

Voices of Volunteering: 75 Years of Citizenship and Service

Interview Transcript

Title Page

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Interviewee's Surname: Kay

Title: Mrs

Interviewee's Forenames: Elizabeth

Gender: F

Volunteer/Employee Roles and Dates:

Volunteer (c1960-1990)

Drugs Abuse Talks

One-in-Five

Keep Fit for Elderly

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Interviewer's Notes:

Elizabeth Kay (EK) talks about her role in WVS in Chiswick and then as a speaker for the talks on Drugs Abuse given by WVS/WRVS members in the late 1960s early 1970s in the UK and at Army barracks in Germany. Also mentions her relationship with Lady Reading and being asked to give One-in-Five talks after the Drugs Abuse talks were ended.

[JENNIFER HUNT]: This is Jennifer Hunt with Elizabeth Kay on the ninth of May 2014 at her home in Kinson, Bournemouth. Elizabeth can you just sort of introduce yourself?

[ELIZABETH KAY]: Yes. I'm eighty-six. I have three children, ten grandchildren and sixteen great-grandchildren. Mm, some of my great-grandchildren I haven't even seen yet because they're all scattered and all over the place. My youngest child, my daughter, lives in Hyde Road and that's why I'm living here because I was knocked over on the pavement and badly injured four or five years ago and she said 'Could you think of coming to live near me'? I was in this great big three storey Victorian house where all my children had been, where she'd been born. And so, mm, I came down and had a look at places and I didn't really like any of them very much and she said 'Why don't you have a bungalow'? Because my arthritis was getting bad and I had to use my late husband's stairlift. So eventually I came down one weekend and the estate agent said 'We've got permission to look at this bungalow, the fellow who owns it doesn't want people looking because he's had offers which haven't come to anything', and I told him that 'If it's suitable you will actually be making him a cash offer'. So, so he, he welcomed me in, and he was in a wheelchair. I'm only four foot ten and everything was the right height for me, and my daughter walked in behind me and she said 'Mum, I knew as soon as I walked in that this was going to be your home'. It was a place full of love and, and for me no steps, no, no stairs and yes, so I sold this house and I moved in to the bungalow. And because I did that I was able to give my children a lot of money so that they could pay off their mortgages. So that's why I have to live to be ninety so they don't have to pay Inheritance Tax.

[Laughing]

[JH]: And when did you start volunteering for WVS?

[EK]: When my Godsent daughter was five she started school, this was in Chiswick, and I felt I'd like to give something back because I felt that she had been given to me because I didn't really want any more children and there was a reason why and I found my faith through her, and so I discovered that they needed people to weigh the babies in our town hall and I went and offered to weigh the babies. And by doing that I met several WVS people at that time and one of them said would I like to help her with Books-on-Wheels, and so I started delivering Books-on-Wheels. I did a little bit of Meals-on-Wheels but then it was taken over professionally so I didn't do any more of that. I learnt how to store clothes, I can only remember that we had to have stacks of five with knickers and five vests and various other things and, mm, and I really enjoyed doing the work. So I did that until I think about the late 1960s, maybe 1960..., I can't remember the exact dates but they're on the letter.

[JH]: Mm.

[EK]: And somebody that I was going to the local church with was actually doing things for the WVS and said 'Can I put your name forward to be given a course on giving a, talks on drug taking'. And Lady Reading had decided that what she needed to do was to train women of child bearing age, which I was, I was only thirty-five, to give talks because she thought that it would make a great deal of difference how the children's home atmosphere was. And she believed that if children weren't told that a pill cures everything, in other words an aspirin, they wouldn't start looking for that for themselves as they got older, and so that's what happened.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And before you joined WVS what did you know about the organisation?

[EK]: Mm, I knew that it had helped during the war because when I was a little, I was a little girl, well I was eleven when the war started, and we had WVS people who brought the evacuees round to find homes, places for them to, to live, and we had an evacuee who, brought to us by a WVS member from East London and, and she came and she moved in and she was with us.

[00:05:14]

The WVS seemed to be more or less everywhere, they were always helping. And they organised fruit picking in the area where I was and digging potatoes and stacking sheaves, doing all kinds of things. They were very, very helpful. They also had something to do with ration books but I'm not quite sure what that was.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: So that's how I found out about the WVS. And I knew that the, they did social work in a different way and I thought that was a good thing. I wanted to give something back having been put in a position where I was, I had very good friends who were able to lend me money to put a deposit on a house, able to get my husband a bank account which he never had, and one of them was actually a WVS member. So I suppose I was aware that WVS people were jolly good. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughter]

[EK]: And they were socially very aware and they would help wherever it was possible.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[EK]: But they were also, mm... I didn't meet many people in the WVS who were, shall we say, working class women.

[JH]: Mm.

[EK]: They didn't have the time or the inclination there, maybe they were too busy with their families. Because at that time women didn't work so much, they did stay at home more with their children, but I was a bit of a rebel and I always wanted to do other things, so I was on the school PTA and, oh, did all kinds of things. I just wanted to give, I felt I'd been so fortunate that I'd been sent this lovely child when I didn't want to have another child. And my other two were at boarding school and I was going back to my career and I just felt God needed me to be available for whatever he would like me to do, and that's what, that's what, that's what I did with the WVS, as it was then.

[JH]: And you mentioned that one of your early roles with WVS was Meals-on-Wheels?

[EK]: Yes.

[JH]: Yes. What was a Meals-on-Wheels round like then?

[EK]: Mm, we used to go, I think we went to, in the Chiswick area, also in to Hounslow. We had twenty people that we went to and the meals were in big containers and they used to dollop them out on, on to, on to plates. They weren't frozen as they are I believe now, they, they take frozen meals round, but no, they were actually hot in metal containers and they were actually put on the plates and taken straight in to the house so that the person was able to eat them. I don't really remember what they were but it was mostly meat and gravy and potatoes [laughing] and very well done vegetables I remember, because I don't like very well done vegetables. [Laughing] But, but they were there and they were the people who couldn't get out and go to a lunch club and, mm, it was important, and for some of them particularly the only time they spoke to anybody was when we took the meal in. But then that was taken over as I said by, mm, a commercial enterprise. The driver

was paid and I believe the helpers were paid on part-time basis, I, I don't know. But I know that I couldn't do it because my children were at school and I could only do things that kept me away while they were at school and I wanted to be home always when they came home. So I went from that to Books-on-Wheels instead because that was, that was an easier option and we used to go round in the morning with them.

[JH]: And what were you doing on Books-on-Wheels?

[EK]: Books-on-Wheels? I would, we, I would go, I was driven by a WVS lady who actually could drive [laughing] and I would go in and collect the books which they'd read and take with me the books which they said they'd like to read.

[00:10:00]

I usually took an option of four or five books and then I would give them the option. Some people used to have the whole five books. They had nothing else to do, they were left in, in their home with no one to talk to and nothing to do and they read. And, and then I would give them suggestions of what they might like depending on what their interests were. Some of them liked biographies, some liked romances, some, particularly liked big print because their sight wasn't so good. I got to know them very well, I had fifteen people on my round and that was every, every two weeks, but in the morning so I was home when my children came home from school.

[JH]: And you were also working in the clothing depot?

[EK]: Yes. In Chiswick at that time we had a clothing depot as well as the headquarters. Next to the Town Hall there were two big Victorian houses next to the Town Hall. One of them was the headquarters and they had an office there and they did paperwork and they wrote letters and they did all kinds of things, and the other one was the clothing store. And, and I learnt to sort the clothing and, and make bundles of five... If you remember it was five pairs of knickers and five vests. I dare say there were other things, we had other clothing but I don't remember how we had to stack them. And then people would come with letters from the local authority saying that they were to have clothing, and so they were then given a supply of whatever they needed. I remember that nappies were very difficult because there weren't, at that time there weren't disposable ones they were, as I had for my own children, nappies that you washed and so eventually they were given disposable

ones or they were given vouchers to use the nappy service, there was a nappy laundering service but you had to be quite well off to use that. So that was what I did in the clothing store.

[JH]: Yes. And do you remember any of the people who used to come in to the clothing store?

[EK]: Not really, no. Because I think they wanted to be anonymous, and I didn't really, I didn't want them, I didn't want to remember them and I didn't want them to remember me in case I saw them. If they were Chiswick people I might have seen them, I might have seen them pushing a pushchair or doing something and it was better not to have a relationship with them. Because a lot of them didn't want people to know that they couldn't afford to buy clothes or that they needed help.

[JH]: And so then after sort of doing all this different work with WVS you were asked to give talks on drug abuse?

[EK]: Well not at first. I was asked if I would be interested in training to give talks on drug abuse. Because the, the Chairman of the Chiswick branch... Would she have been Chairman? Yes, I suppose she would. She asked me whether I'd be interested in training because I had joined the local Am Dram in another church and she was in there and so was her daughter and she said to me 'You can talk, do you think you would like to train to give talks about drug abuse'? And I said 'Well, I suppose I could, what does it involve'? And she said 'Well, Lady Reading has sent a request to all the WVS for women of child bearing age, because the talks are to be given to young mothers and so she wants them to be given from someone of the same age, and what do you think'? And I said, because I'm always interested in trying new things I said 'Okay, yes, good, well I will go along'. I had an interview and I was told that I seemed suitable for training. Lady Reading said that she thought I spoke out well. She didn't know that I actually belonged to the Am Dram Society, but anyway she thought that she had trained me to be a public speaker and she was very proud of me because she, she thought that I was at that time one of her star speakers.

[00:15:05]

So I said yes, I would take the training. And we had to go and be given a talk about drugs, what they did, what they were and suggesting how we should make a talk suitable for young mothers - I don't know why it never included the fathers - so that they would provide a home atmosphere where the children wouldn't want to take drugs, they wouldn't think a pill could cure all ills.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[JK]: And so, mm, and I thought that was good because having two teenage children of my own and having a thirteen year old son who I knew was in contact with, with drugs at school, not actually taking them but he knew about them, and I thought 'Yes, I'm, I'm definitely going to be there and know about these things happening'. So I took the training and gave the talk after I'd written it to a committee and then to, mm, an audience in The House of Commons and then in The House of Lords I was authorised by The Home Office to give the talk, and Lady Reading used me as an example of what could be done by the WVS to train speakers. And so I went on from there and I became very much in demand actually, I was always being asked to go and give talks in different places.

[JH]: And how did you feel about being chosen to go to The House of Lords and House of Commons to give that talk?

[EK]: Well, I didn't realise actually how important it was, I just thought 'Well, that's what I've been trained to do'. What did amuse me was the fact that I was giving this talk so that they could hear what I was giving but it wasn't really for them, because at question time one of the, at the time Reginald Maudling was, mm, what was he? He was in the Cabinet and his wife Caroline Maudling, who was actually in a wheelchair, asked me about, she said 'Well, surely everybody knows you don't leave aspirins and things around, doesn't the nanny keep an eye on them?' I said 'Well, actually I'll be giving talks to people who don't have nannies'. And she said 'Really, what do they do?' I said 'They look after the children'. It, it was an eye opener for me and I did find it quite amusing that these people were listening to this talk which I would be giving to women whose lives they knew nothing about, and I thought it was interesting. And eventually Lady Reading wanted me to give the talk to an advisory group in wherever it is in that letter. I know I had to stay overnight, it might have been Chester I can't remember, but it was, or it might have been Birmingham. Anyway I went to give this talk and, mm, I can remember I was amazed because it was a raked auditorium and I had, gave the talk, would be giving the talk as I was giving it to all these women, sometimes in church halls where there would only be twelve of them, sometimes there would only be five, other times there would be up to thirty. But I went in and I had these aids which I had, they were headings of the drugs and I had a big blanket which I would put over a board and as I talked about them would actually clip these headings to the blanket. And when I looked I realised that there were going to be a lot of people there and I said to Lady Reading 'I didn't actually realise there would be so many ladies

present'? And she said 'They are not ladies, they are women'. And I thought 'Oh yes, know your place'. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[EK]: Yes, she was a lady but the rest were women. So, but anyway I did and she was terribly impressed with it and they all were. They, they had never had a speaker like me, and Lady Reading took all the credit she said 'Well, it's because I trained her', and so the newspaper cuttings say Lady Reading has trained this speaker. And I, I thought well that's fine, you know, she, she's happy.

[00:20:01]

So that's what I did. And then from there I was asked whether I would be interested in going to Berlin to, giving this talk to Army wives. So do you want me to go on?

[JH]: Yes. Do you want to tell me a little bit about when you went to Berlin to give the talk?

[EK]: Yes. I went, when I went to Berlin it was an adventure which I, I had no idea was going to happen really except I knew I'd be going behind the Iron Curtain, I'd be going through, through the wall through Checkpoint Charlie. I was told I was given officer status, I had to wear my WRVS, by that time it was the WRVS, uniform all the time and I was driven in a staff car and I had to hold my passport against the window of the car because we weren't allowed to let go of them to get to the Army base. I flew from Luton Airport, from the RAF base, and we landed at Gatow, which is, was then the RAF base for flying. I was a little bit nervous because I'd never flown on my own. I'd flown with my husband and it was only a little plane and I thought 'Well, it's going to be alright, yes [laughter] that will be fine'. So yes, and I was met there and I was given every courtesy. It was, again it was such a different life, and the people themselves were, Army families are different from not Army families and, but they hadn't given the talk the sort of publicity it should have been given and they thought that the talks were for families and so they thought they would be for older children. Although they'd been told that the talks were specifically for children, for young children, for children from five to about six or seven so consequently it was a bit of a, a bit of a hassle. But, mm, I, I did, I gave them to the first group I gave them to five women turned up and the second one only three turned up. Then I was interviewed for the radio, the, the forces radio and I tried to explain to

them why I was there and why I was giving the talks and what Lady Reading had wanted me to do and so the next one was better attended. [Laughing]

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: But I did feel on the whole it was a bit of a waste of money.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And you said, you showed me before a letter that you wrote about how you felt?

[EK]: Yes. I did write a report which I sent to head office and, mm, I don't know what they did with it, they never told me, [laughing] but I thought I should be honest and, and I should let them have a report. It was interesting and it was certainly interesting being behind, through the wall, behind the Iron Curtain and at one point going to this wonderful Pergamon Museum which I'd read about in books and really wanted to see, because they, the stuff they had an exhibition there. But again I was taken in a staff car by a driver who took me to the gate of the museum and then had to, he wasn't allowed to stay there so he disappeared and said he'd come back for me I think in an hour and a half. And I went in, and I didn't speak very much German and the women who were well, they were there looking after things. I had three of them who walked behind me all the time, very large, very, very frightening looking women, [laughing] and every time I stopped to look at something one of them would go '*ja, ja, ja*', as you say 'Yes, alright, we can see you like that'.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[EK]: But it was amazing, I'm so pleased I went, so that was one of the things. I also went to a theatre where my husband had been on tour with The Royal Shakespeare Company, he'd been there with Paul Schofield, and that was really interesting too. So it was a good, it was a good experience. I'd had to take a, a long skirt and blouse with me because I dined in the officers' mess in the evening and there was dancing.

[00:25:03]

And, but it, I just felt it was amusing that there I was coming from a very ordinary background with an officer status in my W..., or iwell n my long skirt being escorted gallantly around by officers who actually wanted to flirt with me, and I thought this is really mad. Here I am married with children,

grandchildren by that time, you know, I, I don't really, this isn't my life. I dare say it was quite normal but for me, and the thought of my husband at home looking after the children [laughter] because it was school holidays and I thought well, I don't really think it was a, a good spending of money so that's why I wrote a rather critical report and sent it off to head office when I got home. But they never commented on it so I've no idea whether they thought it was something I shouldn't have written or not.

[JH]: And when you were back over here in England did you give talks as well?

[EK]: Yes, yes, I did. In fact I still have some of the letters, people would write to WRVS and say we've heard that you have a speaker who gives talks and so and so. I mean all the women's clubs needed speakers, whether they really wanted drugs abuse speakers but they couldn't afford to pay speakers and the WRVS talks were free and so I did I went all over the place. And by that time I'd also learnt to drive so I could drive myself to quite distances away from where I lived in Chiswick. And, mm, I took my stuff with me. So, and I did enjoy doing it and I did it for I think about eight years, I think I have a letter which says we have been giving these talks for eight years and they'd decided that by that time the drug abuse had become much worse but different.

[JH]: Mm.

[EK]: The drugs were different and they felt that the kind of talks that the WVS, WRVS were giving were not applicable any more. Also so many of the mothers were going out to work and so many of them were taking pills for depression, all kinds of things and so this talk was really not applicable any more, so they stopped and I didn't do any more of them at all. But by that time I had enjoyed public speaking so much that I then gave talks on other subjects, and that's what I finished up doing. I, and the WVS headquarters in Chiswick closed and it moved to some part of Hounslow, which wasn't really where I was. I did help with The Age UK headquarters though, I did help there, I used to help on the sales table and, and help a bit with the gardening. And, mm, but then I started giving my talks which were not drug abuse talks and they were on all kinds of different subjects and, mm, people enjoyed them because nobody else gave talks the way I did.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: So somebody said to me 'We've never heard anybody giving a talk about umbrellas, it was amazing, we didn't know about that'. And so I tried, all the talks I wrote and gave were about things that people weren't aware of.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[EK]: I gave a talk on history of nursery rhymes, and most people didn't know how nursery rhymes started and why. Oh, and I'd talk about tortoises because my son had a tortoise which I was looking after, again people didn't know about tortoises and how they were creatures of veneration. When I was in China I went to see this enormous marble tortoise which was a symbol of longevity. So yes as, I did find giving those talks were very interesting and because my husband had died I had to make an income from somewhere and, mm, so that's what I did.

[00:30:02]

[JH]: So really WRVS gave you more than just...?

[EK]: It did, it gave me more than that, it gave me more than just, mm, learning to do the drug talks, it gave me a feeling that people liked to listen. Also I have a very, can have a loud voice, I don't need a microphone. I used to go in to some old people's clubs and they'd say 'Here she comes, turn our hearing aids off, we can hear her'. I used to say to them 'Turn your hearing aid off you'll be able to hear me'. I also did, while I was in the WRVS I decided because I was a, had trained to be a keep fit teacher I actually used to teach keep fit and, mm, I thought these old people sitting all day in chairs not talking to anybody, long before local authority had started, which they do now, movement classes.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: I went to our local care home and, mm, asked the matron there if she'd like me to go in and, and do some musical movement. And so, and I used all the old songs that they knew. Some of them I had to learn, I didn't know there was a song called *He Played His Ukulele As The Ship Went Down*, and I got the songs from these old, I say 'old people', I mean heavens some of them are younger than I am now. But, but they were and they sat all day and they did nothing, and so I felt that this was a really good idea. And so I, I went and we used these songs that they knew and we did actions

to the songs. Now it's done, local authorities are doing this all over, but at that time it was quite revolutionary and nobody had done that.

[JH]: So would you say that the WRVS was very pioneering at the time?

[EK]: Yes. I don't know, I don't know whether it was the WRVS or me because I don't think they did them anywhere else.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: They, I did say 'How about if I do this'? In fact the magazine has got... [Pause]

There's the, Hounslow used to publish a magazine of social services and things and, mm, I had an article in there of how important it was for people to move, so it's, mm, it's somewhere around.

[Pause] Oh yes, well that, it was in the newspaper as well and, but that's about the drug talks. But there's also a magazine which used to come out every, every quarter I think and in there there's, mm, a photograph of, of me doing the music and movement. Again I'm, I suggested to the WRVS that we should do this.

[JH]: This looks, what you're showing me now looks very much like *The WRVS Bulletin*?

[EK]: Yes.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: It is but, mm, I haven't, sorry I haven't got the front page.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: I don't know what happened to it. But that was in there and, mm, I said, and some of them said, you know, 'Is it really, do you really think...? I said 'Yes, it does'. I always wore my uniform and as you can see one or two of them are actually lifting their arms but they used to like singing the songs as well.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: And, mm, so, and that was actually breaking new ground because it hadn't been done until then. And then after that I then went to, I had a woman who played the piano for me and I went to Age UK and I went to all kinds of old people's clubs and she played the piano and I did the movements, mm, and it was, that was then sponsored by the local authority.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[EK]: I was paid and, but I was paid a minimum fee of whatever it was that the local authority were paying. And some of them, some of them enjoyed it. Some, one of them, the matron, in those days old people's homes had matrons, they didn't have as they do now committees and things, and one of them apologised to me because I used to go in to this particularly, if they sit in their living room, the social room, in chairs all around because I used to say 'Don't put them in rows, I like them all round me' because I work to every single one, which I do. And every week when I used to go in one woman used to get up from her chair, look at me and say 'Stupid cow' and walk out. And matron said 'I'm so sorry'. I said 'Look, if that's the only exercise she gets all week it's exercise, don't worry, she's moved'. [Laughing]

[00:35:04]

But it was, yes. And again it was, it was, it was so satisfying because I felt that the, they just loved having somebody to be with them and do these and think about how it used to be when they were young, the songs that they could sing. And we used some wartime songs as well. And before, as I say, I never knew there was a song entitled *Three Pots a Shilling* which is about a gypsy selling honey from door to door. And I learnt these, I actually looked them up. I went to, I went to Charing Cross Road to the, the archive shop there and looked up all these songs and bought the music so that my pianist could play them for me. And, mm, it was great. And then sadly Greta, who was much older, was not able to do the playing any more and so another, another lady took over and she didn't need music at all, and it was lovely because she used to play for my keep fit classes.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: As well as playing for my classes for old people that I went to. I was very busy but I enjoyed it, I really did enjoy it. My other two children had grown up, gone to university, left home and the young

one was actually she was at horticultural college so. And my husband, mm, was away on tour so much that this was, I had two lives, one where I was doing all this keep fit and going round and one when he came home. As my son said quite bitterly as he grew much older 'It was all very well when dad was away I was the man of the house but when he came home you didn't want to know any of us'. 'No'! [Laughing]. We've got over that now. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing] And you also were involved with The One In Five?

[EK]: Yes.

[JH]: Scheme with WRVS. How would you describe the aims of that scheme?

[EK]: Well, it was to prepare people in the event of there being a nuclear attack, it was to prepare people to have a room somewhere which would be safe. Looking back on it now of course, one knows no, nothing would have been.

[JH]: Mm.

[EK]: But it was to advise people which room they could use, what they could do with it to make it, how they could put supplies in there which wouldn't decay. Mm, I didn't give it very often because it, I think it was decided that it really was superfluous. So knowing even with that nuclear accident how people went on suffering for years and years, and it was much, much more far reaching than the people who wrote that One In Five talk ever realised. So I wasn't involved with it for very long. It disappeared, I don't know why. Do you know when it disappeared?

[JH]: It was the, in about 1985 I think, late '80s.

[EK]: Was it?

[JH]: When the Cold War started to come to an end and....

[EK]: Ah, yes well I had left the WVS anyway by, the WRVS by then. Because my husband retired and we were able, we'd been saving money like mad while he was working and I was working and we were able to go and visit places which I'd always wanted to see. And we had some wonderful

holidays. We always went the cheapest way possible, we travelled by Green Line, we travelled by coach, travelled by bus. We, but we went to China, I'd always wanted to walk on the Great Wall and, and I made a point of going to where the old people were, how they looked after them, what they did and, and because of that I got an insight in to life. When we went to China particularly we were given a guide and we were only allowed to see certain things because of course, the communist state was very, very strict and only twelve of us were in a group and we went with China Exploration and we were escorted all the time. In fact my husband wasn't even allowed back stage in the theatre, which he was quite disappointed about.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: Because it wasn't on the, the itinerary. But I did, and I did actually managed to find a public loo for women which I used.

[00:40:05]

Because I wanted, I wanted to see what life was really like, I didn't want to be in a group that was being told 'Go here', 'look' there. We went to a factory where they were making carpets and I thought 'I don't ever want to buy Chinese carpet', you know, these things happen. And for me it was completing an education which I couldn't have had had we not done that. Because the first time we went we went to India, we went because my husband had been stationed in Calcutta during the war. He was on his way to Burma and he answered a call for somebody who knew something about the theatre to go and help in the theatre in Calcutta, garrison theatre, and because he chanced from a long, he came from a long line of theatre people, he was in the theatre anyway before the war and so he volunteered. And thank the Lord, instead of going to Burma and being wiped out, as most of his regiment were, he was in Calcutta and he actually took over from Jack Hawkins, who was the director of the theatre at that time. And so the first place we went to, he wanted to show me India and he wanted to show me the theatre and he wanted, we wanted to go, I wanted to go to Delhi, I wanted to see the Taj Mahal.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: All the things, you know.

[JH]: Yes. And all the things you couldn't have done if you'd decided to stay with WRVS?

[EK]: No, no, couldn't have done. The, that was, no, it was because I'd been giving these talks and being paid for them, and my husband reached the top of his profession and was getting a very good wage as well. And we never had holidays, we never went anywhere, we also saved the money because we knew one day... And the last eight years before he became incas..., incapacitated we had the most wonderful time.

[JH]: Mm.

[EK]: We had holidays, as I say, I wanted to see Niagara Falls and all the things. We went to Venice because I wanted to be in a gondola. And we went, we went to America, we went to San Francisco, I wanted to see the Golden Gate. We went to Hollywood, you know, the things that you dream about. Well, not now.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: Because any, anybody can do it. But they were things that I had always thought one day maybe I'd love to see.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: And we went to Greece and we went to Ephesus where Paul was shouted down in that theatre and I stood on the same stage where St Paul had stood and been shouted down in. You know, it was just, we had a wonderful time. So, and I'm so glad I did because then sadly he, he was doing maintenance work for old people's homes, residential homes and, mm, he actually had a fall and broke his shoulder and it was because of that they discovered that he actually had Vitamin B Deficiency and, mm, so yes, he, he was, actually they didn't think he would survive because he was so ill. He had haem..., he had, oh, I can't remember the name of the disease now at all, it's not Parkinson's, it's not Alzheimer's but it's the Vitamin B Deficiency which means that he had to have several injections, Vitamin B injections. And then he was not, he actually lost the feeling in the lower part of his body. They said it would never recover but he said 'I'm not going to lie here all the rest of my life', he was a very, very, mm, very positive person, and so was I. And so he was in the hospital in,

oh, I've forgotten the name of the place in London, in central London and they said 'We don't think he's ever going to get the feeling back in his legs and feet', but he worked and worked and worked.

[JH]: Mm.

[EK]: And he couldn't actually feel his feet but he used them.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[EK]: And we still went on doing things but we couldn't do as many.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: But we used to go, we used to go out and, mm, we used to go to places on the, on the bus if we could, mostly locally, and he would put his hand on my shoulder and, and pretend that he didn't need any help.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: But for the last few years of his life he really couldn't.

[00:45:01]

He was at home and that's when he started to write his memoirs then. And, mm, yes, and he was and he encouraged me to go on giving my talks and if he hadn't when he died I wouldn't have had a life.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: And that's the reason I'm here now. Because I know he wouldn't have wanted me, he was nearly ten years older than I, and I know that he wouldn't have wanted me to mourn and say 'I can't do anything'. And I feel very sorry, I meet, most of the women I know either their husbands have died or they're in care homes because they have dementia and they can't do anything because their husbands always did it for them and I think 'This is sad, they have no lives.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: It didn't happen in Chiswick because I had a different, women with different backgrounds.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: But is it Dorset? I, I don't know. They're very friendly but they do look at me as though I'm from a different planet and I think it's, I have learnt to keep quiet. I went, I've realised that unless you've lived here all your life or your parents or you were born here, your parents... Although there are people who've lived here for, they've come from Bradford, they've come from Cheshire.

[JH]: Ah, ha.

[EK]: They've come from Leicester but twenty years ago or more. And I'm an incomer and it won't matter how long I live here I'll always be an incomer. And, but it's alright, people, people are okay. I went to the local church, which is just down the road from here when I first went, and they were lovely people but they would say 'Well, my friend usually sits here but you can sit here this week but you can't...' And it didn't really matter because I did finish up by sitting in the front pew because I could see better and hear better, and the young vicar, who's actually only two years older than my granddaughter, and he was great and he did things for that church but the people didn't like it.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: He did things which they said 'No we won't do that', and they stopped going. And I thought he was wonderful, and when he'd heard that my elder daughter had incurable cancer the morning I'd had the news I was outside in my front garden and he said 'How is Frances'? And I said 'mm', and he came in, put his arms round me and I told him, and I wept and he wept with me and I thought 'What a wonderful man, absolutely', but they didn't like him.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: He started a luncheon club, he started a social club. He had the children's called WOT, 'W', Worship on Tuesday's which was for very small children which was to do things but also learn about

the Bible in different ways, but eventually they, they wouldn't have him, he, he had to leave. And I thought this, yes, he had a, there was a temporary chap who was really good and the other people started coming back and I thought 'You don't own God'.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: 'This church doesn't own God'. God is where Pat said it was, God is everywhere. And it's not just the Anglican church which owns God so then my children persuaded me to have a scooter, a mobility scooter, and now I go to the Methodist Church where they don't believe that God's only in the Methodist Church [laughing] and, and have been made very welcome. In fact they've asked me to give a talk to the fellowship in church. [Laughing] So there we are, that's, that's my life.

[JH]: Yes. And before you were talking a little bit about Lady Reading?

[EK]: Yes.

[JH]: How would you describe her as a character?

[EK]: Oh she was very grand, she was very conscious of her status. She was a lady and her background was very much of the gentility. And she was, she was very, she was very good at what she did but she always knew that the women who were working for The WVS were of a different class.

[00:50:02]

And so I didn't mind, you know, I just thought it was amusing that she thought that she had trained me to be a speaker and it was because of her I could stand in front of an audience. What she didn't know was that I held a scholarship, had a scholarship at RADA and I had been with The Old Vic and on a tour with Robert Donat [laughing] long before I became and ended at... And I thought 'I won't tell her, I won't tell her anything about it', so she always thought that she had trained me. But she did, she was, she was lovely, as I say, and she was so sincere about what she wanted to do and what she thought The WRVS and The WVS could achieve.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: And I admired her because even though it must have been quite difficult for her to find her way through all these things and to find the right women to do the work which she wanted done, because it couldn't have been done by her, by her contemporaries. But she needed women of child bearing who had a background that could relate to the people they were talking to. And I did admire her, I thought, I thought she did so well.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And did you notice, after she died, did you notice a change in WRVS?

[EK]: Yes, yes.

[JH]: And what were, what were the changes?

[EK]: The changes were it became, it became less static. The people who were, apart from what was her name? Letitia who I think she was Lady Letitia somebody, she was Vice-chairman and she took over from Lady Reading. But there was, there were also people like Jean Clode who... They were different, they were not, they were not the upper echelons, they were not in the class of nobility I suppose and they were much more available and they were, they had a different outlook on what was happening and it became less of an upper middle class society.

[JH]: Mm.

[EK]: And more of a, I would never say that it was a working class organisation but it became middle class rather than upper or upper middle class, and I thought that was good. Because the work they were doing was intended to be for that actual, that status of people. So yes, she was, she was very sweet and it was lovely to go to the funeral service and be recognised by various people from The Home Office, who said, you know, 'We've never forgotten your talk'.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: Yes, it was good. It's always good to be recognised.

[JH]: Mm, mm, yes. And especially interesting that you went to Lady Reading's funeral.

[EK]: Yes. Well I was invited, they sent me an invitation. So, and, as I say, I did, mm, they didn't ask me, they said they would have liked me to have spoken at the funeral but they had somebody else. I think it was, was it Jean Clode? It was somebody, the Vice-chairman was speaking about her and about her pioneer work, the drugs talks and various things, so yes.

[JH]: And did you come across Lady Lucas-Tooth at all with The One In Five or the drugs talks?

[EK]: Yes, I did. Yes, that was...

[JH]: And what was she like?

[EK]: She was alright, she was fine. She was, mm, she was younger than Lady Reading so she was perhaps a bit more aware of, mm, I don't know. And I'm not sure whether her husband was knighted. She wasn't born as a lady, I don't know, but I always had a feeling that she had got more in her background than wasn't necessarily of the nobility. It was rather like Baroness... [Pause] Oh, well, a bit like Baroness Thatcher but not because she didn't have the same. But she was, she was an interesting person. She was interested to know what I'd been doing but, as I say, after the funeral service so many people were meeting who hadn't met and chatting away and a lot of them, as I say, collared me and said 'Are you still doing the drug talks. What', you know, 'where are you going, what are you doing'? So it was, yes, it was interesting.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And with the One In Five, like with the drug talks you received training, did you receive training for One In Five?

[00:55:00]

[EK]: Yes, but we were given the, the envelope, the package with, with it all in and we were told to use that as the basis for our talks. In other words the talks weren't authorised the way that the drugs talks were, we were just told 'This is what we'd like you to do. We're not doing drug talks any more, but you can do the One In Five'. But by that time I was so involved with my music and movement, my keep fit, giving my other talks that I didn't, and I didn't think that they were going to be used. I couldn't see that they were going to be that useful and I didn't think that telling people if they prepared a room with food and water and stayed in there and didn't go out they wouldn't suffer from a nuclear attack. And I knew it wasn't true so I, I didn't feel I could give them.

[JH]: No. Because you didn't really believe in them?

[EK]: I didn't really believe, no, I didn't.

[JH]: And did you come across any other issues with the talks such as I know that CND campaigned to get the talks stopped that WRVS were giving.

[EK]: Yes. I, I think they only campaigned to get them stopped because they felt that they were a middle class organisation and they didn't have the background knowledge that they should have had, that the speakers again were middle class. CND were very, I mean I did give talks for CND. In fact my elder daughter and I both, were both at Greenham Common and I gave talks for CND. But again it was rather like The Co-op, it was a, a left-wing movement but I did feel that it was really important. In fact I've just finished knitting a pink, did you know that the CND, the women's movement, have been knitting a scarf, at least a length of knitted fabric?

[JH]: No, I didn't.

[EK]: Well, they were, they started in Nineteen... No, in 2010 I think. Somebody had the idea the women's movement, it's not CND but it's a branch of CND, decided that what they would do in order to commemorate the sort of fifty years of the movement they would knit a scarf, a length of scarf which could be joined together, mostly in pink because the pink is the women's freedom badge, and that they could be joined together and it would eventually measure seven miles and it would be stretched from Greenham Common through to, mm, the nuclear base which they are trying to reinstate. I've forgotten the name, I should know because I've knitted three lengths already.

[Laughing] So that's, yes. And I think they're right, I, I don't want nuclear bases in this country.

[JH]:No.

[EK]: I really don't.

[JH]: So was that another reason why you couldn't give the talks about nuclear, about One In Five and using nuclear...?

[EK]: Mm, yes, yes it is. Because at the moment I'm signing petitions for having wind farms because I think they are a most sensible and less obtrusive. And yes, okay, they're, people don't like the look of them but would they like the look of a nuclear blast as happened in Japan, the accident that happened, do they want that? Do they want their children exposed to that? I can't believe how selfish people can be. And they're, in, in this area they've got a huge movement going on 'Stop the Wind Farms'. I have signed four petitions saying, you know, for Change, you know, that Change.Org?

[JH]: Yes, I do.

[EK]: Oh you do?

[JH]: I do.

[EK]: Well, I've signed their petitions, I've signed other local petitions. We need this wind, we need the wind farms. We really, we don't want, I don't want nuclear power, I really don't. So, and I, I wouldn't mind wave power but you can't rely on it.

[JH]:No.

[EK]: It's, it's not, it's not regular enough and we haven't found a way of storing it yet - the power. So yes, I'm in favour of wave power, but wind power, yes. Oh I am, I'm afraid I have always been a rebel and I always will.

[01:00:02]

I will always, I would always see what I think is the best way of doing things. I mean that's why when our Co-op closed here I was really devastated because my mother was a Co-op member, I still remember her Co-op number, she was a Co-op member. When I was a child my father was very, well he was a communist but he didn't like the Guides and the Scouts and the Brownies because they saluted the flag and they were very right wing. And so I joined the answer, the Co-op answer, it was called The Woodcraft Folk. Have you heard of The Woodcraft?

[JH]: Yes, I have.

[EK]: You have? Right.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: So I was in The Woodcraft Folk. And, mm, and so, and I went on in The Woodcraft Folk for quite a long time. I went to camp, I learnt how to do all those things and, mm, and then I got too old for The Woodcraft Folk. And my own children they, well one of them didn't like it because they didn't like the communal lavatories and they didn't like having to dig latrines. [Laughing]

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[EK]: So, but I was at a meeting the other day, one of my daughter's book launch, where the people there a lot of them were ex Woodcraft Folk people and they sang songs which I knew I should have known but, but I didn't. And they still meet and they still, they still do these things. But, as I say, my two grandchildren who tried it, the boy thought it was great but my granddaughter said 'Ugh, they put our toast and marmalade on the same plates we'd had scrambled eggs on', [laughing] and she doesn't, she doesn't eat, she's a vegetarian anyway.

[JH]:Mm.

[EK]: But yes, so there we are. So I'm signing all the petitions. I can't, I can't imagine why the Nigerian Government didn't do something about getting those girls back when they could, when they knew it had happened, I'm sure they were paid, I'm sure they were paid by this movement. Again you see I, I just get... I suppose you'd call me cynical I don't know but I think people don't take the trouble to read. I know it's awful but if people read *The Daily Mail* they're not going to get the same outlook on things as they do if they read *The Guardian*.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: Which I do. Or don't read necessarily at all but listen to and watch, some of the programmes on Radio Four are so revealing.

[JH]:Mm.

[EK]: And people don't listen to them, they don't. People don't listen, why don't people listen or do they only hear what they want to hear? And how old do you have to be before you say 'I don't care any more'? But I do, I care what kind of world my great-grandchildren are going to grow up in. I care that I use the library, that I like a book in my hands and that my son says to me 'I don't know why you're bothering, in a few years time there won't be any books it'll all be on line'. I go to the library and I ask them to get books in because I think it's so important. And when I help at this children's club I can't believe that some of them can't write except by using abbreviations that they use on their mobile phones. They're five, six, seven years old and it's extraordinary.

[JH]:Mm.

[JH]: They all think I'm very unusual, but I can't sit on the floor with them now but, but I do the register and they talk to me and, mm, they say things like 'So did you know about the war'? I said 'Not the Great War, no, not that one but the last war I did, the Second World War'. 'Were you frightened'? And we have these conversations and it's, it's really interesting. But they really have no idea and, as I say, they've got mobile phones, they don't read books. They don't know their nursery rhymes, they don't know counting games.

[JH]: Mm.

[01:05:00]

[EK]: But this WOT does. They, I taught four of them to knit. Now knitting's coming back.

[JH]: Yes, yes.

[EK]: I've notice that Adult Education are actually having knitting, and at the centre they've got knitting. But they charge thirty-five pounds a term which, you know, I'd be happy to teach people to knit for nothing, I just can't... [Laughing]

[JH]: Yes. Do you have any connection with WRVS today?

[EK]: No, no. I, I wouldn't even know where it was to be truthful. I just feel that because of how I felt about it when I left that it probably doesn't... I'm sure it does, I'm sure it has younger women and

I'm sure they are all doing really worthwhile things. But, from my point of view, I'm actually too old to do... I mean I don't drive any more. I, I'm not accepted as a local person. People often say they can't understand the way I speak and very often I can't understand the way they speak either. So I don't, I can't be of any use to the WVS, WRVS now but I feel I am much more use by helping with the children and going to, I do go to the Townswomen's Guild, Guild.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: That's where I go now. And they've asked me to give a talk. They seem to think I only know about umbrellas so I won't disillusion them there. As long as they send a car for me.

[JH]: You, you won't be giving them a talk about drugs at least then?

[EK]: No.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: No, I won't. But that's not on, not on my list.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: No, nursery rhymes, umbrellas, memories, tortoises. I've got fifteen different talks which I give, which I could give, mm, to any age group. Because younger people like to hear about things that happened before they were born, before their parents were born. So I give a talk which talks about what it was like when I was at school, when I was an infant, what we did and how we learnt things and, and about the punishments that were inflicted on us then which certainly aren't now. So yes, I enjoy it.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: But both my daughters have said I am not to spread myself too thinly. So I've actually turned down, mm, two opportunities to, to give more talks. Because I think they're right, I shouldn't, my balance is so bad I find it quite difficult standing up for any length of time.

[JH]:Mm.

[EK]: And I don't like talking sitting down because that's not how I work, mm, and... [Pause] Yes, and I'm not sure, I can't imagine any organisation locally where I would go that would like... But they may, I, I'm, we'll have to wait and see. I gave the tortoise talk to, oh, mm, I was talking about tortoises with Tina because when she asked me, she took me to one of her, she asked me to say a few words about the talks that I had been giving.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[EK]: And I did mention about tortoises because she asked me when she rang me over the phone, she said 'I've forgotten the name of that tortoise'. I said 'It was Aristotle'. She said 'I knew it was something...' [Laughing]

[JH]: And Tina is involved, she's a member of staff at WRVS isn't she?

[EK]: Yes, yes. It was because of her that I first became, and it's because of her that you, you're here.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: I'm just trying to think. [Pause] Must have been in Chiswick I think. [Pause] I can't remember how I first, how the WRVS first found out about me. I think probably I was giving a talk somewhere where there was a WRVS member and she said to their local group 'There's this woman who gives a talk about umbrellas'. Mm, oh I think her name was Jean Sich. Is she still alive? I don't know.

[JH]: I don't know. I've heard of her.

[EK]: You have?

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: Well, it may have been her because she was, she belonged to a friend of another woman whose name was also Jean and I can't remember her surname and she and her daughter belonged

to the Amateur Dramatic Society at St Michael, St Michael's Church in Chiswick and that's how I met her in the first place. [Laughing]

[01:10:17]

So, mm, somebody, because she was in the WRVS obviously she told. What I can remember about her is that she did drive and I didn't know that you could actually drive a car that didn't leap about like a kangaroo and when I thought I'd have driving lessons I said to my driving instructor 'I want a car that doesn't keep jumping', and I found it was because she couldn't change gear properly [laughing] but I didn't know, I didn't know that. So I did, I learnt to drive because I could do more work then.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: I could do more of my keep fit work. And I went to, when I was working for the local authority one day, on Wednesdays I used to give four talks, movement talks because I had a car and, mm, and it was... And people there obviously used to tell other people because they were, most, they were residential homes but some of them were day centres.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: So I know I never had time for lunch on Wednesdays because I was backwards and forwards [laughing] going to all these different homes. But it was, yes it was, I like life to be progressive. I don't want to say 'I've been there, done that, worn the T-shirt, I'm not doing anything else', or 'well, I've always done it this way'. I never thought I'd come and live here.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: But I'm glad, I'm glad I've done it. I was actually very ill about four weeks ago and if my daughter, my Godsent daughter, hadn't found out how ill I was because she rang me up and she said 'Mum you don't sound...' I said 'I'm, I'm not terribly well and I don't quite know what's the matter with me', and she was round here like a shot.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: And her husband. Phoned the doctor and made an emergency appointment, took me there and yes, and she moved, she slept here for two nights looking after me. So, and she is, she's my Godsent daughter, that's why she's there.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: I say she got me resus when my leg was broken, and yes and she knows and she said 'Mum stop expecting so much of yourself', she said 'you are eighty-six you're not fifty just...' She said 'I forget things, I'm thirty, thirty years younger than you, I don't remember everything, I've forgotten how to get...' I wanted to, need, needed some new inks in my computer and I'd forgotten how to click on the supplies to see how much I'd got.

[JH]: Mm.

[EK]: I knew exactly how to do it but just for the time being she said 'Don't worry, you can't, I'll do it'. She said 'Don't, I said 'And I can't put the new inks in'. My hand, the arthritis in my hands is so bad I can't do small things. She said 'I'll do it for you, don't worry and for goodness sake', she said 'don't commit yourself to doing anything else'. [Laughing] So there we are.

[JH]: Mm. And just to sort of finish off. Do you have any other memories or stories about your time with WRVS that you can remember?

[EK]: Mm, [Pause] yes, I, I do remember, I remember twice getting lost. I didn't have any, I don't have any sense of direction and I was given a WRVS club to go to somewhere on the outskirts of London, and in those days you didn't have Sat Nav or anything you looked it up on the map. And because I'm not very good at map reading I did and I had to ask a passing motorist who'd stopped... Oh I know at a service station, I said 'Do you know where there's a club for older people'? And he said 'There's four of them round here which one do you want'? [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughter]

[EK]: 'Well, it's the WRVS'. 'Oh yes, I know where that one is'. So yes, I did. And I, and I did have, mm, places where they said 'Well, we're meeting in this room but we want you to use the microphone'.

And it would be a very, a very small room and I knew I didn't need a microphone and I'd start using it and they'd all say 'It's too loud'. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[EK]: Most of the time I was told that they didn't want me to use the microphone and they could hear me.

[01:15:04]

And people at the back used to say 'You know we can never hear anybody but we can always hear you', and I was pleased. But then I always spoke to every single person because that's how I was trained to speak to people anyway, so that they all had the feeling that I was speaking to them. And one of them said to me 'You're the only person who comes in who talks to me, the others don't talk to me'. And I thought 'No'. Also another person said to me at a WRVS Meeting 'Why don't you have to read your notes'? I said 'Because I wrote the talk'. She said 'Yes, but how do you remember it?' I said 'Ah, but you don't know do you?'

[JH]: [Laughing]

[EK]: 'I can give it any way I like and you don't know if I've left a bit out and put it back in later on'.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: 'Because it's my talk'. She said 'Do you know that's really clever, why doesn't everybody do that'? I said 'Well, they...'. And people hold their notes.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: And they read their notes like this. Well, what a waste of time. People can't hear them, they can't feel them, they can't relate to them and I think why? And they get paid fifty, sixty pounds a go for half an hour talk, I think that's not right.

[JH]: No. And with the talk, with you're just saying it was your own talk every talk?

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[EK]: Mm.

[JH]: Did you write, did other volunteers who were giving those talks write their own talks or did they all give your talk?

[EK]: No, no. I believe that they all had to write a talk based on the notes we were given at this residential course that we went on, mm, I'm pretty sure they all wrote their own talks. They probably all had the same ingredients because then we were told you have to say this, you have to say that. But I wanted mine to be a kind of theatrical talk. That's why I wanted to have my, a lot of them had, they requested blackboards and wrote in chalk and I thought there are going to be some places that don't have a chalk blackboard and some people who won't be able to see them anyway. So I had a blanket and I had, I used to have them, but I'm afraid I haven't got them any more, you've see them, not there but on this one [Pause] you'll see.

[JH]: Oh yes.

[EK]: There's the blanket and these are all my headlines which I clipped to the blanket and then talked about them.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: So they could see the names of all the drugs. I mean these were the drugs that were in existence then.

[JH]: Yes. And you, so you were, you were talking about things like marihuana and cannabis and...?

[EK]: Yes, yes. All the things that are on there.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[EK]: And slightly about glue sniffing, but it really only just started. But those were, those were the talks I was authorised to give by The Home Office, this, this talk, this talk. And you see this was in *The Evening Standard*. Lady Reading liked to get as much publicity as possible.

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[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: So that was in there. And, mm, and she put that one, that was put in by her or by her secretary, she wouldn't have put it in to put it in.

[JH]: Mm, mm, yes.

[EK]: Of course, she had a secretary to do all that. So, but that's, that's what it was like in my uniform, as I say, with these headings and the talk. Well, you've got, no you've got the talk.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: I don't suppose you want it but, mm, I don't know whether you... I've got the notes that I made, that's the early one. That's...

[JH]: Is it this one?

[EK]: That's, yes that's the first draft with all the information that I was given, and then the actual talk itself, mm, is written there. That's the actual talk which came from all the notes that I made and that's it, that's the talk in its entirety and that's the one that was authorised that I gave at The House of Commons.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: And various places where, [laughing] where they are not ladies, they're women.

[JH]: No. And were they well received by these?

[EK]: Oh yes, absolutely. They couldn't believe that somebody, that Lady Reading had trained such a wonderful speaker.

[JH]: Mm.

[EK]: No, they, they really were.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: And you'll see, if, I think you can probably see from the, from the letters.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: Oh that was the auth..., that's the letter which they sent me to say that I had been authorised after I'd given the talk. But I've got all these different letters saying we've never had people like you talking and doing this sort of thing.

[01:20:03]

And Lady Reading was not able to be there at one of them but Lady Lucas-Tooth wanted to go to one of them. But they're all there, and this one particularly they said, oh, this advisory committee that I gave a talk to, they'd already had a man speaking.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: He was so dull, I can't tell you what it would be. Anyway they said after his long talk they were amazed nobody left, everybody stayed to the very end and they asked questions as well. [Laughing] So yes, Lady Reading was so pleased.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: She really was, and I was quite pleased too. I thought it was, it was worth, mm, asking my long suffering husband to look after the children [laughing] while I was away.

[JH]: When you gave these talks?

[EK]: Yes, but, as I say, most of them were during school hours so that I was home.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: Because I thought it was important. So there we are.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And do you have a most memorable or a most treasured memory of your time with WRVS?

[EK]: Mm, yes. It was weighing the babies, it was the young mothers coming in and weighing the babies, putting a piece of clean paper on the scales for each baby to go on and the way that they trusted everything that the WRVS group, or WVS it was then. They would ask questions about the food and the diet and should they be giving them this, what should it be doing, it's only this age or that age and, and the fact that they were trying to breast feed and we said 'Yes, if you can please do, don't give them formula', because a lot of them didn't have sterilised water.

[JH]: No.

[EK]: To make the formula with. So, and that I suppose because I was so young and my own baby has just started school I could very much relate to what they were.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: Because when, I was only nineteen when I had my first child and I went to, have you heard of Truby King?

[JH]: No.

[EK]: Mothercraft?

[JH]: I've heard of Mothercraft, yes.

EKK: Well, Mothercraft used the Truby King method. And I went, because my mother knew about Mothercraft I brought my first baby, both of them up with the Mothercraft method which meant you fed them every four hours. You didn't pick them up when they cried unless there was a really good reason and, and you cuddled them at certain times, mm, and that's what I thought you should do.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And so you passed on this knowledge to these women who were coming to have their babies weighed?

[EK]: Yes, I did. So, mm, but by that time I didn't think it was important to feed them every four hours whether they liked it or not. I mean that was how I brought mine up.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: But my, my last baby, mm, I decided that she, because she was my Godsent baby and because in order to pay back an enormous, enormous amount of money that I, we had borrowed to put the deposit on this house I was a registered childminder. So by the time she was six months old I was registered to look after five children, my own being one of them, and I used to have the, I used to have the social worker inspecting me, the childminders and she used to look at the diet, the menus. I did all my own cooking, I made my own bread. I, we ate, my husband made, we had a little table and chairs which we got and they, and we used to sit down and I used to insist that they all, all? All five of them went up the stairs, well four of them, not the baby to wash their hands. They each had their own towel. I, I did everything.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[EK]: So I did that for four and a half years and I'm still in touch with one of the mothers.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: Of one of the children who's six months older than my own young daughter. And I used to get up, used to get up at five o'clock in the morning, bath her, breast feed her, put her down for her sleep. They would all arrive at eight o'clock when they would then have playtime, we used to have toys for them to play with.

[01:25:06]

At, at ten o'clock they would have milk and biscuits and I would sit and breast feed my baby for her ten o'clock feed and then she would go down again. And at two o'clock, well, at half, one o'clock,

half past. Oh, half past, yes twelve, between half past twelve and one they would have lunch. They, having all been upstairs to the loo and all washed their hands and they would have their lunch, which I had cooked, which was home cooked. And it had, every week they would come to see what I was giving the children and they would weigh my baby to see that she wasn't starving.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: Because I was feeding the others. And then they all would all have an afternoon nap because I thought little ones like that needed. I had them from two years to five and they had to be potty trained, I could not cope with potty training. So my very first one was a little boy whose mother brought him in. He was two, she was going to have a part-time job because she couldn't manage on, on her husband's money and she said 'He's, he is potty trained, he can use the lavatory, he says something that sounds like "Wembley"'. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[EK]: So I said 'Okay'. So, but then the last one, the mother was much older. She had got, mm, a much older child and this was a surprise, she thought she was having a menopause and this little one, his name was Gareth, couldn't speak and he was in nappies and she said 'But he will sit on a potty, please say you'll have him'. And I thought 'oh'. Yes, I felt so sorry for her. Those, yes and those were, those were the days.

JH :Mm.

[EK]: And whether it had been WRVS or not I would have done it.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: Because it was a need, it really was a need. So, but there you are, that's what I think. I suppose you can say I've spent my, most of my life except when I was really being selfish and doing things for my husband before he died. A lot of it I've been, because I think that's why God decided I didn't die, he needs me to give. This is a wonderful world.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: And it has so much in it and so many people who don't know how wonderful the world is. They really, terrible things in the newspaper they really, but they don't, they don't see any of the glory and I think it's such a shame.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: And that's what, as I say. None of my children are Christians. Some of them have been christened. Well, I had all my children christened although at the time I didn't really believe the first two. My grandfather was a good Christian man and he said 'Will you give them a chance please? Have them christened', and I did in the village church where I grew up, and I'm so glad I did but they are not, although my Godsent daughter says 'We're both on a journey mum, do you think you know where you're going'? I'm not quite sure but we are going.

[JH]: Mm.

[EK]: And I said to her 'Yes, the older I get the more questions I ask'. But the one that I think I'm sure, yes I do know the answer to is that somewhere whatever a person's soul is or does or wherever my husband will be there waiting for me. I just, that's it. So yes.

[JH]: Yes.

[EK]: Isn't life great?

[JH]: It is. [Laughing] Well thank you Elizabeth for talking to me today and for Our Voices Of Volunteering Project, thank you.

[EK]: You're very welcome, I know that a lot of it is not WRVS.

[JH]: But it, it relates.

[EK]: Well, whatever you do, use it, don't use it, abbreviate it, whatever, I'm perfectly happy as long as, as long as it's known that the real reason why I'm doing all the things I'm doing is because God wants me to do it. I am, my faith is very strong and that's it.

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[JH]: Mm, mm. Well, thank you very much.

[EK]: So, yes. He led, he led me to the WVS or whatever else, there it is. Thank you Jennifer.

[JH]: Thank you.

[End of Recording 01:30:02]