

Interviewee: **Bronwen Hill**

Interviews conducted by Nicky Leap and Billie Hunter during research for the publication '*The Midwife's Tale: an Oral History from Handywoman to Professional Midwife*' (1993; 2nd edition 2013)

Date recorded: 1987

Duration of audio: 1:19:48

Collection: Special collections of the archives of the Royal College of Midwives

Archive Reference: RCMS/251/2

Description:

Transcript of an interview with Bronwen Hill covering her experiences as a midwife, including training in London (1925), her role as a midwife in Swansea, caesarean sections, unmarried mothers, delivery of the placenta, her marriage to a doctor, pain relief, own experiences of childbirth, and social conditions.

Bronwen Hill was born in 1897 in Swansea, South Wales and, apart from her midwifery training in London, spent all her working life there. The third of six children, she trained as a nurse in 1919, and worked as a district nurse/midwife in the docklands area of Swansea. She gave up this work after marrying the local GP, since it was not considered 'proper' for the doctor's wife to continue in such a job.

Topics include: Midwifery; Maternity Services; Childbirth; Caesarean section

Copyright of the authors, Billie Hunter and Nicky Leap.

For enquiries and access to audio contact the archives of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists [email: archives@rcog.org.uk]

[START OF INTERVIEW AND FIRST AUDIO RECORDING]

Bronwen ...just in the Dettol and just hang them up one by one. Scrubbed the table, scrubbed this and that. While they were doing that she was having pains. My husband went to a nursing home in Swansea, to get sterile – everything sterile; instruments and gowns and everything, and bed things. So we came back, we got her on the table – oh and we had to collect ((laughs)) another doctor to give an anaesthetic.

Interviewer 1 Why couldn't she go to the hospital?

Bronwen She wouldn't.

Interviewer 1 She wouldn't go.

Bronwen You see, it's – unless you know the – anything about the people. I mean I'd only seen about 12 associates.

Interviewer 1 So she didn't trust....

Bronwen Didn't know anything about her. Anyway, she – I arranged with the people downstairs, and when the baby was born I'd bang on the floor twice, you see. So anyway, did the Caesarean in this room, everything according to plan, and somebody came up and took the baby down. I said, 'Keep it warm, not too near the fire, and just leave it on its side.' So we finished off the mother ((laughs)), and packed her up, and then I did the baby. Well, everything went according to plan; a beautiful boy, about eight pounds, and she was about 4' 11". Of course, my husband at least – he was a bit nervous doing the Caesarean in the house, and I thought, 'Oh dear.' Anyway, I – often now I wonder if she'll be all right, you know, with no antibiotics or anything. Anyway, everything went according to plan, and in about a fortnight's time the wound had healed and er I found the baby wasn't putting on weight. I said to her, I said, 'Are you feeding?' I'd told her how to feed the baby and all that sort of thing. 'Oh, yes.' Well, in a day or two she had mastitis. Now, we didn't know that then. Anyway, in those days it was Lamsin that was the standard, you see. The pus poured out. Anyway, she got over that all right. I attended her for a month, and then er – well, you know, to see that she was all right. Then I said, 'Now, I'm not coming anymore, but I'll call in a few days to see how you are.' So I – after – ((laughs)) I called in a few days, to see how

she was, and she and her husband had flown, and the baby. So we weren't paid for our job as a result. No, nothing at all. I didn't know anything at all about her and nobody seemed to know where she'd gone. They hadn't even paid the lady for the rent.

So anyway, about a couple of months afterwards the police came to see my – to talk to me and talk to my husband. They wanted to know what about them. Well, we didn't know anything about them, because it was all so urgent really and it had to be done all at once. It isn't as if the baby would wait to come, as it were. Anyway, we discovered eventually they'd moved to the midlands in Wales and er the reason the police came to see us was because the people that they went to in Wales wanted to know all about them. Apparently, they took two rooms and then er one day they said that they were going to see about buying a house and would she look after the baby until they came back. So the lady, of course, looked after the baby and then the parents never turned up. We discovered afterwards that he was somebody else's husband and er that's.... I felt very sorry for her really, bless her, 'cause she must have been in dreadful agony, I should think, not knowing what to do.

Interviewer 1 What happened to the baby?

Bronwen I don't know what happened to the baby. Probably he was put out for adoption or something. We didn't know, we didn't hear any more about it.

Interviewer 1 What a story.

Bronwen Oh, it was very sad.

Interviewer 1 What year are we talking about now?

Bronwen 1926, because we were married in '27.

Interviewer 1 Are you drinking that?

Bronwen Pardon.

Interviewer 1 Are you drinking that?

Bronwen Yes. Do help yourself to cake; whatever it is.

Interviewer 1 Thank you, it's lovely. Did you carry on practising as a midwife after that?



Bronwen Oh yes.

Interviewer 1 Yes - after you were married.

Bronwen No. No, people would come in to book me. And, you see, it wasn't the done thing, if you understand.

Interviewer 1 You didn't carry on working when you were married.

Bronwen No – well not working. I worked in the surgery with my husband and did stitching and things.

Interviewer 1 Did you? But no more babies.

Bronwen At the beginning of September of 1927 we had another case. A tiny little woman – she hadn't booked anybody and somebody said to me, one of my mothers I was attending, 'Oh, Mrs Hill, she's expecting her baby, has she booked you nurse?' I said, 'No.' She said, 'Well, if I were you I should go and have a look at her.' So being nose-y I went and had a look at her. Honestly, when I saw her I said, 'Well, when is your baby due?' She said, 'Oh, in about two weeks' time.' I said, 'Well, have you booked a nurse or a doctor?' She said, 'No, I haven't.' I said, 'Well, I think you'd better book a doctor.' So anyway, I sent this ((laughs)) note again down to the doctor and er in a day or two she started labour, but her membranes had ruptured first. So anyway, my husband came up and we had to do a craniotomy. Fortunately, the baby had died because, I don't know, I – it was a funny affair really. The husband was more or less a cripple, and a mother's boy, and she, poor dear.... Anyway, we had to do a craniotomy and that was terrible. We felt dreadful about it, but I think they were thrilled to think the baby hadn't lived, you see. So, I thought, 'Oh God, another month or six weeks I wonder if she'll survive.' It's a horrible thing, as you know. Anyway, she survived.

Interviewer 1 Did she not want the baby?

Bronwen She didn't mind, but she – but they were glad it was dead because she had – they had to get married in the beginning, you see, and there was all this fuss with the mother-in-law and – oh, I don't know. One doesn't know half the things that go on between these people. Anyway, I attended her for about a month and she got on like a top. She never – didn't even have a whisper of a temperature or anything.



Interviewer 1 Interesting, isn't it?

Bronwen Yes, it was very interesting, but it was a bit upsetting, you know.

Interviewer 1 Yes, it must have been. Was that your only experience of doing something like that?

Bronwen Yes, it was like that. But, funnily enough, I did quite a number of Caesareans in the hospital, of course.

Interviewer 1 When you were working in surgery.

Bronwen Yes. But the erm ((laughs)) – I have to laugh really. These housemen, there were about four housemen, and one of them was a very tall Jew. Sax his name was; but he was lovely, he really was. He used to come and do the Caesareans, you see, and, as you know, sterilising everything up after one and thread – you had to thread the needles and everything for the surgeon. One of them was a bit finicky doing the surgery and he said, 'I don't like that needle and I don't like this.' Anyway, you couldn't answer back, so Mr Sax said to him, 'The best thing you can do is use the needle nurse has threaded for you and don't make a fuss.' So that was that. Oh dear, but it was very – most interesting really.

Interviewer 1 When babies were born at home how much did it cost?

Bronwen To have a baby at home?

Interviewer 1 How much did they have to pay you?

Bronwen £3 to me. I don't know what the doctor would cost. Probably, if they had it done in a nursing home they'd have to pay about £200, I'd expect.

Interviewer 1 So if they just booked a midwife.

Bronwen £3.

Interviewer 1 But if the doctor had to be called, because there were complications, would they have to pay extra?

Bronwen Well, you see you filled in the form then, that you had sent – he'd send them to the – well, I suppose to the nursing association and they'd pay probably about £10.

Interviewer 1 Were women also having local handywomen at that time to deliver them?



Bronwen No, just one neighbour would do the – everything. Get you the water, get everything ready for you.

Interviewer 1 Were there women like that who delivered babies as well?

Bronwen No, no, no. They were all – we were three trained nurses, but it was a big district and each nurse – ((laughs)) you just – somebody came and booked you. It didn't matter whose district it was, you just went.

Interviewer 1 But do you remember people talking about the days of the handywomen who delivered babies?

Bronwen Gamps you mean.

Interviewer 1 The Gamps, yes.

Bronwen Not very much, I don't think.

Interviewer 1 There was a history of women laying out bodies and delivering babies and doing everything really. Doing abortions and things like that. Did you...?

Bronwen Well, I don't know, but I didn't – I had one or two miscarriages but not – normal ones, you know.

Interviewer 1 Do you think women were trying to control their fertility in those days?

Bronwen Oh, I don't know. I don't think they had very much to say about it. It's the husband that had to be talked to.

Interviewer 1 Did they come to you for advice on that sort of thing?

Bronwen No, they never bothered. They just – if they were pregnant they were pregnant and that was that.

Interviewer 1 Were there many women who weren't married having babies then?

Bronwen Not very many, but the young girls ((laughs)) – we laugh about this. This was another one, and that was in 1926, because, of course, I was only on the district two-and-a-half years. I er – oh we were – I was married then of course. About 12 o'clock at night the front door bell went and my husband answered it. 'Please doctor, will you come at once.' He said,

‘Where is she?’ ‘She’s in the Bridge Inn. I was taking her up to the workhouse to have this baby and she started having pains.’ She was in the Bridge Inn and that’s a pub just below where we lived. He said, ‘You’d better come with me.’ So, just as well, off we went. The poor thing was in the – snug you call it, is it?

Interviewer 1 The little bar.

Bronwen A little room, you know, where somebody didn’t want to see you is in the big room and would take a jug and say, ‘A pint of beer’ or something like that. That’s what they called the snug. Well, my husband was quite a big man, a tall man, and he couldn’t get through. They’d put her in the snug and she, poor dear, had struggled until you could only open the door about that much. So I had to make myself small and get inside, and the baby came. I had to hang on to her tummy for a bit and my husband had to hand me the things through the door for me to tie the cord. The wife of the pub man brought me a nice, soft towel and a blanket or a sheet or something, and filled a hot water bottle, not too hot. So anyway, I managed to wrap the baby in this thing and put it on the hot water bottle while I saw to the mother. Then the afterbirth came and er – she was about 17 or 18. So anyway, we managed to bundle – I opened the door and handed out the baby. She, bless her, was able to stand up, just about, and they were all put in the taxi to take her to ((inaudible)) Lodge.

Interviewer 1 What happened to her and the baby?

Bronwen Oh, I don’t know, we didn’t bother after that. She probably got on quite well. They used to, you know.

Interviewer 1 She kept the baby then.

Bronwen Oh I – probably. Well, another one I had, I was ((laughs)) – oh dear, I have to laugh at these things. I was doing my – one of my mothers had had her baby and er then another lady came in. ‘Oh nurse, will you come, please? Will you call at the house, please? Grace is having an awful tummy ache.’ So I thought – I said, ‘Yes, all right, I’ll call, but wouldn’t it be better if you sent for the doctor?’ She said, ‘No, you call and see her.’ So after I’d finished with my ((laughs)) my mother, I – this was in a terrace of course. I went down to the first house in the terrace and there was Grace on a couch, an old-fashioned couch, having

dreadful pains. I'd seen dirty places before, but I'd never seen one quite so dirty. It was dreadful, with frying pan and shoes under the table and a funny old stove and the girl there on the couch. So I said to Mrs Martin, I remember her name too; 'Will you go and fetch so-and-so for me?' While she left the house I said to Grace, 'You know what's the matter with you, don't you?' She was a girl of about 17. She sort of – I said, 'Well, you're having a baby.' She nearly had a fit. Now you see, the East End part, boats used to come in to the Swansea docks with these er foreigners. She'd been out with one of the foreigners and this was the baby. Well anyway, the mother came in – I said, 'Your mother will have to be told.' So Mrs Martin came in and I said, 'You know what's the matter with Grace, don't you?' She said, 'No, I don't.' I said, 'Well, she's having a baby.' Oh God, I think she would've killed her. So anyway, I calmed her down and said, 'Now look, the baby is coming so just calm down, make yourself a cup of tea and get plenty of water boiling.' So anyway, after about two or three hours I thought I would've had to have sent for the doctor there. Anyhow, the baby came and er everything was all right. I said, 'I want clean clothes, clean bed clothes, clean something.' 'See, I've got nothing for the baby.' I said, 'That doesn't matter, give me a nice, clean sheet and a hot water bottle, not too hot.' So I did the baby up and wrapped it. Lovely baby. Anyhow, I did the mother up and I said, 'Now, I want clean sheets to put on this couch.' The things we had to do, you know, it was dreadful. 'And do you know Mrs Martin; I'll come tomorrow and see her. Clean up a bit. Just put these things away.' So anyhow, I went next day – this was later that night, I'd been over nearly all day. Then I went next morning and the baby was slightly yellow. I thought, 'Oh, dear.' So anyway, by the day after it was better and the yellow had disappeared. Well, not all of it. She'd cleaned up a little bit. Well, then I attended her for about 10 to 12 days. She got on quite well and the baby got on lovely.

About two years afterwards ((laughs)) my husband was a councillor on the Swansea council and we were at a council meeting with hecklers and all that sort of thing. I was sitting down and er somebody behind me coughing away. I said 'You'd better have one of these sweets.' Who looked round? It was Mrs Martin with a bundle in her arms. I looked at her. She said, 'Yes, this is Mary, this is Grace's daughter.' Oh dear, and she loved this baby, funnily enough.

Interviewer 1 She'd taken over looking after the child.



Bronwen The mother.

Interviewer 1 Did that happen a lot?

Bronwen Oh yes, the mother took to it straightaway. The girl's mother took to the baby straightaway. It was amazing really, and she brought the child up.

Interviewer 1 That happened quite a lot, didn't it? When young girls had babies the mother would bring the baby up.

Bronwen Well, I don't know what – anyway, she seemed – she didn't murder her, thank goodness ((laughs)). She threatened to, you see. It was amazing the way mothers with four or five or six children having another couple.

Interviewer 1 Do you remember doing women who'd had lots and lots of babies?

Bronwen No – I think the most babies – eight. Funnily – and she was a tiny, wizened little thing. Her place was absolutely spotless. The poor thing, I don't know how on earth – and the children were beautifully clean. Very poor, of course, but their table and all that was beautifully clean. Well then, in another house, in another street ((laughs)) the mother – she had about four or five children and she used to sweep all the floor. There was a hole in the wood where the – the floor was wood, you see. There was a hole in the floor and she just to sweep everything down into the hole. How they survived, I don't know, I just don't know.

Interviewer 1 Did you ever get any severe complications with the ladies?

Bronwen No, I never – funny – I never had one with a temperature or anything. It was amazing. I used to tell them exactly what – mind you, I think if I'd told them to stand on their head they would do it. They used to do everything according to plan. It was really marvellous.

Interviewer 1 During their labour did they used to walk around or did they lie down?

Bronwen Well, sometimes, if they'd had several babies, I don't think I wanted them to walk around much because it may have come on the floor.

Interviewer 1 So the women always lay down on their sides for you to deal with.

Bronwen Some of them. Others I used to just keep them on their backs in a sort of a – with their legs wide open, as it were, you know.



Interviewer 1 What about the one in the pub? Was that one standing?

Bronwen Well, she was sitting down, bless her heart. Sitting down in the corner when the baby – I hardly had time to look at her even, before the baby came.

Interviewer 1 Because now we deliver the women standing up and squatting and on all fours.

Bronwen Well, I didn't see anything wrong with doing them on their side.

Interviewer 1 That's a good position, isn't it?

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 So you didn't get many tears like that.

Bronwen No. I don't think I had any tears at all.

Interviewer 1 How did you do it?

Bronwen I don't know. I used to rub their backs, of course.

Interviewer 1 I wish you could tell me how you did it, because we're not taught these days how to prevent tears.

Bronwen Well, you see when you sort of – the perineum. With each pain she had we just pushed the perineum, 'cause that would stretch anyway. So I don't think I – I think I had one though, got one tear, and doctor had to put two stitches in.

Interviewer 1 But otherwise they were completely intact.

Bronwen Absolutely.

Interviewer 1 That's very clever.

Bronwen Absolutely, yes, absolutely.

Interviewer 1 What did you actually do with your hands when the baby was coming out?

Bronwen Well, of course I always had plenty of Dettol and stuff. Well, just er once the baby started coming out we'd just hang on to it and it came right out. Once the head is born, as you'll know, it sort of just slips out.

Interviewer 1 Did you do anything to the head to make it come slowly or did you tell the woman to breathe slowly?

Bronwen Well, I'd tell – don't press, not to press and just leave it. Then as soon as the head was out I'd mop the eyes with – well, not woollen swabs, gauze swabs, just gently. Then once the baby was born, tied the cord after a couple of minutes.

Interviewer 1 What did you tie the cord with?

Bronwen I suppose some sort of string. It was all sterilised, anyhow. Then I'd clean out the mouth and just mop its nose. If it yelled I just put it one side for bit, you see.

Interviewer 1 Then did the women.

Bronwen I did the women first.

Interviewer 1 Did the women push the placenta out on their own?

Bronwen Well, the placenta normally – I don't think I ever – I've never had a torn placenta or anything.

Interviewer 1 Did you ever have a retained placenta?

Bronwen No, I didn't. I used to keep on rubbing their tums all the time.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 Did that help?

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 Rubbed up a contraction.

Bronwen And er press it.

Interviewer 1 Fundal pressure.

Bronwen Press it, yes, and the placenta used to come. I had no trouble at all.

Interviewer 1 How long after the baby was born?



Bronwen Well, sometimes it took about three or four minutes. It seemed to be a long time. Normally it would come almost immediately.

Interviewer 1 So as soon as the baby was out you started rubbing up a contraction.

Bronwen Yes. I'd hang on to the tummy for a bit, for it not to sort of swell too much, and funny I never had a haemorrhage.

Interviewer 1 Didn't you?

Bronwen No.

Interviewer 1 That's wonderful, isn't it?

Bronwen Yes, it was marvellous.

Interviewer 1 That's incredible.

Bronwen To think we had no polythene sheets or anything, just newspapers and er brown paper and all that sort of thing.

Interviewer 1 Then did you boil your instruments?

Bronwen I – yes – well, I never used instruments really, you see. I used to have sterile er mouth swabs. I used to have a ((inaudible)) as well. I always cleaned the baby's mouth, especially if it didn't yell.

Interviewer 1 What sort of things did you do if the babies didn't breathe straightaway?

Bronwen Well, I used to hang it up by the feet, you know, and tap its bottom. The funny – it nearly always used to start yelling, you know, funnily enough. But I was very lucky, as a matter of fact, and I seem to think – things went my way then.

Interviewer 1 Did you have any stillbirths?

Bronwen Any what?

Interviewer 1 Stillbirths.

Bronwen No.

Interviewer 1 None at all.



Bronwen None at all.

Interviewer 1 That's good, isn't it?

Bronwen Yes. None at all. Sometimes I wondered how the mothers survived. Another case I had was an Irish woman. It's not very pleasant now. It was about her fifth. Of course, the more babies they had I think the more hazardous it was, really. She had piles; well, I've never seen anything so dreadful. 'Haven't you had ointment?' Of course, they used to use – I don't know what the ointment was called; black stuff. I said, 'Haven't you had any ointment for these piles?' It didn't seem to bother her, but of course it must've been terrible for her to sit down in any way. Anyway, eventually this baby was born and I thought, 'Oh dear, with all this mess I don't know whether it'll survive or not.' I think in about nine months' time the baby was walking. It was amazing really. But I always advised them after that. I used to go – perhaps I'd go and see them in about six weeks, or something like that, to see that everything was all right. 'You must go and see the doctor and get something for those piles.'

Interviewer 1 Did you become very fond of the women? Did you get very close to them?

Bronwen Well, I did. You see, that's what I mean. The poorer they were the nicer they were. It really was amazing. They were so grateful for everything you did for them, if you know what I mean. Probably next day they were up and doing things, which was quite right I suppose, really.

Interviewer 1 Did you ever have difficulty getting the money from them?

Bronwen No. One or two perhaps. That's another thing: one woman especially I went to see, she was an Irish woman named Mrs Quinn, bless her heart. She was a great, big woman and ((laughs)) living with her was her mother, who was a tiny, wizened little thing. It's funny, she'd booked me, you see, so of course I went to see her. I used to try and measure them and see how....

Interviewer 1 Antenatally you'd just watch the baby growing.

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 Did you measure the fundal height?

Bronwen Yes. She said, 'Nurse, your money is under that ornament on the mantelpiece.' I couldn't reach it, but she could. 'Your money is under that ornament.' My money was always ready with some of them. It was marvellous. She had three babies and the money was always under that ornament. The funny part about it is that some years later, when war started and the children were all grown up I expect, her husband was working on a boat on the docks and a plane came over and machine-gunned the boat. About ten of the men died and the husband of this woman was one of them. They were such a happy couple, you know. It was terrible, absolutely terrible. Anyhow, there was a lot to laugh about at times.

Interviewer 1 So the women were obviously very fond of you too.

Bronwen I think so, because after I was – I got married and I didn't tell anybody that we were getting married. I know they used to pull my leg and all that, and then we went back to live in this place, of course. They used to come and see me, 'Oh nurse, I wish you could come and sort out....' 'Nurse, I wish I could have you.' Oh dear. She said, 'It was like a film star wedding.' I said, 'Well, you didn't see it.' They were so kind really, you know. Then one day I was sort of – I'd been married then about 12 months and I was going out through the front door, onto the road, and there was a crowd of men coming up. One man looked at me, 'Nurse, Miss Evans.' I said, 'Yes, who are you?' He said, 'I'm Gray. I was in Swansea hospital when you were there.' I suddenly remembered him then. I said, 'Good gracious me, what are you doing out of work this time of the day?' He said, 'Oh well, I work three days a week and I have dole for the other three, you see.'

Interviewer 1 Did you miss it after you gave up?

Bronwen Oh, I did, I did. I missed it. I felt I'd like to go on with it but, you see, with a busy practice it wasn't possible, not really. Mind you, I had four maids, but even then I was kept busy because – and, of course, when war came I was very busy. I was in charge of the first aid post at the house we were living in, when my husband had another post. Sometimes we used to have locums Some of them were as dull as bats. Once we had one locum, Dr. Briscoe, and he had a wife who was absolutely stone deaf, but I think he was much more dull than she was. We had a Canadian – well, of course, we used to have lots of soldiers coming in with minor accidents. This Canadian had come on the boat and he'd split his eye open,

the top part, right across here. Dr Briscoe had him in the surgery and after about ten minutes to a quarter of an hour I thought.... My husband then, he'd passed his primary FRCS when he was a student. He was married before I was married to him, you see. Then he had to earn some money and so he didn't go for his Fellowship altogether, he had to earn money. He kept on saying, 'I wish I had done my FRCS.' I said, 'Well, now the best thing for you to do is start doing it now.' This was about ten years after he'd qualified. 'Start doing it now.' He said, 'With the practice and this and that....' Anyway, he had a partner. Anyhow, we had this locum and er I thought, 'Well, he's a long time there.' I knocked at the door and I went in. Do you know? This poor soul was sitting in a chair with this doctor trying to put stitches in here. So, I said to the doctor, 'Look, I can do that if you like.' He said, 'Can you?' I said, 'Yes.' So I got one of the girls to make this old dear a cup of tea. I said, 'Do you mind if I do this for you?' Bless him, after struggling for about ten minutes trying to stitch the thing you can imagine it. Anyway, I threaded a couple of needles and I stitched it. Daddy, a doctor, he was very fussy about stitching, to get the ends close together, so of course I did the same. When the poor man came back next day, 'Thank you nurse, you've done a marvellous job.'

Interviewer 1 So how long was it before you had children of your own?

Bronwen About 12 months ((laughs)). Paddy was born 12 months after I was married.

Interviewer 1 Paddy.

Bronwen Paddy.

Interviewer 1 Did you have her at home?

Bronwen Huh?

Interviewer 1 Did you have her at home?

Bronwen Oh no, I had it in the house.

Interviewer 1 Yes. With a midwife.

Bronwen I'd booked a midwife. A friend of mine was a midwife, and I confined her on her two babies before I was married and I booked her. And I booked a doctor, another doctor, which I liked very much. I used to work for him as well, you see, and I – and my husband didn't



mind. He said, 'Yes, all right.' So Dr. Vyv Davies came and we sent for the nurse. I'd been in labour then for about – oh quite – 12 hours, and I'd got a bit fed up with it. I thought to myself – so I took a pituitrin.

Interviewer 1 What was that?

Bronwen That would ((laughs)) make your uterus work.

Interviewer 1 Was it an ergot?

Bronwen I don't know. It was a spot of ergot. Anyway, I was sorry afterwards I'd taken it because I thought – the pains came very bad. I thought, 'Oh God, I hope I haven't done anything silly or that sort of thing.' Anyhow, Paddy was born half-past-ten at night. Nurse not there, Dr Vyvyan Davies was there and Daddy was there. So Daddy gave me an anaesthetic and Vyvyan Davies produced the goods.

Interviewer 1 What sort of anaesthetic did he give you?

Bronwen Oh, ether, chloroform. It was a mask.

Interviewer 1 Did they do that for everybody?

Bronwen Yes, who'd had an anaes.... You see, afterwards – they used to call it twilight sleep.

Interviewer 1 Did the doctors knock all women out for delivery then?

Bronwen Probably. I think – I don't know about the others. My husband did, anyhow.

Interviewer 1 You didn't do that as midwives, did you?

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 You did as well?

Bronwen I used to do the anaesthetic while my husband was delivering the babies. Before we were married, of course.

Interviewer 1 So all the women were knocked out with ether.



Bronwen Not – always chloroform and ether. I'd just put a spot on the mask. Tell them – well, of course, you didn't want very much because once the baby started coming you stopped it. We never had any casualties anyhow, thank goodness.

Interviewer 2 Was that for every mother or only for ones with problems?

Bronwen Every mother who had – I didn't of course. No, I didn't. My husband – well, if I had a doctor....

Interviewer 1 If you had to call a doctor you had it.

Bronwen Yes, yes.

Interviewer 1 So they had it for forceps or difficult deliveries.

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 But not for normal.

Bronwen No, not for normal births, no. I never sent for him, except for a difficult birth.

Interviewer 1 So was Paddy's birth a difficult one?

Bronwen No, not really. You see I was 31 when she was born ((laughs)). Oh dear, six weeks after she was born we both had whooping cough, because there was a whooping cough – she was born in October. Every so often you'd have a whooping cough or scarlet fever or something like that. I was terrified of having that. Anyway, we both had whooping cough and we used to cough in turns. Anyway, we got over all that. Then three years later, two years after Paddy was born, I had to have an oophorectomy, the right ovary removed, and my appendix. I came up to a very lovely man living in London. I went to Middlesex Hospital and he did that. I thought, 'Oh dear, one ovary gone and one left.' Anyway, in 1931 I had another baby, but it died. It only lived 24 hours. That was dreadful. Then eight years later Gaye was born.

Interviewer 1 Was that birth easy?

Bronwen With that we – I didn't mind having a big family, although mind I had two step-daughters, but they didn't live with me. We tried everything to see if I would have another baby. Anyway, eventually I decided that – I decided I'm going to have a dilatation and



curettage. So this was in 1937 – April. Everything happens to me in April. April 1937 I had a dilatation and curettage and I had two hernias and I nearly died. I was unconscious for about three days, but I think the anaesthetist had given me too much anaesthetic. I remember it was my birthday on April 21st and I remember sort of lying in bed and looking – I could hear somebody talking and I looked at the bottom of the bed and there were four faces there. There was an anaesthetist, my husband, the one who did the hernias and the one who did the dilatation and curettage. I looked at them and I could see them all smiling. I was so thirsty, so matron came in – I was in the nursing home then, matron came in with a quart jug of water and I think I drank that – I drank the quart of water in about two hours. I was absolutely dehydrated. Of course, no drips or anything then. So my husband went out and bought a bottle of champagne. I drank half a bottle of champagne and I loathe the stuff. I can't bear the stuff, but I didn't stop drinking for about two days.

Interviewer 1 Then you had Gaye after that.

Bronwen Pardon.

Interviewer 1 You had Gaye after that.

Bronwen Yes. Then my father became ill. My father and my mother were living with my sister then. She used to nurse him during the day, bless him. He was 68. I said, 'Well, I'll come up at night, I'll look after him at night.' This went on for about a month before he died. Funnily enough, when I was nursing, sort of training, if I was on night duty more than a month I'd go like a rake exactly, just like a bean stick. I'd gone very much thinner. Anyway, so that was that. This was in the October – November, December. About the beginning of January I said to my husband, 'Oh, I have got a pain in my tummy.' I mean I didn't assume it after having my ovary – 'I've got a funny pain.' Anyway, this went on grumbling for a couple of days and then one night I felt a thump and I realised it was a baby. I woke up my husband and I said, 'Do you know what's the matter with me?' He said, 'What is it? What is it?' I said, 'I'm pregnant.' We sort of couldn't believe it. So next day I went to see the gynaecologist who had done the dilatation and curettage. He said, 'Yes – this baby will be born in June, the middle of June.' Well, do you know, I was shocked to think that for three and a half months I didn't know I was pregnant and I wanted to be pregnant, you see. Anyhow, on the 15th

June – my husband sort of measured me and all that and he said, ‘Oh yes, about the 15th June’. Gaye was born on the 15th June.

Interviewer 1 Was that an easy birth?

Bronwen Oh yes, quite easy. I was 41, which was amazing.

Interviewer 1 That must have been wonderful. She was born at home.

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 Did you have ether and chloroform that time?

Bronwen I had just a whiff. I had a nurse in from the nursing home.

Interviewer 1 Was that good?

Bronwen Yes, I think so because, ((laughs)) don’t laugh, I went – we used to go to the theatre every week. We had sort of seats, you know, as one of the patrons, you see. We went to the theatre on the Tuesday night, second house, and er about 8.30pm I said, ‘Oh dear, I’ve got a bit of a pain.’ Anyhow, we went home and he said, ‘Take a couple of aspirins and in the meantime I’ve made up a bed in the spare bedroom for me. Take a couple of aspirins.’ So I took a couple of – one aspirin, I couldn’t take two, and I’d moved from the bed we were in into the spare bedroom. Three o’clock I yelled out, ‘Leslie, you’d better come in.’ So in he came. I was having labour pains, so he sent for the nurse. The girls there phoned for the nurse. Gave me whiff and Gaye was born. Well then, while nurse was bathing the baby I felt a bit light headed, you know, and I thought, ‘Oh, I expect it’s the anaesthetic.’ I felt my tummy and it was like a balloon. So I got hold of the jerry and I sat on that. Of course, I was haemorrhaging. Not a – well quite a lot, more than I should have.

[END OF FIRST AUDIO RECORDING]

[START OF SECOND AUDIO RECORDING]

Anyhow, everything went off all right. When I saw this little one I was hoping it would’ve been a boy, but it wasn’t. A mop of black hair. I had a cot ready with yellow frills, beautiful, and a fin coming down either side. She looked so lovely in this thing. Anyway, when she was nine months old, ten months old, we adopted a boy.



Interviewer 1 Did you?

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 How wonderful.

Bronwen He was nine months and Gaye was ten months.

Interviewer 1 Gracious, you were very busy then.

Bronwen Yes, well, plenty of help in those days. Before maids I didn't know I was born. I've had a very happy life I may tell you.

Interviewer 1 That's good.

Bronwen Yes I did.

Interviewer 1 Do you look back on your midwifery practise as being a very good time of your life?

Bronwen Oh, it has. Even the bad times were good times, if you understand. I mean it sort of – the Caesarean in the house and then the craniotomy. I regretted it, but still the baby was dead anyway and so it didn't matter. It was just luck that the mothers got on so well, really.

Interviewer 1 Well, it is a natural process, isn't it?

Bronwen It is, yes. It could've gone otherwise, you know what I mean. The funny part about it was the mother who had the craniotomy – I didn't see her – I went to see her when – after six weeks she was perfectly all right. A few years afterwards – well, of course, I was married and children of my own then and I was driving along the road and I saw her pushing a pram with four little ones. One tiny little toddler hanging on to her. She wasn't much taller than the pram, the mother, she was so tiny. I thought, 'Well, really, this is funny.' Yes, life's been very kind to me.

Interviewer 1 What did you used to do if women weren't getting on quickly in labour? Say it was a first baby and it was taking a long, long time.

Bronwen Well, I never had anybody very long, you see. Just ten days and then perhaps a week or so later I'd pop in and see how they were. They were fine.



Interviewer 1 But in labour, if somebody wasn't labouring fast, did you ever use any herbs or anything to....

Bronwen Nothing at all.

Interviewer 1 Nothing.

Bronwen And you see there were no antibiotics and no sort of pethidine or anything like that.

Interviewer 1 Did you carry Syntometrine or Ergot?

Bronwen Pardon.

Interviewer 1 Did you carry Synto...?

Bronwen No. Well, I used to carry it, of course, but I never had to use it. Never.

Interviewer 1 What did you carry? Syntometrine or Ergometrine or...?

Bronwen No, just used to put it on a piece of sugar if I wanted them to take it.

Interviewer 1 Ergot was that?

Bronwen Yes. I never had to use anything at all. It was amazing. I was very lucky.

Interviewer 1 Were the babies always born quickly?

Bronwen Not always. Some of them....

Interviewer 1 So what did you do when they weren't born very quickly?

Res Well, I used to examine them to see how they were – some were very slow, as you know.

Interviewer 1 What about posterior positions? Where the baby was round the wrong way and takes a long, long time.

Bronwen Well, only one I had and that was perfectly all right, a breech. Now my husband, of course, when er he used to have one or two, he used to turn the baby before it was born.

Interviewer 1 Did he?

Bronwen Especially with the multips. But with the primary of course, primaps, you couldn't. But he used to turn the baby. Oh dear. Oh yes ((sighs)).



Interviewer 1 You said that somebody was always supporting the woman. Like a local neighbour or somebody.

Bronwen Yes, the neighbour next door would come in and do everything for her.

Interviewer 1 A lot of that went on.

Bronwen Oh yes. I don't remember anybody with maids to do anything for them. It was marvellous.

Interviewer 1 Do you think the women were well fed in spite of being poor?

Bronwen Oh yes. I think so, I think so, yes. Otherwise, they wouldn't be so friendly, they wouldn't be kind. Not so kind, anyhow, some of them. I never had any trouble over.... 'Yes nurse, no nurse, all right nurse, leave it for me.'

Interviewer 1 Do you think they had enough to eat?

Bronwen Oh yes. Enough to eat, yes. But you see the poor district, it's amazing. It was worth doing midwifery in a poor district to see how they lived really.

Interviewer 1 You came to London to do your training in midwifery in 1925.

Bronwen 1925 and left in the June.

Interviewer 1 Which district did you work in London when you were a student midwife?

Bronwen New Cross.

Interviewer 1 New Cross. Did you?

Bronwen Yes, yes.

Interviewer 1 What was that like?

Bronwen Well, there were very poor people there too. You see, the sister – you'd go – went with the sister to do so many. You had to do 20 births ((laughs)) and I went one day with – I think I'd been out to about two births; or three births perhaps. I went with this sister to a place where it was her fourth baby, I think. The sister examined her and said, 'Oh well, she'll be sometime, I'll go and see so-and-so.' She hadn't been gone half-an-hour before the baby was born. So I packed up the baby and – I always used to see to the mothers first; if the

babies are all right I mean. I just put the mother right first. When she went – the sister came back about three-quarters-of-an-hour afterwards and I was bathing the baby. She looked and she couldn't believe her eyes ((laughs)).

Interviewer 1 Did you find it very exciting seeing the babies being born?

Bronwen Oh yes, especially once they were bathed and dressed, you know. Some of these mothers, bless them – well, I don't know if they still do – mind you I always advised my mothers not to buy long clothes from the very beginning. Their mothers, of course, the mothers' mothers would – you get such small – and I used to say, 'Just little frocks.' That's what – when Paddy was born all I had were little frocks and for the second baby little frocks. Funnily enough, when she died she was buried in one of her little frocks.

Interviewer 1 Was she?

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 Do you know why she died?

Bronwen I don't know. I have a feeling she probably would've been a spastic, I think, because she was moving all the time. We didn't have a PM or anything. Nothing to be seen wrong. I had the doctor again for her, Dr. Vyvyan Davies.

Interviewer 1 Was it a normal birth?

Bronwen Yes, quite normal. I was talking to my mother-in-law in London five minutes after they were born. Oh dear.

Interviewer 1 Did all the women breastfeed?

Bronwen Well, I didn't, no, because I had – I used to have asthma. Your mother was brought up on True Food. The nurse I had – it's silly how some people – anyway, the nurse I had – they had to sterilise all the bottles and all that sort of thing, of course. She – instead of giving Gaye, your mother, the proper measurement of the True Food, she reduced it and your mother cried and cried and cried. She was in a sort of a nursery and would – I felt I couldn't stand it any longer. Anyway, this went on for two weeks and I said, 'I think I'll get up now, nurse.' I used to get up every day, but now I mean the babies are born and the mothers do



their ordinary work. Anyway, I looked at the bottle and thought, 'That's funny.' So I used to give her the proper measurements, I could get too much, although they used to put the measurements and all that sort of thing in – and she flourished after that.

Interviewer 1 Did the mothers usually feed themselves? Did they breastfeed?

Bronwen Yes. Normally, yeah. Well, I always used to advise them to breastfeed because it was much better, because....

Interviewer 1 Did they feed right from the beginning – as soon as the baby was born?

Bronwen Yes, yes, yeah. Well, after an hour and once they'd settled down they'd feed the baby. I never had any trouble, funnily enough.

Interviewer 1 Did you ever get a mother with a first baby, with a long labour, and the labour stopped, just packed up?

Bronwen No.

Interviewer 1 Never.

Bronwen No, never, never.

Interviewer 1 Healthy women in Wales.

Bronwen Where did you train?

Interviewer 1 In London – Edgware.

Bronwen Was it a sort of a hospital or...?

Interviewer 1 Yes, yes.

Bronwen Where did Maggie train?

Interviewer 2 Manchester. She did direct entry, the same as Nicki did.

Interviewer 1 She was recently the midwife when my sister had a breech baby in Bristol.

Bronwen Good gracious.

Interviewer 2 Maggie delivered it.

Interviewer 1 Just by sheer chance.

Bronwen Oh did she?

Interviewer 1 I didn't know Maggie, it was coincidence. Isn't that funny?

Interviewer 2 Nicki was going to do the baby and because it was breech she took her to hospital and there was Maggie.

Interviewer 1 It was a very interesting birth because she wanted to do it naturally, and nowadays they tend to do Caesarean sections for breeches. At least they interfere a lot. My sister stood up and delivered the breech with her standing. She just stood and the breech came down all on its own. Wonderful.

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 That's how I met Maggie.

Bronwen Funny, I never knew. I never had any trouble. I was lucky, I think.

Interviewer 1 What about the other midwives that you knew? Were they lucky too?

Bronwen I think so. Well, there was quite a lot of rivalry, of course, but I was busy enough, goodness knows.

Interviewer 1 Because some midwives were more popular than others.

Bronwen Well, I don't know. I seemed to be popular.

Interviewer 1 I'm sure you were. Did you earn enough money from being a midwife to live comfortably?

Bronwen Well, I lived in digs. I suppose I must have. I always used to pay for my digs.

Interviewer 1 Did you ride around on a bicycle?

Bronwen No, on my two legs.

Interviewer 1 How did people get hold of you if you were out on a visit?

Bronwen Oh, they used to come to the house and ring the bell, 'Please come at once.'

Interviewer 1 But if you weren't there would somebody always know where you were?



Bronwen No. Oh, everybody knew where I lived, you see, because there was a notice on the bottom of the....

Interviewer 1 What if you weren't at home and then they came? What happened then?

Bronwen Well, I don't know. It never happened.

Interviewer 1 Sometimes midwives would leave a message on the door to say where they were, didn't they?

Bronwen Yes. Well, my landlady, she was a second mother to me really, she was marvellous. They always got hold of me, anyhow. Funnily enough I never had to bother.

Interviewer 1 Maybe your landlady sorted them out. Were you ever too late to catch the baby? Did they come...?

Bronwen No, I've never been too late to catch the baby. Once I went to a first baby, and I thought, 'Oh, she'll be some time.' You know how you're thinking yourself. I said, 'I'm going up to see my mother today.' My mother lived a good way from where I was in digs. 'I'll be back at a certain time.' I just got back in time for her to have the baby. No, I was very fortunate.

Interviewer 1 What about forceps? How often did you need to...?

Bronwen I didn't – I didn't do forceps, I didn't use forceps.

Interviewer 1 How often did you have to call the doctor to do a forceps?

Bronwen Oh, not very often. About four or five times.

Interviewer 1 In 200 births.

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 That's good, isn't it? What about Caesareans?

Bronwen Oh, just the one Caesarean on the district. Of course, I don't know – no, we didn't have to send anybody to hospital.

Interviewer 1 That's wonderful. So the one that you did on the kitchen table was the only Caesarean in 200 births.



Bronwen I did, yes, out of hospital. In hospital we did quite a number.

Interviewer 1 But that was when you were working in the theatre, wasn't it?

Bronwen Yes, yes. I always considered myself lucky.

Interviewer 1 When you came to New Cross, when you were a student, did you enjoy...?

Bronwen After my training – my fever training I did in Stockwell, in the – it's an old people's home I think now, the Stockwell hospital. Then I went back to Swansea. I went to Swansea hospital to do my general training and then came back to Middleton Square to do my ((midder?)). Funnily enough, in the hospital in London, Stockwell, I met – oh I met lots of girls, of course, but one of them I got very friendly with, because we had to share rooms, you see. Do you know, we're still friendly and we're both 89?

Interviewer 1 Isn't that wonderful?

Interviewer 2 Miriam, isn't it?

Bronwen Miriam, yes. She's been coming up to me every year, until last year when I – I wasn't well enough to do the cooking. I used to do the cooking and she'd wash up, you see. I'm afraid last year I couldn't do it and I was really sad. Now, she hasn't been up since then.

Interviewer 2 She could come maybe now that Paddy's retired, couldn't she?

Bronwen Yes, but er I don't want to put too much work for Paddy. Paddy's been marvellous. I don't know what I would've done without the girls; they really have been marvellous.

Interviewer 1 That's good, isn't it?

Bronwen But now I can't clean like I used to, and I certainly can't make a cake.

Interviewer 1 Did Miriam carry on with her nursing?

Bronwen No, she didn't. She was married before I was married.

Interviewer 1 Did midwives ever carry on working after they got married?

Bronwen I think some of them did – yes. She got married and she had twins the first year and then three years later she had her son. Then it was rather sad really, I think. They weren't compatible, not really. They were married for about 35 or 36 years when he was supposed

to retire. He was about 60 and he was a customs officer, this is her husband, and he decided he'd like to – this was in er Birkenhead – not Birkenhead, where is it? Wallasey. He was going to retire and he was going to live in Falmouth and Miriam was thrilled. 'Oh, thank goodness, we'll have somewhere nice to live.' Anyway, one day he disappeared and so Miriam thought, 'Oh, I expect he's gone to Falmouth to see about a house or something.' Then somebody came to the door and Miriam answered the door. He said, 'Is Mr Woods in?' She said, 'No, he's gone to Falmouth.' He said, 'Yes, I know, he's gone there with my wife.' He'd taken her. He'd left Miriam and gone with her.

Interviewer 1 Oh, isn't that a shame?

Bronwen I thought it was so sad, you know. Fortunately, she had lovely children, marvellous children. Then, she wouldn't divorce him, you see, because his – actually he did work until he was about 62. Anyway, he worked for a while, and then er their pension is – what do you call it? You know, where they have to bring up the pension to the salary. If she divorced him, you see, she wouldn't have any money from him. She wouldn't divorce him for a long time. Eventually, the eldest son, Peter, sort of had a good talk with her. They decided to build a bungalow and he'd give Miriam the bungalow – this was years after they were separated. So she went to live in the bungalow in Wallasey and then – of course, when she – she's been living in Uckfield for about five years now, five years last April. So he said, 'Well, if Miriam will....' He was still living with this other woman. 'If Miriam will divorce me she can keep the bungalow, she can have the bungalow.' So the exchange was made legal. So she divorced him. Then, after that, she sold the bungalow and went to a flat in Uckfield, so she's quite near her son. So....

Interviewer 2 Are you tired now?

Interviewer 1 I'm sure you must be tired.

Interviewer 2 Are you sure you don't want any more tea?

Bronwen We ring each other every Sunday. She rings me and then I ring her.

Interviewer 1 That's good.

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 That's lovely.

Bronwen I'd love to – but I can't, sort of, peel potatoes and things now. She, poor dear, can't get about very much, you know.

Interviewer 1 Did you keep any of your midwifery records?

Bronwen Of the - of my work, do you mean?

Interviewer 1 The midwifery records. Did you have to keep a register?

Bronwen I had to leave that for the nurse who came after me.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 That's interesting. You didn't have your own register.

Bronwen No, I didn't. It belonged to a nursing association, you see, and they had all the records.

Interviewer 1 Did they employ you?

Bronwen Did they what?

Interviewer 1 They didn't employ you. They didn't pay you.

Bronwen Oh yes. They used to pay you so much a week.

Interviewer 1 On top of getting the £3.

Bronwen No, no. The £3 is to go to the association. I'm sorry; I should've made that clear.

Interviewer 1 So you were salaried.

Bronwen Yes. I forget how much I used to have. £12 a week, I think. Out of that I had to pay for my digs, you see.

Interviewer 1 Gracious, it sounds so little.

Bronwen Yes. I used to collect the money and send it into the association every month. About a month before I was married I'd collect the money, put it in an envelope, and I hadn't even told my landlady that I was getting married. I was clearing my drawers in my room. I had a

marvellous room; I had two rooms, with the lounge as big as this downstairs and the bedroom. I cleared my drawers and put everything right and on the Sunday night I said to her, 'I've got something to tell you.' She said, 'Yes, I know.' The point is that you had to give a month's notice. I'd given a month's notice at the beginning of September, but we were married on the third week of my month, so I had arranged with a nurse to do my last week's work. So I told Mrs ((inaudible)) that I was getting married. 'Yeah, I thought so.' I said, 'I'm getting married tomorrow morning.' ((Laughter)) You see, my husband was a Catholic and I was a Baptist and there was a lot of bother about – and it was very difficult. I wouldn't change my religion and, of course, he couldn't change his, so we decided we'd get married in a registry office. I said, 'I don't want any....' I didn't tell my parents, because marrying a Catholic was dreadful. He'd been married before, you see, so I said, 'We'll just get married in the registry office.' The priest was prepared to marry us in the Catholic Church, providing I promised to bring up the children in the Catholic faith. Of course, I said, 'It's no use me promising that because I might change my mind.' So I wouldn't promise. Anyhow, we got married in a registry office. I'd written to my parents, and by the time – it's dreadful when you think about it. In any case, we couldn't afford a big wedding, so that was out of the question. I'd written to tell them that by the time they got this letter I'd be married.' So that's how they knew about it. Of course, being – Swansea's quite a big place, really, and the papers were full of it that night.

Interviewer 1 Were they?

Bronwen Oh, pictures – how they got the pictures first, I don't know. Me and daddy, er your grandfather and I, and my sister-in-law, she was – and Vyvyan there. There were four of us, a picture of four – with a huge letter – write-up on it.

Interviewer 2 You've got pictures of when you were in your nursing uniform, haven't you?

Bronwen I've got one. I think I didn't bother. I always used to try and change to go out.

Interviewer 2 No, in your photo book you've got pictures, haven't you? I remember seeing a photo of you with your short hair.

Bronwen Oh yes, yes. It seems such a – well, 70 years ago is a long time.



Interviewer 1 Did you always wear a uniform when you were working as a midwife?

Bronwen Always wore a uniform, with a cap.

Interviewer 1 Did you?

Bronwen You know where the cap comes down.

Interviewer 1 Right over your eyes.

Bronwen Yes. No – just here.

Interviewer 1 Have you got a picture of you like that?

Bronwen I think so, but in with a crowd. Anyway, the point is I had rather nice, wavy hair and er in those days, of course, bobs came in. I was dying to have a bob. Eventually, I did and then shingles came in. I thought, 'Oh, I'd love a shingled hair.' So I went and had a shingled hair.

Interviewer 1 What was shingled?

Bronwen Almost like a man's cut. When I put my hat on it came down to here. The boy I was friendly with then – I went home one night with my – I tried to sort of put my hat so that it didn't come down so low and then he said, 'Take your hat off.' I said, 'No, no, it's a bit cold.' 'Take your hat off.' He pulled my hat off and when he saw me he said, 'Well, you have made a monkey of yourself.' It upset me so much and so I thought, 'Right, off you go.' He was at the university and so we couldn't get married until he'd finished. The Swansea University only started in 1921. Anyhow, it all went. Oh well, so there we are.

Interviewer 1 It's lovely hearing about all this.

Bronwen Yes, I think about it sometimes. I think about how lucky some of these women were, if you know what I mean. Probably now there'd be an outcry, especially if we did a Caesarean in the little room. Things have changed for the better, I think.

Interviewer 1 And for the worse.

Bronwen Probably, I suppose.

Interviewer 1 In Guy's hospital at the moment, 40% of the women end up with Caesarean sections.



Bronwen That's not right.

Interviewer 1 Of course it's not. It's terrible.

Bronwen That's not right.

Interviewer 1 Women are wanting to book with me for a home birth, because they want to avoid going in.

Bronwen Do you get much aggression about that?

Interviewer 1 From the authorities, do you mean?

Bronwen Yes.

Interviewer 1 No, but they watch very carefully what I do.

Bronwen Is it uncomfortable?

Interviewer 1 Sometimes, yes, because midwives aren't practitioners anymore. That's why it's so important to talk to people like yourself and learn how it used to be.

Bronwen Well, I hope some of it's been helpful.

Interviewer 1 It's been very useful.

Bronwen Good.

Interviewer 1 It's inspiring hearing about it all. I think it's lovely.

Bronwen I think about it when I'm here on my own sometimes.

Interviewer 2 You often talk about it.

Bronwen Hey.

Interviewer 2 You talk about it as well, don't you?

Bronwen Did I tell you?

Interviewer 2 Lots of those things you've told me.

Bronwen I don't talk about – it's just you. I don't even talk to Nicola.

Interviewer 2 I've heard a lot of those things.



Interviewer 1 It's lovely hearing those stories. When did they start training midwives? It was not that long before you trained, was it?

Bronwen I don't know. I couldn't say. It must be – 1925, so it must've been before then.

Interviewer 1 1912, wasn't it the Midwives Act?

Bronwen Something like that, I think. The sisters we had at the home we were in, Middleton Square, they were all elderly.

Interviewer 1 Were they?

Bronwen Yes, yes. I used to think I wouldn't mind doing it again. Not now, of course, I'm – but if anything happened to my husband I thought, 'Yes, I would go back to do nursing.' My one regret now is that they're doing these heart operations and liver transplants and kidney transplants. I'd love to have been able to do that.

Interviewer 1 Would you?

Bronwen Yes, I would love that.

Interviewer 1 You'd be interested in watching the surgery.

Bronwen Oh yes, I would. I watch it....

Interviewer 1 On the tele.

Bronwen But I can't see very much. I can't see very much now.

Interviewer 1 They quite often have surgery on the tele, don't they?

Bronwen Yes. I listen to the commentator, but I can't watch it.

Interviewer 1 It is fascinating what they're doing, isn't it?

Bronwen Fascinating. I'd love to see that again.

Interviewer 1 The difficulty in childbirth is that they've used their technology unwisely. Instead of using it for the few women that need it, they use it for all women. Women end up in hospital, wired up in all directions. They end up needing Caesarean sections because they've been so traumatised by the experience.



Bronwen They do have – they mustn't have more than two Caesareans anyway.

Interviewer 1 They shouldn't do, but they do sometimes.

Bronwen Well, I think that's dreadful. My – one of my granddaughters, my step-granddaughters, she had a Caesarean.

Interviewer 1 Did she?

Bronwen Yes. Funnily enough, she had an ovary removed – this was just a few months after she was married. Mummy has, Gaye has...

Interviewer 2 Has she?

Bronwen ...and I have. That's the funny part about it. Anyway, er....

Interviewer 2 Mummy had cysts, didn't she?

Bronwen She had a penducular cyst. This thing that burst, the bottom of it burst, and she was almost on the verge of peritonitis.

Interviewer 2 She was very ill.

Bronwen She was very ill. Your Daddy rang me up; I lived in Swansea then, to say that Gaye was taken to hospital. The funny part about it – I always flew up, by train of course, up to the ((inaudible)) Cottage you were living then. Nearly every year I was up about once or twice a year, and sometimes three times a year.

[END OF SECOND AUDIO RECORDING, INTERVIEW AND TRANSCRIPT]