

Susan and Jean, Belfast. Interview: 9th March 1996

1 SC: My name is Susan C., I'm 86 and I was born in Gorey, Co. Wexford and I went to boarding school here in Belfast at the Methodist College. The reason for that was because we had gone to Dublin but we had no friends there and my grandmother was here in Belfast and she would be able to keep an eye on us. Then I studied music for four years in London and then I taught music in schools for a couple of years in Inverness and Eastbourne. Then I decided that I didn't want to do that any longer and I trained as a medical social worker, an almoner, as we were called in those days, at London University and at the Institute of Almoners in London. And then I was offered a job at the Rotunda Hospital, and I was there from 1939 to 1943 and then I was offered a job at the Royal Victoria here, it was a promotion really, and I came here in 1944 and I worked there until I retired in 1970.

2 MM: Your family in Gorey, can you tell me something about them?

3 SC: Well, when I was small, we lived with my grandfather and my aunt, my father's sister that was, and my father and mother and my elder sister and younger brother.

4 MM: What did your family do for a living?

5 SC: My father had a business, a drapery business.

6 MM: Was your mother involved in that?

7 SC: Oh yes, she was, she did all the book keeping.

8 MM: Jean, can you tell me how old are you?

9 JC: I'm eighty-five.

10 MM: And were you born here in Belfast?

11 JC: I wasn't, I was born in Scotland.

12 MM: When did you come to Ireland?

13 JC: I was about four.

14 MM: Do you come from a large family?

15 JC: No, I was the only child.

16 MM: And have you been in Belfast all your life since then?

17 JC: Apart from visits to Scotland.

18 MM: So you still have family in Scotland?

19 JC: Not any more.

20 MM: Susan was telling me what she did for a living; were you working in Belfast or did you give up work when you got married?

21 JC: When I got married, my husband was a superintendent in the Ormeau Bakery then he left and we opened up a business of our own. After a bit - fourteen years - we sold it and we bought another business, which was a confectionery and tobacco business. We were there until my husband was coming up to retirement and he was having blackouts and this kind of thing. So I told him it was time to give up the business.

22 MM: Had you been involved in the business when it was running?

23 JC: Yes, I worked in it until we retired. My daughter was married and she thought well, her parents were getting older and she would like us to be nearer so we came back to Stranmillis.

24 MM: Can I bring you back a bit to the war years? Did you have a business then?

25 JC: No, my husband was in the Ormeau Bakery at that time. I wasn't working then.

26 MM: You were at home with your children?

27 JC: I have one daughter, just the one.

28 MM: I don't want to direct you too much. If the two of you have particular recollections of the period I would like to hear them but it would be useful if they were based on your working life outside the home. Susan, was there anything that struck you about working in Belfast in the period that was different from working in Dublin?

29 SC: Oh well yes, the blackout for one thing, it was very strict up here, it was always very dark and the rations, of course. And I was further away from my family; I used to go down every weekend when I was working in Dublin but that wasn't possible from Belfast.

30 MM: Was that because of the distance or was travel restricted?

31 SC: It was because of the distance. I would go for holidays and that kind of thing but not go down for every weekend. I didn't drive a car, I never have had a car, and I think it was mainly the distance that was involved because travel really wasn't restricted. We were up and down on the trains from Dublin all the time. People were always going up to Belfast for the weekend or to the North, and as I say, we always did a little bit of shopping in the South, cakes and cloth and sweets and that kind of thing. Yes, and cigarettes, that's right. So that I think was the main difference really. The blackout and the rationing; particularly the rationing.

32 MM: You were telling me earlier of the strategies that you used to get around the rationing. Would you like to go through that again for the tape? [All laugh]

33 JC: My memory of it, going back beyond that, to the real bombings and the troubles, that eventually we got so used to getting up, that very often we went to bed without undressing because we knew they were coming. We dreaded the moonlight nights; we dreaded moonlight because that was their best time. I recall one Easter Tuesday night, it was the biggest bombing raid in Belfast. My mother was alive, she had a little cottage in the country outside Ballymena and we, my husband and myself and the baby, we used to go down for the weekend to the cottage just to get away. We came home on the Tuesday night, we weren't very long home when the sirens went and there was a big bang. I knew one street where we actually lived at one time, it was my grandmother's house, it was very difficult to find a house at that time in Belfast and we lived in Duncairn Gardens and there was a street quite near and it was Hogarth Street. There were 104 in that one street killed that time and it was apparently a landmine on the Antrim Road, they came down the Antrim Road and right over all that district [pause] one could see the gantries in the shipyards. There was nothing we could do, we knew they were making for the shipyards and there was a landmine and it landed in the middle of Hogarth Street in the shipyard area and 140 people were killed that night. As I say, at that particular time Sheila was born in 1938 and at that particular time, it was about 1941, she was very young. There was a family lived a few doors from us, a young couple, and they had a toddler and they used to come to my mother's house to play with Sheila sometimes. She used to toddle down and they would play about and Sheila would look forward to every Saturday when I would go every Saturday to my mother's when Phil was working. And these were talking about a trip and the night of the bombing the three of them were killed. It was so sad. The memory is hard to forget, it's hard to forget. That was one of the worst times

34 MM: Sheila was very young at the time, does she remember much?

35 JC: I don't think so [pause] she was a poor sleeper always but I think she was, in some kind of a way, aware of it.

36 MM: The preparations for the air raids must have been disruptive.

37 JC: Well, eventually we got an Anderson shelter, you've probably heard of those. It was a big [pause] it was about the size of that rug only twice as broad across [indicates rug about 8' x

6'] and it was sitting in the living room. We crawled under it [to SC do you remember the Anderson shelters?

38 SC: I remember them well. I remember they were very restrictive but some people had them in the garden, I think, not in their rooms. The ones I've seen were in the garden.

39 JC: They were very small, you had practically no room.

40 MM: Were these supplied by the Local Government or did you actually have to buy them yourselves? Did they make you feel more secure?

41 JC: Some people felt secure, others felt trapped under them. You know, too, if the house fell down on some of them, the walls, you'd be smothered. But there were 104 killed that night on the one street. A few doors from us there was a coal merchant lived - I think he had eight of a family - four girls and four boys, and seven of them were killed and only one lived from that night.

42 MM: They were very close to you?

43 JC: Very close to me. The following morning I got up, very tired, and went to the window to look into the garden and the place was all gone. My mother's house was gone too, and the strange thing, there was a pantry [pause] I can see it yet, there was part of a windowsill sitting and part of the house was still standing with no room left behind it, and there was a bright blue teapot sitting on the windowsill [laughs].

44 SC: Was it cracked or broken?

45 JC: No. I said that's our teapot, and I said can I get it, can I get through for it but the wall was ready to collapse and they wouldn't let me. Little things like that [pause].

46 MM: Your mother was in the air raid shelter when this was happened, was she?

47 JC: No, she was with us in the cottage we had just come home from, we were very lucky.

48 MM: What did they do then?

49 JC: My father died in 1940 so my mother was on her own. [Pause] I remember talking to a student, a young woman asking me about the war years, for a project, I think she was doing a thesis and I was asked could I fill her in with the details of this and I was amazed at how many incidents and how many things had been left out in the teaching and the knowledge of the war years. She had never heard of Lord Haw-Haw, they'd never been told about that and she didn't know that his name was William Joyce and that he was an Irishman.

50 MM: I think that [pause] we certainly learnt about him in school but it may have been because he was an Irishman that there was so much embarrassment about it.

51 JC: Things like that they happened [pause] and I remember so well the broadcasts. They came regularly, always at eight o'clock from Lord Haw Haw. He'd regularly start up by telling us the time on the town clock, the Albert Memorial Clock and he told us about greyhound racing down the Shore Road and he told us about it, a couple of minutes, just almost immediately after the race. He told us who won the race and saying things like the sports news, that kind of thing [pause].

52 MM: How did that make you feel?

53 JC: Angry, angry. I remember my husband was going to smash the radio.

54 MM: Was that because this was an English speaking voice or was it because he was obviously so closely in touch with what was happening?

55 JC: My husband was very closely in touch with what was happening. He was a sergeant in the Home Guard, he was out at nights very often, doing night duty and that was fire watch and contacting the others. He used to contact the American soldiers. He was based quite close to the American compound and he became friendly with the sergeant there. We used to have the

sergeant coming to our house quite regularly. He was a very charming person. He was only married a few months and had to come to Ireland and then he was sent off. They didn't know where they were going or when they were going until the very last minute or two. But at the very last minute he was sent off and I remember, at the beginning of the week, he came every week, he said I can't tell you where I'm going because I don't know, we won't know when or where until we're moving and we're given orders but I'm going to say goodbye in case it's this week. He would shake hands with my husband and he'd put his arms round me and Sheila and kiss us, and that went on for weeks. And we used to laugh and Bill used to say, here boy, this is getting too much of a habit, you leave my wife alone [laughs]. This was great fun and he loved Sheila. He was so good to her; he was a lovely man.

56 MM: Did you ever hear from him after he left?

57 JC: One letter. No that's wrong, he went to England and he wrote to me every day for the next seven days and one day a letter didn't come and we didn't hear from him after that and we knew he was gone. I still wonder if he lived through it all. It was a great tragedy, a great loss, for so many men. For a long time, we hoped to hear but I was afraid to hear the news as well.

58 MM: Given the extent of the losses that you endured in Belfast, do you think there was any resentment of the South for not being involved in the war?

59 JC: Oh yes, there was resentment. There was another site of the soldiers from England, from Derbyshire and we had a friend would bring two or three and we'd open our house and we got to know them. And this man was stationed on the Antrim Road and that was used as their base, and Billy had a bicycle, and he borrowed this bike, and he rode over and kept coming back and forth on this. But the resentment, definitely there was resentment. At one time, before he came to Belfast, he was stationed on Tory Head, and there was these Irish cottages, overlooking the bay, of course the blackout was one and there were lights on, and he was on duty this night when he saw upon the Head, he saw a glimmer, he saw lights, so naturally he went to investigate. He went to the door and an old, old lady opened the door and he said excuse me madam but do you realise you're showing a light. Yes, she said. So would you mind very much putting it out, he said. Indeed I will not, she said, I'm going to show the Germans the way in. That made me angry. We were all Irish, why should she wish her own country [pause] I just can't answer it. It's impossible to say what way she was thinking but she refused to put the lights out. That made me angry.

60 MM: Would this have been before or after the big bombing raids?

61 JC: Well the bombing raids were going on at that time. They were really going on because it was night after night after night. You know there was no let up and we knew when to expect them, one o'clock in the morning. They went away about five or six o'clock in the morning.

62 MM: And they were dropping bombs all the time?

63 SC: But did the Dublin Fire Brigade not come up to help?

64 JC: Oh yes, they did and different ones, was it Monaghan and [pause] quite a lot of them came.

65 MM: Did that not alleviate the resentment?

66 JC: Oh it did, but it was so intense, Belfast was raided [pause] so many times.

67 MM: When the bombing stopped in 1941, did that make life easier or were you all still nervous that they might return?

68 JC: Well you know, I think it takes a long time for people to get over something like that and to think normally again. Normality doesn't come overnight. You know, there certainly wasn't a feeling of relief.

69 SC: I didn't come until 1943 and I remember one day, I think it was [pause] the sirens used to sound and one of the ladies I was working with, she got a terrible shock because she said that'll be the planes again, she said, and I've left Jack on his own at home and he can't move. Her husband was Jack and he was very severely handicapped with arthritis and she was very upset and felt [pause] it wasn't a raid but the sirens went. Any kind of sirens going after that, I think alarmed people, you know.

70 JC: But I must say, there was always, sometimes, a funny side. Many was the time you had to laugh at things that happened but as soon as the sirens went, all you could hear after that were toilet chains being pulled, flushes, toilets being flushed [all laugh] you heard them all go round the park. You know, we remember those things and then, now, we, at that time, we didn't have a car, and we had bought the house so we had very little money then, but there was quite a lot of people had cars and we called them the hillbillies. The minute the sirens went, they were into their cars and they were away to the hills [all laugh]. We said those were the hillbillies when at one o'clock between the sirens going and the cars starting up.

71 MM: Did the people who took off to the hills in their cars, were they inclined to offer lifts to people who couldn't get away, or did they just go?

72 JC: I don't know. I think they just went; I don't know whether [pause] they didn't look to see. Certainly, we were never offered a lift.

73 MM: I always get a great sense of the community that developed in times of hardship. People come together - did you find that?

74 JC: Absolutely. We had a family lived [pause] their house was semi-detached, not the detached ones on the other side. We were fairly young at the time and they were all middle aged and I remember about three or four o'clock in the morning, in between the bombing you would get a lapse of maybe ten or fifteen minutes, maybe longer. There was the man next door or the lady, usually the husband at the door with a jug of tea for us.

75 MM: That was a fairly standard sort of behaviour at the time, was it?

76 JC: Oh it was. My neighbour at the other side, they were older too than us, and her husband, he was a bit panicky. Years afterwards, we laughed because they had two sons and a daughter and as soon as the sirens went, he said, and her name was Minnie, and he said, Minnie, get next door and bring that baby in next door, bring that baby in to us here. He thought Sheila would be safer with them, than with us [all laugh]. So Minnie had to come and grab the baby and take her in. He said, go and get that baby, that young couple, he said, they're not able for this. We used to laugh; it was like the apple tarts [laughs].

77 MM: Can you tell me that story again for the tape? It was a way of getting around the rationing?

78 JC: Oh yes, it was. There was this little shop, it was run by one girl and once a week, they would expect these apple tarts. You had to queue for them, and if you were at the end of the queue you had no chance because everyone queued. But we made sure we were very early and if Mrs. Elliott was having visitors I queued for her and her little boy, he queued for her and that way she got the two apple tarts and then it worked in the reverse, and if I had visitors, the same procedure would work.

79 SC: Well, you weren't really cheating, because you were entitled to one each anyway. We had ration cards, and we were given coupons and I remember, I was in lodging all the time, and I remember, I was in lodging with an elderly lady who didn't really understand much about rationing. She thought that if the food was there she would take it. I had to share her larder and one day I came home from work [pause] well, I don't think we got much butter at all but we had

marg, and I had my marg ration in the larder and when I came home from work that evening there was 1s/6d there or something instead of the marg and a little note from her saying 'I have taken your marg. I saw you had some marg and I have taken your marg and I have left the money for it because I saw you had it' she said. [All laugh] I wanted my marg, whatever the price was it wasn't much good to me.

80 SC: But you were asking what happened when people were left homeless. In that particular house where I lodged, she had another lodger; a lady working in the factories had been bombed out and she had very reluctantly agreed to take her in, and this poor woman, really she was wretched because she was from a different part of the town altogether, and she didn't know any of the people round about and she missed her neighbours and she missed her own home as well. The lady that we were lodging with was really very eccentric and wasn't very kind to this other lodger, because I don't think she felt she came from a good background and that kind of thing. I think there were some people who used to live round the corner here who were bombed out. They were bombed out and they were a sister and a brother, and I think their mother was killed, and they got a very sort of broken down house round the corner there; it was in very bad repair. I'll never forget the landlord in the early days wouldn't do anything for them so they were very put out by that too.

81 MM: As a medical social worker, would your work have involved finding homes for people?

82 SC: Yes, I mean all our patients had all kinds of problems about housing and a lot of grief and bereavement and money problems too. We had a very wide spectrum, because we had a lot of the forces in the hospital too. Americans and people from other parts of the world who had to be helped, befriended or advised in some way. And there were Gibraltarians [pause] Gibraltar was evacuated you see, the civilian population of Gibraltar was evacuated and they lived in a big camp outside Belfast. It was a dreadful place, we used to visit sometimes there, if there were people who were ill and had to have visits from the hospital if they had problems. It became a sea of mud in the wintertime. I can't remember just exactly where it was but I think it was somewhere, it was around Dundonald I think, but it was a little bit outside the town.

83 MM: Did they speak English?

84 SC: No, they had to have interpreters. It was not the whole of Gibraltar here, but a very large number. Some of them were in camps in England.

85 MM: Would you have found that the nature [pause] you were doing the same job during the war as before?

86 SC: Well in the Rotunda, of course, it was purely maternity and very poor people and in the Royal Victoria, it was everything to do with general beds and specialised beds and that kind of thing.

87 MM: Would the war have changed that as well?

88 SC: Well, not very much so, it was all the same kind of problems, if you know what I mean. In a way, it was like they were deprived people; they were deprived of their homes and they were deprived of their husbands who were away serving over in England or in France or somewhere like that and we had all sorts of difficulties to deal with. It was a general kind of deprivation.

89 MM: Could I bring you back a little bit then to your work in Dublin, being in a maternity hospital in a poor area? What kind of things did you do for the women you saw?

90 SC: At that time, we would have been seeing, well, we would have been seeing the in-patients but we were seeing a lot of the out-patients and helping them make arrangements for the

care of their children when they came in to have their babies or various things like that, and arranging for them to have any charitable assistance that they needed. For instance, the St. John's Brigade, they ran dinners in Dublin and it was very difficult at that time because a lot of the women really needed the extra food and most of our patients would not take the dinners because they served too much fish and in war time, because of all the people who were being drowned, the fish were feeding on these drowned people therefore they just did not eat fish. I think this was quite a common affair, I've heard other people talk about it. They certainly were very, very adamant about that, but I suppose meat was a bit expensive and they served a lot of fish and they served a lot of cheese dishes and Irish people in those days wouldn't eat much cheese. So we gave them very general support, you know.

91 MM: How long did women stay in hospital when they were having their babies?

92 SC: I can't remember [pause] I think certainly it was at least a week, probably ten days. I can't remember that but it was a week anyway and of course, we had gynae patients as well and operations and people suffering from terminal cancer and that kind of thing. I remember one patient who was referred to me from the Gynae Ward and the doctor said can you do something for her because she was not going to be able to be looked after by her family, they were very badly off and she was very ill, and we discussed it with her and I arranged to get her into a home. I can't remember, it was a very well known place for terminal cases in those days, and we got her a bed there. And I remember I was sitting in the clinic, it was an evening clinic a year later, and the door opened and this beautifully dressed, beautifully made up woman came in and she said, you don't know who I am. She said, I think it was St. John of Gods, or a home like that, you sent me into the home to die, because the doctor said I had six months and she said I recovered, and I've been to America and I've come home again to see my friends. I was astonished so I went and told the doctor. I said there's a miracle here. A miracle cure, I don't know what her cure was but actually she died fairly soon after. He said the result of the operation had changed the chemistry of her body and that had halted the growth and she had a very lively year going to America. It was wonderful.

93 JC: There were quite a few miracles and I remember one particular time I had a miracle of my own that happened to me. It was one day I no sugar and Sheila needed sugar and I hadn't a spot of sugar in the house and no one around me had any sugar either because they all had children and the sugar was rationed so strictly. Because of the shipping they could not get the stuff in and late that night, the bell rang and I opened the door and there was an A.T.S. man at the door with an ordinary packet of sugar. To me that was a miracle.

94 SC: I remember one patient [pause] I was fairly newly qualified, I wasn't experienced at all and our patients always had to have someone call and take them home because of the baby, you see. And they always had to go before midday, before twelve o'clock to leave the bed for the next admission. And there was this woman in the ward and she was to go home and I said now have you got somebody to come and she said no, her husband wasn't there. So I said would you like to wait and she said yes. So at three o'clock in the afternoon, no one had come so I went up and I spoke to her again and she said if you ring Mrs. so and so, she's my neighbour and she'll either get my husband to come or she'll come for me. So I did this and I go no [pause] I think she said she was too busy when I rang the neighbour and anyway, this went on, I think I must have rung up a different woman later on and it came to five o'clock and I was going home at half past five and the sister rang down and said she's still sitting here. She said no one has come near her. So she lived quite near, within walking distance, actually, so I went up and I said if you like, I'll take you home and she said that would be very nice, thank you very much. So we

got her bundled up and we got the baby bundled up and we got her out and off we set. And as we walked down to the street, we saw neighbours who were all standing at the door chatting, disappearing like smoke as we approached, and we got to the house and there was a padlock on the door and the next door neighbour said her husband is not going to have her back. He has taken most of the furniture out of the house and he's put the padlock on the door so she won't be able to get in. By this time the rain was coming down, and this was an eight day old baby, they used to get out after eight days, and to make matters worse I was going to an official dinner at half past seven, and I had to get home and get changed. So I said to her, well now, have you any relations who will take you in. Oh yes, she said, there's so and so and she lived quite near. So we walked round there and we went in and the family were sitting there and they said sorry no, we have no room for her at all, we have no room for her. We can't take her - try her auntie somebody else. So we went there, I think we went round to three different lots of relations and not one of them would take her and I knew they wouldn't take her back at the hospital. It wasn't a shelter or anything like that and there wasn't anyplace that she could go to. She had no money or anything and so I said, you'll have to come back to the hospital while I try to make some arrangements for you.

95 MM: Had she given any explanation for her relations' reluctance to take her?

96 SC: No, she hadn't but apparently, she was well known, her husband was very angry with her and wouldn't have her back at any cost because she was going with other men. So, anyway, at long last, I managed to get her a bed in the Union hostel. It was very hard to get anyone in to the hostel, they wouldn't take them unless they absolutely had to, but I rang and explained she had an eight day old baby and so I took her to the Union and they took her in. When I got to the office the next morning, there was a woman, she was known as 'Mrs. Crulity' no, Lady Crulity-Clarke, that's what it was, Lady Crulity-Clarke and this was Lady Crulity-Clarke and she said, I can't thank you enough for getting that woman into the Union because she said we've been trying to get her somewhere where we could get her fixed up for a long time. She had I don't know, I've forgotten how many children, she had four or five children and the father wouldn't own them, and they'd been trying to get them placed in an institution or somewhere. She said I've been trying to get that woman placed for a long time and we'll be able to cope with her now. So that was the last I ever saw or heard of her and what happened her I don't know. But there I was, on the street walking along, thinking what can I do, I'll have to take her home in the end if I can't get her in anywhere. Oh, she said, don't worry dear, she said, just leave me here, I'll find someplace myself and I said I'm sorry but I can't leave you here, with a little baby and in your state, you're not well enough to walk around. I said the rain's coming down, so she said agreed to go along. I didn't know what to do but of course, I never should have taken her out myself like that, I should have left her in the hospital and rung some organisation to come for her.

97 MM: You couldn't have known it was going to be such a drastic situation.

98 SC: She didn't seem to care that her husband wasn't there. He was in the army, I think, and he had cleared the house, but it was the way they all vanished when we turned the corner to go down the street [pause] everybody knew that he wasn't taking her back. It was very obvious when he had padlocked the door.

99 MM: Jean, did you have Sheila at home or in a hospital?

100 JC: I had her in a nursing home, on the Ormeau Road. I remember it was a big house on the Ormeau Road, with a big window on the first floor. It was run by a Mrs. Montcrieff.

101 MM: Would you have been in for eight days?

102 JC: I was in for ten days time.

103 MM: And while you were in, was the emphasis on getting as much rest as possible or were you encouraged to move around?

104 JC: Well I was three days in an emergency room, which was next to the delivery room and the other miracle is that we both lived thanks to my own doctor having to the wit to come in at five o'clock in the morning. He saved us both.

105 MM: What was the problem?

106 JC: The problem was that the night nurse who was on was incapable; she didn't give me an enema when she should have. The doctor said it was dirty, she was dirty and then the doctor wouldn't risk her giving me a sedative or an anaesthetic so he looked after me himself and called in a consultant. It was Mr. McAfee who delivered Sheila, you remember him [to SC] but I didn't walk, I didn't step out for two months after that. That emergency came a couple of days after the delivery, after the birth, and they brought me a couple of flights upstairs to another little room and in some way there I got the infection and so I was in a chair in my own room for three months and it was three months before Sheila was pushed out by me in her pram.

107 MM: Do you think childbirth techniques have changed much some that time?

108 JC: She just let me go on and on and on, I was weakening all the time, you know I was just [pause] I can remember them asking for towels to wipe the sweat from me, the perspiration was rolling off me and the doctor sat at my side just rubbing it off because he couldn't do anything else.

109 MM: Was your husband with you at the time?

110 JC: He waited at home.

111 SC: In those days, husbands didn't attend the birth or the delivery room. When I worked in the Rotunda they would not have been let in at the birth.

112 JC: He came in to see me and they told him then.

113 MM: When you went home then [pause] obviously you were ill so it would have been different for you, but for most women, were they advised to rest?

114 SC: I don't think they were given too much advice at all. I don't think they were given a lot of help in any way. They mostly had swarms of young children at home and very inadequate housing, a lot of them. I remember, I think it was about the last case I looked after before I left, and I was visiting a woman who'd had her twenty first child, and it was in a tenement house. The staircase was all gone; I had to practically crawl up the last few steps on my hands and knees. Her husband was unemployed and I remember I said to the doctor, you know her house is very poor and her husband is unemployed. The doctor said indeed he's not unemployed, if he's got twenty-one children [all laugh].

115 JC: He hadn't time to work.

116 SC: He didn't do a thing to help her. He was sitting there in the room when I went in and the children were yelling and shouting and tramping about [pause] well, there may have been some of them not there but there seemed to be a lot. There certainly were a lot of young children there but I noticed that he was doing nothing. And there was only the one bed in the room so I don't know how they managed.

117 MM: Was any advice ever given about family planning?

118 SC: Not that I remember but there must have been some. And there were a lot of unmarried, not a lot, but quite a number of unmarried mothers and we had to make arrangements for them too. They mostly went to convents.

119 MM: I'm sure you've heard of some of the controversy about that in the South? [Referring to revelations about adoption practices in Goldenbridge and other orphanages].

120 SC: Oh yes, and I recognise some of the names of the places now that we sent them to and I remember there was an awfully nice priest, who used to get very upset about it all and I remember him saying to me once, I hate to think of the future, these children, he said, a lot of them are being adopted and they will grow up and boy will meet girl and they'll be attracted to each other and they could well be brother and sister. There was no way that they could know that, you know.

121 MM: Did any of the unmarried mothers keep their children or was it always assumed the children would be adopted?

122 SC: Not unless the mothers agreed and often their families would help them. I remember some of their mothers were very good but some of them were dreadful. I remember one woman, I said something about helping her daughter; she wasn't taking either the girl or the baby home, she wouldn't have either of them and I remember her glaring at me and saying that girl was put on this world to cause me pain. No compassion whatever, and in fact, she was terrified that it would be discovered, the neighbours at home, she was from the country, quite a few of them were from the country; they would be sent up from some homes to Dublin. Some of them would just come up from the homes, they were of various kinds, and come into the hospital and there were quite a few of those homes for the babies.

123 JC: In the country places, a lot of them were shipped off to friends in Canada or other places.

124 SC: I'm sure they were. I never came across any babies that were shipped off anywhere but they were nearly all, as I say, found homes straight from the hospital. They nearly all went to the nuns.

125 JC: There were young girls who became pregnant who were moved abroad. It was terrible and sometimes they didn't know how it had happened.

126 SC: Of course, that was a terrible problem for the social worker. The girl would come up to the clinic and she would be diagnosed as being pregnant and she would practically collapse with terror as well as surprise, you know. I remember one girl who just could not take it at all. She kept screaming you'll have to take it away; you'll have to take it away. The nurse came, she was in my office and she got so hysterical that the nurse came to see if she could help us, and the nurse was saying now calm down, calm down but she just went mad. We tried to explain to her what could be done but she just wanted to know how would she go home, how would she ever go back. Well, she did go home; we got in touch with the father actually, but what happened after that I don't know. I didn't see her again; she didn't come back so she must have gone to her local doctor. Well then, when I came up here, I came specifically to work in the STD department and that was a very difficult job because I was the first social worker ever to work in the hospital.

127 MM: Was that because you were a social worker or a woman?

128 SC: Because I was a social worker. I wasn't either a nurse or a doctor and the question of confidentiality was what was bothering them. I remember my first morning, my supervisor, she'd insisted on them having a social worker, she'd been working on the problem for a long time, trying to persuade the senior doctor to have a social worker and when he finally agreed, I was the one appointed. I remember the first morning when I went in, he called me into his private office and he took me aside and read me the story from the bible of the woman taken in adultery and he said, now I don't want you to condemn any one who comes in here. I said I wouldn't do that, it's not my job to condemn, I'm here to help them and it's completely outside my sphere to make any moral judgements. So anyway, he was very, very difficult for quite a while and it was funny how I got round him in the end. There were a lot of children in the

hospital, particularly in the wards; they should really have been in children's wards but these were special cases who had been passed the diseases by their mothers, they should have been in children's hospitals but because of their problems they were there. So I decided something should be done for them. I can't remember how many there were, I think about twenty, so anyway I took this doctor aside and I said I would like to do something for all these children and I said how would it be if I asked the ladies who visit to give each child two tickets for the pantomime. I will book them and I said the child can go with someone, whether it's the mother or an older sister or whoever was in the family. So we did that and the Ladies Committee were delighted to help and they gave me the money for the tickets and they also gave me a lot of toys which they sent to a party [pause] and this all went off very well. Some little time afterwards, I found a picture on my desk, entitled the Good Fairy, of me with a wand and wings [all laugh]. So after that I had no opposition at all.

129 MM: And were the children actually left in the hospital?

130 SC: No, no they were just brought into the VD clinic; it was all out patients. And of course it was wartime still and the American soldiers were here and there was a special nurse attached to the American forces, one of their own nurses, and she was following up their contacts so she worked very closely with me. She would advise them on the use of condoms and she would be aware if someone needed to be treated and bring them to me. We worked together whenever we could without breaching too much confidentiality, you know. It had to be done and also, in those days, at that time, there were special regulations and if the partner didn't turn up for treatment, she could be taken to court. So this American girl she told me about these girls who were having treatment, and which of her soldiers were being infected or vice versa. I didn't have anything to do with the men; I only had to deal with the girls. So I had to follow the girls up very closely and try and insist on their coming and it was very difficult to do. I didn't want to take any of them to court. I thought we would be lost altogether and would never get any cooperation if we had to take someone to court. I didn't want to have to go to court myself either, in such a situation. I remember there was one girl who was very bad; we couldn't get her to come, she was very irregular, and in the end I resorted to going out on the street that they were using and bringing them in. There was this particular girl, I didn't do that with very many but I did it with this one girl because she wouldn't come. I think they were allowed to miss so many appointments before you could take any legal action. I know I never took any legal action but this girl, I was very much afraid I was going to have to with her. She'd promise me she'd come but she didn't and this was her last chance. I went out to see her and she was in bed and she wouldn't get up, to come [laughs]. I said look I'm going to sit here until you do and I did. I sat for an hour and then she got up and grumbled but she came in with me.

131 MM: Did you have to check up their partners and whether they were infected?

132 SC: No, I didn't do that at all. I was just in the business of finding the girls and getting them in for treatment. It was just the people who had been referred to me by the medical staff.

133 MM: Your working day, the actual work that you did, were you nine to five?

134 SC: I think it could have been nine to five, but certainly in the Rotunda it was nine to five except if there was any evening clinic, which there were. There were several gynae clinics – there were two gynae clinics, two days a week in the evening and they were, I think they were seven to eight and I would get an hour off in the afternoon and then come back.

135 MM: How did that affect you then if you had to go and queue for two hours for your shopping?

136 SC: Well, this was in Dublin.

137 MM: Well, in Belfast, when you were working all day, how did you cope with having to queue for your rations?

138 SC: I can't remember any difficulties. There were lots of shops near the hospital where I worked and they stayed open until late at night and just, you had to queue. I wasn't so bad because you see with the canteen in the hospital you could get a meal there. The only food I needed was what I bought for my evening meal or at weekends.

139 MM: I know, particularly in factories, the munitions factories especially, when they brought in the shift system a lot of it was to help production but also because so many women had factories and they were working at times that shops were open. Part of the reason they wanted shifts was to help the women cope with the difficulties of shopping in those circumstances.

140 JC: A lot of people during the war, people with money and cars could always go down to the South, down to Dublin or Drogheda. In those places, there were shops with loads of food and they could stock up.

141 SC: There was the food black market too in Belfast.

142 JC: There was, like I say if you had enough money and if you had transport, this was what happened, and you know, it made the Northern people quite envious in a way, that Southern Ireland [pause] it seemed so unfair because our children were just the same as theirs.

143 SC: It encouraged the smuggling. There were all kinds of devices for smuggling, up and down on the train. The smuggling was fantastic; I had friends who brought all sorts of things in their coats just travelling on the train.

144 JC: I didn't have many opportunities but if I got an opportunity for something, I certainly bought sugar or whatever.

145 SC: You got all kinds of tips about how to smuggle things [laughs] people started putting bags. You could get Teatime Express cakes, sponge sandwiches they were, you would open the sandwich and put a ring or a bracelet or something inside and bring it down. But the customs got wise to that and would put a finger right down through the cake.

146 MM: Not very hygienic [laughs].

147 SC: Or a big dirty thumb [laughs].

148 JC: And cigarettes and tobacco went up your knickers [all laugh].

149 SC: People were bulging all over the place, with all the things they had concealed. You see, the Customs people would sometimes take the odd person off the train or the bus, right into the station, to be searched.

150 MM: Was any action taken against people who were caught smuggling?

151 SC: I don't think there was really, they were just fined. I remember being terrified one time I was coming back from Dublin, I think it was just before my birthday or something like that and these friends came to the station to see me off at Dublin and they handed me a Tea Time Express cake box. The Customs men knew it well, it was cream and red with writing on it, and before my friend left she whispered to me that's not a cake, it's a cut glass bowl for your birthday [laughs]. I was terrified the whole journey, I nearly died but he just assumed it was a cake and he didn't even ask.

152 MM: Was there actually restriction on other goods, it wasn't just food?

153 SC: Yes, and for long years after the war.

154 JC: I remember having cups without handles because you couldn't get them.

155 MM: Why was that?

156 SC: Well, there was restriction on producing goods and the rationing continued until a few years after.

157 JC: Everything [pause] all that kind of manufacturing was cut out because everything was for the war effort.

158 SC: And as for nylons, or silk stockings, I mean the great thing was to get a pair sent to you. I don't know what way they used to send them, in an envelope of some kind to get through. The Americans, of course, were great for having stockings.

159 JC: The American soldiers gave all their girlfriends stacks of stockings. I remember when I was a teenager, before I met Billy, I had a boyfriend and he had a brother in Canada and he was over on a visit and I remember the first pair of silk stockings I had ever seen – he brought me a pair and I was about seventeen.

160 SC: Everybody entertained the Americans, they were great fun and I remember our dietician, she used to see them quite a bit to arrange entertainment and meals and they said that the one thing that really astonished them and amused them here was when they would go into a house and the owners of the house would say, would you like a cup of tea? And the soldier would say yes please and they'd be told well just sit down and we'll give you a mug in your hand [laughs].

161 JC: The soldier that we entertained, one of the boys that we entertained, he was from Derby and he couldn't understand the Belfast bus drivers and the tram drivers and he kept getting repeating 'the next stop the Black Mod' [laughs]. I was smoking at that time because the Americans supplied us with cigarettes and we were sitting on the settee and his wife was with him, this might be two years after the war, he came for a visit (incomprehensible section about Belfast accent).

162 SC: There was a lot of fun in those days. People did not need so much to be entertained.

163 MM: Was that because of the war, do you think, or were they poorer times?

164 SC: Well, they were certainly poorer times than they are nowadays, that's for sure. There were big families and small wages and these girls in the hospital, these dockers would come in – you know what a docker is? She works in a mill and they had to work in their bare feet because the floors were wet, whatever the technique was in milling that it had to be kept damp or something, do you remember that, the wet floors [to JC]. And the girls used to have chronic chest complains, dreadful and also at that time, tuberculosis was rife. Absolutely, almost every family had a tuberculous member and this caused great, great [pause] not only just grief and anxiety but troublesome things like trying to keep them using their own cup and saucer and that kind of thing and not let anyone else in the family use it. The spread of infection was terrible, it was in the most overcrowded places and the overcrowding really was much worse than you might think. I remember one day in the hospital, it wasn't in the Royal but in the City Hospital, not so terribly many years ago, the Ward Sister sent to me one day, look at that young man there, she said, I don't know what to do with him. All he wants to do is lie in bed and sleep. Now I had been asked to investigate and I discovered he was one of a very large family, living in a house that was two up and two down. I said to the sister I am not one bit surprised, I said, I'm sure he's enjoying his sleep because he had been sleeping in a tiny little bedroom, sharing a bed with three brothers so he could never have a really restful night's sleep. It was a luxury for him to get a bed to himself, to be able to stretch.

165 MM: Would you have come across many patients from such poor surroundings?

166 SC: Oh yes, we didn't take in private patients at all. There were some private patients in the Rotunda but you didn't really have anything to do with them, unless they'd had a dead child or something. I remember going to a girl whose baby had died, I think it was actually still born, no I think it had lived for one or two days but it had been in the premature ward and she said

don't worry, it's not like a child that you'd ever held in your arms. She wasn't at all put out about it. It was just one of these things – you had another next year, anyway. You could see her point of view. She had never seen the child; she hadn't minded it and it wasn't involved with her at all in that way. So you really never knew what the problems would be, where individuals were concerned.

167 MM: Did you across women suffering from tuberculosis?

168 SC: I didn't really but a friend, she was working in one of the voluntary hospitals and they had a sanatorium. There was a taint associated with tuberculosis and families would often not visit patients.

169 MM: Was that because it was associated with poverty?

170 SC: It was because it was so infectious [pause] it was like the plague for some people.

[Incomprehensible section]

171 The perception was that Éire was a back door for the Germans to get in to Britain.

172 MM: I've seen a copy of the handbook that was given to American troops during the war and it was warned them about that and to be careful of contact with people from the South. Another thing was that it warned them to respectful of Northern Irish women because they came from a different culture. Did you find that your dealings with the U.S. soldiers were any different than dealing with other patients?

173 SC: I didn't meet an awful lot of them.

174 JC: I did and I liked the Americans. I found them very charming and very helpful and very, very generous.

175 SC: A lot of the impression I got from people who had been here all the time, when the Americans were here, was that they were certainly very popular.

176 JC: Very popular. There was one neighbour of ours, a daughter of theirs, a daughter of that house, married one of the American troops and went out America. But while he was here, they were married and of course, at the time, because she had a baby there was a photograph in the Telegraph of her inside the ship and the baby lying on the top of the bunk and her. She was on her way to join him; he had gone with the troops because he had to. Her name was Bertha, Bertha Scott. Do you ever remember seeing that [to SC] but ended sadly because she wasn't very long married to him when they were divorced. A short time after that, she married his boss [all laugh]. She married very well, someone very well off. She was a lovely girl; she babysat for me. When she arrived there first, she found she'd married into squalor. Eventually, the father and mother and all the other children, they went to America, after she married the second time.

177 SC: Well, you see the G.I.s were homeless and they just socialised with everybody and everybody was so glad to have them coming in to support our troops that they went really round the corner to entertain them. Quite a few of my colleagues were involved in running a canteen down the docks and they found that a lot of sailors were from Irish backgrounds and they mixed very well.