

Interviewee: **Alice Forrest**

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:

Transcription of an interview with Alice Forrest covering her experiences as a mother during the 1930s to 1940s, including details of social conditions, Caesarean delivery of her baby in hospital, war time, baby gas masks, pain relief, and feeding.

Alice Forrest was born in Dulwich, South London in 1903 and had one son by Caesarean Section in 1937; she was from a well-off, middle-class family.

Topics include: Midwifery; Maternity Services; Second World War; Caesarean section

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[START OF INTERVIEW]

Alice I told you, didn't I, that it was a breech Caesar?

Interviewer Yes, that's right.

Alice Yeah and er – oh dear, I've only just got in meself. Yes, I went to the Houses of Parliament last week. I try to do all I can what they tell you. You know – anything to try and help and that, I do it.

Interviewer What was it about then? Was it about pensioners?

Alice Yes, he's trying to fight for the er – for the pensioners to stop this erm – oh I've got some tea on me. Erm to try and get the standing charge for electricity and whatsaname, you see, 'cause they want to put that right up or something. Well, they hardly use any gas you know, especially if they have the home's hot dinners. Of course, I cook all my own, I like me own cooking and er really, I live well. I won't say I don't, 'cause I do. I mean I've got today, steak – yeah steak ((laughs)) steak, a pork chop and a chicken. Oh yes, I take – I take care of myself. You see with some of 'em – so if they had to pay that £9.90, that's quite a lot you know, and perhaps you've only got a blinking £1 or something of gas that you've used. So it's not much there at all. So er – this is what er Mr Hughes was fighting for, you see, to try and get it for us. He does have a go and – I will say this man is a jolly good man. He seems to be everywhere. I've been to Peckham, I've been all over where – and you don't know he's gonna come, but he – all of a sudden he appears, he's there. Well, I think that's good, because when you come to consider Labour, we never see any – blasted nothing of 'em.

Interviewer Well I know. I've been wondering who to vote for, 'cause I don't see the Labour....

Alice Oh no, I'm voting for him, yes. I think a lot of 'em are. I've spoke to a lot round by me and they're all voting for him. Yes, because they don't seem to er trouble at all to come round. I mean it's him that's noticed this crack right across our ceiling. There's all this erm – all this stuff all running down on the main street door. He came along – they did it on a Saturday.

Interviewer Whereabouts do you live then?

Alice I don't live far from here.



Interviewer Yeah, round the....

Alice Yeah, and er – I mean he sent his representatives round and everything else. So that's the one I wanna vote for – er Hilary....

Interviewer Hilary Wines, yeah.

Alice That's it, Hilary, yes. That's who I'm voting for anyway. I've had a talk to several more and er I think I've found nine at least that are now gonna vote for him. I wondered where one of them – he's got a whatsit up in his window, you know, for him, and I haven't got one. I would've liked one. I don't know where I'd get one. Where will I get one of those?

Interviewer I suppose you could get one from her, couldn't you? From Hilary; she lives in the Peabody.

Alice Yeah she does, doesn't she? She's only – doesn't live far from here, does she?

Interviewer No, because I live in those flats, but she lives in Ilfracombe flats, the ones on Marshalsea, but I've forgotten which number it is.

Alice Yeah, I think I'll have a look on the paper and see if I can see.

Interviewer It tells you.

Alice Yes, 'cause I've got – yes, I'll have a look on there.

Interviewer It might be number nine, but I can't remember. I wouldn't say for certain.

Alice No. How's your baby? All right?

Interviewer Oh he's fine. He's enjoying the nice weather.

Alice He's a lovely, bonnie boy, ain't he?

Interviewer Oh he loves it in the sunshine. He just can't get over it.

Alice Yes, good, lovely, because that's what they want, plenty of sunshine.

Interviewer That's right.

Alice I meant to bring some pictures of my son round, so you could see, and I haven't got 'em, I never bought 'em. Anyway, it's 'cause I want to er have a rake round, because last night we



had somebody here at the meeting and they wanted to know all about old things. I think I was the one that could tell them basic – he said, ‘You’ve told us more and we’ve never heard it.’

Interviewer Really?

Alice Yeah. I said, ‘Well, there you are.’ I said, ‘That’s actually true.’ Oh they was thrilled to bits, so they’re coming again. So he said, ‘Will it be all right if we...?’ I said, ‘Yeah, sure.’ So I said, ‘I’ll tell you, and you can take it down if you want.’ So he said, ‘That’s interesting, all what you’ve told us.’ He said, ‘Now, we’ve interviewed a lot and we haven’t got the information like you...’ He said, ‘You’ve got a wonderful memory.’ I can think back quite a bit, you know.

Interviewer What year were you born in then Mrs Forrest?

Alice Very, very old.

Interviewer Go on, tell me.

Alice 83.

Interviewer You’re 83. I’d never have guessed that.

Alice No, none of them know that, because they all think Bill’s the oldest. I’m 83.

Interviewer Goodness me.

Alice But – yes, I have been cut about, what with the baby, having the baby, you know, and er – that. But I have got a wonderful memory and I can think, you know, I can think right the way back to the erm – when the er – it was the horse bus. See, I can think right back to that.

Interviewer So were you born round here as well?

Alice No, no, I was born er – no, where was – Dulwich I think, because we lived up in Dulwich. Yes, and er my parents – we all – they were comfortable. You know, what I call comfortable to what you hear some of the others were. You know what I mean. I mean we didn’t have to er skimp and scrape like some of the poor old souls for a dinner or something. We lived well and my father had a good job and we lived well and er....

Interviewer What did he do?



Alice Oh he was a surveyor over – a lot of the stuff that's over in the city now. Like the Guildhall and all that sort of thing. You know – big places. And erm – so we had a nice life and always knew when the holiday was, whereas some of 'em never seen the seaside, you know, which I only learned as I got older. I used to say to my mother, you know, 'Ain't it sad, they've never seen the sea and all that. To think that we've been on holidays here and holidays there and they never go.' Of course, my mother's people, they were comfortable; they had a hotel in Hertfordshire. So really, you know, it wasn't a wanting family. Well, now what's this bit you want to know? It's to do....

Interviewer Well, I just wanted to know what it was like when you actually had your son.

Alice Had me baby – right.

Interviewer Your baby, yeah.

Alice Well, we'll say that I go in the hospital, I went in the hospital that was in Dulwich, and er I had to wait and wait and I – three times I went into false labour. That was terrific, I might tell you. I don't know if you know labour pains but....

Interviewer Yeah, I do.

Alice They're murder, aren't they? Then, of course, on the third attempt, when – 'cause they keep on putting needles in your botty to bring on the false labour, and I thought I was gonna to get the baby and er it was slowing down and then, of course, I heard the doctor – he swore. He said, 'This child is determined to come standing up.' Of course, we found out afterwards, I told you, they reckoned there was a piece of bone right across the – the baby couldn't get out, you see. Of course, he was a big baby, 9¾. It was a big baby for a little me, which – I'm not big now, you know, but I was very slim when I got married. I only had a 19 waist. Mind you, the size of me – well, first they said, 'I think it's twins.' So I said, 'Oh, that'd be all right, I don't mind.' I says, 'No good worrying about it.' I went home and I said to my mother, 'We'll have to go knitting faster.' Because we were knitting all the things we could knit, you know. 'Best keep on knit, knit, knit.' Then, of course, we could see why it was afterwards. It was the baby keeping on chopping and changing all over the place. They'd find his heart here and they'd find it up there. So – and then I had to have an x-ray, and they didn't like x-

raying me really. I got fixed under the x-ray machine, and this is the funny part ((laughs)) of it – I'm lying under the x-ray, you know, all naked of course, and I got fixed. I'm shouting out, 'Help, help.' ((Laughs)) There was nobody there. Nurse had gone and said, 'I won't be a minute.' I said, 'Right-o nurse.' Who should come in but a fellow like as if he was working on the road? He said, 'Don't worry girl, I've got six kids, don't worry.' ((Laughs)) I'm lying there and I said, 'Oh give me something.' Because I'm going like this. It was up here you know? Oh, I'll never forget it. Anyway, he hadn't fixed this blinking bolt thing at the side of me and – of course I was all right. Nurse come running, 'Oh, oh, how could I leave you like – I'm sorry.' I said, 'Don't worry dear, as long as I'm all right.'

Anyway, they got the picture and then all of a sudden they said, 'Well, you're going to have a Harley Street specialist.' I said, 'Oh good.' So of course I had the Harley Street – and er when I saw me baby I couldn't – oh he was absolutely gorgeous, really beautiful. She said to me, the Sister, she said, 'We're very, very pleased.' She said, 'I'm very, very pleased about this birth because it's so beautiful and clean.' She said, 'You must have drank castor oil by the bottle.' And I was. I was drinking – 'cause when we had a nurse in, she was rather strict, and she said, 'If you don't take this castor oil I shall hold your nose.' I said, 'You don't have to nurse, I've been drinking it ever – before I came in here.' 'Oh, let me see you do it then.' Of course, I drunk it right down. So she said, 'You don't want any orange.' Because we used to sprinkle orange, you know. So I said, 'No, that'll be all right.' Down it went. The Sister said to me, 'It was the most beautiful birth and I'm very, very pleased with it.' Of course, it was a general call in the hospital because they hadn't had a birth like this I – oh within years, what I could hear of it. So, as I say, the baby was born and all of them were saying that it was perfect and all that?'

Interviewer So it was actually a Caesarean when he was born.

Alice Yes, yes, that's right, when he was born. Of course – well I've still got the whatsit down here. I had a bet with the doctor, before I was on the table. He's saying, 'Now, what would you really like?' I said, 'A little girl.' Because I always think girls are more closer somehow. He said, 'All right, but I'm going to say it's a footballer.' I said, 'All right.' So, of course, it was a footballer. Well, he was just beautiful. He'd just got one mass of thick, curly black hair and



bright blue eyes. Oh and when I looked at it, 'cause of course I couldn't hold it, and – of course in those days, with a case like mine, you're laid in the bed and they put a cradle over you, see, and sheets and blankets and whatever. I can remember the nurses, two nurses, starting, 'Come on. Wake up, Mrs Forrest. You've got twins, Mrs Forrest. Wake up.' ((Laughs)) Of course, I did – I come to and er she said, 'Oh, thank goodness.' She said, 'You'll never believe it, but one of your nurses got told off for crying.' I said, 'Really.' She said, 'Yes.' She said, 'Because they thought that what you'd been through, just to try and get this baby, and you've done everything possible to have it.' You know, I really wanted it, because over in the other bed to me she'd been taking God knows what and the baby was all burned. Oh it was terrible.

Interviewer Had she been trying to get rid of the baby?

Alice Yeah, Mmm. She'd only got one child and it seemed terrible to me. I'd been talking to her, you know, and of course – but I didn't know this at the time, because the nurses just ignored her sort of thing. They're so cross about anything like that. Her husband was upset. Good thing, it died, you know, dead. There's the doctor saying to me, 'Now, you haven't been doing anything silly.' I said, 'No, I've not, that's just it.' I said, 'I want this baby.' I said, 'I've been doing everything you've told me as regards going for a walk and....' My husband made sure we did. After tea we'd go for a nice walk all through Dulwich park and I'm doing all the exercises and one thing and another. Sister was saying to me, 'Well, you've got one of the most beautifulest babies and we've got a lot of students coming down to see you.' I think nearly all the students from – what's the hospital? Denmark Hill, you know.

Interviewer Oh yeah, King's.

Alice They came down and they said, 'Lovely baby, beautiful baby.' She said, 'You've got the biggest baby from the smallest mother in the ward.' But they did, they treated you lovely. Not like today, which I hear when they have a Caesar. They're in and out in no time.

Interviewer How long were you in bed for?

Alice Oh, I was there for about three weeks. Yes, they really cared for you, you know. Well, they did me, I can't speak for any – but even people having ordinary births. Of course, I had to

learn how to walk. That's what frightened me, because when I got out of the bed I said to the sister, 'Oh, I hope I'm going to walk down to the bottom.' Because, of course, my bed was right up to be near them, you see. They'd put me in the corner. She said, 'Oh, I'm afraid it's not going to be like that.' She said, 'You might do three steps a day – five steps....' I said, 'I am going to walk again, aren't I?' She said, 'Oh yes, but the rest that you've had to have – you've got to take it very, very steady.' Well, that was it, I did it. She said, 'Just walk from one bed to the next bed and now back.' I thought, 'Oh my goodness.' My husband thought that I was just coming out like that, sort of thing, you know. But anyway, as I say, they were very, very good to me and after about three weeks, well then I came out.

I don't know how the hospital's gone today, but er – oh after that I went to church, which was underneath. There's a church there. I went to church and then er they read this bit through about er the pains of hell, but I don't think there are any worse pains than it, I don't really. I thought to myself – I think I went all through that and then, of course, the girl in the next bed, young, you know, she was young, she said, 'I wish I could've been like...' Well, Sister nearly killed her for what she'd said. 'You wish you could – never would you want to be.' She said, 'Poor Mrs Forrest has had it three times and no baby.' She said, 'You've had it once and got a baby.' She said, 'And Mrs Forrest is badly cut up.' Yes, it was a nasty cut. Anyway, afterwards – I mean when I used to have to go to hospital and er they used to pay you so much money for them to have a look at it sort of thing. Yes, to see the cut. They were all very, very pleased with it. Beautiful work all in it. As I said, it was really very lovely what they done for me.

Interviewer What year was that, Mrs Forrest, when you had your son?

Alice Oh my boy's now what? I said I couldn't remember, but he's now 49 my son. As I say, I never had no bother with him. I wouldn't have him vaccinated, although the whatsit wanted to keep on at me to have him – and I wouldn't. He wasn't vaccinated until he went in the army, and I never had a cough, a cold, nothing from him. Now, is it today you've got to have it for pneumonia, haven't you? Bronchitis – all these dabs and things that go on today, and you've got to hope that they don't turn funny. I've seen more children, as I say, on TV that haven't

been right. That was never in my day like it. I think they go over the limit here, you know. I do really.

Interviewer How did you get on with feeding your baby?

Alice Oh yes, I used to hold him by....

Interviewer Did you feed him yourself?

Alice Oh yes, yes. Oh yes, he was breastfed and er he was gaining weight lovely. Er the nurse said – once they got me home. As I say, in those days they never let a mother – I don't know how you went with your baby coming out of hospital. Did your husband carry the baby or you?

Interviewer I had him at home, so....

Alice Oh you had yours at home, yes. That was lovely. That's what I wanted, but my doctor – I suppose he knew what was there and he said, 'Lassie.' He was Scots. He said, 'Lassie, you must go into hospital.' He said, 'You're going to be looked after there. Taken good care of and everything.' He said, 'I'll keep a look out for you, you know, but it's gotta be hospital.' I think in his own mind he knew what it was.

Interviewer He knew it was going to be a big baby.

Alice Yeah. Anyway, as I say, I had the baby and he was lovely and he was no bother and I trained him early on for the toilet. Yes, I hardly knew what a dirty nappy was. I was really, I think, very, very lucky how I er brought him up, you know. The only trouble was that then war came and then you'd have to grab your baby – which was one morning with me, he was in the bath and I had to grab him and throw a towel round him and run out in the garden and get in that shelter. Of course, I'm worried. I thought, 'Oh, this baby, will it catch a cold?' That was a good thing that we did get in there because – well, they bombed us two doors away and they were killed, so we were lucky. We'd had this er shelter built right down into the earth, half-way, and I'd bought a bed, a proper bed, mattress, you know, to go on it. We fixed his cot up in the corner and me dog come down with me and er I think that saved us. We had a steel gate on the door and when the fireman called in, you know, and said, 'Are you all right in there 31?' 'Yes, quite all right.' 'Don't come out, there's a time bomb in your garden.' I thought, 'Oh, God.' He came back and he said, 'The time bomb is an alarm clock.'



((Laughs)) Oh dear, oh dear. You know, you have your family and when you think what could happen. He then said, 'But you've got no street doors or no windows.' All blown off.

Interviewer Was that down in Dulwich as well?

Alice Yeah, yeah. He said, 'No street door; that's right up the main road I think.' It took it completely right off. Nobody knows what that war was and what we went through. Yes, I met a young girl and it had stripped her of everything she stood in. I took her indoors and I wrapped her up in a blanket. I put a blanket around her. I said, 'You'd better stay with us, love, for a while.' My friend was there and I said, 'Oh, what if I – I am worried about Malcolm.' She said, 'Don't worry, I think he's a strong baby and he'll be all right.' But it was all that sort of thing that used to worry me, you know. I used to try and – say me bathing, I tried to make it a different time, but this blasted Hitler – I mean he bombed us all one day for 24 hours non-stop. You couldn't go out, you couldn't do anything.

Interviewer It must've been so frightening.

Alice It was – it was frightening, oh yes. Your little bit of er, you know, rationing that we had. The er – 'cause all the electric light had gone and gas was off. Then – so what do we have to do? That's why you're glad of the coal fires. I'd got two coal fires and one was er – because they were just coming in then, the electric fires you know, getting this new light going. I said to my friend, 'There's only one thing; we've got to cook by fire.' I said, 'They did years ago, Glad, we'll have to do it now.' That's how we cooked our potatoes and greens and our little bit of meat was being cooked in the baker's. We used to take it over to the baker's and they would cook this little bit of meat for us. We put our two books together to make it a bit of something to eat, you know. Yes, and then of course after that – I don't know whether it interfered with me a bit, but my milk started going. It could've been shock or something. So they told me to use Glaxo – that was the name of the babies' food. We made that up and he got on with that and – you know. He really was a charming baby. A wonderful, good tempered, happy baby. Yes, I had a lovely life with him, bar, as I say, with the war. Apart from that it was a lovely life.

Interviewer So you didn't get evacuated.



Alice Oh, they wanted me to, right, so they kept on. The town hall kept coming down – two men. He said, ‘I think that you should go away, because you’re the only person down here with a child.’ I said, ‘I know, but I still have a mother and father that I worry about.’ So he said, ‘I can understand, but we’re thinking of the baby.’ I said, ‘Naturally, you’re thinking of the next generation to take over.’ I said, ‘Another war.’ Which he’s already been in. So I said, ‘Well, I’ll think about it and let you know.’ In the end I goes to Wales. I didn’t wanna go to Wales, but anyway I went. I’m not in Wales one day and – they hadn’t had a bomb and I got over there and they had ‘em. Over they come. I’m walking along to go and get my army pay from a little tiny place which was – it was right in the heart of Wales. Over these were coming – machine gunning. A young boy got hold of me and threw me in the ditch. He said, ‘Quick, get down.’ We both got in this ditch together. He held me down there and there was like a brrrrrrrr all the way along. It said that they knew where the Dunkirk boys were in the hospital and they were determined to get it, but they didn’t get it because.... We laid in there because – I was covered in mud and grass and goodness knows what. I never got no money that day. I was glad to get back to me babe, you know, in this er lady’s house and erm – it was a lovely house too, it was a beautiful house. It had servants and all that there. We looked up and I said, ‘Here comes us.’ The spitfires come over and did they boom ‘em, and up they went. So you had all that to put up with. Even Rye Lane – you know Rye Lane, don’t you?

Interviewer Yeah, yeah.

Alice That was machine gunned one day. When they came over and we used to have what – see them balloons that fly there, well we had these. I forget what they call ‘em. Yeah, they were up there and while they were up they couldn’t come down low to us, see. They couldn’t because after blowing ‘em up, right, so they kept them up. On this particular day, however they got the information, but all the balloons were kept down. They came over and they really – they even machine gunned children in a school not far from Peckham. Yeah, yes just machine gunned ‘em. To me they were a most violent lot, really. As I say, I went to the pictures once, in the four years of the whole war. My friend said to me, ‘You never seem to get a break Alice, why don’t you try?’ I said, ‘Oh all right, I’ll go.’ Down our lane used to be

erm oh a lovely – a beautiful cinema, the Tower. So I said, ‘All right, I’ll just go there then.’ So she said, ‘I’ll look after the baby, don’t worry, just give yourself a break.’ ((Laughs)) And I’m in there, and if anything happened they used to put it up on screen see, ‘An air raid warning is now being announced.’ Oh I couldn’t get out the seat quick enough to get up – me legs wouldn’t take me, you know, to get home quick. I said, ‘Oh Glad, never again. I’m never going no more.’ I never went no more either. So I said er – it seemed to follow you, you know. Your life was er ducking in here and ducking in there and dragging your pram in a shelter and – and, of course, some of the women would be screaming and shouting. I always used to keep control of meself because I – and, of course, then again you used to have a big erm case like that, that you put your baby in, right. But the point is, which I don’t think the government thought of, if mother, or whoever had got that baby, left off pumping then the baby would die. Now, what was the point of that?

Interviewer How do you mean?

Alice You had to pump it, to keep the air going for the baby. So suppose the mummy got hit, where was the baby? Of course, my baby christened it ((laughs)). When my mother saw it she said, ‘Oh Alice, has he gotta go in there?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ So I said, ‘Get him in it.’ And he loved it, he was laughing away and – oh my goodness, and there was me at the ((inaudible)) hall, pumping and pumping this blasted thing.

Interviewer What was it like this thing then?

Alice Erm like a big box – which we had to hand ‘em all in after the war. And the gas masks, you know, ‘cause we had gas masks and all. Oh what a life.

Interviewer Did it have like a cover on it?

Alice Yes, yes, it was all fixed in and you could see your baby. Yeah, see there was a lovely opening and you could see your baby. I used to just – over the top with him and all that. He’d laugh, oh he loved it, yes, kicking away and we did more laughing ((laughs)). Oh that’s good, yes, and then you had to hand them in, you see. Directly baby was old enough, see, on its legs, running around, well it had to handed in.

Interviewer I see. I’d never heard of that.

Alice Had you not heard of those?

Interviewer No. Were they made of like strong metal?

Alice Erm I can't quite think – I think it had erm cloth around it as well. But it was, as I say, what they'd given us these things for, because I always thought we were gonna be attacked by gas, you see. This was to stop the baby breathing it in, like these poor souls that are suffering over in Russia at the moment, see. That's what would've killed 'em and that's why we had the gas masks. I always remember it that erm my husband had come home at the time from France and he said, 'You haven't got one of these.' I said, 'Well, we're gonna get one.' He said, 'I'll pull the blinking town hall down if I don't get one.' Of course, he did. Well, of course there was a line of mothers all lining up for these things, you see, when we heard what it was for. We heard that the Germans had started using gas, so of course naturally the government gave them out. Of course, we had to return 'em and all the rest of it, because you'd hear – it used to be very funny because you'd get a policeman riding on a bike with a notice on his back, 'All Clear.' All clear ((laughs)). Oh dear.

Then another time er – then I tried Hertfordshire. I went back to my mother's home; that was it. One of her sisters said, 'Alice, come down here with the baby.' Well, I went down and she said, 'Oh, isn't he lovely?' She said, 'We don't know we've got a baby here, he's so lovely.' My cousin, who'd also got a baby, who was a year older than mine, oh it was murder. She couldn't get it down to sleep and she still wanted to breastfeed – all for dragging 'em down. I said, 'Pat, why don't you pull yourself together?' I said, 'You don't carry on like this.' So she said, 'What? You've put your baby down at half-past-six; he was wide awake, you've left him in the cot, sung a little lullaby to him and he's away. Me, I can't get her down.' Sleeping in the room with her, she was screaming and carrying on nearly all night.' I said, 'Oh my goodness.' I said, 'To live like this is terrible.' I wondered whether she'd really welcomed this baby into the world. Do you know what I mean? All different things were going through my mind. Oh she was a terrible child to bring up, dreadful, and you couldn't get her to sleep when you wanted to. Whereas I did everything like the hospital told me and, as I say, I used to have a nurse come round and visit me. Yes, they still kept in touch with me. She came and she said, 'Mrs Forrest, I can see that you're house-proud, but I want

you to get out into that Dulwich Park.' I said, 'I'm going to.' She said, 'I don't care about the garden, I want you to get out into Dulwich Park.' Because I used to put him in the garden, with a mosquito net right over the pram, so no flies. He'd lay there and coo and it was lovely. Then after dinner, well then I would take him for a nice do right through the park. I really had a nice, happy motherhood with him, you know. Sometimes when I think back, I think, 'Oh I wish it could be that bit now. It was lovely.' I think you get more worries as they grow up. I'm sure of it.

Interviewer Yes, they say that, yes.

Alice More worries as they grow up. What does your mother and father think?

Interviewer That's what they say. 'Make the most of it while he's little.'

Alice Yeah, make the most of it, yeah. Now, I must say – like with Dulwich Hospital, see, the Sister held the baby and she brought it down. I got in our car and she put the baby in my lap. They bring it right off the premises. I don't know what they do here now. I don't think – I don't think they do anything like that now, do they?

Interviewer No, I don't think so.

Alice That's how it used to be, yes, for a child that was born – so it leaves their premises safe. Now, what happens now is up to you.

Interviewer Did you go to the clinics and stuff with him?

Alice I used to go, but really I had nothing there to go for, if you know what I mean. I was breastfeeding him and all it was – weight. Just putting him on the scales. They was always very pleased with him and perhaps say, 'Oh, no need to come next week.' I used to say, 'Well, now he's gone on this whatsaname, this Glaxo milk, because I've started losing my milk.' They said, 'Perhaps it was the fright of a raid that could've upset you. It may come back again.' Anyway, we continued like that, but he really liked breast milk best.

Interviewer Yeah, they do, don't they?

Alice For me, for being so tiny like I was, you know, but of course I filled out with the baby and that. He was a nice, lovely, contented baby and the bath – oh he loved it. To take him out



of the bath, then we did get a scream, so I used to put him back again, being a daft mother. I put him back again, so he could have another kick and a, you know, and it was all glee and it was all lovely. I'd get him out again and he used to – I used to think, 'I've got to. Look at the clock.' I thought, 'I've got to.' ((Laughs)) Oh it was lovely when you think back to those days. I enjoyed it. But for the war, as I say, it would've been lovely. The play-pen he had was a beautiful play-pen, which I've not seen like it since. It came from Selfridges and it had a spring floor, yeah a beautiful spring floor, with a bed in – on it. Then there were beads round it and er – beads and little rabbits, that's right, beads and little rabbits on it. Oh and a draft sheet, that was it, a draft sheet right round. It was really a beautiful – a beautiful play-pen. Well, you could put him in that and he'd – well, it was lovely. He didn't worry you, you know, for picking up and all that. Of course, when Nanny comes along, your mother, of course naturally she wants to pick him up. I used to say, 'All right Mum, for a while, yes, pick him up.' So she said, 'Oh you're still – everything's lovely.' I said, 'Yes, washing's all done.' It was all – and of course washing in those days you had to do it – until bag wash came along. No doubt you've heard about that, have you?

Interviewer No, no.

Alice Haven't you? Right. Bag wash came into it, and his name was Maxwell. You could fill this bag up with your washing and er – I used to rinse me – I tried 'em out, you know. I thought, 'Oh, I'll try this.' I'd rinse me er nappies and all that out. I'd put them in and whatever it was and took it up. You took it one day and you got it back the next. Now that was good. All you had to do then was hang it up and dry it. So I had that. That was a new thing – that was one of the newest things invented for us. So I did enjoy that really. That helped out a lot. Of course, all you had to do then was the ironing of it. That helped quite a good bit, I enjoyed having that, but as regards er anything else, well there wasn't much of – not like you have today. Have this, have that. Do this, do that. I dunno how they carry on with it like they do. I mean when I see er – Jackie's talking sometimes and poor little Kelly, I feel sorry for her, but er – they're just lovely little souls. Not a Mongol, she's not a Mongol, but of course she is a – oh what do we call them, these children? Oh, I can't think of the name. Oh that's terrible.

Interviewer Is it a syndrome?

Alice A syndrome baby, yes. She's a syndrome baby. She's coming on nice, she's now er six. But, as I say, with the other little baby that's come along, Robin, he's – Robert rather – he's er – he's nearly as big as her and he's only just what? 18 months, see. So I told you, they've given her – they're gonna try her out on this new stuff. It's supposed to come from Switzerland somewhere, to try and make her grow. I said to Jackie, 'I feel I wanna get hold of her and pull her.' She said, 'So do I.' She's so tall and so is her flipping father, you know. I can't understand why all this is. I said to Jackie, 'Did you take a lot of stuff when...?' She said, 'Well, I did used to bung – take tablets for this and tablets for that.' I said, 'Because look at him.' I said, 'He's wonderful, ain't he?' I said – and well, when she was born, oh she looked terrible. Inwardly, in my own heart, wishing she'd go, you know. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. For such a beautiful girl, which she is, Jackie's a beautiful girl. She carries herself nice and Robert's a very nice looking chap. When you get a baby like that, that really done me.

Interviewer It's so upsetting.

Alice It was. And a great shock to her parents too. But anyway she is coming on, because when I spoke to her last time – though she will get these spasms of wanting to perhaps grab hold of him, you see, and they're really strong these children. She gets hold of me and she goes – I say, 'Now just a minute, nanny don't want her head pulled off today, you can do that next week.' ((Laughs)) You know how she – with all the different things that she does. Then I said to her, 'Now, what have you had today? What have you been doing? What did you have for your dinner?' 'Sausage and mash.' It's always sausage and mash. 'Sausage and mash.' So I said, 'Is it always sausage and mash then?' 'Hmm, yes nan, it's always sausage and mash.' 'Oh.' So she knows what you're talking about. She's with it there. So I said to Jackie, I said, 'The brain is all there, so you haven't got that to worry about.' I said, 'It's only the slowness of her picking up something and you've just got to keep on with her like you're doing, both of you, trying to make her read words.' Then, all of a sudden, she put her hands on her hips, 'I don't want anything more to do with that baby.' I said, 'Why's that? Poor little Robert; you don't want anything more to do with him.' I said, 'Oh he's lovely, go and

love him then.’ Then she was off and she put her arms around him. But you have to be careful, because she squeezes him so tight, you see. You’ve got to watch her all the time. Of course, she’s had trouble with her growing – nappies all the time. It’s so sad, because it should never have been, I don’t think. When she went in for this one I said, ‘What about all the dope?’ So she said, ‘I didn’t take it.’ I said, ‘Didn’t you?’ She said, ‘No.’ So I know perhaps I shouldn’t say it, with the hospital trying to help, but she said, ‘There was nothing wrong with me, so why do I want all that?’ I said, ‘Well, I never had not a dose of medicine with Malcolm. Not a tablet or a dose of medicine.’ All I had was the oil, and they used to give you that. Well, that didn’t worry me, I mean – but you hear ‘em taking tablets for this and tablets for that, don’t you? I said, ‘Oh my goodness.’ So I said, ‘What did you used to do?’ She said, ‘Sometimes I used to give them to Robert to throw away.’ ((Laughs)) Oh my God. She said, ‘Yes, I used to tell him to get rid of them when he went out and put ‘em down the toilet.’ ((Laughs)) I don’t suppose you had a load of anything.

Interviewer No, I didn’t.

Alice No, there you are. You had a proper, healthy birth, no doubt.

Interviewer Yeah. You don’t need it, do you?

Alice Well, I don’t – that’s what I’m saying. I never had it, knowing what I was going to go through. First it’s gonna be twins and then it got to triplets. My mother then did get worried. I said, ‘Mum, it’s no good worrying. If it is then we’ve just gotta face up to it and that’s all there is to it, ‘cause you cannot do anything about it.’ I said, ‘I’m quite happy and I’m not gonna make myself unhappy by thinking it’s three. All I’m doing is knitting, knitting, knitting as fast as we can knit.’ She was knitting; I was knitting ((laughs)). So I said, ‘It’ll all turn out all right, you’ll see.’ But I didn’t dream it was going to be a birth like that.

Interviewer So when you had false labour did you have any painkillers then?

Alice No, no. No painkiller, no. I just went into a false labour and went through all that pain for nothing.

Interviewer It’s almost like the baby couldn’t get out, could it?



Alice No, no. No because the doctors were there and they were ready, you know, and the nurses were staying in there and he said, 'I think we've got him now. Try not to move.' I said, 'I'm not.' He said, 'If you wanna scream then scream, because I know you're in pain.' But I didn't scream. All of a sudden it went all dead, as I said, and I'd never had it. I fell into a deep sleep and that was the end of that. So I thought to myself, 'Oh this is great.' Of course, when I did go back to me bed, you know – nurse walked back with me and that's when I did burst out crying. I was so worried knowing that you want to have this baby, you've not done anything wrong, and er to be treated like that. But then, as I say, I had a lovely baby, thank God. I don't know how they do them now in hospital, but when he was born his – the little hands were all wrapped up. Yeah, because my husband was like – he said, 'Is he perfect? Is he all right?' I said, 'Well, that's what they do, because they're little nails are so sharp and they scratch their face.' 'Oh.' I said, 'Yes, that's what I've been told.' I said, 'Don't worry.' Directly nurse came I had a chat with her and I said – and that's what she told me it's done for. So I said, 'I take her word that he's perfect.' Then, of course, when I was able to get up she said, 'You can come and see him being bathed.' Oh and he did love it right from tiny. The water was gorgeous. That's how he went on all the time. No bother at all. He would scream if I went to take him out, see.

Interviewer When you were breastfeeding did you feed him by a routine?

Alice Oh yes, regular – regular time, yes.

Interviewer What that every four hours?

Alice Three times a day. About three times a day I think it was and he'd go down to sleep, you know. I used – well, I don't know how you do with your baby, but I used to bath him morning and night-time, right, as they told me and that's what I did. I'd put him into his cot and er he'd just coo himself to sleep.

Interviewer He sounds wonderful.

Alice It was, it was really wonderful. This is what I can't get – because I tried to tell Jackie, you know, because this little boy he will scream. Bless his little heart, he's just had er that in his arm, you know. So she said erm – I said, 'The way he screams like this, Jackie, is terrible.' I

said, 'Try putting him up in his cot now, because he must be tired.' I said, 'And you must be tired.' She said, 'We've had hardly any sleep.' For a baby to keep on yelling like that. So I said, 'It could be the arm lump that's, you know, troubling him.' So she tried that and we came down and I said, 'It's all quiet on the western front.' And he went off. She said, 'Oh, that's an idea.' I said, 'Don't stand there and cuddle him and all this sort of thing, just put him down, leave the door ajar so that we can hear if there's anything, and that's that.' So she did it. I said, 'Now, if that is going to work, you've got to try and do this at night-time. If not then you'll have to bring the cot down into the lounge so that you can both get a night's rest.' You see they'd been having bad nights with him, but I put it down to this plug in the arm that was worrying him, you know. I said, 'It is a shame.' I said, 'How many is this?' So she said, 'Well, that's two lots he's had.' And there's another lot gotta come off, I'm sure.

Interviewer What is it then?

Alice What do they have for – diphtheria and....

Interviewer Oh yeah and tetanus.

Alice Yes, you've had all this with your little baby, have you?

Interviewer He's due for another one now.

Alice Is he?

Interviewer I'm dreading it.

Alice That's it. See, she does.

Interviewer I'm absolute – it upsets them so much.

Alice That's it, that's it. You see, well now in my day we didn't have that sort of thing.

Interviewer It does make you wonder, doesn't it?

Alice It does make you wonder, dear, and we didn't see any – these little babies – Mongols and all them. I've never seen so many in all my life as I've seen as the later years have come by.

Interviewer Yeah, I know. And nowadays there's so much with junk food, isn't there?



Alice Oh yes, yes. Of course, that was another thing, even as he grew up, you know, and he was toddling around. I would never let him eat out, no. It had to be a proper meal in the house. I'd buy him an ice-cream, a little ice-cream, a cornet, he liked that. I wasn't one like these mothers; you see them today, a packet of chips and stuffing themselves with that. A packet of crisps and stuff – oh, I think it's a dreadful way of going on, I do really. Then they wonder why Johnny or somebody is eating their dinner, where he would eat it all up. Yes, thoroughly enjoyed his meals, you know, and of course all were homemade – all proper cooked.

Interviewer Yeah, I'm very strict with Marlon. He doesn't get sweets or anything like that.

Alice No, no, you keep it like that, dear.

Interviewer And he loves like an apple or a carrot.

Alice That's it, yes, yes.

Interviewer He's really happy with that.

Alice Yes, well they're good things for them.

Interviewer When they get older it's harder 'cause all the other kids have it. At least when they're little – if you can keep them off for a couple of years.

Alice Yes. And another thing she's doing is about this – 'cause I keep telling her about this sugar. Now, I don't take no notice of it, but er with the sugar, what's she's doing? She's training him now – he's having his little drink of tea, a little drop of tea, with no sugar. She's not to put that in. She says that if he never has it then he won't know it. So I said, 'Well, that's an idea.' So she's doing that, see. Whereas with Kelly; she's known sugar and she can tell.

Interviewer Yeah, that's right, they get a taste for it.

Alice Yeah, she'll say, 'Not nice.' ((Laughs)) Just like that. 'Not nice.' I say, 'Not nice?' I say, 'Oh, it's lovely.' And I make a happy face. 'It's not nice, Nanny. It's not nice.' I say, 'Well, I think it's beautiful tea.' Then I look at her face. Jackie says, 'You can't do it with her.' You see, with him, he takes no notice and he just drinks it. So with this no sugar lark I say, 'Do you think it's gonna work?' She said, 'Well, I'm trying to think – when I think of you and what you eat, you have the best of everything Nan, don't you? Steak, chops.' She said, 'You have



chips once a week with your fish.' I do all of my own cooking. She said, 'And you thoroughly enjoy everything.' She said, 'I don't get all this.' I said, 'Well, I don't.' I said, 'I really don't, that you mustn't eat this.' Did you hear that lady on the wireless about it? Ah, she went hell for leather - the BBC, for keep on putting on - and then it was on the wireless, yes, with whatsaname Cook - Barry Nook or Cook or whatever his name is. To him, 'Will you stop that man keep coming on telling us not eat this and not to eat that?' She really went hell for leather for him and told him, 'I've gotta mother 95 years of age and she's still eating fat, sugar, salt.' ((Laughs)) I thought, 'Good for you.' Well, I'm doing just the same. See, now I've gotta lady that comes to me. She's very, very nice and when I've been queer she has got me errands, but she is er really hot on this stuff, you know. She's got herself right down, because her husband's had a heart attack and she's worried. I said, 'Let's face it, he's stout. Your husband's stout, isn't he?' She said, 'Well, you shouldn't have all this.' I said, 'Don't say that at all to me.' I said, 'That is a card from the hospital with all my meals.' She read it and - 'Oh.' I said, 'Yes, and I'm doing all the right things.' I said, 'According to that I'm supposed to have eight cups of liquid a day.' And it was....

((Outside interruption))

Female voice Sorry.

Interviewer Hello.

Female voice Sorry.

Interviewer That's all right.

Alice Don't take any notice of her. I said, 'It's underlined there.' I said, 'It's underlined, isn't it? Liquid - plenty of it - and that's what I do.' She said, 'Well, I can't believe it.'

Female voice I'm sorry. I've only come to see if there's any books in here.

Interviewer That's all right love, I don't mind.

Alice She's always the same. She does this with everybody that's talking. I don't suppose you can help her, I don't know. Anyway, have you got all the information that you wanted?

Interviewer Yes, that's lovely.



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Alice Well, I hope you have, dear, and it'll help you a bit.

[END OF INTERVIEW AND TRANSCRIPT]