

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: Howard-Jones

Title: Mrs

Interviewee's Forenames: Mary

Gender: F

Volunteer/Employee Roles and Dates:

Volunteer (1953-Present)

1953-1963 Ambulance Driver and Radioactive
Trainee Department, Rhyl, Denbighshire, Wales

1963-2014 Old Peoples Welfare, Wales

1989 Joint District Organiser, Cynon Valley,
Glamorganshire

1989/1990 County Old Peoples Welfare
Organiser, Mid Glamorgan

1990s/2000s Old Peoples Welfare, visiting war
widows, Darby and Joan clubs, Volunteer

Partner

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Interviewer's Notes:

Mary Howard-Jones talks about her time as a WVS/WRVS/Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) between 1953 and 2014. She mentions her time as an ambulance driver for civil defence in the 1950s and 60s and the disbandment of Civil Defence. Also talks about being a village rep in Haverfordwest and being responsible for the Butter Mountain. Comments on moving to Mid Glamorgan and getting involved with Old People's Welfare after joining Citizens Advice Bureau, helping in magistrate's courts, hospital tea bars and visiting residential homes. Also talks about how her role in the county developed including becoming joint district organiser, Emergency Services, training at Easingwold college, becoming a senior trainer, call outs to emergencies. Discusses her time as OPW organiser in Mid Glamorgan and how her role in OPW changed over time. Also discusses Darby & Joan Clubs, being on Coal House at War, giving talks to Welsh Assembly Members, MPs, Business men, launch of the WRVS computer and laying a reef at the cenotaph in London. Discusses being a volunteer partner and what the role involves including legacies. Mentions work with war widows and how WRVS stopped running the service and visiting other people as part of WRVS.

[Jennifer Hunt]: This is Jennifer Hunt with Mary Howard-Jones on the twenty-third of June 2014 at Royal Voluntary Service, Cardiff Gate, Wales. So Mary would you like to just introduce yourself?

[Mary Howard-Jones]: I've been around through many changes with WRVS, WVS and now Royal Voluntary Service. I was twenty when I joined and I joined Civil Defence Ambulance Service.

[JH]: And so before you joined WVS what did you know about the organisation?

[MHJ]: Quite a lot because it was during the war and my mother was WVS and she used to look after the evacuees, because during the dark ages she had been a nurse in the Nineteen whatever before she was married in 1918 so I knew about the evacuees.

[JH]: And what sort of things was your mother doing with the evacuees?

[MHJ]: She would meet them from the train or how, whatever transport they had to the place in Cowbridge, we lived in Cowbridge in those days and it was usually at the Town Hall where unfortunately she had to check them for cleanliness.

[JH]: And did she have any other roles in WVS?

[MHJ]: Eventually my father was promoted to North Wales so she ended up, she, that was after the war, we moved 1945 and she was in the office answering the telephone because they were very short. I think only had about four members in Prestatyn.

[JH]: And so what made you decide to join in 1953?

[MHJ]: Well, I was quite busy doing lots of things but I was working for the GPO full-time as a telegraphist, got in from work and my mother said 'Oh I've heard a very interesting programme today, the WVS are looking for on behalf of Civil Defence for people to be ambulance drivers' and she said 'I thought that'd be just the job you'd like'.

[JH]: And what's your earliest memory of being an ambulance driver, when did you get...?

[MHJ]: Well, I had to do all the training because I was carrying radioactive material sealed in steel containers so I had to learn to drive this large ambulance because it was like a 'Green Goddess', a lot of people will remember those if there's been a fire strike and everything, I don't think they're used now. But I also had to learn all about Geiger counters and I was trained on that. And then they decided that because I knew a lot of telegraphy that I could help them on a field radio, so I helped on the field radios of Civil Defence as well.

[JH]: And could you describe to me what the Geiger counter is?

[MHJ]: The Geiger counter is to test radioactivity, because if you're working in a dangerous field it always has to be tested. And it, I was the only female, and I was young I was only twenty so I had a great time with these men and very often in darkened rooms and things and I had to know how to test them running of these Geiger counters. Rather like going through the security at airports.

[JH]: And what, you have talked, you said, mentioned that you had lots of training, what did the training involve?

[MHJ]: Well, I had to learn how to use all these Geiger counters and I also had to put on masks and go through smoke filled places because when, I had to also attend WVS, it was Five In One I think they were called, lectures on how people were managing. But the instructor made a rather an odd comment, she said 'None of you need worry it's only the ambulance drivers who'll be in the danger zone', I just continued I thought I'm learning so much. And in those days Wales was deciding to be a non nuclear area. How they'd stop any reaction from coming over the borders I don't know.

[JH]: And so part of the training was that the One In, the One In Five talk?

[MHJ]: It wouldn't be normally. It's, the WRVS did the One In, One In Five lectures to know how to look after people and different things because then they were realising people were being bombed out, it was happening in Swansea and Bridgend and Cardiff and they had to learn all about that, but being in North Wales it was a little bit different because most of the bombing was then further across in Liverpool and Manchester. [Pause]

[JH]: And can you tell me about the people you worked with with Civil Defence and the ambulance sort of thing?

[MHJ]: Well, that was all with the men because I seemed to be the only female around.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: Because it was '45 and of course, most of the men, as my two brothers, they were involved in the war.

[00:05:00]

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: So it was the older men who'd been perhaps in the war earlier so I was working just with the men who were older.

[JH]: And how did your role with them as ambulance driver and with the radioactive team change over time?

[MHJ]: Actually I was never called out on anything because, mm, we didn't get any atom bombs drop near, near us, but I had the knowledge which came in useful later on. I've never actually used it but it was interesting learning to double declutch which people listening to this, older people might know about double declutching .

[JH]: And could you tell, tell, tell me what double declutching is?

[MHJ]: Well, when you're driving a car if you want to change gear you just press the old clutch down and change gear, but in those days you had to press the clutch, move the gear stick and press the clutch again and then get in to the right gear. So it was interesting.

[JH]: Mm, yes.

[MHJ]: But I make a lot of people laugh when they hear that I've learned to do that, they say 'I've never even heard of it'.

[JH]: And what, how would you describe the ambulance you worked with, going to drive?

[MHJ]: Very heavy. But because I was carrying radioactive material they had radioactive, I can't remember the name of it now, they had buttons that had been processed to be highly radioactive so that had to be in like a rather large Thermos, and it was double sealed with solid metal and that was in the back of the ambulance. And I, I was never allowed to park near any cars, that was quite easy in '45, '46, '47 because not many people had cars. I was lucky, we were lucky but so you had to learn that it was a dangerous thing.

[JH]: And do you have any other stories or memories about your time as an ambulance driver?

[MHJ]: Not really because I mean I used to, I went to a royal event because the Civil Defence were there. The worst thing was the uniform which was a bit horrendous, and when they recalled all the

uniform in the '60s I was delighted to get rid of it. So it was dark, it was navy blue and the shoes would have been dreadful.

[JH]: And did they recall the uniform when the service, The Civil Defence Corps was disbanded?

[MHJ]: That's right, in about '63 I believe, around there. And that was safely at home with my mother so I think she was glad to get rid of it as well.

[JH]: And did you have any other roles or experiences with WR, WVS in Rhyl and Prestatyn?

[MHJ]: Not so much really because I did deal with the Civil Defence people who were mainly in Mold, they used to have to come and take me out and everything. So my mother went to the royal event because the Queen Mother was there but I went as Civil Defence in a horrible heavy uniform.

[JH]: And you also wrote on your form that you were involved with WVS in Haverfordwest?

[MHJ]: Yes. Eventually, you know, moving around the place I ended up in Haverfordwest and that was great. I became a village rep, I lived in Manorbier and it was at the time of the butter mountain and giving out the butter mountain and the cheese and everything. Unfortunately we never did get the wine, so that would have been fun. Probably would have been a case of delivering empty bottles.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MHJ]: But being honest WVS probably wouldn't have drunk it all.

[JH]: And so between 1953 and 1985 you were in North Wales weren't you?

[MHJ]: Yes, and I got married in '64 so...

[JH]: And were you involved at all in the Twenty-fifth Anniversary in 1963?

[MHJ]: I'm just trying to work out where I was. Yes, I think I went to a service, I can't really remember much about that. Because I was doing nine hundred other things as well because I was working full-time.

[JH]: And did you in that time you would also have received your fifteen year service medal?

[MHJ]: Actually I didn't because when I was in Haverford, no when I was moved then, I moved to near Aberdare and I was applying for a medal and I was told 'No, you can't claim the Civil Defence part', which surprised me because it was linked to WVS. And one day, I can't remember who was down in Cardiff, it was when we went on internet and everything else and she said 'How long have you been in'? I said 'Well, I actually joined when I was twenty in 1953'. She said 'You've got a lot of medal, you've got your medal and, and some clasps'.

[00:10:01]

I said 'Well, no, I was told I couldn't claim the Civil Defence part'. But then it was arranged for me to have it backdated so I did have that.

[JH]: Yes. And did you have any experiences with Lady Reading?

[MHJ]: No, no, she was up in London and I was sort of floating round Wales.

[JH]: And did you notice after she died in 1970 did you notice a change to the organisation?

[MHJ]: I don't think so because I was quite involved and we didn't get the links. I think I've had more links with everything since moving more to the Mid Glamorgan because I was given many different roles and so I was more in touch with people in the office as well.

[JH]: And also in 1966 at that time the name was changed, we got the 'Royal' in, in the name. Can you tell me about that?

[MHJ]: Yes. That's been easy to remember because my second daughter was born in '66 so I can easily rattle that one off so people think I'm quite clever, but I'm not really I just link it to my daughter's age. And in '66 I was just floating round doing a bit of everything, I already had three children, so not only doing butter mountains and cheese mountains and everything else in Pembrokeshire and Mid Glamorgan I was, you know, quite involved in my family.

[JH]: Mm, mm. What were you involved when, in at the time with WRVS, was it old people's welfare?

[MHJ]: I think then it became old people's welfare because I think I had one people, one badge saying Old People's Welfare but that has changed all the way through ending up now as a volunteer partner. Which is quite good because you're dealing with other people who are in and they don't very often have the contact with the office. In fact a lot of people seem very hesitant to ring the office, and because as things change it gets even harder, and the people in the clubs that I deal with are getting older.

[JH]: Mm, so you moved to sort of the Mid Glamorgan area and what's your earliest memory of volunteering in that area?

[MHJ]: Well, they had all my details and they hesitated, there was a bit of a gap and I thought well, I was so busy because all my children were away in schools and things so I had more time on my hand and I found that I thought 'Well, I can't just be doing nothing because I've always been very busy, I can easily run my home, deal with the children wherever they are', and so I actually joined for a short while the CAB.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MHJ]: The, I thought 'Well', and no sooner had I joined that WRVS got in touch with me, and that was from the office in Pontypridd in those days, and suddenly I found I was fully involved with butter mountains once again.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: No wine. And so really it took off from there because then I started looking after the clubs. I was helping in the Magistrates' Court and I was visiting residential homes, and having taught yoga I used to teach some of the older people in the residential homes some exercises.

[JH]: And where was the Magistrates' Court that you were, mm...?

[MHJ]: In Aberdare the Magistrates' Court. And I used to go and help quite regularly at a residential home in Mountain Ash, and I used to go to another home in Aberdare that had a mixed variety of people in and sadly they had dementia at different stages. And my eldest daughter used to come along because she was a member and I'd say 'Whatever they ask you give an answer', and they used to say to me 'Have you seen my mother today'? And so you'd say 'Oh I must have missed her', and my daughter was asked some leading question because obviously she was much younger and they'd say 'I've been shopping and I can't get any tomato sauce anywhere'. And at that time she was a food designer and she said 'Don't worry our factory's got a lot of it'. So she learnt something then that wouldn't have been learned by her. Whereas I was older by then, I was in my fifties, so you realised that dementia was causing a lot of trouble.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: So really I led a very varied life. And I used to go and help at one of the tea bars at the hospital in Mid Glam. and very often they'd ring me up and say 'We're going to have to close the tea bar this afternoon because we can't get anybody, we're ringing you, would you like to come down?'

[00:15:02]

And it was usually in the holiday time so I would take my young son who'd been a member since he was fourteen.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MHJ]: And one day I said 'Well, you'll have to wear a tabard', he said 'It's only a bit of material', which I thought was a lovely attitude from somebody who was sixteen, and he said 'I really feel I've done something worthwhile this afternoon'. So that was good.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And so the tea bars and cafes you were working in, what sort of people were you serving at, for example, the Magistrates' Court?

[MHJ]: Well, the Magistrates' Court, interesting this one, I even served my own burglar. And I knew who he was and I knew where he'd lived and, mm, I said 'Hello, and how are you today'? He said 'I've been rumbled'. And I knew it was him because somebody in the village had told me but they said 'Don't mention his name', in fact I didn't know his name and so that was quite an experience. But you just, you're serving people who are going to various clinics really and in hospital, in the hospitals and then obviously in the court they were up for different things, some minor things.

[JH]: And were you also in the courts, were you also serving witnesses and...?

[MHJ]: Yes, whoever wanted. And a really interesting thing came up, which I've mentioned quite a lot. One young man, he was by himself so obviously he was over eighteen or whatever, he said 'How much do you get paid then'? I said 'Well, no we're volunteers'. He said 'Yes, but they pay you'. I said 'Oh no, we give of our time'. And he said 'Oh'. I think a lot of people still don't realise what a volunteer is.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: But that, you know, and I think it'll be still there. It depends who you are, where you are and what you've done.

[JH]: And you've mentioned the butter mountain as well, how was the butter distributed around the area?

[MHJ]: Usually the Area Office would have it in Haverfordwest or Pembroke Dock, they'd move it over to Pembroke Dock or I'd go to somewhere in, mm, Pontypridd area and collect it. But it was

very funny. I lived in the village, where I still live now, and I'd tell several people I was there giving out the butter and things. Very reluctant to come but in, when I was down in Haverfordwest there was no problem, everybody was quite happy and I'd deliver it. And I'd have my son with me so he'd knock on the door and say, you know, 'We're from WRVS, WVS and...' But in the village they wouldn't come. So what I did I'd, I'd go to church and I mentioned it to one or two people there. I said 'Anybody in pensionable age I'll be outside the church tomorrow, from my freezer I'll be collecting the butter and cheese'. And good for them they came and I said 'Please tell other people'. When I went a few days later some of the villagers came but they thought 'Oh she's giving out charity'.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: But when I explained they've got all this butter mountain and they're trying to get rid of it. A lot of church, because I hadn't been there very long, you know, I'd only been there a couple of months but I didn't keep any myself.

[JH]: No.

[MHJ]: Might have been different had the wine arrived.

[JH]: [Laughing] The wine instead of the butter. And do you have any other memories or stories about your time in Mid Glamorgan in the 1980s?

[MHJ]: Well, I've been very busy really because if, sometimes the Area Manager was always, always very busy she'd say 'Would you fancy going up to Birmingham'? or 'Would you fancy...' or somewhere close by 'and just standing in for me'? Which was good because I met many more people. And I think that's the beauty of WRVS and now Royal Voluntary Service, whoever's in they are friends, they are not just random people, and you keep in touch with many of them so it's very good.

[JH]: And then in 1989 you attained your District Organiser?

[MHJ]: That's right.

[JH]: And how, how did you get that role?

[MHJ]: Mm, I think it was too much for the one who was the District Organiser and so my Area Manager said 'Would you please help her'? So I really did more or less take over but it was a bit alarming. A good word this, because the first thing I was given was a pocket alarm.

[00:20:00]

So I thought what am I taking on because I knew what, vaguely what the work she did because I would then go out and visit people who are going to use some of our holiday accommodation but you'd always take somebody with, with you. And I'd always say 'We don't know where we're going', and of course, for holidays you had to make sure they were keeping their home tidy but not spotless. Because obviously if perhaps a family went in to some of our accommodation and ruined it or messed it up it was out of service for anybody else. So that was interesting but I had some interesting stories on that one. Went to one house and it was a gentleman we were going to see so I had somebody with me. And walking down towards the house I, all I could see was a bare body. So we knocked at the door and this chap came to the door, he was only topless. And he said 'Oh no, you want to see so and so, he's in the other room'. So I'd said to my partner I said to her 'Come on', and in we went and he was sitting there, luckily he did have trousers on. So really it's a very interesting life we have.

[JH]: Yes, very interesting. [Laughing]

[MHJ]: So but I did say that my alarm is in one pocket and she had one of the bricks that were mobile phones in those days.

[JH]: And did you have any other roles as Joint District Organiser?

[MHJ]: Oh yes, you'd have to go to various council meetings and I went to a lot of those. And because I'd been trained in the Civil Service as an instructor that I was used to meeting people and

I'm quite good at chatting to anybody. I don't look at them and say 'I don't like you'. I can chat to whoever they are and what, and of course, as you know religion and politics are way out so two subjects you can avoid so there's nothing that you can major row. So, you know, it was interesting.

[JH]: And you were also involved with Emergency Services?

[MHJ]: Yes.

[JH]: So did you start volunteering with that?

[MHJ]: Well, I was asked if I'd like to do it and I thought 'Oh yes, I've done all the Geiger counters and things', but of course, they'd gone by then. And then I was asked if I'd like to go on a course up to Easingwold, which was hard work, you know, I still know people who were there. Angela Curry was on a course and, you know, you had to really present yourself properly. And they watched you from the minute you left your room, you had to wear your uniform the whole time and as soon as you left the room you were being watched. Because as they always said 'You are representing WRVS' and so you had to be really tidy.

[JH]: And Easingwold College a Civil Defence college?

[MHJ]: It was Home Office Civil Defence college, which was very interesting and we were shown some of the air raid shelters there.

[JH]: And what were your roles and responsibilities in the Emergency Services?

[MHJ]: Well, you had to be then training other people. You did three exams. You did your basic exam, which was just learning all about it and how you'd have to present your work, but you couldn't do much instructing then because you had to get up to the third level to be a senior instructor. And they did ask me, I had passed and they did ask me if I'd come back as soon as possible because they wanted me to go on to the next stage, but unfortunately my son decided to have cancer so that slowed me down for a few years, but I eventually caught up and became a senior instructor.

[JH]: And how, did you attend any exercises?

[MHJ]: Yes. I'd, there used to be a lot of practice exercises because it was important that people for being called out they needed to be in hand to know exactly what they had to cope with. So we used to run exercises and that was part of my work as well to help the manager to set it all up, and you'd be given certain roles and you'd hand them out to different people. So one perhaps would be a little bit deaf and somebody else would be a little bit of an invalid and you had to learn foods for different, in different religions. So you had to learn everything like that. It, it was fascinating so I'm jolly glad I did do that.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And where did the exercises take place?

[MHJ]: In, usually in leisure, leisure centres.

[00:25:01]

Because they would be used for evacuating anybody to. And we had a good relationship with shops like Tesco's and things, they weren't open twenty-four hours as they are now.

[JH]: No.

[MHJ]: But one exercise was at a battery operation up in near Merthyr, and I couldn't do it because I'd had a bit of an accident to a foot I managed it all from home. And in the end she rang, she said 'I don't think there's any more food left at the garage', so she'd thought everything because you could have Tesco's and those would open for us, but now of course, they are twenty-four hours.

[JH]: Mm, mm, yes.

[MHJ]: But that's changed as well. It's, it's not quite the same now, it's R and R.

[JH]: Resilience and Recovery that is, isn't it?

[MHJ]: It was very good but so we're not involved so much now.

[JH]: Yes. Mm, and what emergencies have you attended?

[MHJ]: The, mm, a fun one in a sort of a strange way. I wasn't at the Aberfan when it went, I was living in London then. And, mm, there was a flooding, I think one of the valves was opened in Merthyr Tydfil and it flooded Aberfan. So there was a callout at nine o'clock and I had to call, you have your team all lined up, you have your regular people on your team and you'd ring them to make sure if they were available. They could say 'No' because you never know what they'd been up to and you went off to, to deal with it. And this, everywhere in Aberfan was flooded, the roads were flooded, everything, but the police would know you're coming through so that was fine. And it was in a leisure centre and there was a wedding at the same time and they managed to do that and they said 'Can we open the bar'? And I said 'Oh I wouldn't suggest opening the bar because we had enough noise last night without a bar being open', so they went along with that. And then the television it, we ran that for a fortnight, which was longer than usual, normally at the end of a week most people could have gone home. And the television people came in and they wanted to interview people who'd been rescued. And this one lady, she, sadly she had lost a child when the school was damaged and everything and she was in the boat with the firemen and she said 'I've always wanted a cruise and now I've had one', and she was in a little rowing boat with the fire brigade and everything which was lovely. And they asked me and I said, well I'd already become a widow, and I said 'The feeling was rather like being bereaved'. Although they hadn't been bereaved the, that first time when they came in they didn't quite know what had happened.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: They knew they'd been flooded, they knew that they'd been rescued but there was that horrible feeling of nothing happening. So you just had to be a good listener and, but I can still remember the lady, she was much older obviously, and she said 'I've always wanted a cruise', and I thought she had it right.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: You know there's always a good side.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And did you, have you attended any other emergencies?

[MHJ]: That was the biggest one. And a big factory, everybody's heard of Hoover's and they had a fire and I was working with the manager and we would take it, it in turns to run it. And it was fine, we had all the normal polystyrene mugs and things, five hundred at a time in a box and [Inaudible 00:28:56] I'd rung the manager and said 'There's no need to come back', because she'd gone back to work, to sleep because you take it in four hour shifts. And I said 'You stay in bed'. So she said 'I'll see you in the morning then and collect all the bits and pieces you've got', because you have such a lot of things. So clearing up at about half past two in the morning and the fireman there said 'Oh I'll help you'. So they were loading everything on to trolleys and things and there was a big box containing all the mugs and then at this Hoover factory in Merthyr there was steps so he said 'Go and get your car and bring it to the bottom of the steps'. He picked this big box up which we hadn't used, it was open at the bottom, suddenly up to five hundred plastic or polystyrene mugs went bouncing down the steps, which was lovely. He said 'Whoops'!

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MHJ]: But I said another 'Whoops' the next morning when I met my manager to hand over all the stuff and she said 'Where's everything'? And I said 'Well, it's in my car and in the boot'.

[00:30:00]

And she said 'What on earth are all those mugs doing'? But, you know, they couldn't be left on the, on the steps so...

[JH]: No.

[MHJ]: So that was one of the fun moments. But lots of exercises but luckily, you know, no major events.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: We were on standby very often for an aeroplane and you just called up your, your tribe and things to see if they're available and you have everything ready, because everybody, everybody had a bag ready to go.

[JH]: Yes. And what did you have in that bag?

[MHJ]: Well, you'd have your personal items. So you'd have perhaps a hand towel and some soap and anything else you used. And then in the grub bag you'd have all the things. You always kept some cheese and butter and, mm, milk and stuff. And then you'd put it in another bag and take it with you, because as one of the leaders you'd have a few more things which you'd take and then you could get on with the job.

[JH]: Yes. And how did you feel when you were attending, when you were attending those emergencies?

[MHJ]: Mm, getting on with the job. You didn't panic. You learn things because I mean there were a lot of exercises. We, we also did other exercises for other people. And on one somebody said, they were having their, their curry and whatever and they said 'may we have it half and half'? Well they didn't say it quite like that they said 'can we have it arf and arf'? And I thought 'I'm not quite sure what half and half is', so I said 'I'm sorry'. She said 'Well, I want some chips and rice', so I learnt something, you even learn something when you're doing a job.

[JH]: Yes. And do you have any other stories or memories about your time volunteering for Emergency Services?

[MHJ]: No. But, you know, being a member of WRVS and everything else I've loved every minute of it, you know, and I still managed to do other jobs and, you know, carry on doing everything really. And over the years, you know, I've had different recognised from Internet, you know, from

[Inaudible 00:32:08] and I've had different things. So obviously somebody's been pleased with what I've done and I love it.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MHJ]: And you meet so many people. And they are, are in the same boat as yourself because they've joined and I've joined.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: So it's lovely, you know.

[JH]: And you're also an Older People's Welfare Organiser?

[MHJ]: Yes.

[JH]: In '89, 1990 and how did you become the...?

[MHJ]: Again because that was sad. Because I'd been doing all, other things in, you know, court and residential homes, the lady who did it before me died very suddenly so I had a phone call from the Area Manager and said 'Would you like to do the clubs with the older people'? I said 'Yes, it will be fine', because I drive.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MHJ]: Which I, that was one question I always asked if somebody was going to join us I'd say 'Do you drive'? I learned then that was to be a third or fourth question not a first question because I didn't realise so many people didn't drive, their husbands for some reason wouldn't let them. So I ended up going all over. I think originally I had about nineteen, twenty clubs and now I've got all the South Wales coast as well down to Barry and everywhere. So I still do it but the clubs are getting smaller.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: Everybody else is getting older, I'm just getting a different number behind my age.

[JH]: And can you tell me about the project or the services that you ran in Mid Glamorgan for older people?

[MHJ]: Well, they have afternoon clubs mainly and they usually meet every, say, every Monday, or every day I used to have some clubs. And some days there's clubs with, three clubs running on the same day, well you can't possibly... And as long as, in those days as long as I visited the clubs at least once in six weeks, and if you've got four clubs on a Monday and that's about, takes up all your time.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: So, and you just go along and they've usually got, if they've got a large club they can have speakers in because they've got the money. They're self-funding and so they'd have speakers and it still goes on today, they have their own speakers. You see you just go in and you chat to them. I mean I've been in my area now twenty-seven, twenty-eight years so my clubs know me now and it's great. So I don't have to wear any uniform at all.

[JH]: No.

[MHJ]: But I make sure I've got my lanyard on. So it's been super.

[JH]: Right. And how did, you've already mentioned the clubs have got smaller but have the way they've been run changed as well?

[MHJ]: I think so. But you see now most of them like playing Bingo.

[00:35:01]

Which it's fine and that's very good in some areas. But a lot of the other clubs will have speakers and that is even better because they may be watching television or listening to the radio but to get somebody actually standing up, and they're usually good speakers they're not just anybody who happens to turn up, they usually use professional people. So it's expensive but it's good, you know, so...

[JH]: And have you taken your clubs on any trips and outings?

[MHJ]: I don't personally but club leaders do. Because there's usually a club leader, treasurer and everybody else and on a bigger club they've got a lot of support with other WRVS members.

[JH]: And you're also involved with residential homes?

[MHJ]: Yes, not now so much because really I'm so involved with all the other clubs really. So they can run themselves, and even they are changing as well. But I very often used to stand in, as my, my role got busier I would stand in if somebody couldn't turn up. And of course, I'm being sent all over the place which I love, I love meeting people.

[JH]: And how would you describe what a day club, or a Darby and Joan club was?

[MHJ]: It was a place for them to meet. Because most, in, especially in the valley areas the men would be working and the women would be at home, and we're going back a few years now, and so they were just going along to the clubs and having an afternoon of friendship. That has changed quite a lot. Unfortunately we don't get many men in the club, I think two clubs still have a few men, which is good, but majority now are women. But the thing is most young women now married, they've got children, they're working so the grandmother of the older age group who would be going to the clubs now has to look after the grandchildren so it has changed from that angle really. I think, I don't know how we get round to that, that's why just the age has changed and the younger people, the younger in their seventies...

[JH]: Right, mm, mm.

[MHJ]: Now are so busy looking after children. And most of them drive now whereas when I first moved to this area they didn't drive so really it's all changed. But it is important because they can chat to each other and they learn things, but the clubs are so different in different areas.

[JH]: And why, why did you want to be involved with the, that sort of work and the clubs and...?

[MHJ]: I think that was the main one that came up, but I mean I've, I've been lucky I've done so many different roles and when anything is going on it's usually, you know, see if Mary would like to do that and I usually, because I haven't got the tie of children, they're all away.

[JH]: No.

[MHJ]: And, you know, I, I, I'm not very good at doing nothing and I like being busy and so, you know, I go all over the place.

[JH]: And before you were an organiser did you have another role with Darby and Joan clubs before then?

[MHJ]: No, not, I've not. Oh I did find a newspaper cutting from the dark ages and I was only telling somebody about it the other day that they had a choir in who were very good and I said 'This is so strange', I found a newspaper cutting some time ago and I've mislaid it again and I was studying singing when I lived in North Wales and I was asked to go along with Madam somebody, because they were always called 'Madam' and to sing at Darby and Joan club in Rhuddlan and I had to perform as a singer. So it was most interesting to find this newspaper cutting of when I was probably seventeen or eighteen that I'd sung to a Darby and Joan club.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And Darby and Joan clubs, were they usually held in community centres and...?

[MHJ]: Usually. Some have to hire a room. But they're very crafty, if they take, take a trip on that day they don't have to pay rent. Because they have to be self-funding, which is difficult because as a club gets smaller it's not raising enough money, but luckily they'll nip out to lunch somewhere local. They

don't have to involve, you know, it's a pity they have to be self-funding because it means a lot of them will have to close.

[00:40:01]

[JH]: Mm, and they always been self-funding?

[MHJ]: Yes. But they're usually pretty good at that, you know, with raffles and they have book stands and different things, you know, so it's pretty good. But they do need, they need more support but I think I can see in the end they're dying out because the older people now do different things. I can remember people in their forties if you were a widow...

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: Were in black, you know, and it has changed now. I mean when you see people on television, somebody's in their hundreds and they're still doing things. One thing that I haven't mentioned that my mother was looking after evacuees and in Nine..., 2008 I was asked if I would be representing a WVS person looking after evacuees. It was for a film company on behalf of the BBC and the programme was called *Coal House at War* and I was delivering evacuees so it took me right back to when my mother used to check the evacuees over.

[JH]: And how did you feel about being involved with this?

[MHJ]: That was fantastic. But I hope you realise I smile a lot Jennifer, but I was told immediately and of course, I can remember that if you met somebody they were 'Mrs' or 'Mr'. It wasn't 'Hello Jennifer', 'hello Mary', 'hello David', it was always proper. And I found the first two days very difficult because my first role was to deliver evacuees and it had to be 'Hello, I'm Mrs Howard-Jones and I'm here to check where you're going to let the evacuees sleep', and I'd been told that you want to rub your fingers along something and say 'oh my goodness, I think that needs a bit of a clean'. And after two days I thought 'This is hard work'. But even the cameramen were told in the end because the youngsters were normal children coming from all over the place and a couple of them, one said 'Can we call you Mary?' I said 'No, you mustn't call me Mary because everybody was called by their

correct title'. And I'd mentioned this to the producers and they said 'What do you call your teachers'? 'Oh it's either miss or...' 'What do you call the men'? 'Sir'. And he said 'Right you call Mary Mrs Howard-Jones', and I found, I think they found that difficult. But to be honest with you, you know, at the end of a month, I was there every day for a month and they got used to it, you know, so that was fun, that was fun. I'd do it again any day.

[JH]: And did you wear the WVS uniform?

[MHJ]: WVS uniform. And I had to, archives loaned me, I think Matthew sent something down and everything. But the coat was three sizes too small, which was very handy in October, and one night it was snowing when I left.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: Well, normally as soon as I'd get to the car I would take my coat off and slip something else on. It was snowing this night because we'd had to pretend there'd been a bomb nearby and so I thought 'Well, I can't take my coat off standing in the snow' and so I drove home, and, you know, no arms. And the uniform was great but one thing if I arrived they said 'We want you here at so and so time but', they said 'would you keep out of sight'? Because they knew then something was up and so I would have to keep out of the way, you know. But they had an emergency exercise and I said 'Well, I can't do that by myself', because you wouldn't go into an emergency by yourself you'd always have at least two people with you. They said 'Oh we'll get two more people WVS, WRVS to come with you but only you will be talking', because you weren't given a script you were just given just a sentence. And so that was fine, and you'd have to make sure nobody saw you because they'd think 'Ah, ha, she's here again'. [Laughing] But it was a wonderful experience, you know, so it was the film. I will give you the name later of the company. It was for the BBC.

[JH]: And you also, as well as *Coal House at War* you've also done talks for MPs and is it, mm, Assembly people?

[MHJ]: Business people.

[JH]: Business people?

[MHJ]: Yes, and the MPs in Cardiff, the AMs, I've given a talk.

[00:45:00]

And I think David had just started with us so he was quite new so he heard me talk, but you had a lot of business people plus the AMs and I've also been to St James's Palace to talk to the MPs and business people there and I told them about spending the night with, because invariably they brought their wives and I told them the night I went to the Hoover fire and I said there were five fire engines then so there were about forty men and it made one of my managers very jealous because I'd spent a night with forty men. So one wife said to her husband 'I think I'm going to join them if that's what they get up to'.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MHJ]: So, you know, although we were on duty sort of thing.

[JH]: Yes, this film.

[MHJ]: This felt great and I spoke, I stood in for the Chairman at the Houses of Parliament. And they, I knew I was going to give a talk but then when they rang me they said 'Chairman can't make it would you give the talk instead of her please'? So I did that as well.

[JH]: And do you remember which Chairman that was?

[MHJ]: Mm, I can't remember, it was quite a few years ago. They, they change after 'X' number of years. It was after...

[JH]: Elizabeth?

[MHJ]: It could have been.

[JH]: Or Tina maybe?

[MHJ]: Yes, one of those.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MHJ]: You can sort that out after.

[JH]: Yes, I can look that up.

[MHJ]: Yes, yes. And it was in the ante room and that was rather nice. And I know because I was giving a talk. I, I'm so used to doing that it doesn't bother me but I thought 'No, I must behave, I'm standing in for the Chairman now'. Nothing worried me really, and they kept coming up with glasses of wine I think and I said 'No, thank you'. And then one said 'Will you have a drink at all'? And I said 'Yes, but I'm going to give a talk', I said 'I'll have it afterwards', [laughing] and they came up and they said 'Would you like it in a tumbler or a glass'? Because I didn't want, and I didn't want to eat anything because that's just when you get a crumb in your throat. Had it been my talk I could have apologised but standing in for this Chairman this was, you know, really didn't want to show, you know. But I, it was good, I met whoever it was the Chairman then she said 'I haven't seen for such a long time' because I kept turning up at different events.

[JH]: And what sort of things did you used to talk about, tell people about?

[MHJ]: Well, you say really what WRVS, WVS, and it was WRVS really, saying what jobs we do and how we introduce ourselves to them, and because we weren't wearing uniforms so much but we always had identities with us before these came out and just talking generally about, you know, what we were doing. And I remember the Secretary of State for Wales at the moment, it was first of March and he had a beautiful dragon tie on and I was talking to him later and I said 'I like your tie'.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MHJ]: When I see him on television now he doesn't wear the tie with dragons all over, [Laughing]

[JH]: And you also mentioned on your biography sheet that you were there when the WRVS computer was launched, can you tell me about that?

[MHJ]: Oh that's right, yes. I was just there as one of the sort of gang that were there. I can't, I'm sorry, sorry chairmen I can't remember all your names because you change so regularly, you know.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: And it, that's when I met, you know and I wasn't involved in giving a talk then just chatting generally but I know somebody collared me and said 'We haven't taken a photograph together', and that was one of the chairmen, so it was with a local AM, the Chairman and me. And somebody many years ago said 'Went up the archives the other day, the other week and there were loads of photographs of you'. I said 'Well, they weren't for me they were of somebody else. [Laughing]

[JH]: Yes. And you also were, have said that you'd laid a wreath at the Cenotaph in London?

[MHJ]: In London, yes. That was, I should have gone twice but I did go up. And in those days there were twelve of us and we stood at the Cenotaph and we were called the guard with other people, sort of very selective then. Because now there's no guard there by the WVS, WRVS or anything else, they're in the main parade. And we were in The Home Office and we were brought out last minute but we came on last but we went off last as well. And one day it was raining and we still had the new hat and it was drizzly and we'd been issued with raincoats thankfully and when the bishop said 'Let us pray' you could flick all the water off your hat because it was collecting the rain.

[00:50:01]

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: [Laughing] One thing I didn't, I haven't mentioned Wimbledon is starting on Monday. Now for years we used to have guests at Wimbledon which was great fun you went up. But one year

somebody from Cardiff, I can't, she's, I think she's got letters after her name now, MBEs and goodness knows what, you know, but she said 'Would your son like to go up to Wimbledon'? I said 'Oh he'd love to'. Because he used to come everywhere with me but, and he was the first male to go to Wimbledon so after that more men went. But he taught himself Russian in the meantime, and somebody came up, didn't speak any English, and he'd spent all the year teaching himself because I said he'd been ill and so he was able to help out somebody Russian. So, but after that a lot of, you know, a lot of the men started going. Because they should have been asked before but, you know.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And what were they - sort of information?

[MHJ]: Information had a desk and people would go up and ask, you know, where's this, where's that and usual question 'Where are the nearest toilets'? Because we've all done The Royal Welsh Show and the first question there is 'Where's the nearest toilet'? So you, you learn where the toilets are, and that's what he said, it was the same there.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: But with other queries as well but that's number one.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And did you, when you were at The Royal Welsh Show did you ever get any unusual questions or requests?

[MHJ]: No, no, it was pretty, you know, it's interesting, I haven't done it for two years now but I, previously I've done it for about ten years, I'm hoping to go this year. But they, invariably 'Where's the nearest toilets'? You know, they are signposted but how they miss them I don't know, but I think it's easier sometimes, if you're in a hurry ask.

[JH]: Yes. And do you also provide tea and refreshments?

[MHJ]: No. Usually, we used to have a rest room but there's plenty of places to buy teas, there's so many bars and things and vans, we just used to have a rest room and a crèche. I used to do the

crèche and that used to be good, you know. But you had other people from, we didn't do much with the children but we just reg...

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: And that way Emergency Services came handy because you always registered people in emergencies if somebody would come in because invariably somebody would say 'Have you seen Mrs so and so'? Well, you'd have their names and that was one thing we did at The Royal Welsh, so it was using some of our training so that was good.

[JH]: Yes. And now you are a volunteer partner. So how would you describe your role as volunteer partner?

[MHJ]: Well, I introduce myself now. When I ring somebody up, I had to ring somebody this morning but she's known me some time, but very often I'll chat to someone. There's one club that has about ten volunteers, you know, and I'll say 'Of course, I can ring you any time because if you want to mention something as a volunteer partner you can tell me if you don't want to tell anybody else'. So it's really a bit like a befriending thing, you know, and I'm trying to support two people at the moment and I ring them up and which I'd hesitated before but because I don't know them so well. If they're volunteers helping at a club and there's fourteen of them but now I can ring them up and they know me, and I think it's a different role again. Because I think volunteers who are working in something like the Darby and Joan clubs there's no way if it is a big club who do you deal with? Do you deal with the volunteers or do you deal with one of the ninety people attending the club? So it's a mixed role.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: But I think it's a role that's got to be advertised more but I love it, I'll talk to anybody.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MHJ]: Don't laugh.

[JH]: [Laughing] And also as a volunteer partner you're involved with Paul, Tasmin and...?

[MHJ]: Yes. Well, you see...

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: Because people, even if it's a case of just buying raffle tickets they are supporting. And I was giving a talk for him in Newport the other week and, mm, one chappie said 'I always buy your raffle tickets'. I said 'Have you won'? He said 'No'. I said 'Don't worry, I've bought raffle tickets since they started and I've never won' but my daughter won a hundred pounds because I gave her a ticket. So it's people to thank them really and introduce, it was a smaller meeting in Newport, but I've done Swansea and Cardiff and different ones, I love it, I love people.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: But I've noticed when they come, if it's males they come by themselves but if it's a female there's somebody else who's in and they come with them.

[00:55:07]

So I said to Paul after the last one, I said 'I chat the men up', and he laughed. I said 'Well, they're there by themselves and they're going to sit down and be by themselves but the women have got somebody else with them'. One thing I did war widow visiting.

[JH]: Mm.

[MHJ]: And that, I did that for eight years. And that was interesting because it was once every six months I'd see them and it was like a friend coming in because over eight years I'd got to know most of them. Some interesting tales there.

[JH]: And did you visit them individually or...?

[MHJ]: Oh yes, individually because then you could make sure they're alright. And, mm, you don't have to look around. And the same when you visited for our holidays, you didn't have to take your eyes off the person you're talking to you could still see over their shoulders and things.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: And we could weigh up a lot, you know. And I upset one war widow, she said 'Would you like a coffee?' I said 'Yes, please'. She said 'Oh I'll go and put it on now'. I said 'Please could I have cold, cold milk?' She said 'Oh no, I always boil my milk'. So the next time she said 'Now you don't like boiled milk'. I said 'No', and so you became quite friendly with them. But that had to stop because the people who ran it, we were running, WRVS were running it on behalf of the Social Services or whatever and they said 'I think Mary will have to be trained for this job'.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MHJ]: And my manager said 'Well, she's done it for eight years'. 'Oh, but it's in the rules now, nobody can go out unless they've done the training'. So we decided if that's how they feel they'll just lose WRVS. I think I was the only one that did it because it was in South Wales you see, but that was very short sighted. So of course, I didn't ring them all up and say 'I'm not coming again'. They probably wondered, but I mean that to stay with the pension people. Because I'd sent in a report on, on what happened to my manager who then sent it on to the pension people. But I loved it because, you know, I had a lot of them on, on my car and I'd just go to see them and by myself and it was lovely. They were glad to see somebody they could talk to, and they could tell me all sorts of things, you know. So I was war widows. Sorry, I forgot that one.

[JH]: No, that's fine. They, and were they widowed by the Second...?

[MHJ]: In the Second World War, yes. So you know...

[JH]: Because I read that some of the reports and things that I read at the archive they mentioned the pensions being altered and the war widow work.

[MHJ]: That's right. And I had a very good friend, I still have her, and she lost her husband, he was a flight lieutenant over India, he was killed so he never saw the baby that his wife was having. So, you know, I've felt all my life through WRVS and WVS now especially getting older myself I have been there.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: So, I mean over the years since especially moving to Mid Glam. they say 'Oh you're only a youngster', you know, and you're in your fifties. Then you're in your sixties and they still say 'Oh you're a baby', you know, and they still tell me I'm only a... But I've always felt that I've been widowed, I've lost both my parents when I was young, younger and I had somebody with cancer and so I feel now I've had so many of the things that they're going through that I can...

[JH]: Relate?

[MHJ]: Relate to them. Because one lady had cancer and she was very, she was very reluctant to talk about it, but as we were leaving one of the clubs I said to her 'You probably didn't realise that my son had cancer'. And I didn't say 'How are you' because the leader had told me all about her. And when I used to be at the club she always give me a big hug. And when I rang her because she was in hospital, I went to see her in hospital and, mm, I said 'We didn't speak about it', I said 'but your big hug said it all'. Now I haven't said 'How's the cancer, how's this, how's that?' so I was doing the right thing. I think having been there yourself it helps. So, you know, they've helped me, I just love them.

[JH]: And I mean so like war widows, are there any other services you've been involved with that WRVS have stopped providing?

[MHJ]: No.

[01:00:00]

The war widows it was a shame. I mean WRVS didn't do that it was the pension people. But it was a shame because I'd had experience and somebody, not everybody's going to do that job anyway.

[JH]: No.

[MHJ]: Because you're going in to a sad situation. But you have to be the right sort of person, I mean you can chat to somebody and I mean they were all good friends in the end after eight years.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: You know, so no, it wasn't WRVS stopped that but...

[JH]: And also, so during, in 2004 we had the colour, sort of change of colours to the purple and orange and sort of changed the name to RVS rather than calling it Women's Royal Voluntary Service. What was your experience of that?

[MHJ]: Well, you either go with the changes or you forget it. What I didn't like, a lot of people didn't like and they had been saying, they'd say to other people with it but change is a good thing, you know, it moves on. You don't always have to agree with everything, as long as the basic things are there. But I'm delighted because I don't like green. Even if I did wear it on Saturday at the arm, at the forces day I would never choose bottle green to wear. Purple I love. In fact I've got loads of purple, my present manager says 'Oh you've got the colours on again', but I happen to have it.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: Because my husband didn't like purple. So I mean I wouldn't say I didn't have anything but certainly I have a lot of purple in my wardrobe now. And what's happened? They've changed the colour again. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing] And what do you think about the name change as well - dropping the 'W'?

[MHJ]: I think it's, it's a change, but I think people have to get used to it. Unfortunately still people don't know what we do. In fact years and years ago people used to say to me 'What do you do?' I'd say 'You name it we do it'. Because, you know, I'm going back to the '80s, we did, we nearly did every job that was going. But now they, and then you say 'We're in hospital'. 'Oh yes'. I think they think that's all we did and do, but you just have to somehow get over to them. I said, you know, I've been on the radio with different people, you know, Sally and everyone but it doesn't get through that what we do. So I think it's another change, but you just had to go with the changes.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: But we need definitely some better advertising or whatever, but it all costs money, this is the thing. But of course, changing all the signs now it's, it's all money. But, you know, we haven't got funding now from the Government we have to raise our own money but how do you do it? I think *Saga Magazine* doing the article on WRVS that was a good thing, because I've had the different calls and one person I hadn't had contact with about thirty years she happened to be reading *Saga* and she thought 'Hang on, that's Mary', and I think we need something like that to be in a popular magazine.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: Not *Saga*, *Saga's* good, because they've been very good, but we need to be in a popular magazine. I think that's the only way we're going to get the message over and get, we, we claimed two new members from my talk in Newport.

[JH]: Oh that's...

[MHJ]: They thought 'Well if she's eighty-two years old', but I'm not, you know, 'if she's doing it still'. And they, two, two ladies and they said 'I've got so much time on my hands' and she said 'I'd love to...', so really they were more or less signed up then.

[JH]: Good.

[MHJ]: So but we do need to be in something a little, you know, because our radio calls are usually before eight o'clock, and if you're younger you're getting the children off to school, getting or you're not up or everything, you know. I think we need to be in a popular magazine somehow to show we've got youngsters in.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: You know. My two youngsters were in. But there was no publicity you see. I think we, that's what we need, we need publicity.

[JH]: Do you have much contact with your local hub in Cardiff?

[MHJ]: Oh yes, I'm always in touch, you know. That's why I suggested coming here today because, you know, I have good contact with everybody. The two new girls, Karen and Gwyneth, we've got between areas. Locality Members, yes.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: I've got a good contact with those two because they're coming to different clubs and we chat, you know.

[01:05:00]

So that's, that's good. But you see people like that we, we need and we need something in magazines. But we need to be in schools, this is the thing, we need to be in schools. On their CV it does good because they're doing voluntary work.

[JH]: So you'd like to see more younger people? So we used to do The Duke of Edinburgh, hold The Duke of Edinburgh Award.

[MHJ]: That's right, yes. You see that's what we need but we need to be in the younger magazines somehow. Because we've got quite a lot of youngsters.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: You know. So we've got to pub..., publicise what we've got. We're not all in our nineties and hundreds, we've got some people in their hundreds now. You know, we're not all old and sitting at home doing nothing we're all active. And people are going to be more active and live longer and so we must get in some magazines.

[JH]: Yes. And how much contact, so how much contact, well, you talked about the Project Managers and the Locality Managers. But sort of between the mid 1990s and last, last couple of years we haven't really had a hub or a centre that you could have contact with, so has having the new hubs affected your role at all?

[MHJ]: Mm, I'm lucky because I've always had good contacts with the offices wherever they've been, I mean Abingdon and all the way down here, you know, so I'm, I'm okay. But I think everything's a hub now, all the big companies are hubs, I'm not quite sure how that will work. I think in the end of the day people are saying 'Oh it's just like another big firm, they've got this and that and something else', we have to be careful we're not going to lose ourselves in little hubs. I think we need to get out and advertise more to show we've got youngsters in. I mean we're not all going to live in to the hundreds and we're going to run out of energy. We need some youngsters coming in now who know what we are about.

[JH]: And so saying all about the publicity, where would you say Royal Voluntary Services place in society is today?

[MHJ]: They still think of us in hospitals, but of course, we also lose our role in the hospital. I think The Heath, because I was tied to The Heath when my son was ill and I always used to go and chat to anybody, and when I have a hospital visits I go and chat to anybody on the tea bar. But a lot of people don't realise what we're doing, and of course, now there's no uniform, at least if you had a green tabard on it said something, you know, a big 'Royal Voluntary Service' across you and then just a badge. I, I don't think now with the change of uniform again we've got to get something that shows who... One hospital's got a new thing and they're not allowed to advertise, they're not

allowed to put up a sign so how do they know it's Voluntary Service there? I think somebody's got to look at that otherwise they're not even going to realise 'Oh you're in the hospitals aren't you'?

[JH]: So that would you suggest we need to sort of with the new branding and the green and the red and the new sort of circles we've got and that do we need to use that in the hospitals, like we used to have the purple and orange blaze?

[MHJ]: That's right. And get somebody, it's normal, to me I mean as my son said when I said 'Well, you'll have to wear a tabard', he said 'A new a bit of, it's only a bit of material'. Having the tabard on showed because it looks as if you're working, but, you know, we've got to advertise ourselves more.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: But I think it's getting in to schools, getting in to magazines. That *Saga Magazine* worked because somebody only rang me the other week and said 'Oh I was in the doctor's and I picked up *Saga* and you were in it'. Now it didn't matter if it was me or somebody else.

[JH]: No.

[MHJ]: They would have heard of WRVS and they saw something in the magazine but, not everybody goes to the hospital.

[JH]: No, and not everybody reads *Saga*?

[MHJ]: No, no this is it. We need to be in something more modern definitely.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And what would, what do you think is the future for Royal Voluntary Service?

[MHJ]: Without good advertising it won't last. Because how many people are joining now in their thirties, forties, fifties? See we need the youngsters in.

[01:10:01]

Because I know my mother got me in. I was in my twenties and I got my two children in but we need that younger group coming in. You see as my interviewer now.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: You know, she's younger and a lot of people are younger now, but you see we need more younger people. But we need some format, I'm not saying everybody has to go in uniform, I mean my last uniform cost a hundred and fifteen pounds, you know. But the tabard or just a fleece or something. I had a nice lilac fleece, I can't wear it now. Even, if I had a new badge on it I could stick it on. You see we need something that shows who we are.

[JH]: Mm, mm. So that people recognise us when you were walking down the street?

[MHJ]: Going somewhere. Well, I was, after going on Saturday to the Armed Forces Day I was pretty tired because it was so hot and I thought 'Oh it will be good to get home'. But then I thought 'I'll nip to Tesco's', there are Sainsbury's, Morrison's, all the other of our supermarkets [laughing], I heard somebody say 'Who's that lady in green'? And the lady said to the man 'That's somebody in WRVS'. I was just, I mean I hadn't changed. I, I didn't take my hat off because my hair would have fallen down because I've got long hair. And so, you know, I didn't go there to show off WRVS or anything but I did have my green uniform on. And he was wondering, you know, and she knew what it was, obviously she'd seen us in hospitals because of the green. But, you know, I like the new colour and I like purple but I wouldn't have bought bottle green. But then I've worn it, I mean I've had to wear it.

[JH]: Yes. And do you have any other stories or events that happened to you as a volunteer that you would like to share?

[MHJ]: Well, I always talk about the night I spent with forty firemen. I mean it was, you know, they were busy, so was I. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MHJ]: And, you know, the, all f the things falling out. And it's friendship. I, I enjoy people, I love people and I, I don't weigh them up, they're, to me they're people. And some are lovely and some are friendly and if you give them a smile they usually smile back.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: And it's the friendship really. And then people that you haven't seen for years, you go to something, because I was on Shaping our Age and we're only meeting three times a year but when you met there would be one or two, only four from WRVS are on that committee, the rest were random charities. And you'd meet up and you'd say 'Hello, nice to see you, how's it been going'?

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: And one I used to ring, and she used to ring me from Yorkshire, because you were in the same lot, you know. Only four of us but, you know.

[JH]: And you also celebrated sixty years of being a volunteer with WRVS?

[MHJ]: Yes. I've, I suppose I've done sixty-two years now. I've got the clasps and things and of course, I had a diamond thing.

[JH]: Yes. Oh yes, you are a Diamond Champion?

[MHJ]: They couldn't find anybody else you see that's the thing. I was very proud to get that, it was lovely.

[JH]: And were you nominated by somebody?

[MHJ]: Yes. Now I was nominated by two people, and I nominated one of them. But she, I, you had to ask permission so I'd rung this person and when I had the letter to say that I was going to St Paul's I rang her, but it was a mobile, it was her answer phone so I said 'Oh I've got something to ask you', because you could take somebody.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: And I'd nominated her you see and I'd put five people in. And she rang me back, she said 'I was going to ring because I've had a letter', and somebody from the club had nominated her because although she'd only been WRVS eight years she had done loads of volunteering before.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: And I said 'Oh brilliant', so we both ended up with us sitting altogether.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: And, you know, that was lovely. So then...

[JH]: And did they have a big celebration for you?

[MHJ]: Oh it was, no, it was, the one photograph there. No, no, I haven't given you that one.

[JH]: No.

[MHJ]: Well, Roy Noble, who was there. Now was he? Yes, and he was dishing out them, you know, to all, because there were only sixty from Wales and, but they weren't all at the City Hall.

[01:15:02]

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: But it was lovely when the other one went up for hers because, you know, she had been, wanted to ring me and tell me and because she knew I'd nominated her so I took my friend that I always have with me, you know, she's WRVS.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: And she had one of the couple, the people who had nominated her. So a lot of happy things you see.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: And I've got loads of certificate things saying thank you for the work you've done. I've had Vice-Chairman's Certificates and, yes, they're all in a file.

[JH]: Yes.

[MHJ]: So...

[JH]: And do you have a favourite or most memorable moment of being with WVS or WRVS?

[MHJ]: It's, no, I don't think I can pull out one because each one is special. I mean sometimes I mean you probably know you can't possibly like everybody but at the same time you don't dislike them, but you make some good friends and so it changes really. It's, everything's good and I mean I'm lucky because I work with the clubs so I'm now losing some of my clubs, I just need more to do now. But, you know, I don't want a butter mountain again.

[JH]: No.

[MHJ]: Because I think I must have driven miles and it's a responsibility looking after that, I don't think we'd have that. But, you know, I've enjoyed everything and it's kept me young,, and one of my daughters said 'It's like a full-time job'. I said 'Okay, at least I don't pay more tax'.

[JH]: No. Well, thank you very much Mary and that will be a good contribution to our Voices of Volunteering Project.

