

Voices of Volunteering: 75 Years of Citizenship and Service

Interview Transcript

Title Page

Ref. No.: STAB

Collection Title: Voices of Volunteering

Interviewee's Surname: Statham

Title: Mrs

Interviewee's Forenames: Barbara

Gender: F

Volunteer/Employee Roles and Dates:

Volunteer 1965-Present (2014)

1965-1969 Meals-on-Wheels Driver Bedford

1969-1979 Meals-on-Wheels Organiser Bedford

1979-1996 County Hospitals Bedford

Boys Holidays, Housemother

Emergency Feeding

1996-2001 Helping in the Office, Bedford

2001-2012 Social Transport, Bedford

2012-2014 Befriending/Good Neighbour

Scheme Bedford

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Interviewer's Notes:

Barbara Statham (BS) talks about her time as a WVS and WRVS volunteer from 1965 to 2014. BS started with Meals-on-Wheels (MOW) in 1965 as a driver and went on to be MOW Organiser. Talks about working at the local office in Bedford and the other activities which took place there such as emergency services (ES) and finding work for young offenders in the office. Comments on moving on from MOW to County Hospital work, starting off as an assistant and then taking over dealing with profits. Talks about opening South Wing at Bedford Hospital on the day she retired from hospital work. Also talks about the roles of volunteers in the different hospitals. Involved with children's holidays from 1980 for under privileged boys as housemother. Also mentions working in court canteens, contact centres working in the office answering enquiries and talks about moving offices to Rush Court. BS talks about taking on Social Transport from home and how the work diminished. Comments on the good companions work, how it started, how she became involved, over sixties clubs and how they have diminished. Talks about more recent changes to the organisation with the loss of MOW. In 1994-1996 WRVS started to disappear in the Bedfordshire area when the offices closed. In 1998 BS took on publicity for the 60th Anniversary in the local museum. Currently (2014) BS visits an elderly woman to help with correspondences as a good companion. Discusses here opinions on the current organisation Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) and how wonderful it was in the past.

[JENNIFER HUNT]: This is Jennifer Hunt with Barbara Statham on the 8th of July 2014 at her home in Bedford. Barbara, would you just like to introduce yourself.

[BARBARA STATHAM]: Yes, I'm now eighty-eight, and in 1965 I became a member of WRVS, or WVS then, still.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: And through being asked to become a Meals-on-Wheels driver, or a helper for the first day, I didn't know what I was in for. I didn't know what, I didn't know what it was all about. I helped with Meals-on-Wheels and I, then I became a driver and in four years I became Meals-on-Wheels Organiser for Bedford, and that's how it all started.

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

[BS]: My earliest memories are absolutely wonderful, so, lots of lovely people that we met and the work we were doing was so much appreciated by the, particularly the Meals-on-Wheels was much, much appreciated, I enjoyed doing that, it was, it was really great. We had our vans, we weren't in a very nice office to start with for, I think for three years we were in a very, very small office which was pretty awful, and then we moved to our beautiful house in Kimbolton Road. **Mm**, we had offices, everybody had an office, a County Office and a Borough Office and we had a Meals-on-Wheels Office, by that time I was Meals-on-Wheels Organiser. And we had five rounds to start with and that increased to seven or even eight rounds later on. We were very busy with up to twenty, twenty plus people to visit each day with meals, hot meals. And it was, it was really very rewarding. I met lots of very nice people, dealt with the Social, Social Services just before it became Social Services. All the rounds had their own Welfare Officer who used to, they used to make sure that people were coming on the list who really needed meals. Some of them were a bit naughty and stayed on whether they needed it or not. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[BS]: And, but they were lovely and very, very grateful. And we had meals from different places. To start with they were, came, they came from, from the factories. And then we moved, we moved several times to different places, and on the whole the meals were very, very good. We had the old, the old vans had, had metal heated containers and we had to slide them on to runners, which wasn't very easy because if they came off things like custard used to go over. And then eventually that, that stopped and they brought in polystyrene boxes, which was much easier. And we did that in, we had, I don't know how many volunteers doing Meals-on-Wheels, we, we were a very busy office in Bedford you know.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: Very busy. And, mm, I did that for ten years.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: I was, I was Meals-on-Wheels Organiser.

[JH]: And why did you decide to join WVS and Meals-on-Wheels in 1965?

[BS]: Well, originally it was a friend who rang me up one Friday morning and said 'My partner, my helper, can't do Meals-on-Wheels, are you free'? And I said 'Yes I'm free, I'll come and help'. So that's how it all happened.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: Before I knew where I was, I was in it. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing] And what was your opinion of WVS when you joined?

[BS]: It was good. **Mm**, I didn't know anything it, I didn't even know what had happened during the War, at the time, because I was at, at, still at school. I lived in Manchester, went through the blitz and things, but I didn't realise that, that WVS existed. My husband did because of course, he was in the Air Force.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: But I had no idea until, until I was in it and I became aware of all the things that they did. And of course, that all increased while I was there to other things. It wasn't just Meals-on-Wheels, there were lots of other things.

[JH]: Okay. And your first role was a driver for Meals-on-Wheels?

[00:05:02]

[BS]: I was driver or a helper, whichever. Yes, so I used to do about two days a week, two mornings a week.

[JH]: And who else did you work with on your Meals-on-Wheels rounds?

[BS]: I worked, I had one or two permanent helpers but I can't remember their names Jennifer. **Mm**, but we, when I took over as, as Organiser, after four years, we had two drivers who came in three times a week and all the others were on a rota, a rota system.

[JH]: **Mm.**

[BS]: Some of them would drive once a month. I had two doctors' wives who used to come once a month particularly. Quite a lot of people gave up their time and came in every, every week, and we had people with their own cars as well as the, the vans. We had, we had two vans to start with and we started, we ended up with four because we were given vans from The Round Table and, mm, the, there was another, one of the, not The Round Table the, one of the, the big organisations here. And we were donated, one of the vans was donated to us and it, we were invited to an evening ball.

[JH]: **Mm.**

[BS]: At the, one of the local hotels, a very posh thing, and they'd got the van sitting on the top of the steps. And that was lovely.

[JH]: **Mm.**

[BS]: I mean it was, it was, it was wonderful to have those. Those vans, we had, we had a, a river festival, which is going to happen here before long again and we entered all those vans in the, in the procession.

[JH]: **Mm.**

[BS]: And we decorated them all. Our Meals-on-Wheels one was, was, looked beautiful. All the vans showed something different that we did.

[JH]: **Yes.**

[BS]: And they were covered in all sorts of things and we, and it was wonderful. Because that showed people in Bedford that WRVS was, you know, was around.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And there to help.

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

[BS]: Mm, we, we used to, we used to start, some teams depending on the lists and where we were, the, the lists were all typed. And when I was Organiser I had a, an elderly lady called Mrs Ramsey, who used to come in, she loved coming, and I, she liked the company and she used to type and have a chat. And the lists were all typed in the order which, which, the order in which would be the best way to deliver. And we used to go to people who were mostly ill or couldn't cope. We had one or two who were a bit naughty. We had one lady, [laughing], one lady who, mm, she was a, quite a character, and I, once, sometimes if the van, the drivers didn't turn up I would have to go out. And I went to this Mrs, Mrs Wright, I remember her very distinctly, and well she greeted me with 'Oh, it's you. I hope you haven't got that there mince it gives me the diarrhoea'.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[BS]: [Laughing] Now she, that lady [laughing] got herself remarried and the County Organiser said 'Oh I've got a, somebody from one of your lists on my county list'. I said 'Who is it?' She said 'Oh a Mrs Wright, but she's just remarried'. I said 'Oh Elizabeth aren't you the lucky one'? Anyway that lady, her husband died and she came back on to the list, of our list, but I discovered her cooking her own meal one day so she had to come off because we had a waiting list.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: We did have quite big waiting lists which were seen to by the, the by that time Social Services.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: They vetted the people who came on the list. And we, we used to be there, we were there for them, we posted letters, sometimes we had to ring up the doctor. I, one lady had hypothermia and I saw her looking so ill, and she was in hospital within an hour of my ringing through.

[JH]: **Mm.**

[BS]: We, we were always there for them. And they used to, sometimes we were the only people they saw, you know.

[JH]: **Mm, mm.**

[BS]: It was, some of them were very sad. One lady, she, she'd been on the list for years and she, she said 'I don't know what I'd do without you'. She just couldn't cope with, with cooking or, or anything.

[00:10:00]

We had one who, when they did a, the, the, they did a reappraisal of all the people who were needed, needed the meals and I, I'd delivered the meal that day and, and I saw this lady peeping round the corner in the corridor. I said 'Hello, are you alright'? She said 'Yes, I thought you might be Social Services and I'm very ill today'. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[BS]: But then, she, she was lovely. It was, it was very interesting altogether.

[JH]: **And how, what were the meals like that you were serving?**

[BS]: On the whole they were pretty good. Mm, you know, the traditional, sometimes a roast and potatoes, sometimes mince, 'that there mince', as Mrs Wright put it. They'd have fish. **Mm**, and always a very nice pudding, sometimes steamed pudding, sometimes fruit. It was thought out, Jennifer, quite nicely thought out, yes.

[JH]: And how did you become Meals-on-Wheels Organiser in Bedford in 1969?

[BS]: Well, in, in, really nobody wanted to do it. And we had a meeting with Edna Woods, who was then our County Organiser, and I volunteered, and I enjoyed it.

[JH]: And what is your earliest memory of your role as Meals-on-Wheels Organiser?

[BS]: My earliest memories of?

[JH]: Being Meals-on-Wheels Organiser.

[BS]: Well it was a bit of a responsibility and I, because I had to cope with the money. Sometimes people paid for the week, sometimes paid every day. And then of course, we went into decimal currency which did cause a lot of problems because they didn't understand it and quite frankly neither did I to start with. Mm, but then I of course, I used to have to go and do the banking and I, but I managed to do it with no problem in the end. It was, my main problem of course, was always if one of the drivers didn't turn up, sometimes they didn't for no apparent reason. We used to get volunteers coming in sometimes and they'd volunteer and then they didn't turn up.

[JH]: Oh.

[BS]: That does happen.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Mm. And we never knew why. But that was the, I, I just, I used to go every day, I used to be there by half past nine and the, the meals used to go, the, the people, they were used to, the drivers and, and their helpers used to turn up for ten o'clock then go pick up the meal. We didn't like it to be too early because otherwise it was going to go cold. It was just be, before the time when they, they had thermometers and things.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: And we did worry sometimes if they were going to keep the meal until the evening but it wasn't, the, the, the bother that it is these days.

[JH]: Mm. And can you tell me about the Bedford, did you work at the Bedford Centre?

[BS]: Yes.

[JH]: Yes?

[BS]: Bedford, yes Kimbolton Road, we had a lovely house in Kimbolton Road, mm, a really big, lovely house. We had a conference room, kitchen and upstairs were all the offices. We had a County Office and a Local Office and a, a County Meals-on-Wheels Office. And I used to work in the Local Office, I had a desk in there.

[Sound of doorbell ringing]

[BS]: Oh that's my husband.

[JH]: Oh.

[BS]: Shall...

[JH]: I'll pause.

[BS]: Yes. We had a, a, quite a big garden where we used to do training for emergencies. We used to have Soyer boilers which were stored in a shed on the, mm, at the side. Mm, and we used to do quite a bit of practice out there, which was good. And we kept two of the vans there, two of the, the other vans, the other two were kept in a garage locally, and they used to have to be picked up and swapped over and... And that's another thing I had to do as Meals-on-Wheels Organiser, I had to make sure that their MOTs were done and, and they, you know, they, they were kept up to scratch

and in good condition. And at the time I got involved I was asked by, mm, our County Organiser, who'd been approached by the Probation Department if I would have two, have a, well not at the time just one, young offender.

[00:15:03]

Would I be able to find any work for her? And I decided I would. Well I had Kathy and, but I had to oversee what she did. She didn't do Meals-on-Wheels, we couldn't let her go out but she did help in the house. And, because in the house downstairs we had big store cupboards where we kept sheets and blankets and things that had been given to us that we gave out for people who came from Social Services, they were allowed so much every six months. We also had a clothing store in Bedford and they had the, the six monthly allowance there. But we had all the bedding and the household goods, cups and saucers that people used to give us. And quite a lot of people, young girls particularly, if they were perhaps pregnant or, or were going into a, a flat and they had nothing they were allowed to have so much. And so I used to, mm, be, be in charge quite a lot of the time of going down and giving these things out. And with, with Kathy she used to help to clean the cupboards and keep things tidy. And I used to have to sign for her each week.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: When she'd been. And then she got herself pregnant and, and left, and unfortunately got caught, again, shoplifting with her sister into Marks and Spencer's. And then I had a, a young lad and he was different. Mm, he, he, there were a lot of things he could do but one of the things he did do was see one of our staff putting money for the old, The Over Sixty-Fives Clubs into a, into the file. And he spotted it and un..., unbeknown to anybody he went, nipped out into the garden one day and while he was in, oh while he was in the garden he was mowing the lawn actually, mm, he slipped the, the catch on the kitchen window and he stole from the, he stole the money. And that ended up with me having to go to court, which was unfortunate. He had to go to prison. And that, I didn't enjoy that.

[JH]: No.

[BS]: At all. But, so I said I wouldn't have any more. But that was quite an experience really.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: I think he made good in the end, mm, I heard he had.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: So, mm, that was one of the things that, that I wasn't quite so happy about. But on the whole I enjoyed, I enjoyed my ten years with Meals-on-Wheels very much. And when I finished, I decided to finish doing that and I was asked by Edna Woods, our County Organiser, if I would consider doing something else, and I said 'Yes, I would'. So I, I finished Meals-on-Wheels and my deputy, oh, by that time I had a deputy, and she took over.

[JH]: And then, is that when you moved to County Hospital?

[BS]: Yes.

[JH]: And why did you become involved with hospital work?

[BS]: Edna Woods asked me if I would enjoy working with the hospitals and I said 'Yes, I would'. Again, I had no idea what it involved. I was assistant to somebody to start with for a year, and then she left, she went, moved to Norfolk and so I took over from Phil. And of course, it meant I was really doing the fundraising for the hospitals. Well the profits, the, I was responsible for putting the profits from the WRVS back into the hospitals.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And I had all the hospitals in the county, all the, even the little ones, we had a trolley service. And I had all the big ones, Luton and Dunstable, Bedford. I had two, Fairfield for people with mental health problems, and Bromham for people with learning disabilities. And we had two little hospitals with trolleys in the county. And, mm, that was very enjoyable because we gave, in the, in the

thirteen years that I was involved we gave two hundred and sixty-five thousand back into the hospitals, there was a lot of money.

[00:20:01]

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: I've got the books here where it, where it all, where I, I wrote it down, what we'd given. In the case of the, the Bromham and Fairfield it was mostly things like, things for the patients, but the, the other hospitals it was mostly medical equipment.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: And of course, I used to have to write up to Head Office and get their permission to spend the money. And then I used to get a nice letter back saying 'Yes, that's fine', then we used to go ahead. So, and of course, they didn't pay tax on that.

[JH]: No.

[BS]: And it was wonderful, I really, really enjoyed it. And of course that's, that came to an end when I had to retire, literally.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: I had to retire from the job because of my age. And I retired on the day that I opened the new shop in South Wing Hospital in Bedford. And they gave me a most wonderful party, I had over a hundred, a hundred and twenty guests in the hospital. It was absolutely wonderful.

[JH]: And you were also County Hospital Organiser as well as, after you became, after you'd been assistant, the assistant. So how did you become the...

[BS]: Yes.

[JH]: Organiser?

[BS]: When, when Phil, Phil Watson retired.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: After a year, and then I, then I became County Hospital Organiser.

[JH]: And who were the volunteers you worked with in the hospitals?

[BS]: Well, the volunteers we had they were, they were lots and lots of local people. Luton and Dunstable had a, a big a, a lot of people working there. And it was a wonderful place. They had a trolley, they had a baby shop, mm, they had a tea, a coffee bar and they had a big shop, a really big shop in the hospital as well as the one in the, in the baby shop. Mm, and they had a, a really big rota and their, the person in charge there was Sheila, who sadly died last year, she lived down in Wimborne in Dorset. Sheila, she was absolutely marvellous, and she had two assistants.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And I used to go and see them. If they needed any help or, or what, whatever I used to go down and see them, and also dealing with the gifting. The same in Bedford, now Bedford Hospital had, of course there were volunteers and Bedford Hospital had a, a shop and a trolley shop. And that became bigger over the, in 1994 we negotiated to have the shop enlarged because the night staff didn't want to move out of their office next door. But they did, in the end so we moved, so it meant that the shop could open longer hours, so then we had to actually employ somebody to work there because it started at half past seven in the morning and they were open till seven. And they used to use, do newspapers as well.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And we also had the trolley shop there. And then in 1993 we opened a baby shop. Now the baby shop started in Bedford North Wing Hospital and then two years later moved to South Wing Hospital when they had the new, a new building for the maternity.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And we had the baby shop, which was very successful, it was lovely. And I used to work there as a volunteer on a Tuesday evening anyway, as well. I used to enjoy that.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And occasionally I did the trolley. Mm, so I, I liked to feel that I was involved.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: And when it came to Fairfield, was the one with the mental health problems, they had a very, very successful shop, and, and they had a trolley. And we bought them an electric trolley, which I went up to Morley, near Leeds to get, to choose.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And we, that was quite a thing, because they had to go a long way into the other wards, you know, with it. And then it had to be locked because they had, they had to go into the locked wards, which some of the ladies were a little bit worried about but they, they did. And they, they were all so dedicated, you know, Jennifer. They...

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: They used to turn up and they used to run those places absolutely like clockwork.

[00:25:00]

Now Bromham unfortunately, I've got a, a lovely photograph of, of, or painting out in the hall that was presented, presented to us when we, when it closed in 1996. We'd done thirty years there. And we had a, a shop and a canteen for people with learning disabilities. And my husband and I worked there every weekend, which we enjoyed. And then in 1989 we had a, the most disastrous fire. I had a phone call one Friday morning, just before Christmas, from the, mm, chief, one of the, one of the managers. She said 'It's Sue, Barbara, are you sitting down'? I said 'No, why'? She said 'You're going to need to', she said 'your canteen and shop have gone'. I said 'Sue, what do you mean, they've gone'? She said 'They've been on fire and the whole lot's gone'. Well I was so shocked I could, absolutely shocked. So I got in the car and I drove out to Bromham only to find the loss adjuster already there and he was stomping around. 'Oh well, this is the end for this', he said 'you can't, can't do anything with this', he said 'sorry you, that, that's it'. He was really unpleasant. And I said 'But we're insured, we're insured for a hundred and ten thousand', I said 'we've, we've got to, to, to rebuild'. 'Oh you can't do that' he said, 'you can't do that', he was horrible. So that morning I was, we were all, and the, the residents were in tears because it was their place.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: So we took over the rec hall, the hospital's rec hall, and we got cups and saucers and tea urns and things from the hospital canteen and we started to use that. And after about three or four weeks we heard that the parents and friends would let us have their hut, which was quite big, if we could furnish it. And RAF Cardington were just finishing and they were getting rid of all their equipment so we got it. All their, a lot of their things, tables and chairs and all those things, and we re-equipped and we, we used the parents and friends hut for about fourteen months while we were rebuilding. The residents watched the building, they gave two of them hard hats because they, Dougie and Keith, because they loved to watch.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[BS]: And we built that lovely, lovely place, it really was beautiful. And the, the County, the National Chairman came and opened it, Mary Corsar.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: Mary Corsar came and opened it. And that was there for five years and then of course, the hospital went and they rebuilt on the site, which was sad because it was, it was a pleasure to work there and a lovely new building, the residents loved it and we had a, we had a great time. And we were all given, the Committee were all given a, a picture, a watercolour print of the hospital when it closed, and I was given the sign, well a, the, one with, it's a, it's a, it's a, an original watercolour.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Of the, of the house there which was the man..., the manor house on the site. And with, and it's got there on, on the, the bottom about thank, you know, 'With the grateful thanks to WRVS for all the years that they worked there', that was wonderful, and that was where, where my BEM came in, because of the work. Because I didn't know anything about building.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: Luckily one of our County staff... Is this alright for you by the way?

[JH]: Yes, this is lovely.

[BS]: One of our County staff's husband was an architect and he was, I went to him, the police first of all had to provide a, a, a thing of the, of the building for the police because it was arson really.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: One of the residents, one of the volunteers had gone into the, the shop and seen cigarettes so he thought he'd have some cigarettes for nothing. And he broke in, lit a paper towel and that was, that was the fire. Twenty minutes later the whole thing had gone. And, mm, they, it was, it was quite a, quite a, a thing altogether.

[00:30:07]

The architects produced the plan for me and with, with my help, because I knew all about it, and then they recommended the builders, which were a local firm. And, but I had to learn all about building and insurance and I didn't know a thing about it at all. And I used to go to sleep at night and waken up and have a little notepad where I used to jot things down, I've never really slept properly since.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[BS]: And then when it came to the insurance Muriel Soldosh [ph 00:30:48] up in, in insurance was absolutely wonderful. She was such a help, she was a lovely lady. And she, she and I had to go to a meeting in the insurance department, which we did, one of these wonderful new places in London where we went up on the outside in a, in a lift. And who should be sitting there but the loss adjuster. And when he saw me, after being so unpleasant the first time, he said 'Oh, hello Barbara, call me Michael'. [Laughing] But we got our own way and we, it was all done. And, but I was the only, the total loss in the country, it was the, the only time they'd ever had a total loss. But I did learn a lot and I, and working there was, was, was really wonderful. Not easy sometimes with the, but you felt you were doing such a lot for them.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: Mm, sadly that place, after it closed they were disbanded and moved into smaller places round the county but where they were locked in, they weren't locked in at, at Bromham, they could wander round and they could go into the woods. In fact Dougie, one of the, one of the lovely ones, he, who used to watch the building, came in one day with a great big bunch of primroses he had pulled up in the woods for me.

[JH]: Oh.

[BS]: Oh it was lovely, it was so touching. [Laughing] And they were lovely, lovely people. And we enjoyed it. And my husband was a, he's been a volunteer for, what? Twenty-five years I suppose now. So that was Bromham. And then we had the little, the little trolleys and unfortunately of

course, Luton and Dunstable lost their tender. Mm, oh must be twelve years ago but they've still got the baby shop and they've still got a trolley.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Bedford lost the whole lot [coughing] about eight or, eight or nine years ago. First of all the tea bar went because the politics there said they didn't want tea and sympathy in this hospital, which I thought was awful, mm they got their own bistro and a, a restaurant. And then for some reason we lost the, everything. They were going to have a new shop and it didn't materialise and I'm, and very, very sadly [clears throat] all the walkers, all the workers walked out.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Some of us went back as volun..., hospital volunteers, which I do on a Friday.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: But it's not for WRVS.

[JH]: No.

[BS]: But I hear them talking Jennifer, I hear people in wheelchairs saying 'Oh we do miss that lovely cup of tea and the ladies who used to talk to us'. One of the ladies it's her funeral next Monday, she's now nine..., she would have been ninety-seven, you see we still kept in touch with the families and she died last week. And I'm, some of them are still mem..., members of the, what was the Association, we are now Bedfordshire Retired Volunteers Association, we kept together.

[JH]: Yes. Lovely, yes.

[BS]: We're still, we're still working on it, which is nice.

[JH]: Very good.

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[BS]: Yes.

[JH]: And also, as well as working with hospitals over the years, you've done children's holidays?

[BS]: Mm.

[JH]: As well.

[BS]: Oh yes.

[JH]: Will you tell me about the children's holidays?

[BS]: Yes, mm, the children's holidays, and I did the [clears throat] I was asked in, I think it was 1980 our Emergency Services Organiser, Pat Henderson-Begg, who was absolutely brilliant, knew that there was going to be no, no-one as, as house mother in her local village where they have a, actually it's an Emmaus now.

[00:35:05]

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: But it was a school for, a little bit like a borstal, they've a nice building in the country and they took it over for holidays for boys, underprivileged boys.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: And they also had them for girls in another part, I helped with that once. But the boys, for three years I was house mother and I didn't realise what I was taking on, because none of them were easy.

[JH]: No.

[BS]: We had to search through their cases when they came, make sure they had no offensive weapons. [Laughing] They didn't in the first year but one of the little boys decided, well he was an eleven year old, decided he was going to steal everybody else's things that we'd given them, we gave them all crayons and books, painting books.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: And, and things. And we were also involved with the Bedfordshire Round Table, they funded the outings, and we had a coach and every day we went out. But I used to have to cope with them at night most of them wouldn't go to sleep. [Laughing] So it was sort of parading down the corridors, particularly with two or three of them who were very difficult. I had, the first year I had two helpers who came from the RAF, and I'd had two teachers as well because we had, I think, sixteen boys.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And every day, three times a day, we had a team in from the Emergency Services, from the Emergency Group, all different ones, from different villages, to come and do the meals.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: They came in the morning for breakfast, then they'd do packed lunch and then in the evening they'd do the, the, the evening meal and sometimes they stayed on and helped. Mm, they were absolutely wonderful and we had a very good menu, which Pat Henderson-Begg did. And in the evenings we used to go to her house, because she lived in the village, for a glass of sherry and a bath. Mm, [laughing] and we because we all felt quite tired. And I was the only one to do with, the RAF people went home, I was the only one who stayed overnight.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Mm, which wasn't easy when, as I say, when they didn't go to sleep. Mm, one particular boy the first year was determined he wasn't going to let the others go to sleep either.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[BS]: And this happened for three years. And we used to go to some wonderful places, we went to, we went to Woburn, we went to Wicksteed Park, we went to the, the place where they, the proving ground for the, for cars, which is very unusual for people to be allowed to go. And we went to Wicksteed Park, and we went to, oh, we went to some wonderful places. Oh Lon..., somewhere near, outside Cambridge where they had a, a big thing for children. But we had an absolutely wonderful time. Oh, we went to, ah, the RA..., the Air, the Air Museum, Duxford, we went to Duxford.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: But a lot of the time of course, we were spent making sure that we'd got the, still got the boys, because they, we used to let them go off. Oh we went to Whipsnade and that was the day that one of them, he'd been an absolute nuisance all day and he was really, really getting our RAF girl's back up. And he, he was going, walking along by the, the electric fence. He said 'If I touch this will I die'? And Shirley said 'Well you might'. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[BS]: Everybody laughed because he was such a nuisance. But they, none, some of them didn't know what, they didn't know, they didn't realise that they were going to have meals, they thought their breakfasts, they, they would, we found one boy had kept extra bread and things, he said 'It's for the rest of the day'. I said 'But you're going to have your packed lunch and then, and dinner this evening'. 'Oh are we?', he said 'I'm, I'm not, I don't have those at home'. And it, it, sometimes it was sad.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Then I went, after three years I was invited by Jackie White to go down and do Dell Farm for two years, which I did. The first year, it was abso..., a lovely log cabin, near Whip..., just on the outside, just outside Whipsnade.

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[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: You could hear the wolves at night. And that was quite an experience because it was a different place, it was really exciting and with, with lots of woods round, and it was lovely. And big greens where the boys could go and play football and things in the evenings when we got back from our, our outings.

[00:40:05]

And again we had the Round Table in Luton funding all the, the outings.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: And the, and the, and the coach, the same coach driver each time. And we had, it, it was great, and I've kept a, I kept a, a diary of it.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: Did you read that one?

[JH]: I don't know.

[BS]: I sent one.

[JH]: I don't.

[BS]: Yes. I've, I get a, a diary of, of what we'd done, because we used to have to make sure that they all had showers and, and, mm, their, anything that if they fell over they had to be looked after, of course you couldn't do that now. But they, we had one boy who was a bit of a nuisance the first year at Dell Farm.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: He was, [laughing] he was called Stuart and he wouldn't go to bed. So I said 'Alright Stuart, you and I will go and sit in the dining room', this was quite late on, and at a quarter to one he was still sitting there, I said 'are you going to write, write something down for me Stuart, why I can't go to bed, why I don't want to go to bed'. So he wrote something down and eventually he said 'I think Barbara I'd better go to bed, I'm tired'. The following year Stuart came again and I said 'Oh hello Stuart, we've got you have we'? He said 'Yes', to the other boys he said 'yes, and you better go to bed because Barbara will make you write why you can't go to bed if you don't'.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[BS]: [Laughing] He remembered. But I, I had lovely card, a 'thank you' card for each time, you know, signed by all the boys.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: They'd really appreciated their holiday. And it, some of them were really sad. They had come from broken homes and never had a holiday some of them.

[JH]:No.

[BS]: I don't think they knew what the country was like. So I did that for five years, and I, I enjoyed it. And at the same time they had girls, I can't remember where the girls used to go, but one day I was asked to go and help in Northampton, they were, had a, a narrowboat on, on the canal there. The girls were a different kettle of fish, they weren't the slightest bit interested in any of it, and, mm, they weren't very easy. I had two, three in the back of the car coming back to Bedford and one of them was, she was called Karen I remember, and she was saying that she, she was fed up, she didn't like anything and 'Oh', she said 'when I get home I'm going to kill myself'. So nobody spoke anything, nobody said a word.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And I had Do Vesey sitting by me, also a wonderful person in Bromham – WRVS. And then she, there was, after a very long silence she said in a very loud voice 'And when I get back I'm going to, I'm going to get pack, pack, pack, packed up and then I'm going to kill myself'. I said 'Well I don't think you need to bother to pack if you're going to kill yourself, will you'? And after that there was dead silence, she didn't say any more. But, they weren't so easy, but I think on the whole they enjoyed it. We enjoyed the, the canal, it was lovely.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Nice, nice outing. But they, they did, oh, and they had... I did go there once, they had a, mm, holidays with Betty Rogerson organising it down by a river in Northamptonshire. And they stayed, all stayed in log cabins. I spent the day with them and that was a lovely, lovely holiday. Well we did have such a lot of lovely work, you know, really. And at the same time all that was going on, all, everything else was still going, going on everywhere else.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: And it, it was just so amazing. And then there was the Magistrates' Court, and the prison. I used to do flowers in the prison chapel, I'd forgotten that. I used to go up, put the flowers up right at the very top of the, of the prison, be escorted up there to put flowers. And, mm, we also, the one worth, very worthwhile was the Family Meeting Centre, and I helped there sometimes on a Saturday. That was wonderfully well organised. Sometimes, in some places they've still got them, I think they've got one in Hereford still.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Mm, where the children of separated parents would meet, usually with the dad who came in, mother having already left in case there was a problem.

[00:45:10]

And that was sad because sometimes the child didn't turn up and the father would turn up from somewhere like Derby only to find the child hadn't come. But that was, that was one really worthwhile thing, and that stopped, unfortunately. Right.

[JH]: And you, also at the same time, you were working in the Bedford office answering enquiries and things?

[BS]: Yes, yes. I used to be in the office, mm, and I used to do interviewing as well. And if the phone went I used to answer it. We used to, we used to have a, a very nice social time, down in the kitchen in Kimbolton Road we had a very big table, we used to have lunch round there. And our County Organiser at the time was Doris Davidson, she was absolutely wonderful, and she used to go to Barbados on holiday and she used to sit and tell us about her holiday, because she, they knew Princess Margaret and, and Earl Snowdon who were there at the same time, they used to have meals with them. And Doris used to tell us how many times her husband had to light Princess Margaret's cigarettes during the meal. [Laughing] That, it used to be great fun. And I was at the end of the table and it was my job if the phone went because obviously I could get out easily to go and answer it. And I started to do quite a lot later on when we moved from Kimbolton Road to the little, little office in Bedford, in the middle of Bedford, Rush Court, we were there for four years, that was really just, just an office. And, mm, we were still doing social transport.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: Mm, when that finished no one was going to do that. And we had a lot of people, and we had a lot of drivers, we had about seven drivers and a lot of people who used our social transport so I said 'Well, I'll do it from home'. Well somebody said 'Not a good idea using your home phone number', but I've never had any trouble with it.

[JH]: No.

[BS]: And that gradually diminished as my drivers, some, two of them went, had to leave because they, they had eye problems, one went to live in Devon. And I ended up with only two drivers, but we still, I was always there if they, I had an answer phone and I used to ring back, they'd ring

through and say they were going to Social, doctors or, we did medical things, doctors or the hospital or wherever. And, mm, I used to ring them back, having rung the, the driver and then tell them what time the driver was coming and, and then ask them, I didn't know, I didn't know them, it was just on, a voice on the phone. Just occasionally I met them in places like the hospital when I was doing the trolley, that's another thing I did in, the hospital trolley. Occasionally I'd meet them in the, in the hospital. And they'd say 'Oh', I'd say 'Yes, I know you don't I'? 'Do you, who are you'? I'd say 'Well you talk to me on the phone'. 'Oh it's Barbara'. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[BS]: [Laughing] And they'd say so many, you know, quite a lot of times. And I did that social transport from home for thirteen years until a year last December when I was told rather abruptly, it shouldn't be on that should it, that I wasn't wanted any more. Sad.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: So I'm now just helping somebody called Susan every week or every fortnight with her correspondence and going as a sort of good companion. We had very good companions.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Very, very good companions, Do Vesey organised that. And she used to, she used to pair the people up with the, with the, with the help of with the person going to visit. And she was absolutely wonderful with that. We had them all over the place and she used to visit them and, and also she ran a disabled club in Bedford as well, that was nothing to do with it but that was that. And of course, we used to have five Over Sixties Clubs, and they were very, very busy, these.

[00:50:00]

And they, they, the people who organised them used to come in with their money each week and have a cup of tea and pay out their money. But they, they were busy clubs, there used to be fifty or sixty members.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Now they've got one left in Bedford, it's not, I don't really know whether the WRVS is, or RVS is, are doing anything with it. They weren't, they weren't visited but there's still, this club is still there, only the one. And they also had a Luncheon Club that Do Vesey organised.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Which was WRVS as well, and that was very good. That finished when, I mean, because she's ninety-two now, but she'd still do it if she, if she could.

[JH]: Yes. If she could.

[BS]: Knowing her. And she's a wonderful person, she's absolutely marvellous. And, oh gosh, I'm just trying to think what else. There was so much. I mean, the, the, it was, it was never ending - the work that we did. When the, when the office closed, the, the Kimbolton Road closed, we had a lot of the things were sold off for, the things that, that we didn't need. But the things that were left they, we had a manager an Italian, Area Manager, Italian, Toni, and he asked me where, where would you let people, where would you go with the, all this, these things, the curtains and the carpets and things, which were pretty dirty by that time. I said 'Well I think we ought to go to the homeless and roofless people', because they'd love them.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And, as I was a keyholder they came and cleared it all and gave it to the people who had no homes for when they were going into homes.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: And that's what happened to the house. And then Rush Court was, that disappeared after four years. Then there, for a long time there wasn't an office here, and then they had a little office.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: They, funnily enough, went back into the first office that I started in, which was horrible. And she was there for two years and then moved to another one, now it's Milton Keynes.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: So, so people haven't got local...

[JH]: No.

[BS]: A local thing at all. Because you see this morning somebody spoke to me and said 'Is, is it still going?' I said 'Oh yes'. He said 'Oh I thought it had all finished'. You see they don't know.

[JH]: No.

[BS]: They don't realise. Because they, we've lost our focal point, like the hospital and the Meals-on-Wheels, Meals-on-Wheels went to Apetito. So that was Social Services lost the tender. But that was... I'm just trying to think if there is anything else.

[JH]: Were you, you said in your letter that you were also involved with emergency feeding.

[BS]: Oh yes, yes. Yes, we, we did quite a few, we went out to feed the, the, feed the Fire Brigade. Mm, if there was a fire we were called out to go and feed the firemen at the fire. And I always remember going once and picked Pat Henderson-Begg up in the car, in the, in the village in north Bedfordshire, and I said 'where are we going then Pat'? She said 'Well I don't know, we've got to follow the fire, the, the light in the sky'. So we, there we were going through all these country lanes, it was a huge, huge fire, fire, I think it was a, a haystack. And we had to wait till it had gone down before the firemen would do anything. So we, then we fed them with hot coffee and things.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: That was great, that was good, that was really good. Mm, we did our training, we had, we had a training session up at RAE in November, and it was foggy and it was very cold, and we were working through the night feeding the SAS who were supposedly in an, in an aircraft on the airfield. So we had to make meals in the Soyer boilers, that was great fun. Somebody put pearl barley in one of the Soyer boilers and it burnt on the bottom.

[JH]: Oh.

[BS]: [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[BS]: Another time we were asked to do a breakfast for a, a family who lived just outside Bedford they, he'd got a huge party of people coming to use his swimming pool.

[00:55:13]

And he asked us to do a, a meal. And we did a Soyer boiler, we did a cross trench cooker and we prov..., provided the most gorgeous full English breakfast for him, with lots of smoke, and we got, it, it, it was great fun. Mm, and of course, we, I got involved with, you've heard of Yarl's Wood? Well they had a fire there and we were called out. It was the last time I did anything, must be four years ago. And they had a fire and we went to feed the police who'd come from all over the South of England, we, I think there were about two hundred. The meals were brought to us for the firemen and the police and we fed them while the fire was still going, and then the next morning we went and gave them breakfasts. Then I had two days off where the, and I washed my hair and my clothes, because they all smelt of fire.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And then on the Monday there was no-one going and I, Jack, my husband, and Do Vesey and I were in..., asked to go and do the evening meal again.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: And they'd come from somewhere like, well South, on the South Coast. And they, they said, 'Oh, God bless you, we're so hungry and so cold and so tired'. And they had a meal brought, I don't, I never did know where the meal came from but it was very nice.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And we worked from a police, a police van, that was good. Mm, oh, and we did, in my early days when I was Meals-on-Wheels Organiser there was a pile, a huge pile up on the M1, and I didn't go out to it but I, I was there making sandwiches and filling in the, filling the, mm, the water boilers and getting them all... I think, I can't remember they, if we had very big flasks. But that was, we, we did that a lot. We also had the Ugandan Asians.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Mm, Edna Woods went to Stan..., Stanstead and met them and brought them into Bedford and we put out an appeal for clothing. Well, you've never seen anything like it, we had huge piles and piles of clothing in our conference room. And we gave it out and that was quite a thing. And at the end of that what, two of the Asian ladies went to live in St. Neots and they invited us all to go and have a, and have a meal with them.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: To say thank you. They were really, really grateful. But that was quite something, we had, the clothes we had brought in, that was... Now our son, our youngest son was eleven and he's now fifty-two so you can tell how long ago it is, because a photograph of him helping in the conference room with the clothing. So that was, that was quite a, I think it was 1972. Something like that.

[JH]: Yes, 1972.

[BS]: I think it was Seventy..., 1972.

[JH]: There's an anniversary this year I think.

[BS]: Yes, I think so, yes. Something like that. But it was, that was, that was really well worthwhile, because it was very cold and they'd, they'd come...

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: [Clears throat] I seem to remember that it was winter and they'd come over from Uganda in the clothes that they were standing in, you know, flimsy saris and things most of them, because they were Indian ladies and, and men. So that was good old WRVS, they were so grateful to us. [Pause] I'm just trying to think.

[JH]: Mm. You've told me about the hospital work that you've done, you worked in the hospital shop and canteens and...

[BS]: Yes. The hospital shop we sold lots and lots, toiletries, confectionery, magazines and things.

[01:00:00]

And I enjoyed doing that. I used to work with, the lady who has sadly died and we're going to her funeral, I used to work with her on a, very often on a Saturday afternoon. And we were busy.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And in the baby shop we were very busy. That was lovely because we, we used to see the babies.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Quite often, babies going home. And, and, and we had some little tiny clothes for prem..., premature babies. That was, that was, that was really enjoyable. Mm, and the trolley, we used to go round all the wards, I enjoyed that. I've done that since as well. Mm, [clears throat] the, we had, do you know we, we took, took a lot of money.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: We really did. It was, mm, a good service to the patients. And the tea bar, again, we re..., we re..., we refurbished that two years before they finished with it. They altered the hospital. I was so sad because we went to a lot of trouble to make sure that it was conforming to the regulations, you know. And we, it was all tiled and everything was, we had a separate little room and the, to do the sandwiches in, and the staff loved it because they used to come and say what they wanted. We didn't have them displayed they, they were made ready for them as they wanted it, if they wanted corned beef or cheese or cheese and tomato or whatever. And the consultants were very upset when we left, when we finished. They signed a petition, I think there were well over four hundred signatures asking to be kept. Mm, and of course, tea and coffee and soft drinks, we sold all the soft drinks, cans and things.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Mm, the, it, it was, it was really, [coughing] it was really good. [Coughing] And then we had, [coughing] we had shifts, two people working in the hospital on three shifts, one morning, afternoon and, when it came to the baby shop, in the evening, that's when I did it. Mm, I was on my own there.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: With a receptionist who I got quite friendly with, which is nice. But, [coughing] it was, it was apart from being a, a good service, it was fun.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: That, that was the thing. And I met so many wonderful people. So I'm, I'm sorry that the, the, that it's all over really.

[JH]: And we talked a little bit about, before about the offices, different offices that you were in, closing. So how did that affect you as a volunteer when there was no office, or no sort of local centre for you to go to?

[BS]: Well we just, everybody disappeared. When, in 1994 when it was all... Was it 1994 or 1996? 1994 I think, wasn't it? No, 1996 every, it just sort of disappeared. Because we used to have village reps, and we used to have, local places like Ampthill they used to have a, they used to work in the, the village hall there. Mm, and they had their own Meals-on-Wheels Organiser, and all the villages had their, their own Meals-on-Wheels Organiser. Well that's, oh I did...

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: That's another thing I'd forgotten I'd done. I used to go in on a Thursday morning and once a month and help, no every week I used to go in to help Elizabeth, the County Meals-on-Wheels Organiser, with the admin.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Because the, all the, the sheets had to go into the local, you know, the, their office.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: Or County office. County Treasurers, because they, they paid for it out of the local... I'm not quite sure how it worked now but I, that's what, we used to have to, [coughing] check all the, the, [coughing] all the sheets and mileage sheets.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: And the, and things from the volunteers. And I used to do that on a Thursday morning, as if I hadn't got enough to do.

[01:05:01]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[BS]: [Laughing] And that was great, that was great. And in those days of course, we had an Area Office too in Bedford.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Which had the area, for the four counties, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire? Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, three counties, yes. And they used to do, deal with everything down there. I'm still in touch with Pat Sherwood-King who used to work down there, she's a member of our Association and, mm, in fact she used to do the hospitals. She, I was, I had to go through, through the County Office then through the Area Office to get up to Head Office. But it used to work very well.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: They were, they were great. And I had the great pleasure when, in my early days, of going up to our old Headquarters in, in Park Lane.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: It was a wonderful building, yes. I was there one day when they were letting off a, a gun salute for The Queen, I can't remember how old she was in, just behind us. It was a beautiful place.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: It was really enjoyable. Then I went up to the one in near Brixton.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Which wasn't so good. It wasn't very nice. It was alright, but the area wasn't very nice.

[JH]: No.

[BS]: But certainly old Park Lane was quite something, yes. And we had, mm, interestingly Matthew was very interested in the fact that we had, mm, Pearl Lawson- Johnston, the Hon..., Honourable Pearl Lawson-Johnston in our, she was a member and I'd sent him a photograph of her with Lady Reading.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: Taken in Bedford. And she died about two years ago. I used to see her in Sainsbury's, I used to go up and chat to her. She was a member of the Association.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: She was a nice lady, she was a good age and she was still driving a car in '95. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[BS]: Yes, so what have I missed out?

[JH]: Mm, well you also, you said to me in your letter that you'd helped publicise WRVS over the years, the sort of The Sixtieth Anniversary you did a display or something in the library in the museum.

[BS]: Yes, I did, yes. Mm, I used to do the, I was asked if I would take on publicity, which I did, and I had somebody in Flitwick, which is ten miles south, to do posters and things. And I used to do the, I

did for about four years I did a display in the library. Mm, I had the whole of the upper floor, which with big, the big display things, and I used to have, it was good.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: I was told it was the best they'd had.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: And then in 1998 I did, I had six weeks in the museum. Mm, I did six years with WRVS, all this memorabilia that, and including a, a uniform and it was good. In fact I've got a photograph of that somewhere, yes. And I was really pleased with it, I had some very nice remarks in the book.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: I left a book by the side.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: Very nice remarks. And I hoped that would, it's a strange thing Jennifer, all these things, sometimes you leave, you leave a, a pile of, of, mm, things out for people to, mm, to take and fill in and become volunteers, and we never used to get more than four or five from each one, but it, I suppose it was worth it. We did get the odd, the odd few from the museum. But the, that was quite something to be in the museum like that. I, I was quite, quite pleased with it. And of course, when we had medal presentations we used to invite the, the top people, the, the High Sheriff.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Of the year and, or Brian Woodrow, who was the High Sheriff one year and then he was the Chairman of the Hospital Trust.

[01:10:00]

And, oh, we had Sir Trevor Skeet MP and his wife, who got stuck in the loo.

[JH]: Oh!

[BS]: [Laughing] While she was there. And she was so upset, because she said 'Oh, you won't tell Trevor will you'? [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[BS]: They used, they, we had lots of visitors. They, in fact I'm sure that there's nobody in Bedford these days who, who does that any more.

[JH]: No.

[BS]: I'm sure. They don't seem to have, we had the Mayor of course, but the, the others, they, they were really good, you know, and they were very supportive. Mm, and also we used to put on a lovely meal for them.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Always, oh yes, and we had a horrible, a horrible little kitchen where we used to sit round the big table, we used to take our own sandwiches, but a tiny little kitchen. It's amazing what we could produce. Beautiful food, buffet.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: For all these visitors. And, from time to time, we had the Meals-on-Wheels Organisers coming for tea and, or the Meals-on-Wheels helpers from a certain area coming to tea, or coming for lunch. We used to look after them really well.

[JH]: Mm. It was sort of more of a community.

[BS]: Yes. Oh, it was.

[JH]: A social thing.

[BS]: Yes it was.

[JH]: [Pause] And now you, or you started and you still do visit people as a volunteer sometimes?

[BS]: Right, I'm just, I'm visiting one person, she had somebody visiting her and, mm, they've dropped out and I now go to see her. It's somebody I, I didn't realise who it was going to be, when they asked me to go I, I said 'I hadn't realised that it was, it was going to be somebody I knew'.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: I've known from, you know, many years. And she, she, she's not very well, she, she suffers from ME.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And she has a lot of correspondence she can't cope with, and she's recently lost her mother, so apart from anything else it's, I'm, I'm sort of good companion really.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: So we sort out her, all her correspondence and then we have a chat, which is nice. Mm, they have asked me other things, I can't really do anything now, not really. I'm sorry, sorry because I'd, I, I like to, to help them. But I do get the odd phone call from people who I used to help with the driving because from transport, 'I can't get hold of Milton Keynes office, they're not answering the phone, what am I going to do?' I said 'Leave it with me, I'll phone Vicky and see if Vicky can sort something out for you. And I will give her, Vicky, your phone number and then she, she will give you a ring'. Because some, sometimes they've, they're, they're not manning the office, unfortunately. I mean

they're, because they used to ring me they always knew I would be there for them. If I was away I used to tell them I was going away, as many as I could, or they'd realise I was away.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: But I'm still, I want, I want to carry on just as long as I can.

[JH]: And tell me about your British Empire Medal that you received for WRVS work?

[BS]: Yes, I, I received that. 1991 I had a, a letter to say that I would, that, from the, my, my husband brought the letter up [laughing] in the morning. He said 'It's funny here', he said, 'you've got a letter from, from the Prime Minister'. I said 'Oh don't be silly'. And it was to tell me that I'd been awarded the BEM. And I received it from the, from The Lord Lieutenant at the, and they, they gave me a lovely supper at the hospital.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: I had it, the ceremony at the hospital, it was quite a, an evening.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And I've seen him quite a few times since because The Association is always invited to the volunt..., the Voluntary Service for, for the, for the Lord Lieutenant's Volunteers, Volunteers Service. Now he died, he retired and the new one, again a lovely lady, and I had my photograph taken with her.

[01:15:09]

[JH]: Good.

[BS]: Not long ago. She's the, she's the new one, and I went in uniform, that was at two years ago at the, she asked me to read, do the reading.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: And so, so I was wearing my medals there.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: So she was the, the Chairman of the Hospital Trust, and all our ladies knew her because she used to come in a lot. So of course, they were all thrilled to bits that, that she would be, she became Lord Lieutenant. And she is really a very, very nice person. And, and she, she had a letter asking if I would do the reading, and she'd chosen one of the longest readings that she could, [laughing] it was really good, but in the church it was, it was quite something. So, mm, the, the actual, mm, BEM I, there were two of us. Oh she also, she was, the, the, the other person was, got, got it at the same time, but she, it was nothing to do with WRVS it was something to, something else. But we were invited to, well we asked if we could go to the service that they held for the holders of the, of the OBE and et cetera at St. Paul's Cathedral, and she and I went to that. I've just been the once, it's, they hold it every four years.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: Dorothy Ward's been.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: And I think Jackie White's been, and absolutely wonderful, I've never been to anything like it. The Duke of Edinburgh was there, it was a real honour. So yes, I felt very honoured to get it. And it was really, I think, mostly because of my work for, with, for Bromham.

[JH]: And are there any other stories or memories that you'd like to share about your time with WRVS?

[BS]: [Pause] Ah, only, not really but, just getting used to all different cars that we drove. We had two cars as well as the vans and it was just so varied, everything was, you never knew what, what was going to happen any day. It was, it was wonderful. It was, but it was, I couldn't have done it without him, he's just been to the physiotherapist, he's got a walking problem.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Like, like I have. But he, mm, he's been a great support.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: As, as a member as well. He's got his little badge, I think for twenty-five years. [Speaks to husband] 'Alright?'

[JS]: Hello. Hello.

[JH]: Hello.

[BS]: How many years have you done with WRVS?

[JS]: Oh, a hundred.

[BS]: [Laughng] I was just telling Jennifer about Bromham.

[JS]: Oh, Bromham, yes.

[BS]: Yes, and the old transport.

[JS]: [Inaudible 01:18:32]

[BS]: Oh yes he, Jack used to do Social Transport.

[JH]: Mm.

[JS]: I did enjoy Bromham.

[BS]: Yes. Yes we did.

[JS]: [Laughing]

[JH]: And since you joined in 1965 how has your opinion of the organisation changed?

[BS]: I think it was a wonderful organisation altogether, and I think Lady Reading would have been very proud of it. I'm not so happy now.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Not really. I felt upset that, that it went the way it did. I know they had to, but I don't think it was... In the first place Jennifer, perhaps I shouldn't say this should I? In the first place they took on too much, they had four, four places, they had Darlington, Cardiff and two other places, oh, and then they found that was too much. They had Milton Hill, which was lovely, because we went to the garden party there with The Queen and she planted a tree. And, mm, I think they took, they took, they, they did, they, they weren't right, they didn't do it right. Now they've just got Cardiff, but I think it's a pity because The Red Cross has done the same, and now St. John Ambulance are doing the same, exactly the same.

[01:20:02]

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: It's all, I know that they all have got to get their finances but it's a great pity that, I'm sorry that they've, they've opted to go for the elderly because there are a lot of younger people who need the help.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: Like these young mums with, with their, with their young children, and people like that. Mm, because I think the, the elderly are well looked after, they've got Help the Aged and things like that. And I think it's a great pity myself that they've just, mm... When I think what we used to do for young children, I know we couldn't do the, we couldn't do things like the, the boys camps any more.

[JH]: No.

[BS]: We couldn't do it because of the, mm, well you couldn't, not any more. You, you wouldn't be allowed to to start with. But we did do a lot of good with it at the, at the time. So, but I thought I, I, I've had my best years. Do Vesey and I both agreed that we, it was wonderful while we were there and that, every time we meet we, they, the, the people that we used to work with, they all say, 'Oh wasn't it lovely to, to all work together'. But they still like coming.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: And, and we will have a good old chatter.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: You ought to have heard us last year at the, at the, the retirement lunch in Birmingham for the Association, that was quite something. And I sat opposite Freddie and, oh gosh, what's she called? Lives in the Barbican in London, she used to be in the police, a big lady, oh dear, I can't think of her name. And I've seen her from, every time we had an, an AGM for the Association, I used to go to those until just recently and she was such fun. But gosh the, the chatter. Meeting people from all over the country, it was amazing, yes. It was sad that that finished.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: But I'm glad that we're keeping going.

[JH]: Yes, oh it's good. Mm, what was the, or what is the biggest change that you've experienced during your time with WRVS?

[BS]: The finish, from 1994.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Mm, 1996, 1996, it was devastating, we were all devastated. Because it just seemed to, to go, after being... We had, that's another thing, we had a big, a rally here at Bedford School in 1993, 1993 we had a rally and there were two thousand and ten members in Bedfordshire then. And we, the, that hall and the, the Bedford School was full to the back. **Mm**, all the County Organisers were at the back - at the front, and we all had five minutes to tell everybody what we did and what... And we had a most lovely, lovely, lovely lunch. And our, we had a, a guest of honour - what is her name? One who, whose daughter vanished and they never found her. Suzie, she went, she was a, worked for a, for an estate agent.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: She went to show somebody round, well her mother came as a guest of honour, because she, she got a... And she was, she was so lovely. And we had lots of well-known dignitaries there. And that was a great day. And of course, once they finished in 1996, I don't know how many members there were left, very few.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: I think, I was talking to Amanda once, I said 'How many people have you got altogether'? She said 'Seventy, that's all'. And people say they don't, they don't know WRVS now. So what they're doing, I don't know. Pity.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And where would you say Royal Voluntary Service, as it's called now, place in society is today?

[01:25:00]

[BS]: I don't know. All I know is The Council of Voluntary Services here, used to place it fourth from the bottom of their list, which wasn't very good.

[JH]: No.

[BS]: I don't know what it is now, because I haven't, I used to be, I was on their, I was on, a Trustee on their Committee for, for five years. And in those days we used to get volunteers from there for WRVS. I don't know what, what they would say if I asked them now, where it would be, I don't know.

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

[BS]: Well, I would like to think that it would carry on, carry on, but I don't know. I mean I, I notified Cardiff about my change of address but I still haven't received my magazine for six months.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[BS]: So where it's gone I don't know.

[JH]: I'm trying to think whether there actually has been one in the last six months, because the last one was just before Christmas.

[BS]: Oh well perhaps that's why.

[JH]: There hasn't been another one.

[BS]: There hasn't?

[JH]: No.

[BS]: Oh dear. No. Because I, I'm sorry because I think people used to enjoy it. I, it's nice to know that some of the hospitals have still got its... I mean Addenbrooke's has still, and Helen, who runs that, used to be the Area Manager here. I think one of the problems, Jennifer, is that here the, this is a huge area and Debbie Fair lives in Ipswich, she never comes to Bedford. I mean it's too big an area for her. Mm, they've got somebody in, they had somebody in Cambridge who didn't, used to say 'Oh I'm coming to see you', well she never did. Mm, I don't know who they've got now, I really don't. You see we lose touch.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Mm, but I, I certainly think that, that doing that is, is, was a mistake. I mean Debbie Fair's been, she used to be, worked in Luton office with Jackie White for quite a time and then she went up, up the hill. And, but she's still, she lives in Ipswich, she's too far away. Mm, [coughing] the same, the same thing's happened with The Red Cross.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Too big an area, and they don't keep their, they can't, they can't do it, it's too far. It's not their fault. It's a pity. And I think it's a, it's a great shame that, mm, the, some of the top people get paid such a lot and I think they say they only have to, they have to pay for the best. Well surely the best can take a bit less.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Really. But what do they do? And we don't hear anything, you don't hear anything about it. At one time they used to have WRVS ladies, they always had two at the November Parade. I never went because I wasn't, I wasn't tall, they used to choose the taller ones.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: Oh they used to go to Wimbledon as well.

[JH]: Yes.

[BS]: Yes. Mm, there was somebody from Flitwick went to Wimbledon once. But, mm, there were two in Luton, I think they've got quite a an emergency team in Luton, I think they go to London quite a bit if they're needed.

[JH]: I think they do.

[BS]: I think they, yes. Well I know, I, I'm sure Ray does. Mm, because they're that much nearer, and they're, some of them younger. But there again they're, they're not all that much younger. All the of, all the original ones. They, I know they, they, we used to go to, oh, yes The Lord's Mayor's Proces..., The Lord Mayor's thing in London.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: We used to go to that. I never went, but they, they used to go. I mean there's so much, there was so much, wasn't there?

[JH]: Yes. There was an awful lot you used to do.

[01:30:01]

[BS]: Yes. I mean the, the years that I've, I've spent were incredible really, I wouldn't change it.

[JH]: No.

[BS]: I could have gone back to my old job, but I didn't. My old, I was trained as, as an institutional management. And I was assistant to the School Meals Organiser, and then after my children arrived I got involved with this, and that was it.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And what would you say is your most memorable moment of being a WRVS volunteer?

[BS]: Well I think my, my memorable moment really was my retirement party at South Wing Hospital, because it was so incredible. I had so many people, so many people from all the hospitals were there, and that was incredible, absolutely. And my BEM as well. But I've had quite a lot of lovely times.

[JH]: Mm.

[BS]: They've been, we used to have such nice get-togethers. And everybody worked together, we used to have lovely, we used to have lovely Christmas parties and we used to do, Pat Henderson-Begg's husband used to write little sketches and we used to do those as entertainment at lunchtime. I know we did 'Albert and the Lion' once.

[JH]: Oh. [Laughing]

[BS]: [Laughing] Oh, it was great fun. I remember we used to practice, rehearse and, and everybody was laughing and, and we, we used to eat our Christmas lunch, all of us. The conference room was full, there was so many of us. It's yes, it's happy memories.

[JH]: Well thank you Barbara, thank you for talking to me about your time with WRVS, it will make a really good contribution to our Voices of Volunteering.

[BS]: Well I hope so.

[End of track 01:32:24]

