

Interviewee: **Isobel Green (also known as Hannah H.)**

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 Isobel Green covering her experiences as a mother in east London, including wartime experiences, baby food, antenatal and postnatal care, social conditions, introduction of the National Health Service, and lack of contraception.

She was interviewed under the pseudonym 'Hannah H.'

Topics include: Midwifery; Maternity services; Childbirth; Maternal Mortality; Analgesia; Contraception; Stillbirth; Second World War

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[START OF INTERVIEW AND FIRST AUDIO FILE]

Interviewer Can I ask you just a few things about yourself first of all...

Isobel Yes.

Interviewer ...just that, like when you were born and where you were born?

Isobel Yes. Where I was born was in eh I think it was in ((pause)) mm, it was Burnett Road, I believe in the East End...East End of London.

Interviewer Which part of the East End were you born? It's more eh Shoreditch way?

Isobel No, it's the other s- other way, more towards Stamford Hill way.

Interviewer And what year was that?

Isobel What...?

Interviewer What year were you born in?

Isobel 1901.

Interviewer Gosh. ((laughter)) And how many children are in your family?

Isobel Three. There were two boys, one older than me and one younger than me. But eh my mother lost two boys, she had...there were two more boys born. I was the only girl.

Interviewer And what did your parents do?

Isobel My father was a eh, eh a tailor's cutter, used to cut gentlemen's... my mother was into the home dressmaking, she was a dressmaker, so...

Interviewer So your mum must have been quite busy if she had three children and she was...

Isobel We...we always had eh a servant um a maid, if you like, so living...she lived in and, and eh she, she only got about eh four shillings a week, but she lived in. And we had...and we had...had about 20 years we had. She was a Salvation Army...Armyist, belonged to the Salvation Army. They took all her money. ((laughs))

Interviewer So did you go to school round there as well?



Isobel I went to school...we moved, we didn't stay there, we moved about eh in...we had to...we eventually lived, where I went to school was in Argyle Road in...that was in...off the Mile End Road, Globe...Globe Road, and it was a turning off the Mile End Road. And I went to school in Bethnal Green, when I started school.

Interviewer And what age were you when you left school?

Isobel I was 14. I had to go, they didn't keep you on...on longer than that. And I went straight for an office job, I went straight to work and earned 15 shillings a week. And, well, I could do 60 words a minute shorthand and keep a set of books, double-entry book, and that's in elementary school, and that had been even during the War. You see the War'd broken out then. And um and when I started school lessons and I learned French, housekeeping, housewifery, cookery, laundry, shorthand and typing; all at school, all at a eh, oh, it was eh a secondary school.

Interviewer That's quite early for them to be teaching those sort of things.

Isobel Mm?

Interviewer It was quite early days for them to be teaching...

Isobel Yes.

Interviewer ...those sort of things.

Isobel Yes. Early days. And they send, you were educated. And we'd do sewing. Everything. Now when, when you go out and you can't do anything, when you leave school.

Interviewer So did you stay in that office job until you got married, or...?

Isobel No. I moved about, I, I...soon as I'd got the run of the office and that...and I used to do shorthand and typing, they started, they wouldn't trust you at first. I moved...I got eh moved to other jobs, and I seemed to land into eh estate agents more or less, and then it's...because I kept in mostly estate agents' businesses, and I...in the end I was working in eh Sackville Street, in a firm of good estate agents, and I was earning a good salary at that time, £3 a week.

Interviewer Was that in the twenties, then?

Isobel Mm?

Interviewer Was that in the twenties, when you were there?

Isobel Yes. I would have been 19. Yes. But there you go. I've always been ((inaudible)) we, we moved...I don't know if I was 19, maybe I was, we moved to Hastings to get away from the bombs that were starting to fall. We were there for a little while and I got a job in Bexhill in, in the coal merchant's there ((laughs)) then we came back to London. I used to for...every day I used to go down Hastings to London, I was working at...at...yes, on the train. I used to get up about four o'clock in the morning to get to the train. And I worked at the London Chamber of Commerce that time, and eh...because my father used to come...go down as well, so I used to go down with him, go back at five... with the five o'clock train and get back to Hastings and, and by the time I'd got there and had my supper I went to bed because it... ((laughingly)) I was so tired, I don't know really why I kept on with it. Anyway, and then we came back to London, we moved to West Hampstead because with my mother, father got a house in West Hampstead. The... but the War was still on, I believe, when I must have been... moved with the other lot. Wait a minute, let me think back; 1919, no, the War was over.

Interviewer It was finished then, wasn't it?

Isobel It was over, wasn't it, mm, when we were in West Hampstead, and eh and I'd got...I used to stay in jobs pretty much then and eh went out dancing of a night, Cricklewood... Cricklewood dance hall ((laughs)) and um...

Interviewer What sort of dances were you doing?

Isobel Foxtrot and waltz; not these ((inaudible)) ((laughter)) static stuff they do, that that's not dancing.

Interviewer So did you meet your husband at a dance?

Isobel Well, they were...yes, there used to be a clique of us going around, and he was friendly with...I had a girlfriend and she had a brother, and eh he was friendly with my husband, and we were...and there were other girls and other boys, we all...there was all...there was a group of us, because you used to drink together and eh...we, we eventually got married;



and he was younger than I, he was six years younger than me, and eh there was a lot of controversy then, they was, oh, he's too young for you ((laughter)) no good for you and they says, she's too old for you and...and anyway we, we got married eventually.

Interviewer So how old were you when you got...?

Isobel 27. Though I had a fling with um I, I wasn't eh whatsaname, I was a very innocent...I must say ((laughingly)) I was a very innocent...I was, really. Although, because of the War and all that, it was like, you know, ((inaudible)) or anything.

Interviewer I think it was like that then, a lot of women I've interviewed have said when they got married they didn't know...

Isobel Didn't know anything, like, now my... my mother used to avoid it, I never used to ask... it... I never used to know what a period was until it happened to me. Never knew what it was.

Interviewer Must have been a real shock.

Isobel You used to see...hear girls whispering together and, and shutting up when you got near, but eh I... I'd... I would never...never, never have whatsanamed, no, was never inquisitive enough. So I never knew a lot eh a lot of things really. I still don't either. ((laughter))

Interviewer So when you got married where did you live then?

Isobel My father had died, little while before, and eh we thought it would be better if we got married and lived with my mother, it would help her or keep her, it helped her. And lived in the same house in ((inaudible)) and we were...and lived there quite a time, she'd got heart trouble, and eh I, I had my first child there – that was your mother...

And Mother used to look after her and I used to go to work. I worked, and grandpa worked. He earned £3 a week in those days, he was a tailor, and dressmake-, he was very good at dressmaking, cutting. And eh then the War came, start...was, was coming. I was three months pregnant. And grandma, she, she eh had heart trouble, she...because anyway she used to have attacks, and she died in...I'd...she died in my arms, as you might say, I was pregnant as well, so it did...it was a bit of a shock, anyway I phoned the doctor and he came round. He said she'd gone. And I ((inaudible))



Interviewer What was her name? Your mother?

Isobel Selina. And we stayed in the house um then I had a little room, stayed there and the Second W-, the Second World War started. And eh your mother went to a church school round in Mill Lane. And then they evacuated the children, so they sent Elma – because she was nine years older than, than the baby I was going to have. They sent her to Brackton in Bedford, and then started on evacuating ((inaudible)) I'd had the baby by then, yes, that's right, I went to whatsaname...Irma I had had in that whatsaname – Queen Charlotte's – and I had Lesley there as well. And I wanted to stay in there because I had no one to go back to in the house when I went back, and oh, no, they'd said, we want the bed; had to go, I had to go and I went home and there was nobody there, and I managed anyway with her. Because when I had Irma I came home, grandma was – my mother – was there, she could help. And anyway we got to the Second World War, and they were evacuating mothers and babies so I went along to be evacuated. My husband, he didn't stay in the house, I think we gave the house up, it was only rented I think at the time, and I don't think the rent was a lot of money, he went, he shared a flat with somebody, shared a house, and he was working. And they sent...Irma went to Bedford and I was hoping I'd go, I did go to Bedford, they did evacuate us to Bedford, it was probably that district went to Bedford – West House with people– and she gave me her address where she was, so I got Mrs Linham, she was a very nice woman, she took me in, and I told her I had another daughter here and where she was, and she said, oh, you'll go and get her, she said, I'll take her as well. So she took her as well. And we were very all right there, I had my own bedroom and used to do a bit of cooking or eat with them. Irma when to Bedford Grammar School, a very, very good school, she passed her 11-plus, Irma, that's why she was going to quite a good school.

Anyway, a year or so later the War seemed to...there was no bombing or anything like that, that's why we went away. Leslie was about three years old, three and a half, getting towards school age. Mike had come back. So Mrs Linham said, I'll keep Leslie as well, I'll have the two children, she had Irma and Leslie, and I came home. In the meantime I had no home because we'd given up the house, but we found a flat in St John's Wood high street and we moved there, it was an upper part – three floors – and my husband could

work there, he worked on the top floor, he was working for himself by then, he got on, you see, he was quite good, had quite a good lot of customers. And we stayed there. And then the bombing started, and he was called up, he got called up. So I was there on my own, bombs were going, so what happened, I went back...no, I didn't go back to Bedford, he was posted to Barry Island, he got me a room in Barry Island with some married people who ran a shop, and I went there, left St John's Wood. So we were in Barry Island and I had a room, and Mike was there as well so we used to see one another, he was in barracks, we never used to stay overnight or anything like that. And the children were all right.

But I couldn't do nothing, so I used to help them in the shop, it was a grocery shop and cakes and stuff and that sort of thing. And they used to be allowed so much during the War, they were allowed so much to sell, being grocers. They found they were getting a lot of excess stock, like fruit, dried eggs, flour, and bread; so I set myself to...and they ran a small café and soldiers used to come in and have a cup of coffee and a sandwich or whatever they could give them. So I set to, and I saw they had currents and dried fruit and a lot of bread left, stale bread; I made bread puddings, I used to make bread pudding, and that went down fine, I used to sell it; and I'd find they'd...when they wanted something in the morning I made them dried-egg omelettes. They thought it was wonderful, all these soldiers that came in.

Well, when there was no bombing I went home again, and the children were still away, and they didn't want me to go, the Jones, because I suppose I was an asset to them, they were very upset when I went, but I said I came back. And when there was bombing I used to go down in the...the people that were underneath had a dress shop, they had a cellar, I used to go down in their cellar because there was nothing else to do.

Interviewer Can I ask you a bit about when you had Irma you had her at St Charlotte's, didn't you?

Isobel Yes. No I didn't have her at Queen Charlotte's, I had her in the whatsaname hospital in Mortimer Street.

Interviewer Is that called the Middlesex?

Isobel Middlesex. I had Irma in the Middlesex, yes.



Interviewer And did you have a choice where you could have stayed at home and had her or you could have gone into hospital?

Isobel No, I think it was you used to go to hospital then. And maybe I could have had her at home but I didn't want to, I preferred to go.

Interviewer So did you have any antenatal care? Did you go along to the clinic before you had her?

Isobel Yes, I used to be examined and pressed and punched and that sort of thing. Yes. But we didn't have any exercises to help us with our having the child. No exercises.

Interviewer So how did you get on when you had your first baby?

Isobel Well, with Irma it was a long labour, it was all night and part of the day, and they just put you in a room and let you get on with it; they used to say, don't bear down, bear down, do this, do that, and they never used to take you into the labour room till the water broke. And if your water broke first and you were still not getting it you stayed in the labour room anyway. And it was a very bad...and that, I think they used forceps for her, because she was bruised on each side of her head when I had her.

Interviewer That must have been very hard in labour with nobody with you.

Isobel No, nobody we'd know, only a nurse or a midwife, maybe a nurse stood there. And she said, well, the next one won't be so bad. And I think I had stitches. It's the sort of thing they used to do anyway, what do they call it, it's not allowed any more. They used to cut something or other.

Interviewer An episiotomy?

Isobel That's it. Yes. But it's been discontinued, they don't do it any more. Because when I got a job with the Midwives' Chronicle, I used to work for them. That was years later. So I came home with her. But I think I was looked after quite well there. And they only keep you in for ten, 12 days, that's all, and you go home.

Interviewer How big was Irma?

Isobel She was eight pounds. She was, yes, eight pounds.



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Interviewer Did you have any painkillers when you were in labour?

Isobel No, no one did. I don't think...no.

Interviewer Even when the- did the forceps?

Isobel I don't even think I had a smell...or did I have anything to smell? No. Maybe I did, but I don't remember, it's just so long ago.

Interviewer And how about when you had Leslie?

Isobel Leslie...when did I have her? She was born early in the morning, during the day. Much easier, a much easier thing. A dose of castor oil, I believe, and I had to call the nurse, I said, I think she's coming as well ((laughter)) In the bed pan. You know? And they wanted to give me a smell but I didn't want it because I could feel her coming. That was a much easier...

Interviewer Smashing. So you just gave birth to her normally?

Isobel But between the two I had a miscarriage, yes, that's right. Oh, yes, and I had an ovary taken, between the...four years after, I had it, I had pain here, and doctors thought I may have mis...I may have conceived outside of the womb. But after...I saw a specialist, he said, no, it was a whatsaname on an ovary.

Interviewer A cyst?

Isobel The dermoid cyst I had, it was growing hair and God knows what, so I had that operation. And I said, I suppose I can't have any more children now. Oh, yes, he said, yes, you can, if you've got one ovary you can still have children, and another four years or so I had Leslie. That's why there was such a long time between. This birth was much easier.

Interviewer And how did you feed the babies?

Isobel I'd got no nipples, very, very small, and they didn't...I couldn't...they used to say, pull them out, and gave me this...but they couldn't suck, that both of them, it was no good at all for them.

Interviewer So you bottle-fed them?



Isobel Yes. Irma had some stuff that was about then, some woman in Australia, what was her name, that used to swear by it, giving it with young babies. There was a woman.

Interviewer Not Truby King?

Isobel Truby King, yes. Irma was trained more or less on Truby King. Yes. But it was all right.

Interviewer They used to go by the clock, didn't they?

Isobel Yes. Oh, every three hours, yes, all through the night as well, every three hours. And I'm one of the people that stick to rules so I had to do it, yes, and potted and then all that business. Oh, dear. I wouldn't do it any more if I had one, I'd wait till they understood more.

Interviewer Yes.

Isobel It's better for them.

Interviewer Yeah, I think, because mine, he's 15 months now, my baby and he's just beginning now to realise when he wants to do it.

Isobel Yes.

Interviewer I think I would have been silly to have done it before now.

Isobel Yes.

Interviewer ((laughingly)) It's a bit more work for yourself really.

Isobel Yes, and it annoys you and upsets you. And Leslie was...what was it when Leslie was born, some milk, Ostermilk, she was Ostermilk, Leslie, but I think that she was all right on it. She was easier to wean, you know, to bring up than Irma was, a much easier child, more placid, much more placid child. She still is, she's different altogether. Irma's fiery.

They only kept me...I was only in the hospital for ten days. They were more concerned with the child than with the mother after the birth, they don't want to know, they want you to go out breastfeeding them, that's a triumph for them. But I couldn't, I would have liked to but I couldn't. I used to pump it out and never much never came, and all that business; and



I didn't even used to get the pain of milk coming through. So that was it. And I mean I'd had Leslie, I must have been 37 when I had Leslie.

Interviewer How old were you when you had...what year was it when you had Irma?

Isobel She's 54 now, so...I got married when I was 27. When I was 27. I had her in 1928.

Interviewer 28.

Isobel 28. Yes.

Interviewer So things probably changed quite a lot by the time you had Leslie, there would have been some changes in the way they did things.

Isobel Yes. But I don't remember. Well, of course I had Leslie in the other hospital, in Queen Charlotte's. And after I'd had Leslie I went into a home, a sort of an aftercare place near Brighton, and I stayed there for ten days, I wrote to ask if I could come there on my own ((inaudible)) and I think it was safe there. And I was looked after there, it was quite nice, sort of a holiday, and they looked after the baby and they feed you and...

Interviewer When you went into hospital – because this was before the National Health Services – did you have to pay the hospital? Or was it covered by your husband's insurance?

Isobel Covered by husband. Yes, by a husband's insurance. They used to allow you so much money, you used to get, if you were pregnant or...you used to get so much money.

Interviewer And when you were pregnant you didn't have any problems, did you, in your pregnancies?

Isobel No, only heartburn, that's all. ((laughs)) No, I was all right with that, yes, as far as I can remember. You know that's a long time to remember, and when you're getting older things are not so clear as they were, as they used to be now.

Interviewer Because in the 1930s quite a lot of women actually died as a result of being pregnant or in childbirth.

Isobel Yes.

Interviewer Do you remember hearing about that?



Isobel Well, I don't...I can't remember absolutely now about it. Most likely they did, yes. If they didn't have the proper care or things weren't sterilised enough and things were clean. I was very fussy with them, I used to boil and boil their bottles and boil everything properly, and everything. We never had these throwaway nappies and things, we always...there was always nappies soaking and you had to boil them and boil them. There was nothing as good as it is now with a child. And they used to say, don't put mackintosh knickers over their whatsaname, it's not good for them and they can get rashes. They used to get a bit of a rash, I used to put ointment on. And you had none of those things, none of these things that don't leak ((laughs)) are they all right?

Interviewer Yeah, they're great.

Isobel Do they work?

Interviewer They're wonderful. ((laughs))

Isobel We had nothing like that then.

Interviewer Yes, it's so different nowadays, isn't it?

Isobel Yeah, it's much different, it's easier. It is.

Interviewer Yeah.

Isobel What else do you want to know?

Interviewer After you had the babies was there a clinic or something you could go to to get advice from the health visitors, or...?

Isobel Yes, I used to go to a clinic every week, to have the baby weighed, and if I had any problems I used to ask them. Yes, there was health clinics, yes, there were those clinics. Because they used to weigh them to see that they were gaining weight.

Interviewer What was your house like at the time? The other house in West Hampstead.

Isobel We had a house. Yes.

Interviewer Did you have electricity?



Isobel There wasn't when we first moved in but my mother...we had it put in. And there wasn't a telephone and we had a telephone put in. And it was not a bad house, there was a basement which had a copper boiler, for boiling clothes, and there was a toilet in there, a lavatory in it as well. And then upstairs there was the kitchen. Not a bad kitchen that, for a kitchen. And a scullery. And there was a small back yard, a small garden. And a sitting room, a back sitting room and a front one, three rooms on the ground floor. And up on the half landing there was a room, and then up a few more stairs there was another two rooms. There was two more rooms, front bedroom and a back bedroom, and then up another flight there was the attic, we had a part of the attic. So there was quite a lot of room, a lot of stairs. Then upstairs there was a bathroom, a lavatory. And we had a geyser for the hot water. And in the kitchen...was there a boiler, I think there was a boiler, I can't remember. Perhaps not because it was a fireplace. But there was no electricity at first, we used to have fires, fire in the sitting room.

Interviewer And electric lighting as well?

Isobel Well, no, we had gas mantles at first.

Interviewer So you went back to work when Irma was still a baby and your mum...?

Isobel My mother had to...

Interviewer How old was she when you went back to work?

Isobel Who? Irma?

Interviewer Mm.

Isobel Did I not go back to work, I used to help my husband. I'm not sure, because one time I didn't work and I helped him because I could sew, I was quite a good sewer, I used to love it. So I really can't...you know, don't know.

Interviewer It must have been nice having your mum there to...

Isobel Oh, yes. She used to do all the cooking. Yes. Used to help with the cooking. And I think that I must have been going to work, perhaps I was, only I'm not sure. But at one time, when she was older – or perhaps it was during the War – when I was working, I helped him in

work, he took a room in Great Marlborough Street, two rooms, we had a fitting room and a work room, and I used to go and help in the afternoons. So, no, I didn't go back to work ((inaudible)) but I did get a job, during the War I went to work for a little while in some places. And that's right, and I didn't work for some time, when the War was over, I used to help my husband.

When he died, then I went back to work. ((inaudible)) I don't know. Anyway, I went back to work...when a woman could earn as much money without losing any pension – 60 – I went back to work at 60. I was a widow then, oh yes. I worked from 60 till 80, I was working... I worked till I was 80. I worked on the midwives' college that I told you, afternoons from two till five, I used to work there in the afternoons... didn't earn very much.

Interviewer That was until you were 80 you were working there?

Isobel Yes, I went there when I was 70-...must have been 75.

Interviewer So you know quite a few of them. Do you know Ruth Ashton?

Isobel I worked in the office, not the college, it was local, they're in Belsize Lane.

Interviewer That's right. I remember when I've written letters it's been...

Isobel Yes, I worked there, I used to see to the subscription side of it, I used to deal with that.

Interviewer Because that's how I got in contact with a lot of the old midwives is I wrote a letter in the Midwives' Chronicle.

Isobel Yes, well, I think we used to do the publishing, or we used to get the book together, and the advertising together. There were only three of us in the office so there was the advertising manager and the editor and me, we used to run it. And that was an old-fashioned office, well, it suited me, it was quite old-fashioned, we were no young floating around, we were all sensible. I was the oldest. When I went for the job I gave my age much younger, a bit younger, ((laughs)) the editor, she didn't say anything, she looked at me, asked me a few questions. She said, you've got the job – no references, nothing at all – and she just said they'd had so many applications for it – it was part-time work, I think there was a premium at that time – she said, oh, yes, when do you start. I used to walk there

every day, walk down there. Walk to Finchley Road most days and do my shopping, kept myself fit, I was just walking a lot. Because there was no way of going there, there was no bus running at that time to get there. Now we've got the 268. So I started there. And when I got... I was heading to be 80, one day, one evening I'd got a query and I thought, oh, bloody hell, I can't be bothered with it, and I threw it out, and I thought...you know, that was the beginning of the end, as you might say. And in the end I told them I thought that I wouldn't carry on ((inaudible)) And I gave it up. Stayed at home.

But it's not good. When you're going to work like that you don't make any friends; it wasn't a big office to make any friends with, and going out, being out all day you don't get to know the neighbours or anybody so you're really on your own more or less, and you don't get to know people. But since then I know a few people, not many but I go to a couple of clubs. The Sobell Club, have you heard of it?

Interviewer No.

Isobel It's a big club in Golders Green. And I go to the Fleet...you're not in this district, are you?

Interviewer No.

Isobel No, so you wouldn't know.

Interviewer I know it a bit because I used to live in Islington, so we used to come over this way a bit.

Isobel Yes. The Fleet, Agincourt Road. The Fleet Centre, it's for pensioners, somebody runs it, it's only every second Thursday in the month, and she keeps us au fait with whatever they're doing for pensioners in the district, the older people, if the council are helping to do anything, or promoting anything for us, and they let us have a bus or one of their coaches twice a year to go out and take us to the country. But I don't go any more. I've got diverticulitis, I don't know whether you know about it.

Interviewer A little bit.

Isobel It's very whatsaname. It's not nice to have, you never know when you want to go to the toilet, or if you...you can feel like it the whole day long, and it's not good...



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Interviewer It's quite a handicap for you really.

Isobel It is more or less, yes. Have to take medicine. I attend the hospital for it but there's nothing to be done any more because I'm too old. You see I had an operation for haemorrhoids and that's the aftermath. That was many years ago I had that operation. I've got a tummy ((laughs)) a pattern on my tummy ((laughs)) what with the ovary and that was... And then I had an ulcer. Hiatus hernia. ((laughs))

Interviewer You've been in the wars.

Isobel ((laughingly)) And still I've managed to reach 85.

Interviewer Yes. It's fantastic I think. It's wonderful.

Isobel It's too old.

Interviewer You think so?

Isobel Mm.

Interviewer That's what my grandparents say.

Isobel How old are they?

Interviewer My gran's 90 this year. My granddad's 87, just 87.

Isobel I hope I don't get to 90.

Interviewer They've just gone into an old people's home, they've gone in together. But my granddad's fine, he's absolutely fine, but my grandma's had a couple of strokes. She varies from day to day, some days she's completely all there, other days she's quite lost, she forgets where she is. And she says she's lived too long, she's tired, she wants to go now.

Isobel Yes, she must be. Yes. And they will keep bringing you back, won't they?

Interviewer I know.

Isobel I hope they don't for me when whatsaname, you know, I'm quite prepared to go, I'm quite ready. I get the heads, you know, you get a bit bewildered. I get bewildered, forget, for lots of things. Unless I have things ordered in my mind that I've got to do, you forget them, there's lots of things you can forget to do. When I wake up in the morning I think, oh,

what's going to happen today, what's to go on, what's to do. But I read books, I belong to the library. My eyes are not all that they should be, but still, that's what you've got to expect. You've got to expect all these things. And thank God, I say, touch – where's any wood, there's no wood, only up here – I haven't got arthritis, I can walk, although that's getting slower, but still I can walk, I go for a walk, for walks out.

Interviewer That's what's got to my grandma because once she was chair bound she couldn't even walk into the kitchen or down the garden and so then she got really just frustrated and unhappy.

Isobel Yes. The younger people can't understand it.

Interviewer No, you can't imagine what's it's like.

Isobel No. And there's my daughter upstairs, Irma, she says, coming out, Mum, coming for a walk? Oh, I said, no, I don't think so, I won't go. But they do take me in the car and we go to Regent's Park and we walk in the park for a while if it's all right. But I couldn't walk...I used to walk right up to the Heath...

[END OF FIRST AUDIO FILE]

[START OF SECOND AUDIO FILE]

Isobel ... looking after yourself.

Interviewer Yes.

Isobel I can look after myself, I do have three rounds ((?)) a week. I go to the clinic, foot clinic, have my feet looked at, although thank goodness, I've got quite good feet, no bunions. And one corn which comes now and again which they treat. They cut my nails because I can't bend down to cut them. And that's all they do is to do that sort of thing.

And I've got a cleaning woman once a fortnight for a couple of hours. And she had to have an operation at the end of last year, she was out of work for a few months ago I applied for a home help ((inaudible)) help me when I don't want the help. ((laughs)) She was hopeless. No good at all.

Interviewer Going back to what it was like in the 30s and 40s. Was it very different when the National Health Service was introduced? Did it make a difference to you that you didn't have to...?

Isobel Yes, I didn't have to pay the doctor. Yes. It made that difference. Otherwise we used to go to... I used to have an Indian doctor when we were in West Hampstead, he was very good, he never used to charge a lot, I think they used to make their own medicines ((inaudible)) But he was very good. Then the National Health came of course and uh... But I didn't used to need a doctor for anything. Except for children. I remember Irma had earache once, trouble with an ear, and we used to take her every day to have it syringed, he used to do that. And he was very good, this doctor, when I had the miscarriage, because it wasn't in the...I was in...had gone to bed. But that day, I remember now, I had a checkup at the hospital, I was carrying, and with all that. If I'd have stayed there another hour or so they'd have...I was already getting a slight niggly pains, but that I was going to see my brother, he was going...he was up on leave but he was going away the next day or something, and I went on the bus, and the jolting of the bus must have shook a bit. And I still had this niggly pain, and I took no notice of it, but I should really have gone back to the hospital because I had the miscarriage then. It was in the night, I'd gone to bed, and all of a sudden I felt all wet and sticky.... I was miscarrying. But my husband got the doctor and he took it away, and he said it wouldn't have been good anyway, it was lucky I lost it.

Interviewer And how many months pregnant were you?

Isobel About three, four months.

Interviewer It's still upsetting, though, isn't it?

Isobel Yes. It is.

Interviewer It upsets your system, I think.

Isobel Yes.

Interviewer In those days, when you were pregnant, were there things...or did you just carry on your life as normal, or were there things that you didn't do, or...?



Isobel Well, no I...

Interviewer You just did everything?

Isobel Yes, I didn't...

Interviewer Did you have any special things that you eat when you...?

Isobel I used to have Horlicks at night. I didn't used to...things I couldn't eat because of the heartburn, otherwise, yes, we used to get iron tablets I think they used to give us for blood. But otherwise, no, I don't remember having anything special, any special thing, no. Do they now?

Interviewer Not really. I think ((multiple speakers)) yes. Yes. Got to agree to it. Sometimes, in the 30s, in some areas, to the poorer families, they often used to give them, like, Virol and Marmite, they used to give them, like, supplements that they were supposed to take.

Isobel Yes ((inaudible)) Yes. They used to have, but I don't ((inaudible))

Interviewer Mm.

Isobel Used to get orange juice for the baby.

Interviewer Yes, that's right. Can you remember, you know the nurses and the midwives that looked after you in hospital, what sort of women were they? Can you describe them?
((laughs))

Isobel No. Just women. No, just like they are now I suppose. Nothing outstanding.

Interviewer And was it the midwives that delivered the baby, or was it a doctor that came in?

Isobel I think a midwife did deliver the baby. I believe Leslie was delivered by a man midwife, because he said, oh, he said, I'm glad you had her, he said, that makes my so many, and that's how many I've got to deliver. Is that right? They have to deliver so many?

Interviewer Yes, that's right. When you're a student.

Isobel He must have been a student. I think Leslie weighed nine pounds. She was much bigger than Irma.

Interviewer It's a big baby, because you're not very big yourself.



Isobel No.

Interviewer It's quite a big baby.

Isobel I remember him saying that. Because I had her midday, it was lunchtime, they were all having their lunch and I had to ring the bell for someone to come.

Interviewer When you were in labour were you on the bed or were you walking around the room?

Isobel No, you had to walk around the room. They wouldn't let you lie down, you had to walk about, until you were actually in...were going to...

Interviewer To push, yes.

Isobel Then you went into a special room, special ward, a labour...proper labour ward, where you delivered.

Interviewer And you were lying down on the bed?

Isobel Yes, you were lying down. Yes.

Interviewer What did you think about that? Having to walk around. Was it a good thing?

Isobel Well, I suppose they think it's a good thing, but at the time you just don't think, because you're in such a bewildered state, and if it's the first time, and I'd never been taught by anybody who'd had a baby or been in hospital like that, that it was all new to me and I just did what I was told, so that was... and I thought this was what has to be done. And they'd say, keep moving otherwise it gets locked or won't come down. So I used to do that ... till you felt the head coming. Or, you see, the water'd broken a long time before, before the baby came through. The first baby. They don't...I don't think they made any program whether it was the first or 50th that you were having, ((laughingly)) you just had to go...it would go by the board, by what they told you.

Interviewer Yes. And after you'd had the baby did you get any advice on family planning, contraception?

Isobel No.

Interviewer No, there was nothing?



Isobel Nothing like that. No, nothing at all.

Interviewer Because some of them, they had very large families, didn't they, in those days.

Isobel Yes. No, there was no...nothing...no...anything like that. I suppose it was up to you, if you wanted more. Or if you just didn't want them perhaps you did ask, if you were a bit more enlightened. But I think the only conscious...I never knew about contraceptive...what is the...the...you put a thing in your...

Interviewer The cap?

Isobel A cap. A diaphragm. Never knew ((inaudible)). Shows you how ignorant I was.

Interviewer Oh, I think most women were. Most of the women I've interviewed have said that. They'd sort of heard about it ((inaudible))

Isobel Of our age, yes. You were kept very ignorant.

Interviewer Do you know what happened to unmarried mothers?

Isobel Then?

Interviewer Mm. You didn't come across any?

Isobel No.

Interviewer Just wondered what happened to them.

Isobel Perhaps the baby was adopted, put in a home, or perhaps they kept them. Some may have been brave enough to keep the baby. But now of course you keep... it's for you, you keep it if...in any case if you want to...

Interviewer Mm. Because it's very different.

Isobel Yeah, it's different now.

Interviewer There used to be more stigma...

Isobel That was the thing then, that people were...I don't think women were as loose as they are now, if you like, today, because of the stigma of having a baby when you weren't married, you were scared stiff to do anything or to whatsaname...you used to think you'd get



pregnant if you kissed a boy. ((laughs)) That's how I was brought up. My mother was very...quite strict.

Interviewer Yeah.

Isobel And say...although she was partly French ((inaudible)) She was brought in France... she was educated in France.

Interviewer Because you were the only daughter so she was probably more protective of you, I suppose.

Isobel Yes, maybe. I was scared...I had a...quite a nice boyfriend who used to...I used to meet him once a week and he used to take me to the Finsbury Park cinema; and I was very shy of him, he was quite a nice boy; I didn't know anything and I used to...just a peck when we...goodnight, but nothing, nothing else, no, we used to hold hands and there weren't...anything else; and he always used to buy me a box of Cadbury's ((laughingly)) King George chocolates. And I was scared stiff to tell my mother, I used to meet him on the sly; but she probably wouldn't have minded, she might have said, ask him home or something like that, because he was a nice...he was the brother of a girl at the school, I don't know whether she knew he was meeting me and anything. And then I used to wear glasses, and I was very conscious of wearing eye glasses, in those times if you were glasses it was a stigma to wear spectacles; and now it's a stigma if you don't wear them. ((laughter)) And I used to take them off, and ((laughingly)) I could hardly see ((laughs))...how you are about things, so conscious, self-conscious about them. But I used to put them on for cinema, because I said to him, I must wear them, I can't see, I must wear them... used to have to take them off. ((laughs))

Interviewer What sort of films did you see?

Isobel Oh, good films. Yes. In those days we used to see the best films. Finsbury Park, the cinema was called. I don't remember what they were but I know now if I've seen it, when it comes on again. But this lot, modern stuff you get now, it's quite shocking, isn't it?

Interviewer Mm.

Isobel What they rake up.



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Interviewer Yes, very sort of violent things. So were they silent films, then, or were they...just started having...?

Isobel Silent. They were silent films with subtitles. And then they moved into the talkies. ((phone rings))

[END OF SECOND AUDIO FILE, INTERVIEW AND TRANSCRIPT]