

Voices of Volunteering: 75 Years of Citizenship and Service

Interview Transcript

Title Page

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Collection Title: Voices of Volunteering

Interviewee's Surname: Hall

Title: Mrs

Interviewee's Forenames: Maureen

Gender: F

Volunteer/Employee Roles and Dates:

Volunteer from November 1976-Present (2015)

1976-Present (2015) Norton-Canes Darby &
Joan Club

1976-1986 Tea Bar at Featherstone Prison

1976-1991 Emergency Services

1976-2001 Meals on Wheels

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Interviewer's Notes:

Maureen Hall (MH) talks about her experience of being a WRVS volunteer in Norton-Canes, Staffordshire, from 1976 to present (2015). She describes her work with the Prison Tea Bar at Featherstone, as part of the Meals on Wheels service (MOW) which she undertook for approximately 25 years and with the Emergency Services which she was involved with for 15 years. She also talks about her role as part of the Darby and Joan Club which she is still currently involved with. MH has been the Secretary of the club and also its leader until approximately 2011 and currently acts as the Vice-Chairman of the club's committee. MH also talks about the holidays and outings she has organised for the club and all of the sponsorship work she has done for WRVS, such as a sponsored swim for the Toy Library at Cannock Library.

[Jennifer Hunt]: This is Jennifer Hunt with Maureen Hall on the twenty-sixth of February 2015 at her home in Norton Canes, Staffordshire. Maureen would you just like to introduce yourself?

[Maureen Hall]: Yes, I am Maureen Hall. I have been in The WRVS since, oh I should say RVS shouldn't I?

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MH]: I've been in the WRVS since 1976. My mother-in-law she was in at the beginning when the Darby and Joan club started and it was through her that I joined. When she died she, she'd always asked me beforehand to join and I did join afterwards, I was asked to join and I've been with them ever since, I'm still going strong now, [Laughing] or trying to anyway. Yes, so, so that is the Darby and Joan Club but I've done various other things as well. Mm, I mean I've done, I did do the prison tea bar at Featherstone and I rather enjoyed that, I think I did that for about ten years. And Meals-on-Wheels I know I did for twenty-five years until they lost the contract but I loved doing that, going around talking to the people.

Some of them weren't really bothered so much about the meals it was just someone they wanted to see and talk to, but of course, we hadn't always got the time. We tried to stop a minute or two, you know, but yes, I enjoyed that and I was sorry when it finished after twenty-five years but still I enjoyed it. And what else did I do? I, the Emergency Services, my first duty actually was with the Emergency Services, I'd only just joined I think a week and Mrs Babarootie [ph 00:01:59] she was the District Org..., Organiser and she rang me up the one night and said 'Come on Maureen, there's an emergency in Norton, we've got to get down to the race track', she said 'all the people are going there'. I said 'What's happened'? And she said 'There's a gas leak and we've got to get them all there', she said, 'ambulances are taking them in', she said 'get up, get dressed, put your green uniform on and if you've got a bag of sugar and a bottle of milk bring it down with you'. So that was about two o'clock at night and my husband said 'What's the matter, what's the matter'? I said 'There's an emergency, a gas leak somewhere'. And as I came out of the door when she came to pick me up, I came out of the door and you could smell it. But it was a leak on a big lorry that had come to one of the factories and they were just taking all the elderly people, especially all those right in

the vicinity, to this place, there was about a hundred people and we went down made tea and gave them biscuits. And the ambulances had given us blankets to put round some of the elderly people and, you know, it was quite exciting really because that was the first time. I said 'I'm, I didn't know I was in the Emergency Services'. She said 'Oh yes, you are', she said 'you filled the form in and you said you didn't mind doing Emergency Services'. [Laughing] So that was how I got involved, but I loved it really, yes.

[JH]: And you mentioned that you became involved because of your mother-in-law?

[MH]: Yes.

[JH]: Were there any other reasons you wanted to join WRVS?

[MH]: Well, yes. I'd given up, I used to do a part-time job and I had given that up to actually look after my mother-in-law towards the end. And because I'd got no job afterwards and I thought I would like to do. Actually when I was about eighteen I worked in that office at Stafford and they asked me to join and they said 'You can learn to drive' and I was going to join then but I didn't, I was put off because they said 'Oh, you might be one of the first to be called up if there's a war', and it put me off and really they shouldn't have said that because I, I absolutely loved it when I did join. And the family were growing up, they were still at school, I've got two children, they were still at school but they were alright because I could go to the Darby and Joan Club anyway on a Wednesday afternoon, which is what I started to do to, to fetch my mother-in-law back, take her and bring her back. But of course, and then when she died I had a letter from them asking me if I would join them. So I'd got an idea what it was like, and so that was why I joined really. And apart from the fact that I think voluntary work is very good for anyone that's on their own or, you know, that perhaps not got a job, you get satisfaction from it, you know, you don't, you don't want paying for it you just get satisfaction of helping other people. Well, I always have anyway.

[00:05:05]

[JH]: What are your earliest memories of volunteering for WRVS?

[MH]: Mm, the early years was... Well, it was really looking after old people, I never thought of myself, you know, being involved with old people, and when I started there weren't that many that

went to our Darby and Joan Club but I found myself really enjoying looking after them and they used to ring me up any time. You know, if, I remember one lady and she rang me up and she said 'Harry hasn't come back yet'. I said 'Well, where's he gone'? She said 'Well, he went a walk' she said 'and he', and she says 'but he hasn't come back and he's always back by now'. And I said, I says 'Well, don't get worried', I said 'I'll get the car out and see if I can find him'. Anyway I didn't know, I went around the streets, I couldn't find him, and I went back and I stopped with her in her house and I said 'Have you rung your son'? And she said 'Yes'. Anyway about half an hour later in walks her husband, and he'd been to one of our old ladys' houses and she'd made some cakes and he'd stopped and had cakes and tea, [Laughing] and she was that worried the wife was, you know, and I said 'You'll know where he is the next time'. [Laughing] You know, that was just one of my very first memories really apart from the Emergency Service that I had down there. Mm, but it, I've always found that it's been, I've looked forward to it especially the Darby and Joan I go up to, I mean I'm still going there now and I, every Wednesday afternoon I don't go anywhere else, I have to go to the Darby and Joan Club. And we did have a hundred members at one time but they have dwindled down now. And I mean I looked after my husband for, he had Parkinson's for eighteen years and so I looked after him and I thought 'Have I got to give it up' towards the end because I knew he was getting worse and a friend said 'You can't give it up, you'll want something to do afterwards if anything happens', and I didn't want to give it up anyway so I just carried on. And I'm glad I did because it kept me busy, it kept my mind busy and, as I say, I still go now. I don't do the holidays now because I used to do a holiday every year for them as well, but which none, some of them wouldn't have gone away at all, you know, because either they hadn't got family or the family doesn't want them to go away with them and so I did these holidays and I used to really enjoy it. I mean we did have some fun. We went up to Scotland one year and one old lady, she was ninety but she met a chappie up there and he took her out and we were worried to death in case he didn't bring her back, but he did bring her back and she says 'I kept on holding my handbag alright, I don't know what you were worried for'. [Laughing] But, you know, we did have, we did have some fun, they really enjoyed those holidays. So, you know, I, I just enjoyed the whole experience and I wouldn't want to give it up, you know, even now. I mean I know I'm getting older, I've had operations and one thing and another but I still go and I do enjoy it and they like me there as well, they do. You know, I've had it 'I wish you were still the leader', [Laughing] which is nice of them. [Laughing]

[JH]: How would you describe what a Darby and Joan Club is?

[MH]: Well, some people say 'What is a Darby and Joan'? And, but I don't really know how it got its name, I think it was during the war and I think a Darby and Joan to me was always elderly people, an elderly couple, but where the actual name came from I mean one of them was Joan I don't know whether the man was Darby or what or whether they came from Derby but they got the name Darby and Joan. And I know like my mother-in-law used to go and she, well, she was on the committee when I first started. She was also a WRVS member as well during the war because she did the savings and she also, I know she had a, I didn't know her at the time but I know that she had a refugee come to stay with them, I mean my husband can, could remember that. And she did quite a lot really for The WRVS but I don't think any of them, well I know I took over from a Mrs Watson, Maud Watson, who was the leader at the time. I think I'd been going two years then, or three years when they asked me to become leader. I wouldn't at first because I felt I didn't really know enough, and so another lady they persuaded her to do it but she only did it for twelve months and then she said 'Here you are Maureen, here's the badge, the WRVS badge, you, you are now leader', and that was it [Laughing] I had no choice. But, you know, I sort of, I got in to it anyway so I didn't mind and I enjoyed it. And they, you know, they, and we did get up to a hundred members.

[00:10:35]

I remember saying we had to close the books and just put their names on a waiting list for them to join, but now I think they've got about forty or fifty. But I think a lot of these Darby and Joan clubs, I don't know what it is, well, they can't get volunteers to run them for a start. I mean you've got to have someone that can organise things, day's outings and holidays and, you know, all sorts of things really. I mean we, the Darby and Joan, people come to have a good old natter, and at the moment we've got a minibus that picks some of them up that can't get there otherwise and they all look forward to it and they come. And although they're not so bothered about, well they do like to play bingo, we have a game of bingo, but they, the main thing is they come and meet their friends and they can have a good old natter and they perhaps don't see anyone else for a week or so and so that's why they come. We make them a cup of tea. We used to do them sandwiches but I think three o'clock in the afternoon they didn't really want one so we've cut that down and we just do tea and biscuits now. But we give them parties, I mean when they're eighty they always have a party so we have a good party for them, get them a cake and perhaps a little drop of sherry or something, you know.

But, and I think that's why they come is because they, they like to see the other people and it gets them out, they don't get bored then in their four walls because some of them don't go anywhere otherwise. There's a lady next door and she's got very bad legs because the nurses have to keep coming in, but I do take her down on a Wednesday with me and she shuffles in, you know, and she really enjoys it she, she does. And, but she don't see or go anywhere otherwise than there, you know. So I think that's what it is really a Darby. We did think of changing the name at one time because we knew younger people don't know what Darby and Joan mean when you say a Darby and Joan Club, they'd say 'Well, what's that'? But, and so we thought of changing it but we went through no end of names and we never did change it, [Laughing] we just left it. We thought, we couldn't agree you know, the committee couldn't so we just left it as it was. But it is for elderly people, yes. My granddaughter used to, she was at college at the time but every Wednesday afternoon she, it was her free time from college and she used to come and help us out and she really enjoyed it, you know. I never thought she would but she did and they loved to have her there, you know, but we can't get the young ones to come and help now, you know, I don't know why. They should come because I think it would do them good and it gives them an insight in to other people, you know. And my granddaughter, I mean she's a nurse now and she's got on really well and I think it helped her to come down and have a talk with the elderly people, apart from giving them a cup of tea or, you know, whatever, and she was really well liked there. So I think if a lot of younger ones could get involved it would do them good, you know, for the rest of their life really because they're helping other people and it, I think it just makes you feel good in yourself.

[JH]: Where is the Darby and Joan club?

[MH]: That's down at the community centre at Brownhills Road. It used to be on the other side of the road but it got a bit old and dilapidated. And anyway we, when the Housing Committee took it over, the grounds, to build houses they built this new community centre for us, and that's how we've got it and we used to buy bricks and things to, you know, a pound a go or whatever it was and it helped as well, and we've got a lovely community centre now. That opened, we moved in in the year 2000 and the parish council gave us a grant towards new crockery and everything so we had all new crockery because doing all, well, a hundred cups of tea a week some of them did get broken so we had all new crockery and we had new plates and everything. And it really is a nice community centre, I mean it's used a lot.

[00:15:09]

And it isn't council run it's run by volunteers. I was on the committee for fifteen years, mm, and it's getting good, you know, good, mm, what's the word? I can't remember it but, you know, really did like the, they do like the community centre but, and it's warm and they come and it's nice and airy and they have concerts and that there. And we have people come to entertain us as well from time to time for the Darby and Joan Club. But I mean there's, there's dancing there, there's bowling there, I go to all of them, well most of them. Bowling there on a Tuesday night and they have concerts there, have dances Saturday nights as well as well as Friday night. There's judo there, there's things for all, all ages really, you know, it isn't just a Darby and Joan Club, I mean that's just on a Wednesday afternoon but there's lots of other things going on there as well. And it's in more or less the centre of the village really so people can get there. And, as I say, people that can't drive now they go on the minibus so they can still get there. We're going out next week, we're going to the Byrkley Garden Centre next week and we're taking a coach load of them with us. So that will be a day out for them, yes.

[JH]: And where were you, where did you have the club before you moved in to the community centre?

[MH]: Well, it was in the old community centre which was over the road, but, like I say, it was getting a bit dilapidated. But mind you I can remember when that first went up as well, but it was alright, we still had a lot of people then. And we did have another WRVS club come from Etching Hill, which is Rugeley way. There was actually that lady's just not long died, Helen Dawson, she was over a hundred, a hundred and two when she died but I think when she got to eighty they couldn't get anyone to take her place so they had to drop out. It was a shame really, she was a lovely person, she'd got a lovely club and we invited them all over to our club and we had a, it was something the WRVS did, it was, mm, I think we was, was we Alice In Wonderland or something?

[JH]: Oh Mad Hatter's Tea Party.

[MH]: Oh that's it, yes, Mad Hatter's Tea Party, that was it. And it was a great success that was. I mean they all came over from Etching Hill on a coach and all our lot were there anyway, and this was in the old centre and we had a fabulous time, we were all dressed up, you know, and the Emergency Services team had sent a team to make the tea and that for us so that we had a, could enjoy it as well. And we didn't have to make the tea or sandwiches that day so it was nice to be treated. And

we did we had a fabulous day, it was really lovely and, you know, made quite a bit really out of that for the WRVS. And, as I say, this Helen Dawson who was the leader of the, of the Etching Hill club she invited us over to them and so we went and we spent an afternoon with them as well and it was quite good, I really enjoyed it, yes, yes.

[JH]: Can you tell me about the different roles you've had at the club?

[MH]: Yes. Well, I started off as a secretary, that was my first job. Then I went to, and then I, I, after three years, two or three years I was made the leader and then I've been the leader right up until, oh, I think it must, well, my husband's been dead four years coming up to five. It was about twelve months before that so up to about six years ago so it's been about over thirty years and, well over thirty years. Yes, because this year I will have been in it thirty-nine years, that's right, in November, that was when I actually joined. So like next year it will have been forty years. So, but anyway, as I say, I was, and I mean I'm not, I'm vice-chairman now I'm not the leader now I'm just vice-chairman but that's alright. I mean I still do the leadership sometimes, like yesterday I went to the club and Zaphne, that's taken over, she does a lot of council work and she said 'Would you be able to close the club this afternoon because I've got to go to a meeting'? I said 'Yes, that's alright'. So I still do part of the job anyway, you know, but that's more or less what I, what I did. But I did use to do the holidays as well for them.

[00:20:25]

I mean I, and I did, at one time I seemed to be doing everything until I remember Jeanette Cartwright saying to me 'You must delegate work out, you can't do it all yourself', she says 'you, you know, you'll make yourself ill, you've got to delegate'. Well, at the time I just thought, because I used to say to people on the committee 'Well, can you write to so and so and do so and so', and then I found well they weren't doing it I'd got to keep chasing them up so it was quicker to do it myself, and so I used to do it myself, and I did find at one point that I was seemed to be doing everything and so I started to do what Jeanette said which was a lot better. And we got a social secretary then because I was all that as well. And so now we have got someone that organises the day's outings. We all, the committee get together and we decide where we're going to go and what dates we're doing but someone else now sorts the, you know, organises it really. But that's only like the last three or four years really that I haven't done it, because I was doing it right up. I mean the holidays I did up until about five years ago, I used to take my husband with me as well. But yes, but

I've always enjoyed it and we used to have a fancy dress party the last night before we came back and they used to love that, I've still got a bag of fancy dress stuff in there. [Laughing]

[JH]: Yes.

[MH]: You know, and they, if they want one they come and ask me 'Have you got any fancy dress, can we borrow one'? But, you know, and then I used to organise the Christmas dinners as well, and we used to invite the councillors to come, especially the ones that used to give us a grant from time to time, you know, we used to look after those. But yes, I've, I've really enjoyed what I have done and I still do, I still do, I love to go to the Darby and Joan club, yes.

[JH]: You mentioned the holidays a couple of times?

[MH]: Yes.

[JH]: Where did you take them on holiday?

[MH]: Oh I took them all various places. We've been up Scotland. We went to, mm, near Glasgow, I forget the place we went to now, we've been to about three different places up Scotland. We've been down Devon, we've been down Cornwall, we've been down Wales, across to Wales, to Tenby and Saundersfoot, we've been really all over the place. And I brought, and we've even been to, we did get to Jersey as well. That was funny because we went on a, I thought we were going from Birmingham but when it turned out we'd got to go from Weymouth. So they sent a coach to pick us up, we got a coach load going and we went down to Weymouth. We got on the plane, it was only a little plane and it was only a little airport and, but anyway we got to Jersey and they all enjoyed it, they thoroughly enjoyed it. And they did manage all to take passports with them as well, [Laughing] so I had to make sure that they've got a passport. But yes, I mean that was good in Jersey. But we've been all over the place really. We went to, oh dear, we've been to Anglesey and we went to the Isle of Man and they enjoyed that, and that was, I thought going over some of them might not be well going over on, on the boat across, but we weren't we were all alright it was quite a good sailing, you know.

But I remember when we went to Jersey we had a day out at Guernsey and I said to them we, I hadn't booked the day out to Guernsey but it was a hovercraft that was going across and I said,

'Well', I said 'we're going to tomorrow', or whatever day it was, I said 'we're going to go across to Guernsey'. I'd never been there and I said 'So I'm going to go in to the shop when we get in to wherever it was' and I said 'and I'll book, book us in, but if you want to go you better go and book and say, you know, we'll all be together'. And I didn't think they would want, many would want to go really you see so I hadn't collected it, I thought 'Well, I'm not going round collecting the money they can pay it in themselves'. So we got off the coach with my husband and two, two of our friends and we walked down off the coach down to where this office was and when I looked back they were all getting off the coach and following us, [Laughing] the whole lot did and I was really surprised.

[00:25:23]

But anyway we went, we did all go and, but it was so rough going across that well, my friend, my friend's husband he was ill and they had to go and lie him down at the back and one or two others they couldn't get off the toilet, [Laughing] we was giving them peppermints [Laughing] to have. [Laughing] Oh dear, and I thought 'Well, what a day out'! But, and anyway my friend's husband he, when we got there I had arranged for the horse and carts to take us up the hill and to go. I mean there's no cars on there you just go round on the, I think the doctor might have had one but I don't know. Anyway it, they had to take him to the middle of the island of Guernsey and he had to lie down in the doctor's surgery [Laughing] all the while we was there. They gave him an injection and they said if ever he went across water again to have an injection first, which he does do now. But that was good though it was lovely. It, the first time I'd ever been to Guernsey and it was so quiet and peaceful, it was a lovely holiday that was, yes. So yes, so yes we've been all over the place really, yes. And my men used to always say 'Where are we going next year'? And I'd think 'Oh gosh', you know, but nobody does the holiday now. I mean Zaphne did start to, she was doing one and we paid a deposit in and I don't know what went wrong but she said that as there weren't enough to go and so we lost our deposits. Well, I didn't think that was right but still that's, you can scrub that bit out. [Laughing]

[JH]: Yes.

[MH]: But anyway, I mean I'd love to do it now but I'm getting too old now to, you know, to do it. But I mean I've had a new knee replacement in, but it's not too bad. It does, it hurts a bit at times but it's alright, I've had different operations so I thought 'I'm getting past it now organising', you

know, there's a lot of work involved but when you're younger you don't mind, you know, and I used to enjoy it. I still go on holidays but I don't organise them now. [Laughing]

[JH]: And what other services have you been involved with in WRVS?

[MH]: Yes. Well, I've told you, oh, I, I did the prison, I did the tea bar at Featherstone Prison. That was quite an experience really, they locked the doors behind you as you go in, it's all very secure like, you know, and you think 'Oh gosh I hope they let me out'. But that, it was an experience, I mean I'd never been in a prison before, don't want to go in a prison [Laughing] but they took us round and showed us round. I mean we were there to make the tea actually for the wives of the prisoners who'd come to visit them, some of them had come a long way so, and it was like a little tea bar and we made tea and coffee and drinks and chocolate and biscuits. But while, but when we first went they took us round to show us and I mean it, it amazed me, you know, what, we didn't go in to any of the cells or anything but they've got a great big gymnastics hall, you know, and everything there. It was marvellous really, opened your eyes. So that was at the Featherstone. And, but then I found I was doing Meals-on-Wheels at sometimes the same time and it was a bit of a rush to get back from doing Meals-on-Wheels to get over to Featherstone for the, the tea bar so I, I gave the tea bar one up and carried on with the Meals-on-Wheels. But I did do the, the prison one for about ten years, yes.

And then, and then, as I say, with the Emergency Services and I did that for about fifteen years. I did that actually up until I had an accident with my own car and that was going to do some emergency work at Rodbaston. They, The WRVS had got a big meeting on there and we, me and three other ladies with me were going to do the tea for them for this big meeting. And I tried to turn, well, I did. I was turning in to go in to Rodbaston when a van was coming, it's right up behind me and he, we had an accident, it went in to the back of me, knocked me in to the pave..., the kerb as I was going to go round and I tried to pull back out and burst a tyre and I just remember everything happening.

[00:30:34]

We were all alright, we weren't hurt but they expected us still to work. My car was smashed up and me and my friend sat on the bank, on the side till the police came and the other two somebody picked them up and took them off and they had to make cups of tea for everybody, I thought 'It's us

that want a cup of tea', but anyway I did. Mind you they were good about it because the, Carol, I can't remember her other name now from Lichfield, she was a District, one at Lichfield, the head one and she did send a car, let me have a car for one day for, because I think I was without mine for about a month. She let me have it one day to take my mum to see, I always took my, my mum about once every three weeks to see my brother who was in a home at Stafford and of course, I couldn't get there you see and she must have found out and she says 'You can have the WRVS car', so she lent, sort of let me have it to take my mum, which was good of her. So I thought 'Well, they were looking after me really', but it had shook me up at the time. But anyway I thought the car would absolutely be no good at all afterwards but they did, they did manage to do it up so I did have it back. And my husband made me go out and even past where it had been, he said 'You're driving down that road', so we went down and that was it, once I'd done it I was alright. Yes, so that was the Emergency Services, that was one of them.

We had, oh, we did do some with the old RAF camps at Pye Green and Hednesford, we always called them that, I used to live not far from there before I was married and there were some refugees came there but I couldn't remember whether they were Polish or who they were but they, they were from abroad anyway and they came and they'd got nothing and we had to go and sort clothes out for them, you know, in to ages and that so that they could come and look at their size and have them, you know. And I can remember it, I don't know who it was but it might have been Hungarians. I don't know. But they've done a dinner, well for them lot, for someone had done a dinner and it was their sort of food and I wasn't used to any food like that but we had it and actually it was quite nice. I mean today you eat anything don't you, you know, there's Chinese, Cantonese and anything. But in those days, you know, in my younger days anyway, we weren't used to that we just had plain cooking. I remember, I mean my dad was in the war and as I was a child growing up we just had chips, egg and chips mainly, you know, just something plain and we weren't used to anything like that, you know. But anyway I really enjoyed it, it was alright and we were helping them. So that, that was, that was alright, I did enjoy doing that. Then we had a, oh there's the, Cannock Chase was all on fire as well the one, the once, and they were there for about two, two days and nights I think and we had to take it in turns to go up there with a, those that could drive like and so I used to take a team up there and we'd go and do sandwiches and cups of tea for the firemen and the policemen really that were there all the while. But we'd only do like, say, a four hour stretch and then go back, perhaps go back again the next day. But it was quite exciting really but it was nice work, yes. And they're all happy and cheery as they're working on even though I mean the fire, they thought at one time they weren't going to put it out but they did, yes. That was the Emergency Services.

I think we had another one as well but I can't remember what that one was. But I remember we went for training, we used to go to Penkridge, a big hall there and do our training for Emergency Services. We even had, we did have an emergency, a training session down at our community centre the one day and they came over from all around really that were in the Emergency Services and we had to go and train, you know, take names down and where do you come from and this, that and the other, you know. And I think I bandaged somebody up, [Laughing] but we enjoyed it, it was a bit of fun really, and at least it does give you an insight in to what could happen, you know, and that training would come in useful. So that was the Emergency Services.

[00:35:40]

The prison service. Oh I did do the library, that was Jeanette Cartwright that asked me to do that. Mrs Babarootie [ph 00:35:53] when I done the, the emergency down at the race track which is where they took all the old people, she was the doctors wife Mrs Babarootie [ph 00:36:03] and she was, I think she was the District or Area Manager, she was one or the other anyway, and it was her who really introduced me to The WRVS. But Fod Stretton, I mean she's not with us now and her husband only died a couple of years ago he was ninety..., he was ninety-eight, just coming ninety-nine, he did want to live till he was a hundred but he didn't manage it. But Ray's, like his wife Fod she was in the Emergency Services in the WRVS since it was, I think it was just after the war. She lost her daughter at, there used to be a canal through Norton and her daughter got drowned, and I think that was when she joined The WRVS, you know, to give her something else to think about. She's got a son, and actually it's her son that is now our treasurer at the Darby and Joan Club. But she was a lovely person. So what was that, I've forgot where I've got to.

[JH]: You were talking about Emergency Services and then Books-on-Wheels, well, the Library Service?

[MH]: Oh the library, that was it, yes. Jeanette Cartwright, she was the Area Manager then after Mrs Babarootie [ph 00:37:24] died and she, she said 'We want to get some funds in so that we can get some toys for the toy library at Cannock', in, in the big library at Cannock, they wanted to, they'd got a space where they could have children in and mothers come and borrow a toy for their children if they couldn't afford to buy them one, and she said 'now we've got to get funds in to get those toys' and she says, and she said to me 'will you do a sponsored swim'? Well, she knew I liked swimming

anyway, I still do. So she said 'Would you do a swim'? I says 'Yes, what, how much have we got to swim'? And I think it was twenty-four lengths, which was half a mile, I know that was half a mile at Cannock baths then, and I says 'Yes', I said 'I'll do it'. So I went and she came and there were others there as well, WRVS members that were standing there as well and they watched us that was in the water going up and down and counted how many we did to make sure. But I did it, I thought, but I knew I could do it because I could swim quite a way then, I can't now but I still go swimming. And anyway we did and we collected quite a lot, she was really pleased, you know, with the amount. And they did open the toy library and I was invited to the, you know, the day it opened. So I did that, I've done sponsored swims, slims as well because they used to ask the members at the club to sponsor me you see and they used to always sponsor me and they said 'What are you doing about those sponsored slims'? [Laughing] Because I would do it and then I would put some more weight on and, but I always lost it when they were sponsoring me. And yes, I've done sponsored slims, sponsored walk, walks but those have usually been for St Giles Hospice or The Katherine House Hospice at Stafford, I've done walks for them. Or The Macmillan Nurses, and that was starting off from the community centre, we'd walk all around the village, it wasn't too far, we'd walk quite a distance. I can't do it now but I did do them up until about five years ago and that was for The Macmillan Nurses. But yes, I've done them for various things. So yes.

[JH]: You mentioned Meals-on-Wheels a couple of times?

[00:40:00]

[MH]: Oh yes, the Meals-on-Wheels, as I say we did that for, I did it for twenty-five years. Yes, I used to do, I think I did round Cannock at first. Then I did Heath Hayes and Hednesford, and I've done Norton Canes, I've done quite a few areas really with Meals-on-Wheels and, you know, it's, it's quite interesting that is. You go round and, and some of the people you can see they can't get out and they just like to keep talking to you, they want you to keep talking all the while. And you feel you want to, you want to stop and talk to them. I used to always, I mean they want, they used, they used to say 'Oh here she comes again, she's always got a smile on her face', but I used to go because I used to want to make them feel happy and they wouldn't want to see anybody with a funny face, you know, and so I used to go and say 'Hello, how are you', you know, and, and that was all they wanted was someone to know that they were there. But they used to have their dinner and pudding. I, at first we used to, we started off they were in a big container and the dinner was already plated up and you just take it out, it had got a cover over, take it out and take it in. Sometimes we had to

put the knives and forks out for them because they couldn't even get to the, the drawers to get the knives and forks out, but most of them had have a plate and knife and fork ready. And, and then we'd give them the puddings but the custard we had to pour out of a big thermos to keep it hot like, you know, so we did that or, and the gravy and then we'd collect the money off them and take it in to the office when we got back. But then afterwards the, I've been to various places, we used to fetch the dinners at one time from the Cannock Hospital and then I don't know why that dropped off but eventually it did. And then we fetched it from a school and we used to go and fetch the dinners from there. Then it moved to another school and we fetched, I've been all over the place really fetching dinners. And, mm, we used to go and take it. But some, I mean most places was alright to go to but one or two weren't very nice, you know, but we used to go in and take a breath and, but hurry up and get back out again, you know. But some of them you see, you know, I suppose they just wouldn't let anybody in to help them out some people don't. You know, I mean they would, did let us go in to take the dinner but it was, you know, to get, but the majority were very nice, you know, they, they were grateful for what you did and to get a nice good hot dinner and a pudding. Yes, they really, and I, I enjoyed doing that the best I think really. Well no, I did like the, I liked the Darby and Joan the best but I did enjoy doing the dinners and I was sad when it finished because the, they just lost the contract, I think someone else beat them to it or something and so we didn't have to do it anymore, which was a shame.

But there was one old man I used to go to and he always looked forward and he'd always have an apple for me. I mean we weren't supposed to have anything off them but he'd make me have that apple. He'd say 'You have that apple, I won't eat it it's for you, you have that apple'. Well, I used to have to come out with the apple, but, you know, really we weren't supposed to have anything, but, mm, you know. But we'd always have somebody with us because you didn't go in on your own because you don't know what they might say. So we always had, I always had my neighbour actually next door, she's not with us no more now but she used to come with me to do Meals-on-Wheels and I'd always say 'You come in'. But the one day I, I went in a flat and actually she did go in to another one to try and get it done quicker and of course, we knew they were alright, and I went in this flat and as I come out I don't know what happened but my leg gave way and I, I was on the floor and I couldn't get up. And I just looked, and I remember looking and I saw my friend come and got back in the car and she started and I was on the floor I couldn't stand up. And I remember her looking and then she looked again and I was still there, [Laughing] and I was trying to shout her but she couldn't hear me and then she suddenly realised she said 'I thought what are you doing, I can see your head', she says 'I could only see your head' she said. And she got out of the car I says 'You'll have to come

and help me, I can't get up' and I'd sprained my ankle, I'd really sprained my ankle, and how on earth I managed to, to go. I drove to the office to give, luckily I think it was about the last one or last two that we'd got to do and we got to the office and I said to my friend 'You'll have to take the money in, I can't come in, I've got to go home', I said 'I've hurt me ankle, I'll have to go to the doctors'.

[00:45:01]

Anyway we, and I drove it home, I don't know how I drove it home I really don't but I did. I managed to drive home and then I went to the doctor's and he says, he says, 'Oh, I don't think there's anything broken', he says 'but I'll send you...' No, he didn't, he said 'Just keep it wrapped up'. Anyway at the time I was going to the hospital for my arthritis, I've got, full of arthritis, and when he saw me, the one at the hospital, he says 'What have you done'? Because I limped in and I said 'Well', I said 'I think I've sprained it'. He said 'We better have it X-rayed', and he straight away sent me for a X-ray and when it came back he said 'No, you haven't broken it but it is very badly sprained', and it was. And I thought to myself gosh, I didn't know how so easily that could have happened I just don't know why, whether it was, mind it might have been the arthritis, it might have been my knee just gave way I don't know but I'd sprained my ankle anyway. But apart from that I mean I used to enjoy going out and doing it, you know, yes.

[JH]: Where did you collect the meals from?

[MH]: Well, I, we used to collect them, as I say, from the Cannock Hospital is the one place. Then there was St John's School in Cannock, it was all in Cannock, we had to go in to Cannock to pick them up. And then there was another school, I don't know what the other school was called. And then, and then, oh, and I did do a luncheon club as well, we did a luncheon club at the Methodist Chapel and they used to, I think they cooked them there and, but that, it was a WRVS were helpers with it but they didn't do any cooking or anything we just went to dish the dinner out, you know, and put the gravy on and do the puddings. And so we did that as well at the Methodist Chapel here in Norton. But the other dinners mainly they were all in Cannock but we used to take them out as far as Hednesford and Pye Green and, as I say, Heath Hayes, Norton. And we never did Wyrley, I think that must have come in, under another district. But Pye Green and Hednesford and Cannock, parts of Cannock we did. Yes, I got to know quite a few places, [Laughing] yes. But it was mainly schools or, or hospitals where we, they did the dinners. They were doing them for themselves, but I mean

they don't now anyway, I think they have the dinners come over from, for the hospital itself from Stafford now. Well, I don't know it's gone all, gone all haywire at the moment. [Laughing]

[JH]: And you wrote, when you wrote to me you wrote down that you also helped with planting trees?

[MH]: Oh yes, we did that, that was another Jeanette Cartwright's, yes. It was all The WRVS. I mean all, all our committee went from our Darby and Joan Club that were in The WRVS and we went to, to Bridgtown and they were setting these trees all round in, in a field. They'd made a new road through and they, I suppose they wanted something to grow up and look nice and so we went. And all these trees they were only saplings like and we had to dig a hole and put them in. And my husband came as well, he came although he wasn't in The WRVS but he came and helped and the men, some of the men did come and dig, helped to dig the hole and we planted these trees. And it's funny because I saw them the other day and I thought 'Gosh how big those trees are'. But I mean that was a good many years ago. I mean May Grantham, she was here then and she was, I mean she, she was in The WRVS a long while. She was in actually before I was in but she wasn't in as long as what I was. But yes, there were about ten of us I think off the, our committee that all went and put these trees in, and it looks lovely now with all the trees round. Yes, yes, we did that, yes, enjoyed doing that. I think that our photos was put in the paper, [Laughing] yes.

[JH]: And you also went to a garden party at Milton Hill in Oxford?

[MH]: Oh yes, that was, I don't exactly know what that was, the celebration was for. I think it was so many years in the WRVS but we did go, we did have an invitation. It said if any of us wanted to go we could go on the coach that was going from Stafford, so I got the names in off the committee who wanted to go and I think we all went up, it was about ten or twelve of us as went. And we were took down by coach and we was all in our finery, all dressed up with a hat on. It was lovely really because I'd never been to anything like that before. And anyway it's in a great big marquee and we went in and then it started to rain and it absolutely poured down and we thought 'Oh dear', you know, but anyway it did go over when the Queen was actually coming round afterwards, we were all standing outside and she came down the steps and then she, there's a proper walkway through and she came round and then she was shaking hands with certain ones that had been picked out like. And so, you know, we didn't actually get, well I didn't get a, get to talk to her but, but we saw her and she looked lovely and everyone else did, everyone was all dressed up, it was lovely really. It was a lovely day

that was, yes, yes. We took some good photos there and I think they all enjoyed it because it was the first thing that we had ever been invited to to do with Royalty really. Yes, it was good, I enjoyed it.

[00:51:41]

[JH]: Have you been to any other WRVS events?

[MH]: Mm, no, not really. No, I don't think we have been to any others, no, we've not been invited to any others. We did think we might have perhaps been invited some time or other to the Remembrance Service, you know, in November at London but, and I know some are but anyway we never have had an invitation. Oh I'm telling a lie, we have been invited. With, mm, Margaret and meself, Margaret Edwards that lives just up the road. She, she was joined, I got her to join the WRVS about two years after I'd joined and, but as we'd been there a long while we were invited to St Paul's Cathedral. That was a couple of, three years, a couple of years ago, I think it's a couple of years ago. And we thought The Queen was going but it wasn't The Queen it was, it was Camilla, and we went then, it was a big service. It was, gosh, so many years I suppose it must have been celebrating.

[JH]: Seventy-fifth Anniversary which was a couple of years ago?

[MH]: Yes, I think it must have been, yes. And anyway we had a service in there and it was really lovely. And we, [Laughing] well, we felt that, because we were all dressed in our nines and Zaphne came with us, her, her and her husband, we booked a hotel down there and so we stopped overnight and then we got ready the next morning, then had a taxi to take us to St Paul's. And then we, as we went up the steps there were WRVS either side, some in uniform. And I mean we could, well, I've still got a uniform but anyway they said 'No, you dress up how you want', like, you know, so we just dressed up in our finery. We'd got a hat on, you know, and we looked quite smart and I think everyone thought we was really somebody [Laughing] because as we went up the steps to go in 'Good morning', you know, and this, that and the other, you know, and 'would you like to come this way', you know, and oh we really felt somebody. And Zaphne said 'Oh I was ever so proud of you', she said. 'I thought you looked lovely the two of you', you know, she says 'you looked really nice'. And we were walking down in to St Paul's and they were, said 'Oh you're', because we'd got a ticket saying where we were supposed to sit in what area and 'Oh you've got to go right down the front', you know. And there we was walking and of course, I was in shoes with a heel on and my heel went down the grid didn't it? [Laughing] And it went off, 'Oh dear no'. But anyway we, I got the heel

out and we carried on walking. And we were almost opposite where, we, where Camilla came. She came, she came round the other way mind you but she sat and we were almost like on a level with her, we were at the side but were on a level more or less, she looked very nice.

[00:55:07]

And anyway we had the service in there and it was wonderful really. And then we went out and then we went to have a cup of tea and we had a cup of tea out in the other part where they were making tea but of course, where Camilla had gone they took her in to a private part so she was having tea and biscuits or whatever. And anyway and then somebody said she, they thought she was going out but she never came out through where we had to come out she went out of another door. But we went out, we did go out and we just, and actually she was just coming out of the side door and we just happened to see her. I didn't get close enough to take a photograph but, but Zaphne did because she could get there quicker than I could, she took the photograph of her and she managed to run round quick enough to, to get her. But yes, that was quite, that was a lovely day that was, yes. So that's when, that was with The WRVS. I enjoyed that and that's it like. Yes, I think that's about it.

[JH]: When you went to the service at St Paul's, did they announce the name change at that event?

[MH]: No they didn't, no, no. No, because I was surprised actually that, you know, when we had notice that it was changing. But I had an idea because those at Stoke, at the, at the Stoke office said, Nigel said that, he came to our club to present two, two of the ladies with the medals for the Long Service Awards, but he gave the one, he gave her just the pin part and there was no medal. Well, she should have had the medal because we always had medals. What we used to do was fifteen years a medal, and then twenty-seven years a medal, which I've got two now, and then forty years was a medal. But anyway he came and he just gave her this pin. And I looked at it and I said 'That, that isn't right', I said 'it's got to be a medal'. And he says 'Oh', he says 'I'll have to sort it out', but he never did. And, and actually this, as I've just said, Margaret Turner that made this cloth, she was one of them that just had this pin and she was really disgusted with it. She said 'You can't do nothing with that', she couldn't even pin it on her properly. I said 'Because it should have a ribbon down with the stripes on', and I thought, I thought 'Something's happening here', you know, 'something ain't right. Anyway I ran it and I know Nigel said he would try and sort it out but he never did, we never heard anything else and Margaret's never been to the group since because she didn't, she said 'I was

disgusted, I'd done fifteen years service and all I had was this thing'. I said 'That's like a bar really that you have to put on your medal but you'd never even had your medal', and I know she'd done fifteen years. And Beryl Taylor that's died now as well she only had a pin as well and she was disappointed. But Zaphne did, she presented us all with a basket of flowers so I suppose that to cover it up really. But I thought at the time I thought 'I wonder if they're changing the, the badge again or something', because that's what they kept changing. Then the hats would be changing, [Laughing] and now they don't wear a uniform do they half the time?

[JH]: No.

[MH]: I mean I've still, I always wear my uniform on Remembrance Sunday because I take a wreath up to the, a WRVS wreath. Mind you, as I say, this year I didn't have one, they never wrote and asked me if I wanted one. But last year I didn't have one and I rang Nigel up and he said 'I'll get one sent to you within a week'. Anyway the one, I rang him up a couple of days before and I said 'It hasn't come'. He says, 'Oh' he says 'well, it should have done, I'll put another one on' and I finished up having two. But the one did come in time for the Sunday, so the other one I kept it and it's a good job I did because I wouldn't have had one for this year. But anyway I took the wreath up and I always wear my uniform and my hat as well on Remembrance Sunday so that they know that I'm representing The WRVS. Well, I should say The RVS now, yes. So they changed that didn't they because there's quite a few men in it now?

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MH]: You see it was just women really wasn't it to start with? I mean it was The Women's Voluntary Service, then they had the 'Royal' put in it, The Queen gave them the 'Royal' to put in it like, so we went Royal Voluntary Service and now it's The Royal Voluntary Service so that the men can be included as well. Which is great, you know, because I mean there's quite a few, or was quite a few men drivers for the Meals-on-Wheels and things, you know, so yes.

[01:00:23]

[JH]: Has the organisation, well has the charity changed in any other ways as you've been a member?

[MH]: Mm, oh well, I don't, I don't know. I, I think in one way that you, it's very hard to get people to join because they, I know the, they do good work and everything and it is voluntary work but I mean today you can't get the young ones to join. I mean in, when I joined people would do voluntary work but there weren't so many went out to work to earn money, they would do voluntary work then to stop them being bored if their children had started school and things like that. But today they don't want to, you just can't get young ones interested. I mean we've tried to get them to join our committee but they don't want to, and they don't want to do voluntary work today really because they want the money, they just want to go out to work. And that's it, and that's a big difference really. It's a shame but that's, that's how it is today ain't it? You know, you just can't get the young ones to join. It is, it is a shame because I think they can learn a lot, get a lot of experience from it and there's different things that they can do for the, in The WRVS and it's, it's helping other people. I mean that's what I've enjoyed best is helping other people. I think if you can help other people you feel better in yourself anyway.

[JH]: Is there anything that we haven't talked about today that you would like to mention?

[MH]: Mm, I don't think so, I think we've more or less covered everything I think, yes, I think we've more or less done it all haven't we?

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MH]: Yes. [Pause] Yes, I think that's, I think that's about it.

[JH]: And in your opinion what has been the biggest change to WRVS since you joined?

[MH]: Mm, well, perhaps it's the, like these, well in this area anyway I think the biggest change is the, the Meals-on-Wheels because they don't do it now do they? You know, not The WRVS, it's somebody else that, somebody else perhaps does them. I think that's the biggest change really. I don't know I, I mean I know they still they do hospital work and that and in the shops and that and showing people where to go in the hospital, that's good work. But the biggest thing that I think is that people's attitudes are changing. They don't want to, like I say they, they don't want to do voluntary work. And it's a shame because they just, if they want to do any work they want to be paid for it. So it's a shame that it is because I, like I say, I've always enjoyed doing voluntary work and helping other people, you know, so. I mean when I was young if anyone had have said to me, you

know, 'In fifty years time you'd be looking after old people', [Laughing] I would have laughed at them but I just went in to it like, you know, and that was it and I loved it and I'm glad I did. I'm glad my mother-in-law mentioned it to me because I knew that she went every Wednesday anyway to The Darby and Joan Club so I'm glad I took her advice and I did join and I'm sure she would have been pleased with what I've done, you know, so yes. But, like I say, it's a shame. I think they ought to talk about it more in schools perhaps for the children and it might get them interested in joining as they grow older, you know, and helping other people. That's what I think, yes so yes.

[JH]: Where do you think Royal Voluntary Service's place in society is today?

[MH]: Well, I don't know really. I mean I know that like during the war they were needed weren't they? They were very helpful then, and they're still needed today I suppose really but in certain places and that.

[01:05:08]

But I don't know, you know, I don't really know, I don't, you don't hear much of them today. You see at one time they used to be advertised a lot, you know, you'd hear about the work that they had done here, there and wherever, you don't hear that today, at least not round here. I mean perhaps, you know, they're advertised better other places but not round here you don't. And I think probably I think the worst thing was when they closed all the offices down. I mean I know it cost money to keep them going but at least while they were there people could pop in and ask for advice or, or whatever or help and do things and you knew where to go, but you don't now. I mean, like I say, I think our nearest one to us is Tamworth, and that's a good way especially if you haven't got a vehicle, you know, or you can't drive.

[JH]: Yes.

[MH]: That's a good way to go. And I've never been there so I don't really know what it's like, but I know that's supposed to be the nearest place. I think that that was a shame that they had to close all those offices. I mean I have been to Lichfield before now, and I mean one or two of our members, committee members, were given their, presented with the badges at outside Lichfield Cathedral, we did go to a big service there for The WRVS some years ago, it's got to be ten or more years ago. But it was nice, it was a lovely service and, and then some of our members received their long, long,

what's it awards and it was lovely. I remember them being outside the cathedral and having their photographs taken and they felt quite proud, you know. But you, we don't get none of that now, we don't get any of that. In fact we don't see anyone hardly from WRVS. I don't know why but we don't, no.

[JH]: What do you think is the future for Royal Voluntary Service?

[MH]: Well, I don't know really. Like, as I say, it's trying to get the young ones to join you see that then they can carry on with it, but it's just trying to get these young ones interested in it. So I don't really know, I don't, I just don't know. I just hope that they do keep on going because they do good work and, and it helps people. But, you know, the situation as it is at the moment with work and one thing and another it's, it's hard to visualise.

[JH]: Mm. And what is your most memorable moment of being a WRVS volunteer?

[MH]: Mm, well I think, I think actually it was going to that service at St Paul's Cathedral. I think it was that one, that was an absolutely wonderful day. Also the one when we went down Oxford or what do you call it, down there, that was a memorable day as well, that was lovely. So yes, I think, I think that, I think that would be it. Yes, really enjoyed that day, it was lovely, yes.

[JH]: Well, thank you for talking to me today Maureen and this will make a lovely contribution to Our Voices of Volunteering Project.

[MH]: Oh it's a pleasure.

[End of Interview – 01:08:54]