

## Voices of Volunteering: 75 Years of Citizenship and Service

**Interview Transcript**

**Title Page**

**Ref. No.:** SPAB

**Collection Title:** Voices of Volunteering

**Interviewee's Surname:** Sparks

**Title:** Mrs

**Interviewee's Forenames:** Barbara

**Gender:** F

**Volunteer/Employee Roles and Dates:**

Volunteer 1978-Present (2015)

Clothing Store

Emergency Services

**Date(s) of recording, Tracks (From-To):** 07/07/2015 (Track 1)

**Location of Interview:** Interviewees Home, Somerset

**Location Interview Deposited:** Royal Voluntary Service Archive & Heritage Collection, Devizes Wiltshire

**Name of Interviewer:** Jennifer Anne Hunt

**Type of Recorder:** H4n Zoom/H5 Zoom

**Total no. tracks:** 1

**Mono or Stereo:** Stereo

**Recording Format:** WAV 44.1/16

**Total Duration:** 01:42:15

**Additional Material:** Biography Sheet and Recording Agreement

**Copyright:** Royal Voluntary Service

**Clearance:** Yes

**Interviewer's Notes:**

Barbara Sparks (BS) talks about her time as a WRVS volunteer from 1979-2015 in Somerset and the South West of England. Mentions being involved in the Clothing Store in Taunton and then moving on to be involved in Emergency Services (ES) as a volunteer. BS also comments on being an Area Manager for Emergency Services as an employee. She concludes with her thoughts on Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) current situation and her other memories of ES Exercises.

**[JENNIFER HUNT]: This is Jennifer Hunt with Barbara Sparks on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 2015 at her home in Somerset. Barbara, would you just like to introduce yourself?**

[BARBARA SPARKS]: Hi, my name is Barbara Sparks as you said.

**[JH]: And when did you join WRVS?**

[BS]: Well I joined in 1978; do you want to know why I joined?

**[JH]: Yes please.**

[BS]: I was totally fed up with nappies and baby talk, and I've got three children and we'd decided that I wouldn't go to work, I would stay home with the children while the children were small. But there's only so much nappies that you actually want to cope with. And one night I went along to a talk which was about Emergency Services basically. And I thought 'Well I quite like the sound of this'. So the lady said to me would I like to join an emergency team? 'Yes, I would'. So we formed one in the village and I got heavily involved with that. And then I started to work in the clothing store. You didn't always become members originally, you were helpers, and they decided that perhaps I should become a member but I needed to do these forty duties to become a member so they signed me up for the clothing store. So, Victoria, the one you saw earlier on, she went to play group for three mornings a week and I went into the clothing store in Taunton and thoroughly enjoyed it, absolutely thoroughly enjoyed.

**[JH]: Mm. Who would come into the clothing store?**

[BS]: It, they were sent by Social Services, they had to have a need. And they would be supplied with up to three changes of clothing twice a year so they could come in the summer for summer clothes and then in the winter for their winter stuff. And everything was logged down in a book and, if they came back in between time and tried to swing the lead that they needed more because they hadn't got any, the ladies would go and produce the book and say 'Look, is that your signature? Because on the such and such a date you were given this, this, this, this, this and this, what have you done with it?' 'Ah, I, well it wore out' or well, and that was fair enough, that was fair comment. But if it was just that they'd sold it because they thought they'd get a couple of pennies for it, well no, they didn't get anything else. The ladies were quite strict like that, but you needed to be. And it was quite, quite sad

to see some of the people that came in some days because one lady came in, no names obviously, but she'd, she'd been pregnant and she's got a maternity grant and she'd blown the lot on a pink baby dress because it was something she'd never had when she was a child, and she just loved this dress, and she blew the entire maternity grant and then she had a red headed boy. And poor lady, she came in and she said 'What am I going to do'? And they said 'Don't worry, don't worry, we'll sort you out'. And they gave a complete layette, so she had everything from nappies right the way through to vests and booties and, and, and little rompers, everything that the baby needed for a little boy. And it was so tragic to think that she'd, she'd been so much in need when she was a child that all she wanted was this dress for her child. Really, really sad. And yes, I used to go in there on a regular basis, well three times a week.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Until things changed.

**[JH]: And where was the clothing store?**

[BS]: It was in Taunton, the office was, the County Office was in Canon Street and you, you accessed it from Canon Street. But if you went right the way through there you came to a Portakabin at the back and that's the, the entire Portakabin was the clothing store. And its main access was through a back street, which all the people who got the clothing knew how to get there and they would come through with their letters from Social Services, yes. Some people you, you thought 'Well, why did you do it'? One of my relatives was quite high up in Social Services elsewhere and he said he loved WRVS, absolutely loved WRVS clothing stores because their staff were being asked for money and they knew it wasn't being spent on what it was being asked for whereas they could give them a letter for our clothing store and we would make sure that they actually got what they are supposed to need. And that they could use it that way. He, he couldn't sing their praises high enough, it was great.

**[JH]: Mm. And where did the clothes come from?**

[BS]: They were all donations you put on weight so you sent your small clothes in. You lost weight, you sent your big clothes in. Your children grew out of them so you sent the children's clothes in. Every item was gone through and it was checked to make sure that there was at least six months

wear in it, it wasn't even kept if there wasn't six months wear in it. And then they were checked for cleanliness, and we didn't dry clean them but frequently people took them home and washed and pressed them. And there, there was never a smell in the clothing store in Taunton, there was not even a hint of a smell of old clothing because anything that was unpleasant was got rid of very quickly, and some things were unpleasant that were brought in, but they were disposed of immediately.

[00:05:19]

And the things were folded up and they were segregated into men's; women's; boys; girls and babies. And they were kept on shelves. And there was a different person in charge of each section. It was an entire Portakabin so you, you know, the size of a Portakabin, you can imagine it was quite a big place. And they were run off their feet the three mornings that they were open, completely run off their feet. So it was a much needed facility at the time, Yes.

**[JH]: And after you'd done your forty duties did you stay with the clothing store, or did you...?**

[BS]: Well I, I stayed with the clothing store for a while, but then they asked me if I would take more of a role in Emergency Services. So, 'Yes, certainly', I liked Emergency Services. Well would I become the Deputy County Emergency Services Organiser? 'Yes, love to, absolutely love to'. So I got heavily involved with that, and then, because I was doing so much with that I had to back out of the clothing store things.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: But Yes.

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

[BS]: Absolutely nothing, I had never heard of them. So it was quite interesting that this lady came along, and she was called Pat Bridger, lovely lady. She came along and, and gave this talk, and that was it I was absolutely fired with interest. But we were expected to wear uniform every time we went on a WRVS event, you can't even call it an 'event' when you're turning up at a clothing store, can you but we were expected to wear uniform. And they looked at me and they could see my age

and they looked me up and down a few times and then found out I'd got three children. And the next thing was, they produced, I could have bought a uniform.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Because that's what you had to do, you had to buy your own uniform, but these dear ladies produced a uniform for me because they, they didn't want me to, to, feel I, I couldn't carry on because I didn't have a uniform.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: So when, when it got to be that I was actually signing up to be a member they produced this, this second hand uniform.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: The, how kind of them. And we were expected to wear it all the time then.

**[JH]: Mm. And what did the uniform that you first had look like?**

[BS]: It was a, a short sleeved dress. It was plain green, but with short sleeves.

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

[BS]: And there was a cardigan that could go with it, yes.

**[JH]: And what, apart from the clothing, or as well as the clothing store, what are your earliest memories of volunteering with WRVS?**

[BS]: Oh, let me think. There was an exercise, I, I should think actually the first real thing that I did for WRVS was an exercise and it was called, [Laughing] they called it 'The Nuclear Stew'. And it was at Norton Manor in, in part of the old camp, and we were to cook this stew. The government were quite keen to work out whether the, the nation could survive on what they thought would be available in the aftermath of a nuclear war. And they decided, 'they' being, I don't know who it was,

but 'they' decided that what it would be would be beef, because the cows could have been brought in, and kibbled barley. Now I'd never heard of kibbled barley, I don't know whether you have. But apparently it's, it's rolled in a certain way, and this was what it was supposed to be. We weren't supplying any of the ingredients, they would all be supplied for us. But we had a little chat and we didn't like the sound of this meat. We weren't going to be allowed to put any seasoning in, so no herbs, no stock cubes, no salt, no pepper, and it sounded disgusting to, to most of the women who cooked on a regular basis for their families. So we decided that what we would do we would provide a really wholesome pudding. And we had a red handbook and in it was the WRVS boiled pudding so we made up this pudding. And the pudding was, was enough pudding for everybody, it was cooked in, in, one side of the, the, the site, and the other we had this, this stew which was cooked in Soyer boilers. I don't know if you've ever come across Soyer boilers, but they're like great big dustbins.

**[JH]: Yes. We've got one in the archive.**

[BS]: [Laughing] Oh great, but so heavy. Well, [Laughing] it holds ten gallons of, of liquid, and in actual fact it would bring ten gallons of water to the boil quicker than an electric, an electric or a gas one would bring two and a half gallons of water to the boil. You would, you, you've got to stoke it properly obviously, because you fuelled it with, with either coal or wood and just kept stoking it regularly. But we, we were given these things and we had to make this stew. So there were the thing, and the, I can remember standing, I, actually there's a photograph of me kicking round somewhere of me stirring this great big Soyer boiler with a wooden, it looked like an oar.

[00:10:15]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: A wooden paddle thing, stirring it all round. But whoever supplied us with the ingredients, and it wasn't WRVS, made a great mistake. Instead of getting kibbled barley, which is what they should have got, they got barley meal and it sank to the bottom of these Soyer boilers and it turned into porridge. So we had to hoik it all out and sieve every bit so that we could water it down and make it more useable.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: We did eventually manage, and they did get their meal at about the right time but oh my goodness me what a palaver. And can you imagine what that stew tasted like? It was disgusting because there was no seasoning in it. And they had to eat some of it before they were allowed to put any salt on it. So after a while, and you'd see their faces screwing up. They came back for the salt and the pepper and then, then they were allowed to have it. And, I don't think anybody cleared their bowl. The bowls were blue bowls and they were half a pint, and that was considered to be the starvation diet for anybody and that's, that's what was needed to keep somebody alive for, for twenty four-hours, until the next day. So that would be, if they had got anything of their own hey, hey but this is what they were going to get as a mid-day meal was this blue bowl of stuff. And after they'd had that they could have their pudding. And we'd made custard as well, but we, we cheated on the custard. The, the part of the camp where we were had got a, a little gas supply, electric supply and we'd plugged in little cookers and we'd made custard in there. We did everything else outside on the boilers, in the boilers but not, not the custard, we made that indoors.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And the, the puddings went down very well indeed, and every bit of pudding went. That was our 'nuclear stew'.

**[JH]: And then was that part of the training that you received to be in the Emergency Services team?**

[BS]: We'd had, we'd had our training.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Sorry, I didn't cover the training, we'd had to do our basic training, which was ten sessions of two hours a time. And they went round people's houses doing it. I remember one, one session we had in, in here.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And the, the whole team got together and they had the training and, and qualified instructors came along and did the training. And it covered many, many topics. Cooking, outdoor cooking was

one of them and the, the care and uses of Soyer boilers was included in it. So that was, the training came first, then came the exercise.

**[JH]: Yes. So there was a lot of practical training?**

[BS]: Oh yes.

**[JH]: At that time?**

[BS]: Yes, Yes, very much so, Yes. Working on the theory that, that you needed, you needed to know how to do it and then you needed to have tried it to make sure that you knew how to do it.

**[JH]: And did you do any other exercises?**

[BS]: Many.

**[JH]: Do you want...?**

[BS]: Yes. My little crib sheet has got a list of...

**[JH]: Okay.**

[BS]: Just some that I thought of as I was going along. Mm, yes, when it was Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother's birthday, it was her eightieth birthday. We decided that, we were asked, every county was asked to do something special for The Queen Mother's birthday and in Somerset we decided that what we would do would be some children's holiday activities.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And we decided to do little barbecues for them. So we built trench cookers and we cooked sausages and chicken legs and things like that and all the children's holiday children came along with their hostesses and they had a whale of a time at the party, yes. So, yes, so there was those sort of things. [Pause] Oh I've got other things in here then.



**[JH]: Mm. Did you get involved with sort of The Taunton and Wellington Carnival?**

[BS]: Yes, we did.

**[JH]: And things like that?**

[BS]: Sorry, [Laughing] you've got that down on your list have you?

**[JH]: I went, I went through our narrative reports and...**

[BS]: Yes, [Laughing]

**[JH]: List, listing different things that went...**

[BS]: Yes.

**[JH]: Went on. I've got the St. Mary's Hospital Fete.**

[BS]: Yes.

**[JH]: Mm...**

[BS]: The St. Mary's Hospice Fete.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Yes.

**[JH]: RSPCA Open Day.**

[BS]: Yes. We did those.

**[JH]: Five Districts Carol Services?**

[BS]: Yes, we did those every Christmas, one in each district. We went round with them.

**[JH]: And were they for WRVS?**

[BS]: They were WRVS members organising them, but it was the Old People's Clubs.

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

[BS]: And the, the Old People's Clubs would arrive in buses, that's an awful term these days isn't it - 'Old People's Clubs' - but that's what they were called then.

**[JH]: Sort of the Evergreens and the Darby and Joans?**

[00:15:00]

[BS]: Yes, those are those.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: They, they, they turned up on their on, on, in their buses, there was one in each district so it was the clubs from that district came.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: They didn't go all round the county. And, and so you got different people there every time, but the county staff went to most of them.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: That they, they possibly could. And it was, it was nice and it, one year we were at the Salvation Army Church and part way through the first hymn, the first carol, the minister stopped us all. And he said 'This is no good', he said 'I've got a, a room full of people here and I can barely hear you, you've got to sing out, you're not loud enough'. [Laughing] So one person said 'Oh the reason that we're not loud enough is you're playing the notes too high', [Laughing] 'you need to go down an octave

and we might manage it'. And the, the, the, the minister looked and as much as to say 'Well no-ones ever said that before'. So he said to the pianist 'Can you bring it down a bit'? 'Yes'. So they brought it down an octave and everybody joined in and, and that was, that was great.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: So, yes, we did that. And then there was a big tea afterwards.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And when it was the, it must have been the Golden Jubilee of, of WRVS.

**[JH]: Oh, so '88?**

[BS]: We had a, a big function in Wells Cathedral, that was for members. And we had four marquee and, on the Bishop's lawn. And four districts, it was the five districts in, in Somerset, but four of the districts had a marquee each and they had to do the food for everybody else, and everybody had a ticket and you went into the right booths, into the right tent. And the other district organised the carol service and, and the stewarding and everything else, and they cleared up. It was Mendip did all the clearing up because Wells Cathedral was in their area. So, yes, we, we did things like that. The Hospice Fete, we, we went along and helped at the hospice. They were all events where WRVS was getting their face to the fore.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Because we all wore tabards.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: If we didn't wear uniforms to them. And you'd have a little notice, little board that...

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: 'A' board there with the name of WRVS to the fore.

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

[BS]: And frequently we also had panels up there saying what vacancies we had..

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And would they like to help. And then there was the Bath and West.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: There was the Bath and West, a show.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: We went on, we used to do the crèches, loads and loads of crèche facilities. And it used to take us all the Tuesday to set up Bath and West show. And then the children would arrive on the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and it used to take us most of Sunday to clear up afterwards. And to start off with we didn't, we didn't have posh toys we borrowed them from local nurseries.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: So we had theirs and it was very kind of them and we would give them a little donation for letting us use them. But then Little Tykes came on board and they would arrive with a lorry full of beautiful Little Tykes, I'm very, very sent on little toy stores.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: I, we bought loads for our grandchildren as presents. Really, really like them.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: They're so colourful, and the children would come in and it looked bright and appealing. And we'd have a nursery where, if you didn't want to go into the crèche you didn't have to you could just go into the changing room and change a nappy and, and feed your baby in there. Either breast feed the baby...

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Yourself. Or you could feed a baby with a bottle.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Or, or jars of food, whatever you wanted to do. So, yes that, that went on for four days and of course, we got a donation for that. And we used to do the information booths there. So, four districts used to do the crèche, one, one district a day. And the fifth district used to do the information booths, that was Mendip because it was their area, it worked out better that way, they had more information than we did. So, yes, we did that on a regular basis. And then the police had crèche facilities, lost children facilities, not crèche, lost children facilities after the... Big in carnivals in Somerset. So they'd have the carnival but they wanted a lost children facility where they could just go and dump any child they found, and we would usually set up at the police station. And the, the police would bring in the, the lost child and leave the child with us and then go off again and look for any more, mm.

**[JH]: And did that change, what, the amount of events you used to do in carnivals and shows, did that change over the years.**

[BS]: Yes, it did, it, it did, yes.

**[JH]: Did you start doing them less and less and then eventually stop? And did you also get involved in things like the Pilton Pop Festival and...?**

[00:20:00]

[BS]: Oh yes. This is Glastonbury, [Laughing] oh yes. We, we, the, the first one we got involved with, oh dear me, my children were quite small then. It was, oh, in the early '80s. And the, the music

lovers had gone on and left behind were, they were termed as hippies but I don't know what they were, they were travellers of some description and the police couldn't get them off the site. And, in the meantime, no, I can't think what it was. Not typhoid, what's the other one?

**[JH]: Dis, dysen...?**

[BS]: Dysentery, thank you. Dysentery broke out on the, on the campsite. So the policemen were coming in after perhaps handling somebody who had dysentery and they were coming into the feeding point, which was at Pilton, at the school at Pilton, and they weren't, it was a, well it's still, yes, they were, they weren't washing hands and then they were going and getting food. And our ladies were getting a bit miffed about this because they said 'Those men are going to go down with a bug and we're going to get the blame..'

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: 'Because we're the one that's been feeding them'. So they said, they, they rang me on my mobile and said 'Are you anywhere near'? I said 'Well I am but I'm not, it's not a WRVS, you know, I'm not WRVS'ing I'm doing something privately, I've got my three children in the car'. 'Well could you just call in'? 'Yes, okay, I'll call in'. So I went to the, the school, I said to the, to the children 'Look, stay in the car you've got things to play with'.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: 'You've got sweets, you've got biscuits, you've got drinks, stay in the car, keep the doors locked, Mummy won't be very long'. And they, I put them so that they could be, actually seen from, from where I was going to be and the ladies were waving to them anyway, because the ladies knew them. And I looked up and my two youngest were missing. So I thought 'Ah, right'. So I legged it out, as you can imagine, and oh yes oh my, my two youngest had been seen by ladies that they knew and had said 'Will you come and help us please'? And they'd, they'd taken them to the front door of the, of this centre and they'd, they'd got them standing there, they were, obviously WRVS ladies were with them, and as a policeman came in if they went towards the cloakrooms, that was fine, the kids didn't speak to them but if they went in the opposite direction they were asked to say to these policemen 'Have you washed your handies?' Well, I mean my children were small, we're, we're talking quite young here. But they loved it, the policemen absolutely adored it. And, and they were holding their

hands out to be seen by the children. And 'Go', and they were pointing to the loos and the men, the men would trundle on down, they absolutely adored it. I couldn't get my kids back in that car [Laughing] fast enough. But, because my children were well known to, to members anyway from other things that, that was, that was great fun they thought. So, yes we did that. But then after that, the years went on, and one, one year I was here and it was torrential rain, absolutely torrential rain. And a call from Emergency Planning, 'There's a danger of hypothermia up at the camp'. They did they don't know what to do, they, they've really got problems up there, can we help, they needed clothing. Well the main clothing store was a Taunton one.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: So I said 'Well fine, Richard can drive my car. I'll come with the Emergency Planner. We'll go and pick up the clothing and then we'll go on up there. Richard follow me', and Jim was the Emergency Planner, 'follow us up there, and that will be fine'. And one of the kids, my kids joined WRVS as soon as they could, absolutely as soon as they could so they, they've been members for a long time. And whichever child it was that was here, she said alright she'd come and help as well, fine, okay. So we went into Taunton and we crammed both cars absolutely full of, of clothing, and then we drove on up. We got to the site. It was tipping it down. And the police said 'Oh, yes, yes, come on, you come in through this way'. And I said I was with the Emergency Planner. And the police took us up this sheer field, it was a really steep field of grass. The Emergency Planner went to follow, Richard didn't, he hovered, he hung back. But the Emergency Planner went up to follow, sorry I use my arms a lot, and about half way up we slid all the way back down again. [Laughing] And Richard and Victoria, it was Victoria, went straight on and they, they didn't go up that, that slope. And we went on and we, we found out what we could do, it really was a need of, of towels.

[00:25:15]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: We had towels with us, dried them off and getting them warm and giving them warm drinks. There was plenty of food on the site, they didn't want food, they just needed to be given some hot drinks and some dry clothing which, which we did. So yes, oh dear me. And one of the members, a dear man, Dennis Edwards, lovely man, he has a photograph of this sea of people and he would point at somebody in the middle and say 'That's me'. [Laughing] How the hell he thought that,

[Laughing] but he knew that was him. 'Fine Dennis, you carry on, that's you'. [Laughing] So, yes. And then another time the police said to me they, I, I knew, well I'd, I'd worked with these policemen for a long time by now. And they said to me 'We've got a legal rave, we think that it will be a good idea if you came on, but don't come on your own, bring somebody with you'. 'Well who do you want me to bring - Richard?' 'Yes, bring Richard'. I said 'Ah, I've got Victoria at home'. 'No problem, bring Victoria, won't, won't be a problem. It's a legal rave but we just want you to get the idea of what it would be like if it was an illegal rave and we want you to just come and feed us because we don't want to ask you to do something, you think it's okay and say "Yes" and then when, when your people get there you find that really you didn't think that you, you wanted to send them. We'd rather discuss the, the issues in advance'. 'Yes, fair enough'. Anyway we got there and we were, the noise it was horrendous, it was up near the, it was up on top of the Mendips. The noise was absolutely, totally horrendous. It was so loud, of flashing lights. And we were, we were taken into this police compound, locked into this police compound and we were, we were standing there talking to them and we were by a radio and we could hear these announcements being made, [Laughing] it's how the other half lives really isn't it? And Victoria kept taking steps closer and closer to me and the policeman kept coming in with these holdalls. I thought 'What's in those holdalls'? And they kept putting them down and going out with another empty holdall, naive weren't we?

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And the, the police said 'Don't you know what's in them?' 'No, I haven't got a clue'. They were absolutely full of drugs.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Illegal drugs. And Victoria's mouth was getting wider and wider and, wow, wow! And then unfortunately came the tragic news that there had been an accident on site, somebody had been stabbed. Richard by this, Victoria by this time was, was actually glued to me.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: With superglue. And the, the, we heard the ambulance arrive and went away pretty quickly and then we heard that tragically the person had died and so the police were there arresting people. And Victoria said 'Oh, I'd love to go to the loo mummy'. So the policeman said 'It's not a problem, it's'



der, der, der. And she looked at me and she looked at him and she said 'I'll cross my legs'. And I was like, 'Yes I think so', so we left soon after that.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Because, if, if somebody wants to go to the loo they want to go to the loo.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And that's it isn't it? And you, you, so we actually left but she was, she was like a limpet between me and Richard back to the car.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And I thought 'If that's her attitude...'

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: 'I can't possibly ask any volunteer to go to any sort of rave'. So I think the police were, the police were right I needed to go along because I, in my middle class ignorance I might have thought 'Yes, okay, you're asking us to do it, I'll see, I'll see what the, the members say'. But then I could say 'No, absolutely no, there's no way I would ask any of our volunteers to even consider it. So, yes. But Victoria, well she was at sixth form college by this time, she was the only one in the entire college that had been to a rave. Oh deary me! She didn't tell anybody she was between her mother and father like a limpet [Laughing] all the time, [Laughing] But it's done the, my children the power of good.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Because not once have any of them wanted to go to the Glastonbury, to the, the, the music festival. Never wanted to go to a rave.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: It's, WRVS has really served my children well. [Laughing] With the, with, there was another one I was trying to think of, I thought of it part way through that. We were called to, it was, it was the lack of loo thing, we were, we were asked to take part in an exercise, are you alright for time?

**[JH]: Yes, only, I've, I've in fact come from, over from Devises, it's not that far.**

[00:30:00]

[BS]: Oh yes, yes. Would we take part in an exercise up on - oh where would it be? Up on the, up on Exmoor somewhere. And there would be army cadets out supposed to be lost on the moors and then there would be everybody out, Search and Rescue out, looking for them. There were helicopters, there, there, there were, helicopters in the plural up there searching for them. On every vantage point there was somebody with binoculars looking for people. And we, we got up there and we set a feeding point and we gave them breakfast and we had hot drinks going all the time. Because the, the searchers would come back and they were freezing cold and, and we, we would do that and that was fine. And then one lady said 'Where are the loos'? And the policeman said to me 'Well there aren't any'. 'Well what are we supposed to do'? He said 'Well the men are using the hedges, they've, they'll go as...' 'Come on, how can, how can women do that? Women aren't going to go and do that'. He said 'Well can't you sort of make a little group around them and so that, sort of five or six of you stand on the outside and a woman...'? You know, 'Get real, what'?

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: What do you know, well that's, they had a little think about that one. And said 'Ah'. 'Oh well', they said 'if you were desperate enough you'd find somewhere'. 'You'll, you'll still be on every vantage point, wherever the woman went she'd be seen and it's, it's not like a man who can lean into a hedge, is it'? So eventually Richard had arrived and he said 'Right, never a problem', ferried them, there was a loo a couple of miles away and he, he then ferried people down to the loos in the car. But I did say at the debrief afterwards 'Did you never thought that we would have needed loos'? 'Well, no we haven't, because if we put up portaloos for you somebody would have had to wash them out afterwards'. [Laughing] 'Yes, but you're not going to get us to do it again [Laughing] unless you provide loos another time because that will be one of the first questions I ask the next time', and that was that.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: [Laughing] But that was great, it was, it was a wonderful exercise. I mean, oh I can't remember what team was, was there, but I know Richard was there and, and Anne Marie was there, my oldest daughter was there. And they kept winding her up, and they said 'Oh, we're going to put you up in a helicopter in a moment to deliver refreshments, take a pump pot out'. And, and I had to go up to them and say 'Look you can't, she, she's, she's not my age, she doesn't realise that you're joking'.

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

[BS]: 'You, you can't say that to a teenager and, and not expect some ructions later'. And he just laughed and walked away. And a bit later on he came up to me and poked me and said 'You, get her, come my way, now'. So I grabbed her hand and ran over, 'Where are we going mum', 'I've no idea'. Off we went, there was the helicopter, and he said 'For you', and they pushed her up into the helicopter.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: They said 'And you', pushed me up as well, [Laughing] 'you're not escaping'. And we went out, and they took us out all over the bay.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And came right, oh, it was a lovely view, and it, it was wonderful. And of course, then she could go to college and say to, to, to the teenagers there 'This is wonderful, you want to join WRVS, you'd be surprised what we get up to'. And we did actually do some training in the sixth form colleges.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: So that, and that was good, that went down well, yes. So that was good. But we, we've done so many things.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: It's difficult to remember over the years what you've done and, and I don't have the reports.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: If you can remind me of another one. [Laughing]

**[JH]: Mm. I've got here the, doing transport for disabled children in the late '80s/early '90s?**

[BS]: I wasn't involved with that.

**[JH]: Yes. And the Westland Grand Charity Ball?**

[BS]: Oh that was wonderful, oh that was absolutely wonderful. Could we go down, they wanted us in old uniform.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And it was, oh, what was he called? Glenn Miller, I mean obviously it wasn't Glenn Miller but it was a, a Glenn Miller type band. It was, it was the ones who had taken over The Glenn Miller Band and, and the generations that went on from that, they were there playing so everybody was dressed up in, in army uniforms from the war. And the, the decoration when we got there was all that, but they wanted, they wanted soup. They wanted a soup kitchen basically, so we went on down there and we, we, gallons and gallons of soup, but we were all dressed in, in old uniform as well, that, that was wonderful fun, that, you know, the Westland's Helicopter factory. Yes. It was, it was the atmosphere I think.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: That, that you got in there and, and everybody was, was, I don't know, just so, so enjoying the old music and...

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: The old style of dancing. And they really appreciated this, this soup that we took in.

[00:35:02]

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

[BS]: [Laughing]

**[JH]: Yes, they've got that you had two cast members from *Allo Allo*?**

[BS]: Yes, they did.

**[JH]: Wow!**

[BS]: It was the two English pilots.

**[JH]: Oh.**

[BS]: They, they had them in there. Yes, that was who it was, and they, they went round and spoke to everybody and they, and in, in role, they were in role as they came round and spoke to everybody. And they came up and got their soup and everything. Yes, yes, that's right, yes. Oh dear me, that was a long time ago wasn't it? But tell you what though, with the Falklands, this is not an exercise, this was real.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: The Falklands we collected books and magazines to go over. And the, the army they, they said that they would use it as packing. So if we could get it down to Yeovilton Air Base, instead of using ordinary packing with the stuff they would shove these magazines and paper, had to be paperbacks, not hardbacks, they would push them in round. Because if they were, if the soldiers were in a fox hole and it was muddy and horrible and all of a sudden a fight broke out they could just ditch that and carry on. Whereas if it was a library book they would have to return it in pristine condition or get fined. So they were grateful for anything we took down. And we, we took down quite a lot to Yeovilton.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: At, at a County meeting when we were discussing it with County Organisers and Managers Meeting, one of the Organisers, District Organisers said that she'd been to pick up some of these magazines and they were totally unsuitable for troops, absolutely total, they were from the top shelf! Totally unsuitable for troops. So she'd refused to take those and she wouldn't pick up any others if they had anything like that in it. She wasn't, she wasn't having her ladies sorting through these things in their office and coming across this sort of book. So I rang up the, the, and the, strangely enough, the, the people who were giving us these brand new magazines weren't prepared to segregate them, we either had the lot or we didn't have any, they'd find another outlet for them. And she refused to go and collect them anymore. So I rang up the, the men and, and the people, and I said 'Look, I'm a different person, I am quite prepared to pick them up and I am quite prepared to take them all because I am sure that they are just the ones that the troops want'. So 'It's too late, sorry', in actual fact it was Richard's cousin that answered the phone, she worked for them, I hadn't realised that, and she said 'you're too late', she said 'I thought that we would pick them up' she said 'but you're too late, they've gone to somebody else now'. Which I thought was a great shame.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: I'm quite narrow minded actually anyway but one trip at Yeovilton while I was sort of packing all these, these, these things that we had got, all packed up for them, they, they didn't want them in parcels which is what the, the ones for the, the troops went over in normally, they went in small packages down to Norton Manor Camp down here and they were shipped out in a regular basis. They didn't want them like that, they wanted them in great bundles so they could open the bundles and take out as many as they needed for packing that bit of equipment, and then as many for the next pack of equipment. So I took them on down, and I mean I had Susanna with me that day, I do have three children. And we were unpacking them all, and that was, that was fine. And I was, I was laughing and joking with one of the, the people down at Yeovilton Air Base, and I, I said 'You'll never guess', and I told him the story. I would think he has dined out in messes all over this country since that, he could not stop laughing, the fact that they thought that we preferred *Reader's Digest* to go to them instead of...

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: [Laughing] Oh dear me. [Laughing]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: [Laughing] So it, it, people are different aren't they?

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: People are, are so different.

**[JH]: And what emergencies have you attended over the years?**

[BS]: Have I attended? There was many. I was involved at Boscastle.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: But I was on the telephone doing all the...

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Arranging like that. Angela Currie actually went to Boscastle because I was the manager but she was at home, I think she was at home, and I needed a Rest Centre manager down there. If I'd got in my car to drive down there I would have been out of contact for too long so I said would she go and manage, so she did. And that was, that was great, absolutely fantastic. So there was Boscastle. And then there was Penhallow, the fire at Penhallow at the hotel there. We had three points on the go there. We had, we were feeding the firemen at the, at the, at the hotel as they were trying to put out the fire. We had an, [Pause] Survivor Reception Centre where people who were at the hotel who were taken out of the hotel, were not injured, could be put, but they were kept from the general public. And then we had an Evacuee Centre where people from surrounding hotels couldn't get back to their hotels and they were there. Eventually we could shut one of them and we just kept the other two going, so there was that one. Again, I was on the telephone here because it was, it's a long way down to Cornwall from...

[00:40:29]

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: From Bishops Lydeard, so I did that. There was a fire at Bradford on Tone, it was, it was a train, it was, it was, it was blocking the crossing, and I, I think it was a police car was cut off. It was quite a, a, considering that there, there were not many fatalities, it was not the horrendous thing it could have been if the fire had happened a couple of minutes earlier or later when they would have been in the centre of Bridgewater or the centre of Taunton, it was in the middle of nowhere. And we got people to go and do that and, there were two points there, Richard was one side, he's very useful is Richard.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Richard was one side with, with cold drinks and the other side we had people with hot drinks and food. And that, that worked out very well indeed. So there's, that was the Bradford on Tone fire. Victoria is desperate for me to tell you that we've done so many things with the Fire Brigade where my kids have come along and called me 'Mum'.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: That at one, one watch in the Taunton area, actually called me 'Mum', or called, they'll all be gone now. [Laughing]

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: But they called me 'Mum'. So whenever I turned up, 'Hello mum, what are you doing mum'? [Laughing] Thank you very much, I really want somebody my age calling me 'Mum'.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: [Laughing] But, yes. [Laughing] Ah, the Fire Brigade are very keen of their nicknames aren't they?



**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Mm. The St. Paul's Riots. We were feeding at St. Agnes Church I think we were, feed, feeding the, the police there. And that's not my story, so I don't think I can tell you. Can you strangle it again?

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: My, it was easier if you, you do the food in a, in a convoy.

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

[BS]: So one was putting the butter on the bread and the next one was putting the filling in, the next one was cutting up, the next one was bagging it. Made it much easier that way.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And so Pat was slapping the butter on the bread and the lady next to her who was going to put in the fillers, 'It's no good, I can't, I've had enough, I can't cope with this any longer'. I said 'What's wrong'? She said 'You're buttering the bread on the wrong side'. I said, 'What do you mean? I've got the loaf in front of me, I'm going like that'. [Laughing] She said 'Yes', she said 'they're not matching when I get them'. Well I can assure you that policemen and firemen don't care which way, [Laughing] in fact they're not bothered if the bread's buttered, they just want something to eat there and then. [Laughing] Oh yes, this, this volunteer was buttering the bread. And, [Laughing] and I've used that story many, many times in training because it just illuminates the point that...

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: There should be flexibility in what you do. [Laughing]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: [Laughing] Yes, oh dear me. What else have we done? Have you got any more down there that you can remind me?

**[JH]: Mm. I haven't.**

[BS]: You haven't? Oh. Oh the ODA, do you know about the ODA. Angela will have known you all about the ODA.

**[JH]: I think so but you can remind me.**

[BS]: Oh, it was the Overseas Disaster Agency.

**[JH]: Yes, both Angela and Pat Gill mentioned...**

[BS]: Yes, yes.

**[JH]: That.**

[BS]: Yes. There's a lovely photograph in WRVS Archive of me and Angela walking down, [Laughing] walking down a bank with the Welch Fusiliers we were.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Walking down this bank after we'd been camping, we were given a poncho each. Everybody, all, all the volunteers were given a poncho, and it was up to us to choose how we wanted to sleep that night, but we only had one poncho and it was November I think it was. But it was in the, it was in Wales in the Highland up in the north of Wales. It, oh dear, near, near Towyn, overlooking there it was. Bodelwyddan, that was the name of the place. Oh dear me, a bit remote. And we were given either, I think I bunked down with, did I bunk down with Angela? I can't think who I bunked down now with. But, oh dear it was a bit... You used one poncho to go underneath you and another one over the top. But if they've been talking about it I won't, I won't bother.

[00:45:04]

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

[BS]: Many times have we been to Easingwold.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Because the, it was considered that was part of your training, you were sent on all these courses to Easingwold. But you, you left the house, your own house wearing full uniform so you had to borrow blouses because nobody had five blouses, because sometimes you were away a week.

[Laughing] Nobody had that many blouses.

**[JH]: Was that the red blouse?**

[BS]: No, no.

**[JH]: Or was it the check blouse?**

[BS]: No, it was the check blouse by this time.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: It was the check blouse, Yes, oh dear me. Yes. The uniforms weren't cheap.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And you had to pay for them yourself.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: But, certainly in this area, you were expected to wear one wherever you went. And you were not allowed to go to Easingwold unless you had a uniform.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And, as I said, full uniform. You arrived in uniform and you left in uniform, and you had to wear it all the time you were there. In the evening you could wear differently.

**[JH]: Yes. And Easingwold was part of the, it was the Home Office wasn't it?**

[BS]: Yes. It was the Emergency Planning College in Yorkshire, just north of York, yes. So I've been up there to quite a few courses. And there, they've, they've got a library up there. So one day I, I'd finished what I was doing and I went into the library and had a look round, and they'd got some WRVS, WVS film there. Have you seen it?

**[JH]: Don't think so.**

[BS]: I would suggest...

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: That you try and get hold of it because one of them is, way back, it must, it was WVS, it had to be. And it was about a rest centre, I would think in the Bath area. And it is well worth, if the archive hasn't got one I have a poor copy of it, but I do have a copy of it, and they're welcome to copy my copy but I want to hang on to it because it's, it's interesting.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And it, it's, when you've been a member of WRVS for so long it becomes actually part of you.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And it, it's very difficult then to part with things. But certainly if archive hasn't got that one, if they approach Easingwold they might get a better copy than I've got, otherwise I'm quite happy to lend mine to be copied as long as I can have mine back. But, yes, oh dear me. There's, there's, there was an exercise in, in Devon, on the south coast of Devon and it was a, a boat that had been sunk and, supposedly, and they were rescuing people. And there's this picture of a lovely WRVS volunteer as the people are coming off the boat. Devon had a, a system of, of, of stickers, before you'd been registered you had one colour sticker, after you'd been registered you had another colour sticker. And this lovely volunteer, and she's slapping the stickers, [Laughing] really slapping the stickers on, [Laughing] And we showed her the film and she was horrified, she hadn't realised that she was

actually [Laughing] doing it so 'energetically'. So that helped, the fact that she could see it on a film because then she put them on more gently after that. [Laughing] At least it was only an exercise.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Oh dear me. I'll have another look at my crib sheet again.

**[JH]: Yes. Did you have quite a lot of volunteers in Emergency Services?**

[BS]: Hundreds, absolutely hundreds of them. Yes, oh yes. Oh yes. One team in Frome, which is a town in, in Mendip, just that one town had a team of seventy-six volunteers, just, just the one.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: The one team was seventy-six volunteers. It was a large team but that's what it, that's what it was. Oh yes, we used to collect the children for the children's holidays, you know about the children's holidays do you?

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Yes.

**[JH]: So would you take, collect them and take them to...**

[BS]: To the office; they went to the office and then from the office they went on, usually with someone else, but not always.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Because it depend where the person was that collected them.

**[JH]: Mm. So was it The Hostess Holiday, Children's Holidays?**

[BS]: Yes.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: The Hostess Children's Holidays. So they would be brought in to, to the office.

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

[BS]: And then who was taking them on would then give them a drink and a biscuit and then take them on to where they were going. And sometimes they had to provide them with clothing before they could go on, because they would just come with a little carrier bag with very little in it.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: So we would have, if, if they came into the office we had access to the clothing store.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: So you would come in and, and had clothing. So yes, poor things, some of them. One boy, he was sent home quite quickly because the hostess had a, a pond full of Koi Carp, and he thought it, this little boy got up very early in the morning and was fishing, but he fished all the Koi Carp out. [Laughing] Oh dear, [Laughing] what can you say? But oh dear me, yes. They, they, [Laughing] so there were the children's holidays. But one girl didn't want to go there she wanted to go to a Guide camp.

[00:50:12]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: She'd been to a Guide camp before and thought it was, so they thought 'Oh well Barbara, Guide Guider, Girl, Brownie Guider...'

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: 'Bound, bound to know somebody'. So, fine, Barbara would find, yes, no problem at all, the local Guide Company were happy to take her. So I picked her up from the office, because then it was everybody knew me and that was fine and I could go on down, and I think one of my kids stayed with her so that she just knew people there and she wasn't there on her own. So, so, so yes, yes, 'I know your mummy, I know your mummy', so that, that was fine. And then we brought, took her home again. Yes, dear me. One boy who had joined the young team that we, we, the, the training that we did at Richard Huish College, he wanted to do the Emergency Services training because he'd been a holiday child and he so admired what the volunteers had been doing that he wanted to join the Emergency Team, so he did. That was good, that was good, yes. But things change don't they?

**[JH]: And when you were called to say there was an emergency and WRVS were needed.**

[BS]: Mm.

**[JH]: What would, then would happen?**

[BS]: Right. You'd be called any time of the day or night. We didn't have the mobile phones so they would have a list of people they could call. I actually got a mobile phone because Richard didn't like me out in the middle of nowhere without communication, so I did have one, but it was mine. And, and that was, I was the first one in the County Office to have a mobile phone. And so yes I, I had my mobile phone. But they would ring and it could be any time, day or night. You would answer it, always had a phone by the bed, always had the contact list there. And then you would just start ringing, you, you would see if it was the sort of thing that WRVS should be responding to, because they weren't all. And then you would work down, where, where it was and the nearest team, and you would call the nearest team first. You, you would call the District Emergency Services Organiser to call the local team, that was the original thing. And, and, but, I mean with, with, when I joined women didn't tend to work, they tended to stay home. Things changed in the '80s, and then we found that we weren't getting the, the people. People who stayed home with their children were then termed as being 'Yummy mummy's', whereas they were never termed as that before. You were termed as being, 'Oh, you, you work'? And it changed from 'You work?' to 'you don't work'? And it was just this fine line from where you were a bad mother if you worked to when you were a, a lazy person if you didn't. Not, not easy is it, when you're in your...

**[JH]: No.**

[BS]: There's that, that very fine line. But, so when we found it was less easy to get volunteers perhaps we would contact the team leader direct, because some people just didn't have the time to take on the responsibility of being a District Emergency Services Organiser so the team member would then call their team. And if they got somebody they would then ring back to say 'Right, we've got a team, it's so and so, so and so, so and so, so and so, so and so', and they're off. And they've got all their equipment, they're, they're all up and running. They've got the food from wherever, or they were going to get the food from wherever, and off they go. And then they would keep an eye on them, they would, they would make sure, they would get the police or whoever had called them to ring through to make sure that everything was alright, or whether it was going to be long, long duration and they would need another team going in. We have lost members where you have turned up for an emergency to find that the team that's there is just going home because the emergency's over. People don't like getting out of bed at three o'clock in the morning if that's happening. They don't mind if it's an emergency, but they do mind if it's a fool's errand.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: So you had to make sure that the, the team was actually required before we sent a relief team. We sent them every four hours all, always aimed for four hours. It sometimes ended up as five because it could finish within five hours, so what's the point in sending somebody for that last windy up bit?

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: So it might be five hours, but they would go. But they had to keep in contact with whoever had called them out. And we needed to know that they'd gone so that we knew that they were there. If they didn't arrive we knew we needed to send police to look for them because something had gone wrong. So that, that, that's the way that we played it.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And then we would send them every four hours until we were told the emergency was over. Yes.



[00:55:03]

Yes, it's, it's, we were on, one, one exercise that we were on, it was supposed to have been a motorway incident and a car had fallen off a, the, the bridge onto the road below and all this, that and the other. And it was tipping it down, and the only place that we could actually get any shelter was standing under the bridge, otherwise, and it was pitch black. And the fire brigade said 'We can't let you have a light', because they, they usually let us have a light, 'we can't let you have a light. We actually need the light, we can't let you have it'. 'Well how are we going to know if we've got enough stuff in the cups?' So you had to put the coffee on the spoon and level it off with your finger.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And then put it in. And you had to put your thumb in the cup, just the, the top of your thumb in the cup so that when the liquid came up to your thumb you knew you'd actually done it, and that was the only way you could do it. So you had, yes, you had to keep your hands clean, because you were putting your finger [Laughing] in the... Mind you they, they were not bothered, they just wanted their drinks, they would have put up with your thumb in the cup anyway.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: But it was the only way you could do it. [Laughing] Tea bags were a good invention.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Yes, but the, the insulated containers, we had thermat urns, [ph 00:56:14] which you don't put on the gas, although somebody did once and it blew up, but that is not a good idea. They are like a big, a big thermos flask and you heated them up with boiling water, you didn't have to fill them up, you just had to put a kettle full of boiling water into them, put the lid on and let them get hot while you boiled up all the water for the, for the thing itself. Then you'd tip that away, the container inside you'd put the tea in it, and, because we knew exactly how many tea bags made up that particular therma urn, [00:56:51] put the water in, stand it for as long as you had to, shush it a bit, give it another minute, then throw the tea bags away otherwise it's stewed. And that would stay reasonable for four hours so you had plenty of time actually to make it in the office or at home and take it to the event and, and to feed the firemen with it, police, whoever it was that called you. Mm.

**[JH]: And how did you feel when you went out on an emergency?**

[BS]: The trepidation, what you were going to find. The adrenaline kicked in so you were on a high.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: But you, you never knew what you were going to find when you got there so there was a little bit of, of, not angst, I suppose, but a little bit of trepidation there. But you were on a high because, it was the adrenaline was pumping through. Even, even at three o'clock in the morning it, it still was like that, and it was surprising. Some volunteers you had to almost put their arm up their back to make them go home because they didn't want to leave.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And it was important for them to go home.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Because then you could call them the next day if you needed them, you couldn't do that if they hadn't been home to sleep, yes.

**[JH]: And did you find that WRVS changed over the years while you were a volunteer?**

[BS]: Mm.

**[JH]: And how did it change?**

[BS]: The volunteers were volunteers, some County staff were paid. The Emergency Services wasn't paid in Somerset.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: In fact the, the Emergency Services wasn't paid in the South-west, although it was paid in most of the rest of the country. Why there was that anomaly, we were told that, that the Area Office had decided that, the Division Office, had decided that they couldn't afford to pay the Emergency Services people on their budget. Whatever. I went into it as a volunteer, I expected to be a volunteer. The grants that they got weren't really worth kicking and fussing about, it was a thousand pounds. It worked out roughly at, if you worked one day a week you got paid a thousand pounds a year, for, for the staff that were paid, which wasn't exactly going to break the bank...

**[JH]: No.**

[BS]: If you didn't get it. But then they decided that I was, when I was made Area Emergency, no, Deputy Area, no, what was I made? Deputy County Organiser and then Deputy Area Manager. When I was Deputy Area Manager I was paid my thousand a year, but I didn't work one day I worked virtually every day anyway. I had the time and, and I enjoyed doing it. But we did know that if one of the kids was ill I was home with the kids, it was, it was never a, a consideration. And school holidays, it was a question of my mother will play with the kids, have the kids and I will go and do what I was going to do. But it was never 'Oh I, oh I, oh dear me, oh dear me, I need to find child care', because I didn't need to find child care because I didn't work, I was a volunteer.

[01:00:03[

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

[BS]: And I liked doing it. Yes, we, we, thought it was our little contribution to the fund, whichever way around you want to look at it. Yes. I didn't like the nuclear bit. This One-in-Five, I didn't like that.

**[JH]: Oh Yes.**

[BS]: At all. Really didn't like that.

**[JH]: Did you have to do the training?**

[BS]: Mm.

**[JH]: For that?**

[BS]: Yes, I did.

**[JH]: And did you have to deliver it...**

[BS]: Didn't like it.

**[JH]: As well?**

[BS]: Yes, I did. I didn't like it.

**[JH]: No.**

[BS]: I didn't like that at all. I didn't feel that I was knowledgeable enough to actually deliver the training. And they, they actually stopped it soon after I was doing it, I, I really didn't want to do it and I was backing out of it left, right and centre. One of the County Organisers in, in Somerset actually had a rough ride, she went along to some village and did it to a village group where, I don't know who it was in the village, but parishioners. And they gave her a really rough ride, and she came back and said 'Right, I don't think that we should be doing this. I would...'

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: 'Challenge whether we ought to be doing it to our own volunteers, certainly we're not doing it to anybody outside again'. And I thought 'Well that, that suits me', because I didn't want to do it to anybody outside in the first place, but I had done it to some of the volunteers. But we decided then that we wouldn't do it.

**[JH]: Did you think it was useful - he training for the One-in-Five?**

[BS]: I ran it by my father once who was in the artillery during the war.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: When he stopped laughing, [Laughing] he said, 'Well, no not really, unless it actually just made people feel a little more confident in themselves to stop them panicking they thought they could do something', he said 'but putting a door against a, a wall is really not going to stop a nuclear blast or nuclear fallout'. So, [Laughing] and he really cheered me up by saying 'Oh well if they dropped a bomb, any sort of bomb down in the village they'd take all the front of your house out because it sticks out by a ruddy mile'. [Laughing]

**[JH]: [Laughing]**

[BS]: [Laughing] 'Thanks dad, I really wanted to know that'. [Laughing]

**[JH]: Yes. because it was all whitewashing walls and...**

[BS]: Oh windows...

**[JH]: Keep a door over the back.**

[BS]: Yes, whitewash your windows and, and dip your curtains in, I can't even remember what you had to dip your curtains in. And hang your curtains up like that. And you, that window you would fill up with books so that that it couldn't get in through the books. And you think 'Mm, right, course not'. I have enough books, [Laughing] books I'm not short of.

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

[BS]: And I have read most of them, but [Laughing] I really couldn't see that that was going to stop much nuclear fallout coming in.

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

[BS]: And they, they said oh you had to stay in under this door for fourteen days. [Laughing] Three kids? Yes, right. [Laughing]

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: [Laughing]

**[JH]: And did they stop giving the talks around the late '80s?**

[BS]: Yes, [Laughing] very much so. I think we'd done it before that, I think we'd stopped just before that.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Because we, we, I ...

**[JH]: because it had been going since 1955.**

[BS]: Yes.

**[JH]: The One-in-Five.**

[BS]: It was, the, Lady Reading wanted...

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

[BS]: One in Five people in, yes. This is why they were called One-in-Five. 'Basic aids to home defence' I think they were then called.

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

[BS]: Oh, dear me, no. [Laughing] I had one instructor when, when I was being trained who took it to the next level. She asked me, she, it was, the, the training was in here, and she asked me for a bucket of water. Right. So she went, I went and got a bucket of water and a cloth, [Laughing] and put it on the floor there. And she had, or she said 'Where's an electric socket'? 'There'. And she had a light bulb on a flex, [Laughing] a proper, proper light socket on a flex with a bulb in it, into a whatever it was. Just, it was just bare wire, that was it, bare wire. And the other one was a plug and bare wire. So she said 'Now, I, I don't want any of you to try this at home', and I thought 'Well I'm not going to bring a bucket of water in on my carpet on my own, [Laughing] so, do you know, 'hey,

let's think about this'. She then put on really thick heavy rubber gloves and she put the two ends of flex, bare ends of flex, one from the socket and one from the light bulb into the water and switched on the electric. [Laughing] Oh, [Laughing] the bulb lit up, which of course, we knew it would. And she then switched it off and said 'I don't want any of you to be frightened the, the, the water's not electrified but I just wanted to show you the current'. And I thought, 'Well if she'd been in a lab at school, demonstrating to school kids wonderful, my sitting room carpet'?

**[JH]: Mm. Not the safest...**

[BS]: I'm wasn't very, not, not so happy about her. But no, we, we didn't do things like that, we really didn't do things like that.

**[JH]: No.**

[BS]: And then, by the time I was a training instructor and a, and an, an HQI I was.

[01:05:04]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: It wasn't very long before, we very rarely did it in people's homes, it tended to be in halls.

**[JH]: Yes. And was it more paperwork based then, and sort of how to run a rest centre?**

[BS]: There was a lot of that, but we would involve the Emergency Planners more. And, and, and get a fireman perhaps to come along and do the fire talk, things like that. And we didn't, didn't really want to be doing it, it looked too amateurish to be doing it in people's houses. Plus the fact, did people really want you doing it in their houses? And houses began to get smaller. How many people can you get in most houses? Yes, mm.

**[JH]: Yes. And did you stop training the, with how to use the Soyer boilers and...?**

[BS]: Yes.

**[JH]: And fill the trench cooker and things like that?**

[BS]: Yes. [Laughing] We had to learn the different types of Soyer boiler.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Because there are different types, and we had to learn which, which, those feats mean they're this sort, and, who was going to test you on that? WRVS, [Laughing] I got tested on that at my HQI exam. [Laughing] So, yes. And how many bricks that you need to do a trench cooker, and how many bricks you need to do a...? Seventy-two by the way. And how, how many for a, a cross trench cooker and a trench cooker, the cross trench cooker is, is seventy-two. And where you had to put the half brick and, some people even had bricks and you had to go and do it in the garden and, mm.

[Laughing] We were, I was, when I qualified as an instructor I was given a set of bricks, of wooden bricks so I could build one on a table and show people. And we did use trench cookers, but not that often, and not once, I don't know, things have changed so they changed so fast and that was the difference.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Things suddenly grew up and became the next generation where people said 'Well hang on a minute, you can get a pizza, you can get fish and chips, do we really need to be doing this?' 'Do we need to be making a stew in a Soyer boiler?' 'Who wants to be lugging round that Soyer boiler in their own car?' So, and then when of course, when the offices closed, who was going to store a Soyer boiler? It made a big difference when the offices closed, mm. But, having said that, the ones that they kept really were modern.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: They were not, some of the offices I've been in were a little bit rough and ready.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And gloomy.



**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Whereas they changed from that to being modern and swish and, and you could order stationery, whereas we weren't allowed to do that. [Laughing]

**[JH]: Did, did this come in...?**

[BS]: [Laughing] It sounds ridiculous, doesn't it?

**[JH]: Did this come in after when they appointed a Chief Executive in 1992, there were all these changes?**

[BS]: Oh, would that be when it would be? It could be.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: It could be.

**[JH]: Because really that's when they started closing the offices, was the 1990s.**

[BS]: Yes. It, but they're opening them again now aren't they so? [Laughing]

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Yes. Not all the changes were for the, the best. To have no office in Somerset was looked on as a very retrograde step by all volunteers in Somerset, and we weren't the only ones that ended up with no office at all. And if you've not got a focal point of some description you lose volunteers, they go to people who have got focal points. And we lost our focal point.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And that was a massive, massive shame, it really was a massive shame.

**[JH]: Mm. And that was the one in Taunton that you lost?**

[BS]: We lost them all.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: We lost them all in Somerset. We didn't have an office because we had one in Yeovil, which was a modern office, rented but a modern office, so there was nothing detrimental about that. There was one in Frome, which was a little bit seedy, so, hey yes, I can understand that. There was one in, in Shepton Mallet which was the Mendip District Office, and that was a house, and that was owned by WRVS, but it was a house which they tried to make into an office and, I don't think that they convert too well. Then Bridgewater was another house that had been converted into an office, and again that didn't really convert too well. I think they got to the point that they were getting dilapidated, nobody was actually putting in the money to repair these places. They were fine when they were new, when they were first taken over and kitted out but then nothing was replaced because the budgets weren't there, we didn't have the funding to actually do it and so they just went downhill, downhill, and downhill. Where else would you, we have an office? Oh, in, in Minehead we had one. That one was alright, that one was alright, but that one closed as well. And then the Taunton one, which again was a house but had been converted to offices quite... And put it this way, it's still being used as offices in Taunton now...

[01:10:19]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: By another organisation, so it's still being used for that function. That converted quite, quite well, and it had its own parking at the back so that was alright, but that closed as well. And then all the ones in Avon closed, so Avon and Somerset didn't have anything. So you had absolutely no focal point.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: What can you do if you've no focal point? How do you keep in touch with volunteers? I think the meals people had offices after all the General Offices had closed, but they were quite snippy about your sharing.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: They didn't like you going in there, they certainly did not want you to use their photocopier or anything like that, but very, very snippy at times. So they, they changed the locks on the door.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: So even if we'd had a key, which he'd asked for all the keys back, even if we had kept one they wouldn't have been any good because he changed the lock on the door. He changed the burglar alarm number so even if we had managed to get through that we couldn't have got in through the burglar alarm. And I thought that was silly...

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Because we were all WRVS and the only managers in Somerset, who lived in Somerset, who might have wanted to go on there were, were, was, was me for Emergency Services and Jill Gould who was Community Services.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: We, we actually lived in Somerset, but no...

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: He had no intentions of us going anywhere near his office. It suited me, I, I converted one bedroom into an office and I still use it as an office now, so it, it suited me, I was up there, I could work away to my heart's content. So, and I had stuff of my own anyway.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: So.

**[JH]: And did you find the number of volunteers getting involved in Emergency Services got less and less?**

[BS]: It, it got less and less and less. Because there weren't any District Organisers, there was no focal point in Somerset to push it, why would they bother volunteering? And then when you did come 'Oh dear, I've joined somebody else now'.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: 'I'm volunteering for this organisation, or that organisation', or 'I've joined The Red Cross', a lot of them went across to Red Cross because Red Cross still had their offices, they still had their focal points, they still did things. Whereas I, I covered when, when I was employed as the Emergency Services Manager for Western Counties, Western Counties was Dorset, Somerset and Avon. I was employed for two and a half days, [Laughing] that's enough work for anybody with the number of volunteers we had, keeping in contact with them, keeping in contact with all those Emergency Services, you know, but Dorset, not only was Dorset County, but they had two unitaries, so you had to keep in contact with the two unitaries, so that made three. Somerset one lot, that was okay, Avon was four unitaries so you had to keep in contact with all those. Then I got, everything changed and it was decided that... I'll go, go back a step if you don't mind?

**[JH]: Yes. It's fine.**

[BS]: Sorry, I'm messing up your recording. I, they were, I, I was a volunteer.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: For Emergency Services, and they were, we were told that they were going to employ somebody to do my job but it would be for more counties. And I thought 'I'm going to end up training somebody to do my job to be then be in charge of me'. So I thought 'No, I'm going to apply'. So I applied and I got the, the, Avon, Somerset and, and Dorset.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Angela got Devon and Cornwall, there was a big debate who was going to have Dorset, whether it would be Angela or me. I got it. So that, that was the big debate, but we were, we were very friendly anyway so it didn't make any odds. Because they all laughed, because Angela and I went to the interviews together in the same car, it made sense. She was passing, virtually.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: To go to, to Milton Hill.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: She might, we might just as well go together. I don't know whether she picked me up from the house or I met her on the motorway. But we might just as well go in one car and save the fuel, might we?

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And they all laughed when we turned for similar jobs in the same car. And they said 'What if you don't get it?' 'Well, tough. We've known each other years, long enough, we're not going to fall out over that'. I didn't want somebody who didn't know anything about it.

**[JH]: Yes. Coming in and...**

[BS]: Coming in and being stroppy and, and funny and, I had to tell them what, and they didn't want, and 'Oh dear no', I didn't want that. [Laughing]

**[JH]: No.**

[BS]: So I thought 'If they, I, I applied for the job and I didn't get it and they put someone in then it wasn't my fault if there was, if they couldn't do it, or it was wrong'. So that was my theory anyway. [Laughing]

**[JH]: Yes.**

[01:15:00]

[BS]: So I applied and I got the job for that, and that was great. And then they, they decided they were going to have another revamp and the area would be Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, Dorset, Avon, Gloucester, not Wiltshire, Gloucester.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And we, we, Angela and I talked all the time as you can imagine. Angela was going to be a senior and I was going to apply for that, and got it and that was it, end of conversation, or, I can't remember quite how it worked out, but that's what it was. She was a Senior Emergency Services Manager, so she looked after the managers in, in the South-west, south. And I was the Emergency Services Manager, and that was full time and a half, because to go down to Cornwall is no short journey.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And neither is it to go over to Swindon. If you've got to be there for a meeting at ten o'clock you're leaving early.

**[JH]: You are.**

[BS]: And, Bournemouth, Poole, it, it's, it's big distances isn't it?

**[JH]: It is.**

[BS]: So you, you soon found out that you had your, your work cut out to do it, but that's how come I was employed as the Emergency Services one.

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

[BS]: And I, when they were doing the last division at, where it wasn't going to be Emergency Services any more and you had to be whatever the title is now.

**[JH]: Mm. Resilience and Recovery.**

[BS]: No, no, no, they changed it.

**[JH]: Oh is it different?**

[BS]: They were going to have, instead of having Emergency Services separate, they were going to amalgamate it and call it something else. I can't think what they were going to..

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And I just couldn't see how that, so Jill Gould, who was the Community Services person, me and Elizabeth, oh I can see her face I can't think of her name. We were going to be made redundant but we could apply for this new job and I thought 'I, I don't want to do it. I just don't want to do it.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: I wasn't interested in the other branches anyway. I, I wasn't interested in, in the hospital projects.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Which you'd have to cover the hospital projects. So I thought 'Oh blow this for a chuckle', so I asked for voluntary redundancy, which I got. And I carried on doing Emergency Services in Avon and Somerset and I've been sitting on the regional Resilience Forum.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: I, I volun..., I represented all the voluntary agencies in the south west of England on that. And that was the Army, the police, Emergency Planning, you name it they were on it. And then when they were disbanded, I then... Oh no, just before that I stopped doing that. But up to the time, up to Christmas, I was the voluntary agency rep for Avon and Somerset to the local Resilience Forum, which again is the same, same group of people.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Ambulance, fire brigade, et cetera. And so I carried on doing that and, and doing call outs and things like that. And since Christmas I, I, my walking, I don't know whether you actually know, my, my walking is not very good, the chair's welcome. I have a, a wheelchair when I'm out, I can't actually walk very far at all. Creaking over there, and so I decided it was time for me to step down. Plus the fact I could sense a wind of change.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: I, I could put my hand on the phone, we used to have a phone here, I could put my hand on the phone and the kids will say 'Well who is it going to be mummy?' 'Oh it's going to be Auntie Hazel', and the phone's ringing, and it would be my sister.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And I could sense this wind of change coming in..

**[JH]: Oh, was this before 2013, this?**

[BS]: This is Christmas, this is Christmas just gone.

**[JH]: Yes. It was this Christmas.**

[BS]: Yes. And I could sense this wind of change, so I thought 'No, I'm getting out'. So I resigned, I resigned from that, I resigned from the local Resilience Forum, I resigned from the, from the Somerset Voluntary Agency Group and from the Avon Voluntary Agency Group, which I was attending all those meetings. The, [Laughing] there were a lot of meetings in a month with that lot. And I now just edit a, a little magazine, compile and edit a little magazine for Sharon Donkin.

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

[BS]: Which is North Somerset and it, it's just 'We want volunteers for this', and 'have you got time to do that', and 'we collected so and so', it's just for her little bit.



**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And any photographs of things that they've been doing with the permission of the people who have been [Laughing] in it, obviously, [Laughing] But Yes.

**[JH]: And do you still keep in touch with what, well Royal Voluntary Services?**

[BS]: Well yes I'm still doing that.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Sharon...

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Sharon Donkin is the manager for North Somerset.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: So she has an office up there.

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

[BS]: And she runs the little community, the little community, I'm sure they're big communities, but she runs the community projects there, the big telephone befriending scheme and..

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And the clubs and things like that.

**[JH]: I do know Sharon, actually, yes. I do know Sharon, who Sharon is.**

[01:20:00]

[BS]: Yes, yes. So she, we had a chat about it to see what I, what role I could do.

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

[BS]: And I, I said to her I used to do it when, when I was the Emergency Services Manager, I would send out weekly updates of what was happening and then every now and again perhaps a bigger one, but just to make sure that the volunteers that were on e-mail, because I can only do it on e-mail, not the stamp, but the volunteers that were on e-mail at least knew what we were doing.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: We'd been out last night doing such and such and so many volunteers were involved. I'm doing the same for, for Sharon now.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: [Coughs] Sorry coughing, I'll have a drink.

**[JH]: Okay.**

[BS]: Did you have some Coke? Help yourself.

**[JH]: I did, yes. Mm, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like me to mention?**

[BS]: I will pick up my little piece of paper again and see what I've got on my, we talked about the ODA, yes. Mm, turned up in uniform, the kibbled barley. Oh, I've been to, I've been to Buckingham Palace, to the Garden Party.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: I didn't have to go in uniform because I was..

**[JH]: No.**

[BS]: I was, I was nominated by the Sheriff, is it the Sheriff who nominated me? Lady Gass anyway, she, she put me forward. So it was me and Richard. Richard could come as well.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: So we, Angela was there in uniform, as was Ann Pearce, [Coughs] and so they were both there in uniform, so there were four WRVS there [Laughing] that day, even though two of us hadn't been put forward by WRVS, so that was great.

**[JH]: And did you meet The Queen when you were there?**

[BS]: I have met The Queen.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: But not, not there. There was the Garden Party at, was it Milton Hill?

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Yes, and that, she's, oh she's so beautiful isn't she? And then The Queen Mother, we were at, we, we were privileged to go to the unveiling of the war, of the memorial for the firefighters who lost the war during, their lives during the war, the Second World War. So yes, there was a big service in St. Paul's Cathedral.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: So, but went up to that, that was great.[Laughing] With the, with the ODA, I'm sorry, I, I really flipped out the back again.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: I, we went up with the Welch Fusiliers and we were doing things with them. And I wasn't all that happy with my map reading, although I used to teach it for WRVS, I thought 'If I'm stuffed in the

middle of nowhere and I've got to map read, I'm really not going to be very happy with the map reading'. And I don't think that the Welch Fusilier that showed me how to do it had got his map the right way round, [Laughing] because he was, I, I was sure he was doing it in the wrong direction and I was right and he was wrong, and that was worrying. And so afterwards I, I approached 40<sup>th</sup> Commando down here and said [Laughing] look would they mind awfully, 'Yes, not a problem at all'. So they, they let me have a, a little marine, who wasn't that little in actual fact, and he went, he spent a day going through map reading with me. And he said, he said 'What I'd really like to do', he said 'is, is to, to get you to yomp over the hills', I've never yomped in my life, [Laughing] Have you ever yomped?

**[JH]: No.**

[BS]: No, Yes, get you to yomp over the hills. No, I don't think so. So, yes, that was that one.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: [Coughs] We used to do virtually all the local agricultural shows with either lost children facility or crèches, depending on which they wanted. Talked about the fireworks. Mm, I wrote the, the crèche training programme.

**[JH]: Oh right.**

[BS]: Because we did so many, I don't, it's Elizabeth Hayler was the lady I couldn't think of, I, I spoke to her about the thing. And I researched it with our volunteers because our volunteers did it on such a, I called them together to a meeting and I asked them how they did it, and I wanted to know exactly and, and you can imagine they were very helpful. And then I went to Emergency Planning and said 'Look, this is what I'm trying to do'. And they said 'Right, let's have a meeting but let's get the police involved'. Fine, no problem. And they had a social worker there as well and we were all involved and we hammered it all out. And then I went away and I wrote a package, which I then went back to the police and it, yes they were happy with that. And then I went back to our volunteers and I, I said to them 'Right', [Coughing] 'I'm going to do a training programme as if you've never done a crèche facility and you've got to listen to me as if you've never done it before. Then afterwards I want you to pick it apart constructively so that we can rewrite any bit that needs rewriting because if it's not going to work there's no point in going any further with it. Because if it's

right that's what we're going to use in future to train people to do the crèche'. 'Oh yes', and they took it all in very carefully. And I did it and they all listened, and, one or two little suggestions, but not much, and I incorporated them in it. And we went back to the police and the fire brigade and everybody else to get 'Oh yes, that was fine'. And then, it was put forward as the Crèche Programme, the training programme.

[01:25:15]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Yes. I enjoyed writing, I, I liked writing things like that.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And just before Emergency Services finished, just before I, I sort of left, like that, before the Emergency Services Managers finished I should say. We were divided into groups and asked to rewrite all our, well update basically all our training packages so that the, the, the changes were going to happen, and we knew the changes were going to happen so that anybody who took over would be able to up and run with what we'd got. So, fine, okay then. And it was Glynis Williamson and I were given the foundation course, so we really went to town on that and thoroughly enjoyed it. And that was it. And other people did other parts of the package. So, yes, we did that and, I think then once I resigned, once I, I'd taken retire, re.., voluntary redundancy, however you want to phrase it.

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

[BS]: I, I don't think it was ever used again. [Laughing]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: I don't think anybody did any training after that, certainly I never did any, mm.

**[JH]: No, I think training has got less and less.**

[BS]: Yes, yes.

**[JH]: Over the years.**

[BS]: Something had to go, you couldn't, you couldn't expect these poor people to fit everything into their schedule, it wouldn't have worked. And more now, basically, in Somerset they, the County Hall, the, the Emergency Planners in County Hall, have been told don't want, include us in our, your plans, cross us off your plans.

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

[BS]: And, we, we, if, if you, you want us, contact us and we'll see if we can help but please don't involve us in any of your plans.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: So...

**[JH]: Because now we've moved away from Emergency Services.**

[BS]: Yes.

**[JH]: And...**

[BS]: Yes. Mm. It was bound to happen, I could...

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: I could see it happening.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: And I thought 'Right, that's it' sort of thing. But I was so pleased that the, the police contacted me afterwards, the Emergency Planners took me out for a meal, but the police contacted me

afterwards and said 'Oh Barbara, there's one more meeting we want you to come to, would you come to it? We want you at this time, and this local...' 'Yes, fine', you know, 'fair enough'. When I got there they presented me with the biggest bouquet I have ever seen in my life, it was massive, and a Bristol Blue bowl out there and it's inscribed, which I thought was really lovely of them, that was kind. And just before Christmas we were involved with the Somerset Level floods, last, last year we were involved...

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: With Somerset Levels floods. And as part of that we were awarded, we got a certificate.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And an award for, from the Emergency Planning Society, so that was quite nice. But the, the bowl I think is lovely and it's got my name on it. No it's not got my name on it, that's not true, it's not got my name on it, it's got everything else on it. Yes, but, yes, I was quite pleased with that. I, I thought it was nice to be appreciated like that.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Yes.

**[JH]: And what was the biggest change to WRVS and Emergency Services since you joined?**

[BS]: Getting rid of the Soyer boilers. [Laughing] Not having to hoik that round with us everywhere.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: It took up so much space. It was alright while there was a car in each, each district but once they got rid of those cars. Some of the volunteers were quite put out. The District Organisers, they weren't volunteers, were quite put out when their cars were taken away from them. One only did, she did less than twenty miles a month and she couldn't understand why she couldn't have a car because she needed one. [Laughing]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: No, not for that mileage you don't, get a taxi, it will be cheaper. I think, I think that is, is, is, the updating of the emergency equipment. From, from Emergency Services, the updating of the equipment it became more professional. And I think we were looked on as a more professional organisation then. The volunteers have always been wonderful.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Been a pleasure working with them.

**[JH]: Mm. It's just become more, as it's got staff and employees it's just become more... A bit, well a lot of people have said it's become more business-like.**

[BS]: It's become more business-like, Yes, yes, it has become more business-like. But that's losing contact with the grass roots, it's losing contact with the volunteers who... Not bothered.

**[JH]: Mm. Okay. And where do you think Royal Voluntary Service's place in society is today?**

[BS]: Do you really want me to say? Not with old people.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Not with old people. There are too many other organisations filling that role, really are. The Home From Hospital, that's all taken care of in our area, that's not a needed service. It's, it's the wrong role, they've gone down the wrong role. I'm not saying Emergency Services was the right one, I've got enough sense to, to realise...

[01:30:14]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: [Laughing]



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

[BS]: The writing was on the wall for that. But I don't think going down the line of old people is either.

**[JH]: And what do you think is the future?**

[BS]: Can, can I just say one more thing about old people?

**[JH]: Yes. Of course.**

[BS]: The majority of the volunteers that I know are old people.

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

[BS]: And you're asking old people to look after old people, and think 'What'?

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: [Laughing] Sorry, the future.

**[JH]: Yes. Yes, the future for Royal Voluntary Service.**

[BS]: I don't know, I really don't know. I don't know what niche you could look at. I, I can understand why you didn't want to deal with children any more, I quite understand that, there was so many pitfalls suddenly coming to the fore. But we, we had tried to cover ourselves wherever possible with two people took a child, you didn't help the child to the loo, but two people went to the loo with the child and two people came out of the loo with the child. You didn't do anything with their clothing. It, all understandable, but I can't, I can't, I don't know, I really don't know.

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

[BS]: The hospital projects. Are we going to lose out to people like Costa Coffee?

**[JH]: We are, I don't know whether you know about the, the Bristol Royal Infirmary.**

[BS]: Mm.

**[JH]: We used to have a shop.**

[BS]: Yes.

**[JH]: There, that's now gone, and it's a Costa.**

[BS]: Mm.

**[JH]: Coffee. And North Staffordshire Hospital.**

[BS]: Mm.

**[JH]: Has now got, is now a Costa Coffee. So there are places where we are losing out.**

[BS]: Yes. The, the hospital in Taunton here, they did approach WRVS many years ago as to whether we would do a coffee shop for them. And the person they approached was a little short sighted, to put it mildly, because they said 'No, we don't do that sort of thing'. Instead of going back and actually asking.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And seeing, could we do it? They said 'No', which was, I, they, they picked on the wrong person. I think if they'd actually spoken to any other member of staff they would have said 'Oh, I can find out about that and come back to you'. So we are not in the Taunton hospital. But where it used to be League of Friends, and that was all it was, League of Friends everywhere, we, we've started to have to go in quite a lot with Richard. And all of a sudden we're finding there's Marks & Spencers with a seating area and their sandwich takeaway area.

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

[BS]: Well I think I quite, would like to go to Marks & Spencers if I had to choose. There is this, a cafe downstairs, but I still would rather go to the Marks & Spencers because I know the standard of the food. So I'm wondering whether if Marks get in like that in, in the Taunton hospital, are they going to start looking for outlets? And if Marks get in would the next one be Waitrose, which is what they do on the motorway, alternate ones, virtually, isn't it?

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: So I would wonder if it's the, [Laughing] writing on the wall for those. I don't know, I really don't know. I would be very interested to hear because people would like you to do things but they don't want to have to pay a bill at the end of it, and that's the problem.

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

[BS]: Because some organisations think that voluntary agency means you don't charge and they are quite surprised when they actually find there's a bill attached to it.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: We used to have to pay, when, the first thing we did when we called out, I'm sorry...

**[JH]: It's alright.**

[BS]: Yes.

**[JH]: No.**

[BS]: The first thing that we, we had to do when we, we were called out, the first question, virtually, on the page was 'Who's going to pay?'

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

[BS]: And then we, we stopped that, that sentence got taken off but that for years and years, the first question was 'Who's going to pay?'

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

[BS]: And then we were told who would pay, and we wrote it down and then we carried on with the rest of the form. Because if it was 'Oh, well we're not', 'Oh well, ring somebody else then, and tell someone who is going to pay to give us a call'.

**[JH]: Because was it usually the County Council who'd pay for...?**

[BS]: If, no, whoever called us.

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

[BS]: Would be the ones that would pay.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: We would slam the bill in to whoever called us. So, the, the edict came out, oh I don't know who was in charge then, I don't know who the Chief Executive was, but an edict came down from him to say that 'Stop asking that, we'd worry about the bill afterwards'. But it was always whoever called us would...

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: Be the ones that would get the bill, because we wouldn't take the police word that the fire brigade would pay, or vice versa.

**[JH]: Mm, mm. Had to be the person. .**

[BS]: Mm.

**[JH]: Who was actually paying?**

[BS]: Mm. Oh Yes.

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

[BS]: Yes. So I just can't, I can't think of a role for WRVS, I really can't, I can't, and that's tragic. But I, I can understand why they've gone down the older people, but it, it's older people, I don't know how many young volunteers they've got.

[01:35:16]

**[JH]: It's very few I think.**

[BS]: It's all my age and upwards.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Which really, we, we don't really want to deal with crumblies, we are crumblies. That was very un-PC of me wasn't it? [Laughing]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: [Laughing] Well at least I admit I am a crumbly.

**[JH]: It's been, it's been said before though.**

[BS]: Yes. [Laughing] Yes, I used to get frequent looks of disgust from my sister-in-law when I called us 'crumblies'.

**[JH]: [Laughing]**

[BS]: We are. [Laughing] But I don't know, I, I really don't know. I, I think that we've had so much fun with Emergency Services it's difficult to think of anything else. We, we went to one exercise, I've written it down on this bit of paper here. We went to one exercise and this guy came out and he was, he was an evacuee, and he was pretending that he was a Muslim, he couldn't speak English. Well Ruth Weaver and I looked at each other and laughed, and we both started talking Arabic.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: And he was completely flummoxed, he couldn't. [Laughing] We could, he couldn't. [Laughing] And then, and another exercise someone was pretending to be French, and yes, and she started, because French is her first language. So we, [Laughing] we could usually produce somebody, somewhere along the line, we've got one who, who spoke Flemish.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Another who spoke Italian. Quite handy really isn't it?

**[JH]: Yes, very.**

[BS]: [Laughing] Oh yes, but he, he was quite floored with that. And another exercise this, it got to the point that I would go to all the exercises but I wouldn't take part. So the Emergency Planners say 'You're going to be a victim'. 'Yes. Fair enough', or they'd put me on the panel, and I didn't like being on the panel, going round supervising. I didn't like doing that, I'd rather get in there and sort it out. So they used to try and make me a victim. One I was supposed to be pregnant, thank you very much, and another I was supposed to have just been raped. And I was taken to, and I was like this with men and...

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Withdrawn, and they took me through to one area and said 'Right, let's...', and they stayed with me, and they'd got this, [Laughing] I assume that she was Victim Support or something, to talk to me. And I, I must be something of a 'drama queen', because after a while she got hold of my hand, she said 'Stop, I need to know is this real'? [Laughing] 'No', [Laughing] I said 'no, no'. At the next exercise, as I walked in the door she said 'It's her, if she does it it's not real'. [Laughing] 'Thank you very much'. But that, in that one I think I was one of the, the people walking round. So yes, I, I have played quite a few funny roles at exercises. [Laughing]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: [Laughing] Dear, dear, dear. We, we had one where Richard, Richard was doing the teas and we had him, if you've seen Richard's hair it's tight curls.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: We had him in a hairnet, [Laughing] he's ever so good tempered, he's very, very pliable. We had him in there, good job was this, he'd got three daughters, and had him in this hairnet and we had him in, he'd got on a tabard but he'd got on an apron on top of it because it was food and he didn't want it to be on his tabard. And his hands were all scrubbed, and he'd got this disinfectant there, and he was just standing there pushing the biscuits and saying 'Help yourself to tea. There you are dear'. And the report that went back to the Emergency Planners is they said you've got to read this, because they I think they had a photo of Richard all dolled up like this. 'Look at the complaint', talk about nitty picky, somebody had, the Environmental Health Officer had gone round and said Richard wasn't wearing gloves. [Laughing]

**[JH]: With the hairnet and everything?**

[BS]: The hairnet, and, and the, the disinfectant gel he wasn't wearing gloves. And actually I did challenge that because I, I, gloves are not the be all and end all.

**[JH]: No.**

[BS]: And another Environmental Health Officer agreed with me, because you put on the gloves and you don't bother washing your hands because your hands are clean.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: But you've got the same gloves on, but you don't wash your hands because your hands are clean.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: Whereas if you, you've just got your hands, you wash your hands frequently and you put the gel on. So, yes. [Laughing] Poor Richard. [Laughing] He fell over on the, on the, the first thing he ever

did with WRVS, it was a bonfire party, a firework party down at, in the village down here, down at the school, the back of the school. And we were, we were doing hot dogs and whatever it was, and of course always when it's the food you're the last ones to leave, everybody else has sloped off. And the caretaker before, was Richard was walking out with the last load, the caretaker switched off the outside lights. Richard went flying over some logs that were, they'd got down, placed beautifully as, as stools for kids to sit on. And he, he, he came home, he said 'Oh my arm hurts. Oh my arm really hurts'. I said 'Well, do you want to go to hospital?' 'No, no, no, it will be alright'. Anyway the next morning his arm still hurt so I said 'Well I'm sorry, come on, we're going'. I took him to hospital, he'd actually chipped a bone above...

[01:40:44]

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: His elbow. It wasn't even that, it was.

**[JH]: No.**

[BS]: And he was in a terrible state. And it had to be all plastered up, and he could go into work but he couldn't write, they had to give him an apprentice to do the writing for, for, pre-computers.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: If there'd been a computer he could have done it with one finger.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: He had to, he had to, they had to give him an apprentice on the shop floor to actually do the writing for him. And that was, well I think about that time he decided he should join WRVS, [Laughing] because he wasn't a, he wasn't a member, because members are insured.

**[JH]: Mm.**



[BS]: He would have, he, [Laughing] he wouldn't have needed the pay-out but he would have got a pay-out.

**[JH]: Yes.**

[BS]: But he thought perhaps he should be insured because you don't know what you're going to do another time do you? But oh dear me, poor Richard. Ah, dear, dear, dear, we have had fun.

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

[BS]: The, the whole family has had fun over the years. Yes. There's so, there are so many things that when we get together we still giggle over them.

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

[BS]: But things change.

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: We, we do appreciate that things change, but it's just, just sad that, that our grandchildren aren't getting to have the fun, aren't going to get to have the fun..

**[JH]: No.**

[BS]: That we had. Yes. Still, never mind. No, so no I can't really think, my brain was working at the same time as that waffle. I'm trying to think what, what I could suggest, but...

**[JH]: Mm.**

[BS]: I really, really can't.

**[JH]: Mm. Well thank you very much for talking to me today Barbara, and this will make a great contribution to our Voices of Volunteering Project.**

[BS]: As I say, I do apologise.

[End of interview – 01:42:14]