

Interviewee: **Ruby Crenin**

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

Date recorded: 30 June 1986

Duration of audio: 1:11:00

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

Archive Reference: RCMS/251/25

Description:

Transcript of an interview given by Ruby Crenin of her experiences of childbirth between 1918 and 1932, including attitudes to sex and marriage, hospital conditions, attendance by doctors, nurses and handywomen, abortion, preparations for the baby and delivery at home, social conditions, and breastfeeding.

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

Copyright of the authors, Billie Hunter and Nicky Leap.

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

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Interviewer 1 I don't know if Moira told you, but I'm working on a book that's going to be about what it was like having a baby in the 20s and 30s, before the National Health Service. So what I'm doing is interviewing women who had babies then, like you, and women who worked as midwives around that time, to try and get an idea of what it was like.

Ruby What it was like, that's right. Oh, I can tell you all you want to know. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 Can you give me about you to start with, like where you were born and when you were born?

Ruby Oh, I was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, um, on ((Prince Road?)), ((laughingly)) if that's any news to you, but it wouldn't be, you wouldn't know ((inaudible)) But, er, anyway, I was a baby at that time. ((Laughingly))

Interviewer 2 What year were you born in?

Ruby I was born in 1900, um, er, the 27th of the 11th 1900, so I'm an old lady. Is that all on the tape?

Interviewer 1 Yeah. I want to know all that. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 2 See, we know now!

Ruby ((Laughs)) You's all know that, don't they. They know too much, that's the trouble. And I'm trying to make out I'm younger ((and they cast it up?)) to me, I'm older.

Interviewer 1 Did you have lots of brothers and sisters?

Ruby I had only one sister and three brothers. My father died when I was 15, and he was a lovely man. My mother was horrible, ah, proper Victorian. Like that was the order of the day then. She was a very strict Presbyterian, you know, and, er, ((inaudible)) spoil the child, you know, that was ... her manner was to not to spoil ((inaudible)) ((Laughingly)) She was very hard. And my father was very soft about ... something like me. ((Laughs)) She's laughing.

Responder 2 Yeah, ((inaudible)) you told me.

Interviewer 1 What work did your dad used to do?

Ruby He was an engineer in Palmers. And, er, my mother, she was ... ((inaudible)) she was Court dressmaker. My grandmother, she believed in not giving them money like a lump sum, she believed in her ... because she had three boys and two girls, and she believed in giving them a good trade, so she sent them, all of them out to America, only the youngest she kept on. She died of TB. But, er, she sent them ((inaudible)) My mother was Court dressmaker. She used to do dressmaking on ... she modelled the clothes. She was about six foot tall, very big ((inaudible)) The only thing used to annoy her, she had a very flat chest, and they used to make her pad her chest, you know, and she didn't like that. ((Laughs)) They wouldn't mind now, would they. They wouldn't now. But anyway, she, she, oh she was always miserable. Oh, she could be jolly when she liked, you know, she was a right sort of ((inaudible)) ((laughingly)) she was very hard on us. Properly kept down. That's one of the reasons why I got married at 17, I wasn't quite 17, got married to get away from her. But I went from the frying pan into the fryer, ((laughs)) he was 10 times worse. Did you ever sell the ring? This is mine. Did you keep it?

Responder 2 Yeah.

Ruby My mother said she hoped to have better luck than me with it, but I don't believe in that, don't bel- ... I'm not superstitious like that. Are you?

Responder 2 No. I think of it with you and I think of him.

Ruby Yeah. Well I wore it, he didn't. ((Laughs)) He bought it. In fact I don't know why he did ((inaudible)) To get rid of him. ((Laughs)) ((inaudible)) gave it back to him ((inaudible)) there's no divorces them days. Well it cost a lot of money to have a divorce. But what are the questions now?

Interviewer 1 When did you have your first baby then?

Ruby 1918, in October the 23rd he was born, and there was no ... I had a ... I didn't have a doctor. ((inaudible)) I believe ... oh you did have to have a doctor, but at the time there was no, er, midwives as such like, you know, that went through the training, trained midwife, was just like a handywoman came round, and, er, I had to have a doctor. And there was, er, there



was no place to go to before the birth, I mean if you'd a breech birth or anything you wouldn't have known anything about it because there was no, no clinics or anything like that.

Interviewer 1 So they didn't check up on you at all when you were pregnant.

Ruby Oh no, never, no. You were supposed to go, you had to go and see a doctor and like, er, you know, or when you thought you were expecting, but, er, that's all.

Interviewer 1 And how about the handywoman, how did you find out about her?

Ruby Well some friend of my mother's had said like this one and was cheap, you know. She just came to bath the baby and generally came and looked after ... My mother looked after me like and that, even though she didn't ... wasn't very good to me, she was ... I think she was sorry for me in a way, you know, because he was out of work. Everyone ((inaudible)) except the last, Doreen, your mum, I think she was the only one who was in work with ... then he was on the Police. Because you're in the Police. A lazy job. It wouldn't be lazy now but it was then.

Interviewer 1 So when you had your first baby you had the baby at home?

Ruby Yes. And, um ... but he, he was sent to work in, er ... he was ... he had a great job in Palmers, pattern maker, but they were short of work, you know, start of ... during the war. Well war was nearly over then. And, er, was, was started the men coming back from the, from the forces like and there was no work. So he was sent to Wales to work, and I was left at home. But before I went ... before he went and I had flu, I nearly died, they thought I was going to die, it was awful bad flu in 19- ... in 1918. Oh and ((inaudible)) must have brought it home from the war. Well the doctor who was a specialist who attended me, and he bathed one arm and one leg in cold water, and this ... all other doctors like said it was too drastic, it could kill you, but he ordered my husband to do it, he couldn't be there all the time. ((Was, was five of a family in all, every day and all the flies?)) with it. His poor leg, Malaria or some, one of them, you know. Very bad. But anyway, after getting over that, then he left me for three months aft, four months aft, and I was pregnant again, and my mother ... I didn't know, I was so ignorant I'll be ashamed to say, I was so ignorant. I wasn't interested in sex

or boyfriends much at all, only that he took me away out of my mother's clutches, you know. ((Laughingly)) Um, anyway, he left me pregnant and my mother got tablets for me to take. I took them and miscarried, and she wouldn't even let me go to bed. And then after a bit he got a place, furnished place, in Llanelli, South Wales, and I went out to him, ((board him?)). And about three months afterwards I was pregnant again, and he brought me tablets, ((laughingly)) and that was two, er, young- ... one child, two miscarriages, and my fourth one ((inaudible)) And I still even with the miscarriages and all had four youngsters when I was 24, with no time between them and no-

Interviewer 1 You must have been exhausted.

Ruby ((inaudible)) I must have been terribly strong. Every doctor says the same, and they say I had great strength of will, that's what pulled you through everything, you know. Did you want something to eat?

Ruby 2 No. ((inaudible))

Interviewer 1 Did you have all your children at home then?

Ruby Only Doreen. She was a breech birth. ((And the place stopped attending?)) my husband, ((inaudible)) space. I was ((inaudible)) Worked with ((inaudible)) isn't it, and he came and said to me, "Are you, are you" ... he says, "You seem ... you don't seem ... you seem an awkward shape", he said, and how the baby was laying that way instead of ... and I happened to be narrower this way than I was across, so he said, "I'd like to examine you", and he couldn't find the baby's heart, so he came to the conclusion that it was a breech birth, best go into hospital. And, er, but it was a college hospital and he was, he wasn't there at night, and the bloomin' ((inaudible)) awkward mother, ((laughingly)) she arrived, she arrived in the middle of the night, um, she was nearly 12 pound, and the child had turned and she wouldn't be turned, she was stubborn and she still is. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 12 pounds?

Responder 2 All of yours are big though, aren't they.

Ruby They're all big, yeah, except Eileen, because I'd had the two miscarriages and such a short ... there was only two years and three months between ((inaudible)) and the eldest

((inaudible)) and, er, she was smallest. She was seven pound- something like that, wasn't terribly small really but she was smaller than the others, the others were nine or ten pound. They're all big babies. Anyway, she was the biggest of the lot and, er, I had a right old time with her, I didn't think I would come through that. Not that I thought much about dying, you know, just thought, 'Oh this isn't very nice'. ((Laughingly)) Especially when in hospital, the next ward to me they called it the torture chamber, the labour ward, you know. But the next ward was men were in there and, er, it seems they were always listening to hear ... I think they liked to hear the women yelling and screaming, you know when they're having a baby. ((Laughingly)) And, er, whenever the nurses ... she was a big, big nurse, she was about six foot, and she was strong and she, she'd done her training in ((inaudible)) in Scotland, you know, and the people are all bowlegged there, you know, suffered from rickets. Because she was trained, you know, to bring babies into world and that, and er, she, she said it was the job for her. And the Matron was there with it, she says, "Oh God, I'm glad that was over", she said, "I thought she was going to pull the baby's head off trying to, you know, get it away". She, she didn't want to come into this world, ((laughingly)) she refused nearly, you know.

Interviewer 1 Was the baby all right afterwards?

Ruby Oh yes, she was right as rain. She was all right. But my husband scared me up no end, he said when they told him ... they couldn't send him word baby's been born, you know, told him afterwards, he said that, "Oh", he said, "There was another woman there and she" ... it was a case of either save the baby or save her, and her husband said, "Oh save her", he said, "She can have another baby but I couldn't have another wife". Anyway, when my husband was told, he said, "Oh", he said, "If they had have given me that choice I would have said save the baby", he said, "After all she has longer length than you to face", you know. I was 32. I was an old woman. ((Laughs)) God, it was awful, you know. It didn't, er, it didn't make me feel any popular towards him like, but I still was in love with him for a long time after all the torture I went through, but, um, I still ... You know, we're all ... we're very religious type and we were very much against divorce and all that, you know. We weren't Catholics but, er, you know, bit religious, didn't believe in divorce. Once you got

married that was your life blood. In matter of fact she had to put with you ... had to put up with ((inaudible))

Interviewer 1 So how long were you with him for?

Ruby Oh, er, about ... it was 22 years because my eldest son was 21 who died, he was killed. But he wasn't a big loss, believe me, except for his money, you know, loss is money, and you couldn't get any compensation because it was, er ... like at that time the King could do no wrong and you got no compensation ((inaudible)) His father ... and I never knew 'til it was the year before last, it was Thomas Cook, you know, the ones that own that big ...

Interviewer 1 The travel agent?

Ruby Travel Agents. It was them. It was his son killed him, and couldn't very well put ... they did bring him up ((inaudible)) because he had been in two or three accidents, and the, er, they, they decided to bring him up because he hadn't killed anybody before but it was the first dead, he had two or three accidents with drunk and driving. But, er, anyway, they couldn't bring him up for compensation ((inaudible)) The father said he'd give us a couple of hundred pound between all of us, six of us, you know, but it wasn't very much. Your ma got the most, I think, and that wasn't a lot. Because she was the youngest, she was only 6. But, er, ((inaudible)) it's all you can do.

Interviewer 1 Going back to when you had your babies at home, who was it who actually delivered the baby, was it the handywoman or the doctor?

Ruby Er, well the doctor in the first case, and then when Eileen was born I was over in Wales like, came back, came home to have her, because my health was very bad, was very anaemic. Well I would be after all that. Never went to bed. Never was allowed to go to bed, there was, there was nobody there to look after the baby, you know. And, er, anyway when I came home in the meantime they had gone in for training, you know, and we were able to have ... because he wasn't, wasn't welcome then either. And, er, he wouldn't go to work even if he had a job. So we had this nurse and she delivered the baby and everything. She was very good. She was just as good as a doctor like. But then who's the next then after that?



Responder 2 Mum?

Ruby Eileen. No. ((inaudible)) Over in Belfast then he was from and he joined up on the ... there was trouble in Belfast and he joined up ((inaudible)) and then he went to the Police, you know, joined the Police. But, er, I was expecting within a year and two months after I had Eileen and, er, she ... he, he came in a hurry. ((Laughs)) I didn't realise that he was, you know, so near, and I was living in rooms because we couldn't get a house at the time, and ((inaudible)) curfew going on, and was really ... ((laughs)) I laugh when I think it was some- ... it wasn't funny to me at the time, but they were crying after me, they were helping me along. Couldn't get a cab because curfew's on, everybody's off the streets, you see, or you'd have been in trouble, and I was ... I had ((inaudible)) because she couldn't have looked after me all right. And, er, I got round and they took me ... ((inaudible)) and my brother and my husband took me round by the Army now, ((laughingly)) and there's the crying and said, "Oh she's been shot, she's been shot". ((Laughs)) I thought, 'Aye she's been shot all right but not with a gun'. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 Did you get home in time?

Ruby Yeah, just got in in time and he was born. Midwife was there. Well they sent ... they only had to send down the street for her and she came. But then when Maureen was born that was ... well he was away serving in, you know, the specials, and he was away doing that so I got a bit of peace then. Has for three years between Wilfy and Maureen. And then when Maureen was born I had to have a doctor then because there was no nurse in the village, it was a village, and a lady of 70, oh God she nearly drove me crackers, ((laughingly)) and she kept ... Do you know what she done with Maureen, she was born on the 6th of December and the ... she believed in ((banging the baby hard?)), you know when they come to, and had a big bowl of rainwater and she had to break the ice on it, and she brought in that. ((Laughingly)) So Maureen should have been tough! And she had whooping cough as well. We didn't know ... I didn't know she had it, knew she had a cough but didn't know it was that. ((Laughingly)) Oh God, I nearly died when she started. And she used to ... I used to ... talk about I brought in new styles everywhere I went, ((laughingly)) you know, you have to lay in bed 10 days and you mustn't get out and do anything, you know, hardly get

out to the toilet. And, er, anyway, when I ... as soon as I got her home I used to jump out of bed and dust all round the bedroom, ((laughingly)) you know, and tidy it up, because the way she'd done didn't please me. Oh it was funny. ((Laughingly)) You know, it is laughable in a way, but it wasn't funny to me at the time.

Interviewer 1 That was the old handywoman then, was it?

Ruby Yes. Over 70.

Interviewer 1 What were the handywomen like?

Ruby Oh like ... well as a rule they were a lot younger than that, but she was proper old country woman, you know. Oh she was ... she wasn't bad like, and she used to say to me, "Oh you ... you never ... see, I always believed that you shouldn't scream and shout, the best thing to do was to work 'til the baby arrived". Do you ever have any children?

Interviewer 1 Hmm, I've got a little boy.

Ruby Um, they always used to tell you, you know, work hard and push hard and get rid of the baby, and all the screaming stops you, you know, you're not using the contractions properly. And she said, "Oh, she said" ... the baby used, the baby used to cry maybe for a little while and I had afterbirth pains and that, and she said, "No wonder you, you have pains", she says, "Er, you've no pain when the baby was being born". Not much. ((Laughingly)) I felt like saying, "You try it". I don't think she was even married. I can't remember that she was even married. ((Laughingly)) Anyway, tickled me when she said, "You have no pain ((inaudible)) the baby, you must have some". That was her idea. But, er, anyway then I had about eight years then between ... Maureen had nothing to do with grandfather, I washed him out of my hair. ((Laughs)) Well he was running round all the women, ((coughs)) ((inaudible)) drew a blank. And I couldn't afford to ... he'd never given me enough money anyway, but couldn't have afforded to get a divorce, took a lot of money then. I know it's different these days. Somebody said to me, "Oh, if I had to put up with that I'd have run away". But where would you run to, me with five kids? I wouldn't have left. I hardly left my kids a day with him. If we left him to go shopping I'd come back and they were all ((running round?)) and sitting in the corner with their hands behind their back



crying their eyes out, you know. It was awful. It was cruel. Terrible. Really wicked. He was a sadist really. He enjoyed seeing, you had to suffer. Someone should have given him a bloody good hiding. I'd love to have done it but I was too scared of him. ((Laughs)) ((I had no way to get me back?)) you know. Wouldn't know how to do it now. It's amazing how yeah they're talking now there's more ... there's as many men doing it as women.

Responder 2 ((inaudible))

Ruby Well I don't know, but I'm sure there is some women ...

Responder 2 There's bound to be some but they like to make the most of the few that are.

Ruby Aye, they like to make a fuss. They couldn't be hit too much for my liking. ((Laughs)) ((inaudible)) like everybody else. I had mine, I suppose, and I've nearly ((inaudible)) ((Laughs)) Oh that's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Interviewer 1 Can you remember what the labour was like with your first baby?

Ruby Pardon?

Interviewer 1 Can you remember what the labour and the birth was like with your first one?

Ruby Oh yes. Oh God, I thought, 'This is the end of the world', and I kept praying all the time. 'Oh this is terrible, I'll never get through this. Oh God, it's terrible'. The doctor he was lovely and he kept talking to me, "You'll be all right dear, now don't worry". He was easy-going, you know. And he stroked my hair, "It'll be all right dear, you'll get better all right and you'll forget all about this in a very short time". And it's true, childbirth you do, don't you. ((Agreement)) I think it's nature's way.

Interviewer 1 If you're going to have any more. ((Laughs))

Ruby Any more. ((Laughs)) It is, it's true. And even then ((inaudible)) it's like a bloody nightmare, it was terrible, this ((inaudible)) I had, and it was ((deadly?)), and yet now you get over it, but you know, it's fading from my memory, I can't even, I can't even imagine what it was like then. I don't try to really, but I ... it's fading from my memory, I think. Anything happens to you like that you do, it fades away.



Interviewer 1 But when you were in labour, were you lying down on the bed or were you walking around?

Ruby No, you weren't allowed to walk around. I was walking around and the doctor he came like, "No, get into bed, get into bed". Oh, you're not allowed to have a baby where you want to have it. I think this new method is the best where they're allowed to sit up or stand up, or run round ((laughs)) with baby hanging out! Oh no, ((inaudible)) is ridiculous, made you lie down on the old iron bed, you know. You had a towel and your dress down. "Now don't press down unless you have a pain. Now press down". Oh God, I was in agony. ((Laughs)) You had none of that.

Interviewer 1 No, she was lucky.

Ruby What did she did do?

Interviewer 1 Hmmm?

Ruby What, what did you do?

Interviewer 1 You were really quick, weren't you.

Interviewer 2 Yeah.

Ruby Were you in the hospital?

Interviewer 2 Yeah. Went in. Three and half hours, I was.

Ruby ((inaudible))? Especially when you're old like. You were older than I was.

Interviewer 2 You could say I was older than everybody else.

Ruby Yeah. Oh well, it's a good job that you went through it with her. You haven't answered half of them questions.

Interviewer 1 I'm not writing because it's on the tape anyway.

Ruby And all that yelping is on the tape. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 It's all really interesting. You know you were saying when you wanted to miscarry you took some tablets.



Ruby Yeah.

Interviewer 1 Do you know what they were? Did they have a name?

Ruby No. As well I never even knew, mother says, "Oh you have to take these to help you", and I thought they were, you know, just to, you know, boost you up, like kind of a tonic or something. ((Laughingly))

Interviewer 2 So you didn't know that you were going to be losing the baby?

Ruby No, I didn't know. And whenever this had happened I was sitting. In fact the girl I was praying about, you know, I went to school with her, and she was sitting in the house and like ((inaudible)) blood all of this ... on my dress and the ... and on the chair, and the mother hurried her out. And then she said, "Oh, that's good", and that was all I knew about it. ((Laughingly)) And, er, you know, I felt lightheaded and all like that. This was only about three months after he was, he was gone away and have his oats before he went. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 This was after your first baby, wasn't it?

Ruby Yeah.

Responder 2 So did you know the second time when he bought you the tablets?

Ruby Oh yes, I had an idea. I was out at the pictures and the lady in the ((inaudible)) like the ((inaudible)) office lady, and, er, she looked after Theo and I went to the pictures and he had given me these sweets, you know. And, er, ((laughingly)) we were coming home and down an alleyway I said, "Oh well, I don't know what's wrong, I want to go to the toilet", and I had the miscarriage down an alleyway. Oh God. I thought nothing of it because I didn't know anything, it just, it just didn't worry me because when you don't know. You know, silly. Like the way they told me that when you're getting married you had to have a man. ((Laughingly)) Only once. And then the Lord sent you all these ... as many kids as you want. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 No.

Ruby That's right. Yeah. I wasn't interested in sex like as such, you know, never. People then weren't, you know, because you knew nothing about it, it didn't bother you like.

Interviewer 1 And there wasn't any contraceptives.

Ruby No. No. It was French letters. ((Laughingly)) But I never knew what they were. ((inaudible)) now they just want to come over to work in London, and her boyfriend then, it's her husband, was working in a pub at ((Down Woods?)), and she took a job in a big house on somewhere in the, um, in south of Ireland never had divorce ((inaudible)) and, er she was, er, you know, she ... oh, she was cutting sandwiches and serving up meals like for visitors ((inaudible)) and she cut her finger, so she went down to the ((inaudible)) seen these and she put a piece of rag and one of these on her finger. ((Laughter)) ((inaudible)) and the nurse just called her ... it's true, ((inaudible)) She called her in to the kitchen and she said, "What's that you've got on your finger?", she says, "I thought they were the thumb stalls for a sore finger", she said, "I found them up in the master's bedroom". ((Laughs)) Oh God. That's how ignorant we were, really didn't know anything. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 Were you frightened of having a baby?

Ruby Well I was a bit apprehensive, you know, but I did- ... I knew so little about it. But anytime and any pains ((I'd say more?)), you know, oh if I had a pain here ((inaudible)) "Oh you'll be worse before you're better", ((inaudible)) ((Laughingly)) That's what they said to you. I think most more or less did say that. I suppose it was true like. But at the same time you didn't want that sort of consolation, you wanted a wee bit of cheering up, didn't you. He was funny about it. ((inaudible)) ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 Do you ever hear of any women who died through childbirth?

Ruby Oh I had heard. Not very many that I know of like, but, er, I had this friend ((a next door neighbour?)) ((inaudible)) There was quite a few of them, you know.

Interviewer 1 Hmm, there was in those days.

Ruby Because there was ignorance more than anything like. They took, um, umbrage ((on those?)). ((inaudible)) Neglect. ((Pauses)) ((inaudible)) was on the Police and that. Er, the schooling, there was one woman lived near us and she was further up the ((inaudible)) God she used to do all sorts of things to herself to get rid of a baby, you know, just sticking pins and poking needles in herself to break the water or something. Oh, I don't think I would

have liked to do that, I'd rather have the baby as that, you know. It's amazing what some people get up to though.

Interviewer 1 When you were pregnant did you carry on doing everything as normal?

Ruby Oh yes. Oh God, I, I had to, I had nobody else to do it. ((Laughingly)) You weren't bothering even pour out a cup of tea. Oh, I remember when, er, ((inaudible)) we were living out in the country, and, er, every night we used to ... knives that weren't stainless, you know, steel, and spoons and all that had to be cleaned all the time, all this, we used to do them all before I went to bed at night. Everything had to be ((inaudible)) all the kids, you know, oh you couldn't leave anything dirty or anything like that, no, everything had to be just so, and everything ready for the baby. I used to make all the baby's clothes. So it wasn't ((inaudible)) that much. ((Laughingly))

Interviewer 1 What sort of things did the babies used to wear?

Ruby Oh, they used to just wear a long kind of a dress and had a flannelette one for night and like long ... they were nice and pretty. And we used to put them embroidered sort of material, you know, lacy kind of material on them. And they wore them until about, you know, 'til you shortened them, that was about three months. I mean there's nothing like that now.

Responder 2 ((inaudible))

Ruby It was nice like enough. Because the last of them were about three months because you made them, but they used to have tapes for ((inaudible)) kind of, you know, anyway for nappies and all. Oh, it was very good. I think it's a good idea myself like, saves you buying a lot of fancy stuff, you know. Always nicely dressed.

Interviewer 1 And when you were having the baby at home, did you have to get the room ready and get things ready?

Ruby Oh yes, you had to get everything ready. Oh, you couldn't, er, you couldn't ... like kind of all the bed clothes, changes ((inaudible)) and all in the drawers all ready for the big day. ((Laughs)) It's like getting married ((laughingly)) only worse.

Interviewer 1 You had to get jugs and buckets and things like that, did you, as well?

Ruby Oh yes. We used to have hot water, you know, basin and a jug. Had that filled. I nearly had a fit when this, this one came and, er, put the cold water and started prodding the baby. ((Laughingly)) And in the middle of winter, 6th of December, she had to break the ice on the bath. ((Laughingly)) She said it would make her hardy. Because she was a big baby too, she was nearly 10 pound or more. ((inaudible)) family are all big. Big hearts small ((inaudible)) Oh it was sad about Tommy, it seems young Tar has passed in French ((inaudible)) and just the morning he died, and she ran to tell, tell her dad, you know, about Tar had passed – this was his gran telling me – and he was very pleased about it, she had passed her French. How old is she now, about 10, is she? I was most pleased of course. Kim's 14 or 15, so she must be ((inaudible)) ((Offer of refreshments))

Interviewer 1 Did you work outside the home as well as looking after the children?

Ruby No.

Interviewer 1 You had enough work to do!

Ruby Oh God. Well I mean where, where we were living there wasn't such a thing as work outside, you know. Used to make all their clothes and everything like that, and, er, then when I moved, moved to the country like, I done all the gardening, oh grew all our own vegetables, fruit, made jam, made all our own bread and cakes and everything. Don't half miss them now, you know, because you had beautiful fruit, all pure fruit. And, er, the people they had a reason for it, they used to, used to ply the Police with all sorts of, of chickens and eggs and all sorts, you know, to keep in with them so they wouldn't summon them for any reason, you know, and, er, it was just great, you know, you got all this fresh fruit free really, you know. It was good, that.

Interviewer 1 What sort of house were you living in when you had your first baby?

Ruby Well I wasn't ... we didn't have ... we only had two rooms ((inaudible)) because the houses were very scarce. In fact it was over a shop, you know, these rooms over a shop. And then, er, there was a lot of trouble between Catholics and Protestants and we ... there was a house next door to the shop, and they put these people out because they were Catholics,

so we got that house. Little house, just kitchen and, er, two bedrooms like and, er, all the rest. Was no bathroom or anything. Was nice little house. And then after that, er, my husband joined the Police and he got their Police house, you know. They were good houses mind, garden, small lot. I knew nothing about gardening when I went there first, but soon, you know, took any interest in it, had a big flower bed in the front and all the rest was in the back, you know. I loved the gardening. Had green fingers, they said.

Interviewer 1 I can see.

Ruby ((Laughs)) Oh I had far more than that, had a big yucca plant that was so big was nearly top there. My husband would kick off about it, he had to lift it down every time I cleaned the windows, you know, and, er, I gave it to Gale and then ((inaudible)) so that was too big. I gave that ... I wouldn't give it to anybody only in the family, you know, so gave it to Moira. She hasn't got many plants, she hasn't.

Interviewer 1 Moira?

Ruby Moira.

Interviewer 1 She's got a lot.

Ruby I'm joking!

Interviewer 1 It looks like a jungle.

Ruby Aye, isn't it. ((Laughs)) Oh, you'd think you'd gone to Kew Gardens. My cousin's seen them, he's seen them and said, "I have got nothing compared to what she has".

Interviewer 1 They're really big ones, aren't they.

Ruby Oh, they're terrible. She had a roof garden in Deptford and, er, I think when she was moving where she is now about ... no, moving to, er, Islington, they ... everybody's looking at this mass growth, they thought it was a garden, ((laughingly)) market gardener was moving. ((Laughingly)) ((Pauses)) I like ... I've always liked flowers, we didn't have them in the house much but I had a garden-

Interviewer 1 No, you don't need it, do you.

Ruby No.



Interviewer 1 I'd love a garden.

Ruby You live in a flat then?

Interviewer 1 I live just downstairs from Moira.

Ruby Oh do you?

Interviewer 1 Yeah.

Ruby Oh.

Interviewer 1 Just two down.

Ruby Oh I'm glad she's got a nice friend, makes it nice for her, doesn't it. Mark's nice.

Interviewer 1 Very nice.

Ruby Hasn't been very well, has he. Hmm, I think he takes things too seriously. It's no good, you want to enjoy life a bit, don't you, you never know what's round the corner really, do you. I mean everything seems to be going smooth and then away it goes, all your plans now. Because my daughter planned ... well she was over in Germany twice, in fact that's where he took ill first when he was going there, he ((sliced one?)) and didn't know really what it was now. Thought it was flu he had. He lost a lot of weight in a short time and, er, then coming home again after ((inaudible)) he came home then, he thought, you know ... thanks love. Did you have more tea for ... that's a good wee girl, isn't she. She's treating me to my drink.

Interviewer 1 In those days did you used to have a lot of women friends that would come and help and help out with the kids?

Ruby Ah, no I didn't, because ... well I suppose I would have had really if I'd been settled in one place, but always moving round and, er, you know, the thing was that you were in a country place where you didn't know the people for a long time. But with children you got used ... you got ... I was terribly shy, oh God I was terrible, because I was never allowed to mix with grownups, and when friends came we all had to move into another room away from them, you know, and we were kept isolated like that now. We, we hated company. You know, only like time allowed to if they were giving us a couple of coppers, ((laughingly)) you know,

cousins or that, you know. But, er, I was found to be very shy. But we had, had a few friends in Wales, the people were nice to me and all but didn't like, they didn't like my husband, he was so cruel, you know, didn't like the way he carried on, and there was nothing they could do about it now. But I made lots of-

[END OF FIRST AUDIO FILE]

[START OF SECOND AUDIO FILE]

Ruby ... you know, apart from my own family and ((inaudible)) always try to help anybody that was worse off than them-self, you know. So can't do anymore than that, can you?
((Pauses))

Interviewer 1 Was it a while before you got accepted in the countryside?

Ruby No. No, very fair, the people. Over in Ireland though they are really friendly. I mean if you'd once been there you'd be back again, and they make you feel as if you've been there all the time, never ... no stranger at all, that.

Interviewer 1 When did you come over to London?

Ruby Oh, I've been ((inaudible)) I was away in 39 ((inaudible)) like 'til all the family were all farmed, you know. Except my Doreen, and had her over after ... had a house, bought a little house with the little bit of money I'd gotten saved, I worked like to save. I was actually in the Fire Service so ... not fighting fires but clerical work, and I was able to save a wee bit of money. So I bought this little house and then, er, my daughter Steff, eldest girl, she was married to a Petty Officer, and, er, she stayed, had Doreen to stop with her, and then she, er, then she, she came over ... Oh, I went over and sold the house and I made some money on it, and then I was able to put a deposit on a bungalow down in, er, here, and then had to sell it to get ... let ... lent Maureen some money, you know, to, er, to ((inaudible)) Anyway she's not going to leave the ((inaudible)) you know, because she's so many friends or ... it's all in the flat and she's got ((inaudible)) moving.. She's got lots of friends. They're not having any flowers though.

Responder 2 Are they not?



Ruby No, Tommy's wish. He always, er, expressed that wish, Maureen will be the same, they think it's a waste of money. He wants it ... you know he's 25 years in the, er, sports, in the Bexley Sports Club, you know, and he's Secretary of it, and he was in the twinning thing as well, so he wants any money you send to be sent ((inaudible)) That's what it's going to go and do. Or even make it for how many over to, to get ... to put it into like Cancer Research or scanner. That's about it, that's what I would wish too, I think it's an awful waste, flowers, I want flowers when I'm living not when I'm dead. You can't smell them. ((Laughs))

Interviewer 1 And people spend a fortune, don't they.

Ruby All the ... oh, I've seen from the funeral from here, a great big ((inaudible)) and Dad and all the ... You know, mind you I suppose it's a mark of respect, but oh I don't know, I don't think it's right.

Responder 2 You can do it different anyway, can't you, people show respect differently.

Ruby Hmm?

Responder 2 People show their respect differently.

Ruby Course you can. Can't, er ... to be honest there's not much with there, but, but I wouldn't wish anybody any harm. It's Maureen I'm more sorry for, she's losing her mate, isn't she, and he's been good to her since she was ill.

Responder 2 Yeah.

Ruby Oh, he's, he was tending her all the time, he was looking after her well anyway. But she wouldn't take much notice of him if he wasn't going to ((inaudible)) It's hopeless. And yet her and Sadie were up at Eileen's, at her, er, 40th, you know, um, anniversary, and, er, said that the doctors had said they'd only live a couple of years and they're waiting to die.

Interviewer 2 Who was that?

Ruby Sadie and Maureen.

Interviewer 2 Really?

Ruby Hmm. They didn't lose weight but ((inaudible)) No. ((inaudible)) You haven't seen Maureen yet, she's coming over tomorrow.

Responder 2 Is she? I didn't know.

Ruby They were talking anyway about coming over like after they come back from Ireland. But, er, then she heard about Tommy. She flew over yesterday but they couldn't get a ticket to come by coach – the cheapest way – so they're here tomorrow. Most probably staying here. Expensive, isn't it.

Responder 2 That'll be nice to see them.

Ruby It'll be nice to see them but they'll have to look after themselves.

Responder 2 Yeah. They're big enough, aren't they.

Ruby Yeah, ugly enough too. ((Laughs)) ((Pauses)) But, er, they'll expect me to be ((inaudible))

Responder 2 ((inaudible))

Ruby He moans about ((inaudible)) Always pleased then. Pleased as punch when they go. ((Laughingly)) ((Pauses)) Oh well. What else do you want to know?

Interviewer 1 Are you getting a bit tired?

Ruby No.

Interviewer 1 Are you all right? We're not wearing you out with all these questions.

Ruby Never could tell talking. That's like ((inaudible)) and he said to me, "You told me everything's wrong" and he says, "What's right?", and I said, "The only thing's right is my tongue", "Oh", he says, "What you've got there is sense of humour". You need to have. The specialist I see, c'or, and man named David, he had a bright red sock and bright yellow one.

Interviewer 2 Is there someone at the door?

Ruby It's Mick maybe. Ah, it is. ((Someone arrives at front door))

Interviewer 1 What, the consultant had a red sock and a yellow sock?

Ruby Yeah. And I ... ((Interruption as visitor is introduced))

Interviewer 1 How did you use to feed your babies?



Ruby Oh breast fed them all. With ((inaudible)) fever, you know, I had to stop feeding. ((inaudible)) neighbours, we had lovely neighbours then, ((inaudible)) I think it was, and she took Theo away and kept him and put him on the bottle, and he wasn't easy because after he'd been fed, breast fed, he didn't want it. But all the others were breast fed. Well, it was the cheapest and it was cleaner and everything, you know.

Interviewer 1 And did you used to feed at definite times, or just when the baby wanted to be fed?

Ruby Oh mostly just when, when they cried, ((laughs)) in the middle of the night or anytime. They never did ... Erin's the only one and she used to get colic, I'd sing to her every night ... ((continues to talk to the visitor who's arrived))

Interviewer 2 Did you have the babies checked or anything after they were born?

Ruby No. Well, I suppose while the doctor was attending really, he, he came and looked after. But not really.

Interviewer 1 You didn't have a clinic or anything to go to?

Ruby No, there was no clinics at all. Nothing. You just used your own ((inaudible)) ((Laughs)) You'd feed them lumps of beef.

Resp3 ((Not even days old?))

Ruby Two days old. ((laughs)) Did your mother when you were born. Do you remember anything? Did she have a doctor? You don't know.

Resp3 ((I don't know?)).

Ruby He doesn't remember that. ((Laughs))

Resp3 I'd have a job!

Interviewer 1 Did you have to pay the doctor?

Ruby Oh yes.

Interviewer 1 Do you remember how much?



Ruby Well I think we had a little bit of insurance or ... I cannot remember how we paid. I wasn't worried if it was paid or not. ((Laughingly)) I think some are nearly done for nothing, you know. Very good experience.

Interviewer 1 And the handywoman, you had to pay her?

Ruby Oh yes. ((Brian?)) would pay her.

Interviewer 1 And how long did she used to come for?

Ruby Oh she came for 10 days, every morning ... evening for ... then she tapered it off a bit towards the last ... ((laughingly))

Interviewer 1 What did she used to do?

Ruby Oh, she just used to wash him and bath the baby, especially wanting to bath in cold water. ((inaudible))

Interviewer 2 Did she clean up the house as well, because you were saying you didn't like the way she did things?

Ruby No, she just dusted the bedroom. No, somebody ... well a neighbour next door used to come in and, er, came in to look after the other kids. Oh, and any of that I used to stay up while they got me ... and once he was on the Police like ((and got leave?)), stayed at home with the kids.

Interviewer 1 And how about the washing, did the handywoman used to take the washing off with her?

Ruby No, she never done very much. Never when ((inaudible)) The woman next door asked ((inaudible)) he said, "Oh no ((inaudible))".

Responder 2 What was he like!

Ruby ((inaudible)) They were expecting it. ((inaudible)) as well, you know, and he used to come home every day ((inaudible)) I think it was, and it was a short story that I used to always then read it because it was like 11 o'clock, and he brought everyone along – the husband – and he always thought he'd get in, and I wouldn't let him in when he came home, ((inaudible)) short story. Now he's good, more than he used to ((inaudible)) Moira and

everywhere. It was great. His mates were always making fun of him, you know, but he never took a lot of notice, was very ((inaudible)) Still is, isn't he.

Responder 2 Yeah, you're right, you can still see that.

Ruby Still ((inaudible)) Well they're all ... Mervin didn't get on too well with ... once after Lily was killed at that ((inaudible)) They've been friends since then, haven't they.

Resp3 Yeah. Well they were never like that ((inaudible))

Ruby Oh no, but they didn't like Sadie much, you know, she was, she was the one there, you know, she was too puzzled. She was always ((inaudible)) because she was not bad like, not bad. She used to tell Theo all, ((laughingly)) she used to blame, she used to blame him for taking when they were getting drink, and there's only three years and three months between Dale and Wilfy and ...

Resp3 Didn't need much leading, did they!

Ruby He is a man, he's 60-something now, he's what 63 or 4?

Responder 2 Yeah.

Resp3 He'd drink a bottle of whisky ((inaudible))

Ruby I don't know what I imagined. And, er, she blamed my eldest son for taking Wilfy away, making him drunk. ((Laughingly)) He wrote to me one time and he said oh honestly mum I'll not lead Wilfy astray. ((Laughs)) Because I ... Joaquin and I told him off, I said, "Oh you're a terror, fancy leading your little young brother astray like that. ((Laughingly)) It's like your father leading Mick astray, you know, ((inaudible)) God almighty, they're easily led astray, aren't they. ((Pauses)) Oh, I was laughing then. It was the other way round if anything, Wilfy would lead him astray.

Resp3 They didn't need much leading.

Ruby Neither of them did. Their father didn't drink a lot. No. He did drink at special times but didn't drink a terrible lot, he always kept fairly sober. ((Continues a conversation from earlier with the visitor))



Interviewer 2 So was she involved in all of it, you know when you had all your babies in Ireland, was she always sort of around?

Ruby Oh no. ((inaudible)) Oh, Eileen and Dale too. Because I came home from Wales to have Eileen in the house and she looked after me then like, ((inaudible)) But ((inaudible)) He never worked ((inaudible)) he was never in work, he was a bad timekeeper. Wouldn't ((inaudible)) now, even though his uncles that were, were managers, some sort of managing director ((inaudible)) he wouldn't ask him. ((inaudible)) he was too independent. He didn't want to work. As long as ((inaudible)) ((laughingly)) couldn't care less. The Police life suited him though. Then, you know, all them years ago it was easy, you know, not like it is in the Police now, he wouldn't stay long. I mean it's a risky life now, isn't it, compared to what it was then, I guess.

Interviewer 1 After you had the baby did you use to go to church? Have you heard of it?

Ruby No. Because, er, grandfather didn't believe in it ((inaudible)) No, no, nothing. We used to go to church like, er, especially when ... after your mother was born we used ... we joined a church in ((inaudible)) But, er, before that we never went. Because then, you see, in a way your mum had the best, she had the best, er, life from when he was a babe because, er, Theo was 14, you know, there's eight years between Maureen and her, and they weren't babies anymore, and the, the fact is he claimed to ... he used to ... he was spoiling Maureen a bit, and then when Doreen arrived he didn't, he gave her quite cold shoulder really ((inaudible)) that's why your mum or I never seemed to get on with her, because she felt slighted to know. He made such a fuss of Doreen as a babe ...

Interviewer 2 From really young as well. Was he was interested in like as a baby?

Ruby Oh yes, yeah. Oh she was great. She used to go and tell him lies and, you know, he'd say to her, er, "Did you have nothing to eat?", and she'd say, "No", and she was eating all the bloody time, ((laughingly)) and he'd feed her up. And she used to say that someone hit her, but if they did it was because she was hitting them, and, "What did they hit you for?", "Nothing. I did nothing". She never done anything. And, er, he'd chastise her, he would. He was ... he turned ... the tables turned completely. That's why she'd often said to me, "I



never remember daddy being bad to me”, “Yes that’s right, well he was bad to all of us”.
Around ten, you see, they’re more or less grown up, you know. He was ... she was ... like
she, she was only baby, you know, so it was better for her.

Interviewer 1 I can’t think of anything else.

Ruby When do you start work then Moira?

Responder 2 Another few weeks ((inaudible)) holiday, because I’m going away in two weeks
time I think it is.

Ruby Where you’re going to?

Responder 2 To Southend. Do you remember Ben and Jess?

Ruby Yes.

Responder 2 I’m going to stay with them for a week.

Ruby Is that the ones who were in, er, um ...?

[END OF SECOND AUDIO FILE, INTERVIEW AND TRANSCRIPT]