

Voices of Volunteering: 75 Years of Citizenship and Service

Interview Transcript

Title Page

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Interviewee's Surname: Brown

Title: Mrs

Interviewee's Forenames: Gladys

Gender: F

Volunteer/Employee Roles and Dates:

Volunteer 1959-1972

Range of roles over the years

Meals-on-Wheels

Furniture collections and distribution

Emergency feeding

Training

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Interviewer's Notes:

Gladys Brown (GB) talks about her time as a WVS/WRVS Volunteer in Somerset between 1959 and 1972. She was involved with collecting and distributing furniture in her local area, Meals-on-Wheels (MOW), the Flying Food Squad, Emergency Services, One-in-Five, feeding German students and helping at Lenard Cheshire Holmes (Cheshire Holmes).

[Jennifer Hunt]: This is Jennifer Hunt with Gladys Brown on the sixteenth of July 2014 at her home in Ipplepen Newton Abbott, Devon. Gladys would you just like to introduce yourself?

[Gladys Brown]: Well, I'm aged ninety-three, [laughing] and I did quite a number of jobs in the WRVS years ago. In recent years I've done nothing obviously since I moved in to, to Ipplepen I've lost all contact with, with everybody actually. I have no, no contact at all whatsoever.

[JH]: And what's your earliest memories of WRVS or WVS?

[GB]: [Pause] I don't know. I don't, to be honest I don't know how I got in to it. I, I've been thinking about that myself, mm, because none of my neighbours were members. I must have seen something written somewhere, you know, on a poster or something which, which took me in to the office. But in those days it was a very small office and it was in a building which was demolished, demolished eventually and then eventually they had an office in a big building which belonged to the council. But in the early days, I think the first thing I did was, was really was the collecting of furniture. And I had a fifteen hundred weight van and with another lady, not always the same one, mm, we'd go around picking up furniture which other people didn't want and storing it in the basement of this, this council block. It was called Pulteney, either Pulteney House I think it was called.

[JH]: Mm.

[GB]: But I'm not sure, that's years ago, yes.

[JH]: And this was in Bath then?

[GB]: Yes.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: Yes, the Bath area, yes, yes.

[JH]: That's in Bath's area. And why did you decide to join WVS?

[GB]: [Pause] I don't know, it just seemed the right thing to do. I mean I had, I had plenty of time on my hands. I, you know, my husband had a good position, we, I didn't have to work and I had, I had somebody who used to come and clean the house three times a week. Of course, nowadays I have it one, once a week but in those days it was three times a week the woman came. And it just filled in my time and did something useful.

[JH]: Mm. And what was your, as well as picking up and delivering furniture what other roles did you have?

[GB]: Well, like everyone I did Meals-on-Wheels. If, if the lady running Meals-on-Wheels was short of a driver then she would phone me up and I'd do that for her, but I wasn't, I wasn't what you call a regular once a week person. Of course, most of them were, most of them did it for one, one day a week, you know, for was it three hours or so, something like that? And we'd go to the, go to the kitchen and pick up the food and take it round various addresses. But the person with me usually knew more about the district of Bath than I did.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GB]: So that was another reason why I had someone with me because we, you know, she, she, she already knew where the houses were. But, mm, and it wasn't, it wasn't my main, my main occupation at all. Well, I did anything really that was, that needed, that needed doing. I mean I got in to actually cooking because we, we did some minor cooking out at the, you know, well, we had a Tattoo every year in Bath and we had to, you know, produce I think it was sort of cakey things and, and tea for, you know, people there. But, mm, I know I, I went at my own expense I went and took a cooking course.

[JH]: In pickling?

[GB]: Which didn't really help because it was, it was meant for young chefs who knew nothing about cooking and I'd already been doing cooking.

[JH]: Mm.

[GB]: But I, I having the fee so I went through with it. But, you know, I just, I just wanted to fill my life with something, something useful, you know.

[JH]: Yes. And when you were doing Meals-on-Wheels who were you delivering meals to?

[GB]: Oh, [Pause] well, mostly, well I am now although I don't feel, I don't feel that way myself, but elderly people [laughing] who couldn't cope. But I mean I, when you, or thinking it back it really was those that were fragile, you know.

[00:05:00]

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: I mean I, I'm ninety-three but I, I still cope, I still walk next door and to the Top Shop.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And buy my own groceries and do minor cooking, I don't do a great deal of cooking.

[JH]: No.

[GB]: But I do do, you know, small things. But of course, I'm lucky in that I've got a daughter in the village here and a granddaughter so that, you know, if I am in trouble I can always call on them.

[Pause]

[JH]: Mm, mm. [Pause] And, mm, you told me a little bit about the volunteers you used to work with on Meals-on-Wheels but were there any other volunteers you used to work with at the office?

[GB]: Well, [Pause] you see there, there was a lady, a paid secretary who was in the office permanently and she would ring me up and say will I do so and so and did I need help? And I'd say 'Yes, I would like somebody' and she would produce the person. So it, they weren't chosen by me they were chosen by the office, you know, but, but I got to know some of them quite well. But they weren't actually under me as such, they were, they were there, you know, to help if I needed them. I

mean if we had heavy furniture to carry then obviously I needed help. But I hadn't the staff under, under me or anything like that. They just asked me to do things and I would do, I would do it. [laughing] But, oh, it was, it was, well I suppose in a way it was, it filled up my otherwise rather vacant life because I... You know, the trouble is when you're married to, I was married to a fairly senior civil servant and we'd get moved around a lot.

[JH]: Mm.

[GB]: And when you, when you go to a new place you don't know anybody, and then I, you know, and so that's why I threw myself in to WRVS because although I, I, everybody else had been there donkey's years I didn't know anyone to start with. But I've, well I've always liked to fill my time with something useful I suppose is the answer. But I did avoid the school holidays because I've still got a caravan here down in Devon and in those days of course, we had to come down to it and bring the children or and grandchildren as it is eventually and look after them, you know, for, for the school holidays while their, their parents worked. But, as I say, I've still got, still got the caravan to be honest with you. It's, mm, actually I bought it new twenty-three years ago - the van - but prior to that I had a, an older one. I've had three caravans on that site in, over the years. But that, if I think about where my friends are, and I mean friends, I mean there. I mean I know my neighbours to say 'Good morning' to but not, I don't do anything socially with them, whereas when I'm out there there's always something going on. Up until well, to be honest the last two years I've hardly been out at all, and in fact I didn't, two years ago I didn't go out at all because I was ill. But, mm, but I feel that if I'm out there there are a lot of people that, you know, will look out for me.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: I'd do swimming up until three years ago, well two years ago actually but after that I, I... In fact I've got the gear upstairs and I wonder what to do with it, because I don't think I shall ever go swimming again. [Llaughing]

[JH]: No.

[GB]: Anyway there we are.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And you also did, you were part of the Flying Food Squad, the Food Flying Squad with WVS?

[GB]: Yes. [Pause] But do you mean when we, when we...?

[JH]: When you were feeding people then?

[GB]: I know, yes, we did, we did all sorts of different feeding actually. I mean we, mm, there was a, a fete every year that we used to do, do the food for. In that case we were handling money but not keeping it.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: We were serving food and the money went in to whatever charity it was, I've forgotten what charity it was now. But I've done a lot, a lot of that sort of thing.

[00:10:00]

Like, like the Tattoo, that's another one. But we also did, I went to an ROC base and fed them on one of their exercises and stayed overnight. You know, producing well, I suppose it was, [Pause] I don't know which way round it was. I know it was a lunch and dinner and, and a breakfast, and we stayed overnight so I assume we must have gone then after breakfast and stayed all day and then slept the night and served the breakfast. But I don't know how that was ever, how I came to be asked to do that, but, as I say, they'd ring up, ring up the WVS office and say they wanted something done.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And then if I felt I could do it I'd, you know, I would do it, you know. [Pause] But that was a very weird place, it was a, it was all underground and a bit spooky. [Laughing] Anyway there we are.

[JH]: And you also attended events feeding the troops as well?

[GB]: Oh well, that, that, that, that was, that, that was the, that was the Tattoo actually. The me, I mean, mm, every year we did, we did this, but it wasn't, I, there were a large number of us. Mm, what? I don't know, probably as many as twelve I should imagine at that time because we had long trestle tables and we served. We were actually serving, serving food to the performers, the people that were taking part in the Tattoo actually. And I don't know, that was on for several, several days though actually. I can't remember how many days now. But that was all quite simple food really.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: Nothing I couldn't cook. We had a, we did have an old-fashioned boiler though with the coal going underneath it to heat water. But it was quite simple food, there was nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, you know, definitely nothing difficult. To be honest I can't remember menus now, it's too

long ago.

[JH]: And did you receive any training for, apart from the course that you went on yourself?

[GB]: Oh no, no, no, nobody trained, no, I didn't have any WRVS training but I did train trainers eventually, yes. But no, no, I had no, I had no training at all. I, I, I suppose the answer is they, they realised I was, I would, I would turn my hand to anything.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And that's perhaps how it all started, started really. But, [Pause] yes. No, I never, I never, never, I did, I didn't, didn't attend any, any WRVS training but eventually when I left them I did do a month's training for school meals but that was, that was after I'd left the WRVS. I left them when I moved to Lee-on-Solent and my daughter's husband left her and she felt she had to go out to work to support the children and so I had the children to look after, which meant that I had to give up the, most of the activities we did. But, [Pause] yes. But I mean when I was there I did, also did, I did do training of trainers but that was to do with a lady called Bird, Doreen Bird I think it was, and she had me going all, all over the place actually. It was only once a week but it was all over the place doing, teaching, teaching people to become trainers to, you know, sort of spread the word.

[JH]: Right.

[GB]: But I had to give it all up in the end. I also had an elderly mother who came, came to live with me so that was it.

[00:15:00]

I went, mm...

[JH]: And when you were training people were you training them to promote WVS or were you training them to do things like Emergency Services?

[GB]: Well, it was Emergency Service training. I mean, I mean they were already, they were already, they'd already joined the WRVS. I mean, I mean way back then not everybody wore a uniform, you know.

[JH]: No.

[GB]: I mean there were some people who just gave two hours a week so, but, and then those that wanted were keen to do more than they would, they would come on training courses and learn to do more. But I never, but I, no I can't remember. I can't remember having, attending anything myself.

[JH]: No.

[GB]: As a, as a would be trainee, you know. [Pause] But I remember going up to London to represent three or four counties it must have been because there were only twelve of us.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And at the Cenotaph, you know, when, but marching past the Cenotaph. But there again it, the WRVS were almost the last people. It was St John's Ambulance, WRVS and one other voluntary service, I can't remember now, Red Cross I suppose it must have been. Anyway there were three, we were marched at the very end and if you, if you looked at the, as we did in the evening, the, the photographs taken for, you know, for TV, they didn't, they didn't hold it on to us at all [laughing] so we were hardly mentioned, you know, but we were there. Yes, and then we had, [Pause] actually we were taken to I think it was Lady Reading's house.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: It must have been for a meal. But we all dispersed back, you know, by train from where we came in fact.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And never met any of them again.

[JH]: No.

[GB]: They were from all, all, all over the place. I was representing, you know, sort of Cornwall, Devon and Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Hampshire.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And that, but interesting, mm.

[JH]: And did you meet Lady Reading while you were there?

[GB]: Oh yes, oh yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. [Pause]

[JH]: And what were your impressions of her?

[GB]: Oh dear. [Pause] To be honest I can't, [Pause] I can't give you an answer to that. I, I, I, I had respect for her, but I mean apart from on that one occasion, you know, I mean I never got in contact with her again.

[JH]: No.

[GB]: But she must have been a kind hearted person to, to, to do what she did mustn't she?

[Laughing] There we are. As I say I didn't, I didn't contact any of the others again.

[JH]: No.

[GB]: And that, that was, that was that, mm. [Pause]

[JH]: And also in 1968 you were feeding German students?

[GB]: Oh yes, that was a, I, I don't know what that was all about. There were forty of them I think, something like that, and we fed them for quite a long period. [Pause] Let me see. Well, I suppose it must have been all, all their meals, must have been mustn't it? I mean they came, came to where we were and we fed them at, [Pause] I don't know, it must have been the WRVS kitchen mustn't it?

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GB]: I can't see where else it could have been. But [Pause] it was, well, I mean we, we literally didn't have great social contact with them.

[00:20:03]

[JH]: No.

[GB]: We simply produced the meals and they thanked us and that was that, you know. But we didn't, didn't, I personally didn't, didn't form any bond, I was probably too busy [laughing] making certain everything was going alright. But it was interesting. And I don't know well, that's school, yes. [Pause] Well, I honestly don't remember a lot about it at all, no. [Pause] You can see who we credit people at this occasion Cheshire Home Foundation. I had to do all the buying, buying all, all the food and everything for them.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: The whole lot, you know, the bread, butter whatever. And, [Pause] and even, even had, we

even had to take our utensils out, whatever utensils we had to take with us, yes.

[JH]: Yes. So two hundred cups and saucers and...?

[GB]: Yes. But down here I say, 'Suggest next time mugs of tea, no refinements so that people are not lured from tea tent. [Pause] Now again, again, no we, that was obviously a plan of the layout, 'L' shape. I know it took up an awful lot of my time because I had to go round pricing everything and then buying it and then getting, getting the money to cover it, yes. [Pause] And then, oh, another thing we seem to have done was we, we, they produced food on the way to a students' walk you remember?

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And we did that as well. We were always doing odd... Oh there's the Germans there, yes, yes. [Pause] Oh, their meals worked out [laughing] at tenpence ha'penny a meal.

[JH]: [Laughing] That's not very, well...

[GB]: [Laughing] Oh dear me, yes. And that's all the things, things, things that I, I, I had to buy aren't they? Beef, carrots, onions, potatoes.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: Bhajis, yes.

[JH]: It's your post Gladys.

[GB]: Oh thank you dear.

[JH]: I'm just going to the toilet.

[GB]: Right you are, yes.

[JH]: So lots of different, sort of the basic food supplies really?

[GB]: Yes. [Pause] Yes, well that's just notes about what I have, how much I, how much to buy, you know.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: Yes. But I don't think I could do it all for that now if I...

[JH]: No.

[GB]: I would have to refer to my notes on the file in order to organise that.

[JH]: And it would be more than ten shillings. [Laughing] Mm, and you also mentioned the working with The Cheshire Homes?

[GB]: Oh yes.

[JH]: Would you do that every year?

[GB]: Every year, yes, yes, we did, they did a charity thing out there. We just, in fact to be honest with you I never really had time to see what other people were doing, we just had this feeding tent and that, that and that was it. But that was a, that was another, another good cause. As I say, any, anything that we were asked to do we invariably said, you know, if we possibly could said 'Yes'. But I don't suppose they'd take it on now. [Laughing]

[JH]: No. [Pause]

[00:25:00]

And we mentioned the training before, but when you were giving the One in Five sort of part of the training...?

[GB]: Mm, mm.

[JH]: Did you feel that that was actually useful?

[3rd Party]: It's alright, I didn't want to interrupt anything.

[JH]: It's alright. That training, we were talking about training, when you were giving training and...

[GB]: Well, to be honest I don't remember a lot about it. It was, it was Doreen Bird who, who got me on, on to doing this, this training. This was in, in Hampshire wasn't it?

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And I can't remember much about it now. I know... [Pause] Yes, oh that's One in Five talks, yes. Well, I'm not, I, I, yes. No, to be honest I know, [Pause] I don't think I have nothing else, [laughing] yes. That was, that was when I was leaving.

[JH]: So this is a picture of you?

[GB]: That's Milton when I was leaving. They were, yes, that's me leaving and that was the lady in charge at the time, yes.

[JH]: And are they presenting you with a gift there?

[GB]: Yes, yes, yes. Well, there's Lady, there's Lady Reading. [Pause] Oh no, sorry, no, that's Lady, Lady Lucas-Tooth, that's another one.

[JH]: Now let's see, she was head of One in Five wasn't she and various other things?

[GB]: Yes, and that's Alison Campbell was that one. That's the mayor, whose name at the time was Royston Tucker, and Lady Lucas-Tooth and myself. As you can see from, it was my section that, that they were inspecting.

[JH]: That they're inspecting?

[GB]: Yes. What that was about I don't know, some stall or other that was to do with me I suppose.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: But after all these years I really don't remember, yes, yes. No, it's all too, you can't imagine what it must have been like years ago because I mean if you try to parade somebody now to make a refuse flue or a larder they wouldn't know what you were talking about and they would think you were daft anyway, so... [Laughing] But we did talk about what you, what you could do in case of a, in case of a calamity, but, mm, I can't imagine anybody doing any of the things that are mentioned nowadays.

[JH]: No.

[GB]: Telling you you could paint the woodwork with a solution of water glass, kaolin and, and water to make it less liable for fires. But, [Pause] yes. No, I've no doubt I had notes at the time of all that which I've...

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: But I've, I've long since discarded them because, [Pause] no longer of any, any, you know...

[Pause] Yes, no, right, I don't think there's anything else of any great, great use to you really.

[JH]: And did you attend any emergencies when you were on emergency team?

[00:30:01]

[GB]: Oh we must have done. I can remember people were, were on camp beds and going down to feed them but what the emergency was I honestly don't know now. [Pause] I don't know, I have no idea. At the time it was just one more job to do. [Laughing] No, [Pause] I can't think what it could have been, because I mean it wasn't anything up at, perhaps they'd been, a building had caught fire maybe, I honestly don't know.

[JH]: No.

[GB]: I mean I, I really don't know after all these years it's, it's faded in to the background, I, no.

[Pause]

[JH]: And you mentioned before that you went to the Cenotaph?

[GB]: Yes.

[JH]: Did you do anything else representing WVS or WRVS in any other way?

[GB]: Mm, no, I don't think so. I went, I went to the annual parades at Bath Abbey, you know, in uniform once a year, we did that. And, as I say, I went up to represent my part had been, a remover. But we went up individually, you know, and [Pause] literally we were told what, and what, you know, what, what, what, what to wear, what, you know, full uniform but in actual fact I turned up with my hat on.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And the others had berets.

[JH]: Oh.

[GB]: But I mean, mm, I don't know why we were, we were given the choice. You know when you went, well, I think I had to go to London to, I must, one must have done, there was nowhere in Bath you'd buy it.

[JH]: Well, I think at the time the uniforms came from Harrods I think or somewhere like that I think?

[GB]: I honestly can't remember but I know that there was a choice of hat and I chose, I chose that, that type of hat. But as you can see there they've got berets on. [Laughing]

[JH]: Yes. And you've got the one with the brim?

[GB]: Yes.

[JH]: Sort of bowler?

[GB]: Yes, [Pause] mm. But I mean that doesn't, because I was anyone special really.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: I mean it was, it was available to anyone who wanted it, yes. Of course, the thing on the sleeves was a bit different but I don't know what all that was about now. [Pause]

[JH]: Mm, mm. And with this newspaper clip it says there you were Emergency Services Organiser?

[GB]: Well that's what I was.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: Yes.

[JH]: So you were in charge of the emergency team then?

[GB]: Oh yes, in Bath, yes, oh yes, yes, oh yes, yes. Oh yes, I, I was in charge of all, organising any, any emergency. I mean that was, that was, you know, down to me.

[JH]: Mm,, mm.

[GB]: [Pause] But I can't remember. I mean we did whatever, whatever we had to do. I, I really can't remember, I can remember these people in beds and them having, they were obviously refugees from something but I don't know what. Having said they were refugees we also had refugees from Poland didn't we that came to Bath?

[JH]: Yes. You, during the time you were with WVS you probably had Polish and Hungarian.

[GB]: And we did things for them as well. In fact I think some of the housing, the furniture that I was putting in houses was for, for them. Yes, but it was just of course, a case of if you were asked to tackle a job you did it to the best of your ability. [Pause]

[JH]: Yes. And when you were putting furniture in houses was the, were they empty houses or were they where people were already living?

[00:35:05]

[GB]: Well, it was a mixture wasn't it? I mean a doctor would go to somebody's house and find it was very sparsely furnished and that they could do with an extra something or other.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And then it would be suggested to us that if we had something that would fit in we could take it there. I mean we took all sorts of, mm, settees, small armchairs. In fact dining, dining table and chairs. I mean whatever was given us in the store we would, we would find a home for, you know. But some of this furniture was very good and others of course, weren't. And if like somebody dying for instance and a relation come in to settle up their, their home, then they would contact us and say 'Would you like all the furniture'? And we'd go along and say 'Yes please', you know.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: But we never knew what we were going to have. I mean sometimes we had a large amount of stuff in and other times it was difficult to find things. In fact I even went as far as upholstering chairs for them, [laughing] taking them home and getting springs in them. [Laughing] But oh dear. But yes, [Pause] yes, that was, that was another job I taught myself too by taking a chair to pieces and realising how it was, how it was put together you could then... But then of course, that meant going out and buying springs and buying material. You'd put a heavy piece of material across the bottom and put springs on and sew them in so they wouldn't move. And then the springs would come above the wooden part of the seat but you'd compress it down by putting a cross over it and tacking it down all round and then building padding on top of that.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And then the cover. You know, it was, yes, I've done that. [Laughing]

[JH]: So a bit of everything?

[GB]: [Laughing] Oh dear me, yes, yes, I have, yes, yes. And I, I was lucky in that I didn't, you know, I had plenty of help at home, you know, in my own home.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: So that I could, and I've always been practical, I've always liked doing things with my, with my hands and so there we are, yes.

[JH]: And did you always get good quality furniture from the people who were giving it to you?

[GB]: Well, not always. If it was obvious it went straight, was there a dump? Must have been a dump mustn't there? I can't remember it, but I know it is very difficult to say 'No' if somebody thinks they're giving you something that's worthwhile.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And I think, I'm fairly certain we accepted it but then discarded it. We must have had a, a means of disposing of it somewhere but I really can't remember. I know there are dumps around here you can take things to but this is, this is, they must have had the same network.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: I can't, I can't remember it. I don't, not everything that was given was, was, was worth having. But then you might have a bed and the mattress was no good, you'd discard the mattress and get another mattress, you know. [Pause]

[JH]: And the people who you were giving the furniture to, were they, well sort of sent to you through Social Services or...?

[GB]: Well, it was, as I say, it was, it was doctors' recommendations and church padres' recommendations and that sort of thing. [Pause] I don't think there was a Social Service as such in those days, not, not... I suppose, do you know I don't know. I'm, I'm fairly certain that our, our recommendations came from, [Pause] from people who, who, who would be in contact with the poor like, like, as I say doctors and... [Pause] Yes, I'm sure. I can't remember having any, any correspondence at all with, with the Council as such, you know, and I, in fact I even wonder whether we had such a thing. No, if there was I don't remember it, no. [Pause]

[JH]: So as well as furniture, Meals-on-Wheels and Emergency Services was there anything else you did with WVS or WRVS?

[00:40:00]

[GB]: [Pause] Well, yes. [Laughing] In my own car I used to drive people, again that must have been something to do with the, the doctors, people who were, did they find places for people to go on holiday free? I think they must have done. I used to drive people down, down to the coast, you know, too.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And drop them there and then go back, you know, a week or fortnight later and pick them up and bring them back, but who organised that I don't know. You see all my, all my work came through the secretary in the office.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And she would say 'We've got a request for so and so' and I would say 'Right, I can do that', you know, and I would say I could do it on say a Monday or Friday and then she'd do some phoning round and come back and say 'do it on Friday', you know.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And so that, that's how it worked. I, I certainly turned my hand to anything that was, that was going, you know. And, as I say, we had this, it must have been donated, we had a fifteen hundredweight van from somewhere which I used to drive, which was quite a big one really, it was, [laughing] yes but it was interesting.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And how did you feel about having to drive such a big van?

[GB]: Oh I didn't mind.

[JH]: No.

[GB]: That didn't, that didn't worry me a bit. In fact I, I, I mean I'm ninety-three now and I only gave up my car in October, you know, I was really trying... [Laughing] Yes. I was up until ninety-two, aged ninety-two I was driving and I gave up in October and I was ninety-three in May, yes. But oh no, I mean I'd been driving ever since I was seventeen. It, I suppose it was a bit unusual for women to drive in those days but I did I drove at seventeen. I was in Malta at the time that I, I first drove and then it automatically wherever I was then there was a car. I mean, as I say, I financially my parents were all okay and I didn't actually have my own car until I was married, but once we were married it was, I drove a car before my husband to be honest with you.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GB]: He, but in the end I persuaded him that he ought to and then we ran two cars. So then we had an extra garage built on the side of the house.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: We had originally a, a driveway, quite a steep driveway that went up for one garage and then we had a space of a width of drive made out as a flower bed and we scrapped that and, and made double gates at the bottom and put the extra garage on, on the side and then we had, ran the two cars. But nothing, I mean nothing too swishy. It was a, oh, I don't remember now. Must have been a Vaux... of some sort I think, that's what I was always keen on. So, you know, just a useful car. But my first one was Ford was the first car I ever had because they were difficult to get [Pause] for a while after the war, yes, ah.

[JH]: And did you use your own car for Meals-on-Wheels or did you use the WRVS?

[GB]: Oh no, oh it was my own car. Mm, oh yes, it was my own, if I did, if I had to do Meals-on-

Wheels it was my own car, yes, yes. [Pause] Yes, but I mean the route was already planned, I mean, you know, the, all I did was to literally turn up and, and drive, you know.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: With a lady beside me who knew the route and that was that. But at one stage we'd, we'd dish out the food from the, from the containers in the back of a van but then later we got on to having, having the food in, in containers in a, in a sort of heater thing.

[JH]: Yes, in a hot block?

[GB]: Mm, in, in the back of a car, yes.

[JH]: And was it always hot meals that you were delivering?

[GB]: Oh yes, oh yes, yes, yes, always hot meals, yes, yes. But, as I say, a lot of the people that we went to were just old and dodderly and wanted someone to talk to. And of course, we hadn't time to stop had we, not really?

[00:45:01]

[JH]: No.

[GB]: You know, no. [Pause]

[JH]: And do you have anything else you'd like to share about your time with the WRVS, WVS?

[GB]: Not really. I, I enjoyed it, I enjoyed everything I did and, as I say, and as, as you know we never knew, well I never knew what I was going to do that day because I would, I would, you know, the office would tell me what, what was what and off I would go. But [Pause] it certainly filled my life for, for many years and... But then eventually, as I say, I gave up because I had my grandchildren to look after and an elderly mother so that was, that was the end of my WRVS. But that was also because they also asked me if I would go to London and do some work for them and I turned that down. I can't remember exactly what it was now but I, but, you know, it, it, it took up too much of my time and I just couldn't give it so in the end I, I, I gave up altogether. [Pause] I can't remember the last job I did really. [Laughing] Anyway there we are, mm.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And do you have a particularly favourite or most memorable moment of your time with WVS, WRVS?

[GB]: [Pause] Not really. I mean I, I enjoyed being with, well, you know, there was no one I didn't like I just enjoyed whatever, whatever I did to be honest with you, it didn't, it didn't really worry me. I, I haven't really a favourite I don't think. I mean I used to enjoy carting the furniture round.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: But I mean I wouldn't have been able to do that. Well, in any case when I went to Hampshire that was, that was over wasn't it then, I didn't do anything like that then, it was all a case of training when I went to Hampshire and I didn't enjoy that so much to be honest with you.

[JH]: No.

[GB]: And I'm not, I'm a doer rather than a... [Laughing]

[JH]: Yes. Rather than telling people what to do?

[GB]: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. A bit like my friend down the garden, she's chopping up a tree, [laughing] oh dear, yes.

[JH]: And do you know anything about the organisation as it is today, no?

[GB]: Not a thing, not a thing. No, I was surprised to get a begging letter a long time ago, that's why, how you found out about me and I, I, you know, in my day we, we didn't touch money except plates and things and then it was only temporary or we had to, you know, give it all in. And we never, never charged for anything.

[JH]: No.

[GB]: And so I was, actually I was quite, quite surprised when I got this, this, this letter telling me that... It's a different system now, it must be, you know. [Pause] Yes. In fact you've, you've dropped the 'Women's' haven't you, it's, it's...?

[JH]: Yes. It's now Royal Voluntary Service.

[GB]: Yes, yes and you've got a lot of males now I imagine?

[JH]: A few, yes.

[GB]: A few, yes, yes. Yes, we started having, [laughing] having males in Bath just before I left, I don't know why but they started allowing, allowing men to, to help. But I think that probably originally they were probably just driving cars, you know, yes, yes. No, it's been an interesting life.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: But I've no, no particular best memory.

[JH]: No.

[GB]: It was all interesting and having to cope with things, you know.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: With something cropping up and having to deal with them, that's what I liked, liked doing really. [Pause] But I wouldn't want to be a cook as such, you know, not, not, not really. I was, I was for a very, very brief period in a school long after I'd left the WRVS but that's another story. That's my son not going, applying for a grant and so I decided I'd better go out and, and work for it.

[00:50:00]

Which I needn't have done when we had the money but I felt it was a bit, oh I don't know, I just felt that I'd, I'd like to, to earn the money to cover it myself so I did. But I didn't do it for very long. Do you know I was a school cook and I ran a, well I had three hundred children I suppose to feed but that's another story.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GB]: When I, when I joined up there I'd been used to working with WR, WRVS where you which you'd say 'Would you mind putting the kettle on', or 'please can you pass me the whatever'.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And doing that attitude with the paid employees they were sort of, if they had a choice they would almost say 'No', you know. But when I started ordering them around...

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: Then I earned respect, which to me was very weird. But I'd soon know that I treated, if I treated them tough they had more respect for me.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: Which, to be honest with you, at the time I couldn't understand.

[JH]: No.

[GB]: Because I'd been used to talking, working with what I considered to be people the same as me.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: And, you know, I always used to say 'Would you help me with this and will you...'? [Laughing]
But that was...

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: But that was life but I got on with it in the end, yes. Yes, I had a, I, I attended training for that and even to the stage where we, we were, we were taught how to put fires out, which always worried me intensely.

[JH]: Yes.

[GB]: They would light a whole pan with fire and you had to take a cloth and put it over the flames to exclude the air and that, and that way the flames would go out. But I could do it but I hoped I never would have to do it for real, you know, I didn't like that. But that was about the only bit of the training I didn't enjoy but that, that wasn't WRVS training that was, that was schools meals training.

[Pause] Mm.

[JH]: Well, thank you for talking to me today Gladys and this will make a very good contribution to our Voices of Volunteering Project.

[GB]: Good.

[End of Interview 00:52:22]