

Interviewee: **Esther Brading (formerly Silverton)**

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)

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Description:

Transcript of an interview with Esther Brading (formerly Silverton) of her experiences as a midwife in Portsmouth, including her training during the Second World War, social conditions, babies clothes, naming of babies during the war, rationing, delivery positions, donation of breast milk to hospitals, breast feeding, evacuation with mums to Liphook, Hampshire, training in Croydon during the War, details of the Blitz and delivering her first baby during a raid, wartime rations for pregnant women, antenatal care, pain relief during labour, episiotomies and examinations during labour, methods of delivering the placenta, maternal deaths, cot deaths, postnatal depression, the religious tradition of churching, the relationship between midwives and doctors, role of handywomen, breech deliveries, changes in society, and her own experience having a stillborn.

Esther was born in Portsmouth in 1916, and trained as a nurse, then midwife during the Second World War, having been largely deprived of educational opportunities earlier. Apart from an initial spell in a small maternity hospital, she worked as a district midwife in the working-class area where she grew up, and continued to work as a district midwife after having children.

There is an earlier interview with Esther also under archive reference RCMS/251/7.

Topics include: Midwifery; Maternity Services; Childbirth; Maternal mortality; Analgesia; Contraception; Stillbirth

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[START OF INTERVIEW AND FIRST AUDIO FILE]

Interviewer 1 We're down in Southsea and Nicki's talking with Esther Brading, formerly Esther Silverton. So muddle along.

Esther Okay.

Interviewer 2 So can we start off with you telling me a bit about the handywoman that you wrote to me about?

Esther Yes. Right. Well the handywoman to me was a part of my first days of midwifery because I was quite new on the district and although I'd sort of been brought up in the area of going to work, that was my work. I felt that I lived and worked in the same area that I was born, went to school and went to Sunday School in therefore I watched the people and my friends grow up, they became married, I went to their weddings. And then of course when they became pregnant I helped them to become the district midwife and so I was the midwife. And that was me was something super really because I don't suppose in this day and age many people live and work in their own area. That was really special. And except the fact that although I was friend and I had been then employed which was understood and in that area there was a nun who was known as her name was Sturgess and she was known before she ever did any help as Ma Sturgess everybody called her Ma, Ma Sturgess that went with the lady. She was very ordinary, very homely, hair screwed back and up in a bun typical ma that one would think as a ma and she took the role of well if anybody needed any help anyway she was the one that was there. They lived in a little square in an area where there were two sides roads and smaller roads join up so if you went all round you were in the block. So therefore you knew all the little roads together you see and Ma Sturgess ((inaudible)) And it so happened that anyway I don't know who started everything this sort of thing obviously she must have been going into the nuns before I ever went around that area as a midwife.

Interviewer 2 Which was when?

Esther 1946 let me see now '45 something like that. She was actually working there then. So she'd been obviously helping out at some time but she didn't take on the role of you've said handywoman, I don't think she took on that role herself she just was somebody who was

kindly and friendly and they all knew. That's how she appeared to me and when I first went of course I knew her because she was the mother of the children I'd been to school with so I just accepted it you see and they all knew Ma. She was a friend. So she went in as a friend literally.

Interviewer 2 How old would she have been then?

Interviewer 1 Late 40s.

Esther Yes because I mean her children would be my age I mean I was on the district and I was, what was I, late 20s I suppose something like that. So therefore she would, um, well she'd be the mother of the children my age.

Interviewer 2 Right so she did the...yeah, yeah.

Esther You can work that out.

Interviewer 2 Yeah I'll work that one out. ((laughs))

Esther Anyway she was the mother of these children. In fact that she was the mother was so well known that if anything went wrong at the school Ma Sturgess was up the school. She was a person that never let anything die.

Interviewer 2 A strong woman.

Esther Very, big character. She had one funny eye which I had to get used not to looking at. I don't know whether it was a blind eye but it was a very, very bad squint of an eye; and she'd gone one eye down there and one over there. ((laughs)) ((inaudible)) all the time and she ((inaudible))

Interviewer 1 It's a bit noisy.

Esther I have it open because it gets so hot up here. But it does also become quite noisy. Anyway so as I say I went into the home and invariably Ma would be there. Because being that she lived in the area and sometimes I might out on another call I mean she was very useful. Anyway she didn't have ((inaudible)) except the fact that she'd calm the patient, she'd be very useful with that making a cup of tea or wellbeing friendly with them and saying when they were all right the nurse comes and that type of thing. She was handy in as much that she did that part. But I had known her when I've been extremely busy and I've been called out while I



was literally I'd had a delivery but I'd be staying with the baby and she'd say that's alright everything's alright you've done the cord and everything and she knew all what there was to do, she knew it all; in as much as she knew exactly what you had to do and I'd go off to another delivery and then I would go back to a delivery, I never left her there obviously but I meant she was a person that you knew that you could trust.

Interviewer 2 Isn't that wonderful. Did she work as a midwife before that? No.

Esther She just was a person that was very practical. And was sort of somebody you know in most areas, most streets there's always somebody that seems to take over, an aunt of some description isn't there? Not so much now but in the days when I was born we all lived in the same houses. You see we were all brought up in the same ways, in fact the families now, I've just sent a letter to someone that was living in the house where I was born, she's just lost her husband. And they lived in the same road as me opposite. Now when we moved out because of the war and the house was done up I never went back, they moved into the house that...married and they moved into the house that I was born in. So it carried on in that area they were all sort of friends.

Interviewer 2 So do you think that the skills of helping out were handed down mother to daughter? Would Ma's mother have been a handywoman do you think?

Esther Well that I wouldn't know. But I know jolly well that her daughters were very practical too, they were similar. So where it started in an earlier generation I wouldn't know. Well as I say you see when my mother used to talk to me I can imagine that her mother was a similar sort of person, everybody went to her mother when you're in a village and they used to call her Granny Bolt Upright because she was so tall and slim. And she was a person that always everybody went to.

Interviewer 2 Really, yeah.

Esther She's one of ten children and my mother would tell me, she said, of course my mum, as she used to call her was always Granny Bolt Upright.

Interviewer 2 Granny Bolt Upright. That's lovely. Where was that?



Esther Dorset. And I'm just telling you as an off-shot that I started to acquire Dorset words. You see my mother at home would talk about things and maybe ((inaudible)) I was in the house and I done nursing. You'd got the paper down and you put some pieces on it, you used to do, but I don't know if you do nursing now, I mean they're not done like we used to. We used to have them in full nurses, now the handover on a different day and everything was thoroughly done, bed and all. Oh yes we worked jolly hard. Anyway you wrap up a newspaper and you took it down with you, you never left it in the room you took the bundle with you down the stairs ((inaudible)). And I was going to pick up my bundle and I said to the mother in bed, "I've just got one more thing to do I must coupy down and wrap up me ...". So she said, "Do you come from Dorset?" I said, "Yes" she said "you've just said a Dorset word. I said, "What's that?" She said, "Coupy down."

Interviewer 2 Coupy down yes.

Interviewer 1 It's a West Country word actually because Somerset where I come from where you talked about coupying down as well.

Esther Yeah there was coupy down yeah it's amazing. So that as you say I think one does sort of in a home life pass everything I mean I know her children were very practical all three, I think there's young ones, that's the girls they were all in my age group. One a bit older but they were also very well-known and the family, you know, and her daughters. They didn't move you see they lived in the same area that was the thing. This is why I think they became so important. They were part of the street.

Interviewer 2 Do you think Ma did any other tasks? Do you think she laid out bodies?

Esther She did.

Interviewer 2 She did yeah. That's what we've found that usually the handywoman...

Esther Yes she did. I suppose mainly that's also why she became as you say... I think it's the fact that we just all called her Ma because she was known as Ma at school. Oh you know Ma Sturgess at end of the day. Not so nicely that you'd find again oh she's up the school again old Ma Sturgess, you know. Oh yes she did indeed. In fact she was just, as you say, a most useful person.



Interviewer 2 And she used to... Do you think people called her in when they were sick? Did she tend the sick as well to sit with people who were dying?

Esther Yes she'd sit up at night.

Interviewer 2 Would she?

Esther Oh yes.

Interviewer 2 Looking after people.

Esther Yes, yes.

Interviewer 2 Do you think they paid her for doing that?

Esther Well I expect they did in kind I expect they'd give her money because she had five children here altogether two boys as well as the girls. Yes I would think they gave a little...well perhaps they didn't give her as much in money they'd give her in kind but she didn't do it for that reason. She wasn't a paid person that was in any sort of society or on any books as far as I know. It was just word of mouth and kindness. Oh definitely I know she did. And then she had her niece staying from London and I delivered her niece in her house then. And we had twins; Margaret and George.

Interviewer 2 Really! How extraordinary.

Esther I've had seven sets of twins. Yes but that one set was then.. That's the only set I've had that's been boy/girl they've all been two girls or two boys that was the only mixed set.

Interviewer 2 Amazing.

Esther Yeah. And they did that at home but she had this niece staying in her house so that was how well thought of she was.

Interviewer 1 The niece came down especially to be with Ma.

Esther That's right yes.

Interviewer 1 To be with Ma. To be looked after by her.

Esther Although Ma was her aunt but she would look on her as mum. And she called her Ma.



Interviewer 1 It's nice isn't it?

Esther Yeah lovely. And of course I got booked up to go there.

Interviewer 2 So you obviously had a really good working relationship the two of you?

Esther Oh yes, yes.

Interviewer 2 That's nice isn't it?

Esther Lovely, yeah.

Interviewer 2 Because other people we've spoken to have said that a lot of the handywomen really resented the midwives when they came along because well they were kind of different and from outside. I suppose that's where you scored really in that you were part of that local area.

Esther Like a big family.

Interviewer 1 They accepted you.

Esther Round that particular area that I'm talking about I just met somebody very recently now, a fellow that lived round that area same birthday he's only had one every four years because he's a...

Interviewer 1 ((inaudible))

Esther And this was his ((inaudible)) And this was his ((?)) birthday you see, what was he 70...I think it was four is it round a week, I think 74 he would be now. But anyway...72 now, hmm sorry what was I saying?

Interviewer 1 That's alright, don't worry, it'll come back perhaps.

Esther You know they were all around that area all the same they were all brought up and they still lived there you see that's the thing. It's strange how these smaller houses still stay kind of you have to say. Someone was there about 40 and I said, "You used to live in..." and she said, "Oh yes, " but she said, "Oh it's ((inaudible)) it's not what it was. They're all moving out," moving out to other houses now and she said, "Now the children marry and coming



through," like if you look around looking out for a small house to come in you could get three...that's three generations living round there.

Interviewer 2 Where was this?

Esther This is Portsmouth.

Interviewer 2 It's amazing isn't it? So if you were very busy and you didn't get to a birth in time would she catch the baby?

Esther Well now I don't know it's never happened.

Interviewer 2 Hasn't it?

Esther No.

Interviewer 2 I suppose because it was a small area you'd run from one to the other did you?

Esther Yes that's right. Well we did together.

Interviewer 2 Isn't that extraordinary.

Esther I don't think in all my history can I remember... I've fallen on my knees and I've coped.

Interviewer 1 It's usually before you'd met us.

Esther ...fallen and delivered in my coat and no nothing or in those days we didn't wear gloves or anything. But I mean I had literally fallen down like that onto the floor because I always knelt to deliver I always have done all my life.

Interviewer 2 That's interesting.

Esther I can't do it otherwise I have to kneel.

Interviewer 2 Interesting.

Esther And I like natural deliveries, they're going back to some of them now as you know and when it came in that they said it was dangerous oh where have I put my ((inaudible)) Years ago going back so much easier. You see this is how I deliver I'll show you I mean I've have ((inaudible)). I'm right handed so you're my mum.



Interviewer 2 Yeah alright.

Esther ...up on the couch.

Interviewer 2 Yeah.

Esther Right now I'm the midwife and I'm here and I have your leg up over here like this and I have my arms here and I've got all control of my hands. So you see I can really manipulate like this.

Interviewer 2 Oh yes.

Esther You see I'm supported. I've got the technique that I couldn't do it any other way.

Interviewer 2 Yes I can imagine.

Esther And I was very happy in the way I delivered. That didn't mean to say my technique wasn't the same as anybody else's.

Interviewer 2 You'd have to work it out for yourself don't you?

Esther Except of course breeches and of course I had breeches one day.

Interviewer 2 Did you have a lot of breeches?

Esther Four. But the thing was when we had breeches we had to have another midwife excuse me because I'm going to fix that. One is still fixed. We had to have two midwives, that was the criteria do you agree?

Interviewer 2 No.

Esther But you had to have another midwife.

Interviewer 2 It will get complicated.

Esther Right well if you don't know the technique of a breech delivery I mean I found it quite within my keeping I think I used to do it anyway. We hopefully we'd take the bottom off the bed, you know when you had the old fashioned beds, we'd have them down full length.

Interviewer 2 I know yes. So you had them tipped over the end.

Esther Down and then when the baby came out you swung the baby up over.



Interviewer 2 Right.

Esther And that was the technique with the breeches.

Interviewer 2 It's good isn't it? Nowadays we get them standing if they insist on coming at home, we get the women to stand, it's the same sort of thing really because then you've got the gravity.

Esther That's right.

Interviewer 2 And they can turn as they come out. Because you need the gravity don't you?

Esther Of course you do. For the hanging business you see as such and then you brought them back over mum.

Interviewer 2 Lovely.

Esther I only had four, that was quite enough. Well you've always got that extra worry haven't you?

Interviewer 2 Of course. And they often come out quite shocked don't they when they're breech?

Esther And of course you've got the large part you don't quite know what you're going to meet do you? But going back to Ma I mean my confidence with her was such that I never worried that she'd do anything other than what, you know, she was there just to assist. In fact it was wonderful really that she was sometimes there because she'd get the water on for you. And you see I worked in the war a lot you can imagine there were no men, they'd all gone off to war. And they were very, very... I can remember babies I've had just alone in a house with toddlers running around, over the bed, under the bed. ((laughs)) Having anything but the right thing, you know.

Interviewer 2 She sounds a wonderful person.

Esther Yes. She's not alive now obviously. It's just her daughters sadly. But as I say as far as I can tell you about her. I mean, as I say, the trust was such that she didn't hang on and send for you, she just sent for you when she got there but in that little time you see as I say she...

Interviewer 2 So no kind of conflict at all really.



Esther Not at all, no. As I say she was the only one. I don't know whether other people had I don't know I never...because I mean you are allowed to have anybody else in the house. So I mean there was no talk of she ought not to be there. It was so natural.

Interviewer 2 Did you ever come across anybody talking about any of the old granny midwives who used to practise before the qualified midwives came along?

Esther Well like my mother would have a midwife you mean?

Interviewer 2 Hm yes.

Esther But she had a midwife not a granny.

Interviewer 2 Right.

Esther She had a midwife and she lived in Portsmouth and I took it on myself to come and look at it you know my mum's midwife. Now she died when I was ten months old, she had pernicious anaemia and my mother...because my mother was a big person. Like her mother she was great, not so much a great but good, kindness, where it was come to me and I will help you. She was someone others went to. Anyway she always talked to me about her midwife and my mother's midwife was a ((inaudible)) midwife who came to her house is that what you mean?

Interviewer 2 No. She would have done training wouldn't she?

Esther Well training in as much that she was qualified I suppose as a midwife because she had a brass plate on the door.

Interviewer 2 Yes she would have been in the CMB rather than ((inaudible))

Esther Yes that's right.

Interviewer 2 What I'm interested in getting back to, of course it's difficult because they're all dead long ago.

Esther That's it.

Interviewer 2 Is the ones who practised before it became official to be a midwife, the full training was set up and everything.



Esther Yes quite.

Interviewer 2 And some of them you see carried on for quite a long time as bona fides.

Esther Yes.

Interviewer 2 You never met any bona fides?

Esther Not that I can really sort of say now because when I came on the district it was already...the midwives were all there, my friend and I were called the young ones, you know, everybody else was there, those young ones they used to say and you'd think, oh and this is going back a few years and when we had to go for our once a week and take our books in, you know, and we used to stand at the back with everybody, we wanted to be not seen and not heard.

Interviewer 2 Did you ever meet any midwives who were had up before the plenary board? Was that a worry for you? I mean did you have supervisors who were...

Esther Oh yes. They're good.

Interviewer 2 Oh they were good. A good experience yeah.

Esther I mean well you see you'd expect it in a city well it's a city now it weren't then it was a town. But I mean in a place like Portsmouth you were expecting to be mainly official wouldn't you because it is an official city and they've got a naval port, I mean we expect everything to go right. I mean I never thought of anything of what I was told wasn't right, wasn't correct you know.

Interviewer 2 So you didn't ever have any over zealous supervision which was petty or anything?

Esther No I don't think so, no.

Interviewer 2 It was quite reasonable supportive.

Esther I felt that it was good. In fact I think a bit more of that discipline now would be very good. I think that a lot of things that I watch around have become very slack.

Interviewer 2 What sort of things?



Esther Well I see midwives walking around now. I mean in their uniform and one has to shop I know but I don't it's very official being in uniform carrying all these loads of shopping and... No, no I don't approve I like to see when we're in your uniform it bears something and I think it should be worn with pride and not as if you're just in ordinary...I mean you're a housewife you have to be that too but there are times when I think they need not do some of the things that I've seen them doing ((inaudible)) when you look around and I think... well life has become so hectic let's face it we live...we're in 1992 now, but even on the wards going in to patients because I go so many times I've had some very big eye openers.

Interviewer 2 Did you?

Esther Yes.

Interviewer 2 Different from your day.

Esther Oh yes not better, yes but not no, no.

Interviewer 2 Did you do nurse training before you were a midwife?

Esther Yes.

Interviewer 2 So you've got quite a high ((inaudible)) when you go in there.

Esther I was never...I was SEN but I did find that what can I say well the first thing that struck me when I didn't go in for a few years of the training, probably the operations and different things, my first going back after a break which I was glad I had a break but when I went back the Christian name I don't like it.

Interviewer 2 Right. Yeah they all call everybody by their first name.

Esther Even the doctors by their Christian names now ((laughter)) every one of the nurses said to me, "When David comes along I'll see what he says" and I thought goodness! And I thought that can't be right. So I said, "David? Who's this David?" She said, "Your doctor." I said, "What the doctor on the ward!". "Yes," I said, "You mean Dr. and I gave the name" "Yes" she said, "I do, David," she said. She said to me he don't like it.

Interviewer 1 A lot of people of your generation don't like it actually.



Esther You see I find in life, I mean I have children and grandchildren now and I have a lot of children in my life, and I love to ((inaudible)) all the walks of life I love watching from the windows and watching them play and things. But I do think what I think what broke it down was when the war started and I was nursing and I found that's when the discipline broke. I noticed it on my rounds particularly I would be putting up and the children would ((inaudible)) But in my day and age we were put out and we would never have thought to go up and listen to our parents' conversations. But I think it is the fact that everybody is so precious in the war because you never knew from one minute to the next whether you were going to be bombed or... And everybody was kind, it was a lovely atmosphere and I was ever so happy in the war but that's when it all crept in, the lack of discipline. Because your child was as good as you in the next place standing, and they're as important as you if you know what I mean. You treated them as one of you. So the respect of the generations got broken.

Interviewer 2 Interesting isn't it? In midwifery you say you noticed a lot of changes.

Esther A lot.

Interviewer 2 Did a lot of changes occur after '48 when the NHS came in?

Esther Possibly yes. I mean it came in as you know that we had well I mean if you see this table now that was on the video you'll see it all on there because Mavis Nicholson she was a very, very pleasant, can interview you, ((inaudible)) marvellous. Because Kate and I didn't know a thing what we were going to be asked. She's ever so nice this ((inaudible))

Interviewer 2 Kate? She's a darling isn't she?

Esther Oh she's gorgeous And I did write to her at Christmas to say where you are and we're up there together I mean I don't know how long you want?

Interviewer 2 No this is fine, this is lovely.

Esther We sat up there with Mavis Nicholson and we didn't know a bit what we had to do. So we asked her what we'd got to say and she said, "Oh you're both professional people" she said, "when I start asking the questions you'll know the answers." ((laughter)) I thought this is a bit ((inaudible)) so we went in and start and we were both sitting there and it was really

hilarious honestly you have to see it we were sitting there like this. And so she said, "Well, good afternoon" and she introduced us. And this was all on the air live.

Interviewer 2 It's a bit nerve wracking isn't it? Yeah.

Esther And do you know they said afterwards outside so perfect they didn't alter a word.

Interviewer 1 Isn't that lovely?

Esther They put it straight out as it went for because Kate Isherwood is a wonderful speaker if you've ever heard her.

Interviewer 2 Yeah she was good.

Esther You see she knew the line that I didn't know it, I was the old fashioned type of midwife and she'd brought all the modern ideas and technology and everything.

Interviewer 1 We'll have to get hold of that tape.

Esther I've got it. But would you send it back to me if I let you have it?

Interviewer 1 Yes. Yes I would.

Esther You would?

Interviewer 1 Yes. By return of post.

Esther Right, okay. And I was to take it to Switzerland we're not going until the 24 August.

Interviewer 1 I could definitely get it back to you next week. That would be lovely.

Esther Then you'll see all that you want to know about me doing my first delivery to save me repeating again because she asked me outright then do you go to...

Interviewer 1 I've got all that on the last tape. And I've typed it all up, it's all in the book. And it's a wonderful story. I couldn't cut it up, you know, just as you said it, it's gone into the book. It's a really long chunk actually but everyone who reads it, because quite a few of my friends have read bits and said, "What a wonderful story."

Esther ((inaudible))

Interviewer 2 It's just fantastic.



Esther I don't want to spoil ((inaudible)) But I don't think, I don't know, I may have told you this but I didn't put it on the tape because there was no time and nothing in all that time and obviously it was important for Kate to come in you see. I don't know whether I told you on the tape about how I went home in her clothes.

Interviewer 2 Yes you did! ((laughter))

Esther I shall never forget that midwife as long as I live. Treasure her name. Mrs Treasure and she was very prim. She had a daughter Deirdre and I thought Deirdre goodness me, what a name I thought, Deirdre. She used to say it like that Deirdre. I'm so ordinary, you know, and there was this dear Deidre when she came home from boarding school she was there you see, and then Mrs Treasure said to me you know what the story was I was doing my first delivery unaided, unsupervised. And she said, "Now it'll be any of these tonight." I mean she held the book to know who they were to be and she said, "We'll go in the day and you'll familiarise yourself," because I mean to say I was only working with another area that I didn't know terribly well. And of course at night when there was no lights it was ((inaudible)) When I look at it now I wonder how I ever did it. No wonder I've got bad hips, kept falling off my bike. Anyway, you know the story, but the thing was I don't know...I didn't tell at the television because there wasn't time but that was the crucial piece at the end when my midwife seven o'clock in the morning I called her out and she told me not to come until 9:00. If anything happened in the night let her know at nine in the morning that would be alright. We'd sort the work out. Yours truly did the work when she ran in ((inaudible)) you know that story. Light seven o'clock in the morning there's me hammering on the door couldn't contain myself with excitement. And she put her head out of the window and she said, "Nurse?" she said, yes nurse, "What's the matter?" I said, "I've had the baby." So she said for me to go you see so I mean she knew I was on a delivery. And she said, was anything up then in a minute she took a great big breath and she said, "What have you got on?" ((laughter)).

Interviewer 1 That's a wonderful story.

Esther There was me with clothes on and I've never remembered and I put my coat on top of ours I was so excited. I couldn't put my dress on because it was drenched.



Interviewer 2 Wonderful.

Esther And I went through the streets cycling with all these... And you know they're very young because what with the ((inaudible)) by the time they drop they're right down here. Oh yeah and I look at it now of course I won't be able to get another dress on. I'll never forget her face. And it wasn't until she said it that I realised when I came in the house not with my uniform, my dress, I had my coat on you see. "What have you got on?" she went. ((laughter))

Interviewer 2 Can you tell me a little bit about how you got to be a midwife because it was quite difficult because you had to pay for things.

Esther Well no. You see the thing was in my case no well I didn't, didn't have anything under the National pride. You see the thing was that it was war, right and I got called up. I hadn't had a higher education which I was ((inaudible)) because she asked me do I want to nurse. Well now going back to my very early days I don't know whether I told your friend my love it started with me with my dolls. Because I love dolls now still I love them. I'm glad I've got a granddaughter and she's going to be a real mum. Of course she pushes her little bits out and everything you know she's going to have the real maternal instinct thank goodness because that will be lovely. And my mother told me that my dollies she said it's a funny thing I'm not surprised you wanted to nurse because your babies and dollies were always ill and you were nursing them and getting them better. I always had to have bits of rag and bandage them and all that sort of thing. Have them over and put them to bed and make them better and care for them. My mother said it was there, you know.

Interviewer 2 Isn't it interesting.

Esther Well then of course we were quite poor, we lived in a two up and a two downer so we had very little cash, and my father was an asthmatic and diabetic. So everything yeah he never worked. And they were the days when you didn't have any back-up, you had no money you didn't eat. And unless you had a good mother like I had saved a bit for the rainy day. And so when it got to 14 you had to go to work. There was no way that I could be educated. I would have loved to have that I said today don't I wish I'd have had a higher education how wonderful it is. People these days don't appreciate how lucky like being pushed out at 14, of course it



wouldn't be 14 now, but it was, you know, I left school and I went as an under children's nurse. I worked with two under... there were two nannies, Princess Christian and ((inaudible))

Interviewer 2 Oh right.

Esther Now quite different ideas, one bathed the baby in front of an open window yes. And one had ((inaudible)) and when I do ((?)) but I used to do for my children in my charge and my own and for myself it's lovely. Therefore I had no idea of ever getting a higher education because I went into to do ((inaudible)) When the war came my golden opportunity was to nurse. But you see I had no qualifications so I took the hospital exam that's how I got through. But if you took the hospital exam and I suppose your general knowledge you passed or failed and I went in you see.

Interviewer 2 So were you actually called up with the Army?

Esther No, no, no I volunteered, I wasn't called up.

Interviewer 2 As a volunteer.

Esther Yes. I actually I had a double mastoid and unfortunately at the same time my ear wouldn't heal because we went ((inaudible)) like there is now and I was eight months not being able to work ((inaudible)) terrible. And while that was on you see they were asking for people to go and nurse.

Interviewer 2 Right so they were desperate for nurses.

Esther Yes. And I had no idea except that I wanted to you see. So my mum was coming to the hospital with me about this ear and everything there was this big notice, now I used to be able to say it off pat, there was a nurse there, the naval nurse with the big caption, you know what gave an image of a nurse "Why not join us, come in now" or something like that and there was a booking office. It was nine in the morning and I said to mother, "Come on let's go in and see what's it's all about." And we walked in and that man must have thought, "What's going on here? She's all done up what does she mean?" And I said, "I want to nurse." And he said, ((laughing)) I don't know what he said I can't remember the full words, but from there I mean I think he knew I was keen and so he gave me a form and I don't know how I got to St. Mary's Hospital but I got called up as it were in a sense. And I loved it, loved it. And you see

before I did the SEN I found that to go on the ward because I used to help because I was a Girl Guide, we used to go up there and help in the needle room sometimes and do all that sort and used to mark the linen. And when the sister let me go on the ward one day and she came up to say I'd been promoted. ((laughter)) It was wonderful. And I said to her, "Can I come next time and clean the lockers" And then I got promoted further I used to...greased all the wheels on the swings. I thought that was a bigger job you see because I went out and slooshed them and we did that. Yes, I thought I'd been really allocated a wonderful job. I thought it was wonderful. And I would see that they didn't move, I mean all the...all the screens as you know we were wanting to get ((inaudible)). And I used to see that mine were better than anybody else's. And I was so keen. As I say I started to nurse through that way.

And then because the uniforms we wore it was good because we had extra sleeves, you know, short dresses the sleeves matched the dresses and you took your sleeves and your cuffs off, when you put them on when you left the ward and took them off when you entered the wards. And you'd have your uniform running to the knee and I love it. And you know we had an exhibition once here in Portsmouth and it just shows you what the younger people think ((inaudible)) And we went back to the old days and had all the old dresses, a big pile of them from many, many people; all the old baby things, all the baby gowns you know that were very great. We'd got them all on show and do you know the biggest interest of the city were the school girls of 16 that came from the secondary schools. And when they came and did the round you asked the questionnaire I was on the questionnaires that day at the door and of course I took a while let them get by and I put my chair out and I said, "Ah you young ladies just the ones I want to talk to. Now you can tell me a thing or two. Now what do you think?" All said there's only thing that strikes us is the old fashioned, we had models you see from the shops, you know the milliners' models and dressed them all up, it's the one that means a nurse to us. None of the others have got any meaning to them.

Interviewer 2 Isn't that interesting?

Esther The nurse image is what it meant to those girls. And they were, I mean, intelligent girls they were taking their metric I suppose you'd call it in those days, way back that was but...

Interviewer 2 So was it the next step on from nursing to do midwifery for you?



Esther Oh yes well you see while I was doing nursing and when I was in night duty if there was anybody else needed for the baby ward extra as such I'd say I'd love to go to the children's ward, the baby ward, you see I loved it. And if I saw, as I told your friend that this particular night, it did something to me, like the staff nurse of the ward I mean I went to ((inaudible)) obviously she went off and then you have to hold your fort, as it were, and I felt a little bit important to say ((inaudible)) with a lamp you know how it is ((inaudible)) ((laughter)) And a little boy and a little girl were awake in their cots, and that little girl called out to me and she said, "My name's Mary, your name's nurse. And that little boy over there, Johnny's wet his bed." I remember that that little story lovely. Then I suppose it got that we were never at the nursing school in Portsmouth you see we weren't...they hadn't got a school there, and then they started this school up and matron said would you like to do midwifery, I said all right. She said, "Well I don't know about you living out" because in those days nurses had to live... not live in their own homes you had to live in the homes that was... because it was wartime and things had to slacken off didn't they? So I did my first part in St. Mary's here local and the second part is St. Mary's in Croydon. It's just been pulled down recently.

Interviewer 2 Has it?

Esther Yes. My sister sit in St James Road and my sister sent me a card so that was wonderful, absolutely wonderful there. It was a small little hospital, there were two floors up and down and it was just lovely.

Interviewer 2 Were there other student midwives who hadn't got higher education in your set or were you unusual?

Esther Well no I don't think there were many, it mainly comes from ((inaudible)) no they didn't. But I didn't find it made any difference because I loved it you see and I wanted to learn.

Interviewer 2 You were keen.

Esther Yeah. That was the thing my name before that was Churchill before I married and- They said, "Go and ask Churchill she'll know the answer."

Interviewer 2 Because you were keen.



Esther Well another girl and I called Florrie, she came down from Wales and she you see I didn't want to do it like I was explaining years ago you see in those days, I didn't want to do that I wanted to learn you see. I'm not a great reader but I know I've got to read my notes and study. So we used to go in one and another's bedrooms you see directly we came off duty, her and I, she was that type too, she'd say, "Let's go and have a bath" and we'd go and have a bath and one night we'd go to my room and one night to her, we both went on to the bed and we studied. Because there's quite a bit to learn isn't it all them notes. So that's what we did.

Interviewer 2 Yes. So after you'd been practising as a midwife for a while you got married.

Esther I was practising as a midwife before I was married.

Interviewer 2 Yes. And was there pressure on you to give up when you got married?

Esther The pressure didn't come until I had the baby. No that was heart breaking. The thing was that before I went on district I did two other jobs, not midwifery this is where I got, I feel I got my experience because it's not until you're really on your own that you really know. And I started up a home here for six months with somebody opening up a big house and she was a midwife as well. But she wanted it started and then you get individual cases. But where I really got my experience I went out to Emsworth which was just a way outside Portsmouth, not far really and into this home ((The Dawn?)) Maternity it was called, and there was a matron but then she had day staff and one of those nurses I've just been to her second wedding down in Dorset two weeks ago, no four weeks ago, it was marvellous. She worked me as a nurse and I was the night sister. And then that's where I got my experiences because I was single handed. And you see the cases used to come in I was only thinking about in war when a jeep arrived with four men in it and this mum and they picked her up at Haling Island, her husband had gone to get a taxi and it didn't come, and he was standing there and hauled her up onto...and they just came and left him standing. And of course how do they ring at the doorbell when they arrived because me being the only one on I had to under advice ((inaudible)) and you used to say, "Patient man?" ((inaudible)) for GIs.

Interviewer 2 GIs yeah.



Esther I opened the door I nearly died. ((laughter)) and they were coming all in and I said, "You so much ((inaudible))" I said, "Leave her to me" he said, "No we'll help," and I didn't let them in. ((laughter))

Interviewer 2 They like the drama.

Esther Yes they didn't know... And they said, "Where are you going to have it then, on this floor?" I made out I was going to have her on the floor in the hall. And they said, "Oh we'll stay and help," they were saying, I daren't let them up the stairs because I would never get them down. Anyway going out the door there was this dear man on the floor and she said, "I think between us we'll get her onto the bed" I thought, oh he's got a labour ward bed ready. He said, "And I'll get her up to the bed," of course I'd had the baby before my husband ever arrived. He went and hired a bike. Came on a bike five miles. Yes it was all outside you see. Had some great experiences then. Another one came in and the ambulance arrived in this case and they said, "We've got a mother in here with a baby" and I got my coat ((inaudible)) "Where's the baby?" I said, in her knickers. They'd left the baby, these ambulance...because they hadn't ((inaudible)) and they hadn't even pulled her knickers down. She'd shoved it out and there it was.

Interviewer 2 Did it survive?

Esther Yes.

Interviewer 1 Just lying there.

Esther He taught me how far...what was delivered and of course I did the third stage in the ambulance we never moved her til they got to the third stage. Yeah it was ((inaudible))

Interviewer 2 Was this a nursing home that you were working...

Esther Yes, yes.

Interviewer 2 And then you went out onto the district?

Esther Well yes you see I felt then I'd got good experience and I thought I'd be alright because I mean it's a worry to think you're going out amongst all the many midwives and very well trained. And when I was at...you know ((inaudible)) what would they think of me, you



know, in the field. And then I applied to come on the district and I had this interview and I didn't whether I'd got it or not because I'd never been under interviews before and I never want to do another. Medical Officer of Health of the whole lot, then the Maternity Medical Officer, she was a lady, my supervisor and a few people that worked in the council, I suppose they had to label us the medical bit, all sitting in one room round like that, and I came in and my ((inaudible)) and they were over there firing questions at me.

Interviewer 2 It's intimidating isn't it? Yeah. But you got the job?

Esther I got the job.

Interviewer 2 And the council in those days were paying before the NHS weren't they? The council paid you.

Esther I can't really remember.

Interviewer 2 I think they were the employers before the NHS.

Esther The only thing I know is we used to go and get some of my money in the tramway offices or something, that's going back a bit.

Interviewer 2 Do you remember how many days off a week did you get then?

Esther Oh it would be one.

Interviewer 2 One.

Esther One a month, a week in a month. And my goodness we could be on duty every night.

Interviewer 2 Yes up all night.

Esther I had seven deliveries over one weekend including a set of twins and never went to bed, never took my clothes off. I was mad, I was high, do you know I was singing.

Interviewer 2 ((laughter)) With tiredness I know. You get into another space don't you?

Esther Absolutely. Yeah and I never appreciated the word drunk...dead drunk means they're drunk, and I was dead drunk and my mother was petrified. ((laughter)) She came round to me at home and saying to me...the number of times that my mum said, "Well have a..." "No I can't stop to eat, mum, I'll have a sandwich in the house or de, de, de da, just to let you know



I'm alright and where I am" you know. Because they had to alter your dress and house to house you see. You either had to get the patient's husband to go or you did it yourself. You went home if you were near because you had to leave on your door where you were.

Interviewer 2 Right, yeah.

Esther Because if somebody come to find you they didn't know where you were. You were as good as useless weren't you if nobody knew where to find you.

Interviewer 2 No pagers in those days did you? We have the little pagers now.

Esther That's right. No we had a list on the door. And mind one day what do you think this silly person did, came to find me and brought my notice in their hand, they'd taken it off the door. ((laughter))

Interviewer 2 So you were living with your mum then. Did she have many children?

Esther No only had my sister and I.

Interviewer 2 Did she? Oh that was unusual.

Esther Before I was literally onto the phone, this will tell you how my mother loved this too, I went into clinic, one of my first jobs was to go into clinic and I knew I was going to be fitted on the phone you see. It was lovely being on the phone, it was wonderful so I was like, "I wonder if it's on?" so I picked it up and my mum said, "Oh yes," I thought, well and my mum said, "Who, who's there?" So I made out I was someone needing help you see. So I planned to all this, if I ever got my mum. "Oh" she said, "well I'm not sure," and this my mum trying to put on all this straight voice and maybe she could go out and help. She said...I was just seeking help you see on a case outside of the district, "I wonder if you would be...I've been given your name and I wonder if you'd be able to help me?" "Well" she said, "I've always wanted to be a nurse, my daughter's a nurse" ((laughter)) she said, "and I've always nursed my hubby." My hubby! I didn't know where to stand in the phone box ((laughingly)) she said, "And my daughter used to help me with the poultices" she said, "he used to have pleurisy" and I was in the phone...wonderful. And I pushed her up and of course it's like...and she still didn't know.

Interviewer 1 Didn't she?



Esther So I put the receiver down and I thought I would give it away and I went home and I said, "Have the engineers been here mum?" She said, "Oh yes you're on the phone". I said, "Isn't that wonderful." My mum said, "I've had a phone call," ((laughter)) "Heavens" she said, "somebody wants me to help." "Well" I said, "perhaps when I've been on the district I'll be able to find out a bit more for you because you always wanted to be a nurse didn't you?" She said, "I did."

Interviewer 1 Awh that's lovely that isn't it?

Interviewer 2 Yeah. What year would that have been?

Esther '44/5, '45 I suppose. Way back.

Interviewer 2 Yes it's amazing.

Esther They're all true stories but they're so natural they took place so, you know, naturally there everything took place as I say.

Interviewer 2 So when you got married that was in...

Esther '48.

Interviewer 2 When the NHS started up. You carried on.

Esther Yes.

Interviewer 1 But then how did you carry on once you'd had a child?

Esther Well you see the thing is such that I mean when I got married and then I was desperate to have a baby as you can imagine. And I knew I was pregnant on my first anniversary because I just was four days over my period you know and being a nurse that was all so normal and natural we used to be, oh we've done well. I guessed anyway, you know something, because everybody says you know, it's funny. So I had a party and I used the top tier of my wedding cake which I'd made, I'd made three and had them iced, people giving you a bit of fruit in those days, because you had nothing you see, there was no fruit around or nothing you see. Very difficult, soya flour, you know you had to do with all sorts of things, no marzipan. Anyway I kept the top tier but the icing wasn't very nice so we took it off and then I had that on our anniversary. And I said my cousin ((inaudible)) she said, ((inaudible))



((laughter)). I said I'd be around if I was going to and of course once I'd had it confirmed I couldn't...

[END OF FIRST AUDIO RECORDING]

[START OF SECOND AUDIO RECORDING]

Esther ...because wearing clothes I had that for six years in that house and we never ((inaudible)) You see when my lady quickened I was in bed, it was twenty past eleven at night because my husband was a restaurant manager and he'd come to the house in the morning and I thought I've got to tell somebody my baby's alive. So no I was feeling like. I ran down the stairs and she never went to bed until midnight never I knew that. So I tapped on the door and she said, "Hello" I said, "It's the nurse ((inaudible))

Interviewer 2 Isn't that nice.

Esther Really?

Interviewer 2 Yeah. Wonderful.

Esther Wonderful to tell somebody and then of course I ((inaudible)) She was the first person I told.

Interviewer 2 So did the authorities ...oh that was the one that was stillborn?

Esther Yeah right. So then I carried on and I worked because I didn't tell anybody straightaway on the district I wouldn't tell them straightaway why should I I was dying to you know. But now I thought everybody would be looking at me if I start telling them because I was the only one to have a radiologist and ((inaudible)) I don't know what they did when they had them, you know, worked or what. So then of course when it came round and it got to my supervisor's ears I was ever so cross that somebody told her it was me because I said I was coming to tell you next week when it came out with my work. And she said well this will have to be reported. ((inaudible)) and it was ((inaudible)) so she came to see me one afternoon when she said, "I'm really sorry but you'll have to resign, you won't be allowed to work with a baby. And I said, "Okay." I know I was wanting to look after the baby but couldn't I do both?



She said, no you couldn't do both of course you couldn't. She said, "You're not allowed to work on the district, not in the...whatever you call it, you're not allowed to work."

Interviewer 2 Isn't that terrible?

Esther Yeah. What they do now because ((laughs)) half of them have got babies who work haven't they?

Interviewer 2 Yes well they can't stop you, you know you're protected in the law.

Esther That's right of course you are but we weren't then.

Interviewer 2 Isn't that terrible?

Esther Yeah and I felt awful about it.

Interviewer 2 So you had to give up?

Esther Yes I had to leave. And all my ladies I was looking after I was heartbroken.

Interviewer 2 Yes I bet you were.

Esther ((inaudible)) Absolutely, absolutely.

Interviewer 2 Was that baby born in hospital?

Esther No at home with my friend the midwife. I was toxic mind and I worked until...I worked...mind you I knew when I went off nursing but I didn't have any more and I didn't have ((inaudible)) The thing was I liked to work, you see what I mean, I loved to work.

Interviewer 2 So did you go back to work then?

Esther Well not straight away but I did when I got over it, because I was very, very shocked about it all ((inaudible)) Of course when I did go back, this was another thing that happened to me and I thought, you know these things are meant to be. And I was going there ((inaudible)) it was somebody else's of course I had to give up my own area. The first one I went to was exactly the same weight that my baby would have been and exactly the same look, fair, it was a very fair child I had. I had one fair one since, my number two was fair, very fair, long and sleek, five pounds and that's exactly what my baby was. And I looked over it and I read the tag and I thought five pounds I thought oh, and I didn't see him, mine, I wish I had



done now but you don't at those times and they don't encourage you to like they do now you see. And I thought, cor that's just what mine looked like fair, oh well now I can do it, I picked it up and cuddled it and cried over it when I was bathing it and I thought now I can do this. That's my first ((inaudible)) because I had a miscarriage the next one ((inaudible)) And that first one I had you know ((inaudible)) it needs to be it's so real you see and my mother was at home helping of course when I was in the house. And so it was my friend who was the midwife she must have been devastated.

Interviewer 1 Yes because it's quite an experience.

Esther And what I did was ((inaudible)) I'd knitted the first coat, ((inaudible)) and I thought all these things out on a little pony clothes horse, you know, them things, and she said, she was holding them, and I got my... I only had chill proof vest, chill proof nightie, you wouldn't know though they're very expensive,

Interviewer 1 Yes.

Esther Yes right. And my other two were more winceyette type, you know, a cheaper quality but nice. But this chill proof one I'd got they would be dressing up best, with fresh clothes and it was strung together with a ribbon in it, with the knicks and everything and I'd got coats and nappies and a few ((inaudible)) I had ((?)) white ones ((inaudible)) because they didn't have disposables then. I loved ((inaudible)) and I had my stillborn dressed in ((?)) because I really like my...

Interviewer 1 That was nice.

Esther Yes and I said to my friend I don't like ((inaudible)) but I said this baby...and I was going to have all my babies J so in my mind I wouldn't call it June because that's my first living child, so it's J so when I renamed, you know, had it named in my own mind. You didn't name them in those days but I look on it as J, Jay because all my June and John. I remember when ((inaudible)) but anyway it was dressed in all these lovely clothes.

Interviewer 2 So were you able to hold him?

Esther No I didn't. But you see I didn't ask. And I was so distraught and I suppose my friend thought well...I suppose in those days all those years ago...



Interviewer 2 They just didn't...didn't know about it all.

Esther ((inaudible))

Interviewer 2 So he died on the way out did he?

Esther Yes well he just was stillborn. Yes, fresh stillborn well possibly one must wonder he was one month prem well mind you it was an episiotomy might have... and they do often don't they, you don't know do you? I don't know.

Interviewer 2 I don't think so.

Esther No I don't really.

Interviewer 2 I think there's very little research to suggest that episiotomies do save lives.

Esther I do agree with you. But I only wonder if there would have been less pressure on his little head because he was premature.

Interviewer 2 They don't do episiotomies now for premature babies, very premature babies.

Esther Don't they?

Interviewer 2 No. Because they've found out now it doesn't make any difference. They used to do episiotomies because they thought the head was too tender didn't they.

Esther That's right, that's what I mean that's what we were trained to understand in those days.

Interviewer 2 They don't do that anymore.

Esther Oh well in that case. No I mean I had a very confident midwife.

Interviewer 2 You're always left wondering aren't you?

Esther Well of course you are. There's always that little bit That's correct... Anyway it was a beautiful baby he had fair...and I said mine was fair wavy hair, the way it is now, of course it's going grey now only it is wavy. So it was fair the same as he was fair, the other one was darker. But it's amazing isn't it so it would have been like that one was. So anyway you knew of the story of how they were disposed of in a cardboard box which I mean I had...I used to do myself as well, so I know. Went two doors away and got a cardboard box, children.



Interviewer 2 Yes it's very sad. But in a way I think a stillbirth at home is easier than a stillbirth in hospital don't you?

Esther Oh definitely.

Interviewer 1 You're in your own home.

Esther And you haven't got to come back to it have you and enter it because you're there.

Interviewer 1 It makes a big difference.

Esther Oh yes. But it's a very traumatic thing. Now they're doing all this study on cot deaths they are including stillborns a lot for the aftercare and counselling because it's a big thing. Even a miscarriage. Well it's life it's yours isn't it?

Interviewer 2 It's very important.

Esther Absolutely. ((inaudible))

Interviewer 2 You then had two other children?

Esther Yes.

Interviewer 2 And did you go back to work after that?

Esther Well I went back in between wards.

Interviewer 2 Oh did you? ((laughs)) They couldn't keep you away could they? Ah it's nice though isn't it?

Esther And I worked until I was over 65 until they kept on saying to me I wish I could have gone on. I wish you could on and do it...

Interviewer 2 What happens do they...?

Esther Well you see they know don't they.

Interviewer 2 Yeah. At what stage do they say enough?

Esther Well they said to me one day on the ward, one of the nurses she said to me, "Are you over 65?" I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "You are aren't you?" I said, "Don't be silly you're as old as you feel I don't know if I'm old or not." And I think they were all getting a



bit suspicious you see so the nursing auxiliary she was. Anyway because I was in a GP unit by this time because having had my hips done I couldn't carry on with district because, well you know, it's very hard work isn't it? You've got to be able to drive now I've got the invalid car but I couldn't get in that but I couldn't I had my own ((inaudible)). I think half of them ((inaudible))

Interviewer 2 So it's the employer that stops you in the end, it's not the CMD or the...?

Esther No, no they just said talk together. Well you've got to do your work properly haven't you that's the case and regarding whether they do with children now I mean I suppose they'd find out if they go down ((inaudible)) I must have had good vision, I do appreciate that and you see there's another way also of looking at it I wouldn't have missed the early days with my children and you see I didn't go...after I'd got them two really mind I didn't go back to work until they went to school because I wanted to look after them. So when the second, there are two years between them. So when the second one went at five I started back the first one was seven by that time because he was two years older you see wasn't he?

Interviewer 2 So you had a good innings with them before you went back to work?

Esther Oh yes loved it.

Interviewer 2 It's nice.

Esther Oh wonderful wouldn't have missed it. Because you're there not ...

Interviewer 2 Precious years isn't it?

Esther Oh absolutely, fantastic. What I love to hear my daughter-in-law say to me Gwen I hope I'll be able to do the things for my children that I hear you've done for Julian.

Interviewer 2 Isn't that nice?

Esther Pick up all the occasions because we're church people, my husband and I, we always have been, and when we have Harvest Festival I used help with the Harvest Festival on the table for the children all the seasons of the year we celebrated, whether it be outside the church, we put our Union Jack out for Royal occasions and decorated and my children adored it. And they did ((inaudible)) and they know it all ((inaudible)) But she said I want to do for the children what you did for Julian because he's always talking about it.



Interviewer 1 Isn't that lovely? Was your mother like that with you?

Esther Well my mum was great but of course we didn't have like parties because we didn't have the money and these things cost a lot as you know.

Interviewer 2 Was your father around?

Esther No he died when I was 16, he died of asthma. They had no relief for them in those days there was nothing

Interviewer 2 Terrible.

Esther And when I was 12 I remember when she had this conversation on the telephone with me ((laughingly)) they used to be Lord ((inaudible)) who used to make them up. Then of course we got to ((inaudible)) But I can remember my mother saying test it with the back ((inaudible)) shake the steam out from it first – my mother teaching me all this at 12 - shake the steam out between two enamel plates that went upstairs. Put it to the back of your hand and slightly lower it down when you're putting it on you should lay the back of your hand on it, then lower it down gently, gently and then bandage it round in place. I did all this at 12.

Interviewer 2 Extraordinary for your father?

Esther Yes I used to sit up at night with him so that my mum could have a night in bed, sit up all night with him because you see we had to have a steam kettle going to remove the ((inaudible)) And a little fire, two up and down and you see I had to keep the fire going all night and you see to get the steam near heat I used to go in the toy shop and buy funnels, toy trumpets, and fix those onto the kettle so it came out near the end. And I had to see there was constant steam going all night.

Interviewer 2 Amazing.

Esther Yeah.

Interviewer 2 It is amazing to think about it.

Esther But you see how I love nursing.

Interviewer 2 Yeah. He was lucky to have you as a daughter wasn't he?



Esther Well obviously I helped my mother because I mean she had a lot of strain didn't she day in, day out.

Interviewer 2 She must have been devastated.

Esther She was. And I was ((inaudible)) and the other thing was I was up in London so I was ((inaudible)) when my father died at 16. And my mother was in bed with 'flu at the same time. My mother had 'flu very, very badly. And the only time in her life, she never forgot it because she was always telling me about it as if it was something that never left her. She couldn't care for him that last time so he got sent to a school ((inaudible)) He went off in a terrible fog. And of course he just died within two days, he got pneumonia probably and he died, but my mother never went to the funeral, she was so ill. I went, I can remember looking up at my mother looking out of the window as the carriage went by. We had horses in those days horse and carriage and there was my mother at the window doing this. Yes. I mean life lives and you still think of it.

Interviewer 2 Of course you do. It must have been dreadful. And what about your sister was she younger than you?

Esther No she was five and a half years older than me so she'd gone out in the world. I mean she had to. So I was more or less then like an only child.

Interviewer 2 She didn't nurse?

Esther No she never. I nursed her husband with cancer at the end. ((inaudible)) I mean she had no nursing experience and of course it means you look out to see him and to look at him was enough I mean he was just skin and bones in the end, and of course I had my mother to nurse and she had anxiety neurosis towards the end and she was in the ((inaudible)) Hospital quite a few times. That was traumatic because she was a changed woman with that and drugs as well I guess.

Interviewer 2 It's hard isn't it?

Esther It is terrible. But anyway she ((inaudible)) As I was saying to Jim I've always got this wonderful memory before my mother died when they seem to get this burst of energy and you know ((inaudible)) she said to me like this and I was sitting by the side of her and she said,



"I want to thank you for all you've done for me." Two days after... she never said nothing and she died in two days. She said, "How I wished you'd be a boy" she went like that. Even on her deathbed, oh I knew I was willed to be a boy. Oh she didn't want no girls or anything. She said but you'd have gone to the war and you'd have been killed and I wouldn't have had you then would I" she said.

Interviewer 2 Isn't that lovely?

Reps Wasn't that wonderful?

Interviewer 1 Wonderful.

Esther And well, honestly, it made up for everything. And I asked them to always let me know if I wasn't there because you can't be there night and day I was working obviously doing my job. So I said ((inaudible)) I didn't want to lay her to rest because she'd always said you've helped so many other people and laid them out in the street why don't you come and help me. Why don't you help me and do my meals and things like that, you know and I realised then it would be me and it was.

Interviewer 2 It's lovely though isn't it? It's nice to do that.

Esther It's lovely. It's wonderful. It's a great honour I think. Anyway that was ((inaudible))

Interviewer 2 Do you remember a time when there were rules about midwives and laying out because...

Esther I wasn't allowed to lay out when I was on duty.

Interviewer 2 Right.

Esther Yes. And also...

Interviewer 2 That was because they were worried about the spread of infection.

Esther That's right.

Interviewer 2 Because there was a lot of worry about...

Esther There was that's right.

Interviewer 2 ((inaudible))



Esther Before I did my midwifery in the war I did that as my extra service when I was going into nursing before I was in the war and then you went you know you were all right because you was...and I remember being on a general ward and in the church where we went we had a husband who died on one ward and two nights after his wife, or vice a versa I can't remember which way, and I laid them both out. Because they sent for me and told me from another ward and they knew when I was visiting both of them so I laid them both out. So there were no restrictions on it then.

Interviewer 2 Right. I'm not quite sure when those restrictions came in.

Esther I can't remember now. There were restrictions of course with all the regulations ((inaudible)) all very...

Interviewer 2 Very strict rules.

Esther Oh yes.

Interviewer 2 I think they're much more relaxed.

Interviewer 2 These days the rules.

Esther I think they are from that yes.

Interviewer 2 I mean they're good the rules but they're put in such a way it gives you a lot of leeway to be a practitioner really.

Esther That's right. I mean to say if you were held so much you couldn't give them yourself could you. As long as, as I say people don't take too many...don't take liberties, you know and only do what they're...they know ((inaudible)) They know what's expected of them don't they really?

Interviewer 2 But they don't have any rules about laying out anymore because nobody's doing it of course.

Esther Of course not. Well no you can if you want to in a home because my husband was a funeral director, that was his job.

Interviewer 2 Interesting.



Esther ((inaudible)) of course the joke was in our church was I bringing them in and he takes them out.

Interviewer 2 That's nice. Because it used to be the same person didn't it, it used to be the midwife.

Esther That's right.

Interviewer 2 That's what she used to do, see you in and see you out. I got to interview a 95-year-old handywoman.

Esther Oh that's interesting.

Interviewer 2 Who used to see people in and out.

Esther That's wonderful, that's nice. Was she all with it?

Interviewer 2 She was very with it, quite a sense of humour you know, lots of very bawdy jokes ((laughs)). Some very strange ideas about what you actually do in midwifery I must say, you know. ((laughs))

Esther Funny. She put the old tyre on the end of the bed did she?

Interviewer 2 Yes.

Esther And that sort of thing.

Interviewer 2 "You'd reign in as if you were telling your horse to stop" she say. ((laughs))

Esther Oh crikey she must have had ((inaudible)) And then the old story the old wives they used to put a cherry in piece of rag for the baby do you know that one? For the baby to suck.

Interviewer 2 No tell us.

Esther Oh yes. An unhappy baby that's always crying.

Interviewer 2 You put a cherry in a piece of rag.

Esther A cherry in a piece of rag and tie it in the rag and put the rag in and yes. Didn't you know that one?

Interviewer 2 No, no I don't know that one.



Esther Oh that was a very old one.

Interviewer 2 Was it? Can you remember any more of those, things that they used to say?

Esther Our mums in the old days, our mums I got stuck with that from calling my mums and my supervisor said to me one day, "Nurse Churchill will you please not speak, you know, it's your mothers". I said, "Well" – I won't say her name just in case – ((laughter)) I said, "Well then what...

[END OF SECOND AUDIO FILE, INTERVIEW AND TRANSCRIPT]