

Voices of Volunteering: 75 Years of Citizenship and Service

Interview Transcript

Title Page

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Interviewee's Surname: Findlay

Title: Mrs

Interviewee's Forenames: Alison

Gender: F

Volunteer/Employee Roles and Dates:

Volunteer 1986 to 2004, Perth, Perthshire,
Scotland
Meals-on-Wheels
Old peoples Welfare Organiser
Emergency Services Organiser
Vice Chairman's Committee
Trustee

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Interviewer's Notes:

Alison Findlay (AF) talks about her time as a volunteer for WRVS between 1986 and 2004. During that time AF was a Meals-on-Wheels (MOW) deliverer, Old people's Welfare Organiser (OPW) and Emergency Services (ES) Organiser for Perthshire after the Perth Floods in 1993. In 1996 AF was

asked to Join the Vice Chairman's Committee (VCC) and then in 1998 became a Trustee for the WRVS until 2004 when she resigned for the organisation. AF concludes with how the organisation changed while she was a member.

[JENNIFER HUNT]: This is Jennifer Hunt with Alison Findlay on the 5th of May 2015 at her home in Perth, Scotland. Alison would you just like to introduce yourself?

[ALISON FINDLAY]: I'm Alison Findlay, I'm, been in WRVS for sixteen years, I think it was all told, maybe a little more than that. Not sure now when I left. Mm, but I'm married to husband, Malcolm, and have one daughter, Pamela.

[JH]: And why did you join WRVS?

[AF]: Well we had moved here in 1984 and I felt I needed to, I'd always volunteered in some way or another. We moved up from Monifieth to Perth and I wanted to meet other people and to become involved in the community.

[JH]: And when did you join?

[AF]: Mm, well it says on my card 1986 but I think I was actually in for some time before that, but not long.

[JH]: Mm. As an unofficial...

[AF]: Yes.

[JH]: Volunteer?

[AF]: Yes.

[JH]: And what did you know about WRVS before you joined?

[AF]: Very little. Mm, I knew that it did Meals-on-Wheels because they did Meals-on-Wheels in Dundee, which is where I'm from originally and I thought I could help with that. Then I discovered all the rest that they did. [Laughing]

[JH]: And what are your earliest memories of WRVS?

[AF]: Mm, being in the back of a large white van, sort of Transit size, mm, with one other lady in the back. Mm, large containers that held the soup, which we ladled out into jugs. The, and a big hot box which had the, the main meals and puddings in. And we were normally driven around by a man then, which, you know, was a bit sexist perhaps.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Most of the drivers appeared to be men. But you were thrown about quite a bit, because there weren't proper seating in the back so it was a bit manic on occasions, they, between road conditions and where we had to go to deliver the meals they, sometimes the soup was splashing out of the container and the meals sliding about as well as us sliding about. And you leapt in and out of the van quite athletically I say at that time, I don't think I could do it now. But great fun nevertheless.

[JH]: And Meals-on-Wheels was the first service you were...?

[AF]: Yes it was.

[JH]: Involved in?

[AF]: Yes it was. And, really it gave, I mean I, I had been a radiographer the, so had seen life, I would have said, and, and how some folk had to live, but it didn't really prepare me for how many elderly and very lonely people there were.

[JH]: You said that the drivers were men, were they members of WRVS or were they from the council?

[AF]: No, they were also Meals-on-Wheels volunteers for WRVS. Mm, huge team in Perth. And, because we covered 2000 square miles each village or small town all had a team, and that was really when I discovered, you know, how large WRVS were in Perth and began to see what else they did.

[JH]: How long, well how often would you go out on a Meals-on-Wheels round?

[AF]: Once every three weeks we did. Mm, there was a huge team in, certainly in Perth City. But throughout, throughout the area, which was wonderful, because when I actually became Emergency Services Organiser there for the area I tapped into all that team that was already set up. So it was a huge, huge team we had eventually for Emergency Services, because of the Meals-on-Wheels.

[JH]: How would you describe a typical Meals-on-Wheels round?

[AF]: Mm, well, we normally had twenty odd addresses to go to. Mm, and there were five routes, I think, in Perth. They worked very closely with Social Work. Mm, so we were divided into areas of the town and you could do it in, within maybe an hour, which, of course, now is the legal limit. You, you would have to, [Laughing] the, but at that time, and depending on road conditions it, I mean it can be snowy here, it, it could take a little longer than that. Mm, and depending on, on, depending on how your clients were they, I mean there could be emergencies. You, you could not get entry into a property so it, it wasn't all plain sailing...

[00:05:04]

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Every time. But, and sometimes a wee bit challenging, but certainly could be entertaining on, on occasions as well. Mm, I do remember one, one occasion going in to a gentleman and I don't think I'd been in there before, but I, I sort of 'Yoo-hoo it's, it's Meals-on-Wheels'. And very often the outside door was open, just knock and, or ring the bell and, and go in.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: The, but there was a shout, 'I'm in the bath', and I thought 'I hope you're going to stay there'. [Laughing] So I just quickly left his meal in the kitchen and beat a hasty retreat. But, but no, no there

were some lovely, lovely people that we... And because you went in every three weeks you could see if a person was ill. And, or deteriorating in any way. And we had an arrangement with Social Work in the office that if you came back and you thought there was something amiss there was a message left in a book and a Social Worker went that afternoon just to check that things were okay. So that was where we felt, you know, when I became a Trustee, much later, the, the value of that check that went on each day.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Mm, when I started with Meals-on-Wheels people had a three day delivery, that was the maximum. But I mean ultimately it was six here. Mm, so it, it was a wonderful check that people were well and not lying behind the door ill, which we did discover on occasions as well. They, which was lost then when frozen meals started.

[JH]: Did you ever deliver frozen meals?

[AF]: No.

[JH]: They were always hot?

[AF]: Yes, always hot.

[JH]: And what sort of food were you providing?

[AF]: Mm, well it was always soup, a main course and a pudding. And sometimes it should have been a cold pudding but it was always in a hot box. [Laughing] It was never ice cream I may hasten to say, [Laughing] but, but no, no, it was a very wholesome meal, and very often, contrary to instructions they, I know, and, and many of us did know that quite often people would have the soup and the pudding at lunchtime and keep the main course and heat it up for teatime. So it, while it wasn't regulation [Laughing] it certainly went on, we know that. But no, no it was a very wholesome meal. They, it would be meat and, and, normally potatoes and a veg, and perhaps rhubarb and custard or a tart and custard, something that like. The, and a nice veg soup, it was, it was certainly a very nice meal.

[JH]: And did you have a partner who you delivered the meals with?

[AF]: Yes. Yes. But, but we did swap if it, it was always the intention that if you couldn't do your, your, what was on the rota that you change with someone else. And very often you changed with someone else who did the same route because it was easier. Mm, then we went down to little vans and it, there were just the two of us, a driver and a deliverer. But depending on what happened both of us delivered on, on occasions. But, and I think it continued like that until the Meals-on-Wheels stopped in Perth. Mm, which was very sad. [Laughing] Mm, because while folk get, no doubt, a very nice meal, they, and very often I know if they can't prepare it themselves in the microwave someone goes in and does that, but there's not, with some people there's not the same check on, on how they are.

[JH]: Mm. There's not the same contact?

[AF]: No. And very, very often we were the only person that that would, that would be in that particular day, they, to see how they were.

[JH]: Do you remember who was in charge of Meals-on-Wheels when you were helping that service?

[AF]: To start with? No I, no I don't. Maggie Ewing [ph 00:09:23] was, mm, the final person. Gosh I can't think who it was to start with. I don't, I don't think there was a Meals-on-Wheels organiser as such when I started, I think it was just the office.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: That there were two, two people in the, in the office as well as the, as the Organiser, and I think it was the two ladies in the office who organised, and I can't remember who they were now right at the very beginning when I started.

[00:10:01]

[JH]: Was the office based in Perth?

[AF]: Yes. Ah, ha. Mm, you would have passed it actually as you came up the road in the bus. Mm, Rosslyn House, which is now flats, and I can point it out to you when we go down to the station. They, that's where Social Work worked out of at that time, and there was a small building round the back that our offices were in there. Very comfortable, it was very nice. Free parking and the, it worked very well. And close, close association with, with Social Work here, which was great.

[JH]: And were the meals cooked by WRVS?

[AF]: No, they were cooked by, at the hospital. So you went and picked up the van, or the driver did, and you went up, picked up the meals in the van and then set off to do your round. Then took the car or the van back to the parking space, and again that space was part of Social Work, which worked very well. And I don't think there's anything else there.

[JH]: Do you have any other memories of Meals-on-Wheels?

[AF]: I can remember one day going in to a lady not too far away from here and I called her 'Mrs', and she said 'I am Miss, I'm still a treasure to be collected', [Laughing] which I thought was really funny. [Laughing] But old folk were so pleased to see you. I'm getting emotional.

[JH]: Mm, do you want me to pause it for a...?

[AF]: Mm, mm. [Break] In Perth, and, you know, icy roads, and the van skidding and, you know, the, this hot box and the soup and, and, you know, were taking off across the van and oh dear, dear. They, and of course it, it can be, you know, really quite dark here in the winter, and I mean stumbling up stairs that weren't lit and [Laughing] all sorts, [Laughing] But I don't know we all, we all survived and we, and we did have 'get togethers', you know, 'volunteering thank yous', which, which were super because you were with the people of, of like mind.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AF]: Which, which was good as well. But, and great camaraderie with and I did get to meet quite a number of people. They, some of whom I'm still quite friendly with. [Laughing]

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: Which, which was very nice. And then you, you discovered that you know, 'Oh I work up at the hospital as well', or, or 'I do Books-on-Wheels too'. They, so saying Emergency Services were never mentioned, which was really strange. But, and I knew people who came, because you were in the office and other folk kept coming in and out and we also had a, had a, had a clothing store at that time so there were always, you know, clients coming into that, if you like, too. So it was a busy, busy place down there.

[JH]: Mm. And so you would have been running a lot of services out of that one...

[AF]: Oh yes.

[JH]: One office.

[AF]: Yes, all running out of, ah, ha.

[JH]: Because was it the county office as well?

[AF]: Yes, yes. Ah, ha. They, oh yes a huge amount of services and as I say I had no idea the, the widths of, and depth of the work that we, that we did until much further down the line really, [Laughing] but I certainly went in as a 'rookie', [Laughing] no doubt about that. It, it was quite, quite a revelation to me...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Finally about all what we did.

[JH]: Because when you went in to the office was that when you became the Old People's Welfare Organiser?

[AF]: No, not, not at that time. Mm, as I said, Jenny Milne, who was the organiser at that time, they had a dog and she walked it past and I was gardening out here leaning on my hoe having a, a bit of a rest. And she said 'If you've got time to lean on that hoe you've got time to do more for me', that was the kind of person she was, [Laughing] 'so come and see me'. So Jean Stewart, who was the Old

People's Welfare Organiser at that time wanted to retire and had done the job for, I can't tell you how long, but some time anyway. And I met her in the office and I went out once or twice with her, just to see what the job organ... organiser involved. They, and what she said to me was it was mostly the Darby and Joan clubs, of which I think there were maybe eight, about that I, I think. And she said to me 'You don't really need to do anything, the, the clubs run very, very well without us, but no-one ever goes in to say "Thank you" to them'. So I saw that as the primary task really to go in and make sure that they were thanked from a higher up level, not that I classed myself as a higher up level, but...

[00:15:30]

[JH]: No.

[AF]: I was bringing the, the thanks from the office, and because certainly Jenny Milne couldn't have got out as often as I did. And I made it my business to be around these clubs on a very regular basis. Mm, we ran a handicraft competition, of which I've got photographs of the, I think it says bi-annual on the thing, I thought we just did it once a year but perhaps we did do it twice, winter and summer. But, and all the clubs could contribute to that. And we had a huge show of very, very good crafts, wonderful stuff so it was my, my job to organise that venue, to get judges to come along on the day, and to organise the teas and the coffees. They, and we had a wonderful time because they all came in from the clubs to have a look and a nosy at what everyone else had done, mm, and who'd got First and, you know, it was a great, great success that they, that was one thing. And we, we tried to make sure that the volunteers who did run the show, again were, had a volunteers thank you, at least once a year where everybody who volunteered for WRVS came in, either into the City Hall, the, or another venue or perhaps it was done locally if there was a big enough team. Mm, but I saw that as my primary task and I had a wonderful time going round these clubs. And they fulfilled a huge hole that might have been in other, in loneliness again and a lot of these clubs were rural and people lived a bit of a distance away perhaps from where they met. They, and it happened once a week or once a fortnight in the afternoon folk went along, they, they got a bit of information. They, they maybe played dominoes or indoor bowls or cards or they had entertainment. They, they were fantastically well run, and, and then they got a very, very nice afternoon tea, which meant that they didn't have tea when they went home. [Laughing] Lots and lots, sandwiches, sausage rolls, all home-made, they, and they were absolutely super and the ladies who ran them were great. Mm, one occasion we took over the whole of Perth Theatre at Christmas time and bussed them all in for the

panto, which they thoroughly enjoyed, free ice creams. And I don't think we had to pay any of that, I think that was all sourced from local fundraising and the donations, which was great. Mm, another occasion we had a lunch for anyone and everyone who wanted to come in from the clubs in the City Hall, Christmas lunch, and that was cooked by Friarton Prison. Mm, and we had entertainment in the afternoon, the children singing and the other, other bits and pieces of entertainment, I don't just exactly remember now, but I do remember the children, children singing carols and things. The party hats and festivities, it was a super, super lunch. Mm, but, no, I was a magician's assistant on occasions and I had never played indoor bowls, I was taught how to play indoor bowls.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: They, I declined the dominoes because it was far too serious and the men in the club tended to play the dominoes, but no great, that was a great time. One of the ladies came to me, oh, quite, quite far on in my career with, with the Old People's Welfare and she said to me 'Do you think I should still be organising Alison'? And I said 'Oh gracious me, why ever not, unless you feel you can't, you know, is, is it...?' 'Oh no, no, no, I love doing it but, you know, I, I just feel I've been doing it for such a long time'. Now I don't remember how long she'd been doing it for but certainly a long, long time. And I thought this woman was in her late seventies, she was actually ninety.

[JH]: Oh. [Laughing]

[AF]: [Laughing] But she and her team were absolutely fabulous. And, unfortunately I can't go to someone's funeral this morning the, which I would have done, but she, she was Treasurer out at one of the clubs and she died just last week and I would have gone to, to Jean's funeral.

[00:20:17]

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: But, because she was fantastic, and she's now into her nineties and, and was still organised with the, the organising the club, or helping to organise it. So it's a lifetime commitment sometimes.

[Laughing]

[JH]: It is.

[AF]: [Laughing] But feisty ladies and...

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AF]: Did such wonderful service, but, you know, I, I feel, I feel the, at that time and, and possibly still do, when they speak about 'day care' they, that, that was a deluxe afternoon care. They, because they, they knew these people so well they went and picked them up if they couldn't get there. They took them home again. They, and made sure that those folk were, were looked after. It was, and I hope still going in some places. Mm, but a, a wonderful, wonderful way to look after folk locally.

[JH]: And did you take on other services in Old People's Welfare?

[AF]: Mm, we had caravans. One caravan had been, or had they both been bought? Certainly one, one man bought the caravan in memory of his wife, she had been a long time volunteer with us, and that caravan was bought. And perhaps both of them were and then we managed to, to update them at least once in my career with WRVS. But then the, the, I mean they only paid ten pounds for a week in the caravan. And we had one at, at Blair Atholl and one at Anstruther. And there was another one we managed which actually belonged to The Blind Society of Perth and it was at Blairgowrie. Mm, it wasn't just as popular with our members but certainly the other two were. The one at, at Blair Atholl certainly, it was in a lovely position and it, oh, pardon me, in the castle grounds, which is a huge camp, caravan park now. Mm, but it was, it was a better class of caravan if you like, [Laughing] a little upmarket from, from the ones at Anstruther and Blairgowrie. But I organised the let of that, which could be quite problematic because everybody wanted the same week. These were people who could go on a holiday at any time, [Laughing] but they all wanted July, [Laughing] which could be really, really a problem. And, you know, if people had had it they perhaps two years on the trot I would try and steer them into another week and the, the forms that I eventually sent out had, you know, first, second and third choice and it was pointed out to them that if you had your first choice last time you might not get it this time. But oh dear, dear, we're all, we're all beasts of habit.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: [Laughing] If you've had that week in, in July you really want it each, each year. [Laughing] But, and, and really from that then we, I discovered then that there were lots of people, quite, quite a number of folks who were on their own and who wanted to go to the caravan on their own, which I really didn't think was an option. Mm, as you see out here I have a caravan of my own and I thought 'No, gas heaters and all sorts is not a good idea, an elderly person by themselves'. They, and no-one really to perhaps pay attention to what was going on. So I asked Jenny Milne the, she was still the organiser at that time, if we could perhaps do something for these people, I wasn't just quite sure what. But Jenny was always open to suggestions, and I said 'Why can't we take them on holiday? We could perhaps take them on holiday.' So we knocked that idea about but of course we knew that they couldn't afford really to lots of money to go on holiday to a hotel or wherever. But there were two, two centres, two Christian centres, one in The Borders and one in, up in Highland, Perthshire, I won't say the names, they, that we decided that we could possibly take away a couple of car loads of folk.

[00:25:07]

So three of us, and, I think it was five, I used to have photographs of them too and I don't, I don't know where they are. Mm, perhaps five or six, I can't remember now, did we have three cars? Mm, and, but we took these folk off on holiday and oh dear it was just, it, it was very problematic. We, we got people through Social Work really, people that perhaps we could identify too from Meals-on-Wheels that perhaps we knew needed a break. They, but one lady in particular was obviously suffering from dementia and we didn't, you know, get that information. But I actually, my room was next to her fortunately, the, well it, they weren't en-suite bedrooms so up, off she went, toddling down the corridor [Laughing] with me in hot pursuit to make sure that she got back to her, her room. The, and the first once or twice she went to the gents' toilet instead of the ladies' toilet, which was [Laughing] again a bit problematic. [Laughing] But it, but we had, we had a super time, these people were, were so appreciative of being taken off for a holiday. And when, again we managed to subsidise it with, with donations and one or two folk in Perth trust funds and whatever, we managed to do that, which was good.

Mm, another occasion we went up to, to Perthshire they, and we, the, one, one of the ladies we actually delivered Meals-on-Wheels to, poor, poor soul she was. And she hadn't been on holiday for seventy-four years, the last time she'd had a holiday she was ten. They, and that was, and she came from that area, which was a complete coincidence but she could tell us all about the area. And we

had an old chap who had been obviously country born, born and bred, and there was a museum at Blair Atholl and he was able to tell us what all these old implements did. [Laughing] So it was a two way street, we could tell them some, some things but, and in the evening we played games and things with them and, you know, it was, it was a, a really, really smashing time. Mm, and we did that again after the Perth floods, after '93 because it had been so successful before. We, we did two or three holidays with people who had been completely washed out in the '93 floods, which was dreadful here. And that was when I became Emergency Services Organiser, after the floods. Mm, but however, you, you ask a question.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[AF]: Go, go through your questions.

[JH]: But were you, were you part of Emergency Services before?

[AF]: No.

[JH]: Mm...

[AF]: No, we...

[JH]: That, that's...

[AF]: In, in Perth we had, I mean WRVS is renowned for its Emergency Services, it's really what, you know, why we, we really started WRVS. They, you know, during the war and, and all the war effort that, that we did. And, but we only had a very, very small team here and really were, were used for, the Emergency Services team were used if we did, well like bringing in the volunteers for a thank you, the Emergency Services team would do the teas and the coffees and things, augmented by other people, it was a very small team, I can't just tell you how many. But at the floods they, I mean Social Work just phoned over, it was still Jenny Milne at that time who was the Organiser. And it was Betty Bridgeford who I know very well now, she's a friend who was in charge of Social Work. And we were just phoned over to say, you know, 'People are completely washed out, they, it could get much worse, what help can you supply'? And Jenny just immediately set to organising a rota and that went on for over a month. Mm, and some of us were there overnight because there were fifteen

hundred and more homes completely washed out, very much down in the lower part of the, the town by the river. But elsewhere as well, The Bridge of Earn was badly affected. The I mean we had over a foot of snow on the Sunday, Saturday/Sunday, blizzard conditions and, and then had a very rapid thaw. Mm, and the, you were in a huge catchment area here. Mm, I mean The Tay is bigger than The Thames, it carries...

[00:30:10]

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: Much, much more water and things just were washed away. The, and it resulted in the, a great many folk out of their homes for more than a year, it was really disastrous. I can let you see some photographs of that, I've got a book put through the way. Mm, so it was after that that, by this time there was a new Organiser, Avril Duncan, and she asked me if I would set up a team. And I said 'But what would, what does it involve, you know, what?' 'Oh well you do this and you do this, maybe twenty-five folk or so', said she. The, you know, just a team that, but the more I went into it I went and did training with Pat Glynn in Edinburgh, they, I went down to Easingwold a few times and became qualified, and then went on to do a trainer's, a Senior Trainer's Certificate again after another jaunt down to Easingwold. Mm, because I, I saw, it was really an ongoing problem, until, until we developed the flood defence in Perth and elsewhere that it could happen again very easily. And I had seen how many folk we required during the emergency and, if it was a twenty-four hour commitment, as it was for a month, you need more than one lot of people, you need at least three teams in a day, they, so twenty-five folk weren't going to go very far. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[AF]: So, and to wait for a trainer, there weren't that many trainers in, in this area at that time. Mm, I thought it would be better if I could train people myself so that was why I became a, a trainer...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: A senior trainer then. Mm, but, and made it my business to get as many people as possible on board, which wasn't always, I may say, approved by [Laughing] the powers-that-be... [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[AF]: In WRVS, but I had a very friendly arrangement at that time with Betty Bridgeford and she paid for all my training so I really didn't feel that it cost WRVS anything. They, or if it was it was a minimum commitment and so I went [Inaudible 00:32:58] in Perth and Kinross and got a team organised in every little village and town and made sure that there were enough of them to, to cover and then we could send out from Perth, or they could, you know, what happened at the start of the flooding in, in '93, the Auchterarder, do you know, you'll not know Auchterarder?

[JH]: No, no.

[AF]: Well it's bypassed by a, a motorway, well not really a motorway but a, a big main road now there, you don't go through the town, but there was a, a, a good Meals-on-Wheels team out there with a wonderful team leader. They, and the police brought all the traffic in off the main road because of the road conditions. Lorries were stuck, cars were stuck, it's quite high, a high area. Mm, main road between Glasgow and, and Perth, they so all these lorry drivers and car drivers were brought into Auchterarder town and put into the Town Hall and May and her team they set about feeding them and bedding them down. They managed to get shops to open, and I mean conditions were really bad, you're speaking about, you know, great depths of snow, mm, and fed all these people. They, until we had the thaw and they could get on their way and the road was open. So, but what we didn't, we couldn't get people out from Perth, plus there wasn't a team anyway.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: So it was a case of realising that that could happen in anywhere, I mean the A9 goes up through Pitlochry...

[JH]: Yes.

[[AF]: But we had a team there, Meals-on-Wheels team. So just train folk in as, as many places as we could. They, making use very often of the Meals-on-Wheels Organiser. They, and they, they came to trainings here or I went out there and did, did trainings. Mm, but we trained, I can't tell you how many then but I would have thought, by the time I'd finished my career, upwards of fifteen hundred.

[00:35:12]

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Mm, and I came up with a new concept ,which again was only because of the problems I saw locally. Mm, we helped with, do you, do you know a process of how folk come through into an Emergency Service?

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: Yes? Well we, we helped with every stage of that and the Emergency Services Officer for Perth and Kinross, Bill Maddox, he had seen the problems in '93 as well and started to develop, with others, a computerised reception form. Mm, at the '93 they, they were asked all, for all their personal information, they, at the desk, front desk, and given a number, now it was just a cloakroom ticket. Now folk, you will discover if you, if you do, you know, go round, there's very, very many different types of methods that people work with for Emergency Services but I felt we had it pretty slick. But, so that's reception. Then the Social Work want their information, Housing want their information and the police want their information so folk were sitting at four different desks, and if you're pretty traumatised that's...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: A real problem. So we tried to come up with a computer programme that would do it in a 'oner', and, and that was what we did. They came through reception pretty quickly, we took their name, they, and their address, and that was all. And then they went to another desk, much later on, after they'd had a cup of tea and been made comfortable and, you know, got a change of clothing, all of that they, and they went and they had one other session, so we did that, we helped with the teas and the coffees. They, I had a team of people who could go to people's homes and bring them in, or take them home. They, and all of these tasks were divided out. And after a training I would take folk through all of that process and say to them 'Now, what job would you want to do?' So you had round pegs in round holes, which was great. They, if people weren't good at interviewing folk or whatever. And we, we gained the respect, very much so, of Social Work but, and, and the police. I can remember Jim Edmonds, [ph 00:37:47] who was the Emergency Services Chief Officer for, for this area, for, for the police, they, saying to me 'Oh, I don't know if, if volunteers could do our forms'.

I said 'I beg your pardon?' They, so he said 'Well let's have a dry run at it', or I maybe said to him 'Let's have a dry run and see how we go'. So I gathered the folk who wanted to do that they, up in the top flight, storey of Perth Headquarters of the police, and we went through a dummy run and he was very impressed. But then I had bank managers and doctors, the school teachers, every profession. They, now these people were used to interviewing people, why wouldn't they be able to interview someone and fill out the form, it's incredible? They, so after that we, we were working, and then they came and helped me with the training. They would come and explain what the police did. They, and Social Work came and they, it was a, very, very much a team effort, but really because of there's nothing to focus the mind like having a real emergency.

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: You can go through all sorts of things but you don't, you don't really realise how crunch time it is if you haven't been through it. Mm, and lots of traumatised, traumatised people with lots of varying needs that you and I wouldn't even consider to have thought, but they, and traumatised people don't always... I mean I knew that through my work as a radiographer, if, if people are shocked or upset they don't always, they co-operate to the best, they, and can be quite unpredictable so [Laughing] it, you need to train people really to cope with that. They, and we, we did dummy runs training, I, I did refresher trainings, you know, every year, I would do one or two, there, and not always in Perth they, and we got a half and half the team would be evacuees, acting as evacuees, and half would work, and then we swapped over. Mm, and the team that did the food made lunch so it, it was a whole day thing, or at least from ten till sort of three or four, which worked very well. And I really, really enjoyed that, I found it quite challenging then but I, I certainly enjoyed, I enjoyed doing that.

[00:40:18]

They, and I had loads of call out lists. They, with all, you know, a, if say Pitlochry, the whole team would be there but broken down into the folk who did which jobs, there were five tasks that I had it broken down into. And I just had to phone the team leader and she had a cascade, she knew exactly what to do, who to call out. Mm, and it did, it did work well.

[JH]: Did you have any emergencies in Perthshire?

[AF]: Not that many. They, at one time I, I actually had to cover for Dundee as well, and that, that was the most problematic actually. Mm, there's a, a big hotel, it's a Malmaison now actually, it's been redeveloped but at that time it was, or had been a hotel and it was a home for the homeless finally, for Dundee Social Work, and it had gone on fire. And I was asked to come down to Menzieshill Community Centre and, and do the needful for, with Emergency Services. So I'd, I'd called a number of folk, got, got some people organised from Perth to come down as well. And, [Laughing] but because of who they were, you know, homeless and they, [Laughing] not, not prone to working terribly well with the police can I say, they, they came in with fictitious names or, and the police wanted them to go on to a bus, but of course on to the bus with a whole load of policemen? Oh, no, no, no, no, no, that wasn't a good. So they, they drifted in realising that where, you know, where they had to go but it was a different name you got in the morning, it was terribly chaotic really. Mm, but it worked well as far as managing to feed and clothe and, and look after them. They, and another occasion I was asked to go over to Fife. There had been a, a problem with the gas in Tayport, and I got a phone call again from the, the Organiser, Regional Organiser, and to go there and we had to feed seventy-four gas employees. Because of course, once the gas goes off a gas man has to come back to your home to make sure that it's, so there were a great deal of, so that was quite good fun, because no-one was hurt and no-one was injured and it was just a case of feeding people, they, so that, that was quite good.

Mm, not another true emergency like we had in '93, not, not anything on a comparable scale, that was just dreadful because some people had lost absolutely everything. Mm, I, I think I said to you we, we took some people on holiday. There was one lady in particular I went to, to interview before we took her on holiday and she said every night that it was, in the winter when it got dark and if it was snowy or if it was heavy rain she sat all night with her coat on and a suitcase. Now, I mean that was more than a year after the event. They, and while there were no deaths, there, there were very, very many people who were quite traumatised for, you know, a long time. And she had been in sort of pensioners houses, they were called at that time, and the flood water had been up to her ceiling there and she'd no upstairs so everything that had been in her home, photographs, memorabilia, what you and I would want to hang on to, they were all gone. And there were, were a number of people like that. And we took, took them off on holiday.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: They, and she, this particular woman that I've been telling you about she said that was the first time she'd slept all night. So it was beneficial.

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: Mm, plus it put them into contact with other like-minded people. They, who had been through the same experience and that, that, I believe helps to get over an issue as well, if you speak to people who have, who have had the same problem.

[00:45:00]

Mm, but no, no, our Emergency Services, there, there was a, this, this business that's going on just now about VE Day celebrations, we were asked to cover as an Emergency Services team for an event that was taking place on The North Inch. There was a, a Black Watch monument and a sort of ceremonial thing that was taking place and I was asked by Social Work to go along to a meeting, which I did, and spoke to the chap who was in charge, the, and he was very nice, very charming. And he said they were needing teas done down on The North Inch, well of course there's no electricity there. So there would be a marquee put up and could I serve tea and biscuits to about two hundred folk? Oh that wouldn't be a problem. And I then organised with Social Work to get a generator, and we certainly had all the equipment, urns and tea urns and all of that and I would, I would manage to do that, organised a team. Next meeting I went back to it was up to four hundred people. And then another meeting, quite close to the event, they, he said well there was another event taking place in Oban and they were all Black Watch I think, mm, they would be coming over as well perhaps, buses coming over. Okay.

They, but it was open to the public because they were putting on a display of artillery and tanks and, you know, an army, an army display, so that it would be open to the public as well, but the public weren't to be getting a cup of tea. Okay then. So the morning of the event the, and I had loads of supplies I may say, just as a, [Laughing] which was just as well. Mm, we had our team, we were all set up and this chap arrived with the generator, council fellow on the back of the, a little lorry, and he dropped it off the back. I think it was, he was trying to lift it off by himself which was an impossibility, and it wouldn't work, so that was the first problem. So Bells Sport Centre is just off The Inch further up so we hived over there and filled up our tea urns with boiling water from them, which was very kind of them to give us. And one or two urns and back across, not terribly health and

safety, back across [Laughing] carrying all these things. They, so we knew we had enough hot water to get the thing at least under, under, started. Mm, this fellow arrived back with another generator which started to work, so great, urns were all plugged in, all hunky dory.

The other thing I had asked for was a water supply so an Army bowser arrived, but it, the tap just dribbled. Now I'm telling you this because it has huge, [Laughing] a huge influence on what happened later. [Laughing] Mm, it just dribbled out. So I kept this bucket underneath and, you know, once the bucket was full I managed to top up the urns then, but it, it was not great. Mm, however, they, the thing got under way, we started to serve our tea, they, and then this presentation take, took place, but there was too much noise from the generator. What would they do? Oh well, there were straw bales further over for part of the Army exhibition that was going on, bring those over and muffle the sound from the generator, which was what they did. The bales of hay, straw, whatever, went on fire, too close to the generator.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: So there was this fire going on, we were trying to serve teas. They, this drippy, drippy water bowser not, not much use as a fire prevention, they, all hell let loose, everybody was running about like scalded cats trying to put this fire out and this man pushed me out of the way to get the bucket and started to turn the tap on the bowser, and I said to him 'It won't run any faster than where we had it', we had it at the, optimum, [Laughing] drip level, if you like.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[AF]: They the chap who was in charge of the generator, there was a big black bin, not just a litter bin a, a big dustbin, he went down to the river, because it was right down by the river, and put this bin in the water. But of course it was such a large container he just about went in after the bin because it was, it was too big, too heavy then...

[00:50:15]

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: To haul out. [Laughing] So, [Laughing] he's trying to do that. The Army had a fire unit, much further over, so all was well. They, but of course, what happened, the generator didn't work again then. However, we did have enough hot water. But we served two thousand, eight hundred and fifty cups of tea that day. So we were very pleased...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: With ourselves. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing] For making all that tea.

[AF]: Making all that tea. The only thing we ran out of was sugar. The old soldiers take quite a lot of tea, sugar in their tea. [Laughing]

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: But, but no, no, we had they, we felt we, we did well that day but not without that problem. But it was, it was great fun, but we had quite a number of occasions when, like that, we were asked to come out and do teas or look after folks in that way. And we looked after our volunteers...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: As I say. Mm, did cups of tea and thank yous.

[JH]: Mm. And while you were Emergency Services Organiser did you find that the way WRVS wanted Emergency Service to work changed?

[AF]: Well it changed in as much as we had paid organisers then, paid managers, mm, which I didn't feel worked as well. Mm, latterly we had, well our man.., my manager stayed up in Highland Region somewhere, I'm not, not say perhaps, mm, and really had no local knowledge of here, and, to the extent that he'd been asked to put us on standby, which very often happened. I mean, you know, you, you, you could have a situation where they thought it was going to get to the stage where folk would need to be evacuated but not always. And he had phoned up, not me because I had, I think I'd maybe left by that time, certainly was unavailable. They, but he phoned quite an elderly member,

why I have no idea. They, but he would have a copy of my list so whether she was a name that just, or whether he'd tried a number of people, I have no idea. But he said, you know, 'We're needed to go on, on standby at the High School'. And she, she said 'High School? But it's not, it's the Grammar school'. Which was, I mean it, they'd, the Emergency Services manager for Perth and Kinross, the paid fellow for Council, he had nominated schools that we would use and we'd very often done trainings in these schools.

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: So you knew exactly how the set up went. Mm, well this fellow had said 'Perth High School', which is just along the road here, and she had the wits to say 'the High School? But that's not normally where we would go'. 'Oh well, they said the High School, leave it just now anyway, I'll get back to you'. Well it was actually the High School in Kinross, which is miles away from here.

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: There, there was a team down there but we still needed, would have needed to know the correct venue. But, now whether he'd been told Kinross I've no idea. Mm, but, it, it was certainly easier when the organiser was more local.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: They, and you knew who to contact. That, that was, you needed to have this line of, you know, call out, the which, which we certainly had, and, and elsewhere. I mean Kate Toynee, for instance, you know, was very much on, on the ball. They, but, you know, I felt it wasn't just as well organised. They, because trying to do it into a bigger area I don't think, you needed to know the local, local knowledge, really. That, that would have been my, my opinion, perhaps not correctly but they, I mean I carried a, for ten years I carried a, a bleep, the 24/7, they, apart from two or three weeks that I went on holiday I gave it to somebody else.

[00:55:00]

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Mm, so you, you knew, and I, I mean my, my personal team, I, I, I knew that if it was something to do with food for instance, I mean there was an occasion when there were, there were all, there was a lot of burst pipes that, they'd gone in insulated attics down in a housing scheme down here and not realising that the pipes weren't then, you know.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: House was insulated, pipes up in the attic, you know, absolutely freezing.

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: Lots of flooding, lots of folk had to be evacuated. And they, it was just feeding and they were going to be re-housed so, very quickly into accommodation so it was really only food. So I just knew I had to phone the, the woman along the road here who had been in charge of catering at Perth College they, and say to her 'Anna, they've got a problem down in Tulloch School folk are needing fed'. They, and I knew that I didn't need to do anything else, you know. They, and I got, you know, a team organised to, to ferry folk to the place. They, but again it was just one phone call. They, and he organised his team so I was then free to get down there and make sure things were okay down there. They, now if you're dealing with that from...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Miles away, they, everybody needs a, a, a centre point to as a control if you like. They, I felt that was missing.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: That it, it needed more local control than, than it got latterly. Mm, rightly or wrongly, that was my opinion.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: [Laughing]

[JH]: And while you were Emergency Services Organiser, was that when you were also a Company Member and on the Vice-Chairman's...

[AF]: Mm, yes...

[JH]: Committee?

[AF]: I was on the Vice-Chairman's Committee at that time but when I became a Trustee I, I felt I couldn't, you know, do that job correctly. And there was a woman who wanted to take over from me, which was great.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: They, I didn't really feel that, you know, because I was away so much more they, I felt that I needed to pass the baton on to someone else. Mm, but certainly as a, I was a, from the, the Vice-Chair's Committee, yes.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Yes. Ah, ha.

[JH]: And how did you become a member of the Vice-Chair's Committee?

[AF]: I have no idea. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[AF]: Mm, I, I suppose because I had shown willing to do a number of tasks that was possibly why. Mm, and the powers-that-be in Edinburgh, I mean I had gone through to meetings so they'd got to know me a wee bit I suppose. They, I didn't have full-time employment, nor did lots of people either, but I, I really have no idea, but I was asked and I thought 'Well', you know, 'perhaps I, if I'm being asked I should go and do it'.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: They, and of course, Alice was in charge of that group, so I mean what's not to like about Alice?

[Laughing] She's a lovely person.

[JH]: Because she was the Vice-Chairman at the time?

[AF]: Yes, she was.

[JH]: Wasn't she?

[AF]: Mm, yes she was, they, ah, ha. And Elaine Ross was the Scottish Organiser at that time in Edinburgh, a very nice person too. They, they all were, very, very kind and, and, you know, if you were a new girl you got shepherded around and they, which was very nice. And that, that's, I, I think all the meetings that I attended were all at, at Milton Hill.

[JH]: In Oxford?

[AF]: Yes.

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: Ah, ha. Which is no more is it?

[JH]: No.

[AF]: No.

[JH]: Now we're at Cardiff.

[AF]: No, you just, so, and where do the Trustees meet now?

[JH]: In London.

[AF]: In London?

[JH]: At our office in Grosvenor Gardens.

[AF]: Right, right.

[JH]: That's where they will have their meetings now.

[AF]: Ah, ha. Mm, no I, did I attend one meeting in London? I might have done, but the rest were all in... Yes, I think I did because I can remember, I can remember there being... No it, at Brixton, it was in a hotel somewhere. Because their headquarters were in Brixton.

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: But I, I was never there. Mm, but I think, because I can remember, I can remember Didcot being bought so I must have gone to meetings elsewhere but I don't honestly remember that. I seem to think that it was an Ibis in London, an Ibis Hotel in London somewhere.

[JH]: And what did you do as a Vice-Chairman?

[01:00:00]

[AF]: Well really there were four of us, were there? Four of us in Scotland. I think so. Mm, yes Myrtle Porchess [ph 01:00:17] I don't know if she's still alive is she, Myrtle?

[JH]: I'd have to ask Alice.

[AF]: Rachel Fraser, who has changed her name now, she is Rachel, gracious me, what's her married name? She's got married again, husband died. Rachel, and Marion Yool from up Elgin direction.

[JH]: Yes. I've been to see Marion.

[AF]: Have you been to see Marion?

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: Marion will have lots of stories as well.

[JH]: Yes

[AF]: [Laughing] Mm, and myself, four of us, ah, ha. I've got a photograph actually of us, the four of us. Mm, so we, we divvy'd up Scotland. Rachel was Edinburgh, Marion up the road there. Mm, Myrtle was Glasgow, or West, and I was sort of Greater Tayside. They, and we went out and spoke about WRVS and handed out medals and they went along to tea parties and tried to promote WRVS to the best of our ability. Mm, I mean I had, I had been involved with lots of talks with Emergency Services so...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: You know, you did, you did the, the sort of recruitment bit, [Laughing] if you like on those events as well. Mm, and then we got together as a group here the four of us. They, and then Marion became a Trustee and Sylvia Bertram from Inverness came on to Vice-Chair's Committee. Mm, and again we, we kept meeting as a group here to discuss Scottish problems in particular. They, and then went down to, to Alice's meetings at, at Milton Hill. Mm, so I did that for, I can't tell you how long now.

[JH]: About six years I think it was, sort of three...

[AF]: Was it, was it two...?

[JH]: Three...

[AF]: Two lots of six? You have my history better than I have to be...

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: Perfectly honest. Do you have a copy there, no?

[JH]: Mm...

[AF]: Mm, because I...

[JH]: I've got...

[AF]: I didn't, I didn't, those dates weren't all, you know, I thought 'Oh. are these accurate'?

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Mm...

[JH]: Because I know that Alice did, she, it's because she started the Vice-Chairman's Committee.

[AF]: Yes, she did.

[JH]: And she did two lots of three.

[AF]: See I, I've got Company Member there 1996, with a question mark after it.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Because I'm not, I'm not sure.

[JH]: Yes, because the Company Members came first. And Alice...

[AF]: Yes, but I, I don't think, because I then was asked, you see 1998 to become a Trustee. I didn't...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: I didn't do it that long, I don't think I did it for six years.

[JH]: No. Was it maybe two, two years and then moved on to the Trustee?

[AF]: Ah, ha. Because I had no intentions of becoming a Trustee.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AF]: And I got this, this letter from... I was, I was, we were, I, we were all going down to a meeting anyway because both of them tended to be around about the same time, and Lisa, what's her name? Who was secretary for the Trustees Committee and Vice-Chair I think, she sent me this letter asking me to send my CV. And I phoned her up, I said Why, why are you needing a CV from me? 'Oh well it's just the Trustees need to know if you're becoming a Trustee', there was going to be a, a vote, you will need a CV'. I said 'Who put my name forward as a Trustee'? And it was Annie Boyd, who was, by this time, Scottish Manager. And I thought 'Trustee'? So I knew Marion Yool was a Trustee by that time and I think I got in touch with her and asked, you know, 'What does it involve'? Mm, and I had asked Lisa, you know, to send me stuff and let me see what was involved, you know, you think, they... And then down at the, at the Vice-Chair Committee meeting I think I spoke to Alice then. So she said to me 'Oh no, no, no, no, you must do it, you must do it'. So I thought 'Oh well, give it a whirl, see how I get on'. [Laughing]

[01:05:06]

But that, that was, I found that quite challenging but wonderful. They, they, I had, I mean I'd been a, a, you know, a Trustee of various things, you know, I'd been on Board for, you know, Junior Chamber and the, one or two other things, but certainly nothing as challenging as, as this. I mean it's, it's a, it was a, it's a huge business, you were, well at that time it certainly was. Mm, I think we'd a hundred and twenty or a hundred and forty or something volunteers, thousand volunteers at that time, which we'll not have now I'm sure. They, but, and that was a, a wonderful time, I certainly did six years in that. They, and enjoyed my time, not the travel, [Laughing] but I enjoyed my time, [Laughing] up and down, and my involvement with organising things in Scotland and down, down there. They, and meeting all the people that I did there and attending meetings all over. And in the Channel Islands, I represented WRVS at a meeting over there. Mm, so it was, yes it was quite, quite interesting and...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Very, very worthwhile I felt anyway. Whether it made a difference, I'm not sure but, [Laughing] it was certainly good.

[JH]: Do you remember who the Chairman was at, at the time you were a Trustee?

[AF]: Elizabeth Toulson was there for one or two years. Mm, and then Tina Tietjen the, and both women gave, gave a lot, quite different ladies I would have said. They, but, and Alice of course. But no it was a good, a good team. Gerry Burton.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: The, and then Mark...

[JH]: As Chief Executive?

[AF]: Yes. Ah, ha.

[JH]: And did they have different styles of managing?

[AF]: Yes.

[JH]: WRVS?

[AF]: Yes. Ah, ha. Yes, I would have said. I mean Mark was far more modern in, in outlook, not, not that I'm, I'm not criticising Gerry Burton at all. They, because both gave, you know, way and above what anybody would have been expecting to do for the, and wonderful representatives for, for WRVS. And the fact they were men I thought was quite good really. They, you know, I'm not a feminist in any way and they, they certainly, you know, got over the, the male point of view. They, and of course we'd one or two men on the, the Board as well as Trustees experts in their, in their field. They, and in, in a way perhaps, that was the start of encouraging men to join the organisation, I would have liked to think so. Mm, not just as drivers but...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Mm, doing many things as no doubt they still do. Which was good.

[JH]: And what was changing about WRVS while you were a Trustee?

[AF]: Oh the big change was paid people coming in. And, and I, you could see why, why that started because very often as a volunteer dealing with paid people, now this is a sweeping statement I know, but you very often had to prove yourself. They, oh a volunteer, now I mean I, I spoke to you earlier or I told you earlier about the experience with the police here, people forget that you, you are standing in front of them as a volunteer, they, they don't appreciate what you've done in a prior life. And I can remember that one occasion I went up to Inverness to, to speak to a group and there was someone being quite derogatory about volunteers, and I thought 'Mm, that's not a very nice thing to say'. They, so I thought 'Right, I'll just put a wee bit into the beginning of my speech'. So I was speaking about the floods in, in Perth. And they were all professionals that were there, Social Work, Fire, Police, Ambulance, the firemen, all, all professionals. And I said 'Now what, what do you see when you, when you look at me'? And I said 'A wee WRVS wifey who can make the tea'? Because that was what WRVS were viewed as doing, great at making tea, and we were, we were exceptional at making tea.

[01:10:15]

Mm, but, I said, 'But if I tell you that if you were scraped up off the A9 in an accident the second person who would be dealing with you would be me'. So there was a hush. I said 'Volunteers all have expertise elsewhere'. They, and the one thing that my life as a radiographer taught me was that you didn't panic, and if you were panicking you certainly didn't relay it to the person in front of you. They, and they, as professionals, I mean a, a fireman or a, or a policeman might see a situation as being 'Oh my goodness me', but the last thing they're going to do is, so they're professionals but, but so are we. They, and when I asked people to come on board to do Emergency Services they, I recruited from every and any field, they, people who were very professional. The, the lady who I asked to come on to the team to do the food, as I said earlier, managed the refectory at Perth College, hundreds of people every day she was feeding so she knew about large amounts of food, she knew how to cook it, she knew how to prepare it, she knew how to keep it hot. They, all of that, they, we certainly, as a team, had to go and do our food handling and there was kinds of sort of goods to make things okay, the Health and Safety wise. But, but she knew her stuff and was already qualified so people needed to have a more open mind about, [Laughing] about volunteers. They, and I found that was quite challenging always with, with WRVS. They, that and I'm sure that's, I'm sure folk find that, no matter where they volunteer, that they have to... And I could see where the paid

management came in because very often if you were dealing with big contracts and things, like Meals-on-Wheels contracts, that they didn't want to deal with a volunteer, they wanted to deal with someone who was employed.

[JH]: Did you find WRVS were becoming more businesslike, and more...?

[AF]: Yes.

[JH]: Professional?

[AF]: Yes. And both of those were required. But what we had were management and senior management coming in who had never dealt with volunteers, and that was tricky because volunteers really need to be treated differently. Not, difficult to put that into words, but, if someone is coming in nine to five and they're earning money for their mortgage they, they have a totally different outlook from one who is there from nine to five as a volunteer, I'm quite sure you could appreciate that. They, they're there because they want to be there and you, you've got to volunteer to realise how much you get back. It's nothing to do with money, it's fulfilment, it's feeling you're making this difference, all of these things that folks speak about as, as a volunteer. And you do, you, and, and it is very, very worthwhile. They, and you meet interesting people who are also volunteering. They, quite different from someone who goes in the for money. They, they're there because they maybe need to be there. Very few folk, very few folk that you hear they 'Oh, I'm thrilled to bits to go into work every day'. Mm, and there will be some volunteers who will think 'Oh dear I've got to do that today'. But they by and large the volunteers are there because they want to be there so I think people need to be managed in a different way. They, what you might be able to say to someone who is in paid employment you cannot always say that to someone who is volunteering. Mm, and I felt that was, there were tricky situations that developed because of that, people's lack of appreciation of that if you like. I'm not saying they weren't good at managing, they, many were, some weren't but then that, that's true of, of any organisation. But there was a, a lack of insight I think sometimes as to how they should be dealing with volunteers.

[JH]: Were there changes to the services WRVS were giving in the local community?

[01:15:05]

[AF]: I wouldn't have said so. Mm, certainly hospital, now I had nothing ever to do with hospitals apart from as a Trustee, but certainly that became big time, if you like. Mm, very, very big hospitals with, and that's where the professionalism needed to come in, you needed to have trained retail managers for those shops. Mm, you know, I mean it, as a Trustee I heard stories about, you know, old ladies couldn't still work their tills. They still wanted to come along and do their shift but they did their, their shift with a, you know, an ice cream container with some, some cash in it. Now obviously that won't do. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[AF]: And I mean these tills were, you know, they did a, a stock run as they, as you take off, you know, if it was two Mars bars that comes off, you don't have to stock take with these big tills. They, so if you're dealing with, you know money in a, in a carton of, you know, ice cream carton, now this, this did happen, I don't know where but, but they were elderly members of the Association, or WRVS who perhaps went up to big modern tills, big modern retail units that was, that was the truth of it. They, but these situations have to be managed, when you have volunteers you've got to manage those situations well, and that didn't happen. But it, the need was certainly there because of that, I mean that was one place where we needed to be far more professional. They, and you needed in retail people who knew the stuff, definitely. Mm, and contracts were coming in for most things, you know, Meals-on-Wheels contracts had to be organised. They, you know, books, books aloud even, the, or Books-on-Wheels rather, library staff, you were, you know, it's, it was big business they, and, and a huge turnover at, at that time, I don't know what, what like it is now but, I mean there is certainly still a shop down at PRI for instance. They, and we do other things down there, you know, there's a Welcome Desk and folk will take you to a ward if you're not sure where it is. They, and I think there's still a book trolley goes round, I don't think we're doing the newspapers now but perhaps we do and the shop. So it's, and cafe, so it's, I mean that's still functioning and...

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: I'm sure it does elsewhere as well. Mm, so there was a, there was a need for management but not without its problems.

[JH]: How long were you a Trustee for?

[AF]: Six years. I did two lots of three.

[JH]: Mm. And when did you step down from the Board.

[AF]: Oh, about, 2000, well it will be 1998, 2004.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AF]: I would, I would come, come out. Mm, and I finished with Emergency Services, I was still on the, on the, the...

[JH]: On the rota?

[AF]: Rota. Mm, and still on as a sort of, you know, assistant organiser if you like in 2005/2006, somewhere round about there. Mm, I wanted a bit more local organisation for the reasons I said to you. Mm, and I wanted the team retrained, all throughout Perthshire, it hadn't been done for I think four or five years. Mm, and I wanted folk retrained and the call out sheets up to date. And that was refused, so I resigned. They, it, I mean there were people on that call out list who were dead, seventy-four, I think out of the list. And I, I just felt I couldn't be, you know, if, if you phone up and someone's ill or someone has just died there's an excuse, but if folk have been dead for maybe a year and you're still calling them that seems unprofessional to me so I didn't want to be involved with that, and I thought 'There's no way I'm going to'. And fair enough because of changes, staff in, in Social Work there wasn't the same rapport that I had had when I was the Organiser, and all our training was being paid so WRVS were going to have to pay for that training to happen and, but I still felt it should have been done and I wasn't prepared to. I mean it, if I had been called out for an emergency folk would have been looking to me to be able to, to organise it.

[01:20:32]

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: As, as it had been done, and I didn't feel that I was in a good position, because of what had, or what had not happened as a, an update and as a retraining thing. And folk were meeting me in the street and saying 'We haven't had a training for ages Alison, what's...'

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: You know, 'Oh well', you know, 'nothing to do with me'. They, and I said 'But I'll, you know, I'm having a meeting I'll, I'll see what I can do and...' Someone said, you know, and it put me, when I looked at the lists I thought they, 'Oh this is awful', because one of the, one of the folk she'd actually been a friend of mine and, and she'd died two years previously, and I thought, you know, that, you can't have people, as I say, if it's happened, just happened that's, there's an excuse but not if it's... So these lists needed to be, because they would have been used in an emergency, so that was the reason that I resigned from Emergency Services. But I was very sad to do so.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: I may say. Because I thoroughly enjoyed my, my time. And I'm still interested in hearing what goes on I may say. [Laughing]

[JH]: Did you keep in touch with WRVS at all once you'd left?

[AF]: Initially I did, and I still did one or two things but they, and I really felt I, I could have down, back and done Meals-on-Wheels but then of course they stopped here. Mm, and I wondered for a while about doing Books-on-Wheels but I have a bad back because of my radiography days, pulling bodies about so I didn't really feel that, and I didn't want to be involved with the hospital. Mm, so I'm afraid [Laughing] it just... I mean, as I say, I did do one or two things but it just stopped then. The thing is the, the personnel down there changed so, you know, they'll be calling on people that they know rather than... But I was a bit sad that as a Trustee the organisation generally didn't stay more in touch with me, if you know what I mean?

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Mm, I mean I know there was the thing down in St Paul's they, but I can't remember now for which, what reason, I think I was maybe on holiday.

[JH]: It was...

[AF]: Was it?

[JH]: Seventy-fifth Anniversary.

[AF]: Yes.

[JH]: Service.

[AF]: Ah, ha, that's right. And what, when was it held?

[JH]: It was May 2013.

[AF]: Ah, ha. I can't remember why I didn't go but there, there was a reason anyway. But, I mean it was a long way to, to go, they, and, you know, I'd... [Pause] Well there was no, there was no structure that I could get a part of, if you know what I mean. You know, no-one had said 'Oh', and, you know, 'people are to be staying in these hotels'. I mean I'm a Soroptimist and if we have a big meeting, you know, they send you a list of the hotels in the area where folk are staying and you know that there'll be others, other Soroptimists there that you can go along and, but no-one had, you know, given me any indication of, you know, where folk might be or, and I didn't know anyone else in this area that was going then but, so I didn't go. But, you know, it would be nice, it would be nice to be in a loop of some description, there's not that many Trustees, they, that you hear what's going on so that you're able to go along if you can, that would be nice, mm, to, to keep a, you know, a slight tenure with, [Laughing] with the organisation [Laughing] and stay interested. But I mean I hear absolutely nothing now.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: They, is there not a newsletter comes out or?

[JH]: There's, well the last, very last *Action Magazine* came out last month.

[AF]: Ah, ha.

[JH]: And they're it not producing it anymore.

[AF]: Are they not?

[JH]: And they sent a letter out saying that if you were to find out what we were doing to go on the website, but of course not all our volunteers have the...

[AF]: No.

[JH]: Internet.

[AF]: No.

[JH]: At home.

[AF]: Well I mean I could, I could certainly do that but it's, you know, do they still hold a carol concert every year?

[JH]: No. We don't do any of the social, what a lot of volunteers who I've been to see before said to me...

[AF]: Ah, ha.

[JH]: The social side.

[AF]: Yes.

[JH]: Of WRVS...

[AF]: Ah, ha.

[JH]: Well Royal Voluntary Service.

[AF]: Yes.

[JH]: Has gone.

[AF]: Yep. That's right, yes, they, which was sad. They, and I, I realise someone has to organise that and, and it has to be paid for.

[01:25:06]

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: But, but as a shop window for, for the organisation these things, you know, if you have a big carol concert somewhere they, it could be a shop window for all that you do, ours certainly was, the one that I organised in, in Edinburgh certainly was because it included information about, about WRVS and you tended to invite the movers and the shakers so that you were, you know, sowing seeds, perhaps they, for future occasions. [Laughing] But no I'd, I'd, I certainly would agree with that, that, and it would be very nice if, if there was some kind of link to certainly the folk that, that gave a lot of time. You know, managers and regional managers and all the folk who were committed for a long, long time, there's lots of folk had a lot more service than me. They, I mean I, I remember handing over a lady, a medal to a, a lady and she was ninety, down in Broughty Ferry she did Meals-on-Wheels every day. I mean I think it was her life but, you know, and was, was so enthusiastic about WRVS. I mean if you stood, you know, she, oh, she could tell you about, which you, I, I'm trying to think, it was forty years she'd been a member. They, and another lady in Longforgan, which was just down in the Carse of Gowrie there they, I gave her a medal at an afternoon tea that was organised for her. And she'd driven an ambulance during the blitz, you know, a...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: A, a little old lady and so full of, by gum she could tell you some stories. They, and again had been a member for, you know, years and years and years. Mm, so it, you know, it, there should be something, they, that can draw these people together if, if they want to come and, as I say, showcase WRVS, one would hope anyway. [Laughing] Maybe all these grey haired old ladies are not what you want to show off, [Laughing] but it's a way of promoting what we're doing now. Mm, you know, I, hammering away about the other thing I do is, or did, was Girls' Brigade. They, and now it's Soroptimism that I'm very much involved with, but to let folk know what you do. They, and, and to, to get them involved and they, you know, folk are thrilled to bits once they, once they are members.

I don't know what they, they think, 'Oh no, no, no, I don't', and 'That's not for me', or whatever. But they, because it, you know it's good works, no matter whether it's local or, or abroad, I mean Soroptimism does both things. But I mean WRVS does such, or did.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: I mean I'm not up to the mark, I, but I mean I can remember Alice going on. Now she'll tell you this story was it The Queen Mother's Hundredth Birthday? It was some celebration down there anyway, and she was asked to go and was it one of the Dimplebys she sat beside? And spoke about WRVS and volunteering in this country, how much it saved the country. Now, Alice will have that information.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: They, she maybe hasn't told you that yet, has she?

[JH]: No.

[AF]: No.

[JH]: I've not interviewed her. Alice is...

[AF]: Haven't you?

[JH]: Coming up to be, she, she keeps...

[AF]: Pushing herself away, does she?

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: Ah, dear. Mm, no Alice, Alice went along, I can't, but she, she will have that in full.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: The, and the chap was absolutely, I think it was one of the Dimblebys, was absolutely staggered at the amount of money it saved Britain. Mm, because of course at, at The Queen Mother's funeral, and Diana's, the WRVS were heavily involved with both of those events. They, both writing and attending to mail and getting them, collecting all the flowers and all the teddy bears and things after Diana's death. They, heavily involved with that, you know, a lot of our, the office staff went along to Buckingham Palace and sat for days doing all the, attending to, I'm, I'm not sure, letters of condolence and replying to them and whatever. They, so, no, no, highly thought of. [Laughing]

[01:30:10]

[JH]: Mm. [Laughing]

[AF]: As an organisation.

[JH]: And is there anything which we haven't talked about that you'd like to mention?

[AF]: Mm, well I organised two events here, which the one was the carol concert in the Canongate Kirk in Edinburgh.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Which was a great success. Mm, I've got information here about that. And the other event was we wanted to do things in Scotland, well I wanted to do things in Scotland too. I mean I don't think everything should just happen in one part of the country, you want to really advertise and promote the organisation up in Scotland. So we also organised a reception in Holyrood, Holyrood Palace, they, with Princess Alexandra, so that was, that was a good night. And the other thing there was a dinner in Stirling Castle and Princess Anne came to that. And again that was really promotion, they, but all three events were, were well attended and the, not the, the, the reception at the Palace could have been better attended but they were all, you know...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: A good showcase for, for WRVS. Mm, but I can let you have a look through this stuff.

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: You won't have time to do that, what time is it? Twenty-five past eleven just.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Okay for time.

[JH]: Oh yes.

[AF]: But if there is anything that you...

[JH]: Mm...

[AF]: Can think about...

[JH]: Well is there, what was the biggest change you experienced as, during your time as a volunteer?

[AF]: I think the, the, the changeover to paid management, I think I could say that was the biggest...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Change.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Because that was quite radical really. Mm, and really impacted on every part of WRVS. Mm, some good and not such good, some not so good. Mm, but I would have said that was the biggest change. Mm, and as was pointed out to me, and quite rightly so, when, when you've been a member of an organisation that has been run locally very well, that didn't happen everywhere. I can remember, I'm sure it was Gerry Burton, that, you know, I, I'd been going on about something at a meeting and he said to me 'But not everywhere was', you know, the membership cards that you

were speaking about that Alice has saved in Wiltshire, not everywhere kept those cards. They, I'm sure you, you realise that.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AF]: They, and with the result you'd, you'd no history, and folk don't... I mean that, there's me, I have no, you know, no, not, not a clear cut 'This is what I did when, where, when', they, I, I don't have that either. But that was on these people's cards. Now we kept the cards here, they, and we always had a, an organiser here who was on the ball. They, Avril Duncan, who took over from Jenny Milne who, who was an excellent manager. Mm, Avril Duncan, who took over from her, her mother had been the organiser before Jenny Milne.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: They, so Avril was steeped in, in WRVS, she, she had delivered Meals-on-Wheels from fourteen. [Laughing] They, when her mother was stuck for somebody, you know, they 'Oh Avril you can do this'. So we, we had people who were absolutely they... But that, that wasn't to say that, but when you've seen this organisation working very well you assume that that's what's happening elsewhere, but that wasn't. So there was, and as I've said earlier because we were dealing with, you know, contracts, big hospital retails shops, all of that, there was a need to, to go over, I realise that, to, to proper management, paid management. They, but it was still a massive change.

[01:35:01]

They, and I don't think, I think it did impact a bit on goodwill sometimes, they, from donations. When, when, you know, folk before had been, you know, quite generous, when they saw WRVS people in, you know... [Laughing] One day it was actually very apparent because we had a meeting in Perth and there were all these WRVS cars, and that did impact on donations, you know, folk I think they thought 'All these WRVS cars', they, you know 'who's paying for that?' And I mean it, it, you, you will appreciate, as I do, you want your money, if you're handing over a donation you want your money to be spent on the, the end product, not...

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: Not on a car. [Laughing] Mm, so it, that, that did perhaps make a difference to the organisation too more so than I maybe thought before when I think about it now. Mm, because we did have, you know, access to money here from trust funds locally and, and, you know, just local people who were, who were very generous to, to WRVS. They, that, you know, there was maybe questions asked after, after that. Mm, I was going to go to tell you something else but it's gone out of my head again.

[JH]: Mm.

[AF]: It will come back. [Laughing]

[JH]: So what was your most memorable moment of being in WRVS?

[AF]: Oh gosh. I think the Perth floods, helping with them I think. Yes, I would have said so.

[JH]: Yes.

[AF]: I'll, I'll let you see the book.

[JH]: Oh excellent, thank you. I'll, Mm...

[AF]: Is there anything else that you...?

[JH]: No. I think that's...

[AF]: Not for the minute anyway.

[JH]: I'll, I'll stop it for now, but thank you very much.

[End of Interview - 01:37:29]