

Jean Margaret Bisset, Bolton

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Catalogue No. 31

Jean Margaret Bisset

(b. 17 March 1927, Skye)

MB CHB (Edinburgh, 1949)

FRCGP (1976)

8008

Transcript of an interview conducted by:

Dr M.J. Bevan

Perhaps you could start by telling me when and where you were born?

Well, I was born on the 17th March, 1927, in the island of Skye.

And could you tell me something about your father?

Yes. Well, my father was a GP. He had been injured in the War, and ... because doctors had done so much for him, he took, trained as a doctor in, just after the First World War. And got married, I suppose, latish for those days, because he was about 30 years, 32 or 33 years older than me. Yet he lived to be nearly 95, so it didn't hinder him! And he was, he tried working in, I think it was Birmingham. He did a locum there once, and he hated it. So he got himself an Assistantship back in Skye, and, from then on, he had practices there until 1944, when my mother prevailed upon him to leave the island and go back to the mainland.

What was he like?

What was it like in Skye?

What was he like, your father.

What was he like? He had only one eye. He lost an eye in 1915, so he only had one eye, but he could park ... it was his left eye, but he could park nearer a pavement than anybody with two eyes, that I know! He was shortish, and he wore plus fours. And he, he was a totally classless sort of person. He was happy in any sort of society, provided, of course, that everyone took his word as gospel! And my mother was from the mainland, so she was always a foreigner in Skye, and she didn't like it. She didn't like it a bit.

How did she get to be on Skye?

She was a schoolteacher, doing, I think they call it relief, and she went to Skye for a few months, and stayed there for 17 years. Or 18, or something. So ... I went, I went to university from Skye. I, I went off from, in October, to Edinburgh, and the family arranged to move, and when I came to go home in December, for Christmas, I was told, "Don't go home, go to your grandmother's." And I never really said farewell to Skye properly, you know. But they had, Dad had a big practice. It was scattered, rather than a lot of people. So that he was, he'd go 20 miles in one direction one day, and then he'd go 20, 30 miles in the other direction the other day. But it's a whole different life, you know. Started off with no gas or electricity, or anything like that, and we didn't get a generator until about 1936, or something. So we used to have oil lamps and I talk about this to anybody who's willing to listen to me, but it makes a whole different sort of story.

Did you pay much attention to his work?

Yes. I can remember, my mother used to keep his books, and she used to sit on the bath every morning, while he shaved, and she wrote down the visits he'd down, and then he'd say, "Well, now, don't charge them. I've had to go in every day this week, and they just can't afford it." Or, "Charge them for one visit instead of three", sort of thing. And he used to get, I remember getting worried if he was called out in stormy weather, and he was passing by certain places near the sea, and the roads were wild, and I used to lie awake until he came back in again, just to see what happened. We were always dressed up ready to go somewhere, perhaps to a party or something, and he'd get a call, have to go in the other direction, and you took your coat off, and stayed home.

Where had he trained?

He trained in Glasgow. He wanted to train in Edinburgh, but he'd have had to have wait an extra year, because of the times when they started. So, as he felt he was old enough, he went to Glasgow, and loved every minute of it.

And were there many other practitioners on Skye?

About ... oh, Uig, Portree, Dunvegan, Broadford, Slate, did I say Dunvegan? Oh well, there were five. There was, oh, Edinbain - six! There was a little general hospital at Edinbain, with a GP surgeon, and there was a hospital in Broadford, which had a better surgeon, you know, a proper surgeon, he was still a GP, but he had a, a surgeon, surgical qualification as well. And they used to meet on a Saturday. All the GPs used to meet in Portree, in a little back room of the Royal Hotel, and they'd discuss the cases and things they'd had. But one or two of them, who had read up some abstruse things in books and things, and be very learned, and they, in other words, they invented the first clinical meetings. And they always used to do that. And I can remember another time, when my father was dealing with a maternity case, and, of course, the great thing in those days, was death by a sepsis, or something. No antibiotics. And Dad was called away, he had, he'd had a little maternity hospital. So there were four hospitals - two surgical, one maternity, and a fever hospital which was opened from time to time. And Dad was in the Maternity Hospital, and he got a call out to a sore throat, a streptococcal infection. He was, of course, didn't want to go, but he went. So he came home, and he gargled and had a bath and changed all his clothes, everything he had, before he went back to the Hospital, because he couldn't be seen to bring a, a bug into that hospital.

And was this a single-handed practice that he had?

Oh yes. They were all single-handed practices. There were no partners. If you wanted a second opinion, you called your favourite doctor, or your nearest one. And now you mentioned ... mixing, and there was a little decrepit sort of doctor, an alcoholic, who lived in a village about 20 miles from my father, in one direction. He didn't really have a list. I should explain that, in Skye, they had a Highlands and Islands Scheme, from the 1930s, where the doctor was paid a small retainer, so that he'd not to charge mileage, and you could just charge your patients what they were paying, what they were to pay, had they been in the town. And there were also the few Lloyd George patients, the people who were on the panel. And, of course, there were some seamen, people came in from the sea, and that sort of thing. So there was ... that was an insurance thing. Well, this little, funny little man in, in Staffin, known locally as "Wee Murdo", he tended to drink. He didn't have a proper practice, but he married a local woman, who must have had a croft or something, and he seemed to survive on that. And he did occasional locums for us. But normally, if he wanted a second opinion, he'd bring the doctor from Edinbain or Portree.

Do you know what sort of fees your father would have charged?

Five shillings for going, and, I suppose, half a crown if they came to the surgery. But, of course, many didn't come to the surgery, except in the actual village where we lived. But he had little branch, sort of subsidiary surgeries. A room in a house, say, in Staffin one day, and then, perhaps, 20, 30 miles in the other direction on another day. So I expect he charged these people half a crown. And he used to do, had to take teeth out, because the dentist only came to the island, sort of twice a year. And they didn't have a vet at the beginning, either. So, and he did school then, he used to come and do school medicals. I can remember him being behind the blackboard, with a screen in front of it, and he looked down your throat, and felt the, and the district nurse looked in your head for nits, and things like that.

Was it a very busy practice?

Well, he was always out, because, of course, it was a long way to go, wherever he went. And then there was the maternity part. He got the maternity from all over the island. Anyone who wanted to go into hospital, came to him. I think he had four beds or something, but he had a very good midwife, he always said, in that hospital. He thought she was wonderful, because she scrubbed up properly, I think. Really, that was his criterium.

And did you learn to speak Gaelic, as a child?

Yes. And my grandmother, my paternal grandmother, who lived with us till she died, couldn't speak English, so I had to speak Gaelic to her. But ... my father brought us up to speak English. He thought it was easier for us. And, I suppose, one learned better English grammar that way.

You say you had your paternal grandmother living with you?

Yes. My grandfather died just as my father qualified. So, naturally, when he came back to the island, he brought his mother to live with him.

And what had his father done?

His father had done two things, mainly. He did all, he'd been a crofter, a small, small-holder. But he'd also been a thing called a "Salmon Factor", on the big estates, on one particular estate, and it had something to do with the salmon fishing, because I gather that he got a penny a fish for ... if it was brought in.

Do you remember your maternal grandparents?

Oh yes. They were fine. I remember them quite clearly. They lived on Loch Ness side, up above, looking down over the Loch, and we used to go there, spend our summer holidays with them. And my grandfather didn't die until the mid-1940s. And my grandmother lived until just six months before I qualified.

And what had been his occupation?

He'd been a jack-of-all-trades! He'd done, he'd done this, that and the other. He'd been at sea a lot, and then he did odd jobs when he came ashore. But I don't remember him working. He was a lot older than my grandmother. And my grandmother had got married at 17, so she never did anything. She taught herself French, reading, so she didn't pronounce it very well, but she knew the meaning of the words when they were written.

Your paternal grandmother lived with you, did she play any part in your upbringing?

Well, she must have done. I used to go into bed with her in the morning, and she told me Bible stories, because she didn't ... she would, they were very religious on my father's side, excessively religious on his mother's side, so that she only told me stories from the Bible, because anything else wasn't right. So ... you know, as a matter of fact, they were rather bloody! You know, Samson and Delilah and things like that! But she died when I was six. And the moment my brother was born, she didn't want to know, because, like all primitive civilisations, the son is the thing. And, of course, I think I was three when he was born, and ... Grandmother took over from then!

Did you have any other brothers or sisters?

Yes. There are five of us. Surprisingly, three of us live in England. No, all of us live in England. Just the way ...

And where do you fit into the family.

I'm the oldest. That's why I'm so bossy!

And what occupations have your brothers and sisters ...

Ah, well, my sister, my next sister, she is, was, was medically qualified, but when she got married, she took up community medicine. She married a radiologist. Then my brother, he now owns a hotel in the North of Scotland, in Wick. And the next one did an MA at Edinburgh, but she didn't actually, she didn't work until her recent divorce, when she was 50, so now she teaches English to foreigners. So she's planning to go to Bulgaria this summer to do it. And my young brother is the Public Relations Officer for Merseyside, having trained as a journalist. He was at school when my parents came down here, and, you know, he trained with the *Bolton Evening News*.

Did your mother work at all, after she married?

For a, for the first year. They kept it quiet, because she felt she wanted to work, but it was in the twenties, and women weren't allowed to teach, if they were married. So as soon as I was on the way, she had to stop working. And then, I think she did a little bit of relief work, after the War, just after the Second World War, but she hated housework, she hated being at home, and she'd have given anything, this was why she made sure all her daughters were trained for something.

Did they have any maids?

Oh yes. We had, they had a maid in the house, and a chauffeur/gardener who looked after the car, and dug the garden, as my father didn't know a tree from a bush! You know, he never had, he was never home long enough to do any gardening, so ... Mother looked after the, organised the home, and took the calls, and looked after the books, and taught us and all the children in the village to swim, and this sort of thing.

What sort of house did you live in?

It was an old shooting lodge. Not very big. Four-bedroomed ... T-shaped. You went into a stone-flagged front hall, and then the rooms branched off, and one, my father had a consulting room in the house. There was a bungalow also, but ... it was all rented from the Board of Health, as it was called, in those days. And, with this, went a little bungalow, which he let the chauffeur/gardener have, which was next door. And we also had a small-holding, because the tuberculosis was very bad in the islands, and it was milk-borne, so, having tried various means of pasteurising the milk without success, they decided to have a couple of tubercular-tested cows, which they did. They had to get a vet to come and do TT tests, and then buy the cows, and, with the help of the maid and the gardener, we had a couple of cows in the old stables, or so, of the house, and ... so that was the sort of background we had.

Did you have many close neighbours?

It all depends on what you mean by "close"! Uig was a straggly village, but it was semi-circular, round a bay, and there was a house on each side of us. There was the undertaker-cum-joiner was on one side, and our chauffeur/gardener on the other. We played with their kids, and, perhaps, 50 yards down the road was the Post Office, and some rooms in it, which were let. And so forth. It just went, there was a farm 50 yards over the other side, and we all went to the village school, because it was easier, until we were 12, in Scotland. And then you had to go away, if you were going to go to further education. So, we had, I was fairly aware of the fact that nobody came to our house without first knocking at the door. And the consulting room was in the house, whereas, nowadays, the doctor lives at that house, but the consulting room is in Portree, 15 miles away, because it's all one big group practice, as far as I know, that side of the island now.

What was your father's position in the local community?

Oh, he was highly respected. He was "the doctor", and there was ... the doctor, the schoolmaster, we didn't have a minister in the village, we had a missionary, who was a sort of lay preacher, in other words. And so you didn't have many people of his intellectual equal, and you had to have your friends from scattered around. He used to go into Portree to be ... he was a Freemason, and they used to meet in Portree, and this sort of thing. But not a lot of, and this is why my mother hated it, because it was a, she hadn't got many people to be, to befriend her, you know. And she was better off once they invented the £100 Ford, and she got a little car of her own, but she didn't like driving anyway, so ... and then the War came, so there wasn't any petrol.

Did your parents have any close friends?

My father had loads and loads of friends. My mother was more reserved, and she didn't really like the Skye people. She felt that they all ganged up together, and that she was a foreigner. I'm sure it was in her imagination, but that made it no less painful. And she was never very happy, although I wasn't aware of it as a

child. But I only know that from afterwards. Until we moved to the mainland, and she got nearer her own folk, she was much happier.

Did you have many close friends?

Well, I thought I had. I was friends with the children, and we played around. But, again, people didn't come into our house. When I stayed at my grandmother's, people would open the door and come in and sit down, whereas in our house, they always knocked at the door. And, of course, fifty per cent of the people who came were visiting the surgery, and not the family.

Because of your father's position in the local community, was it difficult for you to mix with the other children?

Well, we mixed, but it was difficult to become really close friends. For one thing, we had, we had books and, again, we spoke English as well as Gaelic, but we spoke English at home, and they didn't. And that sort of thing. And I suppose, we went away for holidays, when people in the village didn't. They were lucky if they went to Portree, 15 miles away, or something like that. Many people didn't go out of the island at all. And so that we were different. I never really, I never really felt I belonged, properly, there. But I became more aware of that as I got older, rather than when I was really young, it didn't much matter.

What social group or class would you have said your parents would have thought themselves to have belonged to?

Well, I suppose ... I would have said, looking back on it, I would have said probably lower middle class, on the grounds that upper middle class was probably petit lairds. You were distinctly aware of the ... there those who worked on the land, and there were those who were ... worked and got a wage, and there were ... one or two educated people, and then, scattered around the villages were bigger houses with people who ... had, perhaps, a family history, but not a lot of money, and they'd have, not necessarily a proper governess, but somebody who had got their Highers, or something, and the children weren't allowed to speak with the rest of us, because they weren't to speak with our local accent, you see. And my father was a local boy and come back to Skye, so he didn't mind us having the local accent. And so, and then there were, of course, the very few really well-to-do people, who had proper nannies, or sent their children to public schools. But there was this sort of ... ones that you'd call middle middle class, who had half-baked nannies, and had not properly educated children, but they did speak properly, and they didn't mix, and they're the sort of people who ruin the country, you know, they're neither educated nor know how to work.

But you would have fitted into the educated group on the island?

Educated, educated ... workers, you know, like schoolmasters and lawyers, and this sort of thing, teachers. So I don't know whether you'd call that Class III, or Class II, or whatever.

Were people very well aware of those distinctions between groups?

Well, I suppose in some ways ... the, the folks in the village, perhaps, the ones, the people who knocked at the door, who, when you went to visit a house, they put out the cups and saucers, and took you into an unused front room, so that I always felt accepted if I was taken into the kitchen and given a cup of tea in a mug. And I still use that criterium in a way. I really feel accepted in a house, any house, if they'll let me into the kitchen.

Did your parents consider certain things important in life?

Honesty, decency, not to tell a lie, and ... do as you would be done by, I think. Go to church on Sunday. But not ... all the Sabbatarianism we were brought up among, there was an awful lot of hypocrisy. And, on Saturday nights, people stopped knitting, and they peeled the potatoes, and they prepared for Sunday, and then, on Sunday, they went to church three times a day. We went to the village, the parish church. We had three churches in our tiny village, and ours was the only one that had an English service.

What were the differences between those churches?

One was the Church of Scotland, which ... had very few members. And one was the ... United Free, the UF, they had the yellow tin church, and then there were the "Wee Frees" - the Free Presbyterians - who were very narrow and, you know, you couldn't take communion unless you were three-quarters dead and didn't know how to smile! But, some of these people were much better than the God they worshipped, you know. He was hard heart, and cruel. My parents were kind and gentle, and they didn't have a harsh God, but a lot of people did. You know, if somebody, if somebody's maid got pregnant, they sent her home with a flea in her ear, you know. You know the sort of thing.

Which church did your parents belong to?

Well, they went to the, the Church of Scotland. My father had been brought up in an even narrower church, which they didn't have, called the Free Presbyterian, the seceders. Not, they were really narrow, and my grandmother went to them all her life. They used to have what they called "The Sacraments" about twice a year. The church would have its Communion Service about twice a year, and people from all the other villages

and towns would come, and, in fact, it was the death of her, because she got typhoid at one of these occasions, and she died. That's what my grandmother died of. But my father, from quite young, he left that very narrow church, and joined this Church of Scotland, which was the broader, less strict, less severe church. The only time I ever heard him swear was, once, his car wouldn't start on a Sunday, it was while he still only had one car. So he sent to the only car driver of the taxi in the village, to come and drive him to this call, and the man wouldn't come for him, because it was Sunday. So, it's the only time I've ever heard him say, "Damn", and I think he had to phone to Portree, to get a taxi from there.

How often would you have to go to church?

Just the once, 11 o'clock on a Sunday. Still all I ever go is once.

Was religion important in the family?

Oh, it was always ... religion is part ... we were just born and brought up with it, yes. When I went to my maternal grandmother's, they used to "take the books" at night, as they said. They'd read, there would be family worship, and you'd get down and say your prayers against a chair, and Grandfather would read the book, and then he'd go up to bed, and my Grandmother was younger, so we ... the rest of us didn't go to bed!

Did you have family worship, in your house?

No. No, we didn't. But my father always said Grace before meals. My mother didn't. If he wasn't in, we didn't. But if he was there, we did. But our schoolmaster in the village, he was a religious fanatic. We used to read the Bible in Gaelic, and it was a bit tough, because, as you know, the language is archaic in any language.

What did your parents expect you to achieve in life?

I think something useful. My mother wanted us to be able to work, and not to ... so that we could have maids to do our housework for us, because she hated housework. And so it so happened that I managed to achieve that, and so has my brother with the hotel. But the rest have all done their own work. So, I suppose, it's because I admired my father so much that I decided to be a doctor. I can't really understand, otherwise, why I did it. But, in those days, it was the "lady doctor" in inverted commas - a silly thing, you know.

How were you expected to behave towards your parents?

Oh, you were supposed, I expect you were supposed to do what you ... well, we discussed things. I'm sure they expected us to do what we were told, but ... we had a happy childhood. And my father was always out. My mother had to do any disciplining that was done, because he, like all Skye people, he, they lived in the middle of the night, sort of thing. They didn't get up early. The only people who got up early would be the postman and the bus driver, and the people who simply had to. I'll tell you a funny thing. During the War, we had three clocks. You won't know about it, but we had double summer for daylight saving. So, in the summer, the clock was two hours fast. All the year round, the clock was one hour fast, but the real Sabbatarians kept God's time on one clock, the old time on another, and the, you know, so there was the new time, the old time, and God's time. And, it must have been very difficult for those who did that.

What was God's time?

That, that was ... the natural time, Greenwich Mean Time. That was the time where they went to church. So some of these people wouldn't go to church until one o'clock, you know, in the summer, and that sort of thing. But they had to go to school at the same time as the rest of us, or Post Offices, or something. And it must have been very confusing for them. But we didn't do that. But I can remember it.

Did the island close down on a Sunday?

Absolutely! Once, my brother was ill on a Sunday. He had tremendous abdominal pain, and my father was convinced he had an appendicitis, but we couldn't get him out of the island. Fortunately, he didn't. He had mesenteric adenitis (?? 426), which can simulate appendicitis. But it's only viral and it goes away. And it went away. So it saved an operation. Because Dad didn't feel like he wanted his colleagues to operate on him, you see! He wanted to take him to the mainland. But, fortunately, he ... I think he still has his appendix.

You mentioned that with your father being away a lot, your mother would do the disciplining.

Yes.

What would happen if you did something which she disapproved of?

Well, I ... she was, she might shout at you, or, if it was really bad, my father would be told. And I can remember him, occasionally, smacking my brother. But not a lot, really.

Did you talk much to your parents?

Oh, all the time, particularly when we went to Portree School, we, we boarded there Monday till Friday. So on a Monday morning, early, we got a bus at half past six, and I remember my mother getting up and giving us our breakfast, and she was so busy telling us jokes and telling us things that we missed the bus, and had to run

up, she phoned the police station, because the policeman's daughter was also going to school, and they stopped the bus, and we ran this mile up the hill, with our weekend bags, to get on the bus, to get to school in time!

Were you able to share any worries with your parents?

I suppose. But the only worries ... I think, we didn't ... I don't remember talking too much about it, is the menstruation and that thing, at the beginning. I must have done. But, apart from that, I don't remember having a lot of worries. I suppose I must have done. But, it was a small school, and I had no problems at school in that respect. I remember my father once saying to me, I wasn't top in the class that year, and my father said to me, "Fancy letting the blacksmith's daughter beat you!" Which was very naughty, and wasn't like him!

Did they have great ambitions for you?

Oh, I don't know. My father was a great believer in academic success, and he ... [End of Tape 1 - Side A] ... nearly forgot. I got the time of an exam wrong when I was at university. I was in my fourth year and I was a couple of miles from the University, and I thought the exam started at 2.30, and I suddenly discovered that it started at 2, and I had the dickens of a job to get down there. There didn't seem to be a bus, and I tried to get a taxi, and there wasn't a taxi. And, eventually, I got a bus, and I arrived in just as they were locking the doors. So I had half an hour less than I should have done to sit that wretched exam. And I remember thinking, "They'll never forgive me for this. They'll forgive me for failing" if I had just failed. But, for being half an hour late, that's unforgivable!

Were you closer to your father or your mother?

Well, we had more dealings with my mother, but I ... I was my father's oldest daughter, and oldest child, and he did tend to make a fuss of me, and I thought he was wonderful. But only after I married and realised that what a rough life my mother had to deal with, when I had a normal married life, with a husband who came home for his meals, or, if he said he would do a thing, he did it. And my father would *mean* to come back, but he'd get talking. And my mother ... she couldn't organise her life. He was disorganised in that respect. He was a good doctor, caring and up-to-date, and right up until the end he was interested in what was new. But it was very difficult to, to organise his life, and you had to apologise to patients sitting waiting for him, and he hadn't arrived back, because he had listened to some child who was reading, or something, on the way home. So, I think we probably had closer relations with my mother, really.

Did your father take an interest in politics?

All the time. He was very keen. He was rabid Labour. He, he believed the ... I think, implicitly, that ... who was it? Was it Marx? No. Was it Lenin who said, "To each according to his ability" ... "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs", or whatever. And he implicitly believed that. He thought it was pure Christianity, but, of course, it's idealism, and it doesn't work. So I was brought up to believe that the common man was some sort of ideal, the man, the worker, and I'm sure the worker is, only he's a rare bird! Really, although there were more hard-workers, I think, then, than there are now, from what kids say to me. They used to say in the surgery, they'd say, sort of, "I wouldn't work like my Mum's worked", or "I wouldn't work like my Dad's worked", you know, they try to ... try to get by with as little as they can.

Did he ever get actively involved in politics?

Yes. He was, it was very funny, because, of course, in a small island, he ... our MP was Liberal, so he would chair his meetings. Occasionally a Conservative would turn around, and my father had been known to chair his meetings, but spout Labour on, from the platform. But everybody knew him, and he was friendly with all the County Councillors and things like that. He had ... friends of all shades and colours of politics. But it was very amusing. And he didn't mind what he said to people.

Were there many Labour supporters on the island?

No, not on the island. But, of course, in 1944 he went to the mainland, so I presume that when he was in the island, when I was very young, I presume that he, although he voted Labour, that he must have had to ... I don't think he would have been able to vote Labour, come to that. I don't suppose there would be a Labour candidate on the island. It would be Liberal or Conservative. But when we got on the mainland, and I was in my teens, I can remember causing a family argument, because I persuaded my mother to vote Liberal with me, and my father was furious. But our man got in and his didn't.

Would it have been wise for him, on the island, to let people know that he supported Labour?

Oh yes. That didn't matter tuppence! No, no, no. Didn't matter at all. Not in the island. That would have been much more important around here, than it would have been in the island.

Was your mother interested in politics?

Oh yes. She thought anything my father did was wonderful. So I suppose she was interested in it from that point of view.

Can you tell me some of the things that you and your family did for enjoyment, while you were a child?

We used to have picnics. You know, we'd build a fire, and put ... boil a kettle on it, and have smoky tea, and things like that! We used to go fishing. We had fishing, we had a little dinghy, not with a, with sail, just with oars, and we'd go out with that. And my mother took us swimming, and we had bicycles, and then there would be the occasional village ceilidh, and that sort of thing. And we used to strum on the piano, and read and play pencil and paper games, and things like that.

What sort of things did you read?

Everything. The house was full of books, even in the bathroom and the lavatory! I read all sorts of things. I had no right to read when I was very young, because there was a big bookcase in our bedroom, behind the door, and nobody knew what I had out. So ... I don't know, just everything. I remember reading Samuel Butler's, Butlin's, *Erewhon*, when I must have been about 10, or something like that, because it was an anagram of "nowhere". Mmm. And I used to enjoy Walter Scott, for quite a long time, better than H.G. Wells, which was very new at the time. And Sherlock Holmes. They used to get, what was it called? *The Strand Magazine* serialised Sherlock Holmes. We used to get ... oh, and when we were kids, we used to moan we wanted a comic, because the neighbours, you know, the gardener's little boy had comics. And the farmer's little boy had comics. So we wanted a comic, badly. So we got a comic - *Arthur Mead's Children's Newspaper*! So we read their comics anyway, but they didn't bother reading ours! So I read *The Rover* and *The Beano*, and *The Dandy*, and ... because our nearest neighbours were boys.

This was after your grandmother had died, of course!

Oh, of course! Well, she couldn't read English anyway, she wouldn't have known. But, yes, it was. And the other thing I used to read, the maid used to have, *The People's Friend*, so I used to read that too.

Did your parents entertain at all?

Not an awful lot. It was various, the other GPs from the island, and things like that. But there wasn't the bit of actually having dinner parties, the way they do it now. My father, my parents were often asked to those petit lairds, and that sort of thing. And my mother didn't like them at all. She considered them, sort of, too big for their boots. And she couldn't, she thought they were all very affected, and unintelligent, and uneducated, and she didn't really want to know them!

Are these the minor gentry?

Yes, that's right. This sort of thing. And these were the sort of people. But, people would come in and have tea, you know, the young schoolteachers, and this sort of thing. She'd give anybody, she'd give a ... tramps and tinkers would have their tea if they were passing by. My mother always gave them food if they were coming, and so on. And my father had an aged aunt, and she had a step-daughter, and they used to come to us. And my mother made friends with a couple of other married schoolteachers, in the village. One was married to the game-keeper, and the other was married to the postman. But they were local people. And I don't think they ever quite accepted her. She had a different accent, it was a mainland accent.

So you attended the village school from when you were five until ...

From when I was nearly six. My mother tried to teach me at home, but they made her send me to school, so I must have been almost six before I went, until I was 12.

And where did you go when you were 12?

Then I went to Portree, because by that time the War was coming on, so we went to school in Portree, which had ... we think they call it Portree High School now, but we called it Portree Secondary School, in those days. It was the school my father went to when he was 12. And it was only 15 miles away, but we had to board, because there was only a morning bus, and an afternoon bus. Whereas nowadays, they run a special school bus.

Did you miss your parents?

Don't think so. Oh, I remember meeting my father in the street one day, and being ... I was chewing a toffee. I remember trying terribly hard not to grin, so I must have been ... missed them a bit.

What were your favourite subjects while you were there?

I liked school. I, I enjoyed it all. I liked English and history, but then I, I was, it was all interesting. I can't remember not liking anything, particularly. Scottish, we didn't have quite the wide variety of subjects they have now. English and history, maths and science, Latin and French. I think I preferred German, of all things, really. We did Latin up, I only did Latin for three years, because my father felt that German was an important language, medically and scientifically, and, as long as we had the actual Latin in our heads, which I did for three years, he didn't bother about making me keep it on to have a certificate. And then I swapped over and did German. And enjoyed that, because the teacher was good, and, I suppose, we did a lot of German singing, and read German stories, and that was more interesting than, say, the French class, where I always got into trouble for talking.

Did any teacher influence you while you were at school?

Not particularly, I think. There were, although I don't know, the French teacher, I called my daughter after Christine, I liked her name.

And how would you describe your education?

Useful. It was a small school, because of the island, so that way, you could do any combination you liked. I don't think any of my children would have been able to do the combination, because I did, you know, science, that would be a ... a general sort of science, we did it all in one subject in Scotland, at least, all under one cover. You had different papers, but it was only counted as one subject. And then I did French and German, and history and English. And a sort of combination. Whereas, had I gone to the Inverness Academy, which I might have done, if it hadn't been for the War, I would have had to do either modern languages or science, and not both, which was quite good.

When did you decide that you wanted to become a doctor?

Oh, I can't remember. I don't know. Because first I wanted to be a ... I thought it would be nice to be a cook, and then I thought I'd like to be a scientist. And, in the event, I did neither. But, I must have been about 15, I suppose.

Did your parents encourage you?

Well, they never discouraged me. So I suppose they must, no, I think they always encouraged us. My father was terribly proud. He always used to go round with ... it embarrassed me. He used to get our Report Cards out, and anyone who was willing to listen, he'd show them to. So I didn't do that with my kids, because I found it put undue pressure on people to do well. So, I mean, they must have encouraged us where working was concerned. My mother used to light us a fire in our bedrooms, when it got near exam times, to swot. But, of course, we had a book-case behind the door, so I was always reading, and, when I heard her coming, I sat on my book and I ... I feel guilty about that now, when I think of all the effort it was to bring coal upstairs, and everything.

So how old would you have been when you left school?

Seventeen. Again, the reason for that was because there was a war on, and when you were 16, you had to register for National Service. And my mother was convinced that anyone who did National Service became a prostitute for the officers! So I went to university at 17 instead of 18. So I didn't, in fact, stay for the sixth form. I left school at the end of the fifth. As soon as I got my certificates, I was off, which is why I, I could have had some more Higher Levels if I had stayed longer, but ...

What Highers did you have?

Maths, science, French, English, history and, history and German were at Lower Level, because I, I went to the history master, and said, "Couldn't I give up music, or couldn't I give up something else, and do some extra history, so that I could get a Higher history?" And they wouldn't let me. So I didn't. But I had enough to get into university, so that it didn't matter.

So you left school at 17, and then you went to ... straight to Edinburgh?

Straight to Edinburgh. And, you see, that was a reserved occupation.

Why did you choose Edinburgh?

Well, I, we applied to Edinburgh and Glasgow, and I was accepted by both, but I now know I had sinusitis. In those days, I had a cough, and nobody understood what it was. And my parents thought Edinburgh had a healthier climate, because Glasgow was wet. And that is the truth! But my father loved Glasgow, but he thought I'd be healthier in Edinburgh. Most of our colleagues from school went to Glasgow. A few went to Aberdeen. So, there were only about three or four of us from the school, that were in Edinburgh. So I missed out on my West Highland roots when I, when the family left from Skye.

Was it a big shock, going from Skye to Edinburgh?

Oh well, it has to have been, because ... Skye was very rural, and ... you suddenly find yourself master of your own fate, you could do what you liked. And my father and my mother, but my father, particularly, said, "Now, you, you're totally uneducated. You've got to go to, go to the theatre, go to concerts, learn some things other than just basic medicine, because it is a very narrow thing." He always said that my mother was better educated than the rest of us, because it's such a narrow education, medicine. So, of course, I did. I went, I went to the theatre, and things. I didn't always tell them what I was doing. I didn't tell them lies. I just mentioned a few things, and then I had a horrible swot at the end of the, just before the exams!

Did you ever feel lonely while you were there?

When I went to Edinburgh, I was very fortunate. I, my mother wanted to get me into one of the, the hostels, whatever they call them, the Halls of Residence, and there weren't any vacancies at the beginning of the term, so I got into these digs, and there were four other girls there - two from England, and two from the South of Scotland - and myself. So we were, actually, a very happy group. And, when a vacancy came in the Hall of

Residence, I said, "No thanks", and stayed where I was. And so I wasn't particularly, and I was more lonely when, in 1950, was it 1951? I went down to Kent, in a hospital, where they changed the housemen every three months, in my particular subject, and everybody else had been there three months, and I was an incomer, and I was really lonely there for three months.

How was your pre-clinical training organised?

Well, we ... we, we started at the crack of dawn, and even a little earlier, because we did, it was biology, there was biology and botany that we did at ... sort of, botany at eight o'clock in the morning. We used to go to, down to the botanical gardens, and then stop off on the way back for some breakfast, in a cafe at Hanover Street on the way back! But they kept us going much harder than our non-medical friends. They had lots of time to do their reading during the day in the Library, where we had lectures pretty well all the time. My first day, I made a big boob boob, because we had a lecture at ten to one, that was biochemistry, and I thought, "Well, at ten to one, somebody's obviously going to give us a list of books and things, and tell us when to come back." So I arranged to meet my father for lunch at one o'clock. But, the lecture was a lecture. It went on from ten to one till ten to two, and I should have had lunch at 12 o'clock. So my poor father was freezing outside, and I was starving inside! Because he, my father brought me down to Edinburgh, and stayed with me for a week. He took me a week early, and showed me around the city, and that was, sort of, his last, he just wanted to know how I'd got on with the first day, and that was to be a lunchtime meeting.

Were there many other women medical students?

Oh yes. It was during the War, in 1944, so that a third of our class was women, and there were 50 of us. I, we go back for reunions, and I still see a lot of them, those who are still alive. But my best friend died.

What do you remember about your clinical training?

Not as, not as much as Harry does. I can't always remember. I, I always picked the easiest clinics to go to, the ones where the best-natured lecturers and professors were, to make life easier. Once got sent to one particular one, of a man called Dr. Todd, who hated women! I didn't like going to that. But, it was interesting, and, but I think, on the whole, my children had better clinical education.

In what way?

They had more patient contact than, you see, we had, there were 200 of us in a year, and, in the main, it was mainly one big hospital. There was also, there were a couple of subsidiary ones, but I had no dealings with them. Harry did, I didn't. So I was mainly at the Infirmary, and there was always dozens of people, and if you were pushy, then, no doubt, you got things to do. And if you were a man, the nurses got involved with you, but if you were a mere woman and ... the nurses didn't want to know.

Did they?

They were all on the make! Or at least, we all thought they were!

Whereabouts did the student come in the hierarchy of the firm, during clinical training?

Oh, well, we used to do a sort of clinic ... we all had to do a share of the clinical lab work, and this sort of thing. And we had to, to interview patients, and write up cases, and things like that. But I don't have tremendous memories of these things. We must have done them. I have to have done them.

How were you treated by the consultants?

Like anybody else. I, I don't have any memories of either being picked on, or ... sexual harassment, or anything like that, that people talk about nowadays. But then, all the younger people had gone off to the War, and we had, in the main, a lot of older lecturers, and older professors, and things like that. Or, the younger ones who were there, were, perhaps, handicapped in some way. Maybe they had a bad heart or something. I remember one lecturer who used to get (CAN'T CATCH - 296) crises, as they call them. His eyes would suddenly open up wide, and he couldn't help himself. It's a part of some syndrome, which I can't remember now.

What did you do when you left Edinburgh?

I trained to be a general practitioner, actually. So I, I did a year at Inverness doing medicine and surgery. But there were some odd beds, some skin beds, and some rheumatology beds, so I grabbed them, and I looked after them as well. And then I did, went back to Edinburgh to the, took up some gynae at the Western General, not at the Simpson. And then, after that, oh, I had, about that time, I had a brief affair with Harry, and decided I'd join the Consular Service, but, in point of fact, they offered me, having given them testimonials for every year of my life from five onwards, they offered me a job in Aden, so I decided not to take it. And I went down to Farnborough, in Kent, where my father had a friend who was a paediatrician, so I did six months as a paediatric houseman there, and a month locum, as a house surgeon. And then I went up to the North, and did a year as a GP trainee, in 1952. Now, most people south of the Border, don't know that that was possible in those days. But it was a Highlands and Islands Scheme to keep a float of young, mobile doctors, who could go if a

rural doctor was ill, suddenly, and there was no-one to do his work. The isolation was such that it was a necessary thing. So I did a year as a trainee then, and, during that time, I took my Diploma in Child Health, because I had done the work in Kent, and I visited, sort of, various homes, and places like that. And then Harry and I made it up, and I, I came; took myself a job down in Sunderland, a children's hospital, to be near him. Then we got married, and I was, just for some, to earn money, I was Casualty Officer at a little hospital in Hartlepool, where he had risen in practice.

What did the training, the GP Training Scheme involve?

Well, the GP Training Scheme involved, I was, actually, I got appointed to my father, because we thought, frankly, we thought he was the best doctor in the neighbourhood, and he, you did, it was a sort of an apprenticeship. You, you did surgery, you did visits, as the trainees do in practice now. There was no day-release, other than I went, I did go to the Welfare Clinic in the town, but that was more for the DCH. And I did, he taught me to do things far more for patients, than people would actually do, had they done nowadays, you know, you were at the beck and call, sort of thing. But it taught me a lot about people's families, and it taught me, I think, how to be a good GP.

Where was your father practising?

In Foyers, over Loch Ness, twenty miles. In 1944, my family moved to Foyers in Loch Ness side, which was up in the hills. It was a scattered practice. There was a small industrial bit, in that there was an aluminium factory, which had ... paid a certain amount to the GP as a retainer, and they owned the house that we rented there. But it was in my mother's part of the world, you see, so ... and, of course, it was fairly useful, because Dad was on all the Hospital Committees that were around, and, and the Regional Board, and all these, that sort of thing, and his politics, and any other thing that he could get on to, he did. And it was nice for us. We were only 20 miles from Inverness, and 20 miles was nothing on these quiet roads. So you used to go into the hospital and visit your patients, and the patients would ring you up and say, so and so, you know, "Can you take me to see Dad, he's in hospital and ..." And I was, my father insisted I acted as a sort of chauffeur, and took them to the hospital.

Did you ever consider doing anything other than general practice?

When we were first married, I did community medicine. But, in all honesty, my idea of a real doctor was a general practitioner who was interested in everything, and knew the family from the cradle to the grave, so to speak. And so, I, I enjoyed doing the community medicine, because I had children, and I think you worked for four hours a day, or not very much more, and it was money for old rope. But ... when Harry came here, and we got this practice, I was in my element again, because I loved every minute of it. So I hadn't considered specialising in anything.

So you finished your GP training.

Yes. And everything, except that we didn't have a day-release group. And ...

Were you married by this time?

No, I married in 1953 when, after I'd finished it. So I did my year up in the North, and then came down and went back into hospital, and found it very tiring, being on your feet all day, after having sat in a car and travelled the countryside.

Could you have gone into a, a practice somewhere, after you'd finished your training?

Quite honestly, I never thought of it. I suppose I could have done. But, anyway, in those days, they did rather tend to ... there were a lot of men coming from the Forces, and they'd only take, in the practice, they'd only take a woman on on very poor wages. I know, I had a friend who tried, who tried it, and she ... she said they didn't pay her properly, and they, she was just a slave, so she gave it up.

So it was difficult for a woman to get a place in a practice?

To get, to get a well-paid place. You could be a sort of slave and do all the chronics, and all the gynaecology or something, which one tended to do anyway, but, on the other hand, one could do all the other things as well. So I, I just found it was much more convenient to do infant welfare. In fact, when I first got married, for six months, I didn't work. I nearly went mad! But we thought it was the thing to do. You didn't work when you first, you know, but, having had a very good ... I worked, I worked until we had a baby, and then I stopped working just before she was born, and she was so good, and she slept so much, that I started doing welfare clinics, and then that blossomed into a full-time job.

This was in Hartlepool?

Yes. First I went and did the clinics for the County of Durham, wandered around.

What sort of things did that work involve?

Infant welfare clinics, ante-natal clinics. And, then when I was full-time, I did school medicals, and, and superannuation medicals, on the Saturday, for people who were applying for jobs with the Council.

So you were employed by the Local Authority, were you?

I was employed by the Hartlepool, yes, I was an Assistant MOH, I think they called us, in those days.

And, having a family, did the hours suit family life, doing that sort of work?

Well, I had a nanny and a cleaner. I had an easy life housewise! So the nanny looked after the children, and then she'd give them their tea, and I'd come home and play with them, so ... and she was a daytime nanny, so she went home at five o'clock. And, I went home for lunch. I had a couple of hours for lunch, because schools closed at 12 noon, and the infant welfare didn't start until 2 or 2.30, so I had a couple of hours, so they used to bring the kids home for lunch, and then take them back to the sort of nursery school and things they went to. So it was a very easy life. I didn't, of course, have school holidays, but, the way it was, I used to ... *[End of Tape 1 - Side B]*

Was it mostly other women doctors who were employed by the Authority, to work in these clinics?

Well, in Hartlepool, there were, at the time, they were ... part, there was a part-time male GP, and two part-time women workers, and then suddenly, they advertised it as a proper job, and I applied for it on the grounds that, if I didn't, I might not have a job. And it was ... so, there were, there was an MOH and an Assistant, well, Deputy MOH, an older woman, who was a Senior Assistant MOH, and me. That was the quota, because it wasn't a very large town.

Would you have preferred to have been in general practice?

Not at the time. In fact, I, I felt guilty, all my working life, after, well, from, from, in general practice, for neglecting my children. I don't know that I perhaps did, but I did feel guilty, because of the long hours. And I suppose I was sympathetic, so that I couldn't rush people, and I, I worked on. And, in those days, we didn't have secretaries, so we did our own typing in the evening, which I did in the evening, after they'd all gone to bed, and type out the letters to hospitals and things like that. And sort of time off. But that didn't happen till 1960, so at least all but one of the children were at school then, so it wasn't quite so bad.

Your husband mentioned that he, he made approaches to his Senior Partner, to see if you could have joined the practice in Hartlepool.

Oh yes. The Senior Partner was quite jealous when he discovered that I was paid the vast sum of £900 a year. He thought this was awful, that a woman should earn that. He wouldn't have me in the practice. The only times I ever did anything for them was when Harry had flu, and he wouldn't stay in bed, unless I would go and do the surgery for him. So, he made, he made approaches. But I certainly wasn't accepted. They didn't, they weren't so very fond of having women doctors around, and there weren't so many around. People I knew, whose mothers were doctors, they had never worked at all.

Was that a general attitude amongst the doctors in Hartlepool?

Yes. Oh yes. The attitude there, compared with the attitude here, was so different, because the GPs here, Harry says it's because they all had big lists. We all got on like a house on fire. I mean, I'm fond of Robin Clark and all the others, so we got on very well. Whereas some of them hated each other, and sniped at each other, and pinched at each other's patients, you know, in Hartlepool. But there were a lot of young Scottish people of our own age group, so that we had a very nice circle of friends, which here, we were, we were in the wrong ... this is a bigger town here, and most of the other doctors stayed on the other side of town, and we stayed where our work was. So we didn't have so many colleagues around on this side.

Was there much competition for Local Authority work in the clinics?

No, not really. There were just the three of us. And I don't think there was anybody who applied for the full-time job when I did, because if they had, they wouldn't have given it to me. I remember them asking me what would happen to my poor dear little children, when I was working? And I, I said I had arranged to have a nanny and a cleaner, so that if anything happened to the nanny, the cleaner was prepared to be with them. There was no way I wasn't going to be at work, sort of thing. So I just guessed there wasn't anybody else.

It sounds as though it was difficult for a married woman, then, to, to get work?

It was. Oh, it was. And when I, after these five years I ... well, seven years from me actually getting married and coming here, to Bolton, and community medicine doesn't ... you don't do much in the way of therapeutics, so, of course, drugs and things had all changed, and I had to sit down and swot up all the new treatments, and, and all the older treatments as well, to remind myself of things. That's a fair whack of reading to do. And all my working life, of course, reading was the most important thing you could do, to keep up-to-date - journals, magazines, textbooks and what have you - and going on courses, and things like that. And, because of that, Harry and I did different things. Harry went to the BMA, and I went to the College of General Practitioners. We were both members of both, but when it was a case of getting on committees, I was on committees for the College, and he was on committees for the BMA, and, so that one of us was around for the practice, and the children as well.

How did doctors in Hartlepool look upon other doctors who worked for the Local Authority?

Oh, some of them didn't think too much of us. One of them was particularly annoyed. We'd vaccinated, immunised a child for something, and I think they were jealous, they thought they could have, if they could be bothered, they could have done it; but there were some, one or two not very good GPs there, seen from our point of view. But this chap was called out on a Saturday afternoon, to see a child that was crying, and I'd vaccinated, immunised it on the Friday. So he said, "Well, call the public health doctors and tell them, because they've made him sore, that's why he's crying." So, although it wasn't my job to do it, I said, "Okay, well, look, I'll come and see your child." And I went to see, and, of course, it had otitis media, so I had great glee in ringing him up and saying, "Look, if this child has got a sore ear, it's got nothing to do with my vaccination!" And the other thing they used to say was, you know, when you've had a vaccination, you often get a red allergic reaction. But they used to say, "She'll have given it to him with a dirty needle." And that was heard. And sometimes, if there was a family, down town, in the down town area, they had some down town doctors, of Irish extraction, who didn't follow up ... there was a family that had tuberculosis, and, of course, the child was supposed to have treatment, or it might have been an adult. But anyway, I was detailed to go down and see about it, and try and talk them into it, because they hadn't bothered giving them the treatment, and tuberculosis was still pretty deadly. It was before the days when it had vanished and ... and then the other things we did, of course, for when it was polio, the Salk vaccine came in, and we used to go and vaccinate children in the high schools, they'd all queue up. And if somebody fainted when they saw you coming, you did them, you know, you got them out of the way while they weren't looking. And we did the same in factories and things like that. And that was quite interesting.

Were there any groups in Hartlepool, for women doctors, which you could belong to?

No. But I never made any point of joining groups for women doctors. I thought I was a doctor, not a woman doctor. And I had refused to join the Women's Medical Association, I thought "You're not going to get anywhere if you stick to things like that." I joined the ordinary things, and hoped to make myself felt that way.

You don't think they provide any useful ...

I'm sure they did. Well, in fact, I know they did, a hundred years ago. Not a hundred years ago, only about eighty years ago, but, by the time I came along, my year, there were 50 of us. Well, we really didn't need a Women's Medical Association. We needed to get active in the ones we had. The same way as you don't need an Overseas Doctors Association now, other than for social reasons. They should be active in the Associations we've got.

So you were in Hartlepool for seven, seven years.

Well, we were in Hartlepool from '53 to '60. Yes, that's right, seven years.

And you said that, occasionally, you would take a surgery.

Yes. Very ...

If, through illness, or something like that.

Yes.

Did you have to help out in any other ways?

No, apart from answering the telephone when Harry was on call. During the day, the calls went to the surgery. But, in the evening, we still hadn't invented the answering machine, and I had to stay in when he was on call, and his weekends on. So I answered the telephone there.

Was that annoying, considering the Senior Partner's attitude towards you?

Oh no. I, one, I was brought up with, and I ... to me, it was good, that was only one weekend in three, whereas my Mum had it to do, if she didn't, once she stopped having resident maids and had to have daily ones, you know, after the War. I mean, she had to get a telephone sitter, so that, I reckoned it was good to have two weekends off. I thought it was great. It was an improvement!

Did you mix much with the Senior Partner, and the other partner in the firm?

The Senior Partner's wife lived in Jersey. When she came back, she had, if they had us up to the house for a meal, and I mixed with the other younger ones. And I remember, when we got a television, and there was a General Election, then the Senior Partner would, come, and we all sat and watched the results as they came through, you know how it comes, Billericay comes out first, and so forth. So we had a little supper party. But, we didn't actually socialise too much with him, because he wasn't, the poor man didn't have a social life, other than his shooting and his fishing. But ... that, of course, was during the day.

How did being married to a GP affect family life?

A lot less for our family, my children, than it did for myself as a child, because Harry ... well, firstly the practice was, was all close and compact, and you didn't have to go more than five miles. You could go and do a visit, and be back in half an hour. But, it affected them, the children, in that, like myself I suppose, people

didn't come and play with our children in the house, you know, they could have played outside, but they didn't have close friends until they went off to university. And I suppose that's the same sort of thing as we had, that we played outside. So ... oh, the other thing that did affect family life was, there was a rota system in Bolton, I'm sure Harry's told you about it. And it started at 12 noon, which meant that, if we were going anywhere, we didn't go till 12 noon, which meant you arrived at places when they were busy, and this sort of thing. So that did, I reckoned, if I had my life to live over again, I'd have insisted on spending money on a locum for the mornings, and had more time off with the children, to do more hobbies with them, in that sort of way. But ... but Harry looked after all of that, and I, it bothered him, and it never bothered me, so I never worried about money, and ... we could well have had a locum, got a married woman to do the odd weekends. It would have done her a favour. But, when I went up off to, which I didn't do much of until after the children left home when they were 18, when I started going down to the College, for examining, or going away on courses and things like that ... oh, what was I going to say about them? Harry would never accept a locum. And when I started the day release group for the GP Trainees, on Wednesday, the housekeeper called it "Martyrdom Day", because he always asked people to come back on a Wednesday, and I wasn't there! So he had to do all the work. And she said, "Oh, it's Wednesday today. It's Martyrdom Day!" Whereas, if I was going to be missing on a Wednesday, I asked people to come back on Tuesday or Thursday, so, there was only emergencies to be seen on a Wednesday, no repeats. And Harry could have done that, or he could have taken a locum in. And we got paid expenses, which could have been used for a locum when I was away down at the College. He could have done a locum, but he preferred to be a martyr, which clipped my wings more, good and proper, particularly after he'd had that, what we thought might have been a heart attack, and, you know, and after that, I had to sort of give things up, because, as he wouldn't have a locum with him, and my guilt would have got bigger and bigger if anything had happened to him, so that limited my scope.

So you moved to Bolton in 1960. Now, did you stay in community medicine when you arrived in Bolton?

No. No, no. We came to Bolton, and it had been a practice with a doctor and an assistant, so we became partners right away, well, maybe a month or two of difference. And I stayed in the practice, and, as we were needing money to begin with, because we hadn't sold our other house. So we had a mortgage on that, and we had to pay cash for the terraced house we bought, which was over-priced for the time. But, we had a large overdraft. And so Harry went, and Harry did infant welfare clinics, actually, because we knew that if I did them, people would say I was doing welfare clinics, and just getting paid by the National Health Service, so, in fact, I always did that bit more in the practice than Harry, and Harry did first the Welfare Clinics, and then he went on to the DSS things, and doing these RMO jobs that he did, and which he enjoyed doing.

So you concentrated on ...

On the practice. And then I became a practice teacher. We started getting undergraduates, because I, I knew the Professor of General Practice, Pat Byrne, in Manchester, and he said, yes, that, you know, first he sent us undergraduates, and then he said, "Well, why don't you take post-graduates?" So then we started having trainees.

How did you actually share the work out, in the practice, between you?

Well, we had, somebody came and put his plate up around in the Harwood area. Harry will tell you about that as well. And so we all, all the GPs, for self-defence, had a branch surgery up in Harwood. And, eventually, my father was going blind, and we brought him down, and they lived in the surgery, the branch surgery. So, what it amounted to was that, I did the Harwood, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, the surgeries there, so, on these days, I did the visits in that area, and Harry did the visits in the other areas, say, up Bromley Cross, or down into Bolton. And then, the days he went, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, then I did the visits in the other direction. But, on the other hand, if anything happened to somebody that we were dealing with, we would always go ourselves. After all, if you made a boob, or something, you could, well, you could put it right yourself. And not only that, but, of course, if a person, if you're worried about someone, you go back yourself, to see how they are. So we always did our own repeats, which you might do. But the new ones were always divided according to the area in which they came in.

He told me that ... he would pass some patients on to you. He was ...

Well, to be quite truthful, sometimes he wouldn't do visits that I thought he ought to do, in which case, I did them. I wanted to do, to go and learn, do a course on hypnosis. I did the course on hypnosis, it was a wonderful course, and was enjoying it. And it turned out to be quite a good subject. But, on the Sunday morning, when I was going back, a call came in for someone with asthma, and he was in a bolshy mood, and he told them to go down to the hospital. Now, I was on my way out, and I had to leave him with that one. But I wouldn't send anyone with asthma, without first going and making sure that they'd got injections and stuff, into them. I, I, I couldn't bear it. So I decided I couldn't take up anything that was going to get me out of the practice. I felt I was a sort of stabilising influence, because, if Harry was in a bad mood, he let it affect his work. Well, he's a great

guy, and he's a tremendous clinician, but he doesn't allow for people's ... people being frightened, or people ... people having their own things, and queer things. But, if one could sit down and talk with people, and if I could do what they wanted to do, and if they wanted to use herbs, if I could help them in that line, then we would do it, you know. I, I thought that doctors provide as much a service as the fish and chip man down the road. And we have as much right to do what they want, the way they want it, as any other service.

Well, he would say, "This is ... I'm the doctor ..."

Well, "You do what I say." Yes. He was more old-fashioned, in that respect. And he stuck to old-fashioned drugs. And he's proud of being, not costing a lot of money to the National Health Service, where I, I didn't care. I did care a bit. But, I mean, I wouldn't waste public money. But if it was going to suit a person to have things, then fair enough, I would.

Because he was saying that he had little time for patients with emotional problems, and he would guide them towards you.

Yes. Oh well, that was fair enough. And, of course, I did the gynae, because I've got smaller hands. And, I would say, having been at the receiving end, I would always offer them my smaller hands! But, if a person is off sick because they've got emotional problems, they're still as much off work, they're still as much miserable, and a headache is a headache, whether it's caused by meningitis, or migraine, or just stress. And, I suppose, I've had a lot of minor ailments over the years, but they're blooming uncomfortable. I mean, I've not had a heart attack, and I can walk far faster than Harry. But, I've had silly things - sinusitis and ... you know, all sorts of ... - and I know how miserable people feel with them, so I could relate to them. Which meant I always worked long hours, which meant I neglected my children in that sort of a way. But they always came to me when they had troubles, not to their dad, because they knew I would listen. So ...

Is that something to do with your respective family backgrounds, do you think?

It's very probably, because Harry's father was very stern. By the time I, I got married, he was an old pussy cat, and we got on like a house on fire. But ... I gather that he was very cross with them. And Harry used to shout at our kids. I mean, if they spilt a teaspoonful of milk, he made the same amount of fuss as if they spilt the whole bottle! So, I mean, if you're too severe, it has a counter-effect.

How did you deal with the night work, when you were in practice together?

Alternately. Absolutely alternately. So when it came to maternity work, we saw people alternate times. If they came to one clinic, I saw them one Thursday, the next, Harry would see them. So that we both knew them, so that the same person didn't go out of bed each, two nights in a row. We took turnabout. And, in those far off days when we did a lot of maternity, whoever got up in the night, got their breakfast in bed next morning, from the other one! And you could ... eat your Corn Flakes with the best of them.

And who was the Senior Partner?

Oh, well, Harry had to be Senior Partner by ... I think ... the actual money was 50/50. But, I mean, I let him be the boss. You've got to let them be the boss if you want to live with them! I have devious ways of getting what I want!

So he was Senior Partner in name only, was he?

Well, no. We did things, we did things his way. I wanted a nurse in the practice, for years. They waited until I was retired before they got one! You know, all the things I wanted, that sort of ... but I did, when I wanted full-time receptionists, and we got them, and I wanted proper secretaries and things. And eventually, we had a proper thing ... proper staff, and eventually, we had a good team with the district nurses, and things like that. And ...

Would you get to see the female patients, more than the male patients?

They tended, the male patients came to see me, either they had something neurotic, or they thought that the symptoms they had were illogical. They very often weren't. But, if a man reckoned he was making a fuss about something, or if he had sexual problems, and things like that, he'd come to me. But, if he had ... you know, if they had pneumonia, or bronchitis, or something like that, Harry was fine. Because they didn't have to wait to see, you could walk in and see Harry, and he was there. Whereas if you came in to see me, there were three people ahead of you, and they may take half an hour each. My patients knew they had to wait.

Would you see more patients?

I would see more patients, I'd write more prescriptions, perhaps. But, or latterly, I would tell people what they can buy cheaper than my prescriptions, that was when prescriptions got dear. I could work out what they could get cheaper.

Were you the more popular doctor in the practice?

Yes. Yes. And that isn't, that's what I did, because Harry didn't always, he still doesn't always listen to what somebody's saying. We had my sister here for the weekend, and she was telling him a story from our childhood,

and, in the middle of it, he turned and started telling her a long tale about something else. And I had to wait till he was finished, and then ask her, because I couldn't remember the story.

And he was the same with the patients?

He was the same with the patients! He told them what to do. Well, if you listen, they'll very often tell you what they need to do, themselves.

That was interesting you said that the men who thought they had something illogical ...

Yes.

... that they couldn't, they couldn't put their finger on what was causing it, would come to you.

Yes. They'd come to me. And very often, or people ... so that, of course, most of my patients who had coronary by-passes, and it was most of my patients who had the, sort of, hip replacements and things like that.

So the two of you have got different approaches to medicine?

We had different approaches. We were, we did very well. We were symbiotic. We worked very well together, and, but Harry's tended to get ... I used to get really upset. When I came back, when I did the lunch-time surgery up in Harwood, and it was a good time, because, of course, people had fed their kids and everything, and, so, he would be walking up and down, walking up and down. But when he started getting the Ministry jobs, this got him out of the house early, all my troubles went, because the stress was not in the hard work, my stress was within his reaction to my hard work.

Did he think you were doing too much?

Too much. Yes, he thought I was, he always thought I was doing too much, and so he got upset about it. But I never got upset about it, particularly once the children left home. It really didn't matter. I didn't care how much work I did, because it ... I felt useful.

Did he think you were being exploited by the patients?

Yes. He always thought that, yes. He did. He's looked after me, he's looked after me well.

But didn't you try to explain to him?

Well, you can't explain things to Harry. He doesn't listen! Oh, many's the time we used to fight too ... patients, he'd want to put them off the list. And I'd say, "But you can't do that because, just because she's always ill. That's no excuse." You know, he thought they were making too many demands, and we had many an argument and a fight over people he wanted to get rid of, that I didn't. And, very often, I didn't. Often, we didn't put them off but, latterly, it got to a stage when I thought, "Well, I'm not going to ruin my marriage over this. They wouldn't ruin their marriage over me." So, it depended on how things were going.

Did it turn out, then, that you were working longer hours?

Oh yes. Always. But I, the only meal I cooked was an evening meal, and I used to stick it in before I went into the evening surgery, in a, in a slow oven, and it was there when we came out, so that he didn't have to wait for it, sort of thing. You see, he'd no excuse to feel ill-used.

How did you share the responsibilities for bringing up the children?

Ah well, I did most of that, although we had arrangements. When the children were small, a consultant friend took them to school with his. And, on the way home, we picked his up with ours, because he couldn't leave the hospital in the afternoon, and we could. But, on the main, when my daughter was away at boarding school, then Harry did the work and I, Saturday morning, I did a morning surgery, and then scooted off to Harrogate to see her, actually, they got out at 12.30. And I used to do that. And I did point out to her that, when she was smaller, girls had to go away to school, because Mummy had done! Because she was ... the boys got into the local direct grant schools, and she didn't.

Did you try to bring them up in the same way as you had been brought up?

Oh yes. I carted them all off to church every Sunday. That was a thing, now, Harry is an atheist. But we, when we got married, I insisted, "I'm sorry. I will go to church." But I went, I did all my church-going in the morning, and, in fact, this is why I joined the Anglican Church, because they had a nine o'clock service, a nine o'clock Communion, whereas the Presbyterian Church didn't open till eleven, by which time the visits are coming in. So it suited me to go to the nearest church, and get my churching over, before the patients got out of bed, which quite suited. And, yes, we'd, the kids had piano lessons. I had piano lessons. And all that sort of thing, yes.

Do you think, if you hadn't have got married, you would have gone straight into general practice?

I don't know. I think if I hadn't been, have got married, I might have gone on to take as many degrees as I could lay my hands on, just to show that I was better than the others, because, in those days, away back, 40 years ago, everybody got married if there was anything in them at all. And I think I probably would have tried to show my superiority in other ways. But, as it was, of course, you couldn't. One thing ... I was going to do an

MD on psychiatry in general practice, but I discovered that I couldn't do that without neglecting the children shamefully. So I stopped that. In fact, I chucked out all the basic work that I'd done, a box full of papers, recently.

Did you regret that?

Well, at one time I fancied myself with having an MD, but ... there's more important things in life than that.

You had your children fairly soon after getting married.

Well, you see, I was 26. I would have been ... too old, otherwise. At least, that's what it seemed like. So, but I had the third one before I was 30, so there were ... pretty ... it was pretty busy. But, they all went to school together, and they all left school, in fact, they all did 'A' levels more or less the same time!

How does general practice affect family life, do you think?

It's very difficult, really, because, especially for two of us. It meant that, that you might plan to do something, and then it not be able to be done. You might have, you might have a rota with ... with other people, but, because of a maternity case, or something or other, or somebody important, like somebody who is dying, you're not going to give that to a locum, you're going to do that yourself. And this sort of thing. So you might have to neglect your children for that. And you, I always found I couldn't even book a squash court or anything like that. Other people did, but I didn't feel up to it, so I'm doing these things now. But, the children, we definitely neglected their social life, in that sort of a way, that ... you couldn't plan too much. [End of Tape 2 - Side A] ... because, when he was ill, I had to do his work, and visit him in the hospital, and you've double stress. Or, if you're ill, he's got to do your work as well as, as look after you in the house. And I think it is much better if one could be in nearby practices.

Would you have been happier working with someone who had a similar idea ...

Of course.

... about medicine?

Yes. I would have been. Very much so. But, again, Harry, I don't think Harry, he would have noticed, because he only sees what he ... and I'm perfectly ... he thinks that life was all sweetness and light during the years we worked together. But, in point of fact, it was very fraught, a lot of times. And you only need to look at old diaries to see that.

Who was the major force within the practice?

Oh, well, Harry. He's got a strong personality, and, but, I had my following! But I, I mean, I don't throw myself around, and I ... I'm being a little bit frank into this machine, but it doesn't really ... but, in all honesty, it wasn't at all easy working with him, because we disagreed almost ... over almost every possible thing. Except for the fact that we both agreed that you had to diagnose a patient, before you give them any treatment. You had to know what was wrong. And we both agreed, and that we followed up our own patients if a ... you know, if you saw somebody today, and you were worried, and you would go back again tomorrow. You wouldn't send him, or something like that.

Who would make decisions about the way the practice was run?

Oh, well, Harry did that. And he was in the, I was in the back, in the back of the surgery, where I had peace and quiet with my patients. And he was near the ... and he listened in, he had a darned listening in thing, for listening to telephone, to hear what patients were saying, and this sort of thing. Well, we had a very good receptionist, who would very often say to me "Now, look, this one's not ... I'm not really happy about this one", and slip them in. What Harry would never do, he, he was very very, he would never see one of my, if one of my patients wanted to see him for a second opinion, he wouldn't do it. But a lot of his patients wanted to come to me, and, if I was going to see them, we had to sneak them in. And we'd be very tactful, and I would never let him down. But I sometimes did see them, because sometimes he intercepted my patients on the way in, and sort of say, when they really wanted to see me, because he thought I was busy, and then they'd come back tomorrow. And the receptionist would sneak them in the back, so he wouldn't notice. And if he did notice, of course, the roof would go up! And he wouldn't speak to me for days!

Didn't you ever say to him, "Well, look, I think it would be better if we practiced separately, in different ..."

No.

... partnerships?

No. I reckoned if I had left the practice, it would have gone to pigs and whistles, quite frankly. Because he was bad-tempered, and he could, if he was in a bad mood ... we were lucky in that this was a growing area, at the time, when he could afford to shout at people, and so they left. But, I mean, it, eventually the place settled down, and we didn't have the vast numbers of new patients. And if I left, half of them would have followed me, or more. A lot of patients left the practice when I retired. Quite a lot. Which ... I was sorry about, because of hurting Harry's feelings, you know.

And did he notice that?

Oh yes, he noticed. Oh, he noticed. He got over it. But, yes.

But, up until then, was he aware of the patients' attitudes?

Oh, yes. Oh yes. Yes, he was. He always called me the "proper doctor", and things like that, yes. But it was his own fault. He was, his father was bad-tempered, Harry was bad-tempered. And, like his father, now he's that pussy cat in his ... thing. But ... he, he used to blow up, and if people, if he thought they were unreasonable, or even if they weren't unreasonable, but he, you know, he would yell, you know. He didn't realise what a loud voice he had, that's the other thing. He simply didn't.

Did he make any attempt to change?

He wouldn't. No, no, he didn't make any attempt to change. No, he's changing now because the stresses aren't there, and he's ... he used to, first of all, he always wanted to get back to Scotland, you see, I could have got a job in Scotland, no problem. But Harry didn't manage, because he lived in the Lowlands where everybody wanted to be. He never wanted to be in the Highlands. My dad would have got him a job in the Highlands if he'd wanted it. And then he kept applying for jobs of the more administrative kind, and he would have, in fact, but I don't honestly think he would have done too well, because if, if he thought his colleagues were pratts, he'd have told them so. Which is all right in general practice, he could tell me he thought I was a pratt, fine. But to tell other people! And I was pretty sure that he would have been out the moment he was 60, instead of working on, had he been in any of those sort of administrative jobs for long.

Do you think he should have ever gone into general practice?

Well, I don't think he should have. But he had intended to do surgery, and then, when he came out of the Forces, and saw the way things were going, and his best friends getting stuck as a Registrar, he changed, decided to do general practice because it was available. And, in those days, you didn't have to train for it. And he hadn't trained for it. And he, he, I think he always felt that general practice was inferior, and that he was doing, I think that is the honest truth. And he joined the College of General Practitioners at the very beginning, and we've all worked very hard to raise the standards of general practice, and to make it a specialty in its own right. But I believed in what I was doing, and I think he did it because he wanted to improve his status, rather than, because ... I think he always felt that a GP, he was a bit of a dogsbody, which was the way he looked at it, and not the way I looked at it.

How did you define the GP's role?

I defined the GP's role as, well, I think I was the universal mother figure, in the first place. But the GP is, to me, was a real doctor. My father had been all things to all patients, and he'd brought in consultants, chosen them, they used to come to Skye and stay with us, and this sort of thing. And, of course, we did choose our consultants very carefully in Bolton, in that, if you knew your, this patient was frightened of a cross, bad-tempered man, then you would ask this one, man A. Or if you knew that you wanted the person to have this sort of scar, or something, you knew who did which scars and whatnot, and everything, and I ... which treatment they would get, or which therapy. And we knew them all. So, really, it was wonderful being here in the old days. You knew all your consultants, knew exactly what they would do in any given situation, and you could suit your patient individually.

You said you were a "universal mother figure".

Yes.

What did you mean by that?

Well, the patients would very often, we had a lot of young people living in these new houses that had come up, so mothers were the other side of town, or in another town, and, whereas, normally you'd ask mother or a grandma what to do with the baby, people would come to me with very little the matter, sometimes, so that I would give them the advice that my mother would have given me, had she have been round the corner.

Did you consciously model yourself on your father?

Oh, I think I must have done. Certainly, subconsciously, but yes. Yes, I did. Even to trying to following him into public speaking, and all ... that sort of thing. Yes, I did. He used to be very proud when I was a College examiner, and this sort of thing. He liked that.

Just a couple of questions now, just to sum up. What would you say you're most proud of, in your life as a whole?

Oh! I don't know. I suppose I've been most proud of my parents. I think I had the best parents in the world. But, I mean, of my own achievements do you mean? I was, I think ... I, I was pleased to have been asked to be a College examiner, and I was pleased to start the day release group and run that. I enjoyed that very much. I enjoyed knowing all the young doctors in the town.

And what have been the worst and the best things in your life?

I think the best things are my family and children, and grandchildren. They're the best things that anybody could have. Well, I haven't had many worst things. I suppose the fact that Harry and I didn't get on as well as we might have done. But ... the truth of the matter is that, if you had your life to live over again, you'd make exactly the same mistakes, probably.

Would you have preferred to stay in Hartlepool?

No. No. This has been a, it was very pleasant there in Hartlepool. That was very nice. But here, we have worked for our sons, where they're convenient and easy, easy to see. And for bigger choice, we had better schooling, much better schooling. And, of course, we were very much better off here, with us both working in this thing. We'd have had an easier life in the other. But I think mine was more fulfilling here.

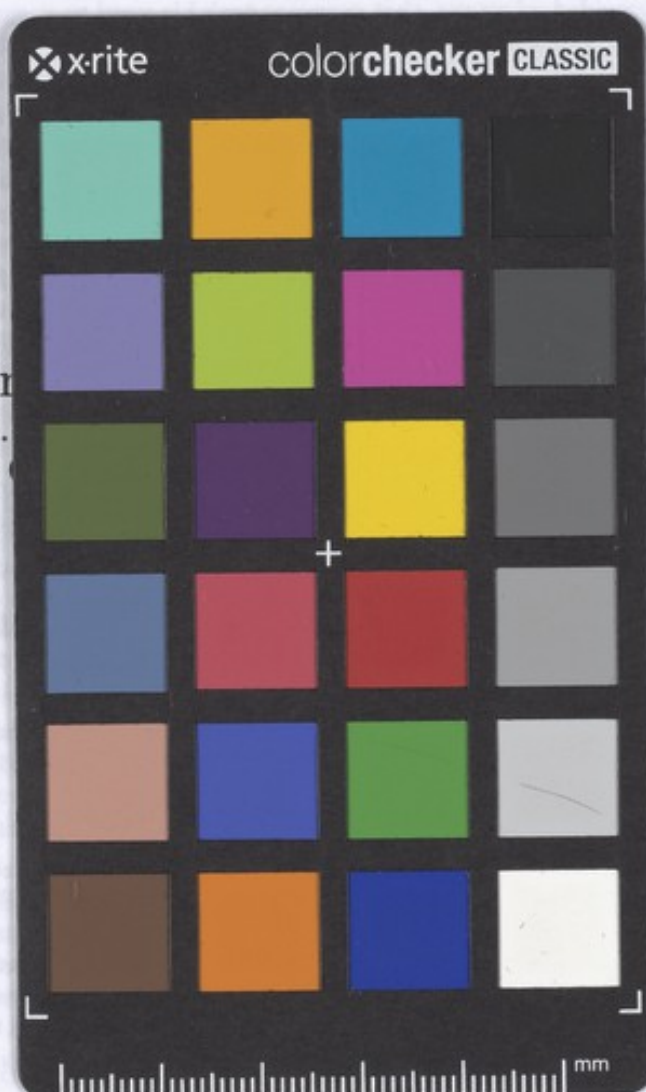
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