

Interviewees: **Molly Baldrey and Lily N**

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 two sisters, Molly and Lily relating to the memories of their mother and the birth of her eight children by a local 'midwife' in South Shields during the 1920s and 1930s, including preparations for the births, home-made remedies, the handywoman's role as general nurse in the community, vaccinations, social conditions, lack of sexual education, illegal abortions, wartime experiences, and prevalence of TB and death.

Topics include: Midwifery; Maternity services; Childbirth; Antenatal care; Homebirth; Contraception; Abortion

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[START OF INTERVIEW AND FIRST AUDIO FILE]

Interviewer 1 ... 7th of August, isn't it, 1987.

Lily Yeah.

Interviewer 1 And basically what I'd like you two to do is just tell me about your mum and the babies she had, and what you can remember about the midwife, and anything to do with who brought the babies and what happened?

Molly Well, Mum was 17 when she married, wasn't she?

Lily Yeah.

Molly Well, she had her first baby at 18, John.

Interviewer 1 What year would that be?

Molly Um, she got married the first year the war broke out, so that wasso she got married in 1914, so John would have been...

Lily Oh yes, that's right.

Molly 1914, and John was born in 1915, wasn't he? Um, she had eight all together, didn't she?

Lily Eight children.

Molly Eight children.

Lily And every one was brought into the world by this Granny down the road, that wasn't any, she had no qualifications whatsoever. They used to call her Granny Anderson, and everybody, every time anybody had a baby, somebody used to run for her.

Molly You used to see them running down the, down the back lane for Granny Anderson.

Lily Yeah.

Molly And she ... you describe her? She was...

Lily Well, she was quite ... actually, she was about your size, plump, fairly plump, and she was all in black and she was, I don't know whether you've ever seen these little black bonnets....

Molly A bit like Queen Victoria used to wear.



Lily Yeah, she used to wear one of those little eh bonnets, and all in black, but she always had a white, pure white apron on, you know.

Molly And she actually turned it up at the corners 'til she got to you. You know, they were tucked in here.

Lily Yeah, and always a black shawl, and very, very few women up in the north, at that time, had a coat, they always used to wear a shawl round there and tie it round them.

Molly I remember that.

Interviewer 1 And whereabouts is this?

Lily This is the South Shields in Tyneside, and really most, most people used to go to her for, um, the illnesses, would very, very seldom eh call for a doctor because you had to pay for it, and everybody was so hard up you just didn't call a doctor.

Molly I think she was originally Stotts, wasn't she, Granny Anderson?

Lily Yeah, her name was Anderson, yeah.

Molly Yeah, but I think she was, she was very abrupt, wasn't she?

Lily Oh yes, oh yes she was. You were frightened of her, really!

Molly Yeah, and I mean if your mother sent you to Granny Anderson, you used to run like the clappers up the back lane to get her, and her, your house had to be spotlessly clean before she went there.

Lily Yeah, scrubbed out in carbolic. You wouldn't know the carbolic soap but it was the colour of your, you know, white and blue, and it was a sort of a marbly thing, you know, that they do, and it was horrible, actually. But everything was scrubbed out with carbolic soap.

Molly Yeah, it had to be scrubbed.

Interviewer 2 Was this before a birth?

Lily Yeah.

Molly Oh yes, I mean she used to give you a list of what had to be ready for her, to hand, you know, like old torn sheets, and newspaper, newspaper, and boiling water.



Lily Yeah, because nobody had running hot water; in fact, we didn't have one in ... we had one in the yard. We had a tap in the, in the yard.

Interviewer 1 And a coal fire, was there?

Molly Oh yeah, and one of those coal stoves, you know.

Lily It was a range that you had to cook in as well, you know, do your cooking.

Molly And she would never allow the men there, would she?

Lily Oh no.

Molly They were sent, they were completely banished, they were of no use to Granny Anderson!
((laughingly))

Lily No.

Molly I never knew whether she was a widow.

Lily I never ever saw a man, because I went round to the house several times and I never ever saw a man there, so

Interviewer 1 Did she have children?

Molly No.

Lily No, not as far as I know.

Molly She was completely on her own, wasn't she?

Lily Yeah.

Molly She was quite a matriarch too, wasn't she?

Lily Yeah.

Molly She ruled and everybody was sort of quite fearful of Granny Anderson.

Lily Yes.

Molly But everybody used her in the road, didn't they?

Lily Oh yeah.



Interviewer 2 What sort of things besides babies?

Lily Oh, she did minor ailments if you went round to sort out. And one of them they used to do um for sore throats was an onion, half an onion and er brown sugar on it, and you covered it up. They still do it, actually, some people, don't they?

Molly Mm.

Lily And what else did she used to do? I mean we always had that ...

Interviewer 1 What did you do with the onion?

Lily You cut it and sliced it and put brown sugar on it, covered it with brown sugar, and then put a basin on it, and when it sort of melted and um the juice ran out the onion, you just warmed that in for sore throats and colds. Because there, there's actually um, what's that cough mixture now you get? Liquid glucose isn't it? That's made of sort of the same stuff. What else did she do? Because I mean I never ever went to a doctor.

Interviewer 1 Did she lay out the bodies?

Lily Oh yes.

Molly Oh yes, oh yes.

Lily And you always had a drawer in those days, I always remember the old people used to have a bottom draw and all their laying out stuff used to be in there, for the laying out.

Molly Oh yes, always had it in the bottom drawer, ready for you to be laid out.

Interviewer 2 Was that just older people or...?

Lily The older people.

Molly Just the older people, yeah. I think they still do, to an extent, don't they?

Lily Oh yes, I think they do, always everything ready for when they die. But I remember er the boy next door to us, I doubt whether you knew it but he had TB, but he never ever seemed to have a doctor or any attention. I mean the only time you were ever taken to hospital was when you, when you were blinking on your death bed, the last nuckings ((?)), you know.



Molly I went to have my tonsils out, didn't I?

Lily Oh yeah, yeah.

Molly But you didn't, did you?

Lily No.

Interviewer 2 Why didn't you go?

Lily Well, I don't know. I think what happened was um my temperature was up or something, because I'd been eating hot sweets, cough sweets or something, and I suppose the heat of it, and they thought I had a temperature and there was nothing wrong with me really, but I never had it out, but I've had tonsillitis every year, every single year I used to have tonsillitis, and they told me I'd grow out of it, and I did actually, about 14 or 15 I sort of grew out of it and never had it again.

Interviewer 1 How old were you when you had your tonsils out?

Molly About seven, just before seven.

Lily Yeah.

Interviewer 1 What year would that be?

Molly Um, 1928.

Interviewer 1 So did you go to hospital?

Molly I went to, I went to hospital and I can remember it was Horton General Hospital, and in the next block it was like a workhouse.

Lily It was a workhouse.

Molly It was called a workhouse or whatever, because in the next block was a workhouse, and I can remember waking up in the night and seeing they all had red lights, you know, some normal lights and red, and I was petrified about it. I was really frightened of these red lights. But, you know, you were vaccinated, you ought to see our vaccinations.

Lily I've got one. Well, you can't see a lot of it because I'm brown, but ...



Interviewer 1 So who vaccinated you?

Molly The doctor.

Lily The doctor, he was half-cut, by the way, and he literally, I don't think he could see what he was doing.

Molly I've got a terrible vaccination.

Lily Yeah, well, he was drunk all the time he got to see you! ((laughs))

Molly I can, um, I mean that's my vaccination mark, and this is what they did to you.

Lily Yeah, and then you wore a red band round your arm, up round your arm.

Molly So nobody banded it.

Interviewer 1 And what was that vaccination for?

Molly Just the ordinary um

Lily Diphtheria, wasn't it? Diphtheria.

Molly No, it was done at school, wasn't it?

Lily No, it was done before we went to school.

Interviewer 1 Smallpox?

Molly It most probably was smallpox, because they used to do it.

Lily No, it was done before we went to school because I remember they said, 'Don't get it wet,' and everything, and we lived by the seaside, and I, and I used to go in and got it wet, and at times I knocked the scab off and it had to heal I suppose.

Molly But I had a terrible one with mine.

Interviewer 1 So did the doctor work with Granny Anderson?

Lily No, he only came ... well, he sort of worked with her ...

Molly He referred people to her, you know, didn't he?

Lily That's right.



Molly Because it cost money to go to a doctor.

Interviewer 1 What did she charge, do you know?

Lily She didn't charge, I don't think she charged anything, I think she was paid by, in kind, you know, favours.

Molly People used to give things and that.

Lily I can't ever remember money being changed hands, do you?

Molly I can't ever remember her speaking kindly to me.

Lily No, well, you were always crying, weren't you? ((laughter)) She was the miserablest little thing I have ever met.

Molly So would you have been if you were only 3.5 pounds when you were born!

Lily She was only very tiny; I was quite big, you know, in comparison. I always looked well nourished. You didn't. But she was always crying, she always had red eyes, always. You'd never ever believe it. You looked at her, if you looked at her, she used to cry.

Molly Yeah, and what did you lot used to do? You used to sit and stare at me to make me cry! ((laughter))

Lily She was a right misery.

Interviewer 1 Where do you come in the family?

Molly Um, I'm second from last.

Lily Um, actually there was quite a, there were two or three children ...

Molly There was John ...

Lily Yeah, and Albert.

Molly ... and then I think she had ... no, Albert wasn't the next one ...

Lily No, she had George or somebody like that.

Molly She had George or ...

Lily ... which died in infancy, I think.



Molly Yeah, and then there was Albert ...

Lily Yeah, and then there was me.

Molly Who was, died of meningitis, because he was struck by a cricket ball.

Lily And do you know, we weren't allowed to go out and play on a Sunday, it was unheard of, absolutely unheard of, we all had to go to Sunday school. And this day we were playing ball, and I don't know whether we actually, actually eh arrived at um the Sunday School, but we were, I remember playing ball, and you know how hard the cricket balls are, and he was hit on the side of his head. And we were, we were so frightened, we didn't tell my mother and father. This is what happened, you see, nobody said a thing, and ...

Molly And he just lay on the settee, didn't he?

Lily Yeah, and he kept just laying down ...

Interviewer 1 How old was he?

Lily And he was eh ...

Molly About eleven?

Lily Yeah.

Molly Yeah, he was about eleven. And then there was another one between Albert and you, yeah, who died, and that makes four, and there was eight all together.

Lily Yeah, I think they were all in infancy.

Molly Oh yes, because she lost ...

Lily I think she had eight and there was ...

Molly Eight, and I thought there were twins or something.

Lily No, I think that was Aunty Sue.

Interviewer 1 Where did you come in?

Lily I came in eh ...

Molly After ...



Lily ... after Albert.

Molly She's the third one, she was the, if there were eight, you were the fifth one.

Lily Mm, I was the first girl.

Molly First girl, all the rest have been boys.

Interviewer 1 And what year was that you were born?

Lily 1920, yes. And I was the one that had to do all the running and all the messages and get this and get that.

Molly I was born '21, and then there was ...

Interviewer 2 And you were 3.5 pounds. Were you early or were you ...?

Molly I don't know, you didn't know in those days.

Lily You didn't know.

Molly But I think she said I was early, about three or four weeks early.

Interviewer 1 And then another one after you?

Lily Yes.

Molly Named Jean, who was killed during the war. We had two children in the war, my brother John, the eldest and the youngest were both lost during the war, yes. Um, Jean was born, and Dad was blinded by this time, wasn't he? Yeah, he was blinded in a shipyard accident at um Swan Hunters, wasn't it?

Lily Yeah.

Interviewer 1 Did he work in the shipyard?

Lily Yes.

Molly Yes, he was a shipyard engineer and eh something had gone wrong with the machine, and it was terrifying, wasn't it ...

Lily Yes, that's right, yeah.

Molly ... that he was blinded.



Lily And he didn't get any compensation because the bell had, hadn't gone, it was about a minute before the bell. He was doing it in his lunch hour, you see, and he, he didn't get any compensation. Those are those days, weren't they, with the yards.

Molly Yeah. By this time, Mum had got a corner shop.

Lily Yeah, that's right.

Molly Open all hours was the, was exactly how you called it, wasn't it?

Lily Yeah.

Molly I mean she used to work 'til gone 12 at night, and at 6 or 7 the next morning, somebody used to be knocking at the door for two-penny worth of sugar, or two-penny worth of tea?

Lily Tea, yeah.

Interviewer 1 So did you all help her in the shop?

Interviewer 2 Well yeah, we did really.

Interviewer 1 Well, we did but we used to pinch more than we sold! ((laughs))

Interviewer 2 I mean we, I can remember her making toffee apples ...

Interviewer 1 Yeah, toffee apples.

Interviewer 2 And the school coming round and telling her that she wasn't to make toffee apples first thing in the morning, because all the kids were stopping on their way to school to buy the toffee apples! ((laughingly)) And she always made all her own sweets, didn't she?

Lily Yeah, and all her own bread.

Molly Yeah, bread.

Interviewer 1 Had she worked before she started to have children?

Molly She had never worked, had she?

Lily Only during the war.

Molly Yeah, during the war she had.

Interviewer 1 What, the '14-18?



Molly Yeah, the '14-18.

Interviewer 2 She would have been having kids then too, wouldn't she?

Molly Yeah, they went back to work. That's where she got her varicose veins from, wasn't it?

Lily She was a bogie-pusher, what they called a bogie-pusher, yes. Bogies, they pushed ...

Molly So they used to stand there and put the shelves in and she used to push that.

Lily Yes.

Interviewer 1 But she'd already had children then?

Interviewer 2 Yeah.

Interviewer 1 Mm.

Interviewer 2 Yes, she had John, because Auntie Mary used to look after him, didn't she?

Interviewer 1 That's right, yes.

Interviewer 2 She was considered a 'had married very well', she'd married a policeman and ...

Interviewer 1 And they were very well off in those days.

Interviewer 2 Yeah, and she couldn't have children and she died in the flu epidemic in the First World War.

Interviewer 1 Yeah, um but we always to trot off on a, on a Friday night, my mother always used to take us to markets where there was a, um, well, it was, I suppose it was a, eh, a chemist, wasn't it, a chemist, and we all queued up and we had a glass of Sarsaparilla, because she said it was good for the blood. In fact, my son, I bought a bottle for him yesterday, and he still, he drinks gallons and he reckons it's very, very good for him.

Interviewer 2 Have you heard of, have you heard of that?

Interviewer 1 Yes, they sell it up in ((Baldwin's 0:15:44?))

Lily That's right, well this is Baldwin's but we found a shop round here that sells it, Baldwin's, it's Baldwin's, and he goes up there, yeah.

Interviewer 2 Which shop is it?



Lily It's at ...

Molly It's a delicatessen place halfway up, behind the Provender.

Interviewer 1 Yeah, I know the one.

Lily And it's got it in the window.

Molly Owned by, I think they probably sell more Indians, very nice woman in there that sells it.

Lily And it saves me a trot round ((inaudible))

Molly And mum was always very um routine, wasn't it? You had routine, well, with all those kids, and then she actually had to learn braille to teach my father.

Lily You know, words on the hand, but we, you know, we picked it up as well, didn't we, we had to.

Molly But she was, actually she was a wonderful woman, wasn't she?

Lily Oh she was, yeah.

Interviewer 1 Do you know what her family was like?

Lily We never knew her family. I had photographs and that.

Molly Well, she talked about them.

Lily Well, her mother and father she talked about, but she didn't, they were both dead, they were both dead when we, when we were born.

Molly Yeah, but she used to talk about um Grandma Smith...

Lily She was one of 21 children.

Molly Yeah, oh yes.

Lily Her father ... her mother got married at 17 and was widowed at 18 with a baby, she'd just had a baby, and then she got married again and had 20 children, and she was a very good looking woman, wasn't she? You know.

Molly Grandma?

Lily Yeah, yeah, grandmother.



Molly And she ran a, a boarding house.

Lily Yeah, when all the children started getting off-hand and moved away, she, she took in boarders then, and the three girls, she had three girls, all the rest were boys, and um ...

Molly They all sort of worked in the boarding house.

Lily Yeah, and the three girls married two lodgers.

Molly Married lodgers.

Lily This is in South Shields, it was actually the house we took in, mum took over, wasn't it?

Molly Yeah, but her grandfather had a shoemaking business.

Lily Oh yes, yes, and it was well known because he used to hand make all the um ...

Molly Policemen's shoes, boots.

Lily ... policemen's shoes, because they were man-made, and he was very, very well know up there, wasn't he?

Molly Yeah, but he drank his money.

Lily Oh yeah, he was a boozier.

Molly He was a boozier.

Interviewer 1 Like that sometimes, isn't it?

Lily Oh yes, we had er two or three I think skeletons in the cupboard. I think there was a...

Molly Uncle Jack's wife drank.

Lily Yeah, and there was another one that the husband eh tried to shoot her, went running after her with a gun! ((laughs)) Yeah, but it was a rough life.

Interviewer 2 Do you remember anything of the births, of your mother's births? Did she have them at home?

Lily All of them at home, except for one, didn't, didn't

Molly Yeah, but she had some funny births, mum, didn't she?



Lily Oh yeah, I know.

Molly John was 14 pounds when he was born, and she was ill in bed for three months ...

Lily And she was very slight as well.

Molly She was very ill for three months through haemorrhaging.

Lily That's right, yeah.

Interviewer 2 What, from having had him?

Molly Yeah.

Lily Yes.

Interviewer 2 Did she get the doctor? Did anybody else get the doctor?

Molly I think the doctor, Granny Anderson actually called the doctor.

Lily Yeah.

Molly Because they thought she was going to have twins, didn't they?

Lily That's right, yeah.

Molly But it turned out to be one child. I was supposed to be born with my hand coming out first, and one of them was born with a ((inaudible))

Lily I was about the only one that was born normal! ((laughs))

Molly Yeah, you were a normal baby, but I was 3.5 and a half and Mum said Granny Anderson was furious with Dad because she'd been in labour 24 hours, and he said, when they showed her me, um, she, he said, 'God, all that fuss over that.' And Granny Anderson was furious with him and sent him out. Oh yes, she, he was, he was banished because of his remarks, and he was actually, because there they didn't used to take new-born babies out until they were christened, churched.

Lily Churched first, and then christened, and you were never allowed to go out.



Molly They were kept in the house, no. And so when it came for me to be christened, the clothes were far too big, so she rushed round to Mary's and got her doll's clothes, and I was actually christened in doll's clothes.

Lily But, mind you, you wouldn't think of it now, would you? ((laughter))

Molly No, but um they didn't discuss births and that.

Lily They didn't.

Molly I mean Mum was only discussing this later on in life.

Lily Later in life, but we never knew anything.

Interviewer 2 At the time you didn't know anything as kids, I mean ...?

Molly No, no.

Lily No.

Interviewer 2 And what happened to you, were you sent off, or did you stay in the house?

Molly Oh no, well, we were sent off, weren't we?

Lily We were sent out to play or something like that.

Molly Or go to Aunt Jane's.

Lily Yeah, I always remember being, Jean, the last one being born, I mean we all trotted in, one after the other, to see the new baby, and apart from that, you never, we weren't allowed in the house, you know, so you didn't hear anybody moaning and groaning or anything going on.

Molly We were there initially, weren't we, we were banished with the men.

Lily Yeah.

Molly Actually, I can remember when Aunt Jane was having ... well, I don't remember but Mum said when Aunt Jane was having um Barbara, that she got John, they brought John in, because he was a baby, and put it on the bed, and she'd only just had, I think it was you, or me, one of us ...



Lily I was nearer John's age.

Molly ... and eh they had lain ... yeah, you were nearer John, and they had put John on the bed with my mother, who just sort of, he was a bit older than you, wasn't he, John?

Lily Yeah, yeah.

Molly That's right, she'd just had you and John was a few months old, so while Aunt Jane was having Barbara, he put the baby on the bed and Albert had rushed down the road, saying, 'Me mum's had two babies, not one!' and it was really Aunt Jane's, wasn't it? ((laughter))

Interviewer 1 Because Aunt Jane was helping out, was she?

Molly They always, everybody, Aunt Jane ...

Lily Everybody helped.

Molly ... everybody helped out.

Lily You never ever shut your back door. There was no, eh, was there, everybody came in and helped and ...

Molly And also sitting with people who were ill.

Lily Yeah, yeah, it was a very close village, wasn't it? I mean everybody helped.

Molly Yeah.

Lily You all, everybody knew everybody as well.

Interviewer 1 Did you all help with things like washing?

Lily Oh yes.

Interviewer 1 And food?

Lily Well, yeah, but there was very little food about.

Interviewer 1 So who cooked for the kids if the woman was unavailable?

Lily Well, one of the neighbours or, or ...

Molly Or Aunt Jane.



Lily ... Aunt Jane.

Molly Because Aunt Jane and my Mum always lived next door to one another.

Lily They either lived in the same house or lived next door.

Interviewer 2 Were they actually related or were they just friends?

Molly They were sisters, they were sisters.

Lily Yes, yeah.

Molly And very, right 'til they died, wasn't it? My mum wasn't going to die before Aunt Jane because Aunt Jane was older than her.

Lily Yes! ((laughs))

Molly And it was really her attitude about it. They had a love/hate relationship.

Lily They did, they did really.

Molly I mean they were all ... um, they were always at one another, but when there anything, a crisis or that, they would never leave one another, and they had this love/hate relationship between them.

Interviewer 2 And how many children did Jane have?

Molly Well, Aunt Jane was married ...

Lily She married twice.

Molly ... she married Bobby Tate first, who came from Corbidge in Northumberland, and they had ...

Lily And they were quite well off.

Molly Yeah, came from a very wealthy family, and they had two children: Bobby Tate and Mary Tate. Now he dropped down dead at 40 with a heart attack, in the road, and they owned a pub, up in, near the docks somewhere, wasn't it?

Lily But Auntie Jane never ever touched a drop of alcohol in her life although they owned a pub, never ever.



Interviewer 2 It's the best way to be, isn't it, if you own a pub?

Lily Yeah, and then she married ...

Molly Then she, during the war she worked in ...

Lily Three months, that's all, he was dead three months.

Molly ... she worked in the shipyard, didn't she?

Lily Yeah.

Molly During the First World War, and she met Billy Stobbs, who was a riveter on the ships ...

Lily Couldn't read or write.

Molly ... couldn't read or write, he was a real ignoramus. And he had, he was a widower, and he had, how many children?

Lily Oh, about, must have been six or seven.

Molly Yeah, so she married him.

Lily And when she came back from the eh registry office, eh she had to delouse all his kids ...

Molly All his kids.

Lily ... because they were running alive with flees! ((laughingly))

Molly And Mum actually provided clothes, didn't she?

Lily They were actually, their heads were running alive, because I suppose being eh, um, he had to work and I suppose they just ran wild.

Molly Yeah, they ran wild. They were running wild, weren't they?

Lily Yes.

Molly Um, and then when they married they had another two children.

Lily Two children.

Molly So there were three different families and totally different.

Lily Yeah, and that, eh, um, the eldest boy ...



Molly Bobby Smith

Lily ... he went to Australia.

Molly ... emigrated to Australia and he was in the Australian Air Force in Kuala Lumpur and he dropped down dead at 40 with a heart attack, and yet he'd gone right through the Air Force and he was in Kuala Lumpur with the um, when, the Malaysian, was it, the first war?

Lily Yeah.

Interviewer 2 Would Granny Anderson have done all those babies?

Lily Oh yes.

Molly Oh yes, she'd done them all. Whether she'd done Billy Stobbs' kids I don't know.

Lily Well, I don't know. No, I doubt whether ... might be. I don't know where he actually lived when, when he married.

Molly No, I don't. I think he lived in Orange Street.

Interviewer 1 I wonder how she started off being the midwife? I mean ...

Molly I just don't know.

Interviewer 1 Do you think her mother taught her or something?

Lily Might have done, because she had no, we know that she had no medical um qualifications whatsoever, none at all. It was just a, um a thing that you fall for, didn't you?

Interviewer 1 Was she called the midwife?

Lily No, no, she was called Granny Anderson.

Molly She was called Granny Anderson. I never heard her first name.

Lily Even the doctor.

Molly Always called her Granny Anderson. And I rang John the other night and asked, because we, you weren't quite sure whether he'd been brought in by Granny Anderson.

Lily That's right.

Molly But he had.



Lily He had, so ...

Molly And he, I described her, and he actually described her.

Lily Like, like we did.

Molly And I said, 'When did she die?' and he said, 'Well,' he said it was, it must have been something like the beginning of the war, when we'd all, moved away, completely lost touch, and that when he came back Granny Anderson was no longer around.

Interviewer 1 So did she carry on practicing right up until she died?

Interviewer 2 Oh yes.

Interviewer 1 Because it became illegal ...

Lily Not up there! ((laughs)) This is it, lots of people did things that were, wasn't legal.

Interviewer 1 Did the county not provide trained midwives that took over, pushed her out?

Lily I never saw them.

Molly What year was that?

Interviewer 1 Well, it varies enormously, but sort of the '20s it was happening.

Lily I never even saw, I never ever saw ...

Molly Really?

Interviewer 1 Yeah ...

Lily This went on for a long, long time after that.

Molly A long time afterwards.

Lily A long time.

Molly Jean was two years younger than me, so that would be 1923, and Granny was doing her rounds.

Lily Oh yes, years and years after that.

Interviewer 2 What did she do? Did she come back and see you the next day?



Molly Oh yes, she came and bathed the babies and that.

Lily They weren't allowed out of bed for about two weeks in those days. I mean you had your feet up, you know, you weren't allowed to put your legs out of bed. I mean even when I had mine, the first one, I mean you were in bed for two weeks, and I thought it was terrible really, because I used to jump out of bed when they weren't looking. Because I mean I felt so fit I thought it was ridiculous, but now they get them out of bed the same day, don't they?

Interviewer 2 If they want to, yes.

Lily Yeah, that's right. But in those days, you stayed in bed and everybody rallied round.

Molly She always came and washed, washed the babies and that.

Lily Bathed the babies, that's right.

Molly Oh yes, followed the babies up, you know.

Lily Yeah.

Interviewer 1 And did she do any work antenatally, do you know? Did she come and check the mothers over when they were pregnant?

Molly You didn't do that.

Lily You didn't do that sort of thing. You didn't tell anybody you were pregnant until you were having it! ((laughs))

Molly Yes, this is the honest truth.

Lily It was so, I mean really they're still behind times up there, I think, but it was ...

Molly They were very- You didn't discuss whether you were pregnant or not.

Lily No, that was terrible.

Molly That was terrible.

Lily And nobody told you when, about periods, nobody discussed it.

Molly They used to say, 'She's, she's...' Their expression was, 'She's gone to bed.'



Lily That's right.

Molly And you knew that she was having a baby, and they never ever said, 'She's having a baby,' she'd 'gone to bed.'

Interviewer 1 So do you think a lot of women were really ignorant about their bodies?

Molly Yes.

Lily Yeah, they were, definitely ignorant.

Interviewer 1 So mothers didn't tell their daughters?

Lily No.

Molly My mother never discussed periods or anything like that with us.

Lily Never.

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

Interviewer 2 Did you talk amongst each other? I mean did you talk to Jean or anything like that?

Molly No, no.

Lily Well, it was just how we were brought...

Molly It was just how we were brought up in the fact ... I mean my mother would never discuss sex or anything.

Lily No.

Interviewer 1 What happened when you got your periods?

Lily Well, I thought I was, I was bleeding to death. You did, I remember you telling me, and I had to tell mum.

Molly Yeah, I thought, I thought I was bleeding to death and I put my dirty knickers in the bottom drawer.

Lily Yeah, so nobody could see them.

Molly And I sat, I was crying, and you came up to me and asked me why. I said, 'I'm going to die, I'm bleeding to death.'



Interviewer 1 Isn't that awful?

Molly Mm.

Lily And you didn't, you just didn't, I mean I told my children everything, but ...

Interviewer 1 So what happened? Did you then explain to Molly that it was your monthly?

Lily Yeah. Well, when I was, I got married at 21, and I didn't know how a baby came. And there was a film came out and it was the birth of a baby, and I went to see it, because I didn't have the slightest ... I knew it grew inside you and all that sort of thing, but I didn't know how you, how it ...

Molly I can't ever remember seeing Mum feeding Jean.

Lily No, I can't. Well, that was hidden.

Molly That was hidden.

Lily You, you used to go in another room to feed the baby, you just didn't feed it in front of your family, did you?

Interviewer 2 In front of your family?

Molly Oh no, this is, it was an accepted fact ...

Interviewer 1 What did you use for sanitary towels and things?

Molly We used to use ... it was um babies' napkin things and my mother used to sew two loops on, and we had to put them in a bucket

Lily Terry towelling.

Molly Yeah, terry towelling, and we used to put, put them in a bucket to soak.

Lily Yeah.

Interviewer 1 And then you washed them out.

Molly She washed them out in a, in a um boiler. I mean there wasn't money to buy real um sanitary towels. I mean Dad had been out of work for years, hadn't he, about two or three years?



Lily Actually, I mean when did sanitary towels come in?

Interviewer 1 I don't know.

Lily You see I can't ever remember them, um, I think it was sort of wartime. Around wartime. Probably the Americans thought of it first. They probably did, because not a lot of things came out.

Molly Well, I can't ever remember Mum even saying to me about dirty knickers.

Lily No.

Molly I mean it was, you never discussed it.

Lily No, or anything like that, no. I mean we weren't allowed in her bedroom, that was, I mean you'd never walk in to mother and father's bedroom, it was unheard of.

Interviewer 2 So how did people find out about sex?

Lily Well ...

Molly I think it was a hit and miss affair. You know, I think...

Lily I'm quite sure it was, yeah.

Molly Yeah. Because I can remember Mum saying 'I wouldn't have had the children if I'd known what ...'

Lily Happened now.

Molly You know, she said, 'No way would it have happened.' She said, 'I didn't want a lot of children.'

Lily Well, there was no birth control for a start.

Molly What?

Lily There was no birth control, was there?

Interviewer 1 Did you know women who were trying to abort?

Lily Oh yeah, backstreets, oh yeah.

Interviewer 2 Was Granny Anderson involved in that?



Lily Eh?

Interviewer 2 Was Granny Anderson involved?

Molly We don't think so.

Lily No, I don't think so, I never knew that, but I knew there was backstreet goings on.

Molly Yes, because don't forget South Shields is a port, was a port, and a lot of seamen used to come, and there was obviously the prostitutes down by the docks.

Lily There was, thousands of them.

Molly And there was a, a chemist down by the old damn, which is the docks, where all these awful women, as my mother referred to them, went.

Lily To get pills and potions that used to make her...

Interviewer 1 That's what they used.

Lily I don't know. I always remember somebody, and I don't know who told me this, but it was in when I was in South Shields, and they used er cotton wool dipped in um some strong disinfectant to put in, up inside them when they had sex.

Molly What, as a contraceptive?

Lily Yeah.

Interviewer 1 To try and kill of the sperm.

Interviewer 2 Yeah, and it probably worked, actually, because it's, even now, but it wouldn't have done much, very nice to the vagina, though, would it?

Molly No.

Interviewer 1 So you don't know how women were trying to abort?

Lily No, only backstreets. I, I've heard one or two rumours when I was up there: they used knitting needles, and er crochet hooks.

Interviewer 1 But do you think it was just the prostitutes? I mean do you think married women ...

Molly Oh no ...



Lily I mean they'd get so desperate because hardly anybody had work then, for a start, and it was awful, wasn't it?

Molly Mm.

Lily And um I think they just couldn't afford to have any more.

Molly I think here women got desperate.

Lily They did get desperate.

Molly About um all the ... And I mean you've only got to take our family, and Aunt Jane and Mum ...

Lily The amount of babies.

Molly The amount of children in just two families.

Lily I think, I quite think that women hated sex, or a majority of them did, because of the, they were frightened to have another um child.

Interviewer 2 How did your mum stop having kids? Because she would have been ...

Molly That's funny, you know, really ...

Lily It is funny ...

Molly ... because it stopped after Jean, when Dad was blind.

Lily Blind, yeah.

Molly Whether ... I mean he was in ...

Lily He actually was blind when Jean was born.

Molly Yes, I know, but he wasn't when she was conceived.

Lily No, no, that's right.

Molly When it happened. And he was in Newcastle General Hospital for quite a long time, because the steel had pierced the eye and they took one out, didn't they?

Lily Yeah, took the eye out.



Molly And didn't lead poison set in or something?

Lily Set in the other one, yeah.

Molly Because there were fragments of lead and had gone to the other eye, and he had been in there a long time. So whether sex went out the window because of him being ill and that for a long time.

Lily Yeah.

Molly But then Mum had a nervous breakdown.

Lily Yeah, she had a nervous breakdown.

Molly And she went into a mental home.

Lily Yeah, they just sent you into a mental home. I mean if you ...

Molly They found her wandering.

Lily ... It wasn't, it wasn't a medical thing to them, a nervous breakdown, it was that you were barmy, you know.

Interviewer 1 She was lucky to get out, wasn't she?

Lily Well, she was actually. I think it was Uncle Jack, I have a feeling that ...or Jo, was it?

Molly No, Jo had nothing to do with it. It was Doctor

Lily Sutherland.

Molly Doctor Sutherland. The Sutherlands had been great friends, hadn't they?

Lily Yeah.

Molly I mean all her life, hadn't they, because his son took over after him ...

Lily That's right, yeah.

Molly ... and I met him when I went up there once. And we were all dispersed, wasn't it?

Lily Mm.



Molly People, because there was no, my father was blind when that was all, there was nobody to look after us kids. John went into the Army, didn't he?

Lily Yeah, well, he went into a school, an Army cadet thing school, didn't he?

Molly Yeah, but then that was still the Army and they graduated into the Army, didn't they?

Lily Oh yes.

Molly Um, and then er he used to go and visit Mum ...

Lily Yeah.

Molly At Shotley Bridge in Durham, wasn't it?

Lily That's right, yeah.

Molly And eh she was picking the blankets to pieces, you know, that's all she did all day is pick her blankets to pieces, and he said um, 'Instead of picking the blankets to pieces, how about knitting me a scarf?' Did she ever tell you this?

Lily No, she didn't.

Molly Yeah, he said, 'How about knitting me a scarf?' And she knitted, she knitted him a scarf, and she said it was a lovely scarf out! ((laughter)) It went on and on and on! And she said it, she used to come and talk to him about the children, that's how it started her off, and he said, 'You know, if you want to go back to your children you've got to get well.' But it was Uncle Billy who looked after us. He, he was the one that worked in the shipyards and he was ...

Lily Yeah, very rough, but he was very, very soft hearted.

Molly But as a gentle, a gentle giant.

((someone walks into the room))

Lily He's been drinking, hasn't he? ((tape paused))

Molly They've gone in to speak to Bill and Bill had given them a drink. ((pause)) Anyway, um, what were we talking about? Eh? Oh, Shotley Bridge. All we remember was she came home.



Interviewer 2 And how old were you then?

Molly ((hesitates)) I can't even remember it. Because Aunt Jane took Jean, didn't she?

Lily That's right. It must have been, Jean must have been about ((inaudible)) years old, mustn't she? So ...

Interviewer 1 It wasn't a postnatal depression that ...?

Molly No, they think it was my, my father being blinded.

Lily Yeah, because he was a very, very awkward man. I mean it was frustration at being blind and deaf, but I don't know eh whether Molly remembers it, but I mean I remember sitting at the table, having, having a meal, and if everything wasn't just right, he just tipped the table up like that, with everything on it. But he never ever shouted at us, us children, never, it was always at my mother, and he, you know, seemed to blame her for everything and took it out, and even when he was dying he did. She used to come away crying and said eh he used to her, 'You put me here in the hospital,' you know, and all that. And um I used to say to her, 'Well, they always go for the one they support and love, you know, and don't take any notice of him.' But he, he had a terrible temper, didn't he, after that, dreadful.

Interviewer 2 How old was he when he died?

Lily What, my father?

Interviewer 2 Yes.

Molly About seventy something, 78.

Lily Yes, and he had thrombosis.

Molly The year '78, did you say?

Lily No ...

Interviewer 1 He was 78?

Lily He was 78.

Interviewer 1 And she was about the same age?



Molly And Mum was 84.

Lily 84 when she died.

Molly But she, um, she had Alzheimer's disease when she, for about eight years before she died. She was in a nursing home. Well, she just didn't know, did she?

Lily No.

Molly It was dreadful. And I always think it must surely have some bearing of when they- the strain.

Lily Because she was a very, I mean you never heard swearing from the women up there, did you? I mean nobody swore, nobody at all. Perhaps the men did, I mean the shipyards and that, were bound to, but we never ever heard it. And yet when she got, when she had this illness in the latter years, I mean she used to come out with some dreadful things, and I couldn't believe the things she used to come out with. I mean she lived with me for a long time, didn't she? And she'd be looking out the window, and she'd say, 'See that woman on the balcony?' She said, 'She, she's always looking at me because I've got a new coat on,' and she went on and on and on about it. And I said, 'No, she doesn't even know you, Mum, don't take any notice.' 'Yes,' she said, 'She's got no brains,' she said, 'she's got crab shit, that's what she's got.' ((laughter)) And I mean I said, 'You don't say those sort of things.' And she used to come out with, swear and tell you dirty jokes, and I always wondered whether it was because she was so suppressed when she was young that these sort of things came out. Because you never heard them swear, did you? Never ever.

Molly I'm trying to think of um whether Marilyn went into hospital? I don't think she did, and this is recent.

Lily Well, it is fairly recent.

Molly Well, the children are only seven and eight, seven and nine.

Lily Yeah, but during the war you didn't go into hospital here, only for the first one or if there were complications. I mean the second one, I mean I had the second one at home.

Interviewer 1 Yeah, it was 60s when they started really getting them into hospital.



Lily Yeah, that's right, yeah.

Interviewer 2 Can you remember hearing about women dying in childbirth?

Lily Oh yeah, loads of them did. Oh yes, they did, yeah.

Interviewer 1 Do you think women were very frightened to give birth in those days?

Lily I think they were too ignorant to be frightened, I do.

Interviewer 1 But they must have been aware that some women died having babies?

Lily Yes, there was a lot. Actually, um my mother-in-law's, you know, my, my father-in-law's um brother, his wife died in childbirth.

Molly I think they did.

Lily They did a lot, yes, quite a few.

Molly I can remember people dying of TB.

Lily Oh, that was rife, wasn't it, there? There were loads of people with TB.

Molly Yeah, well, it was a known fact that it had the highest rate of TB in England, you know, because of the dock areas and Arabs, there was a lot, a whole ... Actually, South Shields had a colour problem before any city in England.

Lily But it was always Arabs.

Molly And they had, um, an Arab quarter, and they think that the Arabs actually brought the TB over with them on the ships, you know, they would jump ship in South Shields and settle down there, and they had a very high TB rate there.

Lily And in, in Cleveland Estate, on the hills, they had a TB ...

Molly A huge sanatorium.

Lily ... sanatorium there, didn't they? I remember that.

Lily Yes, oh yes.

Lily Because one of, Jackie had ...

Molly My Uncle Jack had a TB leg, and so did his grandson have a TB leg ...



Lily Grandson had a TB leg.

Molly ... the same leg.

Interviewer 2 I was just thinking, if Granny Anderson looked after sick people, do you know anything about how she kept clean, going from that to childbirth?

Lily She always did seem to ...

Interviewer 2 I mean she obviously got the house all scrubbed out with carbolic, and I just wondered whether, did she wash her hands a lot?

Molly Oh yes, there was always a bowl of hot water and carbolic soap for her to wash her hands in. That was one of the musts of the table. The kitchen table was always laid out, wasn't it?

Lily And they all scrubbed the kitchen table, it was scrubbed, you know, wiped.

Molly And what was that for? To put the ...?

Lily Well, it was a normal thing, I think.

Molly It was a normal thing.

Lily You always had a scrub ...

Molly You had a kitchen ...

Lily ...a kitchen table, you know.

Molly Oh yes. I mean my mother was spotless, wasn't she?

Lily Yes.

Molly But I can remember seeing her scrubbing her hands.

Lily Yeah, so do I.

[END OF FIRST AUDIO FILE]

[START OF SECOND AUDIO FILE]

Interviewer 2 Did she have a bag or anything with her?



Molly She had a no, I don't know whether she had a bag, but she had one of these over her arm. I can see it, it was beaded.

Lily Beaded black, great big bag ...

Molly Like beaded bag, like the old Victorian people it was, a black beaded bag.

Lily You see, I don't know what was in it.

Interviewer 1 Was it like a shoulder bag or what?

Lily Well no, it had a big handle but ...

Molly It had two handles just like an ordinary shopping bag you get now, like in Sainsbury's, except it was beaded. I can see the pattern radiating out from the middle of it, and it was over her arm.

Lily That she kept all her bits and pieces in.

Interviewer 1 Like a carrier bag only made of beads?

Molly Yeah, made of beads. It was, I think it was about this size.

Lily I mean there was no cotton wool or anything, I mean they never used anything like that, it was only rags.

Molly A bit smaller than that, wasn't it? A bit, Lily, a bit smaller than that?

Lily Yeah.

Molly But it was like that and she had it over her arm like that.

int1 I wonder what she kept in it?

Lily So do I? It must have been scissors, mustn't it?

Interviewer 2 Yes, it would have been scissors and probably string or some sort of cord.

Lily Yeah, and probably carbolic um disinfectant.

Interviewer 2 So she was very keen on that.

Lily Well, there was nothing else. I mean you didn't get eh Dettol and all those sort of things, there was just nothing. I mean I, I don't know what soap we used to ... Sunlight, wasn't it,



we used to wash with, Sunlight soap, and carbolic for scrubbing. I mean there wasn't the, the variety of eh things.

Molly We used yellow soap to wash with.

Interviewer 1 So when she came to a birth, she'd lay out newspaper, would she?

Lily Yes.

Molly Loads of it, we had to save the newspapers.

Lily That was for laying on the bed, they used to lay on that.

Molly And she used to put it round the bed, didn't she?

Lily Yeah, that's right.

Molly And the floor.

Interviewer 1 And then the sheets would be for ...?

Lily For after the birth, to put on ...

Interviewer 1 To use as pads as well?

Molly Yeah, torn sheets. She used to, Mum used to call it the drawer sheet or something, half sheets that were put under them. I can't honestly remember a lot, but just what Mum has told me ...

Lily Yeah.

Molly But I can see Granny Anderson as clear as day.

Lily Oh yeah, I mean I'd run for her several times, you know, to get her ...

Interviewer 1 And did she come on foot?

Lily Oh yes, we didn't have ...

Molly Oh yes.

Lily No buses.

Interviewer 1 How big was the area that she would do, several streets or ...?



Lily Oh yes.

Molly Oh yes.

Lily Oh yes, and probably more than that.

Molly Yeah, I mean we lived at John Williamson Street, wasn't it, and, you know, there were these back ...

Lily Back-to-back houses.

Molly A bit like Coronation Street with the back yard, because they used to put their washing out.

Interviewer 1 Did she cover the whole, she wouldn't cover the whole town, would she?

Molly Hm?

Interviewer 1 Would she have covered the whole town?

Lily Oh no, I shouldn't think the whole town, there were probably about half a dozen Granny Andersons round, you know.

Molly Because there was an area of South Shields which was very up-town sort of thing ...

Lily Yes, and they probably had the doctor.

Molly ... from the shipyards, that owned the shipyard, but where we lived was eh what they called High Shields, a very poor area.

Lily It was very poor too. I mean we weren't too badly off, really, in comparison with some of them. Dreadful.

Molly I mean Mum used to pass our old clothes on, didn't she?

Lily Yes.

Molly And we used to always have shoes to go to school with, where one in ten would have shoes to go to school with. And what you've, what you've got to remember is, it was damn cold out there.

Lily Freezing, yeah. I've been in, you know, playing with children and I remember going in and I mean they've got bare boards, nothing on the floor, and they had to sell their bits and



pieces to, to um get food, and one chair and the kids sleeping on the floor on a mattress and all that sort of thing.

Molly Because there was a lot of mines ...

Lily Yeah, closed down.

Molly ... it was a lot of, it was a mining community as well as shipyard, so ...

Interviewer 1 So Granny Anderson would be paid with food and coal and ...?

Lily Probably, if they had, if they had money ...

Molly Or a couple of shillings of something.

Lily Yeah, you'd give them, give it, but she never eh, she didn't have any fees.

Molly I can't ever remember her, you know, saying about money.

Lily No.

Interviewer 1 Were people fond of her?

Lily Oh yes.

Molly We were fond of her, but in a way of being frightened of her.

Lily Yeah, yeah.

Molly I mean to me, Granny Anderson was authority.

resp1 Yeah.

Molly You know, she was, and she was quite a brusque lady, wasn't she?

Lily Oh yeah, I mean she'd tell a mother off if she wasn't looking after the kids ...

Molly Oh yes.

Lily ... you know, well enough, and they were quite frightened of that, rather than a policeman telling them off.

Interviewer 1 Really?

Lily Oh yes.



Interviewer 1 And did she become close friends with them as well?

Lily Oh yes, I mean she was a, well, she was a friend really, wasn't she?

Molly Yeah, I think, you know, she always treated us kids I think with a bit of contempt.

Lily Yes.

Molly Even though she'd brought us all into the world ...

Lily Oh yes and she took no nonsense.

Molly ... and eh if you were misbehaving outside she'd tell you.

Lily Yeah.

Interviewer 1 But did she speak kindly to the women?

Lily Well of course we never actually were there for births, so we didn't know how she treated them, but I think she was quite ...

Molly I think she was quite sort of off. I think she was more for women than she was for men. I think, I think this was what Mum was saying about, you know, she was sort of very, dismissed the men as out, you know, that 'You're a useless sort of bunch of people,' instead of encouraging them to be there, and they might have changed their mind a bit about sex then! But she sort of shooed them out the place, they weren't allowed in it. But I mean babies, what were they? They were something that appeared overnight to us, weren't they?

Lily Didn't they have lovely prams then? Not many of them had prams, when I worked it out, when I think back about it.

Molly Well, I had a pram, because my mother used to smother me with clothes and put it in it, to make me look bigger.

Lily Yeah, but I mean there were lots that didn't, that didn't have prams. I mean if you had a pram, it had no hood or, you know, it was kept together with string. They were very poor, very, very poor.

Interviewer 2 One of the old things about people like Granny Anderson is that they would get paid with a tot of rum or something like that. Do you think that ever happened with her?

Lily No, I don't think, I can't ever ...

Interviewer 2 It doesn't sound as though it did with her.

Lily No, it never did with her. In fact, I can't ever remember any women drinking up there. We weren't, they weren't allowed in the pubs anyway, in those days, and um so there might have been down by the eh river, with all the sailors coming in, but not where we were, and I never ever remember my mother or any of the family or anybody, women, going to a pub. I mean it, at Christmas I think they had a, probably a port, you know, and that was it, and everybody had a drink, but I can't ever remember anybody going down there.

Interviewer 1 Was she religious, Granny Anderson?

Lily Eh, no, I don't think she was actually.

Molly Interesting, if she was laying out bodies.

Lily Yes, yes that's right. And we were, all the, all the children had to go to Sunday School on a Sunday. Well, we all had to go to Sunday School on a Sunday.

Interviewer 1 I was just asking if Granny Anderson was religious.

Lily No, I can't ever remember. I don't ever remember the women really, they were so hard worked and they all had so many children, the kids went to um Sunday School, but ...

Molly It was a must that you went.

Lily Oh yes, you had to go to Sunday School.

Interviewer 1 Do you remember her ever being called to lay out bodies? Were you ever involved in anything like that?

Molly Yeah, she laid out um ...

Lily Eh Auntie Kitty.

Lily ... Auntie Kitty.



Lily Yeah, and she ...

Molly And she laid out all the babies and that, didn't she?

Lily I remember um Auntie Jane's, eh whoever died, Georgina?

Molly Georgina.

Lily I always remember that because um they had the coffin in the bedroom. I mean they had nowhere else to put it, it was either in the living room, where all, you're having meals and that, or in the bedroom. I always remember it, and I was only quite young.

Interviewer 1 Was that a child?

Lily A child, yeah.

Interviewer 1 It's not surprising that so many children died, in those conditions.

Lily Yeah.

Molly Mm. When you think out of eight there's only two of us, and um out of John's, out of Jane's family as well ...

Lily There's one.

Molly Yeah, but is Jenny still alive?

Lily Jenny, I don't know.

Molly We don't know. There's only one.

Lily Yeah.

Interviewer 1 But when children died, was there a lot of grieving, or was it more accepted?

Lily I think it was accepted.

Molly It was accepted. I think death and poverty and hunger were just accepted.

Lily It was another mouth you didn't feed.

Molly Yeah.

Interviewer 1 So there wasn't a lot of sentimentality around it?



Lily Oh no. No, I don't think there was. I can't ever remember that, seeing Auntie Jane, or anybody weeping and wailing. Perhaps they did in private, but it was never outwardly.

Interviewer 1 But do you think children received a lot of love from their mothers?

Molly No.

Lily No.

Molly I can't ever remember my mum cuddling me.

Lily I can't ever remember – and I'm older than you – and I can't ever remember her putting her arms round me, ever. Whether she, she had so many, eh I don't know. It's, and she never kissed you, did she?

Interviewer 2 And was that different between the boys and the girls, or do you think it was the same?

Lily No.

Molly When, I can remember going to Shields Station when John was going to India ...

Lily Yeah.

Molly ... and he turned round and he said, 'Cheerio, Mum,' and Mum said, 'Cheerio,' and he was going for 13 years ...

Lily Yeah.

Molly ... and there was never any kiss or anything.

Lily No, there wasn't any, and I can't ever remember any of them round there, all the children, I'm talking about in general, and other mothers and fathers. I mean there was no ...

Molly They would consider it a, a display of um, you didn't do that sort of thing.

Lily A sissy sort of thing, you know, you didn't just do it.

Molly You didn't do that sort of thing.

Interviewer 1 It was probably a lot of self-preservation back then, because you couldn't afford to be too close, could you, with so many people dying?



Lily No.

Molly No, that is true, yes. I think it's brushed off a bit on Lily and I. We don't do it.

Lily I think so. I mean I kiss my children ... I mean Michael was a very loving boy, I mean he was, he used to sit on my lap and sit by the side of me 'til he was about 14, very, very close, you know. I mean he's very affectionate now to Barbara, isn't he?

Molly Yeah.

Lily They're very affectionate, but um we didn't get outwardly, we don't. I mean there's a lot of my friends and they kiss you, cuddle and kiss you, and they're all ((kissing sound)), but we've never ever done that, because I think it's how we were brought up.

Molly Yeah.

Lily And I think it's a shame, I think it's a shame ...

Molly I don't think she loved any of the less for it.

Lily No, I don't think so. I know it's difficult to show affection, I think.

Molly Yeah, I don't think she loved us any less. I think she was a good mother to us.

Lily Oh yes, she was a good mother.

Molly And she really was, wasn't she?

Lily Yeah.

Molly If she worked all night, she would do it.

Lily Yeah.

int1 Was your dad affectionate at all?

Lily No.

Molly No, Dad wasn't affectionate.

Interviewer 2 To her, not at all?

Molly The only time I saw him um affectionate was obviously Mum had the shop when Dad was blind and Jean was born, and he used to nurse Jean ...



Lily Yeah, that's right.

Molly ... because she used to be working in the shop, so she, Jean sat on his knee all the time.

Lily He was quite affectionate to, to um Michael when he was young.

Molly Yeah.

Lily Because Jean, my daughter, was eh a bit afraid of him, because of his being blind and deaf and he would shout a bit, wouldn't he?

Molly Yeah.

Molly So she was a little bit afraid, but Michael wasn't, and he used to go and sit on his lap and my father used to say, 'Here comes my best friend,' and Michael used to put his arms round him and give him a kiss. And um he was, and that's about the only time I ever ...

Molly He never showed any affection to Mum.

Lily Eh?

Molly I never saw him show any affection to Mum.

Lily Who? Dad?

Molly Dad, never ever. I don't think they ever kissed.

Lily Put their arms round, never ever.

Molly Not their whole life.

Lily Or Auntie Jane didn't do it.

Molly I mean Mum spent her time with the youngest kid on her hip ...

Lily Doing something else.

Molly ... doing work, cooking the dinner, it was, we always slung on her hip, the youngest child at that time.

Interviewer 1 It's a wonder any of you survived, isn't it, under those conditions, really?

Molly Yeah, I think they survived because of those conditions! ((laughingly)) They were very hard, they were very tough.



Lily Oh yeah, very tough times. I mean we used to have to walk to school in ((Kymythe 0:14:21?)) didn't we?

Molly Yeah.

Lily Snow.

Molly I think, I think that's the first thing I can ever remember, is going home from school and thick snow and I couldn't feel my hands, and Mum putting my hands in a basin and pouring warm water on them to, and I was crying, because the life was coming back in them, and she said, 'Well, you either have cold hands or you have, you know, or they're painful, and that's it.'

Lily And we had a, a brick wrapped in a blanket, a bit of a blanket, for your feet in the winter.

Molly For your feet. Yeah, you didn't have hot water bottles, it was a hot brick, and they were in the bottom of the stove and they warmed through the day and you trotted up to bed with your brick wrapped in a piece of blanket.

Lily Yeah, but, you know, even meals were very, it was always sort of ... I hated them because they used to use a load of barley in it. I couldn't stand it. Mind you, I like it now.

Molly Do you? ((laughingly))

Lily Yeah, I like barley.

Molly I've never liked barley.

Lily Oh no, it was a job to get this, it was always soup because it was cheap, you know, she'd always make ...

Interviewer 1 It was probably quite nutritious, actually.

Lily Oh I know, but oh I hated it.

Molly She used to go and get bacon bones and bacon pieces ...

Lily Yeah, that's right.

Molly ... and put them in a big black pot on the stove.



Lily Yeah, and they used to boil and boil it.

Molly And eh it was always boiling with soup on there, wasn't it?

Lily Oh, I used to hate some of it.

Molly Although the rest, a lot of the family were quite well off ...

Lily Oh yes.

Molly Uncle Jack was.

Lily Oh yes, yeah a lot of the family were well off.

Molly And she used to do his washing for half a crown and he had about six kids, and it was half a crown, all the washing and ironing.

Lily Yeah, and it used to start, it used to start at five o'clock in the morning, and they had um an out, an outhouse with a, with a, what do you call it?

Molly Boiler.

Lily Boiler, and you burnt all your, you burnt all your old rags and everything, rubbish, and she used to, and she used to boil ...

Molly Boil it ...

Lily ... rinse it.

Molly Rinse it, starch it, a lot of the things ...

Lily Yeah, blue it.

Molly Blue it, and then starch it.

Lily The blue bags. Have you seen the little blue bags?

Interviewer 1 Mm.

Lily And starch ...

Molly Starch tablecloths and things like that.



Lily Everything, yeah, and it was all hung up, and then we put our feet in after, in the, to wash them, get in the boiler! ((laughter)) So not to waste water!

Molly Then she used to use the flat iron, didn't she?

Lily Yeah, yeah.

Molly For ironing, you know, on the stove, warming up.

Lily Yeah.

Interviewer 1 Just to get some money.

Lily Yeah.

Molly To get some money, yeah.

Interviewer 1 Isn't it dreadful? And all the while having babies.

Lily That's right.

Molly And you've got to remember, she wasn't really used to work, going to work. I mean she had, they had quite a comfortable life ...

Lily Oh, they had a comfortable life.

Molly ... a very comfortable life. It was, and going out to work, they just worked around the house, you know, making beds and that for the lodgers. She had quite a lot of lodgers, didn't she?

Lily Oh yes, she did.

Molly It was called a commercial boarding house.

Lily Yeah.

Molly Because she took commercial people in, and eh, and really how she knuckled down to all that hard work I'll never know.

Lily I don't, no.

Molly How she coped with it. When I think I whinge and groan about what I've had to do.

Lily Yeah, they, I mean they had a hard life, didn't they? For women it was awful.



Molly She'd make all our clothes, knitted.

Lily Knitted, yeah.

Molly She, she was never without a pair of socks on the needle. Even she used to stand at the stove knitting while she was cooking.

Interviewer 2 Did a lot of you get out and leave the area as you grew up?

Molly Lily and I did, didn't we?

Lily Yeah.

Molly I think they all did ...

Lily Eventually.

Molly I mean my mother was very forthright ((?)) she believed in you going ahead.

Lily Oh yeah, going ahead.

Molly I mean she was ...

Lily I mean she wouldn't hold you at home, yeah.

Molly As there was no work, that's fair enough, and she came down here when, actually when you were 16, wasn't it?

Lily That's right, yeah.

Interviewer 1 But you were already down here then?

Molly Yes, yeah.

Interviewer 1 Really? How old were you when you left home?

Molly Sixteen.

Lily Sixteen, and I went into service.

Interviewer 1 Round here?



Lily No. Oh, round here? Oh dear! West End, for a lady in Wimpole Street. Well, it was either that, which was quite nice because you met the right people, or a factory. So I mean you had, I think it was better, as I say, you, you saw how they, the other half lived.

Interviewer 2 And a relatively clean house.

Lily Yeah, and then the war broke out and um I went into a blind home then, didn't we? We both worked in there with blind children.

Molly With blind children.

Lily Yes, both of us ended up there, and then after that they were moving to, that blind home to Wales and I didn't fancy it at all, I don't know why, North Wales, and then I went up um to Southport and I got engaged, didn't I, actually? And I had to work in a, in a factory.

Molly You were told to go to where you were going to work.

Interviewer 1 In the war?

Lily Yeah, you actually were told, yeah.

Molly I joined the forces and I was designated to an aircraft factory. I mean you didn't have a choice, you were told.

Lily And you weren't allowed to leave without a very, very good eh ... I mean you had to be dying or, or some reason, before you were allowed to leave the employment.

Interviewer 1 Do you look back on those times as happy times?

Lily Not really.

Molly Did I what?

Interviewer 1 Were they happy times, the war years?

Lily Not really. Oh, war years, oh yeah, some of it was, some of it was, because we were young, for a start, and you didn't see the um any fear, did you? I mean I was, the house, flat I was um living in, in Dulwich, was, was bombed, and eh I stayed at me mum's for that night because I was pregnant and I couldn't seem to get a ... because they were going after the factory next to us, you see, so they were going round and round, and eh I thought, 'Oh I



must have a good night's rest, it's no good.' And I went to me Mum's, and when I came back the next day, as I was getting nearer and nearer the house, you know, all the houses were all smashed, and when I got to ours, it was, there was no front door, no windows, and eh all my lovely things were smashed to bits, yeah.

Interviewer 1 So was your mum living down here then?

Lily Oh yes, she was at Toy's Hill, but I was living in Dulwich.

Interviewer 1 Did she move down with your dad?

Lily Yeah, she moved down and lived in Brixton to begin with.

Interviewer 1 Did she do a boarding house there?

Lily No, no, she ... I don't know what she did there? I think she went as a cleaner somewhere, a cleaner, but I know she's always worked.

Interviewer 1 There were more opportunities down here for her?

Lily Yes, there was, yeah, and for us, for a start, you know. And then um I've had a few different jobs, you know! ((laughter))

Interviewer 1 How long were you in service for?

Lily Two years, yeah.

Molly Do you want a cup of tea?

Lily I've got to go in because we haven't ... I've got to get, get them something to eat, and um, er, I think Lynne's coming round.

Interviewer 1 We should go too, because we've got an antenatal to do.

Lily Have you?

Molly Have you? Oh my God!

Interviewer 1 Not one of ours giving birth.

Lily No, another one.

Interviewer 2 She's actually due fairly soon, she's not ... ((recording halted))



Molly ... and raised money for charities, for the hospitals. That's how hospitals were around. And so once a year they had this huge carnival with all the brass bands from the collieries, and my mother dressed you up as what? A shepherdess?

Lily No, no, I wasn't, no, a bluebell fairy.

Molly And what was I doing?

Lily I don't know what you were doing. I never remembered you.

Molly I was crying and I got more money than you!

Lily Yeah, but only because you were crying! ((laughter)) Ever so usual! I was a bluebell fairy.

Molly You were dragging me round and she was a bluebell fairy and I wasn't dressed, and I was crying because she had a pretty dress on, but everybody felt sorry for me so they were filling my box up.

Lily They were only looking at me and looking at, oh, filthy! ((laughter)) And the time ... we always used to get tuppence on a Saturday, and that was a penny for the tram to go to the cinema and back, and a penny to get in, to go in.

Molly Threepence.

Lily Tuppence, a halfpenny it was each way for the train.

Molly Oh yeah.

Lily And anyway, there used to be my two brothers and myself, and I think John Stomson and half a dozen more kids, you know, and she used to, they used to send us to the cinema on a Saturday, and we all used to jump on, and we left her behind! ((laughs)) It left her behind and she was running after the tram like that!

Molly And a man ...

Lily The thing is, it didn't worry us, and we spent her money as well, and we all got a clout round our ears when we got home!

Molly Well, a man found me running up the middle of the tram tracks and he took me to the police station and you had to pay sixpence to get them out. And Mum said to them, when



she came in, 'Where's her money?' And they'd shared it all between them and bought sweets.

Lily So we all got a clout round the ear as well! ((laughs))

Molly And that's what they used to do to me! So you know how deprived I was! ((laughter))

Lily You know, I got the cane every day because I had to take her to school, and she was such a miserable kid, ((crying noise)) and I used to drag her along and I used to say, 'I'm going to be late, I'm going to be ...,' and every day I had the cane on my hand because I was late. And they used to cane me for nothing. You'd all queue up, all the ones that were late, and get a crack, because I had to drag her to school! ((laughter)) So I used to give her more clouts than ...

Molly I had more whippings and punches and clouts ...

Lily No, I didn't hit you; I wasn't that big to wallop you!

Molly Didn't you? You used to, you did used to dig me!

Lily I did, yeah!

Molly Always digging and hitting me! ((laughter))

Lily Well, wouldn't you, if you had the cane for somebody? ((laughter))

Molly I was only a tiny little thing and they used to ignore me.

Interviewer 2 Pick on you!

Molly Yeah.

Lily But she used to get away with a lot, because I used to have to go to the Chinese laundry – and I'd never seen a china man before – I mean it was unheard of, a china man? And he used to take these stiff collars, and me dad, he didn't change his shirt every day but he changed the collar, a stiff collar. And I always remember taking these and I used to run, I used to run, I mean the china man never saw me to begin with, but I used to run like this and I used to open the door like that, and put them down, and run out. I did used to, I was scared that, and all they used to be doing is, 'Hello Missy!' like that, and I was petrified of



him because he was somebody different. And that was my job, the Chinese laundry. Yeah, and the vinegar, and I couldn't say vinegar.

Molly Vinegar, vinegar or something.

Lily You always got it in a bottle and they had a great big eh, one of these containers and you had to go for vinegar, and I, I just could not say vinegar, and I used to be saying all along the road, 'Vinijar, vinijar, vindaloo,' you know, all sorts of funny things! And he used to know what I wanted, this man, a horrible man; I hated him at the corner shop. You used to give him the bottle and he knew what I wanted, and he used to make me say it, and I never got it right, vinegar!

Interviewer 1 Oh no! It's awful!

Lily It was.

Interviewer 1 ((talking over each other))

Molly I think the funniest thing was my brother Albert, the one that died. My poor mother spent her time at police stations and that. We used to live right near the front so we were always on the beach, as we called it, and my mother used to send us down there in the morning, and bring, rush down the Lawe Top with a basket with perhaps sandwiches or something in, and we used to be down there the whole day. Well, we all turned back at home and Albert was missing. So my mother said, 'Well, where's Albert?' and none of us knew. So you'd see her going down the back lane to the Lawe Top, looking for Albert, couldn't find him anywhere, went to the police station, no Albert. He was either drowned or something. Went to Aunt Jane's next door, where was Albert? No. Well, John was there and he said, 'I never saw him,' you know. And I suppose about three hours afterwards, the police in Gateshead rang up, and said, 'Have you got a little boy named Albert?' This is to the police station in South Shields, 'Is there a little boy Albert missing?' 'Yes, Mrs Janison.' 'That's right, he's in Gateshead, but he's going to be brought back.'

So the story goes is, South Shields is a seaside place for up there, and all the kids used to go there for the day, and it had happened that this coach had come with all these kids on and he, and Albert sees that as everyone's getting on the coach, they were being given a

stick of rock, you see, so he tacks on the end of the queue, gets pushed on the coach, and protesting madly, but the teacher thought he just didn't want to go home! ((laughter)) So he had to stay on the coach, gets to the other end, all the mums and dads turn up, and there's nobody for little Albert! ((laughingly)) And by this time, little Albert was fed up because nobody would take any notice of him, so he wasn't going to tell anybody anything. So they went to the police station with him and they were trying to get his name and address out of him and he wouldn't tell anybody. In comes the chief constable and says, 'Hello Albert, what are you doing here?' ((laughter)) So it was my uncle who was chief constable in Gateshead, you see! So he said, 'He's my nephew!' So they said, 'Thanks ever so much, it's taken us two hours to get his name.' He said, 'He lives at South Shields, you'd better ring the police there and bring him home.' All for a stick of rock! ((laughter)) My mother never boxed our ears, she slapped our legs for something. Yes, never boxed our ears. She used to whack us across the legs, though. Oh, did she! But that was Albert.

Interviewer 1 Was he always in trouble?

Molly I was always in trouble. I was, I'm afraid I was the, all my life it was always me that was in trouble. And, you know, it just, I mean at school I hated school, so I was always in trouble there, since I was a kid I think. My mother regales the time that um the fly-boats, or the boats that go out with the tugs to take the pilot on board, you see. So we, my cousin goes, 'I'll borrow the fly-boat and take you all for a ride.' And don't forget this is at the mouth of the Tyne, and that day the biggest liners used to come up the Tyne, you know, it was a very thriving place. So we all piled in this boat, and he starts rowing up, you know, and every time a big boat, 'Oh this is lovely!' Goes to turn round and he thinks it's getting late, and the tide had turned.

So the suggestion was that I stood up on the seat with my coat out to act as a sail. ((laughter)) Now I was only six, so I said, 'Oh yes, lovely!' So I'm standing in there with my coat out and the river police. They were absolutely horrified when they saw we were just a bunch of kids, and took us in tow. When we got to the groin, as it was called, there's my mother tearing her hair out, and us being towed in by a police launch! ((laughter)) And as we all got off, my mother thumped us, went bang as we all got up the stairs! Dreadful!

And the police saying, 'You should take more care of your kids Mrs,' you know. She said, 'Well I didn't know where they are.' I think we must have been a dreadful trial to her.

Interviewer 1 Do you remember when Albert died, vividly?

Molly Yes I do. Can I tell you how? I can remember him lying on the settee, and my mother had a horse hair settee, and him just lying there, and I, you know, I couldn't understand why he was lying there. And so mum said, 'Oh, he's sick,' it was only, it was only a few days, but I can remember, up in the north they always walked behind a funeral, you never had a thing. Even, I think, to this day, a lot of them still do it. And I can remember, we children were never allowed to go to funerals, but I can remember on this occasion the whole school walked behind Albert's coffin.

Interviewer 1 Really? So he died at home on the couch, did he?

Molly He died at home on the coach. No, he didn't go into hospital to die.

Interviewer 1 No, of course not. So is that a vivid memory for you? Did you see him in his coffin and everything?

Molly No, but I know everybody else did. The only one I ever saw in a coffin was my sister, and they, the RAF brought her, put her in my mother's front room, and they had draped it with a Union Jack. And I dreamt for ages after about it. And I'd gone in there to put some, I think it was reeds or something, and caught the Union Jack and it fell off the coffin, and they hadn't screwed it down and it had been pushed back, and I saw her. And I went out to my mother and I said, 'The Union Jack's on the floor, you'll have to pick it up and cover Jean up.' She said, 'Have you seen her?' I said, 'Yes,' I said, 'I couldn't help it, I thought the lid would be on.' She said, 'No.' Because I came home from leave and eh saw her. You want to know how she died, don't you? How she was killed, I should say. Well, she used to work on jets at Farnborough, when jets were first coming out, she was an instrument repairer and there had been an accident, one of the jets ((snipping sound)) Yeah, and my mother thought it was my brother, because they had, the War Office had put J Jemison, and John, my brother John, and she didn't realise it was Jean, because all they put was J Jemison. And she was taken to a military hospital at Aldershot, and her first reaction was

it was my brother. And eh I was home on leave at the time, it just so happened, and I looked, and right at the bottom I saw RAF Commanding Officer.

Interviewer 1 So you had to break it to her that it was Jean?

Lily And I had to say to my mother, 'It's not John, it's Jean,' and she was 19.

Interviewer 1 Oh no, so young. Was there a lot of grieving around when Albert died, amongst the rest of the kids? Or did you take it in your stride?

Lily You took it in your stride. Death was nothing, people being there one minute and gone the next. I mean my, I can remember going to school, remember my girl sitting next to me at school, and her name was Mary Catesby. Isn't it dreadful, after all these years I remember Mary Catesby, and I couldn't understand why she wasn't there one day. And I said to my mum, 'Where's Mary Catesby? She's not at school and sits next to me.' And my mother said, 'She's not very well.' And I said, 'Oh, I'll go and see her.' And my mother said, 'No you don't,' because you weren't allowed to go where there was TB. It turned out she'd got TB, you see. But she just got tinier and tinier and they used to sit her at the window so she could look out, and I can remember her, I used to wave to her, and going smaller and smaller, you know, where she just sort of just went to a skeleton. And there was an awful lot of that TB. I think Georgina, my aunt, one of my aunt's children died of TB.

Interviewer 2 Gosh, it was a hard life, wasn't it?

Molly It was a hard life, yes, only it didn't rub off ... I mean my mother was a wonderful person, she never let it rub off on to her children. I mean um she saw that we had the best education she could give us, by slogging her way, nearly 24 hours a day in a shop, and her thing was, 'The children should have the same education as the men, the boys.' And she said, 'I don't care, you two,' Lily and I, 'will have some sort of training.' And Lily went to secretarial training, whereas I got what we called matriculation and I went to a um, you know, a high school, so I went into the civil service when I came out. But she just saw that you got it, and that was it. There was no um office jobs up there, that's why Lily came down here and went into service, but as soon as the war came, then she had the opportunity, after the factory, of going into office work then. You know, that's why she became a secretary.



Interviewer 1 That's fascinating.

Interviewer 2 Absolutely fascinating.

Molly It isn't, is it?

Interviewer 1 Oh it's wonderful!

Molly Here's my mum. These are very old photographs of her. That was my mum.

Interviewer 1 Oh, isn't she beautiful! Isn't she beautiful! How old is she there?

Molly Um, I think she was about 18 there.

Interviewer 1 She was beautiful, wasn't she?

Molly Yeah, and these are us four kids. That was John, that was Albert, that was Lily, and that was me.

Interviewer 2 ((laughs)) Aren't you lovely?

Molly That was John, Albert, Lily, me.

Interviewer 1 She's beautiful, isn't she? She's got a beautiful face.

Molly I showed um Brian two or three of them, and he said, 'Your mother's got the saddest face I've ever seen.'

Interviewer 1 It's a fine face, a beautiful face.

Molly She had lovely hands, great big long fingers.

Interviewer 1 She has, hasn't she? She's got big hands.

Molly Beautiful hands they were. ((mumbling)) Oh I was quite upset over that. Do you know, I remember that dress: it was red and my sister's was green. Oh, I didn't want my photograph taken, I didn't want it, and I was looking right miserable! So Lily was always, always the nice looking one, and the goody-goody, she never did anything wrong, you know.



I'm very cross with the old man, and I don't have him live here, but he gave Bill a drink and it's upset him. He does things like that. Like I'm going to go in there and have a row with him when you've gone.

Interviewer 1 We ought to go.

Molly No, really ...

Interviewer 1 But it's awful though, isn't it?

Molly That's a stupid thing to do, absolutely stupid.

Interviewer 2 Yeah, it's a senseless thing, isn't it?

Molly Well, I think it's stupid. He's had, probably having a drink, you see, lying watching the football and having a drink, and gives Bill one.

Interviewer 1 It's not fair, because Bill's not capable of saying no.

Molly No, he isn't, he wouldn't even know what he was doing.

Interviewer 2 No, he wouldn't. It's awful, isn't it? I'm sorry if we've been instrumental in that.

Molly No, no, no, no. He would do it. Bill trots over there sometimes. I won't go but Bill sometimes trots over there to have a word with him, and I let him, I think, 'Well fair enough,' but that is a stupid thing to do, absolutely, and I shall, you know.

[END OF SECOND AUDIO FILE, INTERVIEW AND TRANSCRIPT]