



Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots

Interview with Carol Mary Ann Williamson

Interviewer: Margaret ---

Interviewer: 00.00.06

Well, hello Carol; it's nice to be with you, see you and hear you this afternoon. We're here to carry out the, the interview with Carol as part of the Okehampton Oral History Project. And thank you for agreeing to do that, Carol; we're very pleased that you have. What I'd like to start with - if we can, is to just ask you to give your full name, your age and your date of birth and where you live and where you were born? That would be helpful. 00.00.42

Carol: 00.00.42

Yeah, well, I'm Carol Mary Ann Williamson, and fourteenth of the fourth forty-one (14 April 1941). And born in Trinidad, a town called Fyzabad which is the south of Trinidad. And I live at Ashbury - out at Ashbury which is about seven miles away from Okehampton. 00.01.06

Interviewer: 00.01.08

Okay, and what we'd like to start with, I think, today is just to - I understand you came to the UK in nineteen fifty-eight (1958). And perhaps if, if you can just, just perhaps give a little flavour of what was happening to you as a young woman then, as a teenager, at home in Trinidad, that sort of led up to your arrival and, and what happened subsequently, when you came to the UK? 00.01.38

Carol: 00.01.39



Right. Well, both my parents - my father was the Headmaster of a very large school; my mother was Assistant Head. And he, so he was always in education. He wrote an education book which, I said, was a best seller - which is, in fact, is what led me and my sisters and all of us to come to England, really, to train. He, he was taken over by Shell Oil, because they wanted somebody who would represent Shell abroad. And, as a black person, they thought he was ideal. So he left the education bit and was public relations to start with. And then he became a director of Shell Oil. And he was sent all over the world. And when he was coming to Nigeria - I had always wanted to go to boarding school but no, none, none of my sisters wanted to. And I think that was an ideal opportunity. Because he was leaving, my mum was going to join him. And then it was finding places for us to go and stay with relatives or somebody, and because of his involvement with education he had met the headmistress then of Harrogate College, on some sort of conference or something. And so he got in touch with her and she was very happy for me to come to England. So that's how I came to England. Yeah. But before that, I was, as I said, at my parents' school, and then on to private schools before I came to England.

00.03.22

Interviewer: 00.03.24

:

So can you tell us a little bit about arriving here in nineteen fifty-eight (1958)? Just, can you give us a few recollections of that time. **00.03.34**

Carol: 00.03.35

Yes. Well, arriving as – the, my first, very first recollection was on the train going to Harrogate and being bemused by the fact that I thought children were smoking on the platform, and asked the person who was assigned by Shell Oil to take me up to Harrogate why children were allowed to smoke. And he was extremely puzzled and wondered why. (Laugh.) Until I pointed out at the next station children again - smoking I thought, and, of course, he started to laugh and said 'No, that is' (I'd never, of course, had cold because it's hot in Trinidad). And so you don't get this puff of cold air! So that was my very first, sort of, recollection of arriving in England. And then on the way, sort of, having thoughts. It was very cold, of course, because it was early January, and thinking 'Oh, I'll never see an orange or a banana again'. (Laugh.) Sort of, these sort of thoughts flashing through my head. And so, getting to



Harrogate that was fine. I, I sort of - luckily, there was one other person who was from Trinidad but she was from a white family. And her father was head of the sugar estates in Trinidad because sugar was one of the main - apart from oil - produces in Trinidad. And she; her family knew my family. So at least I had a connection. And we were in the same house at Harrogate because it had about seven different houses. And I was in Lincoln house. And so it was actually quite nice. And we were actually very naughty because we - my grandparents and — A lot of the elderly people in Trinidad spoke a patois which was a mixture of Spanish and English - broken English. And so she knew that and I did. And, of course, we used to, sort of, talk to each other like that. So, of course, then the house mistress and the matron sort of thought I couldn't speak English. So, of course, every time they wanted to tell me something they were gesticulating - 'brush your teeth' and do various things. So it was actually quite fun. We, we had a lot of laughter about it and also - I mean all the girls, because Jane had been there from, I think she went to the, what do they call it now? Very young children **00.06.15**

Interviewer: 00.06.16

Yeah, Preparatory School. **00.06.17**

Carol: 00.06.18

She was; Harrogate had that and she was there from about four. So she had - I know! Because all her father's family and mother's family were English, of course. And because they were in Trinidad the children came over to boarding school from a very young age. So she had - luckily for me, she knew the ropes of the boarding school. So that was, actually for me, marvellous. And also because I was then the only black person in the school. You know, I was quite a novelty really. So it had no, sort of, racist effect on me at all. **00.06.57**

Interviewer: 00.06.59

Good, good. Okay. So can you tell us then? How you came to Okehampton and, and how you arrived? And when you arrived? **00.07.10**



Carol:

Right. Well, on my first holiday - first term holiday, my parents both came over: my father from Nigeria; my mother joined him from Trinidad because she didn't go to Nigeria. And they said 'Let's, sort of, drive round and see where you'd like to stay' or where, what you liked. But my brother at the time, was in Torquay prior to going to London University. And so we went to Torquay and then we, sort of, drove round. And for some reason we stopped in Okehampton (laugh) for a night. And I just loved it. I mean, I don't know what it was about the town. It was - it was to me, just lovely. And then I met my guardian's daughter. And she introduced me to her mother. And it was just - we just followed on from there. She said: 'Oh, yeah, she was happy for me to stay with them in the holidays and become my guardian!' And so that was solved. And that's how I've stayed in Okehampton ever since. **00.08.19**

Interviewer: 00.08.20

So it was almost love at first sight by the sound of it. **00.08.23**

Carol: 00.08.24

Absolutely, absolutely; yeah it was absolutely. Jennifer, my - well, I called her my best friend then, she was same age, but she went to Edgehill College. And so we had quite a lot in common except she trained to be a PE teacher in the end, and she was very physical and I wasn't. So that was the only difference. But we went to all the little local dances and had a wonderful time. **00.08.50**

Interviewer: 00.08.52

So you had a, a guardian .. **00.08.52**

Carol: 00.08.58

In Okehampton **00.08.58**



Interviewer: 00.08.59

.. as you were a young person. And can you just tell us a little bit about life in those early days when you used to come here for, to, on your long school holidays? **00.09.10**

Carol: 00.09.

Well, she, they owned what is now where Costcutters in Okehampton is. They had a petrol station - a Renault garage I think, then, and I used to absolutely love serving petrol (laugh) – I used to run out and try and do it. And so that's actually how I met Eddie, because he used to come in for petrol. So I met a lot of people in Okehampton because they all used to come up to that big petrol station. So for me, it was absolutely wonderful. I - and I got to talk to everybody by serving petrol. And my guardian - they had a very big building firm in Okehampton, and she was a staunch Methodist to Fairplace Methodist Church which was her church, which I went to because I was with them, although I was Church of England. And it was absolutely lovely. In fact, Eddie and I got married from Fairplace Methodist Church. So it all, sort of, evolved from that. Staying there. And then, of course, in the exeats - which we had every, sort of, twice a term, three times a term, I think; I went, didn't come down to Okehampton because it was too far. So I used to go to Northumberland and to various friends' homes. So I saw a lot of England actually. And I went abroad quite a lot with, with school trips, which was quite fun.

00.10.45

Interviewer: 00.10.49

And how did you feel at that time having, having had those experiences at a young age? How did you feel when you came back down to Okehampton for your long school holiday? **00.10.58**

Carol: 00.10.59

Oh, well, I just fell back in (laugh). You know, it was absolutely fine. And then, of course, by this time I'd met Eddie when I was just over sixteen. So having somebody who would - he had just, as well, come to Okehampton from university; and so it was nice, having people that I knew we could go; Jennifer had her friends as well, and we just used to go to all the little local dances in the market hall,



every Saturday evening, when on holiday. So that was a highlight of our evening. And, of course, Eddie played rugby then - he and Roger Vick who was his best friend and he became captain of the Okehampton Rugby Club. So, I was very involved as well with the Rugby Club. He was also captain of the Cricket Club. So I was also very involved with the Cricket Club, making hundreds and hundreds of teas. And that was in the pavilion, of course, the Okehampton park. So I, from a very young age, I was very involved in everything, really, in, in Okehampton. **00.12.03**

Interviewer: 00.12.05

And can you tell us what year you were married, and then what sort of, how your life developed from there? **00.12.11**

Carol: 00.12.11

Well, I got married in nineteen sixty-two (1962), and moved out from Okehampton to here where I am now, and so it's been a long time on the farm. And although they had, I didn't get terribly involved on my farm because they had quite a lot of farm workers in those days. And Eddie's dad lived where my daughter, Hazel, now lives. So we're quite close by. And they had men working, and I, of course then I had the children. So I never really got - apart from feeding the lambs, the orphan lambs at lambing time - I didn't really have a big part in, on the farm physically, but I'd feed all the vets and all the farm workers and all the hay people and (laughs) everybody else. You know, just always had to come in and have a cup of tea or have a meal or - the vets. I mean, it's totally different now. Hazel doesn't do any of that. But in those days it was almost tradition. That's what Eddie's mother did. You know, it was part of farming life, really – you expected to entertain all these various people; and all the people who came in for hay time, you had to feed them. And having never, ever cooked in my life, before, it was quite a big thing for me to, to suddenly be married and having to learn to cook. So thank God for my guardian, because I used to be on the phone constantly to her 'How do you do this?' And she'd say 'Well, that's not a chicken, that's a boiling hen and you, you have to cook it, cook it slowly'. So, bless her, it was absolutely marvellous having her there; I wouldn't, I don't know how I would have survived without her really. So yeah. **00.14.04**



Interviewer: 00.14.05

That's quite an experience. How did you feel at any time? What, what have I done, how have I come to this way? You always sound as though it was so enjoyable, albeit quite different. **00.14.18**

Carol: 00.14.19

I think it was a challenge because (a) the fact that I lived on a sort of dirty farm from a bigger house in Trinidad and lots of servants which we had, to come and then having to do something on my own. It was quite a challenge because my parents never ever thought that I would cope. And there's a sort of determination to prove, 'yeah, I can do it!' And, I mean, Eddie's wages when we got married was absolutely half of what I got as pocket money, for instance. So my parents had said: 'Oh, can you manage and - do you still want us to keep your pocket money?' and, of course, 'yes', and that's how I, sort of, we went on really. But it was, it was a challenge. And after, after that, of course, after having children, I decided to foster. And again, my mother thought my marriage was probably on the rocks, and I was looking for something to do! Why should I want to possibly look after other people's children? And again they all said 'You wouldn't, you, you can't possibly cope'. And I thought 'of course I can', and it was really sort of proving all the time that I could do the same thing. You know, it's like having my garden now; nobody thought I'd ever garden. And, and yet, I've got nearly two acres of garden, which I do on my own. So it's always a challenge, really; I think that's how I looked at it. I never actually thought of being bored or lonely. And, of course, my sisters - my father then bought a house in London when my sisters came over. So we spent quite a bit of time and they spent a lot of time coming down to the farm. So I wasn't cut off really. And my parents, of course, came over quite a bit as well so I didn't, sort of, miss life as I thought I would. **00.16.21**

Interviewer: 00.16.22

Mmm, mm **00.16.23**

16:16

Carol: 00.16.23



I was too busy. (Laughs) **00.16.23**

Interviewer: 00.16.26

Right. Okay. Well, I guess we've come to the spot when you, when you had your own children. Can you tell us a little bit about that? **00.16.35**

Carol: 00.16.37

Yes. **00.16.37**

Interviewer: 00.16.37

Do you remember; what, what year did you have your first child? **00.16.39**

Carol: 00.16.40

He's in September sixty-two ('62). Because I got, I was pregnant, actually, when I got married. So he was, sort of, seven or eight months, I think it was; and that again was a challenge because I had absolutely no idea of, of antenatal, prenatal, postnatal, or anything - it was just getting on with, with life really. And that was fine. And then Helen came the following year. And that's when I decided to foster kids because Eddie's mother and father were separate. And his father lived on the farm here. And his mother lived in Cumbria, which is where Eddie originally came from. And she had to come down to look after Keith, when I had Helen, when I was having Helen. And that really, really worried me because (a) Eddie had to wait for her to come when I was in hospital with, with Keith - with Helen, having Helen. And he was - I mean, she was only like a day late. But it's, he still had to look after Keith for a day and, of course, being always on the farm and me looking after Keith; I thought 'how on earth do people cope?' because, I mean, he hadn't a clue anyway. You know, (laugh) alright on the farm - thank God, he looked after lambs, sort of, basically. But his mother then came down and stayed with me. Because in those days you stayed ten days or two weeks in hospital. We were very friendly with my doctor, Dr Shields – you know, Jean and David. I used to say to David, you 'I am staying my full

Telling our stories Finding our roots

time here because if I go home I'll have to do some work'. (Laugh.) So I stayed my full two weeks every time in hospital. And so, yes; so Eddie came and then I came out and I said to Eddie 'How do people manage? You know, when they have children and there's nobody to look after them?' And I said 'I think we should do something about it. I mean', and he just said 'Well, it's entirely up to you'. And I was quite, quite determined. And at that time they were begging people to foster; used to see all the things, adverts, coming up begging for people to foster children. So that actually, sort of, set it in motion. As soon as I came home I, sort of, put my name up for fostering. And I think Helen was two or three, probably, when we had the first lot of foster kids who would - abandoned; and we had them for about seven years, I think, in the end - although I'd put myself down as a short-term foster carer because I thought I'd have to look at it like a nurse and hand them back because I thought 'you can't become too emotional'. That was my thinking, without realising that you **do** become emotionally involved. And I thought 'Oh, I'll just look after them until their parents came out of hospital'. Or, you know - whatever. But, in fact, most of the children we had - the parents were either in prison or mother couldn't cope and it was depression, or — In fact, we had one lot who the parents had five children under five and lived in a caravan. We had twin babies of - from the time they were born 'til they were ready for adoption, to look after. And that's the sort of thing you think 'how do people cope?' So that was quite an eye opener for us - for both of us. And Eddie had to help as well, particularly when we had those twin babies. I mean, he couldn't go out on the farm until he'd fed one as well, so he was sort of roped in - probably against his will, but he did it. Yeah. And, and, of course, I had help by then; I mean I had to have somebody to help us clean. And she lived at Northlew and Eddie used to go and fetch her. And she, of course, stayed with me 'til she was seventy, when, when she died, so we, we had her for, for ever. In fact, one of the funniest things was: Keith used to go over, with Helen, when they were teenagers, to Trinidad, and the upbringing over there is so different. Well, my upbringing when, as I said, we had lots of servants and people looking after, and my mother always had bridge parties with her friends. And, of course, Keith had gone in one day, because he was so used to me saying to Mrs Glover, my cleaner, 'Oh let's sit down and have a cup of coffee', and we'd have a cup of coffee and biscuits or cakes, or whatever. And he'd gone in, marched into this bridge party of my mother's and said 'Granny, I don't think you've given Beatrice any coffee this morning!' (Laughing.) And the sort of looks on all these people's faces - that he was demanding that my mother got up and made the servant a cup of coffee! But, of course, that was Keith. I mean, that's how they were brought up here. She was just part of our family. Totally. And she got totally involved with the foster kids as well, so that was



- as did my guardian; if I had to go into town shopping, she would look after them while I shopped. So it was a nice continuation of families. So I actually never really missed my own family in a way. Because I had Mrs Adams, who was my guardian, and considered her like a mother. **00.22.16**

Interviewer: 00.22.18

And are there any particular fostering experiences that you would like to, sort of, mention? Because it must have been quite, quite a shock. I guess, at the outset? **00.22.30**

Carol: 00.22.31

It was. I mean, the first three we had - you don't think — you know, people ring you up. You think “Oh, yes, somebody, some time somebody will say, yes, ‘we have a child to foster’,” you know. And the first call, phone call was about twenty past seven (19.20), one evening, where they said ‘Oh, we've got three abandoned children at a bus stop in Plymouth’ – no, ‘Plympton. ‘Can we bring them?’ And you just don't think, you just say ‘yes’. I think if I had had to think about it - which is probably why they do it like that, you'd think ‘oh I can't take three children’. You know, ‘what about my own’? And ‘where would I’? You sort of panic a bit, I would think, if you thought about it - but the fact that you were given very little time, Eddie and I rushed around and made beds and got a room ready and that sort of thing. And then they arrived with these three, very dirty children. In terrible, terrible state they were. The youngest, who was eighteen months, was very, very badly burned. And, I mean, I spent years taking him to Bristol, to Frenchay, for skin grafts. Yeah, he was put in a hot bath, boiling water, and his whole body was just dreadful. And the eldest one, he was seven, and he had been, had his teeth all bashed out; and the third - second one was cut about with a bread knife. So I mean, it was for me a traumatic (rueful laugh), never ever having experienced anything like that. But they were absolutely lovely children. You know. They just were sweet. And so we had them; and one of, one experience with, with the youngest one - because we'd had them, I think it would have been about two or three years by then; because he was then talking and he called me mummy. (Obviously, because my other kids called me mummy.) And I was making blackberry jam and had it in the pressure cooker. And I bent over and took the lid off the pressure cooker. And the heat, it had, it had obviously formed a bubble. So, of course, all this stuff came and went straight into my face. And, so Eddie had to take me, rush



me into the hospital, and I just remember that little boy, offering me his cream for him - that he had to have on for his burns, to put on my face; and I think that was just, just sort of shows how much love there was really, because he came with his little tub of cream for my face, you know? So - and then the other good thing about that was my doctor had, sort of, said 'Oh, yes, you need to do this and that and the other'. And then, of course, when I took this little child to Frenchay Hospital, the first thing the specialist said was 'What have you done to your face?' You see, and I told him, and he said 'Well, what are you being treated on?' And he said 'Oh my God, stop that immediately. Because on your type of skin you'll be scarred for life.' So thank — just how things happen. Yeah. So I, you, sort of, see the good that comes out from things like that really. Yeah. And so that was my very first experience. And, as I said, we kept them until Hazel was born. And then they had to, I said 'Well, there's no way I can cope with a new baby and these children' - but they were back again (rueful laugh), with a very short time, because they, again, they were abandoned; they should never gone back to the parents really. And then, then eventually, mother was going to have them because she had to have four children, I think, at the time for, for a council house, I think it was, and her partner had one. So she had to have her three back. Can you imagine? And they allowed her to have them! They were going to but then we said: 'Oh no, they can't, we'll fight this'. And eventually a family had them - all three, and adopted them, which is absolutely marvellous. So that was, in fact, a success story. **00.27.01**

Interviewer: 00.27.04

So did, did you, you obviously had six children? And did you take them out and what, when you went shopping? **00.27.12**

Carol: 00.27.13

In one of those experiences, in Okehampton, I was walking across from - it was Boots actually, when, it's changed over the years, it's now Halletts and various places; but where the traffic lights are, opposite to where McDonald's is. I was crossing over with all these children, and one comment - and it's the first racist comment I've ever had, then, with somebody saying 'Oh, these black people, they don't half breed like rabbits.' (Laugh.) I remember just thinking 'my goodness', and that was the first ever comment I had. I mean, whether people thought it and never said it. It - but it was, that was the



one and - first time that I'd ever heard anything, sort of, mentioned like that. I mean, but I just laughed; I thought it was very funny. I came home and I told everybody and we all, sort of, laughed about it. And that was the end of it. But when you think back now, it was, it was strange. Yeah. I never, sort of, until I, sort of, thought about it the other day; I thought 'well, I could have been very upset or I could have been hurt'. But at the time it didn't bother me, to be honest - I suppose because everybody in Okehampton had accepted me that I just never thought any more about it really? **00.28.31**

Interviewer: 00.28.33

Have you ever thought how you might feel in later years, if that had been said to you? **00.28.40**

Carol: 00.28.43

Yes, well, well, with all the sort of things that's going on now, you probably would have, sort of, stood up, probably, and might have said 'what do you mean?' Or probably challenged them. I don't, I don't know whether I would or not, Margaret, I just don't know. **00.28.59**

Interviewer: 00.29.00

Because that was during - this period we're talking about is in the, what would it have been? In the seventies ('70s)? Eighties ('80s)? **00.29.06**

Carol: 00.29.08

Well, it was still in the sixties ('60s) **00.29.10**

Interviewer: 00.29.10

Still in the sixties ('60s)? **00.29.11**

Carol: 00.29.11



Yes. Because I had Keith and they were all small - all of them, sort of, because the, the other children then, sort of, went to the primary school with Keith as he went to school. So it was all when they were quite young that I'd had these three; it was five of them because I hadn't had Hazel then, you know.

00.29.30

Interviewer: 00.29.34

Right. Well, quite a, yeah, quite an experience to the start of your fostering – that's true. **00.29.42**

Carol: 00.29.43

Yes, and I have had lots of others, since then, all through 'til they were teenagers, and then we just couldn't cope with teenagers really; they actually were a different group, I mean. And also our children were growing up as well. It would affect them eventually, I would have thought, yeah. Well, one of the reasons why we stopped; we used to have children who came on holidays and stayed on because they loved the farm or they lived out of the way. And one incident (we always had no smoking on the farm - I mean, that was a rule because of hay.) And we had one particular boy who actually quite liked lighting fires. And he, he wanted cigarettes, and we didn't realise that the social worker was actually giving him cigarettes. And he was fourteen (14), and told him 'Oh, it's fine, if you smoke along the road'. And he, he was a very, sort of, strange boy; he came to us and he used to spend his holidays with us and used to love the farm. But they then said to us - and we were pressured into it, really, that he, he wanted, he wanted to come and live with us because he, otherwise he wouldn't know where to go. He would have to go somewhere else quite far away from, from Devon. And so we, we said 'Okay', and we made arrangements for him to go into Okehampton College at the time. We knew the headmaster and we - somehow we got him in anyway. But then he went off with a, on a school trip to Buckfast Abbey, and stole a penknife from one of the - I presume it must be they were selling or, you know, things. So it was brought to the school's attention. And we were called in because we were his pare- his supposed-to-be foster parents at the time. And there were about twenty-two people (rueful laugh) in the headmaster's office, you know: social workers, teachers, the people who'd taken him to Buckfast Abbey. And then the, Mr Ray who was then the Headmaster, somehow it came about that we had sort of pushed for him



to come to stay with us. And in fact, they, they said 'Oh yes, well, of course, you always wanted this child to come and stay and things'. And it was totally the opposite. And really, when it came down to it, it was finances because he was going to be sent out of the county, and Devon would have had to have paid for him to be in another county. And, and I just, we just thought it was so unfair - that we were pressurised into having him by them saying he definitely wanted us to have him. And we said 'Oh, yes, obviously, if he had to go somewhere else that he didn't want to go'. And, in fact, it was all down to finance, really. And we realised that we were being used, at the end of the day, because we'd had lots of other incidences where teenagers would come and we'd have the history or the father was abusing her. And we happened to meet that particular girl; we happened to meet the parents, and her father was quite well-known and had a very, very good position. And, apparently, she used to actually cut herself, self-harm, and sort of scream and say he was beating her. And so they put her into - well, we had her for a while. And then again, they all have problems; she, we sort of got horse riding lessons for her, she would steal the numnah (is it numnahs they're called?) - you know, this thing that they put on the horses, and tell us that she'd found them and, sort of, you knew that then you were being manipulated. And she knew **all** the rules and regulations about - because we got her a job in Okehampton - they had a Jaeger factory at the time; we got her a job there, we got her a lovely place to stay and within six weeks - no, the time that you'll get sick pay, I don't remember how long it was, she worked for that time. And then, of course, she cut herself and was on the sick. And the last we heard was that she was up at Brandize Park and was a prostitute for the army people. So you know - and that was, sort of, one of the sad cases because you thought, you know, the younger children were no problem. But when you, sort of, were dealing with people who had their own problems - and none of this, sort of, was explained to us beforehand, you, sort of, had them because you felt sorry, and you thought 'poor child give them a chance'. And then it turns out that we weren't really informed about the types of children they were, really. And we thought 'we've got children now who are teenagers.' And it, it just wasn't really what we wanted to foster for. So we decided that was it. So we stopped. And they were about, yeah, fourteen (14), fifteen (15). [NAME REDACTED], the girl, was much older; she was sixteen (16) when she came because we got her a job, as I said, in Okehampton. Yeah. And it's, it was just the end for us. And it certainly wasn't for the money because I remember when we had the first three boys, we got two pounds seventy (£2.70) a week, which (rueful laugh) - but you had to then in those days; you had to have money because you weren't allowed to hit them, beat them up. But you were paid, even if it was a token amount of money. And, and then you weren't given actual money for



them for clothing; you had vouchers where you had to go to Marks and Spencer's to buy their school clothes. And then they might go home for an odd weekend and come back without the clothes because mother had taken them and sold them. Yeah, so (rueful laugh) it was a learning. But out of it, I think, we came out of the experience with our children learning to share and learning that life is not easy for some children. So I think they have grown up with, they were quite lucky really. **00.36.29**

Interviewer: 00.36.32

And what about; you're just mentioning your own children then because that might not, must have been quite - but as you say, quite an experience for them as well. But what about them? What, how did they feel when they went to, they went to school, they - did they go to school locally? **00.36.48**

Carol: 00.36.49

Yes, they went to the little primary school at Northlew. And, but then at that time they were quite young. But then, when the, when our foster children were going to Okehampton College, Hazel was then at boarding school in Launceston and Helen - Helen refused to go to boarding school. And Keith was also at boarding school in Tavistock. So it didn't, sort of, that teenage time didn't impinge on them too much. But before, when they were young, I mean, we used to have - being where we are, we're quite isolated; our house is separate from anywhere, so no neighbours apart from Hazel, my daughter, who lives across, about a hundred and fifty (150) yards away. So for them, they had fun together, (a) being on the farm, and also we used to do lots of plays, and put on little shows, do (laugh), sort of, silly things. So I think for them, they learned to share, and they learned to, to be involved with others as well. So for, for me, I think that was a learning curve for my children. I think they had to learn to share. Whatever they had, they had to share with others. So I don't think, I don't think it really, I hope it hasn't affected them. **00.38.08**

Interviewer: 00.38.11

Okay, and did your children have any —? Did, were they very much accepted wherever they went, particularly in their younger time? **00.38.20**



Carol: 00.38.21

Well, at the primary school, yes. But then when Helen went to Okehampton College, funnily enough, she was called 'Paki'. (Laugh.) So, yeah, it's, and I mean they are not as dark as I am. But yet they - I was never called a 'Paki'. Not to my face anyway, but they used, but thankfully they used to laugh about it. 'Oh, guess what? You know, today I was called Paki at school.' And, yeah, I think they never really took it on. **00.38.52**

Interviewer: 00.38.54

And how - did you feel very protective of them as you would as a mother and father or did you —?
00.38.59

Carol: 00.39.00

Oh, because they were pretty, they were pretty tough, I think. In, in fact, sometimes now we think possibly - particularly with Keith, who, how he is now. We used to think we used to say to him 'Come on, toughen up (rueful laugh), if someone's gonna say you, you just ignore it'; and you sometimes wonder, you do wonder whether you were a bit, sort of, should have been - I don't know what it is really - more sympathetic, probably. I don't know. I don't know. He never, ever said he was bullied, nor did Helen or Hazel. I mean, he is actually - as a young child, had hair that sort of stood up - very shiny and very sort of gingery colour hair. And they used to call her Bog Brush when she was at school. And I mean - but children just accept, I think how, you know, you just say 'Oh, get on with it (rueful laugh); we were all called names' or and you just didn't take any notice really. **00.40.07**

Interviewer: 00.40.10

Well, thank you for sharing those experiences. That's amazing. So, tell me what else did you - 'cos I know you; you, you didn't - after your fostering you, you didn't sit at home and twiddle your thumbs, that's for sure. What, what else did you go on to do? **00.40.25**



Carol: 00.40.26

I trained to work at the Citizens' Advice Bureau, which I did for about twenty-two (22) years. And, yeah, I went down to Plymouth quite a bit to do the training. And then - because latterly, in the latter years of my being at Citizens', Eddie and I spent more and more time (because Helen had by this time moved to Trinidad), spent more time in the West Indies, so I found it difficult each time coming back - to fall back in after, sort of, being away for three months. And it was changing, how we had to work at the bureau. At first, it was very much an Advice Bureau, where you go to the cupboard and the filing cabinet and look everything up. And then you got, sort of, roped in more and more into people's debt problems. And, and, and it was becoming, for me, more difficult trying to keep up with it, to be honest. So I said, I think, and then also because I am a coloured person and dark and things, people knew, although they, it was supposed to be confidential and nobody, think - people used to actually come to my house for me to fill in their Inland Revenue forms and things and, and I said, you said 'Eddie, they shouldn't be'. And 'Oh, we just came to ask Carol if, if, if this was all right', and, and I said 'I shouldn't be doing this because they should go into the office'. But you sort of felt sorry for some people and would say 'Okay, I'll help you fill in this form', because they came to the house. And I thought 'No, it's time I gave it up', so I then went and worked at Oxfam. (Laugh.) Which I thoroughly loved, of course. Because I used to call it my 'social afternoon'. I did Saturdays, and sometimes a Wednesday if they were short. And I absolutely loved it. Because I used to say to Eddie 'you have your sport on a Saturday, and I've got all my friends coming into Oxfam on a Saturday'. (Laugh.) So yeah. And I did that for about twenty (20) years, and then got rheumatoid arthritis so I had to stop. **00.42.39**

Interviewer: 00.42.40

During your time at Oxfam, what, what, what did you particularly do and what did you particularly enjoy? **00.42.45**

Carol: 00.42.46



I did everything but I would, nobody would do the till – that's the thing, at that time, so I did quite a lot of the till work, but we had to - we had to do everything really, sort of, sort clothes, go through the rails and discard, put the ones for recycling out. And I loved it. And then, of course, my other friends came in, and some had to do the books and we'd get talking about the books, and we all had different jobs with a specific task; but I think I used to be on the till mostly. And, of course, I knew everybody used, would come in on a Saturday, and it was just lovely. Because they would say 'Well, gosh, do you think this suits me?' (Laugh.) So, yeah, I absolutely loved it. I really loved, yeah - so shame I had to give it up. But there it is. Do you know, I've got somebody who is still - what is she? Nearly ninety (90) - still working at Oxfam. I know, I know, amazing, isn't it? I think it's company for some people of course, you know, getting out and you know. **00.43.53**

Interviewer: 00.43.55

And then where, where was the, the shop in those days? Was it in the same place as it is now?
00.44.00

Carol: 00.44.01

It's still in the same place. We, I started just after it opened actually. So it, it was fairly new. We were all pretty new to it when we started. I think I was the second year of it opening that I went in. That's quite a long time now. **00.44.19**

Interviewer: 00.44.21

And that probably would have been in the nineties (90s), early nineties (90s), would it? **00.44.23**

Carol: 00.44.24

It would be, yes it would. Yeah. Yes - because I did twenty years. **00.44.28**

Interviewer: 00.44.30



Yeah. **00.44.33**

Carol: 00.44.34

I don't know if she's still alive now. But she lived in North Tawton - [NAME REDACTED], did you know [NAME REDACTED] at all? No. But she was absolutely amazing. I mean, and she worked on right into her nineties; I must ask people if she still, if she's still got - I think she just calls in now, you know, she goes in. She might not have been, sort of, through this lockdown period. But a lot of them just went really because they were, you know, company. I used to say to them 'Oh [unintelligible]'. No, 'we just love coming'. A lot of them were widows. And I said 'Have you ever thought of getting married?' 'Oh, never! Never again, we're free, we can do what we want!' (Laugh.) So it was, yeah, it was lovely there. **00.45.21**

Interviewer: 00.45.23

So over the years you, you really have known and still know, obviously a, a great number of people and you're very much part of the community, although you're isolated. **00.45.35**

Carol: 00.45.36

Yeah. **00.45.36**

Interviewer: 00.45.37

Physically isolated in that, in that sense; you've, you certainly give the feeling and I'm sure, in absolute reality, you've been very much part of that, that community. **00.45.49**

Carol: 00.45.49



Well, I'm lucky because I live two miles, two and a half miles from Northlew and three miles from Bratton Clovelly, which is where we held the Get Changed concert. And I have involved myself with both villages. So I support both equally. And so that's how I know quite a lot. And because I'm a keen gardener, and I belong to the garden club, a lot of the gardeners come here as well. And we swap plants. So I am quite involved in all the little — in all, nearly everything that goes on in the villages. Yes. **00.46.29**

Interviewer: 00.46.30

And that's, that's over a long period of time, Carol, isn't it? **00.46.34**

Carol: 00.46.35

Absolutely. Well, my guardian came home - she was originally born and bred in Northlew. So all her family - sort of descendants of them, are still in Northlew. In fact, it was one really interesting thing. We, I went over to Trinidad on holiday. And my brother-in-law was CEO of Swan Hunter at that time, which is a shipping company. And he used to go out to the ships that were coming in to the island - to entertain. And he said to me 'Oh, we've got a big ship - the Intrepid, it's come in'; it's a, sort of, I think it was a warship or something. 'Would you like to go? They're having a cocktail party'. And I said 'Of course, lots of men. Wonderful!' Eddie was in, at home on the farm. (Laugh.) So off I went. And we're just chatting away, to all these people. And there was this young lad - he was about seventeen or eighteen. And I just said 'Where have you come from?' and he said 'Oh, we trained at Dartmouth.' I said 'Yes. And where do you live?' He said 'Oh, you, there's no way you would know it. I, I came from a small village called Northlew!'. Isn't that amazing? In the West Indies? And I said 'Oh, what's your name?' And he said 'Oh, well my parents and family were called Mounters.' And I said 'And did they own a bakery in Northlew?' 'Yes.' I said 'Well, my guardian was part of that family!' And isn't it absolutely strange - in all these thousands of miles away? I meet, just a seventeen-year old from Northlew? (Laugh.) Yes. **00.48.21**

Interviewer: 00.48.24



That's a good story, that's for sure. **00.48.27**

Carol: 00.48.29

I know Eddie couldn't believe it. He said 'Fancy going to Trinidad and meeting somebody from Northlew - two miles away from where we live.' Yeah. Very strange. **00.48.39**

Interviewer: 00.48.39

And do you still have regular contact with Trinidad these days? Do you? **00.48.44**

Carol: 00.48.45

Oh, yes. We Facetime all the time, my - because my daughter, Helen, lives there of course. She married a Trinidad doctor, and both her daughters are over here at the minute. So my grandchildren are still in England at the moment. And they come down regularly. But they haven't been, of course, since COVID. And yes, and then, of course, when we go over to Tobago, which is the little island off Trinidad - I go because my parents have got, had, left twenty apartments. So I go and run it when I go over, because the staff then go on holidays. And I sit in the office and read, do very little. But I love it. And again, it's meeting people, you know, I sort of — So I spend, we spend most of our time in Tobago but we go over regularly to Trinidad because, of course, Helen gets a bit cross and says 'Oh, you never come over much here'. So we do spend a bit of time with her as well. And then she comes over to Tobago, of course. So - because it's only fifteen minutes by plane anyway. It's handy. **00.48.53**

Interviewer: 00.49.54

And at the time of the year when you go, Carol, what's the weather like in, in Tobago and Trinidad at that time? **00.50.00**

Carol: 00.50.01



Beautiful. Yeah, it's about - it's never more than about twenty-nine, thirty degrees. In fact, some of our summers here are hotter; but we never, sort of, go the hot months, which is, sort of, June, July, August; now it was, it would be very hot. We always go, sort of, December, January, February, and come back in March. We come back in time for lambing, because Hazel and Graham go off and have a break. And we keep an eye on the farm for her, when we come back. Yeah, it's worked out very well. In fact, we've been extremely lucky, really, all our married life because Eddie's dad came down and farmed, and Eddie came from university and then decided, yes, he would farm. So we've had his father who allowed us to go over - not first of all; we used to go over for a month at a time, which is why Keith and Helen used to go quite a lot. And then, of course, when Hazel took over, we then started going for three months because we, sort of, thought 'we were retired'. So we are, we have been lucky.

00.51.13

Interviewer: 00.51.14

Yeah. It doesn't sound to me as though you've quite got the hang of retirement, which is great news really, isn't it? (laughs) **00.51.20**

Carol: 00.51.21

I, I just think there's never enough time in the day. (laughs) Yeah. Like, well, what I would have done without a garden this summer. **00.51.30**

Interviewer: 00.51.33

Okay. Well, Carol, just as a, sort of, way of wrapping up our, our interview, it's been lovely to speak to you today and to hear your experiences. Is, is there anything, sort of, looking back over the years? How would you, sort of, sum up your, your, your life in the sense of, sort of, things that obviously have been very important to you but, and, and the trials and tribulations as well? But how would you generally, sort of, sum up your experience? **00.52.07**

Carol: 00.52.08



Well, I think I've been extremely fortunate, never ever thinking when I came over that I'd ever be living for ever in England, because the life is totally different, of course, to the West Indians who are very relaxed, easygoing. You know, I surprise myself now. Because when I go back to Tobago and I'm running the office, I say to the girls - punctuality is one of the things that I am very keen on. I can't bear it but 'you're coming in' - because they're just, sort of, so relaxed. So I can, people often say to me, 'Oh, would you ever think of going back to live in the West Indies or Trinidad?' And I said 'I just can't'. I mean, the life is so different. Now, Helen - although she's very practical and very, and has her own business, she is totally different; she absolutely loves the West Indian life. She's very fortunate to be married to somebody who is a party animal. So he has, at the drop of a hat, they have parties. And, and that's her life. And she's always, always loved it. In fact, when - I remember when she was fifteen (15) we had a party here. And I said to her 'Oh, do you mind washing the kitchen floor for me?' And all the time she was saying 'Hmm, if this is what it is to be a farmer's wife, they can forget it'. And I just said to Eddie 'She's not going to be living in England'. I was proven right! And now she and Hazel are totally the opposite. We cannot get Hazel to go on holiday. She's a committed farmer, she really is; just to get her to go on holiday is like pulling teeth. 'You must have a break.' She's totally, totally dedicated to the farm, which is lovely for us. Because what with Keith not being able to take it over, who else would have? So it's, it's, we have been lucky. We really have been fortunate, I think. **00.54.16**

Interviewer: 00.54.18

Well, that's lovely, Carol. I think **we've** been very fortunate and lucky that you have agreed to share all this with us. And I would just like to finish by thanking you very much indeed. It's, it's been lovely and very enjoyable to hear your experiences. And thank you very much indeed for doing that. **00.54.38**

Carol: 00.54.38

I look forward to meeting the others when we can. Which, after lockdown, I suppose whenever that will be, we can all get together and - be lovely. **00.54.48**

Interviewer: 00.54.49

Telling our stories
finding our roots

Well, thank you so much. **00.54.51**