, some of them did, some of them got jobs in Ireland but it was the Montessori thing, you know, Froebel. So I did the year and at the end of the year the headmistress sent for me and she said she had a friend, a doctor who had come back from China and had a big family and was living in Harrowgate and was looking for somebody to look after [pause] to tutor his kids, you know. So there were six of them. There were three big boys, one of them was at public school and the others were at local school and then there was another little boy and two little girls. Well, I didn't do any teaching. I was like a nursery maid but I loved it, because I loved the family. He was Irish but I didn't care very much for her, she was English, but he was Irish, he was full of fun and used to take us around in the car on a Sunday.

17 MM: So you moved to Harrowgate?

18 SG: I did.

19 MM: Were you nervous about it?

20 SG: No, I never was nervous, I never was in crisis. I never get worked up, I take it all and then afterwards I think did I.

21 MM: Were you nineteen or twenty at the time?

22 SG: Yes, I was nineteen or twenty, that's right, yes. And I loved it, taking the children to school and playing with them. Then they had another girl from Alexandra who came over for the boys to go with them for tennis and all that carry on, horse riding and I stayed with the younger three. But I began to see that it was going nowhere. I mean these kids were going to go grow up and I wouldn't have a job. So the headmistress came to Harrowgate for treatment or something and of course, she called on me to see how I was getting on. I told her I was very happy but I'm not getting any teaching, I want to teach. So she understood quite well. So I told the parents I didn't want to stay. So my father came over for me and I came back to Dublin. My father died about two years afterwards – that would have been 1932 – he died in 1933.

23 MM: And how old were you when that happened?

24 SG: Just turned 21. He had given me a twenty first birthday party with my friends. Every Friday my parents used to go to the cinema in Rathmines. When the talkies came [pause] my mother used to suffer from deafness and she couldn't handle it at all so I used to go with my father and we were close. Much closer than my mother. My mother, I don't think she was close to any of us. She was very, you know, domineering, matter of fact, you know. Very keen on saving and economy and my father was the opposite altogether. She used to say if it wasn't for me they'd all be in the poorhouse.

25 MM: Did she run the family finances?

26 SG: Well, no, no she didn't but she was always exercising thrift. If you left a light on in your room she'd say there you are, burning your father's money. You know, that kind of thing.

27 MM: What did your father do for a living?

28 SG: He was in the rag trade. He was a representative.

29 MM: So he would have been reasonably well paid?

30 SG: He must have been. He delved a lot in the stock exchange [laughs].

31 MM: Was he a gambler?

32 SG: I think he made a bit and there'd be rumours about the gold mines in South Africa or something and I think he did that. Because we went on wonderful holidays when none of my school mates were going on these holidays, they'd be going down to Rush or Skerries or somewhere, we'd be off to Wales, South Wales and that kind of thing. And then we used to go to Malahide, of course and Greystones and other places. Oh yes, he threw money around an awful lot. When he'd get a flush he'd go and spend it and my mother was always saying now Daddy. But no, she didn't know anything about business because, when he died, I had to step in and get in touch with the stock broker, the solicitor, the bank and all that kind of thing. She didn't know a thing.

33 MM: So she hadn't worked outside the home?

34 SG: No, she'd never worked at anything.

35 **Indecipherable section.**

36 SG: I lived for a time in Rathgar in various flats and I stayed with somebody whose husband had gone to war and she had a number of children and she wanted somebody but then I got a flat of my own. And then my friend, my school friend, came to me one day and said she was joining up.

37 MM: Were you teaching all this time?

38 SG: No, I was teaching in St. Andrews Prep in Rathgar, that's when the war broke out. So she said would you join up? I said, I couldn't do that because I was looking after this property that was still in our family that had been left to my grandmother, down Sandymount way, it wasn't a huge property but it had to be looked after. Repairs had to be seen to and I had the overheads to pay, the ground rent and the usual [pause] but I had a great friend in my solicitor, he was a great friend of my father's and he was like a father to me and whenever there was a crisis with the boys, I'd go down to him. Weep on his shoulder and tell him I can't cope with this, you know [laugh]. But he was wonderful. So then, my brother got married, the other boy was in the air force and my friend was joining up so I went up to my friend and he said, go on, we'll look after the property, we'll manage. So that's what happened.

39 **Indecipherable section.**

40 SG: I simply just left for Belfast and then we were sent up to barracks in Ballymena. So everybody went on three weeks training, to learn barracks square and battle and all this kind of thing and then you were asked what you wanted to be. You could either be, in those days, you could either be a cook, a clerk or an orderly so I said I wanted to be a cook.

41 MM: Was that because you were a good cook?

42 SG: Well, I did not want [pause] although I had done secretarial. My father said when I took up the teaching, he said I don't think there's going to be any money in this, not in Ireland, you know, too few people want this kind of teaching, he said I think you should do something else. So I took classes with Miss Galway's Secretarial College in Dorset Street and did secretarial and shorthand typing and you know, but I didn't want to

do that, oh no. Stuck in an office, oh no. So anyway, I became a cook and was put into the kitchen and put to peeling potatoes and brussels sprouts.

43 MM: This was still in Ballymena?

44 SG: In Ballymena, yes. We were in the castle, attached to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, they were based there [pause] I was getting restless then, you know, just pottering around the kitchen so one day, I was scrubbing out the yard and the officer came to me. She said how would you like to come over and look after four officers in the Officers' Mess. So I did that, I went over there and I did all the shopping and [pause] and then one day, she came to me and said what were you in civvie life. I told her I was a teacher. A teacher, she said, you'll want to get out of this [laughs]. So I said gladly [laughs]. She said, what about going on a course and she told me about the course. Well, I got myself in the kitchen, it was a big kitchen, with another corporal for a while, and there was a course going at the time whereby they assessed [pause] the recruits coming up were assessed mentally. They had a matrix test; did you ever hear of a matrix test?

45 MM: No.

46 SG: You get pages and pages of questions. You have to answer as many questions in as short a time as you can; you know the kind of thing. And it's graded and you can't say, I want to be this or I want to be that, you were graded. So I thought it would be nice to do that, so she said she would get me to do it.

47 Indecipherable section.

48 SG: You'd have to be on a par with her. So I was told to rush upstairs and stick the stripes on to my uniform and come downstairs to work [laughs]. And she'd be cursing and [pause] from the very beginning she was a domineering [pause] and she knew everything, sort of thing and I had to pretend I knew everything [laughs]. How do you make a rice pudding, she'd say. So I told her the way my mother made a rice pudding, I'd never seen any other way of getting a rice pudding made so I told her how she'd get the enamel pie dish and then she got a little bit of water and put it in the oven to swell the rice and when the rice was swollen [pause] we had this great big round dixie and I put in the rice, put in the water and put it in the oven and then when they were ready, they were stacked, you see, the dixies were stacked. So she said who thought you how to make rice pudding [laughs] and I said my mother [laughs] but anyway, I got through that.

49 And then I was put in charge of the rations and that meant we had to go to Ballymoney a few times a week with the lads from the regiment. There were three or four trucks and then there was Americans arrived and the Americans used to go and pick up their rations. And then I was in charge of the stores, giving out the rations and somebody had to be there to check the ration books and go off in the lorry to collect the rations. When I left Ballymena [pause] another officer came down to me one day and she said would you like a break? There's a vacancy in Bangor, in County Down, and these are officers that have come back from [pause] you know, they've been demobbed, they've done their stint and they were billeted in the Bangor school. And we were [pause] they took over the hospital, no, Bangor school had taken over the hospital and they were all doctors and we were billeted in the castle, we were at the top of the castle and the next floor was the Officers' Mess. The next floor was the rank and file, they were outside; they took over the whole area.

50 MM: And would they have been demobbed before the war was ended?

51 SG: Well, they'd done their stint and they were coming, you know, they had done their length of service and they were just hanging on waiting to be gradually demobbed, you know. It was just before the war was over.

52 **Indecipherable section.**

53 I was in Ballymena and that night we got the word to get into the trenches. You had to jump into your greatcoat, get on your helmet, get your gas mask and into the trenches. But we weren't bombed in Ballymena.

54 MM: Were you involved at all in the operation to clear up after the Blitz?

55 SG: No, no. The first air raid was before I went up and then the second air raid was when I was in Ballymena. In Ballymena, no Bangor, you know, as these officers were demobbed, you would see less and less of them. There were nurses and doctors and a mixture of Japanese and Germans, Chinese and whatnot, all in together and I was in charge of the Officers' Mess in Bangor Castle and I had a couple of Germans as orderlies, to look after the officers. And these two, I got very fond of them and I used to go on my bike, I had my bike up there, I used to go into the town at weekends and the officers would give you so much for Mess money and you would go round the farms getting eggs or something that you didn't get on the rations, you know. They were still doing the rations then.

56 MM: Surely that was slightly black market [laugh]?

This interview was continued on a second tape, which was stolen, along with my transcriber machine. I asked Sally if she would be willing to do another interview, to cover the period described in the stolen interview but she was unwilling. She said she had not realised to what extent she had 'run on' in the original interview and she asked me to delete certain parts of the transcript relating directly to her family. She was agreeable to my taking notes about our conversation but she did not want to be taped.

Sally was promoted to sergeant and was appointed as quartermaster. Her duties included ordering in supplies, allocating the correct rations and having to administer the various ration books to make sure the rations were distributed accurately. She was the only woman in the barracks at the time who was given trousers for her uniform, although the dress uniform at the time included having to wear a skirt. This was because of the nature of the work that she was doing. When she had ordered in supplies she would often have to lift in sacks of potatoes or vegetables and it was reckoned that trousers were necessary for the work she was doing. She did have a man working with her but generally she was fairly isolated. She remarked on how this was a pattern through most of her working life in that she found she was working on her own and that she operated better as a self starter. Sally referred to the fact that they had to wear uniform for a pay parade and for any kind of ceremonial duties.

Sally did think of continuing in the army after the war and would have been given the opportunity to do it but family circumstances prevented her doing this. An aunt became sick and she returned to Dublin after the war from Wales, where she had moved from Northern Ireland. She had worked in England as well, and enjoyed that but that was before the war. One of the reasons that she joined up was not just because her friend asked her, but because she was very influenced by Churchill's speeches.

While she was in Ballymena and Bangor Sally said she never encountered any resentment because she was from Éire. She remembered that a fellow sergeant with whom she became very good friends was actually anti-Éire and anti-nationalist and resented many of the southern workers who came north in search of work and was quite dismissive of them. But she seems to have excluded Sally from this category, possibly because she was Protestant. She remarked on the large numbers of people who had gone to Northern Ireland and she referred to some of the junior workers in the canteen, doing menial jobs with no chance of promotion. She actually said it was good enough for them, not in a dismissive way but saying that they were happy enough with the work so long as they were being paid because the pay was much better for that kind of work than it would have been in Éire.

Sheila, Dublin. Interview: 5 April 1998

1 SC: My name is Sheila and my date of birth is 28 June 1936.

2 MM: Since we will mainly be talking about your mother, working during the war period, and your remembrances of that as a child, would you just give me your mother's name and date of birth, please?

3 SC: My mother's name was Mary O'Connor and her date of birth was 20 January 1899.

4 MM: Do you know anything about your mother's circumstances, where she was born and what sort of family she was born into?

5 SC: She was born, her parents came from Wexford, and they were relatively well off. She was born [pause] they actually [pause] I'm trying to remember now [pause] it doesn't matter if I sort of hmm and haw a bit? They were born [pause] he came, her father, came to Dublin and sort of had got his portion of the farm in Blackwater, and he had several businesses and unfortunately, he was an alcoholic and he drank them out of them all, so it was a pretty rough upbringing for a young woman, you know, it really was. I think [pause] I don't think Mammy really got very much schooling, as a result, you know it was sort of [pause] I don't really, she never spoke about it but I've seen a photograph of her, standing in the doorway of a shop that they actually had in Clambrassil Street at the time, it was like something like 1910, like really dorny looking. It wasn't a very good upbringing.

6 MM: And would she have been expected to work in the shop, do you know?

7 SC: I imagine so but I don't know, I don't know.

8 MM: So when she came to Dublin, or [pause] that she was in Dublin did she get [pause] do you know anything about when she got married, what age she was?

9 SC: She got married round about 1923, so she would have been 24, and my father was about three years older than her. He was in good circumstances because he was a cooper in Guinness's, which was one of the best-paid trades in Dublin at the time and they were relatively well off, until the time that he had the stroke. They were really on the pig's back, as they used to say in Dublin, you know.

10 MM: So when she got married, and your father had a good steady job, what did they do for accommodation?

11 SC: They initially lived in a sort of [pause] they shared a house in Richmond Road, and then they bought, theirs was one of the first houses built - Dublin Corporation/Council houses, built by the Town Commissioners in Marino - and you could either rent them or rent/buy them and they rent/bought them and everybody told them they were mad. In those days, you know, you didn't buy a house, you lived in one unless you were very wealthy. But through all her troubles, she continued to buy it, which was, you know, I think a tremendous achievement for her, because they, once Daddy had the stroke, there was little or no money coming in. But she somehow managed to keep on to the house and everybody was saying, you should sell it, but she wouldn't. She was an amazing woman.

12 MM: And in terms of your family, where did you come in the family, how many children did she have?

13 SC: Seven altogether, and I was the youngest. There were four girls, three boys, and unfortunately the three boys all died at some stage. You know, one was stillborn, one died at about ten months I think, from measles, and then my brother, who was the apple of her eye, was killed in 1944, aged eighteen. So she really had, she really had problems. But she came through them.

14 MM: So this was Dublin in the 1930s [pause] would you know anything about the sort of healthcare she was having when she was having the children?

15 SC: She was lucky in that Daddy worked in Guinness's; so the healthcare there was for free, so you know, she was very fortunate. Now, whether Guinness's paid for the childbirth or not, I don't know, but I know the first child she had, she was booked into the Coombe, and she went in and it was a false alarm, and while she was there, there happened to be a black doctor [laughs] and she never went back to the Coombe, she said no black man was going to touch her. So all the rest, everybody else was always born at home and I presume the local G.P. and midwife [pause] I don't know. I was born at home.

16 MM: In terms of growing up, you say your Daddy had a stroke, when would that have been in relation to your development, what age were you when it happened?

17 SC: I wasn't born. It was [pause] he had the stroke round about the Christmas before I was born - I was born in the June. So I mean, it was traumatic, you know, I mean to say at that stage she still had Desmond, so she had four children already, and I was the fifth alive, you know, so there was no money coming in apart from a minute amount. Guinness's in those days were remarkable, because they had what we call a prolonged disability income. Now it was tiny, but nonetheless, it was all that was coming; there was no social welfare, there was nothing in. And, I was born in June, and Mammy went out to work when I was eleven months old. You know, so I mean, it was just amazing.

18 MM: And what did she do?

19 SC: She worked as a cleaner in Guinness's. I mean she had never worked, as such, so she had no training before she was married, so she was lucky that Guinness's used to look after, you know, anyone in certain circumstances, of their own, in Mammy's circumstances, and they looked after her by giving her a job, the only job she could take on.

20 MM: And what about the conditions of that job? I know of somebody else in a similar case who went in very early.

21 SC: I think it was probably very, very hard. I know for a fact that she had to leave Marino at half four in the morning to walk to the Brewery, because there were no buses at that stage, you know, and she certainly never rode a bike in her life. So she walked, and she probably got the bus back. I can't [pause] I was trying to remember, I don't know if she had [pause] I think she probably had to be in for six, but maybe it was six thirty, and as far as I know, she did three hours. But it meant getting up at half past four, and leaving the baby at home, so Gwenny, my eldest sister, more or less was half rearing me.

22 MM: How old was Gwenny at that stage?

23 SC: At the time that Mammy went to work, Gwenny was fourteen.

24 MM: She little more than a child herself.

25 SC: She was, exactly, yes. But there was one good thing about it, it was that my father was always there, so there was always a responsible, reasonably responsible adult in the house, you know, and so that, in so far as like baby minding, you know, she had no problem there, that Daddy was always there.

26 MM: Well, your father couldn't work. How incapacitated was he?

27 SC: He was completely paralysed down the left side, completely, and I think [pause] I think that his brain might have been slightly affected. I don't know whether it was that, or whether it was frustration, because I remember, not rows with my mother, but rows with my brother. It was very sad, I think that Daddy was just frustrated, that he couldn't do the things [pause] he was still a young man. He couldn't do what he did [pause] because he was always, the house, he did everything you know, building and all that sort of jazz. He was a very, very active man and, you know, I think the frustration of it. It was only when Desmond died that Daddy sort of calmed down, and I think realised [pause] you know.

28 MM: And your mother's routine, apart from starting at half past four in the morning, how many hours then, three or four hours in Guinness's, and could she have got a bus back home then to start the domestic work?

29 SC: Yes, and she'd do her shopping on the way home. She used always shop in Thomas Street, then she'd come and she'd step into [pause] I mean, looking after the family. Marie would have been six then, Kathleen would have been eight, and Desmond probably about twelve or thirteen and Gwenny, fourteen. So she still had a young family, which demanded, really needed all her time.

30 MM: And what about when you were going to school, as you said, they were all young. Who got them ready for school? Was that Gwenny?

31 SC: No, because by the time I was going to school, Gwenny was working and it was [pause] I remember the very first day I went to school, my brother brought me to school, so I distinctly remember that. I suppose everybody remembers their first day at school, no matter how small they were, and it was really Daddy would sort of supervise. I remember Daddy brushing my hair, I'd sort of curly hair, and pulling the comb through it, you know [laughs] so I do remember that he was involved in that and getting me ready for school, I don't know about the others.

32 MM: And as you were growing up, and you'd had your whole life with an incapacitated father, and a mother who took the role of breadwinner, which was unusual for the time, how did that make you feel in terms of your contemporaries?

33 SC: Oh, I don't know how they managed it, but we never, ever felt deprived. I never felt deprived [pause] we always felt very special. I don't know how she managed it, but we never [pause] and I mean we had very little [pause] but then most other people didn't have a lot during the war years, either, you know, with rationing and all that sort of [pause] so probably, things were a little bit more level between, you know, people who were in good jobs, civil service or whatever. We mixed with all sorts; we certainly didn't feel we had to touch the forelock to anybody [laughs].

34 MM: I meant really in terms of maybe the authority structure in the house [pause] that at the time, it was still considered very much a hierarchical thing, that the father was head of the household. Would there have been suggestion that your mother took that over because she was the one out at work?

35 SC: I don't think so really, because I have no recollection [pause] I'm thinking of my contemporaries, and I have no recollection of the fathers being head of the house, it was always the mothers. The mother was always the forceful person, of anybody that I can remember, you know, of people living around us. I don't every remember fathers, sort of, coming in and everybody waiting on them, or maybe it was because of my circumstances that I chose to see everybody else in relation to my own, you know.

36 MM: An interesting aspect of that is that the social emphasis was on the father as head of the household, but em, especially in working class areas, it was the women who were really running things. You know, it was done quietly.

37 SC: But ours was a very mixed area, it wasn't [pause] I wouldn't say it was purely working class. It was really a very mixed area, you know, so that, as I say, we never felt [pause] we never felt that Daddy was pushed to one side, although he probably was, but I always remember him as a strong presence, he was an amazing person too. He was always there, Mammy would be gone out in the morning and Daddy would be there, like. If I wasn't well, and couldn't go to school, or it had maybe the day before been decided that I wasn't well enough to go to school, the next day it was my Dad that wrote the note for school [laughs]. So it might have been very easy, I was never conscious that [pause]

38 MM: It sounds like it might have been more ideal that a lot of families?

39 SC: Yes, we were never conscious [pause] we were never made conscious of the fact that my poor mother had to go to work [pause] it was only afterwards that I felt that. You know, she made no bones about it, just got on with it.

40 MM: And given that, as a cleaner in Guinness's, she wouldn't have been earning very much, and the pension was very small, his disability, what other strategies did she use to survive economically, if you like?

41 SC: She kept hens, she grew potatoes, she grew everything. She grew lettuce, we had apple trees, she was amazing in that way and I mean we always had fresh eggs, so that we were quite well fed. Funny, I remember my sister, I remember Marie saying that, you know, when things were probably quite bad, that she remembers the actual slices of bread being rationed. Like, Mammy would butter the bread on the table and there were two slices each, but I don't remember that, I really don't. I must have been maybe sheltered, I don't know, but I don't remember that.

42 MM: Do you think maybe because you were younger that they were giving you a larger share?

43 SC: No, I don't remember, I just don't remember that. I remember Marie saying that, but I don't remember it, and I mean, we never sort of had luxuries, but we always had enough to eat.

44 MM: And what about clothes?

45 SC: She made most of our clothes, she certainly made all my clothes. She even at one stage used to make my nickers [laughs] and made out of bits of [pause] I remember having a pair of purple nickers

[laughs]. They were made out of bits of material that she had accumulated. She used to go to Switzers White Sale and she'd buy these remnants and things like sheets, she never bought sheets. Gwenny worked in a flour factory in Ringsend, and she was able to buy the flour bags and she used to stitch them up and make sheets out of them. They were like linen, you know, they lasted for ever.

46 MM: Did she have a sewing machine to do this?

47 SC: Yes, she was very good, she was a brilliant seamstress.

48 MM: Given that she was going out to work early in the morning, she was then doing the shopping and coming home and doing the domestic chores, and all this extra - growing vegetables and making your clothes, did she ever relax?

49 SC: She did because at the stage when I would be remembering things, you know, the house was always full, because Gwenny was in the Guides and Desmond was in the Scouts. The house was always full, and I mean, it was nothing to Mammy to make a huge big apple dumpling, say, and that would go on the big table, with maybe twelve or thirteen people to supper, you know. So, she did, and she loved that, she loved company. Games of cards, you know, lots of people played cards, we all played cards around this big table. Yes, she did, I don't know where she got the time, Mary, I honestly don't. I couldn't face into it now.

50 MM: From what I know of your family, you've all developed either artistically or creatively in some way. Would that have been encouraged by her or do you think you just picked it up from her incredible activity?

51 SC: I think it was probably from her activity, really, because we never sort of were taught anything, music or dressmaking. We did, from watching my mother, I used to dress-make, and my sisters, they went on and gave courses in dressmaking. Probably from [pause] I remember really lovely dresses that we had, you know, summery type dresses, always made by Mammy. And then we knitted; I remember I used to knit my own socks. This was when I was quite [pause] this was during the war, when if you didn't knit your socks, you didn't have socks. It was just incredible when you look back on it.

52 MM: You would have been still quite young during the war years. Were you aware of things like rationing actually being a problem?

53 SC: Not being a problem, nothing [pause] I mean my poor mother probably saw all the problems, but I mean, I remember going with her to Liptons every week to collect the rations, and they'd ration out the sugar and the butter and they'd shove it into brown bags, you know, and butter, and whatever else was rationed. And em, we used to, this was my mother again, margarine - you'd mix the margarine with butter to make the butter go further, you know. Many's the time she put butter on the range to soften it and of course, we'd forget about it (both laugh).

54 MM: That was the end of it.

55 SC: Yeah, exactly, yeah.

56 MM: Going into town to Liptons, for instance, would you have walked or would you bus?

57 SC: No, we would have gone on the bus. In fact, I probably, it was probably when I was a bit older that I would have gone in to Liptons on my own, it was Liptons in Dame Street, to get the rations, because Mammy herself would be on her way down from the brewery and that's probably why our rations were there. I remember going in with her into the place, I forget the name of it, some mills or other in Talbot Street, to get food for the hens, you know, the pinhead oatmeal for the little chickens, she used to maybe order up fifty day-old chicks from Carlow and they'd come up on the train and she'd go in and collect them. She'd rear them.

58 MM: She just carried a box of chicks home?

59 SC: Yes, because they weren't delivered. They'd be in a box, like, with little day-old chicks pushing their beaks up. But the neighbours also used to bring their scraps to the hens, that was probably, you know, just to help out. You know, sort of potato peelings, things like that, but you know, this was routine. As I was growing, this was routine that Mrs. Keyes would send in [pause] it was nothing, it wasn't charity or anything, she was just using her scraps and they went out to the hens.

60 MM: Was there any sort of exchange, that your Mam would give her eggs?

61 SC: No, no. I remember another thing she used to do, and this is just between ourselves, I mean, working in Guinness's, she always had her black shopping bag and everyday that shopping bag was half-full of Guinness's barley - they were barley-fed chickens [both laugh]. Not to talk about the kindling and everything else that went along with it [both laugh]. She was a woman of many parts.

62 MM: Did she get her pint of stout from Guinness's as a worker?

63 SC: I think she could have done, but I don't remember her ever talking about it. Mammy didn't drink Guinness, she may have occasionally brought home a bottle of stout to Daddy, but I don't remember.

64 MM: I know of people who used that as part of a barter system, because they didn't drink Guinness themselves but it was always useful to swap.

65 SC: Well, maybe she did get it and bartered it with some of the men, because Mammy didn't drink. She probably did and went about and did it and didn't talk about it. But I can see the black shopping bag, half full of barley, you know. [Both laugh].

66 MM: I know of another woman who worked in Guinness's as a cleaner, and found it became too much in terms of the child-rearing so she started to take the cleaning home. Your Mam never did anything like that?

67 SC: No, no [pause] what was it, washing that she would take home? No, she actually was [pause] I remember her saying that her first day in Guinness's was on her knees, scrubbing and that was in 1937, and she ended up forewoman herself, but in those days, even forewoman was a four-hour job. They'd run their fingers along the top of the shelf and if there was dust there, you were in trouble, but everything was scrubbed on your knees, there were none of the modern aids, which she had later, in the late fifties and sixties.

68 MM: And would you have any idea how much she was actually paid?

69 SC: No, Mary, I know it was very little, but I really don't know. I mean it would have been just a couple of pounds. It couldn't have been more.

70 MM: Recently, I was looking at tables for food prices during the war, and a loaf of bread went up as high as 3/6 at one stage, which if you were earning £2 a week, was a lot, you know. Would she have made her own bread as well?

71 SC: Yes, she would make bread. We had shop bread, because I distinctly remember after the war, maybe when rationing finished, that the first day we got white bread. We were probably better off with the other stuff, but I can see it at this big table, and comparing the white bread and the old bread, which was a sort of beigy colour, you know. But we did have shop bread [pause] but Mammy made her bread, she made apple tarts, redcurrant tarts, everything, she baked, baked, baked all the time, as well as everything else.

72 MM: Was she unusual in the sense of the sheer range of her activity, or would you have noticed other children's mothers doing the same kinds of things, maybe not all of them?

73 SC: Well, they all baked, everybody baked, and everybody was very, very careful. My mother would send me down to the butcher's on Malahide Road for 6d worth of pieces and that would be 6d worth of steak pieces, but in those days, I mean, that made a stew for the family. But nobody, nobody flashed money around, because I think they just didn't have it. You know, even though some people, like, where we were living were in relatively good jobs, you know, sort of white collar jobs, which would be regarded, because they were white collar, they'd be better than [pause] even though somebody who was a tradesman was in a way to make a lot more money, but em, I'm just thinking of the neighbours around. Nobody else kept chickens or anything like that she [pause] everybody baked, everybody made clothes, made clothes for the children and knitted. I mean everybody did that as the norm, it was the normal thing to do, there was nothing extraordinary about it. It was just that my mother did a lot more than anybody else [laughs] along with having to go out to work, you know.

74 MM: And when you weren't working, apart from evening recreation, was there any chance of a family holiday or what did you do during school holidays?

75 SC: Not a family holiday as such, no. I do remember going, my first real holiday when I was eleven, that was long after [pause] that would have been 1947. But Mammy would occasionally [pause] she had a brother living in Derry, and she'd occasionally go up to him for a few days. You know, she'd manage that, maybe go up for the weekend, and this was her little holiday away, maybe you know, just [pause] I can't even remember what sort of holidays she had, it was probably two weeks, you know. And we'd have visitors, I mean our cousins and that would visit us, from Derry and so we never had a family holiday. They used to go on family holidays before Daddy had his stroke.

76 MM: That was before your time then?

77 SC: Yes.

78 MM: And was there very much physical labour involved for her in caring for your father?

79 SC: No, he was great, he could actually [pause] he could dress himself; he had it brought to a fine art. But he was totally paralysed, I mean, if he was going out [pause] all of us, did it, we were there, there were the collar detached shirts at the time, with the stud at the back, and we used to have to put his collar on and tie his tie for him, and always when he was going out [pause] he was always very well dressed, and the bad hand, his left hand, he had to tuck it into his pocket, and he used a stick.

80 MM: So he could walk?

81 SC: Oh he could walk, now with difficulty, but very, very independent, very determined. Very much so.

82 MM: And did he get physiotherapy or anything, even in Guinness's?

83 SC: No, there was nothing. In fact, when the stroke happened, he was brought to Jervis Street, and he was just left there for about two or three days until he signed himself out. There was nobody looking after him so he was better off at home. You know, if you had a stroke in those days, Mary, there was no no speech therapy, there was nothing. There was nothing. If you had a stroke, tough. There was no treatment for a stroke in the 1930s.

84 MM: And in terms of [pause] your older sisters, when they did go out to work in terms of their age?

85 SC: Well, once again, she was, Gwenny probably went to work when she was about fourteen or fifteen, and Kathleen was the same. But then like, Mammy was always very conscious of the importance of education, so Marie, probably at great financial cost to herself, Marie stayed on to do her Inter. and did a secretarial course, and you know, moved away from so-called working class. And then, between Marie and my mother, I was persuaded to stay on to do the Leaving. You know, and she was so thrilled [pause] you know, when the two of her girls had gone to secondary school, you know. She was very conscious of that, she was a very intelligent woman; very [pause] there was always music and books and everything in the house, even though she had no formal education herself. She was amazing.

86 MM: And you say she didn't really talk about her family, so did you ever have any connection with the extended family?

87 SC: Oh we did, I mean, her aunt [pause] now I didn't say she didn't talk about her family, it was her upbringing. No, she had one sister and one brother, and Auntie Wally, that was her sister, she lived off the South Circular Road, quite near, you know, where they all came from that area, you know Daddy used to live in Emor Street, and then Uncle Martin lived in Derry, he married a Derry woman and he used to come and she used to visit him, and we used to visit Auntie Wally and I used to go and stay for a few days. No, we did [pause] now not as much as nowadays, we had no phone or anything, but we did keep in touch. More with Mammy's family than with Daddy's. But we did keep in touch with Daddy's too, to an extent, one of his sisters still lived in Emor Street and we used to visit her a couple of times a year.

88 MM: Would they have been able to help at all?

89 SC: No, I was never conscious of that. I don't think my mother would have accepted it; there was no way she would have taken help from anybody. But certainly, Auntie Wally had five children of her own,

her husband was a cabinet maker, and I always felt that we were better off than they were. I always did, I always felt that you know we were certainly better fed! Because my mother was so ingenious [laughs].

90 MM: And where did she come in terms of her own family? Was she the oldest?

91 SC: She was, she was the eldest and Auntie Wally was about three years younger than her, I think, and Uncle Martin was [pause] Auntie Wally was eight years younger than her, so then perhaps Martin came between, I'm not quite sure where he came, he may have come between the two of them. But Auntie Wally, I know she was eight years younger than Mammy.

92 MM: So, this remarkable woman was doing all of this; as you grew older, did that make you feel intimidated in following her or just determined that you weren't going to let her down in how you approached life?

93 SC: I never thought of it formally like that, Mary, never. We just developed in a natural sort of way, there was nothing very formal like 'I must do this because my mother [pause]'. No I just, more or less, went my own way. My mother was always there and always very interested in what you were doing, you know, if you went to a dance, did you meet anyone you liked better than yourself, you know [laughs]. And she was always there for us, but I never felt, no, I never felt intimidated, no way. We had a great - we had a brilliant upbringing. A very happy childhood, you know, never really [pause] we would have liked another bit of spud, maybe, like that [laughs] but we never, ever felt, I never felt deprived as a child, never.

94 MM: It doesn't sound like you were [both laugh].

95 SC: Even in the garden, like, we'd all be pottering around, helping her do the lettuces and [pause] you know, we never, it was a very, very good childhood, a very good upbringing.

96 MM: And in terms of your neighbourhood, you say it was quite mixed, but that was a relatively novel development, the Marino area, and it seemed, you know, that some of the ideas behind it, the size of the streets and everything, recognising that Dublin life was going to be changing, there were going to be more cards, better bus routes, would there have been many cars on your street, for instance, belonging to your neighbours?

97 SC: No, no, in fact, I mean, as a child, once again during the period that you're interested in, I mean, we would play skipping across the road, and you'd only rarely occasionally have to put the rope down to let a horse and cart through, never, maybe a bicycle, cars were very, very rare. Very much so.

98 MM: Going into town, obviously there was petrol rationing, but would you have had any friends that, after the war when the rationing was no longer there, that there were a lot of cars [pause]

99 SC: No, [pause] we certainly didn't have cars. The first sort of, funnily enough now, when I was eleven and the first holiday that I went on, and my father used, from time to time he'd take a turn, as somebody would say, and I remember he was particularly ill that week and my only concern was that I wouldn't get to go on my holiday. You're like that at eleven, you know [laughs] and I remember his brother, whom we seldom saw, came over to visit him, and the one thing [pause] my Daddy recovered and lived for a good many years after [pause] but one thing I remember about that is that this man had a car and

the idea of getting a lift to the station in the car was brilliant [laughs]. You know, so obviously there were very, very few cars. Very few.

100 MM: And how did you get on that holiday? You got a lift, was that to the train station?

101 SC: Yeah, and got the train then down to Wexford and then you were picked up in the pony and trap from the farm where we stayed, you know.

102 MM: Farm life wouldn't have been as exciting to you as a city child, as to somebody who'd had no contact with the hens and everything?

103 SC: Yeah, that's true but it was still exciting, it was brilliant because you were away from home [laughs], it was brilliant.

104 MM: Despite this lovely home [laughs]?

105 SC: [Laughs] We all wanted to get away.

106 MM: And from your Mum's point of view, obviously I'm just stunned by how resourceful she was, but would she have ever talked about her working day, or the people she met or might be working for?

107 SC: Only if she met up with some old biddy who was giving her trouble or grief, but the various ladies that she worked with, we'd know them by name so obviously she did talk about them. And there was another woman up the road, I can't remember her name this minute, and she worked as a cleaner in the Civil Service, and they used to meet. I always woke up when Mammy was going out, now this was later when she could get a bus, and I used to lie in bed awake and I'd hear Mammy going out and I'd hear the door shutting and I'd hear Mrs. [pause] I can't remember the woman's name, but her footsteps coming down the road, and it'd be still dark, and then the two of them toddling off down Carlton Road to get the bus on the main road at the back of Fairview Park, which wasn't too bad, she could get a bus, and then in the last [pause] oh maybe five or ten years that she was working in the Brewery, the Brewery laid on a bus to collect them from town. So that, it took a lot of the hassle but like, when she needed that, she had to walk, when there were no buses, she had to walk all the way.

108 MM: That's quite a distance, it must have been at least four or five miles.

109 SC: Yes, when you think of it, all the way into town and then all the way up the quays and up Watling Street and up into the Brewery there. Yes, it was a heck of a walk.

110 MM: So, she was doing very hard physical labour first thing in the morning and then she was carrying all the shopping home, quite a long distance as well.

111 SC: She probably walked from the Brewery down to town to get the bus and she probably would have had this black shopping bag with her, carrying the kindling and maybe an oul' bottle of paint of something in it as well, because I think our house was painted with paint out of Guinness's which came home in a milk bottle with sellotape or something over the top, you know [both laugh].

112 MM: I'm not sure she'd get away with it today.

113 SC: No, probably not. But one of her favourite pastimes was going to the cinema, she'd toddle off to the cinema on her own or she'd bring me with her, you know, so that was one of her [pause] she did relax and she did find the time. I don't know [pause]

114 MM: And what sort of films did she like?

115 SC: Oh, they'd probably be romances. You know, she used to read, probably romances, but she probably [pause] there weren't very many sort of intellectual films being made then, really, that came on the general screens, they were mostly [pause] sort of, light enough. But she liked to go to the cinema; she'd go to the cinema about once a week.

116 MM: And how much would that have cost, would you remember?

117 SC: Well, I remember going to the pictures at the weekend, this would have been when I was about eight or nine, the others then would have been working and I'd be going around cadging for the money, and I know it was 7d into the pictures in the Fairview. Whether it was the same at night or for adults I don't know, but I remember that, to go round them all and manage to get 7d out of them [laughs].

118 MM: And you were able to go by yourself then, or with friends?

119 SC: We used to go mostly to the matinees, we'd queue up, there would be a big crowd.

120 MM: As you got a little bit older then, coming into your adolescence, how did she deal with things like the changes in your body and just telling you the facts of life?

121 SC: She was very embarrassed [laughs]. Very embarrassed and I think, I was about [pause] I was ready to have a period and she sort of, just sideways told me, like you know, that [pause] I can't remember how she [pause] I do remember being in the bedroom at the time. I can't remember how she put it but she more or less told me, in a very sideways and offhand way, about sanitary towels. But sure, I knew all this anyway [laughs] at this stage, you know.

122 MM: Was that from your friends?

123 SC: Oh yeah, I probably put her out of her misery (both laugh).

124 MM: And did you ever, she hadn't spoken about her upbringing, so you didn't know kind of what she'd been told by her mother, you wouldn't have gone into that?

125 SC: No, although her mother now, was living, her mother was actually living with Auntie Wally, my grandfather was dead at the time, and em, she was em, now she was a matriarch. I was terrified of her [pause] she was probably quite [pause] Now Anne has a different picture of her altogether, my cousin, who lived in the house with her, but I used to be terrified of her, I wouldn't open my mouth. Mammy never spoke of her upbringing; and I never, you just didn't talk about things like that. I don't know how she managed, I really don't.

126 MM: Was your Mum still around then when you had your first children and what was her reaction to that?

127 SC: Well, she was delighted but once again, I remember up in our back bedroom at home, and I [pause] I suppose I was about eight months pregnant and she [pause] she wasn't very well at that stage,

she'd started to suffer from her nerves, but she was, sort of, I think it was something to do with if the waters broke, you'd go to hospital immediately, but that was the only conversation we had about having children or anything, we just didn't talk about it, ever. There's one thing I remember saying, funnily enough, I remember being out in Howth with her one time, and somebody's daughter got pregnant, out of wedlock and funny enough, Mammy spoke of that, and she said in as many words that, I think this girl had been thrown out of her home, that she would never do that. As much as to say, like you know, I mean don't go, don't be stupid, but if anything happens, come to me, you know. She didn't put it in as many words but I knew what she was getting at, I was probably about eighteen at the time, maybe nineteen, I can't remember. But that was her attitude, that if you did have a child, you know, that she would look after you, she certainly wouldn't be like, at that stage, to be just left like so many, just hidden under the carpet, you know.

128 MM: In terms of your mother's broader attitudes, was she very religious?

129 SC: I think she would have liked to be. She loved the idea of the cosiness of it but she was very sceptical as well. She was, she went to Mass and she went to Communion and all that sort of jazz, as I say, I think she would have liked it because it was sort of a comfortable idea, set beside what she was going through, but she didn't have time to get involved so she never did, and she quite sceptical, you know, and Daddy was very sceptical. But they used to go to Mass just the same. I mean one didn't not go to Mass.

130 MM: Was that because of peer pressure?

131 SC: Yes, because of the neighbours. Everybody around was Catholic.

132 MM: And what about the local priest's involvement, for instance at times of real hardship when your Dad first got sick?

133 SC: Well, I wasn't born when Daddy first got sick so I've no idea, but I never recall any help, any support at all. None whatsoever.

134 MM: You know, groups like the Vincent de Paul [pause] presumably with your mother's independence that would have been anathema?

135 SC: I think my mother was more likely to give to the Vincent de Paul than take things from them. You know, she was amazing, I mean, she certainly never had recourse to the Vincent de Paul, in fact I remember one time we'd a settee, quite a nice settee, and she gave it to the scouts for their den. You know, that was my mother, a very proud lady, very proud, at the back of it all, she was. No, she would not have taken anything from them.

136 MM: So she managed on very meagre financial resources and you weren't deprived and were well looked after [pause] when it came time that there was extra money coming in from yourself and your sisters first, how was that divided, did they hand up the money to her?

137 SC: Well we always contributed from our [pause] you know, from our salary or wages, whatever you like to call it, we always did and I remember when I started work, in 1954, my wages were £4.2.2 and you gave £3 to your mother. And then, a year later, I was promoted. I did an exam and I was promoted, and I got, I always remember these figures, £5.10.10 and I still gave £3 to my mother but at that stage,

before that, when I only had the £4.2.2 she still dressed me, but now I had £5.10.10, she still got £3 and I dressed myself [laughs].

138 MM: The older sisters would have given the same sort of proportions, when they started?

139 SC: I've no idea, but I imagine so, yes. Everybody contributed and mostly it went on food and it mostly went on the house, you know, making things more comfortable and having [pause] you know, not worrying about firing, things like that. But everybody contributed from the start.

140 MM: In terms of buying the house through the rental; what proportion of the income would that have been? Would you have any idea how expensive it was?

141 SC: I remember, because we used to have to go down to pay the rent and it was something like 18s a week, now that was an awful [pause] that was a huge amount in those days. That was why, you know, this was a huge lump that went out of her few bob every week and that's why the family used to say for God's sake, sell your interest, you'd have a little nest egg which probably would have been about £30 or something, that was a nest egg, you know, but she just wouldn't she was determined to buy the house.

142 MM: And what was the term?

143 SC: It was 40 years, so far as I remember. It was 40 years, that was why it was so low, as far as I recall it was 40 years, you know, which you'd never get now. Our mortgage, which we took over when it was 10 years old, it'd only go for 35 years, so 40 years possibly was the norm then, I don't know.

144 MM: I've always thought they were very attractive houses, you know. Would your mum have talked about when she moved into it the first time, whether it would have particularly appealed to her or whether she was just pleased to have her own home?

145 SC: I think she was pleased to have her own home but I think it was probably also the only house they could afford you know, because of it being a Corporation house, the maintenance, if anything went wrong. That was another thing, my devious mother [laughs] if she wanted the bedroom decorated she caused the chimney breast, the chimney to go on fire and the Corporation would come out and examine it, and the chimney breast would be a little bit cracked so she'd have to paper the room [both laugh]. That's a fact, Mary; that happened several times.

146 MM: And nobody in the Corporation ever twigged?

147 SC: Ah, they probably thought she was great, this little woman papering the room [laughs]. They never questioned it, never, but maintenance was included in the rent, you know, which was probably [pause] particularly when Daddy was sick, it was a big help. But this was nothing, she used to wallpaper and paint, she used to do all that, she'd paint the outside and inside.

148 MM: Right up to the top of the house?

149 SC: Oh yes, oh yes, she did everything and probably Desmond did the outside then, when he was older, but I remember when I was 16 and my mother at that stage would have been 52, and I remember thinking, she's over 50 and she's done enough, and at that stage I took over and did all the wallpapering and

painting from then on, you know, and I hope like, that it was a help to her, but at least I had enough savvy at 16 to say well, my mother's 52 and she shouldn't be getting up on ladders wallpapering.

150 MM: You were still at school at that stage. Did she have contact with your teachers and play an active role from that point of view?

151 SC: You must be joking [laughs] [pause] the Irish Sisters of Charity. Sister Mary Delalus, I'm sure you've heard of her [laughs]. She was notorious in the city of Dublin. The only contact my mother had with the school was when she was sent for because I had misbehaved and I probably told you that story [pause]

152 MM: No?

153 SC: When I was fourteen or so, and I was waiting for my pal who lived in Marino also to come out and she was the class captain, and I was outside on the pavement, I was almost oblivious to boys, and with the long, black knitted stockings, and I was [pause] you know the way you'd be jumping off the kerb and on to the road and off the kerb, that's what I was doing, but we happened to be quite near Bolton Street Tech and this woman was looking out the window. She saw me doing this and the boys happened to be coming out of Bolton Street Tech at the time and I can honestly say I wasn't even aware of them. She called me in, sent for my poor unfortunate mother, who had more to do, and told my mother I was shaping in front of the boys. [Both laugh].

154 MM: How did your mother react?

155 SC: Ah, she told her where to put herself [both laugh]. That's true; no that was about the only type of contact, or going maybe to the sale of work every year, or the school play or whatever.

156 MM: So parents' input wasn't welcomed?

157 SC: It was absolutely nil. They just did not figure, definitely, end of story, did not figure.

158 MM: And you did Leaving Cert [pause] what sort of things would you have been doing in the school - this was what, a Catholic girls secondary school?

159 SC: We were the first girls secondary school in Dublin to do a science subject, and our class was the first one to do it, and that was physiology, and we were the first [pause] so she, afterwards I realised that this nun, I mean, God love her, this was the only non fee-paying school in Dublin, that's why I was at it, and she wanted [pause] we all came from relatively poor backgrounds and by God, she was going to get us into permanent and pensionable jobs, if she had to kill us to do it. And most of us did. You know, so, like [pause] in a very [pause] in her own narrow way she [pause] all she did was for our good but she went about it in a terribly peculiar way. But we did the usual English, Irish, French, Geography, History and physiology was the one thing that [pause] we'd a lot of music, we'd a lot of music in that school and it was good. We used to do a play or a musical every year and we used to do drill displays and things, like it was, for a non-fee paying school in the early fifties, it was very good, the results were always brilliant.

160 MM: What about things like domestic science [pause] was there any emphasis on the usual thing that you hear from schooling of the period, that of course, your education would stop in terms of you getting married?

161 SC: Oh no, no that was never said. They never thought, people didn't think like that, you probably presumed that you'd go to work for five or six years, you'd get married, you'd have your children, because that was the way things were.

Susan and Jean, Belfast. Interview: 9th March 1996

1 SC: My name is Susan C., I'm 86 and I was born in Gorey, Co. Wexford and I went to boarding school here in Belfast at the Methodist College. The reason for that was because we had gone to Dublin but we had no friends there and my grandmother was here in Belfast and she would be able to keep an eye us. Then I studied music for four years in London and then I taught music in schools for a couple of years in Inverness and Eastbourne. Then I decided that I didn't want to do that any longer and I trained as a medical social worker, an almoner, as we were called in those days, at London University and at the Institute of Almoners in London. And then I was offered a job at the Rotunda Hospital, and I was there from 1939 to 1943 and then I was offered a job at the Royal Victoria here, it was a promotion really, and I came here in 1944 and I worked there until I retired in 1970.

2 MM: Your family in Gorey, can you tell me something about them?

3 SC: Well, when I was small, we lived with my grandfather and my aunt, my father's sister that was, and my father and mother and my elder sister and younger brother.

4 MM: What did your family do for a living?

5 SC: My father had a business, a drapery business.

6 MM: Was your mother involved in that?

7 SC: Oh yes, she was, she did all the book keeping.

8 MM: Jean, can you tell me how old are you?

9 JC: I'm eighty-five.

10 MM: And were you born here in Belfast?

11 JC: I wasn't, I was born in Scotland.

12 MM: When did you come to Ireland?

13 JC: I was about four.

14 MM: Do you come from a large family?

15 JC: No, I was the only child.

16 MM: And have you been in Belfast all your life since then?

17 JC: Apart from visits to Scotland.

18 MM: So you still have family in Scotland?

19 JC: Not any more.

20 MM: Susan was telling me what she did for a living; were you working in Belfast or did you give up work when you got married?

21 JC: When I got married, my husband was a superintendent in the Ormeau Bakery then he left and we opened up a business of our own. After a bit - fourteen years - we sold it and we bought another business, which was a confectionery and tobacco business. We were there until my husband was coming up to retirement and he was having blackouts and this kind of thing. So I told him it was time to give up the business.

22 MM: Had you been involved in the business when it was running?

23 JC: Yes, I worked in it until we retired. My daughter was married and she thought well, her parents were getting older and she would like us to be nearer so we came back to Stranmillis.

24 MM: Can I bring you back a bit to the war years? Did you have a business then?

25 JC: No, my husband was in the Ormo Bakery at that time. I wasn't working then.

26 MM: You were at home with your children?

27 JC: I have one daughter, just the one.

28 MM: I don't want to direct you too much. If the two of you have particular recollections of the period I would like to hear them but it would be useful if they were based on your working life outside the home. Susan, was there anything that struck you about working in Belfast in the period that was different from working in Dublin?

29 SC: Oh well yes, the blackout for one thing, it was very strict up here, it was always very dark and the rations, of course. And I was further away from my family; I used to go down every weekend when I was working in Dublin but that wasn't possible from Belfast.

30 MM: Was that because of the distance or was travel restricted?

31 SC: It was because of the distance. I would go for holidays and that kind of thing but not go down for every weekend. I didn't drive a car, I never have had a car, and I think it was mainly the distance that was involved because travel really wasn't restricted. We were up and down on the trains from Dublin all the time. People were always going up to Belfast for the weekend or to the North, and as I say, we always did a little bit of shopping in the South, cakes and cloth and sweets and that kind of thing. Yes, and cigarettes, that's right. So that I think was the main difference really. The blackout and the rationing; particularly the rationing.

32 MM: You were telling me earlier of the strategies that you used to get around the rationing. Would you like to go through that again for the tape? [All laugh]

33 JC: My memory of it, going back beyond that, to the real bombings and the troubles, that eventually we got so used to getting up, that very often we went to bed without undressing because we knew they were coming. We dreaded the moonlight nights; we dreaded moonlight because that was their best time. I recall one Easter Tuesday night, it was the biggest bombing raid in Belfast. My mother was alive, she had a little cottage in the country outside Ballymena and we, my husband and myself and the baby, we used to go down for the weekend to the cottage just to get away. We came home on the Tuesday night, we weren't very long home when the sirens went and there was a big bang. I knew one street where we actually lived at one time, it was my grandmother's house, it was very difficult to find a house at that time in Belfast and we lived in Duncairn Gardens and there was a street quite near and it was Hogarth Street. There were 104 in that one street killed that time and it was apparently a landmine on the Antrim Road, they came down the Antrim Road and right over all that district [pause] one could see the gantries in the shipyards. There was nothing we could do, we knew they were making for the shipyards and there was a landmine and it landed in the middle of Hogarth Street in the shipyard area and 140 people were killed that night. As I say, at that particular time Sheila was born in 1938 and at that particular time, it was about 1941, she was very young. There was a family lived a few doors from us, a young couple, and they had a toddler and they used to come

to my mother's house to play with Sheila sometimes. She used to toddle down and they would play about and Sheila would look forward to every Saturday when I would go every Saturday to my mother's when Phil was working. And these were talking about a trip and the night of the bombing the three of them were killed. It was so sad. The memory is hard to forget, it's hard to forget. That was one of the worst times

34 MM: Sheila was very young at the time, does she remember much?

35 JC: I don't think so [pause] she was a poor sleeper always but I think she was, in some kind of a way, aware of it.

36 MM: The preparations for the air raids must have been disruptive.

37 JC: Well, eventually we got an Anderson shelter, you've probably heard of those. It was a big [pause] it was about the size of that rug only twice as broad across [indicates rug about 8' x 6'] and it was sitting in the living room. We crawled under it [to SC do you remember the Anderson shelters?

38 SC: I remember them well. I remember they were very restrictive but some people had them in the garden, I think, not in their rooms. The ones I've seen were in the garden.

39 JC: They were very small, you had practically no room.

40 MM: Were these supplied by the Local Government or did you actually have to buy them yourselves? Did they make you feel more secure?

41 JC: Some people felt secure, others felt trapped under them. You know, too, if the house fell down on some of them, the walls, you'd be smothered. But there were 104 killed that night on the one street. A few doors from us there was a coal merchant lived - I think he had eight of a family - four girls and four boys, and seven of them were killed and only one lived from that night.

42 MM: They were very close to you?

43 JC: Very close to me. The following morning I got up, very tired, and went to the window to look into the garden and the place was all gone. My mother's house was gone too, and the strange thing, there was a pantry [pause] I can see it yet, there was part of a windowsill sitting and part of the house was still standing with no room left behind it, and there was a bright blue teapot sitting on the windowsill [laughs].

44 SC: Was it cracked or broken?

45 JC: No. I said that's our teapot, and I said can I get it, can I get through for it but the wall was ready to collapse and they wouldn't let me. Little things like that [pause].

46 MM: Your mother was in the air raid shelter when this was happened, was she?

47 JC: No, she was with us in the cottage we had just come home from, we were very lucky.

48 MM: What did they do then?

49 JC: My father died in 1940 so my mother was on her own. [Pause] I remember talking to a student, a young woman asking me about the war years, for a project, I think she was doing a thesis and I was asked could I fill her in with the details of this and I was amazed at how many incidents and how many things had been left out in the teaching and the knowledge of the war years. She had never heard of Lord Haw-Haw, they'd never been told about that and she didn't know that his name was William Joyce and that he was an Irishman.

50 MM: I think that [pause] we certainly learnt about him in school but it may have been because he was an Irishman that there was so much embarrassment about it.

51 JC: Things like that they happened [pause and I remember so well the broadcasts. They came regularly, always at eight o'clock from Lord Haw Haw. He'd regularly start up by telling us the time on the town clock, the Albert Memorial Clock and he told us about greyhound racing down the Shore Road and he told us about it, a couple of minutes, just almost immediately after the race. He told us who won the race and saying things like the sports news, that kind of thing [pause].

52 MM: How did that make you feel?

53 JC: Angry, angry. I remember my husband was going to smash the radio.

54 MM: Was that because this was an English speaking voice or was it because he was obviously so closely in touch with what was happening?

55 JC: My husband was very closely in touch with what was happening. He was a sergeant in the Home Guard, he was out at nights very often, doing night duty and that was fire watch and contacting the others. He used to contact the American soldiers. He was based quite close to the American compound and he became friendly with the sergeant there. We used to have the sergeant coming to our house quite regularly. He was a very charming person. He was only married a few months and had to come to Ireland and then he was sent off. They didn't know where they were going or when they were going until the very last minute or two. But at the very last minute he was sent off and I remember, at the beginning of the week, he came every week, he said I can't tell you where I'm going because I don't know, we won't know when or where until we're moving and we're given orders but I'm going to say goodbye in case it's this week. He would shake hands with my husband and he'd put his arms round me and Sheila and kiss us, and that went on for weeks. And we used to laugh and Bill used to say, here boy, this is getting too much of a habit, you leave my wife alone [laughs]. This was great fun and he loved Sheila. He was so good to her; he was a lovely man.

56 MM: Did you ever hear from him after he left?

57 JC: One letter. No that's wrong, he went to England and he wrote to me every day for the next seven days and one day a letter didn't come and we didn't hear from him after that and we knew he was gone. I still wonder if he lived through it all. It was a great tragedy, a great loss, for so many men. For a long time, we hoped to hear but I was afraid to hear the news as well.

58 MM: Given the extent of the losses that you endured in Belfast, do you think there was any resentment of the South for not being involved in the war?

59 JC: Oh yes, there was resentment. There was another site of the soldiers from England, from Derbyshire and we had a friend would bring two or three and we'd open our house and we got to know them. And this man was stationed on the Antrim Road and that was used as their base, and Billy had a bicycle, and he borrowed this bike, and he rode over and kept coming back and forth on this. But the resentment, definitely there was resentment. At one time, before he came to Belfast, he was stationed on Tory Head, and there was these Irish cottages, overlooking the bay, of course the blackout was one and there were lights on, and he was on duty this night when he saw upon the Head, he saw a glimmer, he saw

lights, so naturally he went to investigate. He went to the door and an old, old lady opened the door and he said excuse me madam but do you realise you're showing a light. Yes, she said. So would you mind very much putting it out, he said. Indeed I will not, she said, I'm going to show the Germans the way in. That made me angry. We were all Irish, why should she wish her own country [pause] I just can't answer it. It's impossible to say what way she was thinking but she refused to put the lights out. That made me angry.

60 MM: Would this have been before or after the big bombing raids?

61 JC: Well the bombing raids were going on at that time. They were really going on because it was night after night after night. You know there was no let up and we knew when to expect them, one o'clock in the morning. They went away about five or six o'clock in the morning.

62 MM: And they were dropping bombs all the time?

63 SC: But did the Dublin Fire Brigade not come up to help?

64 JC: Oh yes, they did and different ones, was it Monaghan and [pause] quite a lot of them came.

65 MM: Did that not alleviate the resentment?

66 JC: Oh it did, but it was so intense, Belfast was raided [pause] so many times.

67 MM: When the bombing stopped in 1941, did that make life easier or were you all still nervous that they might return?

68 JC: Well you know, I think it takes a long time for people to get over something like that and to think normally again. Normality doesn't come overnight. You know, there certainly wasn't a feeling of relief.

69 SC: I didn't come until 1943 and I remember one day, I think it was [pause] the sirens used to sound and one of the ladies I was working with, she got a terrible shock because she said that'll be the planes again, she said, and I've left Jack on his own at home and he can't move. Her husband was Jack and he was very severely handicapped with arthritis and she was very upset and felt [pause] it wasn't a raid but the sirens went. Any kind of sirens going after that, I think alarmed people, you know.

70 JC: But I must say, there was always, sometimes, a funny side. Many was the time you had to laugh at things that happened but as soon as the sirens went, all you could hear after that were toilet chains being pulled, flushes, toilets being flushed [all laugh] you heard them all go round the park. You know, we remember those things and then, now, we, at that time, we didn't have a car, and we had bought the house so we had very little money then, but there was quite a lot of people had cars and we called them the hillbillies. The minute the sirens went, they were into their cars and they were away to the hills [all laugh]. We said those were the hillbillies when at one o'clock between the sirens going and the cars starting up.

71 MM: Did the people who took off to the hills in their cars, were they inclined to offer lifts to people who couldn't get away, or did they just go?

72 JC: I don't know. I think they just went; I don't know whether [pause] they didn't look to see. Certainly, we were never offered a lift.

73 MM: I always get a great sense of the community that developed in times of hardship. People come together - did you find that?

74 JC: Absolutely. We had a family lived [pause] their house was semi-detached, not the detached ones on the other side. We were fairly young at the time and they were all middle aged and I remember about three or four o'clock in the morning, in between the bombing you would get a lapse of maybe ten or fifteen minutes, maybe longer. There was the man next door or the lady, usually the husband at the door with a jug of tea for us.

75 MM: That was a fairly standard sort of behaviour at the time, was it?

76 JC: Oh it was. My neighbour at the other side, they were older too than us, and her husband, he was a bit panicky. Years afterwards, we laughed because they had two sons and a daughter and as soon as the sirens went, he said, and her name was Minnie, and he said, Minnie, get next door and bring that baby in next door, bring that baby in to us here. He thought Sheila would be safer with them, than with us [all laugh]. So Minnie had to come and grab the baby and take her in. He said, go and get that baby, that young couple, he said, they're not able for this. We used to laugh; it was like the apple tarts [laughs].

77 MM: Can you tell me that story again for the tape? It was a way of getting around the rationing?

78 JC: Oh yes, it was. There was this little shop, it was run by one girl and once a week, they would expect these apple tarts. You had to queue for them, and if you were at the end of the queue you had no chance because everyone queued. But we made sure we were very early and if Mrs. Elliott was having visitors I queued for her and her little boy, he queued for her and that way she got the two apple tarts and then it worked in the reverse, and if I had visitors, the same procedure would work.

79 SC: Well, you weren't really cheating, because you were entitled to one each anyway. We had ration cards, and we were given coupons and I remember, I was in lodging all the time, and I remember, I was in lodging with an elderly lady who didn't really understand much about rationing. She thought that if the food was there she would take it. I had to share her larder and one day I came home from work [pause] well, I don't think we got much butter at all but we had marg, and I had my marg ration in the larder and when I came home from work that evening there was 1s/6d there or something instead of the marg and a little note from her saying 'I have taken your marg. I saw you had some marg and I have taken your marg and I have left the money for it because I saw you had it' she said. [All laugh] I wanted my marg, whatever the price was it wasn't much good to me.

80 SC: But you were asking what happened when people were left homeless. In that particular house where I lodged, she had another lodger; a lady working in the factories had been bombed out and she had very reluctantly agreed to take her in, and this poor woman, really she was wretched because she was from a different part of the town altogether, and she didn't know any of the people round about and she missed her neighbours and she missed her own home as well. The lady that we were lodging with was really very eccentric and wasn't very kind to this other lodger, because I don't think she felt she came from a good background and that kind of thing. I think there were some people who used to live round the corner here who were bombed out. They were bombed out and they were a sister and a brother, and I think their mother was killed, and they got a very sort of broken down house round the corner there; it was in very bad repair. I'll never forget the landlord in the early days wouldn't do anything for them so they were very put out by that too.

81 MM: As a medical social worker, would your work have involved finding homes for people?

82 SC: Yes, I mean all our patients had all kinds of problems about housing and a lot of grief and bereavement and money problems too. We had a very wide spectrum, because we had a lot of the forces in the hospital too. Americans and people from other parts of the world who had to be helped, befriended or advised in some way. And there were Gibraltarians [pause] Gibraltar was evacuated you see, the civilian population of Gibraltar was evacuated and they lived in a big camp outside Belfast. It was a dreadful place, we used to visit sometimes there, if there were people who were ill and had to have visits from the hospital if they had problems. It became a sea of mud in the wintertime. I can't remember just exactly where it was but I think it was somewhere, it was around Dundonald I think, but it was a little bit outside the town.

83 MM: Did they speak English?

84 SC: No, they had to have interpreters. It was not the whole of Gibraltar here, but a very large number. Some of them were in camps in England.

85 MM: Would you have found that the nature [pause] you were doing the same job during the war as before?

86 SC: Well in the Rotunda, of course, it was purely maternity and very poor people and in the Royal Victoria, it was everything to do with general beds and specialised beds and that kind of thing.

87 MM: Would the war have changed that as well?

88 SC: Well, not very much so, it was all the same kind of problems, if you know what I mean. In a way, it was like they were deprived people; they were deprived of their homes and they were deprived of their husbands who were away serving over in England or in France or somewhere like that and we had all sorts of difficulties to deal with. It was a general kind of deprivation.

89 MM: Could I bring you back a little bit then to your work in Dublin, being in a maternity hospital in a poor area? What kind of things did you do for the women you saw?

90 SC: At that time, we would have been seeing, well, we would have been seeing the in-patients but we were seeing a lot of the out-patients and helping them make arrangements for the care of their children when they came in to have their babies or various things like that, and arranging for them to have any charitable assistance that they needed. For instance, the St. John's Brigade, they ran dinners in Dublin and it was very difficult at that time because a lot of the women really needed the extra food and most of our patients would not take the dinners because they served too much fish and in war time, because of all the people who were being drowned, the fish were feeding on these drowned people therefore they just did not eat fish. I think this was quite a common affair, I've heard other people talk about it. They certainly were very, very adamant about that, but I suppose meat was a bit expensive and they served a lot of fish and they served a lot of cheese dishes and Irish people in those days wouldn't eat much cheese. So we gave them very general support, you know.

91 MM: How long did women stay in hospital when they were having their babies?

92 SC: I can't remember [pause] I think certainly it was at least a week, probably ten days. I can't remember that but it was a week anyway and of course, we had gynae patients as well and operations and people suffering from terminal cancer and that kind of thing. I remember one patient who was referred to

me from the Gynae Ward and the doctor said can you do something for her because she was not going to be able to be looked after by her family, they were very badly off and she was very ill, and we discussed it with her and I arranged to get her into a home. I can't remember, it was a very well known place for terminal cases in those days, and we got her a bed there. And I remember I was sitting in the clinic, it was an evening clinic a year later, and the door opened and this beautifully dressed, beautifully made up woman came in and she said, you don't know who I am. She said, I think it was St. John of Gods, or a home like that, you sent me into the home to die, because the doctor said I had six months and she said I recovered, and I've been to America and I've come home again to see my friends. I was astonished so I went and told the doctor. I said there's a miracle here. A miracle cure, I don't know what her cure was but actually she died fairly soon after. He said the result of the operation had changed the chemistry of her body and that had halted the growth and she had a very lively year going to America. It was wonderful.

93 JC: There were quite a few miracles and I remember one particular time I had a miracle of my own that happened to me. It was one day I no sugar and Sheila needed sugar and I hadn't a spot of sugar in the house and no one around me had any sugar either because they all had children and the sugar was rationed so strictly. Because of the shipping they could not get the stuff in and late that night, the bell rang and I opened the door and there was an A.T.S. man at the door with an ordinary packet of sugar. To me that was a miracle.

94 SC: I remember one patient [pause] I was fairly newly qualified, I wasn't experienced at all and our patients always had to have someone call and take them home because of the baby, you see. And they always had to go before midday, before twelve o'clock to leave the bed for the next admission. And there was this woman in the ward and she was to go home and I said now have you got somebody to come and she said no, her husband wasn't there. So I said would you like to wait and she said yes. So at three o'clock in the afternoon, no one had come so I went up and I spoke to her again and she said if you ring Mrs. so and so, she's my neighbour and she'll either get my husband to come or she'll come for me. So I did this and I go no [pause] I think she said she was too busy when I rang the neighbour and anyway, this went on, I think I must have rung up a different woman later on and it came to five o'clock and I was going home at half past five and the sister rang down and said she's still sitting here. She said no one has come near her. So she lived quite near, within walking distance, actually, so I went up and I said if you like, I'll take you home and she said that would be very nice, thank you very much. So we got her bundled up and we got the baby bundled up and we got her out and off we set. And as we walked down to the street, we saw neighbours who were all standing at the door chatting, disappearing like smoke as we approached, and we got to the house and there was a padlock on the door and the next door neighbour said her husband is not going to have her back. He has taken most of the furniture out of the house and he's put the padlock on the door so she won't be able to get in. By this time the rain was coming down, and this was an eight day old baby, they used to get out after eight days, and to make matters worse I was going to an official dinner at half past seven, and I had to get home and get changed. So I said to her, well now, have you any relations who will take you in. Oh yes, she said, there's so and so and she lived quite near. So we walked round there and we went in and the family were sitting there and they said sorry no, we have no room for her at all,

we have no room for her. We can't take her - try her auntie somebody else. So we went there, I think we went round to three different lots of relations and not one of them would take her and I knew they wouldn't take her back at the hospital. It wasn't a shelter or anything like that and there wasn't anyplace that she could go to. She had no money or anything and so I said, you'll have to come back to the hospital while I try to make some arrangements for you.

95 MM: Had she given any explanation for her relations' reluctance to take her?

96 SC: No, she hadn't but apparently, she was well known, her husband was very angry with her and wouldn't have her back at any cost because she was going with other men. So, anyway, at long last, I managed to get her a bed in the Union hostel. It was very hard to get anyone in to the hostel, they wouldn't take them unless they absolutely had to, but I rang and explained she had an eight day old baby and so I took her to the Union and they took her in. When I got to the office the next morning, there was a woman, she was known as 'Mrs. Crulity' no, Lady Crulity-Clarke, that's what it was, Lady Crulity-Clarke and this was Lady Crulity-Clarke and she said, I can't thank you enough for getting that woman into the Union because she said we've been trying to get her somewhere where we could get her fixed up for a long time. She had I don't know, I've forgotten how many children, she had four or five children and the father wouldn't own them, and they'd been trying to get them placed in an institution or somewhere. She said I've been trying to get that woman placed for a long time and we'll be able to cope with her now. So that was the last I ever saw or heard of her and what happened her I don't know. But there I was, on the street walking along, thinking what can I do, I'll have to take her home in the end if I can't get her in anywhere. Oh, she said, don't worry dear, she said, just leave me here, I'll find someplace myself and I said I'm sorry but I can't leave you here, with a little baby and in your state, you're not well enough to walk around. I said the rain's coming down, so she said agreed to go along. I didn't know what to do but of course, I never should have taken her out myself like that, I should have left her in the hospital and rung some organisation to come for her.

97 MM: You couldn't have known it was going to be such a drastic situation.

98 SC: She didn't seem to care that her husband wasn't there. He was in the army, I think, and he had cleared the house, but it was the way they all vanished when we turned the corner to go down the street [pause] everybody knew that he wasn't taking her back. It was very obvious when he had padlocked the door.

99 MM: Jean, did you have Sheila at home or in a hospital?

100 JC: I had her in a nursing home, on the Ormeau Road. I remember it was a big house on the Ormeau Road, with a big window on the first floor. It was run by a Mrs. Montcrieff.

101 MM: Would you have been in for eight days?

102 JC: I was in for ten days time.

103 MM: And while you were in, was the emphasis on getting as much rest as possible or were you encouraged to move around?

104 JC: Well I was three days in an emergency room, which was next to the delivery room and the other miracle is that we both lived thanks to my own doctor having to the wit to come in at five o'clock in the morning. He saved us both.

105 MM: What was the problem?

106 JC: The problem was that the night nurse who was on was incapable; she didn't give me an enema when she should have. The doctor said it was dirty, she was dirty and then the doctor wouldn't risk her giving me a sedative or an anaesthetic so he looked after me himself and called in a consultant. It was Mr. McAfee who delivered Sheila, you remember him [to SC] but I didn't walk, I didn't step out for two months after that. That emergency came a couple of days after the delivery, after the birth, and they brought me a couple of flights upstairs to another little room and in some way there I got the infection and so I was in a chair in my own room for three months and it was three months before Sheila was pushed out by me in her pram.

107 MM: Do you think childbirth techniques have changed much some that time?

108 JC: She just let me go on and on and on, I was weakening all the time, you know I was just [pause] I can remember them asking for towels to wipe the sweat from me, the perspiration was rolling off me and the doctor sat at my side just rubbing it off because he couldn't do anything else.

109 MM: Was your husband with you at the time?

110 JC: He waited at home.

111 SC: In those days, husbands didn't attend the birth or the delivery room. When I worked in the Rotunda they would not have been let in at the birth.

112 JC: He came in to see me and they told him then.

113 MM: When you went home then [pause] obviously you were ill so it would have been different for you, but for most women, were they advised to rest?

114 SC: I don't think they were given too much advice at all. I don't think they were given a lot of help in any way. They mostly had swarms of young children at home and very inadequate housing, a lot of them. I remember, I think it was about the last case I looked after before I left, and I was visiting a woman who'd had her twenty first child, and it was in a tenement house. The staircase was all gone; I had to practically crawl up the last few steps on my hands and knees. Her husband was unemployed and I remember I said to the doctor, you know her house is very poor and her husband is unemployed. The doctor said indeed he's not unemployed, if he's got twenty-one children [all laugh].

115 JC: He hadn't time to work.

116 SC: He didn't do a thing to help her. He was sitting there in the room when I went in and the children were yelling and shouting and tramping about [pause] well, there may have been some of them not there but there seemed to be a lot. There certainly were a lot of young children there but I noticed that he was doing nothing. And there was only the one bed in the room so I don't know how they managed.

117 MM: Was any advice ever given about family planning?

118 SC: Not that I remember but there must have been some. And there were a lot of unmarried, not a lot, but quite a number of unmarried mothers and we had to make arrangements for them too. They mostly went to convents.

119 MM: I'm sure you've heard of some of the controversy about that in the South? [Referring to revelations about adoption practices in Goldenbridge and other orphanages].

120 SC: Oh yes, and I recognise some of the names of the places now that we sent them to and I remember there was an awfully nice priest, who used to get very upset about it all and I remember him saying to me once, I hate to think of the future, these children, he said, a lot of them are being adopted and they will grow up and boy will meet girl and they'll be attracted to each other and they could well be brother and sister. There was no way that they could know that, you know.

121 MM: Did any of the unmarried mothers keep their children or was it always assumed the children would be adopted?

122 SC: Not unless the mothers agreed and often their families would help them. I remember some of their mothers were very good but some of them were dreadful. I remember one woman, I said something about helping her daughter; she wasn't taking either the girl or the baby home, she wouldn't have either of them and I remember her glaring at me and saying that girl was put on this world to cause me pain. No compassion whatever, and in fact, she was terrified that it would be discovered, the neighbours at home, she was from the country, quite a few of them were from the country; they would be sent up from some homes to Dublin. Some of them would just come up from the homes, they were of various kinds, and come into the hospital and there were quite a few of those homes for the babies.

123 JC: In the country places, a lot of them were shipped off to friends in Canada or other places.

124 SC: I'm sure they were. I never came across any babies that were shipped off anywhere but they were nearly all, as I say, found homes straight from the hospital. They nearly all went to the nuns.

125 JC: There were young girls who became pregnant who were moved abroad. It was terrible and sometimes they didn't know how it had happened.

126 SC: Of course, that was a terrible problem for the social worker. The girl would come up to the clinic and she would be diagnosed as being pregnant and she would practically collapse with terror as well as surprise, you know. I remember one girl who just could not take it at all. She kept screaming you'll have to take it away; you'll have to take it away. The nurse came, she was in my office and she got so hysterical that the nurse came to see if she could help us, and the nurse was saying now calm down, calm down but she just went mad. We tried to explain to her what could be done but she just wanted to know how would she go home, how would she ever go back. Well, she did go home; we got in touch with the father actually, but what happened after that I don't know. I didn't see her again; she didn't come back so she must have gone to her local doctor. Well then, when I came up here, I came specifically to work in the STD department and that was a very difficult job because I was the first social worker ever to work in the hospital.

127 MM: Was that because you were a social worker or a woman?

128 SC: Because I was a social worker. I wasn't either a nurse or a doctor and the question of confidentiality was what was bothering them. I remember my first morning, my supervisor, she'd insisted

on them having a social worker, she'd been working on the problem for a long time, trying to persuade the senior doctor to have a social worker and when he finally agreed, I was the one appointed. I remember the first morning when I went in, he called me into his private office and he took me aside and read me the story from the bible of the woman taken in adultery and he said, now I don't want you to condemn any one who comes in here. I said I wouldn't do that, it's not my job to condemn, I'm here to help them and it's completely outside my sphere to make any moral judgements. So anyway, he was very, very difficult for quite a while and it was funny how I got round him in the end. There were a lot of children in the hospital, particularly in the wards; they should really have been in children's wards but these were special cases who had been passed the diseases by their mothers, they should have been in children's hospitals but because of their problems they were there. So I decided something should be done for them. I can't remember how many there were, I think about twenty, so anyway I took this doctor aside and I said I would like to do something for all these children and I said how would it be if I asked the ladies who visit to give each child two tickets for the pantomime. I will book them and I said the child can go with someone, whether it's the mother or an older sister or whoever was in the family. So we did that and the Ladies Committee were delighted to help and they gave me the money for the tickets and they also gave me a lot of toys which they sent to a party [pause] and this all went off very well. Some little time afterwards, I found a picture on my desk, entitled the Good Fairy, of me with a wand and wings [all laugh]. So after that I had no opposition at all.

129 MM: And were the children actually left in the hospital?

130 SC: No, no they were just brought into the VD clinic; it was all out patients. And of course it was wartime still and the American soldiers were here and there were was a special nurse attached to the American forces, one of their own nurses, and she was following up their contacts so she worked very closely with me. She would advise them on the use of condoms and she would be aware if someone needed to be treated and bring them to me. We worked together whenever we could without breaching too much confidentiality, you know. It had to be done and also, in those days, at that time, there were special regulations and if the partner didn't turn up for treatment, she could be taken to court. So this American girl she told me about these girls who were having treatment, and which of her soldiers were being infected or vice versa. I didn't have anything to do with the men; I only had to deal with the girls. So I had to follow the girls up very closely and try and insist on their coming and it was very difficult to do. I didn't want to take any of them to court. I thought we would be lost altogether and would never get any cooperation if we had to take someone to court. I didn't want to have to go to court myself either, in such a situation. I remember there was one girl who was very bad; we couldn't get her to come, she was very irregular, and in the end I resorted to going out on the street that they were using and bringing them in. There was this particular girl, I didn't do that with very many but I did it with this one girl because she wouldn't come. I think they were allowed to miss so many appointments before you could take any legal action. I know I never took any legal action but this girl, I was very much afraid I was going to have to with her. She'd promise me she'd come but she didn't and this was her last chance. I went out to see her and she was in bed

and she wouldn't get up, to come [laughs]. I said look I'm going to sit here until you do and I did. I sat for an hour and then she got up and grumbled but she came in with me.

131 MM: Did you have to check up their partners and whether they were infected?

132 SC: No, I didn't do that at all. I was just in the business of finding the girls and getting them in for treatment. It was just the people who had been referred to me by the medical staff.

133 MM: Your working day, the actual work that you did, were you nine to five?

134 SC: I think it could have been nine to five, but certainly in the Rotunda it was nine to five except if there was any evening clinic, which there were. There were several gynae clinics – there were two gynae clinics, two days a week in the evening and they were, I think they were seven to eight and I would get an hour off in the afternoon and then come back.

135 MM: How did that affect you then if you had to go and queue for two hours for your shopping?

136 SC: Well, this was in Dublin.

137 MM: Well, in Belfast, when you were working all day, how did you cope with having to queue for your rations?

138 SC: I can't remember any difficulties. There were lots of shops near the hospital where I worked and they stayed open until late at night and just, you had to queue. I wasn't so bad because you see with the canteen in the hospital you could get a meal there. The only food I needed was what I bought for my evening meal or at weekends.

139 MM: I know, particularly in factories, the munitions factories especially, when they brought in the shift system a lot of it was to help production but also because so many women had factories and they were working at times that shops were open. Part of the reason they wanted shifts was to help the women cope with the difficulties of shopping in those circumstances.

140 JC: A lot of people during the war, people with money and cars could always go down to the South, down to Dublin or Drogheda. In those places, there were shops with loads of food and they could stock up.

141 SC: There was the food black market too in Belfast.

142 JC: There was, like I say if you had enough money and if you had transport, this was what happened, and you know, it made the Northern people quite envious in a way, that Southern Ireland [pause] it seemed so unfair because our children were just the same as theirs.

143 SC: It encouraged the smuggling. There were all kinds of devices for smuggling, up and down on the train. The smuggling was fantastic; I had friends who brought all sorts of things in their coats just travelling on the train.

144 JC: I didn't have many opportunities but if I got an opportunity for something, I certainly bought sugar or whatever.

145 SC: You got all kinds of tips about how to smuggle things [laughs] people started putting bags. You could get Teatime Express cakes, sponge sandwiches they were, you would open the sandwich and put a ring or a bracelet or something inside and bring it down. But the customs got wise to that and would put a finger right down through the cake.

146 MM: Not very hygienic [laughs].

147 SC: Or a big dirty thumb [laughs].

148 JC: And cigarettes and tobacco went up your knickers [all laugh].

149 SC: People were bulging all over the place, with all the things they had concealed. You see, the Customs people would sometimes take the odd person off the train or the bus, right into the station, to be searched.

150 MM: Was any action taken against people who were caught smuggling?

151 SC: I don't think there was really, they were just fined. I remember being terrified one time I was coming back from Dublin, I think it was just before my birthday or something like that and these friends came to the station to see me off at Dublin and they handed me a Tea Time Express cake box. The Customs men knew it well, it was cream and red with writing on it, and before my friend left she whispered to me that's not a cake, it's a cut glass bowl for your birthday [laughs]. I was terrified the whole journey, I nearly died but he just assumed it was a cake and he didn't even ask.

152 MM: Was there actually restriction on other goods, it wasn't just food?

153 SC: Yes, and for long years after the war.

154 JC: I remember having cups without handles because you couldn't get them.

155 MM: Why was that?

156 SC: Well, there was restriction on producing goods and the rationing continued until a few years after.

157 JC: Everything [pause] all that kind of manufacturing was cut out because everything was for the war effort.

158 SC: And as for nylons, or silk stockings, I mean the great thing was to get a pair sent to you. I don't know what way they used to send them, in an envelope of some kind to get through. The Americans, of course, were great for having stockings.

159 JC: The American soldiers gave all their girlfriends stacks of stockings. I remember when I was a teenager, before I met Billy, I had a boyfriend and he had a brother in Canada and he was over on a visit and I remember the first pair of silk stockings I had ever seen – he brought me a pair and I was about seventeen.

160 SC: Everybody entertained the Americans, they were great fun and I remember our dietician, she used to see them quite a bit to arrange entertainment and meals and they said that the one thing that really astonished them and amused them here was when they would go into a house and the owners of the house would say, would you like a cup of tea? And the soldier would say yes please and they'd be told well just sit down and we'll give you a mug in your hand [laughs].

161 JC: The soldier that we entertained, one of the boys that we entertained, he was from Derby and he couldn't understand the Belfast bus drivers and the tram drivers and he kept getting repeating 'the next stop the Black Mod' [laughs]. I was smoking at that time because the Americans supplied us with cigarettes and we were sitting on the settee and his wife was with him, this might be two years after the war, he came for a visit (incomprehensible section about Belfast accent).

162 SC: There was a lot of fun in those days. People did not need so much to be entertained.

163 MM: Was that because of the war, do you think, or were they poorer times?

164 SC: Well, they were certainly poorer times than they are nowadays, that's for sure. There were big families and small wages and these girls in the hospital, these dockers would come in – you know what a docker is? She works in a mill and they had to work in their bare feet because the floors were wet, whatever the technique was in milling that it had to be kept damp or something, do you remember that, the wet floors [to JC]. And the girls used to have chronic chest complains, dreadful and also at that time, tuberculosis was rife. Absolutely, almost every family had a tuberculous member and this caused great, great [pause] not only just grief and anxiety but troublesome things like trying to keep them using their own cup and saucer and that kind of thing and not let anyone else in the family use it. The spread of infection was terrible, it was in the most overcrowded places and the overcrowding really was much worse than you might think. I remember one day in the hospital, it wasn't in the Royal but in the City Hospital, not so terribly many years ago, the Ward Sister sent to me one day, look at that young man there, she said, I don't know what to do with him. All he wants to do is lie in bed and sleep. Now I had been asked to investigate and I discovered he was one of a very large family, living in a house that was two up and two down. I said to the sister I am not one bit surprised, I said, I'm sure he's enjoying his sleep because he had been sleeping in a tiny little bedroom, sharing a bed with three brothers so he could never have a really restful night's sleep. It was a luxury for him to get a bed to himself, to be able to stretch.

165 MM: Would you have come across many patients from such poor surroundings?

166 SC: Oh yes, we didn't take in private patients at all. There were some private patients in the Rotunda but you didn't really have anything to do with them, unless they'd had a dead child or something. I remember going to a girl whose baby had died, I think it was actually still born, no I think it had lived for one or two days but it had been in the premature ward and she said don't worry, it's not like a child that you'd ever held in your arms. She wasn't at all put out about it. It was just one of these things – you had another next year, anyway. You could see her point of view. She had never seen the child; she hadn't minded it and it wasn't involved with her at all in that way. So you really never knew what the problems would be, where individuals were concerned.

167 MM: Did you across women suffering from tuberculosis?

168 SC: I didn't really but a friend, she was working in one of the voluntary hospitals and they had a sanitorium. There was a taint associated with tuberculosis and families would often not visit patients.

169 MM: Was that because it was associated with poverty?

170 SC: It was because it was so infectious [pause] it was like the plague for some people. **[Incomprehensible section]**

171 The perception was that Éire was a back door for the Germans to get in to Britain.

172 MM: I've seen a copy of the handbook that was given to American troops during the war and it was warned them about that and to be careful of contact with people from the South. Another thing was that it warned them to respectful of Northern Irish women because they came from a different culture. Did you find that your dealings with the U.S. soldiers were any different than dealing with other patients?

173 SC: I didn't meet an awful lot of them.

174 JC: I did and I liked the Americans. I found them very charming and very helpful and very, very generous.

175 SC: A lot of the impression I got from people who had been here all the time, when the Americans were here, was that they were certainly very popular.

176 JC: Very popular. There was one neighbour of ours, a daughter of theirs, a daughter of that house, married one of the American troops and went out America. But while he was here, they were married and of course, at the time, because she had a baby there was a photograph in the Telegraph of her inside the ship and the baby lying on the top of the bunk and her. She was on her way to join him; he had gone with the troops because he had to. Her name was Bertha, Bertha Scott. Do you ever remember seeing that [to SC] but ended sadly because she wasn't very long married to him when they were divorced. A short time after that, she married his boss [all laugh]. She married very well, someone very well off. She was a lovely girl; she babysat for me. When she arrived there first, she found she'd married into squalor. Eventually, the father and mother and all the other children, they went to America, after she married the second time.

177 SC: Well, you see the G.I.s were homeless and they just socialised with everybody and everybody was so glad to have them coming in to support our troops that they went really round the corner to entertain them. Quite a few of my colleagues were involved in running a canteen down the docks and they found that a lot of sailors were from Irish backgrounds and they mixed very well.