

## **Care Leavers' Stories project**

Mary Godfrey

Interviewed by Rahma Mohammed

C1597/06

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# Social Care Institute for Excellence

## Interview Summary Sheet

## Title Page

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**Interviewee's surname:** Godfrey

**Title:** Mrs

**Interviewee's forename:** Mary

**Sex:** Female

**Occupation:** Retired florist

**Date of birth:** 1948

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**Interviewer's comments:**



## Track 1

*Camera rolling.*

*Could we start by asking your name and your date of birth?*

Mary Godfrey, 26<sup>th</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> 1948.

*May I ask you Mary, what made you want to take part in this project?*

I think it's important to share knowledge and information. The way that I was brought up, in actual fact Barnardo's don't have children's homes in the way that I was brought up with them, they have projects and I feel that there is something lost in history in that. So I quite like to be able to share some of my experiences, I do actually give talks for Barnardo's and share the experiences because I do believe it was a time written in history and it does generate interest.

[00:58]

*Could you tell us a little bit about yourself, where you live, where you work?*

I'm retired now, I lived in Buntingford which is a small country town just north of Hertford and south of Cambridge. When I was working I was in partnership with my husband and we had a display florist business that we ran for 23 years and got all the friends and family involved in that and it was a good – it was a small business but it was quite a thriving concern and gave us a great deal of experience in business and lifestyle.

*So you mentioned that you work as part of Barnardo, how did you become involved in Barnardo's?*

Do you mean how did I start my journey with Barnardo's or how did I start giving talks for them?

*I think your journey?*

My journey, right. It's 1952, I'm three years old and my father died suddenly with a heart attack, he was an older father, he was probably fifty-eight at the time and my mother was forty-eight. Now that is not old by today's standards at all, but in those days it was quite old, she had me at forty-five. They had a tied cottage on one of the Ministry of Defence establishments at Cardington Camp in Bedford and when he died suddenly from a heart attack, which I witnessed as a child of three or four, we lost our home. And mother became very emotional, very – found her life extremely difficult without him and turned to Barnardo's because she knew she would lose her home on the death of her husband and it was documented on my records that she said, if the child became ill with childhood illnesses as children will do, she knew that she would lose her job if she had to keep taking time off. This is what she said; it's documented in my records. So Barnardo's stepped in and took me from the age of three. There was quite a journey from that point, from the age of three to the age of six, I went into three or four different Barnardo children's homes for very short periods of time, and mother in her desperation just kept taking housekeeping jobs where the child could go and then kept claiming me back. But never actually ... told the matron that she was coming, so would just turn up at the home and demand her child back. And matron was somewhat dismayed with this as I recall and I was – she duly had to sign for me to take me away. As I say this happened – there was a home in Worcester called Hallow Park in Worcester, that's a Barnardo home, there was a home called Montgomery House in Long Melford in Suffolk, and there was another one in Stanway near Colchester, and at the end of those three years coming and going I ended up at the village home, Barkingside, where Barnardo's now has its head office.

[04:50]

*For those who don't know could you explain the role of matron?*

I actually – because I've sort of lived through the institution, I was never boarded out or anything, I did live through the transitional time between the matron and her

assistant and then the advent of the married couple and the family ethic, so I lived through all of that. The matron was quite severe, erm ... there were not too many difficult times but they know about corporal punishment, they knew about the ruler across the back of the legs or the good smacked bottom and they knew about if you told a lie, we always called it a fib, then a bar of soap was often thrust in your mouth because you had to have your mouth washed out. So they were a little bit ... yeah, not unhappy with that but it was – it was ... it was not the easiest time. Some of the matrons were quite loving really, I don't think mine particularly was loving, she just got the job done really, and then I could then move onto the married couple situation if you would like me to at this point, yeah?

*Yeah.*

So we've now jumped onto to about 1958 when the new married couple were introduced into the village home. It was the first time they'd ever thought about having a married couple run a children's home and our cottage, all the cottages in the village at Barkingside were named and our cottage was Tyler Cottage and our cottage was the cottage that was selected to trial this new idea of the house parents as opposed to the matron. It was very exciting, because you weren't certain – because we were all farmed out into different cottage whilst the new married couple came into the Tyler Cottage and got themselves feeling comfortable with everything before the children were then reinstated back. And that was a bit of a transitional time for us because we weren't sure whether we would be going back, we don't know how the selection process worked. But I do remember all thinking – 'cause we all farmed out into different cottages and we really wanted to go back, see what was going on with this new idea of married couples and see whether we were going to share a home again and be reunited together. Most of us actually were given a place back with the new house parents, Mr and Mrs Ward [ph], both sadly deceased now, Auntie Pauline and Uncle Ron who came along with their two daughters and we did live as a family. Uncle Ron, he maintained his own daytime job, he was something in the city for the Board of Trade and Auntie Pauline ran the cottage with the help of her assistant. And latterly continued to study and ultimately became a social worker herself. What else can I tell you? Uncle Ron was very enthusiastic about this new concept in his life,

this new direction he was taking and even as a child I still remember his excitement. He brought us all a little present and got busy decorating the playroom and all these sorts of things which showed a great deal of excitement to my mind, the new life that he was bracing, and he really did go for it. He was a very religious man which was actually what Barnardo's is all about, there's a great Christian ethic with Barnardo's as you may know, and he became a lay reader and conducted services in our village church as well. And so that's what I can tell you about the transition from matron to married couple.

*How old were you – how old were you when you left Barnardo's, what was the time period when you were in there?*

Yes, well I was actually really fifteen when I left the children's home, which is this home I'm talking about in Barkingside, but I still didn't have anywhere to go because although my mother was still living at that time she had a residential job so she couldn't take the child. So I was given a place in a hostel just outside of the village at Barkingside because I'd actually managed to get myself a job as an apprentice florist in London and Barkingside was actually on the central tube line station, so it worked quite well that I could travel into London, all the way to Knightsbridge. But I was only fifteen, and thinking back that's very very young. I have a fifteen year old granddaughter now still at school and when I think back I was only three months into being fifteen, and I was given a place in this hostel, I was set out on my way on my job and my career, I was doing an hour and a half's journey each way into Knightsbridge for my apprenticeship, and I think looking back I was very very young, yes.

[10:56]

*What caused you to leave Barnardo's at such a young age?*

Leaving school, I think it – it tied in with leaving school. There was a difficulty in that I don't know whether it was attention seeking or what it was, showmanship or what it was, but I was a bit of a clown at school. I think looking back it probably was

attention seeking, so I used to sort of really fool around and be a bit stupid and make everybody laugh and thought it was clever. At the end of the day it wasn't very clever because I really didn't study very hard at school. And I remember in my fourth year, and I was going to leave at the end of my fourth year so it would have been at the end of my third year at secondary school, the teachers basically said to me, 'Mary, if you don't pull your socks up and do better in your exams and just try a bit harder and settle down and stop fooling around so much you could probably do very very well at school. For goodness sake, you're on your own, you can't afford to mess about like this, this is your life, and it's going to start in a year.' So I thought about it and took it onboard, I didn't consult with anybody particularly but I thought, okay, this is my chance, I've really got to pull my socks up. And so the last sort of six or eight months before I actually left school I really really worked very very hard on all my studies and instead of coming something like twentieth place in a class of thirty-six I suddenly leapt up and became sixth place in a class of thirty-six and got As and Bs and As and Bs all the way through apart from maths. So after these results were published at the end of the third year the teachers all individually wanted to interview me and to tell me that they really really thought I should stay on and not leave, and not leave, stay on, do O levels, A levels, you cannot leave at this early age, you've got potential, you must stay on. I was excited, I was absolutely excited that somebody actually thought I was going to do that well and I remember racing home at the end of that day when all the teachers had individually interviewed me and told me to stay on and do well because they were so amazed and what potential there would be for me and I should stay on. And of course very excitedly I said to Auntie Pauline, who was the house mother, 'This is absolutely wonderful news, they want me to stay on, they think I'm really really going to do well, I could do so well, I think I'm going to do this, what do you think, do you think I should do this?' and she said to me, 'Over my dead body, and not in this cottage.' And the story behind that was as I got older I didn't get on terribly well with Uncle Ron. We were very alike and we sparred quite a lot and I irritated him, and she couldn't stand the conflict that was there between us. Example of the conflict; a fifteen year old needs her own space, my granddaughter now retreats to her bedroom on Facebook and they don't see her from breakfast to teatime, but that's what teenagers do, fifteen year olds, they need to retreat in their own space. So I wanted to retreat to my own space and so what I would do after I had

done my jobs in the evening, I would actually retreat into my bedroom, read, do quiet things, whatever, maybe homework, whatever, in my own space. And there would be Uncle Ron who would be coming back from his job in the city with his umbrella and his newspaper tucked under his arm, striding along in his smart suit, and he would look up and see my bedroom window on [ph], and he would be so enraged by this because he had said – it was a power struggle I think maybe, I don't know, he had said not allowed, bedrooms out of bounds. And he would be so enraged that I was in my bedroom aged fifteen or fourteen, whatever it was, that he would drop all the stuff in the hall and race up the stairs two at a time and burst into the bedroom and say, 'Out, you are not allowed in your bedroom.' So that is one little example of the conflict that there was. I loved him to bits, don't get me wrong, he was very very inspirational to me in so many ways, but we had a clash, we just had a clash. I was a little bit too strong and I think he wanted me to be a little bit more passive and amenable, it wasn't his fault, it wasn't my fault, it was just a personality clash. But because of it his wife, Auntie Pauline, really couldn't stand me another minute more so she said, 'If you want to stay on and take your exams, you must move to a different cottage.' Well that was not an option for me because one of the things in my life, all the way through my life, one of the great fears I have in my life is moving, moving and moving, because I must have gone to so many different new primary schools before I was eleven I probably went to five or six or seven different schools and lived in many different homes between the ages of three and six. It wasn't an option to move out and make a new start at that very vulnerable time, so I – I decided that there was only one thing to do and that was to put my hands up and say, 'Okay, I'll leave,' and that's when I was given the – the place in the hostel. But ultimately I did get my own job which actually led to becoming quite a very ... successful business, so who knows on hindsight whether I would have done any much better if I'd have stayed on and got exams, or whether I would have left as early as I did and went full steam on my own strength.

[17:48]

*What was your relationship like with the others residing in the cottage?*

Good, good, lifelong friends generally. Some of them were on the immigration party of 1963, which I had wanted to be part of and I was actually invited to be in that party ... I didn't go. The reason being that I think matron felt that mother was emotionally and dysfunctional and I think Barnardo's ethic is to give a child a new start in life and anything that maybe have gone on before that point didn't matter, and let's start again now. I think that was their aim with the immigration policy, albeit controversial, as we know Gordon Brown gave us a formal apology about the immigration party in Canada and in Australia, but we didn't know those negative things at the time and we saw it as an opportunity. And as I say I was formally interviewed by our welfare officer who came and said, 'Mary, there's an immigration party that's going to Australia and we think you would be a good candidate, would you like to go?' and I was about thirteen I think, I must have had an old head on my shoulders because although I was very excited to be given a chance and I knew some of my closest friends would be going, I knew that I couldn't do that to my mother. I knew there – I think their take on it was it would be good for the child to go and make a fresh start because the mother was emotionally draining of the child, but as young as I was at thirteen or whatever it was, I knew that my mother had struggled all my early – all of the time really that I was born, she had struggled to get me back in so many ways she'd had so much heartache losing me and trying to get me back, I couldn't do that to her. So I declined, and she actually didn't ever know that I was given a chance, and so some of my friends did go, several of my other friends didn't go and they're still lifelong friends today, yeah.

*Why do you think you never told your mother about having the opportunity to be –*

Couldn't break her heart anymore, she was a terribly emotional heartbroken woman. There was a time when I was seven, 1956, matron called me into her office, we're still with the matron time now, the house parents had arrived yet, matron's called me into her office and she said, 'Mary, I have news,' 'What's that?' she said, 'You are going home for good,' well we weren't particularly unhappy but that was magic words going home for good, you know, we all perhaps wanted to hear those words. And this was yet another time that mother had tried to take me home, I'm seven years old, it's the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1956 [laughs] and I am going home for good. I remember going

up to Stepney Causeway which was where the Barnardo head office was at that time and getting fully kitted out with new clothes and a suitcase and everything for me to go home for good, so off I went on the steam train into Bedford Midland Road and mother met me. Mother had taken another housekeeping job in the centre of Bedford to a gentleman who was a widower who had two little boys and needed to work and couldn't look after his little boys and I was taken with her on the understanding that he really could not afford to pay her, but if she would run his home and look after the boys she could take me and he would just give her a bit of pocket money and we would get by and she took that deal, she took that deal, she'd have taken anything to get me back. Well it wasn't much longer, I remember that Christmas staying with her, that Christmas, probably the first Christmas I can ever remember being with her, and my birthday, turned eight on Boxing Day. And then I think a short time after that the widower that was giving us a home at that time ran into some financial trouble, I think he may have lost his job, whatever, and we had to go, he couldn't keep us. Well I don't think there was welfare state, I don't know why this was but we were out. So she managed to find very quickly another position and so off we went again and another position to another widower who again had some grown up children, would take us on the same deal as the first one. But that didn't work out because that gentleman wanted a bit more than a housekeeper and she wasn't having any of that. So we fled in the day with the clothes on our back, and found ourselves in a refuge in Luton, we stayed there probably from something – I don't have the exact dates but probably something like the March to the June with just the clothes on our backs. So my – mother managed to get herself some benefit, and with that benefit there were two things that were so important to her, her woodbines, cigarettes, ch ch ch, and a packet of Daz, washing powder, and so she was okay with that so she would wash our clothes one day and we'd stay in and then the next day we would go out and wear our clothes, it was really like that, that's how it had to be. And it was about this time that when she started to run out of her allowance, running out of her packet of Daz and her woodbine cigarettes that I decided that – and she was all to pieces because she was very emotional, very needy, almost – I was almost the mother to the child even then. And so I thought I'd had to fix this somehow so I would actually go out without her knowing – without telling her what I was doing, I just went out onto the streets of Luton and begged cigarettes for my mother, just begged them, 'Please, have you got

some money for cigarettes for my mother?’ and people gave me money. I mean I’ve got a picture in my bag now, I could show you the way I looked at that time in Barnardo’s archive picture that they’ve given me. And it’s pathetic to think that a child looking like that could actually stop people in the street and ask for money, begging, but I just felt I could fix it for her and I wasn’t aware of any danger. And then a little time after that Barnardo’s came and got me again because it had all broken down of course, and I don’t know the reasons but I guess she must have asked them for help again. And so now I’m being prepared to drive away in a black Morris car, going back with the travelling matrons, they always had travelling matrons and the early days when I went in and out of the homes when I was very young they were the gabardine coated travelling matron with the trilby hat and they would take you on steam trains from one home to the other. But this was different now, this was now we’d moved on a few years so now we had a motor car. And I remember saying to her as she’s standing there sort of absolute tears running down her eyes, saying to her, ‘Give me something of yours to take, anything, just give me something?’ and we only had the clothes we stood up in, what could she give me. And she had an idea, she was a tiny little lady, not as tall as me but she used to wear a corset, one of these pink boned corsets with little pink laces to do it up, and at night when she took it off she’d roll it up and put it on the end of the bed, I think it was a habit that older ladies used to do in those days. And she had this idea that if she could give a little corset string that would be something that she could give me. So I took the corset string and vowed to keep it as a keepsake and off I went looking back behind as she’s waving and crying and we go off. So we’ve arrived back in the village again, fortunately the same cottage, Tyler, I’ve been allowed to go back to the same cottage, I’ve had a six month break but I’ve been allowed to go back into the same cottage with my friends. A little time has gone on and we all have our own little wooden lockers surrounding the playroom floor, and we keep our own personal little keepsakes in there which I course I didn’t have any. So this little girl had a dolly and I asked her if I could play with her dolly and she agreed I could play with her dolly for a little while. But this dolly had a little pink matinee coat that wouldn’t do up, I think you might guess where this is going, I thought I know what I’ve got in my locker, I’ve got mother’s corset string and if I thread that all the way through there and do that up and tie it, that doll will look a treat and that coat will stay done up and wouldn’t that be good. I did that,

played with a dolly for a little while and then the little girl said, 'That's my dolly, I want it back,' fair enough, we didn't squabble too much about that, but I said, 'Hold on, just let me take the corset string out,' and she said, 'What corset string, don't be silly, what corset string?' I said, 'No, that's my mother's corset string,' she said, 'Don't be so silly, it's not your mother's corset string, that's the little ribbon that came with the coat,' and I said, 'No, it's not, my mum's corset string,' and I'm getting emotional now, 'My mum's corset string,' she said, 'No, it's not.' Matron was brought in to arbitrate and I lost the corset string because matron couldn't possibly imagine it could be a corset string. Just a little ribbon that's tied up with the dolly and I lost it. And years later, still being in touch with matron, socially then, by then, when I'm all grown up with children of my own, socially, I told her this story and she was mortified, she said, 'How could I possibly have done that?' I said, 'But you were looking after twelve children, how could you be attune to everything, how could you?' It was done.

*Did you have any other belongings of your mothers or was it only the corset string?*

I can't remember. No, don't think there was anything else. No, I think it was just the corset string. No, actually belongings of hers would only have been the corset string. There were things that she bought me when she came to visit me once a month, you know, little bits of jewellery from Woolworths or something like that, but nothing else of hers, no, I think that was the only thing.

[30:23]

*How was your mother's relationship with you when she came to visit you?*

Very emotional, very loving, but all of the time that she was with me on the visit once a month she was completely obsessed with her own problems, I think this is why they – they came to the conclusion I would actually be better to go to Australia and start a new life because she was really bleeding me, absolutely sapping me, because she was so full of her own problems. And I mean I remember being quite upset, I was quite – quite a good singer at school, I was always given the solo parts in everything, and I

remember although it wasn't ever possible for her to come and see me in any production because of the distance where she lived, she could only come and see me for a day visit once a month. And of course the school production would always be in the evening, so it wasn't doable that she could come and see me. But I remember a particular occasion when I'd been told I was doing pretty well in this solo bit I was doing and I wanted her to hear it, and I just wanted to sing it for her so she knew what I was going to be doing. And I remember singing my little heart out to her, doing my best and making – wanting her to think, oh my goodness, I didn't know she could sing like that, oh my goodness and she just looked uncomfortable and kept on telling me about her life, she wasn't listening at all and that was a bit sad wasn't it, yeah. She was very aware of everything in her own life but, you know, she had so many secrets, so much had gone on in her life before she ever met my father and as I grew older and began to think in my mind why she was so difficult sometimes and so unbalanced sometimes, I used to say to myself, there is something in her past that's turned her, there is something in her past that I will never know, there's a big secret in there and she's never telling me. And in fact that was very very true and she did take her secret to the grave although I had discovered what the secret was six months before she died and never told her that I knew.

*What sorts of problems did your mother have?*

She had from the age of twenty – I've managed to research this a little bit, from the age of twenty-three – she was in Barnardo's, now that's something that I didn't know, so I think I'll go – going to start off from the very beginning, I discovered she was actually in Barnardo's and she didn't tell me. That was the first big secret, and Barnardo's actually researched the archive for me and found her, and ... I said to them, in fact it was quite emotive really, they phoned me on Christmas Eve about five years ago – only five years ago I discovered this, Christmas Eve and the telephone rang, it was Barnardo's, 'Mary, we've found your mother in our archive,' 'Really?' 'Yes,' they said, 'she really did grow up in Dr Barnardo's,' I said, 'You're joking, really?' 'Yes,' 'Oh,' I said, 'what home, what home was she in?' 'Oh, the same one as you, the village at Barkingside.' 'Oh, and what age was she when she went in?' 'Oh seven, the same as you when you went in the second time,' and duly they've sent me

all her records and there it is, Alice, her name was Alice, 1910 admission photograph of her going into Barnardo's. So she never told me that, and then in bits and pieces after her death I had been able to find out that she was married at twenty-three, lived down in – at the time her family were from Deptford in London, and at some point from her leaving Barnardo's and being reinstated with her family, she was aged fourteen and went into service, this much I'm gathering from her records which I've now got that Barnardo's have given me. Then I've then found out that she found herself down in Margate in the Thanet area and married somebody – she was twenty-three, he was twenty-seven, they were a prominent grocer's family and very devout churchgoers. So she would have been given a good start I would have thought marrying into a family like that. But the story that I've managed to unfold is that after – she fled ... we don't know why – I don't know why, but it is documented somewhere that apparently if you flee a marriage after seven years you can be considered and declared dead, so that was where that was. In the meantime she had found another relationship, whether or not it overlapped with this marriage, I'm not sure, but she's now found herself in Ilford in Essex, so close to Barkingside where the village is, and she has struck up a relationship with another man, and has had a child by him called Frances. She lost Frances, Frances, she had a fall out with Frances' father and walked out leaving the daughter with the father, never having married him, but leaving the daughter, Frances, with the father. And apparently I've heard bits and pieces that I've managed to find out from people that a letter that she wrote to the father saying – actually I think she fled with Frances at that point to somewhere in Bedford and writing to him and saying, 'You can come and take this little bitch away, you can take her back, I don't want her.' So you can see how disturbed mother was, she lost two daughters, maybe felt a lot of regret losing the second one, but wilfully lost the first one by fleeing and running away. Then time has passed, the war has come and gone, she's lost touch with Frances. Frances duly emigrated to New Zealand as a nurse and mother has lost touch with her all this time. Mother surfaces again, after the war, living in Bedford in 1946, meets and marries my father, Edwin Howard. And supposedly they are happy, although again in my – her records, she's still bitterly complaining to the social worker, we called them welfare officers in those days, that the father, her husband was not a kind man and that she didn't want to be with him. And yet all of the years that I knew her she was always saying he was the

love of her life and how tragic it was that he met his death and how she was on her own, so she was a very muddled damaged woman. And that again I think might illustrate to you why Barnardo's felt I would be better with a new start in Australia, but I wasn't having it 'cause I couldn't break her heart, even though I didn't know any of this other business with losing the other daughter and having two or three other relationships with men, it was all out there but not out there, I didn't know anything about it at all until her death.

[39:33]

*Why do you think your mother didn't tell you about her growing up in Barnardo's?*

She was very secretive, and I think she was of her time, she was born in 1903 and I think that was a much older generation, I think they were very secretive. Probably ashamed and maybe of declaring that she may have had to follow the story through and tell me more, and maybe she was – I don't know, I'm just second guessing, maybe she thought it was better just to keep well quiet before – 'cause once she started talking it all might tumble out, I don't know. I don't know.

*Do you think your mother did have a good relationship with your father, despite her saying she didn't?*

I want to believe she did because she was – he was everything to her, in my young life it was all about him, my father that died, your father died, he was the love of my life. But looking at her records that Barnardo's duly gave to me, it wasn't all smooth, no, and he had grown up children from his first wife who was widowed, when she came to move into the married home and she drove them all away. And the youngest was only nineteen, so they couldn't live with her, they just all fled the family home, I think she was very difficult, hmm.

*Did your mother ever speak of her parents or any of her family members?*

Yes, the first time she ever told me anything about her mother ... was she said, 'My mother tried to get rid of me when she knew I was expected.' She said nothing else about her mother at all, until very many many years later, she told me that her mother was still alive and living in Peckham aged ninety and that she'd visited her briefly, and mother would have been probably in her late fifties then. I don't think she had any love lost with her mother, I mean she felt that her mother had put her in Barnardo's, her mother didn't want her. So yeah, I think she was damaged from word go really. With something like – with the mother actually saying, 'I didn't want you and I took something to try and get rid of you,' [laughs], that's a bit damaging isn't it of her life plan, hmm.

[42:32]

*Did you ever – have you ever kept in contact with any of your half siblings?*

Yes, yes, now where can I start? My father's grown up family, they found me in Barnardo's when I was about eight or nine or ten. And they didn't know because she didn't let anybody know where I was, so they could never have known, they wouldn't have known what happened to me and all contact was lost once their father died, my father died and she moved away with the child. They would not have known where we went, but one of them was curious and she put out some feelers to try to find me, and she did, and that again was the most amazing revelation. So that was another visit to matron's office where I was told that I had half brothers and sisters, which [laughs] I'd no idea about, she didn't tell me about them either, I knew nothing, it's all bit secrets, nothing. And so they established contact and I used to go and stay with the family and they sort of took me into their family and I used to stay with them for holidays, yes, so they were – and I'm still in touch with them now, yes, hmm.

*How was it like staying with them and having a family dynamic?*

Erm ... fascinating, absolutely fascinating [laughs]. But it was strange, they lived in a little village in Northampton and it was a strange thing, I mean they were very kind and they involved me in their family life, they were very kind and but they kind of ...

didn't treat me as a – a member of the family, long lost or whatever, they treated me almost – I don't know how to put it, almost something elitist, something elitist, I don't know why that was. They just [laughs] – they seemed to be a bit fascinated with me, rather more than just treating me as a family member, they took me out and about to meet different people and said, 'Oh, this is my half sister,' it was all a little bit like that. They were very kind, but I think they thought I was something to be shown off and paraded in some funny way but very kind, very kind and I'm still in touch with them now, yeah.

*Have they ever told you any stories about your father?*

Only that mother drove – drove them away when she moved in with father.

*Have you ever told them about you witnessing your father's passing?*

I don't think we've ever had a conversation about it. I would have been about three and I think I was a bit of a lone child anyway and I remember spending a lot of time sitting on a table which was pushed up against a window and that was where I used to spend a lot of time just gazing out of the window. And on this particular occasion, I could see my father cycling down the road on his bike and just absolutely collapsing outside the house and falling dead to the ground and I remember sort of rushing and saying to mother something like, 'Oh, Daddy's fallen,' and it's on my records as I've rushed out that, 'Mummy mummy, Daddy's fallen off his bike,' and I remember the neighbours all rushing out and the smelling salts were brought out. And I remember later that day mother being so dismayed because this little boy knocked on the door and said, 'Please could I have your husband's bike now he won't be needing it,' [laughs]. Yeah.

*How did you feel witnessing that and knowing what had happened?*

Again ... I can't remember any pain about losing my father, I can only remember the pain of my mother's dismay and heartbreak and hysterical reaction to it.

[47.14]

*Just slightly going back, could you describe a day at Barnardo's, a typical day?*

Yes, full of jobs and chores, and prayers. Yes, I'll take you to a time when I was probably one of the older girls so that I would have had quite a lot of chores to do, 6.30 let's be having you up, come on, out of bed, downstairs to stir the porridge, butter the bread, all sorts of things, stoke the boiler, all sorts of things to be doing, preparing breakfast. Breakfast at 7.30, everybody else would come down and all sit around – all stand around the dining room table prior to breakfast for morning prayers, morning prayers done, breakfast eaten, breakfast cleared away, washed up, more jobs done, jobs inspected, definitely, if you were on shoe cleaning or bathroom cleaning or washing up, drying up, laying the table, stirring the porridge, all of these jobs that you had to do were inspected and if they weren't good enough they were done again. So that would be the morning situation, then you'd be off to school, I'm now talking about senior school, coming back at the end of senior school for tea, 'cause you'd have a school dinner, more jobs, potato peeling for fifteen people, shoe cleaning for twelve children every day. And that was quite traumatic when the – the school let – the laces would be taken out of the shoes for conkering and then you were in trouble because, you know, some of the shoes didn't have laces and that would be your fault because you were on shoes that week so. And there was a particular story I've got about – which does really ... show how it was with the Christian ethic in Barnardo's. When I was on coal buckets and it was a wintertime, so it was very dark but – by the time I got home from school at 4.00, 4.15, it was dark. And the coal shed was nearly empty so it was a case of having to go right down into the blackest part at the end of the coal shed to fill up the coal scuttles, well I was very frightened, very very frightened of going in that coal hilt [ph] and I really was very frightened. And I really couldn't do it, and I just kept trying and I just kept running back in, I was on my own out there, nobody thought they would come out and say, 'Well I'll stand here and wait for you, go on, you'll be alright,' no I was just on my own having to fill six coal buckets in the yard. And I just kept saying, 'I just can't do it, I just can't do it, I just can't do it,' so after several attempts and running in absolutely frightened and in tears couldn't do it, matron decided that she would know just how to deal with this, she

said, 'Come on Mary,' she said, 'I think I know how we're going to deal with this, come on,' so we went upstairs and we knelt down by my bed and we prayed very very hard for dear Jesus please to make Mary strong enough to go and fill those coal buckets and we stayed on our knees together imploring dear Jesus please make Mary strong enough to fill those coal buckets. And I did go and fill the coal buckets and that is the power of prayer and that is the way Barnardo's operate [laughs]. Bedtime, lights out, yes, we were – towards the end of the time we did have a television, but we were only allowed to watch half an hour a night and I remember seeing the very first episode of Coronation Street, 7.30 to 8.00 in something like 1959 or 1960 or something like that. And so that was a treat, and of course if you were ever ... if you ever needed to be punished which often, you know, misdemeanours led to punishments, it was always loss of privileges by the time that married couples were there, it wasn't corporal punishment, it was miss your television, you know, oh no I'm going to miss an episode of Coronation Street [laughs] and you couldn't record it in those days. But no it was – so you'd watch a half an hour of TV after tea, or you could go out and play, in the summer evenings you could go out and play but you'd need to be in by eight or you could go over to the swimming pool and do some swimming, we had our own swimming pool so those of us were – well many of us became very very good swimmers because I mean it was there, it was a private swimming pool wasn't it, you know, so you could use it and we all got our life saving badges and advanced life saving badges and all sorts where before, you know, you needed to because it was – so yeah. So there was lots of things like that in the evening. But lights out definitely at nine o'clock so then there was the books and the torches under the bed covers. When we were much younger and then of course we would want to talk at night, or even read, definitely matron would be listening on the foot of the stairs and [inaud], 'I can hear you talking, I can hear you talking,' and sometimes, you know, we'd be running out of bed or something, you know, running over to another bedroom to get something. And then I remember one occasion I could, you know, would creep upstairs to try and catch us, out of bed, 'You're out of bed,' and I remember on one occasion this particular assistant I think she was, she wasn't a matron, she'd devised a good plan to see if we'd been out of bed because she would say, 'I think you were out of bed,' and then she would feel the soles of our feet

to see if they were cold,' [laughs], so she would know that we'd been running around out of bed. So that was bedtime, yeah, and lights out at nine, yeah.

*You mentioned corporal punishments and – what would lead to that, what sort of misbehaviour would have to happen?*

For me I think ... back chatting probably might have done that, being rude might have done that, being caught out in a fib would have done that. I can't think of anything else specific that we would have done that. One of the things that would lead to corporal punishment or other punishments would be this amazing game that we had of I dare you, and I dare you, you put a lot of children together, that's a heck of a lot of mischief. Sixty-five cottages in this village, in each cottages twelve children, you imagine how many children that is to make mischief, all playing the game I dare you and the topic of the game was I dare you to run away. Well if you've had any experience at all of the village at Barkingside, it's these three village greens with these sixty-five cottages all around with its own church and swimming pool and food store and school, everything there, but it's got a high wall all the way around it. So of course, you know, you put that many children together and you're not allowed to go out 'cause we were not allowed to go out at all, even out of our own school at junior school, we never went out. So you go over the wall don't you, you go over the wall and you dare each other to go over the wall and the sport of the day was I dare you to stay out for one night or two nights or how many nights and I managed to stay out one night once. And again, you know, I stopped doing that, that was great fun, stopped doing that though once I realised that mother would have been so anxious about it, so I sort of – again I took on the mantle of her concern, so I didn't do that. But that would be something that would certainly lead to punishment, yes. On one occasion – I was a rear dare devil, I was a fixer, I would do anything, I just thought I could it all, and on this particular occasion the only way to run away was to very carefully open the dormitory window and it was a sloping tiled roof underneath, to scramble across that, down the drainpipe, and in through the back door and the other accompanying girl would have unlocked the back door. I don't know what the purpose of this was. Ah, was it to let her out, probably to let her out and off we went and we'd absconded

together. So it's all good sport, I mean I used to read too many *Famous Five* books I think, definitely [laughs].

*Did you ever get caught absconding?*

Oh yes, by the police [laughs], the police always used to know where we were and would say, 'Come out from under that bush and are these yours?' 'Yes,' always.

*And how was matron's response once the police had brought you home?*

Well I guess we must have been punished by staying in and missing your privileges, I'm certain that we would have done. But I think to some extent, I think they took it in their stride, I don't think they – because it was so much of the sport of the time. I think it was just a routine punishment and get on, I think so, hmm.

*How did you feel being confined to such small places?*

It didn't feel small, it felt big because there we are, are you saying confined and not being – going out, I see what you mean, yeah.

*Yeah, knowing that there are walls keeping you?*

Yeah, well it was just intriguing to go out and over the top, it didn't really feel like being confined, although probably it did because if it didn't feel confined I wouldn't want to have gone over the top and out, perhaps. But I don't know that it really, I don't remember thinking I'm confined or I'm imprisoned, no I don't think I felt like that, it was just sport, it was just a game to play I think.

[58:05]

*How was Christmases and?*

Oh Christmases were magical. Christmas Eve, you didn't have to go to bed at nine o'clock, the older ones who had taken communion were going to be able to take communion on Midnight Mass, so we stayed up talking around the fire until it was time to set off with torches and lanterns, walking through the blackness of the night towards the village church and then we would take communion and then we would come home and excitedly get into bed. And the next morning our kit bag, each child had a kit bag and the next morning you would have somehow stealthfully all your little toys would be put under your bed in the kit bag whilst you were asleep, and you were so determined that you were going to see Father Christmas come but we never saw him come but the presents were always there under the bed in the morning. So then it was great excitement opening the presents, then it would be hard boiled eggs for breakfast which were always coloured pink in the water with the cochineal to make them pink to make them special for your Christmas morning breakfast. And then it was off to church again, very social occasion in the church, every cottage had its own pew with its name on, and that everyone was very conversational when you came out of church and wishing everybody happy Christmas and then home for Christmas dinner which I never liked, never liked turkey, never liked Christmas pudding. Would have loved a roast potato, never had a roast potato, I didn't know what a roast potato was because you know you would only have a roast meal on a Sunday, but Sunday was always taken up with church going so the roast potatoes would have spoiled, so we had slow roasted meat but always boiled potatoes and never roast potatoes, because of church. What else can I tell you? And then it was sort of quiet time in the afternoon, maybe playing with your toys and then you'd be off for evensong in the evening, church again [laughs] and then home to bed. That was Christmas.

*How was your birthday?*

*FS: Sorry to interrupt, can I let you know that you've had an hour now, just to let you know.*

*Would you like to take a break now or?*

I'll have a drink if I may, do you mind, a drink, water?

*Yeah, of course you can. Would you like a break though Mary?*

No, I'm alright, just a drink. Would you like a break?

*No [laughs].*

Are you sure?

*Just keep going, yes ...*

[1:00:55]

You're very clever to know just what questions to ask aren't you?

*[Laughs] Thank you.*

Very clever, I'm ready when you are.

*Okay, ready. How were your birthdays like?*

Hmm ... largely ignored, Christmas was always [clears throat], excuse me, Christmas was always, here's your Christmas and birthday present Mary, 'cause my birthday is Boxing Day so it was a non event basically. Barnardo's policy was to have pen friends to come and take the children away for weekends and I had several of these pen friends, but mother always used to turn up on the doorstep and then demand back and then all sorts of problems, but I remember one particular pen friend lived in Barking and I stayed with them at Christmas. And the neighbours next door came in with a tray of sherry, little glasses of sherry which I thought absolutely amazing, never seen anything like that before, the neighbours coming in with a tray of drinks and wishing everybody a happy Christmas. And I think I was caught up in the moment because I said, 'Oh, this is nice,' I mean I didn't have the sherry, of course I

wasn't old enough but I thought oh this is so nice, 'Oh,' I said, 'it's lovely Christmas, it's my birthday tomorrow as well,' and I thought nothing more of it, I was just sharing, you know, a childhood sort of excitement about it being my birthday. And when the neighbours went they came back with a little something and gave it to me and then they went again and the pen friends I was with were absolutely enraged that I'd told them it was my birthday and they were mortally embarrassed that they felt that I would never to have told anybody it was my birthday 'cause it was presumed that the neighbours had to go and find me a present and come back and that embarrassed them no end and I was really told off, I should never have told anybody it was my birthday.

*Do you think your birthday was largely ignored because it was so close to Christmas?*

Probably, yes, I should think so.

*Were the other kids' birthdays more celebrated?*

Birthday cakes, yes, everybody had a birthday cake, I don't think I did but all had birthday cakes. In fact it's something I do for my children now and they're forty-one and forty-two and I still make them a birthday cake, yeah, birthday cakes and tea parties, and you'd probably be allowed to invite your friend to tea on your birthday, yeah, that's what happened, yeah.

*How did you feel not getting a birthday cake?*

I think I was very caught up with Christmas and all the Christmas presents and everything, Christmas was also very magical because in those days big companies used to have Christmas parties where the employees would be allowed to bring their children and be given a wonderful time. And the big companies that were near to the Barnardo's at Barkingside automatically would give some invitations to some of the children, so we had, we were so privileged, we had lots of invitations to wonderful Christmas parties, and with wonderful presents and gifts that were given to us. I remember one Christmas party going onboard a ship that was moored in the Thames,

it was a pirate party and everybody onboard was dressed as pirates and were there to give the children such a good time. And lots of the children's Christmas parties we were invited to and it was just amazing. And pantomime, oh yes, I came to see Aladdin when Norman Wisdom, you won't know who he is but Norman Wisdom was first singing that famous song *Don't Laugh At Me 'Cause I'm a Fool* and he was in Aladdin and so I have good memories of all the privileges and things that we were shown and given to. And so Christmas, it was a run up to Christmas of privileges, parties, pantomimes, as well as the actual Christmas Day. So in answer to your question I probably might have felt my birthday was an anticlimax, but perhaps I did, but I think there was so much more good that I don't think I suffered for it.

[1:05:30]

*How was your school environment?*

Well I've always told you how I probably wanted to draw attention to myself a little bit when I was at senior school, but when I first went to senior school aged about eleven there were four of us that went to senior school, 'cause we'd always been privately educated in Barnardo's own school, you know, junior school but this was something new. We were kitted out in our uniforms which were brown, box pleat skirts, blazers with the blazer badge on, I think trilby hats and the famous Barnardo clodhopper lace up shoes. So we really did look very smart, hated it, but we really looked very smart. Well by the time we got to school parading ourselves in our new uniform we hadn't realised that in our school anything brown would do, very lapse. And so we stood out like sore thumbs because the rest of the girls were just wear – it was an all girls' school were just wearing mini skirts, brown mini skirts and winkle pickers and all that sort of stuff, and so we just didn't look right, we didn't fit and people were wary of us, so we were very clannish in the start. And I think it was probably as a result of that that I maybe analysed it and I thought to myself, well I can either be on the periphery of everything here 'cause I don't fit, or I can plunge in and be a clown. So I decided to plunge in and be a clown [laughs].

*You mentioned that you moved several times before the age of eleven, how did that affect your schooling?*

It affected my reading ... after all the changes of the different homes that I'd been in from the age of three to six, by the time I was about six and a half I wasn't reading at all, very very backward on reading, so Barnardo's gave me a one to one reading tuition. And she was a great lady, I went to her every Tuesday afternoon, you might remember how I can remember all these things but I have an amazing memory from being three years old so I certainly remember what happened when I was six. And this lovely lady, she taught me to read and I remember at one point when I was reading so well and she said, 'Oh you're doing really well Mary, let's go and make toffee,' and so we made toffee instead [laughs]. But yes, I think after six months to a year with her I was reading well beyond my age group so I really picked up fast. And now as a result of that I do help the children read in year five at my local middle school because I have that memory of how a one to one can really help with reading. I think ... clowning around put me back on school studies, but I think as I've said to you earlier, once I decided to pull my socks up and try harder I did achieve.

*How were the kids' attitude towards you?*

Which children?

*The children at school?*

Oh wary, they wouldn't make you as a friend, wary, very wary of you.

*Why would you say that was?*

They didn't want to be friends, I didn't make any particular friends at school. There was one story [laughs], going back to the Barnardo ethic of being a good Christian if you will, took it very seriously. There was an old aerodrome which were not allowed to go, it was out of bounds, as we're older now so we're allowed to go out because we're now going to senior school anyway, so we sort of hang out over the old

aerodrome at Barkingside. And a group of us went over there after school one day and there was a traditional gypsy caravan there parked, the wooden one, you know, the real traditional gypsy caravan and a horse and a fire smouldering and children playing. And we made ourselves known and there was a girl about our own age there, her name was Jeanette, and I sort of made a friend of her, and I remember visiting her a couple of times and then being fascinated with her lifestyle and what was going on. I felt duty bound to bring Christianity to her [laughs], oh I must have been so pompous mustn't I. So anyway the next day I took some bibles and some bible readings, some prayer books and took them to her and her family, and sat and shared it all with them and said, you know, see how you feel about this, bye bye. And the next day went to visit again and the caravan had disappeared and there was the remains of all the bibles and the church books in the smouldering embers of the fire [laughs] that was left behind. And the story is that about a year or so later this girl came to my senior school, Jeanette, and she [laughs] avoided me like the plague because obviously she didn't want anyone to know that she actually was a gypsy and so she – every time I walked into a room [laughs] she'd walk out of it, she didn't want me telling anybody which of course I didn't, of course I didn't tell them [laughs].

*Did you have any close friends growing up?*

Oh yes, yes, very dear friend ... my soul mate in pranks and mischief lives in Peterborough, another one in Southampton, another one in Elstree, Borehamwood, another one in France, another one in Scotland. Australia of course, yeah, quite a few really, yeah, quite a few growing up, yeah.

[1:12:14]

*Going back, when you mentioned about your mother would come and demand for you back, were there any points where you wished that you could go with her?*

Always, every time. When she used to come and demand to take me back on the doorstep, is this what you mean?

*Yes.*

Oh yes, I would go, yeah, always. Because although, you know, I was happy, always I didn't recognise it as being happy, I was just there, it was always – it was always the thing to leave, it was always the thing that you held up as being what you're aspiring to do, go home, go home for good, the magic words, go home for good and every time she would arrive at a home and say, 'I'm demanding my child back, I'll sign for her and I'm going,' I was happy enough because I was going – you know, I loved her, loved her with a passion. So just went, every time.

*Once you left Barnardo's did you ever stay with your mother?*

I was a huge disappointment to her then because she had the mindset all the way through that I would be able to make a home for her, eventually. And we would live together, and her expectation of that was unreal. And so at fifteen it was obvious I had no means of making a home for her, I couldn't make a home for myself, and she was still working residentially in a hospital in South London, and I couldn't make a home for her. Also we began to feel the difference in our ages, I mean she would have been early sixties, mid sixties then and I would have been fifteen, and so we were not coming out of the same corner at all. Also what really really broke her heart is that I got a steady boyfriend about that time which she felt was going to shut her out for the future, and it did.

*And did she ever make any of these feelings clear to you?*

No, I mean she would only just ever say ... there was a little cottage of the high street in Barkingside, it's been pulled down now and we would walk along there and she'd always say, 'That's where we're going to live Mary when you leave Barnardo's, that's where we're going to live,' so you can gauge her disappointment, 'cause that was her dream that we were going to have a home together, that was her dream all the way through and I think I sort of thwarted that dream, and yes, she was very disappointed, I don't remember that she ever voiced it though.

*How did you getting a steady boyfriend affect your relationship with her?*

How did it affect my relationship with her?

*Yeah.*

Jealousy, she was hugely jealous of him 'cause he took my time and attention and my future and she should have had that.

*Did she ever tell you any of this or is it just from her actions that you could tell?*

From her actions, hmm, from her actions and the way she was, yeah. Yeah.

*What sort of things would she do?*

Oh she was beastly to him [laughs]. Erm, I was working in Knightsbridge at the time, or maybe Hammersmith, he was living in Walthamstow, he would – he had a motorbike, he would come all the way from Walthamstow into Central London, through to Knightsbridge and he would pick me up from work, he would then drive all the way out into Catford and Lewisham and quite often it would be a terrible stormy cold winter night pouring with rain. And we would get to visit her on a Saturday night, this is when I was – we were trying to – I was trying to visit her, I was trying to do the thing that she'd always done for me, so I was now trying to visit her instead of her visiting me. And he would help me in this way, he would take me to visit her, so we would – we would get to where she lived which was residential, little room she had in the nurse's home in the hospital. He would be dripping wet, freezing cold and I probably would have been as well and she – he would – I would say to him, 'Come on, take your gloves and gauntlets off and put them on the radiator, try and get them,' and they'd go on the radiator in her room and be steaming because he would be so cold and they were so wet. And she would turn us out in half an hour because the [laughs] – she'd turn us out because she would say – this was her reasoning, 'It's lovely of you coming to see me,' she'd say, 'but the play is coming on, Saturday night theatre is coming on the radio, and if I miss the start of it and you go I'll never catch it

up, so would you mind very much leaving in half an hour so I could get the start of it,' [laughs] so [inaud]. And so we'd put all this dripping wet [laughs] – makes me laugh when I think of it really, but I wasn't worried for myself but I was so aware how he had [laughs] really gone that extra mile for me, to take me to see my mother and that's how she repaid him, she said, you know, 'Half an hour and off you go children [laughs], I'm going to have to start watching this, or listening to the play and if you don't go now I shall miss the start of it,' so we put all our wet stuff on again, got back on the motorbike and went all the way back over London for half an hour visit [laughs]. But he tried very very hard with her, he really did try hard with her.

[01.18.50]

*Growing up what was the one thing that you found comfort and sanctity in?*

... Hmm, hard question ... I think maybe sometimes just being by myself, reading, avid reader ... wasn't necessarily the friendships because the friendships were something that you took for granted that were always there so at the time you wouldn't value them, they were just part of your life. Trying to think back what I would have valued ... time alone I think and time to read and time to be quiet maybe, maybe, yeah.

*Would you have liked to have grown up with your siblings around?*

My own mindset is that the way I grew up I would never change a single day, not a day. It was amazing experience and I wouldn't change it, no, I wouldn't want – I was fascinated when they found me, I was deeply grateful when they wanted me to go and stay with them, and I was amazed that I actually had siblings, but I wouldn't have changed the way I was living, not really, no, it was special.

[01.20.25]

*Once you left Barnardo's and you moved into your own hostel, how did you learn to adjust to living alone?*

I didn't have to straightaway, I was given another hostel to live in because – I tell you how this happened, I'm living in this hostel just outside of Barkingside but I was working in Knightsbridge and I was explaining to you, this was a job I got for myself, but the travelling, it was thought by the matron that the travelling was more than a fifteen year old could cope with and I was very very tired and a bit overemotional. So it was decided after only six months in that hostel that I would be moved to what they told me was the best hostel for girls that Barnardo's ever had, and you were very privileged if you were given a place in this hostel and it was at Ealing in West London. Well this was probably of all the comings and goings and the leavings, this was probably the most difficult part for me. I didn't want to go to Ealing, Barkingside actually was just close enough to the village to feel still part of the life I'd grown up with. They said to me, 'At least let us go over and meet the wardens in this hostel, and see, you know, how you feel about it and what you think about it,' so my matron and the welfare officer met me from work in Knightsbridge, we got on a train and we went about six or seven or whatever stops it was out on the Piccadilly Line to North Ealing. We went to the hostel to meet with the wardens there and to see how I felt about living there. I was shown around in this hostel, there was a girls' sitting room with upright armchairs like a doctor's waiting room all the way around with a piano in the corner, no radio, television, telephone. There were lots of dormitories, there was their private sitting room and I was given the tour of it over four floors, completely empty, no girls there, none at all, and I was being told that I had passed the test, I qualified and I would be taken and they would accept me because I was a good enough girl to get into this wonderful hostel. And I managed to keep the tears back until we left the hostel, and we were walking back towards the tube station, and tears have absolutely fallen to the point where I'm hysterical and I can't walk. And the matron on one side of me and the welfare officer on the other are actually holding me up and my feet are dragging, I'm not walking, I'm being dragged and I'm crying bitter tears 'cause I don't want to go, I don't want to go. I would hate it, I'd be all on my own and I don't want to go. And I went; there was no choice, I was put there. I lived that lonely life with just the two wardens, they were ex land army women, had no idea, although they were always telling me how wonderful all their old girls they'd had at previous hostels and how much these other old girls loved them and sent them

cards and presents all the time, I never saw anything about it at all, they just ignored me really. I was on my own for I think six months and during that time mealtimes were spent on my – well no, mealtimes were spent together, but there was a long refectory table in the dining room, one end of this table sat me with my own little jam pot, sugar dish, butter dish, cups and saucers, knives and forks, all my own, and at the other, hello, they sat with their bone china, cups and saucers, butter dish, milk jug, right up there. I mean how is that going to make me feel, that wasn't good. One day, coming home from my job in Knightsbridge I've walked into the hostel, into the dining area, and because it was always the thing to do, as soon as you get in from work you go and say, 'Can I help lay the table, what can I do?' so that would be your greeting when you got in from work, and there was a girl sitting in the dining room, a girl. What's this, and she said, 'Oh hello,' she said, 'my name's Linda, I'm coming to live here now with you,' and ah, ah, I just hugged her, never hugged anybody before, didn't do that, Barnardo's don't – that's one of the things, you don't ever get to hug or to kiss anyone in Barnardo's, you don't do that. So that was phenomenal that I did that, I just hugged her, wouldn't let her go. And she thought, well what's going on with this crazy person [laughs] but – and the heartache that came out of that really was I thought why couldn't they have told me she was coming, I could have lived off that for weeks, days even. Why did they do that, they could have said to me – if they had said to me, 'We've got a girl coming, she's probably going to be coming in a week or two or a month or, you know, she's coming,' I would have lived off it. And I thought that was really harsh, unkind and it was miserable. During that time my boyfriend, he's still visiting me to keep me sane on his motorbike from Walthamstow, all the way around the north circular to Ealing and he could only afford the petrol to come and see me once a week and it was lovely, you know, it was like the focus of my week 'cause he'd come and visit me. Well over a little time, a year or so, the hostel started to trial a different idea of taking girl students in that were not Barnardo girls, but just needed a lodging if you like. And it was a bit of a trial and they took on about four different girls. So there was Linda and myself, and then there were the four other girls that were not Barnardo girls and they were ... we didn't really sort of quite gel with them. And one of the things they would do and I think again it was jealousy because I had a boyfriend who came to visit me once a week and what they would do is they would get together and say, 'Listen girls, we're going to get into our

dressing gowns ready for bed early on Tuesday nights,' and the idea would be that if the girls were in their dressing gowns then my boyfriend was not allowed in, so they were really nasty and, you know, I had to stand on the doorstep talking to him, or go for a walk on a cold night, because they would be in their dressing gowns and matron obviously wouldn't allow a boy, a man in when the girls were in their nightwear. So they used to do it deliberately, they were really horrible [laughs]. But he stayed with me, he's a good man, put up with it all [laughs].

[1:29:05]

*Did any of the Barnardo's come and support you once you left?*

Yes. Yes, there was a dear welfare officer called Mrs Porter, I loved her to bits and she was the only sane person in all of this and she was the official welfare officer for the hostel and it was like when she visited the sun came out, she made everything normal and she'd got quite a sad life actually because although her name was Mrs Porter and she was a lovely grey haired lady she was only married a year and her husband died and she never remarried and I always thought that was such a sad story, I think he died in the war. But she was a lovely lady and she actually came to my wedding and actually came to visit me at my – in my first married home in my flat too so yeah she was a very very dear lady, yeah, loved her to bits.

*And what would you say was your lowest point sort of growing up?*

That that time in the hostel, definitely, without a doubt, that time when they moved me to the Ealing hostel and the acute loneliness. I remember lights out at ten o'clock, I was still working but, you know, still lights out at ten o'clock and in those days we all used to wear these spiky rollers to bed every night so that we'd got our hair, no blow drying or anything like that, I mean we're talking rollers in your hair every night and lights out at ten o'clock so you'd be rolling your hair up in the dark and then sleeping on these spikes. And I remember one evening getting very emotional and finding everything very very difficult and the warden came in and said, 'Lights out Mary, lights out,' and I just sort of thought – and I got a bit teary, and I said, 'Oh, I'm

so miserable, this isn't working for me and I don't know what to do and I'm so unhappy,' and she just said, 'Well you've just have to deal with it won't you,' and went out and slammed the door. So yeah, and I was actually only sixteen, you know, that's – that's very lonely and very alienated. I mean at sixteen you're very vulnerable aren't you, sixteen is so young to be told to get on with your life, hmm.

*How many welfare officers did you have, or social workers?*

Miss Totes ... Miss Mess [ph] [laughs], what a name, she was my mother's welfare officer, my mother always had a welfare officer attached all the way through her life and my mother's welfare officer would often write to me and stay in touch with me. It was through my mother's welfare officer that I learned about the existence of Frances, my half sister, and how I had to tell her about when mother died and she didn't know about me. And then there was Mrs Porter that I've just told you about as a welfare officer, yeah, there were lots of welfare officers and there was another one, I can't remember name, who came with me – a welfare officer would always go with you when you were having a job interview, you know, so I got this job myself as an apprentice florist but the welfare officer would come with me for the interview, yeah, so they were supportive, yeah.

*What was your relationship with them?*

With them?

*Did you always get along?*

Yeah, I never had any difficulties with them at all, Miss Totes [ph] was definitely to be feared, which was quite funny really, she was the one that most of the time in the village would come cycling up and would be there to support matron in any of matron's concerns and one of the things with welfare officers is the child would be given an opportunity to talk through any issues, and so you would be called into matron's office where the welfare officer would be, Miss Totes [ph]. And, you know, she would go through the, 'Are you happy, any concerns, anything?' but where I feel

now in hindsight it was wrong, the matron would always be in there and I think you would never want to say anything negative, even if you felt you wanted to, if the matron is there all the time, you can't speak freely can you. So it was all part of children should be seen and not heard.

[1:33:49]

*What was your highest point growing up, the most outstanding memory of you being happy?*

Personal achievement I think, personal achievement. Which would have been when I got the starring role and a singing role in the school and I felt so amazed that I could be that good and everybody said how good I was and I felt so good about myself, even though no one actually, matron never came to see me in it, because, you know, neither did mother but, you know, teachers sort of saying how well I'd done and I have made a semi career out of singing as well so it was to set me on a path. Yeah, I'm sure there are other things that are more worthy than that but that's the only thing that really springs to mind, achievement, personal achievement and feeling good about myself in it, yeah.

[01.34.50]

*Did your mother ever get along with any of your boyfriends?*

Well there was only really the boyfriend that we're talking about and I've already told you she was very disappointed. She never really would have said anything detrimental about him, he was so good to her anyway, it was just I could sense her acute disappointment that he had come along in my life when she should have been in my life, when I should have been making a home for her and we should have been living in that little cottage in Barkingside high street. And he came along, so we didn't have that life together that she'd really hoped for. But I don't think she actually ever said anything nasty about him, he was so good to her, hmm.

*Did your mother ever meet your husband?*

Yes, we're talking about the same person, yes, he – I married him, yes.

*You married him?*

Oh, yeah, he was my knight in shining armour who rode in on his white steed, in actual fact it was a Triumph motorbike, yeah, and saved me [laughs], yeah.

*So you've been together ever since you were –*

Yeah, fifty years, we've just had forty-five years married this last March gone, hmm.

*And you have two children?*

I have two children and one grandchild.

[1:36:24]

*How is your relationship with your children?*

Loving.

*Bearing in mind how you grew up with your mother?*

Loving and supportive and tactile. Very very strong relationship with both of them, they would both walk on coals for me and I would do the same for them, unconditionally, yeah.

*Is there anything that you picked up from your mother's way of raising you that you have passed onto your children, or that you wouldn't pass onto your children?*

... Could you ask me that again?

*Is there anything that you've picked up from your mother's way of raising you that you have passed onto your children or that you wouldn't pass onto your children?*

I wouldn't – hopefully I wouldn't pass on my mother's way of raising me, a) she didn't raise me anyway, and b) although she professed so much to have this aim to get me back, it really was not about the child, it was all about her own pain and grief and I really hope that I'm not that way with my children, I hope I see their needs above mine all the time. I hope so, well I know I do.

[01.37.47]

*How did you learn to put your own grief and your own troubles behind you?*

With the help of an amazing woman called Joy Day Godfrey, she was my mother in law ... and best thing ever happened to me my mother in law. She took me into her family, and treated me as a daughter, gave me my first feelings about family life and how to be in a family. She invited me to her home young stropky fifteen year old, every weekend, although I couldn't actually go until after church on Sunday, I had to make certain that Barnardo's knew I was going to church first on Sunday, and then I was allowed to go and spend the weekend with her in Laurence's family home, Laurence is my husband. And she was an amazing woman, capable, strong ... loved me ... was very interested in me, cared about me. We sparred, we fought because we were both very strong minded women and when I first met her I was absolutely beastly to her. Very self opinionated, because one of the things when you leave Barnardo's I feel that you do come out punching walls, you do think that no one's actually going to be kind to you, you do feel that it's up to you to make your own way and if you have to do it – in order to do that if you have to fight and tread on people you do it because it's the survival, got to survive. So I had this kind of mindset when I met her, I must have been awful, opinionated. When I stayed in her home I criticised her home. When she cooked me a meal and I sat down at her meal table, I would question where the butter dish was, 'Where's the butter dish, we're not putting the butter paper on the table are we? Why is the sugar in a bag, why is it not in a

sugar bowl? And why are you combing your hair in your kitchen, you shouldn't do that, that's unhealthy.' I mean these things I would say to her; I would be questioning her home ethic in her own home. I was awful, awfully opinionated and stroppy and – but she just put up with me. And I think rough edges were eventually worn off. There'd be a situation in the home where people might come in and there might be a conversation that goes something like, 'Ooh, so and so and so and so, would anybody like to go down to the club tonight or the pub or do you want to stay home and watch TV, or what does anybody want to do?' and I'd say, 'Oh, this is what I want to do,' and I know my husband would kick me, I got so many kicked shins under the table, like be quiet, wait and see what other people want to do, but that's so typical, I remember how it was. Just plunging in and saying what I wanted because it was every man for himself, and I hadn't – I hadn't learned the ethic of saying, 'Hang on a minute, see what they want and let's get on with that,' so I learned some valuable lessons. But overall she put up with me tremendously and I loved her to bits, and she was my rock and stay when I was very young. And my mother hated her of course, you can well imagine the jealousy that there would have been there. But in her older years, Joy Day Godfrey, my mother in law I looked after her until her death aged eight-six, six years ago. And she was – I felt that she was everything to me when I was young and I think I was an awful lot to her when she was older, she wouldn't let anyone else really take her on hospital appointments or do anything else, I was – I was the one, you know, so we had a good exchange and we were there for each other when we needed most, yeah.

*What was the most valuable lesson she ever taught you?*

... I don't know, how do I answer that? Just by example I think, just by her ... very caring, she was a nurse, so extremely caring. The kindest thing she ever did for me and she did some very very kind things, and you will understand – when I tell you this you will get it. Because mother and I had never had a Christmas together apart from that one I told you when she took me home and I was seven, had my eighth birthday with her. My dear mother in law decided that she would invite my mother to her home to share Christmas so that mother and I could have a Christmas together in Joy Day's home. And that was the kindest thing she could have ever done, she had a small two

bedroom council house, you know, it wasn't a grand house, she didn't have a lot of room, but she took my mother into her home and made her welcome, bought her Christmas presents and my mother criticised her all through the trip, all through the visit. Strange things. She'd put her pinny on, Joy Day would put her pinny on to maybe do something with the turkey in the kitchen and mother would say to her, 'Why are you putting your pinny on?' 'Well because I'm going to do the dinner,' 'Well I would never wear a pinny, I would never make a speck of dirt on me,' and this was just how she was, this little, what I've just said to you, really explains how she was. She was so critical of everything, you know, it was all about her all the time. And a few years after that on my wedding day my dear mother and father in law worded the wedding invitation to say that Alice, my mother, requested the pleasure of the company of, so they'd put the wedding invitations in her name, well she couldn't do anything, she'd got no money, nothing at all, they were kind enough to do that. And on this occasion there I am on my wedding day, in the bedroom with the bridesmaids just sort of adjusting the little veil and all the things that happen and the photographers there for the photo shoot in the bedroom, and mother has arrived on the train and she's come up the stairs, calling, 'I'm here Mary, I'm here,' and she stepped into the bedroom and I've got the three bridesmaids all done up in their bridesmaids things and me in my red wedding apparel, and she stepped into the bedroom and she said, 'Hello, here I am, what do you think of my outfit?' and she just did a little twirl. She didn't look at me, I'm the bride, she did a little twirl, 'What do you think girls?' and the bridesmaids didn't acknowledge her at all. They were just so disgusted with her [laughs]. So again, you know, it was – a lot of it was all about her really, sadly, hmm.

[1:46:15]

*What was your relationship like with your father in law?*

Ah, he was a very dear man and I think I did something for him that he will never – well he's died sadly many many years ago, but he would never have forgotten and also my mother in law Joy Day would never have forgotten, in that when they had given me this wedding and we were preparing for the wedding, I thought to myself, I

– there’s nothing here that I can do, I cannot contribute apart from making all the wedding flowers, there’s nothing else that I can contribute and this is costing them a fortune, they don’t have a lot of money, I don’t know what I can do. My mother can’t contribute, they’re giving me the best wedding. And they’d had two sons so from their point of view they probably never thought they would ever have a daughter to get married, so there was power handed to them in that respect if you like or intervention. But they did it with such good grace and such excitement and so much enjoyment and what I said to Joy Day to start with, ‘cause my father in law was a very nervous man, suffered with angina, had lots of headaches and was not a well man at all, but I said to my mother in law, ‘Do you think he would give me away?’ And she said, ‘Oh I don’t know, it’d be wonderful if he would but he’s so nervous, he would have to take so many tranquilisers to get through the day he might pass out,’ so I said, ‘Well would you sound him out and see how he would feel about it?’ and I think she was delighted and thrilled that I’d asked. And in turn he accepted and was delighted and thrilled and he had that moment that he never would have thought he would ever give a bride away. And he took – he popped his tranquilisers and he gave me away and it was very special and it was the only thing I could think that I could ever do for the family that had helped me get a foot on life really.

*How was ... how’s your relationship with – how was your mother’s relationship with your mother in law, what was your mother in law’s impression?*

My mother was fiercely jealous of my mother in law, Joy Day. But Joy Day and I used to have lots of valuable conversations that we’d talk into the night, we were a real mindset together, usually when she was bleaching my hair or something like that, you know, we did those girly things together, and we would talk and she would say to me, ‘There are secrets in Alice’s past, and you will not know, you may not even know till she dies what those secrets are,’ and we used to speculate and wonder about them. But she was always, Joy Day was always trying to find ways of being kind to Alice, always, she was very sensitive to Alice’s needs, but Alice was very jealous of Joy Day.

[1:49:48]

*How did you feel when your mother passed?*

... New Years Eve 1974, been to a party with my two children, they were so close in age we used to have twin prams for them, and the idea would be that we took the twin pram body and parked it up where the party was and we could settle them down and then we could go and have a little bit of a boogie and a little drinky and have the party. But the children wouldn't settle down, they kept crying through the night. So in the end it was probably about four in the morning we had completely given up and so we said, 'Look, let's give up, let's go home, they're not going to settle and we've had a party, we can't stay any longer, let's go home.' So we did this and we got back to Cheshunt [ph] and we settled the children down in bed, and the doorbell went, it's about six in the morning now on New Years Day 1974 and there's a policeman at the door. And he said, 'Mary Godfrey?' I said, 'Yes,' he said, 'I'm very sorry to tell you that your mother has died.' And I remember thanking him politely and off he went and then I remember sitting back down on the stair, the bottom stair, and they do say this happens, that everything that's happened in the life of that person goes in front of you in a whizz, everything. And I just relived all the moments in just – just sat there completely still and thinking of all the times that she'd taken me home and all the way she was, and everything, just all flashed in front of me. And ... I didn't cry ... but I became very frightened. Because we were estranged at the time of her death, she was sixty-nine ... I got to think that I couldn't be in a room on my own because she would come to me in spirit form. And I was very frightened. And each time ... I couldn't go to bed early without my husband, I couldn't be in a room on my own because I could almost physically see her and she would be doing that [makes non verbal gesture] and it really unsettled me and it made me very fearful because I was frightened that she had gone to her grave when we weren't speaking, and not only that she had gone to her grave with all these secrets about the other daughter that she didn't know I knew about, so she had gone to her grave with secrets, and whether or not in her passing she knew that I knew, I don't know. But I was very frightened of being in a room on my own until her spirit had departed.

*How long hadn't you spoken to her for?*

Six months, she never saw my – my son who was six months old, probably longer than that, she saw my daughter, when my daughter was newborn, and I think a year later, my daughter was eighteen months and my son was six months when she died and she'd never seen my son. So we just – I think it was the jealousy thing that broke us in the end and she did become very difficult, with the people that she was living with. When she retired she was given a place that she could live, and she became very demanding, things like – she was ill, she did have pleurisy because of all this smoking probably, and this place that she was living in which was a very comfortable little bedsit that she was given and we visited her there, that's where she met my daughter when she was newborn. But she got to be very difficult lodger, she was a lodger in this house, and the people that owned the house, she kept demanding of them, she kept coughing very loudly as they went on their way, demanding attention so they had to go and say, 'Are you alright Alice?' and then one or two occasions when she accused them of stealing money from her purse, which was all absolute rubbish, she just – her brain had just gone I think, she was just so unreasonable and difficult. And it was all around this time that I couldn't be coping with her either, she was so difficult, so I think that was partly why we fell out, but she was in hospital six months before she died and that's when I discovered this other daughter through the welfare officer writing and saying that she'd had a birthday card from her other daughter and that's how it all fell out, but she didn't know that I knew. So she was just generally a very very difficult woman, very bitter, yeah.

*Can you think of the nicest and most meaningful thing she ever said to you?*

... It was all about her really. I can remember her saying she couldn't [laughs] – she measured everything by her – my father, and everything I did was either, 'Oh your father would have done that,' or, 'your father would never have done that,' and that was the way she measured everything, you know, I wasn't a person in my own right, I was just somebody that was – was ... erm ... oh I don't know, sort of something that happened from the marriage rather than – I can't explain it really, no I don't think so but she was always very loving, but she did set me off on some hysterics. I mean I – with all the comings and goings that I had as a very young child it is documented in

my records that I became very hysterical, I used to have bouts of hysteria where – and scream all through the night and they would give me sleeping tablets to knock me out, probably so the matron could get a good night's sleep, don't know. And I know that there was one time when I went – used to walk to the gate, matron would say to me, 'Now, your mother's going home now Mary so walk to the gate with her and wave goodbye,' which is what I would do. And she set off one time hysterically herself, saying, 'I don't want to leave you, I don't want to leave you,' and it set me off and we had a terrible hysterical set to at the gates, you know, because she had to go and I wanted to go with her 'cause she was weeping and howling and she was very theatrical in that way. But again I do still – think in hindsight, I mean that the mindset she had was just always to get me back, always to get me back, always wanted to have me back and it's easy to understand that because of course she'd lost another daughter, but then reading in her – her notes, you know, that her records that she actually said, 'Take this daughter away,' I don't know whether there's ever a lot of guilt associated with sending one daughter away and not wanting to lose another daughter and maybe feeling a failure, I might feel a failure I think if I had two daughters and lost them both. So I don't think there was anything particularly loving that I can remember that she said to me. A lot of it was about her really, yeah.

*Would you say that your mother ... the way your mother was, you lost out on a normal childhood?*

Yes, of course. Yes. Yes, because I mean my childhood, I have good memories of it but it was by no means a normal childhood, so yes I did lose out because – and to this day I don't know why, although the reasons put forward that she couldn't have me was because I would have had childhood illnesses and she would have lost her job, well I don't know in 1952, '53, whether there was a welfare state, I mean it wouldn't happen now would it if a mother had a child and couldn't keep the child, she'd go and get a benefit, she'd be given a home, she'd be given everything wouldn't she, so why mother couldn't keep me, I don't know. Perhaps the benefits system wasn't there in '52, I don't know.

*What would you have changed, like what would you have liked to have seen be done differently?*

... I have generally good memories of my time in Barnardo's, but I would say of all the time in Barnardo's it was the leaving and going to that hostel in Ealing, was the thing I would most have changed if I could have done, hmm, that was the worst part, the leaving.

[1:59:40]

*Did you ever return to Barnardo's?*

Oh yes, all the time, because that's where we have our council meetings, yes.

*So you visit the matron and people staying there?*

Oh, well you see it's not there now, the matron's – the children's home were all closed in the early '70s so although I go there it's just their head office now so it's not actually the children's home anymore. So no – so – but from that time, no because by the time I was sort of ready to go visit and go and do, I think it had almost become ... early '70s, so although I go there it's just their head office now so it's not actually the children's home anymore. So no, so – but from that time ... no because by the time I was sort of ready to go visit and go and do, I think it had almost become ... it had closed down 'cause the home was closed in the early '70s really, yeah.

*FS: Sorry to interrupt, let you know that you've had two hours now.*

Oh my goodness [all laugh].

*I know, it goes so quick, would you like a break now?*

I'll just have a drink, I'm alright thank you. Unless you want a drink?

*No no, I'm fine.*

I tell you what, I might have a comfort break, shall I do that?

*FS: It's good to.*

*Yeah.*

Yeah.

*Okay.*

[End of Track 1]

[Track 2]

*MS: Camera rolling.*

*How did you meet your husband?*

There's a little story on that. I'm at the hostel that is just outside of Barkingside, this is before I've gone to Ealing, this hostel, I was only there for six months. The very very first day I've come out of the hostel, it's on a Sunday and I'm going down to get my season ticket to travel into Knightsbridge on my very very first job. I've come out of the front door of the hostel on my journey down to the station to get my ticket and I'm looking the business, I have got new high heels on, I've been kitted out you see because I'm now going to be in the world of work, so I've got this grey coat on with the tartan lapels, and my husband to this day says he can still picture me in this coat. So I've stepped outside with my handbag, really feeling the business, only been left school three weeks, and outside in the street there are about four motorbikes, leather clad blokes, uh-oh. Anyway, so shy was I and I – all this business, 'Hello darling, woof woof,' whistles and, 'where you off to then?' oh that's how it used to be, and then not so much these days, but in those days, you know, you'd get wolf whistled and, you know, cat calls and everything if you were strutting along looking, you know, smart and all these motorbike guys. Anyway, I stuck my nose in the air and strutted off, above all of this rubbish and nonsense. Anyway, went and got my ticket, I came back and they'd all gone, and my roommate who is now on council with me, Jean, she said in bed that night talking, and she said, 'What do you think of those boys then that were outside the hostel?' I said, 'I don't know, I didn't even notice them, not interested,' 'Oh,' she said, 'only one of them really fancies you,' I said, 'Oh really, well I'm not interested, who was he?' 'Well his name's Laurence and he really fancies you, do you want to go out with him?' So I said, 'Well who is he, I don't even know who he was,' so she said, 'Well he really wants to go out with you, will you go out with him?' so I said, 'No, I'm not one bit interested, I really am not, I'm just about to start my first job ever and there's too many other things cooking and no I'm definitely not wanting to go out on a date at all.' Anyway two or three or four days

gone by and we're now on the following Thursday, again talking in bed, I've been at work for about four or five days now, my first job. Laying in bed in the dark, saying to Jean, 'Jean, you know that boy Laurence that said he wanted to go out with me?' 'Yes,' she said, 'Do you think he's still interested?' I said, and she said, 'Well I reckon he is, do you want me to have a chat with his friend and see,' 'Yeah,' I said, 'well if he still wants to go out with me I'll meet him next Thursday and we'll go the pictures.' 'Alright,' she said, 'I'll set it up.' Well the following Thursday, sure enough, set up, and Laurence and I went on a date and we went to the pictures, I fell asleep in the film but that's an old story. Anyway, years on years on years on, it would turn out that he thought I had asked him out, she cooked the whole lot up, he had never asked me in the first place and the first he knew was this girl called Mary, you know, the one that strutted out in the high heels and the grey coat with the pink tartan lapels, whatever, she has asked him out but he didn't know anything about it and so he said, 'Oh alright then,' but it seemed that the first he knew I had asked him out. And we didn't do things that way around in those days, I was never going to be that bold, but that's how – the first he knew that I had asked him out but in fact she'd cooked it all up, this girl Jean, so that's how we met, it was a misunderstanding [laughs].

*What was his impression of you being in a Barnardo's children home?*

... He is in denial about it, he is not – he's supportive in what I do but doesn't really want to know about it. And I think that comes from things happening in my young life that he wasn't involved with, didn't play a part in, couldn't help with, couldn't control, I think that's where it comes from. And if he sees this video and disagrees with me I shall probably be in trouble, but I think that's where it comes from. I think he felt that those things that happened to me were – were something that he had no concept of, couldn't always grasp it and wasn't there to fix it and put it right, so doesn't want to go there.

[00:05:53]

*How did you feel with you having – growing up in a Barnardo's home?*

The same, the same, he doesn't really – he knows it happened, but you wouldn't enter into a conversation about it with him, no.

*So when he met you there were no stigma attached?*

No, not at all, no.

*How's your relationship helped you throughout your years, has it grown stronger?*

Yes, yes, definitely, yeah. He's a very caring man, and he's a good anchor, he's a launch pad, so he's steady and I leap [laughs]. That's how it is. A rock.

[00:06:45]

*Looking back now, would you say that your life has turned out the way you would have expected it to?*

Well you never know what to expect do you when you're very young. I thought I was going to be a nun, that's another story, I tell you, I can see your shoulders [laughs] raising there in laughter. Yes, I thought I was going to be a nun because Barnardo's has this very Christian ethic and I had this idea that I thought I was going to be called to be a nun. And I felt that I needed to have a sign of some sort, so ... we had just one pillow to go to sleep with which was never quite enough so I used to take my dressing gown and roll it and put it under my pillow to get my head a bit more for a comfortable night's sleep. And I remember thinking to myself, if I'm going to be a nun, if I'm going to be called to be a nun, my dressing gown will disappear from under my pillow tonight and it did, it went. And I've questioned afterwards and matron said, 'Well I've told you you're not to have your dressing gown under the pillow so I took it away,' but that didn't matter, it was so strange that that pillow went, that dressing gown went from under my pillow. And so no I thought I was going to be a nun but obviously I wasn't a nun [laughs].

*How much of that Christian ethic has rubbed off on you would you say?*

It's – it's everything, it's my whole mindset, it's – it's the way I live my life. I go to church every Sunday, and I pass the ... the Christian ethic to my children, and it's important, yes, definitely.

[00:08:47]

*How was ... going through all your experiences, how has it affected your life today and impacted the way you are as a person?*

I think it's enriched me, I mean some of us can share and do and – and make a difference and share the experiences, I can do that, not everybody can, but I think it's enriched me in a way that it gives me the chance to give back, so that I do these talks for Barnardo's, or I do lots of other voluntary work as well, it's not only that, because I just have definitely got this thought in my head that I live my life giving back the chances that were given to me.

*Are your children aware of what you went through as a child?*

Erm ... yes.

*Do you speak of it much?*

Pretty much, they're fascinated by it, but they're both busy with their lives now and they have the foundation of knowledge that it happened to me and I think their life is enriched with the fascination that they have with it, I think. But we don't talk about it a lot because life goes on and we're all busy with doing our own things aren't we really and you can't dwell in the past.

*What aspects of growing up at Barnardo's have you brought to your own home and to living your own life?*

Honesty ... good manners ... for me personally being able to empathise with people in need, awareness of – seeing the need, seeing the need and thinking that you can fix it, can't always but I'm not the one to walk past, I'm the one to stop and say, 'Hi, can I help?'

*Would you say growing up in Barnardo's has affected your ability to make relationships and friendships with different people because you were so alone?*

I don't believe so, I have many many friends ... I don't think so, I mean that question might be better coming from my friends who might answer that, but from my – as far as I'm aware no I've made lots of lasting friendships. I believe in friendship very much so, I love girly times, hmm [laughs].

*Was there ever a time where you felt as though you could have talked to somebody as though you could have had somebody there to support you?*

Only that time in the hostel, the Ealing hostel, yes, probably then, yeah. But that was the only time really.

*Was your mother around at that time?*

Yes, I used to see her, still about once a month she would come and visit me or I'd visit her, yes. We never got into any real deep conversations particularly about me, it was still tending to be a bit about her really, hmm.

*Was there anyone who you could have spoken to looking back now in hindsight?*

Well I think my mother in law, straight, you know, she took that role on, I met her when I was fifteen so it was almost like a jumping off point from Barnardo's and I was very very lucky that she took me on. So I wasn't in an abyss of nowhere, she took me on.

*Did she say she saw you as a daughter?*

Yes. Definitely.

*Treated you as a daughter?*

Definitely, hmm.

*What were your most warming memories of her?*

Just the girly chats we used to have, and how kind she was at giving my mother time and space and understanding and an opportunity to share space with me in a family home by inviting her on that Christmas occasion, very kind lady.

*Did nobody ever have girly chats with you prior to her?*

Yes, there would have been Auntie Pauline, we would have probably had some girly chats, but she had so many others to look and – and ... deal with really, other girls, so she was there if I wanted her really but I was – I was okay really.

[00:14:20]

*How was your relationship with the rest of the children, did you ever particularly bond with any one of them?*

Uh-huh, yes, bonded with my friend Maggie who lives in Peterborough, she's two years older than me and she was the one that would despatch me on all these crazy dares and sit in the chair and point at [laughs] – so yes but we're still bonded. We had a situation where a girl came into the home having tragically lost her mother and father within a year of each other and she was the most vulnerable time, she was fourteen. And I was fourteen as well. So we shared the small bedroom together, like the grown ups bedroom really, and she was a very traumatised girl and I remember making her cry one night in bed when you had these late night talks in the dark in the

bedroom and I remember saying something like, 'It's very sad that you've lost your mum and your dad, but I've still got my mum haven't I?' and I remember these great gulps and tears and the bed was shaking and I'd made her cry such bitter tears and I didn't mean to, I was trying to be that person to talk through and get her to open up a little bit if you like because she was a bit clammed shut with grief. So I missed my guess there and got it very wrong. And she was a girl that was punching walls and still is really, she's – the trauma of the loss of her parents and coming to Barnardo's so late, she was just rebelling the institution and everything that went on without accepting any of the benefits of it and just fighting it all and making enemies of everything really. And – but she is a good friend, but she's the sort of friend that most of my other friends don't want to be with her, so a standalone kind of friendship because she's so abrasive, damaged, with the loss of her parents I think. So I think that's – we were so different, I mean she came into Barnardo's at fourteen and I was fully institutionalised from the age of three, so we were so so different, I was accepting of my childhood, and she was fighting it, and so ... but we're still very much in touch. But she's very traumatised, she can't decide whether she – she was one of the immigration parties to Australia and she cannot decide where she wants to live, and so she lives in Australia for a year and then she comes back and then she goes back and currently she's living in Scotland, trying to get back for the fourth or fifth time in four years, so she's a real boomerang girl and a bit lonely and makes enemies everywhere. So that's just another example of on the people that I grew up with, yeah.

*Did you and the people you grew up with, did you ever share stories about each other's family?*

No, we weren't very interested, we just weren't. No, we didn't really talk about our backgrounds, we were only concerned about what was happening that day really so we didn't. And really thinking about the fascination of your background and where it all happens, a lot of that started, you know, in the media, when the BBC made some documentaries in the 1990s called Barnardo's children, it was then that the records were released. None of us had our records, our – Barnardo's mindset as far as I was concerned was that you give a child a new start, whatever had gone on before doesn't

matter. So nobody was busy talking about what had gone on before, and nobody certainly wanted to know about records or anything, but this BBC programme, it sort of knee jerked a need to maybe dig a bit deeper, and of course now as we know it's of its time, there's lots of family history questions and Who Do You Think You Are and all these sorts of programmes that, you know, where people are finding their families and finding themselves. And so it was borne of that that I got my records and then I got in turn my mother's records, and then you learn a bit more. But it was only sort of in my mid-forties when I got my rec – no fifty plus when I got my records, hmm, not very interested particularly on a day to day business lifestyle when you're growing up, you know, we never talked about each other's background.

[00:19:31]

*Did you ever feel as though you – growing up in a foster home would have been better for you with a normal family dynamic?*

... Once or twice I did wonder whether it would have been, but no more than just wondering, hmm, yeah, once or twice I might have done, yeah, because they might have – I might have had a bit more personal interest in my development if I had actually lived in a smaller family unit. I mean anything I did at school, open days or performances, matron really couldn't get around to see us all so really people didn't come and see anything that you may have achieved, so your personal achievement was what you knew you'd done without – whereas if you were with your mother or your father, I mean I know my children, goodness, when I was in business travelling around the country I would never have missed a school assembly for anything, I would have been there, I would have – because I knew how important it is to support your children and – when they're doing good things at school and feeling good and need encouragement, you get there and you do it.

[00:19:46]

*How did you feel when matron did see your achievements and did acknowledge the good that you'd achieved?*

Here's a story, it's time to leave and I'm looking for a job thinking what am I going to do, all the trauma associated with it because not only am I leaving school, I'm leaving Barnardo's, I'm starting a new life and getting a job and earning my own way and I'm fifteen. And so it was difficult and I think probably I was very nervy and worried and upset about things. And Uncle Ron who was the house parent in here, he said to me, 'I think when you leave school Mary you should seriously think about becoming a machinist in a factory,' and [laughs] so needless to say I don't really feel potential was realised was it? Because I chose my own job, I chose my own path, and ended up with a very successful business, a nationwide business employing friends and family and turning over a quarter of a million a year in the 1980s, but he thought I'd be very good as a machinist in a factory [laughs].

*What were your ambitions growing up, your ambitions for the future?*

They tended ... I don't think I saw too clearly ahead, I think quite honestly just one day at a time, just getting through it and making your way, I don't think I saw too far ahead, just to get through each day really, and make a success of it [laughs].

*Why do you think you didn't have plans for your future?*

I don't know, perhaps I couldn't see them, I don't know, I couldn't see it, I don't know. I was so excited about everything – new thing that I did but I think it was just learning new things and doing new things, I don't think I had a vision of being married or making a life or having a home or anything, I think I was too busy just trying to make a success of each day [laughs]. Learning a skill or a trade and earning a living really.

[00:23:41]

*How did – how did growing up in Barnardo's affect you as a mother and raising your children?*

I wasn't very good at being a new mum. Erm [sighs], yeah, I hadn't grown up in a family where I'd witnessed young children or babies, or even animals really so the whole family thing, you know, like having a doggie or a baby or anything like that, I hadn't grown up with that so I think it – I wasn't really quite prepared. And I think I hurt my daughter's feelings early on, when we're talking when she's all grown up and we're talking. And I said, 'Well, Mandy, I think really as four years married, making our way and getting the home together and I wanted to have a baby, but it wasn't necessarily that I wanted to have a child, it was the meal ticket to leaving work and being the housewife and the homemaker, and that's what I wanted,' I wanted to bake bread and dig the garden and grow potatoes, I wanted to keep house. And in those days in the early '70s, maybe now, I don't know, that was the way you did it, you have to – you left work to have a baby and then the home and the family was started. And I think I explained this in a moment of sheer honesty with her saying that, you know, having her was just sort of almost like the meal ticket for me to play house, and I think she was a bit teary upset that I'd said it, and I said, 'I didn't mean it like that really, that was very callous of me to put it that way but I,' was a moment of honesty. But obviously once you have a child you fall in love with them don't you and that is your family, genuinely your family and then my son came along a year later and you fall in love all over again and they are – and family is everything, everything in life is your family, is just you're nowhere if you're not in a family.

[00:25:12]

*How was your relationship with your brother in law?*

... My brother in law, which brother in law?

*Your husband's brother?*

Oh, lovely, he's lovely, yes, always got on very well with him. I suspect he was a little jealous of me when I first came on the scene though, because he and his brother were very very close, in age and in every way and the – his brother being the older brother, my husband, bringing a girlfriend into the home, I think he felt his position

was a little bit shifted, but very good relationship. We go on holiday with them every year as a foursome, for fifty years, yeah. So good relationship, with my sister in law as well.

*Did you feel like you were gaining a whole new family?*

Oh yes, definitely, yes, definitely.

*How welcoming were they at the start of your relationship with your husband?*

I think my brother in law was a little bit wary of me, but he accepted me quite – quite soon, you know, we're very warm with each other now and all good. Yeah.

[00:27:31]

*Hmm ... what would you have improved of your life, if you could have?*

What would I have improved ... ? Probably I would have tried to have been more loving to my children and show affection to them more than I did, because when my children were very young I wasn't terribly good at hugs and kisses with them either, I am now, but when they were very young I wasn't, no. So I would have tried to have been a better mum, first time mum, yeah.

*Would you say that was a result of the way you grew up and the lack of intimacy?*

I do, I do think so, I do exactly that's what I do think so, yeah. Yeah.

*So what would you have liked to have told your mother?*

Oh, so much, she's with me now, I do these talks so often now and it's nearly always about her more than me so nothing's changed really has it with her [laughs]. I would love to have a conversation with her now, I think I would love to say, 'Well look mum, I did alright didn't I?' you know, so that it could be about me, me done good

[laughs], yeah. Yeah, there are lots of times when I think I would love to talk to her again, and when I do my talks, quite often when there's an acknowledgement of your talk, when someone stands up and acknowledges your talk, quite often it's said, once or twice, 'Your mother, if she was here she would be so proud of you,' and that really makes me well up, yeah, it does, that they say that to me, that if she was here your mother would be so proud of you.

*Did you ever witness your mother ever being proud of you?*

Hmm.

*Have you ever witnessed your mother ever be proud of you, or show you any sort of affection?*

Yes, she would do [laughs] – on a bus, if we went on a bus together because she was so obviously the grandmother rather than the mother because she was so much older than me she would get into conversations with people on a bus randomly and before I would know it she would say, 'Yes, well you know, she's my daughter, she's not my granddaughter, she's my daughter, she's a fine girl isn't she?' [laughs] so I'd get a lot of that, 'She's a fine girl, just like her father.'

*Did the age gap ever bother you?*

Well it – it was – yes, it wasn't a success, she never saw me for developing as a person at all, so no it's – there was too much distance between us, we were not singing out of the same hymn book at all.

*Your idea of normal growing up, what would it have been?*

Normal growing up would have been probably like my husband and his brother grew up in their family home, with husband and brother and mum and dad and school holidays on the family farms, and going to school down the road, and just not

anywhere near as privileged as my upbringing, but it depends how you measure privilege.

[00:30:29]

*Did you ever think you were any different as a child?*

Yes, yes. Oh yes, it separates you. You always feel different. I didn't talk to anyone about growing up in Barnardo's at all, until about five years ago. And nobody knew, and that wasn't because I was shy, or holding back, it was simply because I thought nobody would be interested in me, and what I've found is on council we try to think how we can make a difference, what we can do for Barnardo's and on the back of all these programmes like Who Do You Think You Are and Family Histories, I began to think maybe if I were prepared to share a little bit of my experience I could do some fundraising for Barnardo's, and that's how it came about and that is what I do. And I cannot believe the interest that there is in booking me to speak about my life growing up as a Dr Barnardo's child, and that's – there's so much interest in it and as I say it was a time written in history and that's why it's – I think it's viewed with such interest, people just want to know what it was like.

*Were you ever ashamed?*

... Not ashamed, but I wouldn't willingly have declared that I was a Barnardo child, I would have hung back and got to the back of the queue when the questions were asked, so I wouldn't have to declare one way or the other.

*Why would you have done that?*

Because it would have taken a lot of explaining that I wouldn't have been prepared to enter into a conversation about it really probably.

*Did – were you ever ... were you ever told about – were you ever talked to about being a Barnardo's child and being a – not normal?*

No, I don't think so, nobody would ever have suggested that or made me feel that in any way. No, I find people who subsequently meet me and know me over the years have always been slightly sort of interested really rather than anything else, yeah.

[00:34:06]

*Hmm ... what advice would you have given to yourself as you now, what advice would you have given to yourself in your lowest points, so for example when you were in Ealing?*

[Pause]. Hmm, it's a hard one really, I don't know, I was so very young when I was there anyway, it's hard to put an old head on what would have been young shoulders then, I feel now I would like to say well hang on in there it will come right, but that's today's terminology and I wouldn't have put it in words like that then. So I think each day was a bit of a black hole in those days without actually being able to look out of the hole and see it could be better.

*And what would have made it better for you?*

To fill the hostel up with girls [laughs] and to have some girlfriends and have a bit of a lifestyle, yeah, that's all it would have taken really, just to have had some chums.

*So at that point you had nobody who you felt as though you could have talked to?*

Erm [pause] not – not really, no, no not really, I think I was pretty much alright.

[00:35:41]

*[Pause] What advice would you give to young people who are in a similar situation?*

... Friendship is – in the absence of a close family, friendship is the best you can do, and in any situation I say we need just one really good friend, and cultivate that one good friend. Yeah, and ... yeah I think you've just got to find a person, a good friend,

a soul mate or whatever it will be to support you and sustain you and the way that that happens is that you give to them and you get back don't you, so if you're that person to them then they'll be that person to you. One good friend [laughs].

*In Barnardo's, were the other children, did they ever see their parents regularly?*

Ooh, we used to do some matchmaking there, yes, my friend Maggie who lives in Peterborough, she and her brother were in the cottage with me and their dad used to come and visit once a month as well, he was a dad on his own and my mum used to visit once a month and she was a mum on her own and we used to try and plot to see if they would get together or something, so that was quite funny, nothing ever came of it of course, yeah.

*Do you think that was because you subconsciously wanted a normal stable family unit?*

Want everything neat and tidy yeah [laughs], yes.

*Would you have liked that to have worked?*

Yes, we would have loved that, yeah, mum and dad – their dad and my mum together and we'd all have gone off and lived in a nice family home together, that would have been nice, yeah [laughs], yeah, it was a fantasy isn't it [laughs].

*Did you ever contemplate living with your half siblings who found you?*

Erm ... I never seriously thought about it, and they never seriously offered to have me, so it didn't really come up, no.

*How did they feel about you being at Barnardo's?*

They were surprised and they never knew that that's where I ended up until they discovered me when I was about nine or ten I think. And then of course they pitched

in and wanted to visit me and send me parcels and have me for school holidays and stuff, but there was never any talk about any – going any further. One sister's marriage dissolved so that wasn't happening, the other sister was a spinster lady and Barnardo's felt that I oughtn't go and stay with her 'cause her boyfriend was living with her at the time, and the other sister had a small house and three children so she didn't have the means to look after me, so there were reasons why but it never came up really that I would go and live with them, no.

[00:39:11]

*Post Barnardo's, did you ever talk to them about your experiences and why it took them so long –*

I tried to, I tried to, but the older sister was very very ill and I'd been trying to find out her impressions of Alice, my mother, when mother first came onto the scene, because I'd been really hungry for information and knowledge about this first marriage, and how Frances came about, my half sister. And so I would – I'd been trying to find out through the elder sister who was the one that found me and showed interest, but she was so poorly and near to death at the time that she wrote to me in very shaky handwriting saying that she wouldn't be able to help me and wished me well.

*Did your mother have any other family members?*

She had – she claimed she was one of fourteen children, at the time of my marriage she had found her brother, George and he had a wife called Ethel I think or something. And so we did visit them once or twice with my mother at the time of getting married, like when I got married and George came, my Uncle George came to my marriage, my wedding. But as I said, years on when I was trying to research this early marriage I couldn't find him anymore and I think he'd died. But everything's of its time and when you're a young family making your way you don't have time to look back because you're too busy looking forward and making your home and building your family together. It's only then – I mean my idea is that you get to be about forty in life and you've got your children, you've made your home, you are the

person you will be and that's where you've reached the time when you do have the time to maybe look back a bit. And I mean that's how it was for me, just look back a bit. And to that end some of my contemporaries, we met up – we've always stayed in touch but we met up and had a meeting and had a social time together when we were in our mid forties, and we decided that we'd all three of us had wanted to go to Australia on the immigration party of '63, but for whatever reason they didn't go, the reasons I've explained to you why I didn't go because of my mother, and so we said, 'Well look, we all want to do this don't we?' 'Yes,' 'We didn't go did we?' 'No,' 'Why don't we go then?' 'Okay,' so we had this plan that we were going to see our fiftieth birthdays together in Australia. So we made it happen and it's 1999, and the twins, the two girls and me all going to turn fifty in that December, altogether. And we'd got ourselves sorted out because we were going to visit Barnardo's headquarters as part of Barnardo council role, all the other children that had been emigrated of the 1963 party we were going to meet there and it was all sorted. And about a week before we were due to fly on our wonderful journey to Australia, my husband was taken ill and he had almost a heart attack, not quite, but it resulted in quadruple heart bypass, so I didn't go. And they went without me [laughs], so it's one of those things like, you know, am I ever going to get to Australia, but they went and I didn't [laughs]. Yeah.

[00:43:06]

*Did the thought ever cross you remind of how life would have been if you had gone?*

Of course, it does, but because it didn't happen I can't imagine how it would have been and I'm quite content with the way my life has been really, yeah, don't strive for something I didn't know about, yeah.

*So there wasn't anything you would have liked to have done differently or changed?*

The Australia thing is the pipedream, yes it is, it's the box that hasn't been ticked and I don't know if it ever will be.

[00:43:46]

*What are your ambitions for the future, for now?*

... My ambitions for the future is to make sure that my children are happy, in their marriages, in their families, and they don't want for too much. That my husband will stay healthy 'cause he's since had another stent, so you know, he's got a few issues there. And I don't lose my home again, I hope I don't have to lose my home again because the house I live in now is called Seventh Haven [laughs], you know why it's called Seventh Haven don't you, and that was just my married homes, so of all the places I lived well before I got married, I mean it'd probably be Twenty-Seventh Haven, so I don't want to move again [laughs].

[00:44:48]

*FS: Can I let you know that we've got fifteen minutes more until three hours.*

*Really?*

Is it dark outside yet? [all laugh]

*Oh I forgot what I was going to ask.*

*FS: Sorry.*

*No, it's okay [laughs] ... completely, it's gone.*

Erm ... there is one story I could take you back to whether we're dipping in and out too much here but editing will put it right I guess. I'm four years old and I've gone to live – when my mother has just arrived at another children's home and forcibly taken me away and this time she's got a man with her and she's saying, 'This is your new daddy,' so off we go, accepting again of this new daddy. And that doesn't work, we're about a year I think probably, I had my fourth birthday I think maybe with him,

and that all broke down. And I did have some difficulties with him because he was not an appropriate person to be with a four year old girl, and there were times when we lived in a – a tenement building on the fourth floor old house, and mother would go down to the yard to empty the ashes and he would try to be a bit inappropriate. And I remember this story that children can be very secretive if not ashamed and so I – I didn't tell her at all, until one day I thought perhaps I would tell her what had happened, or what had nearly happened, and she was so horrified that she immediately got the welfare officer in again 'cause she always had a welfare officer all the time, and I remember this meeting, he is sitting in the room, stepfather, I am there, she is there, and the welfare officer is there. And she is screaming at me hysterically to tell the welfare officer what I had told her about him, he's sitting there, and a four year old just completely clammed up, I couldn't – couldn't say anything, I said, 'I can't speak, I can't speak,' I really was dumb and I couldn't, I couldn't, the confrontation of the moment was too much. And I remember her screaming at me and saying, 'If you will just tell the welfare officer what you've told me we can get him put in prison,' and the fear of it was so great with him sitting there that I couldn't speak and so I didn't actually get to tell the social worker what had happened. But in my records there is a report for the med – the ... Bedford Magistrates' Court that does touch on that particular episode. So generally a bit dysfunctional [laughs].

[00:48:33]

*What had you hoped to achieve by joining the Barnardo's Council?*

To make a difference with the work of Barnardo's, to spread the word of the work of Barnardo's and be part of the biggest family in the world, which is Barnardo's. There is a great affinity when you meet anyone, even like yourself, I mean you've come through care as well and you may recognise this yourself, there's a great affinity with someone who has lived through the care system, whether it's Barnardo's or fostering, you have a bond, and if you're appointed to Council you're in with people who have got that same bond and it's like your brother, your sister, hmm.

*Would you say that stemmed from your time at Barnardo's?*

Yes, definitely, wanting to be associated with that upbringing, and the people that shared it with me, almost like a family memory bond probably.

*Did you feel like part of a big family at Barnardo's?*

Looking back, yes, living through it no. Living through it you felt that you were the only child, in you know, even though you were with a lot of children you always felt your identity was I'm an only child, which of course was – turned out to be anything but because of discovering Frances and my father's children as well, it was anything but what I believed was the case. But looking back yes of course it did feel like growing up in a big family but when you're living through it you felt your own identity in quite a solitary way really, yeah.

*And did Barnardo's ever take you out on day trips or?*

Oh yes, thirty taxis, have you ever heard of the thirty taxis, London taxis take deprived children on outings every year, I'm not sure if they still do it now, thirty taxis all in a line going to Clacton, I was one of those. They gave us wonderful opportunities, I love opera and they gave us lots of opportunities, lots of free tickets to Covent Garden and Sadler's Wells, all of those things that I was interested in they gave me opportunities to go and do and see and be part of. Yeah, lots of opportunities.

*How did you feel going on those outings, did you feel like you were being looked at differently because you were one of those children?*

No, no not at all, not at all, no.

*What would you thank Barnardo's for most?*

The memories.

*Is there anything else you'd like to add?*

... Well just thank you really for giving me an opportunity to share it and if any good comes of it in a learning or an educational mindset in time to come then praise be [laughs].

*How have you felt doing this interview?*

Comfortable ... yeah, it's good to share.

*Thank you [laughs].*

Thank you.

[End of Track 2]

[End of Interview] [02:52:35]