

AGE EXCHANGE

INTERVIEW WITH ELSIE HOUSE AND PAM SCHWEITZER,

(while Elsie was washing up the dishes as she refused to stop!)

Q: Tell me again what did this doctor come round for?

A: For me ears 'cause I had ear ache very bad, and he came in and he used to come in every morning to do my ears and sit me on the kitchen table, I was only about two, I can remember it as plain as anything. He always used to bring me a piece of blue ribbon to tie up me hair and we had another doctor, Doctor Giddens, very stern, he did all the vaccinations of the babies, and I was the only one out of a family of 8 that wasn't vaccinated.

Q: Why?

A: 'cause I was born with yellow jaundice and I wasn't allowed to be done. But when he used to come he used to sit them on the table and I used to run round and sit outside the outside toilet until he'd gone because I was frightened of him. He seemed such a hard doctor the way he used to stick this needle in, yeah.

Q: What was the treatment for your ears, what did he do to you when he came?

A: I think it was just sort of drops, he only used to charge a shilling and if you couldn't afford a shilling he did it for nothing, ever such a kind man. Very tall, very slim, grey hair, I can see him now.

Q: Was this a different doctor from the one who did the vaccinations?

A: Yes he was an army man I think, army doctor. He used to frighten me. I used to run and hide round the toilet till he'd gone.

Q: With this ears thing did you go deaf for a little while or not?

A: No I can't remember going deaf, I can't remember that at all.

Q: But he just gave you drops and it was just an ache?

A: Yes he came and done the drops himself, he came himself and done them.

Q: What would he have been dressed in this doctor who came on the bicycle?

A: He used to be dressed in a grey suit, very smart, very tall.

Q: Did he have a bag with him?

A: Bag? Yes, leather bag like a carpetbag.

Q: And what was in it?

A: A l l his bits and pieces but he was so gentle. I mean you wasn't a bit frightened of him coming in.

Q: Do you remember any other illnesses you had as a child?

A: I can remember my mother having mumps when we was all little and I can remember her sitting in the armchair with a blue scarf tied up here. She had both sides - she had a very bad face yes.

Q: Was it a problem for her finding a shilling for the doctor or not?

A: Well I think you just found it. We had one doctor there Doctor Marsh, if you hadn't got it - you had to have your money on the table as he walked in the door because if you hadn't got your money on the table he wouldn't look at you. That was a difference with the doctors. I can remember the midwife coming with the babies.

Q: When your mother had the younger children. What do you remember about that?

A: Sitting on the settee in the front room and this nurse came up with a pushbike and I really thought she'd got the baby in the bag because I thought they come like that. She's got it. We sat there quiet and then she used to - when it was all over she used to call us all up the stairs, it was lovely, all went up the stairs she said you've got another sister 'cause my mum had six girls. Five girls before she had two boys and the last one was a girl. And for my brother everything was blue. All round the bed. All the draping was white with blue and all the babies bed was thredled with blue ribbon and we all marched up to see the baby. When they put the binder round they sewed it, they didn't pin it, with a needle and cotton and you thought any minute now she was gonna stick the needle in the baby.

Q: What was the binder?

A: Binding the babies navel. Tight it was and they sewed it. I can remember it so clearly.

Q: Was it just the midwife who came or was there also a doctor?

A: Oh no just the midwife.

Q: Always the same person?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Did she live nearby?

A: She lived in Beckenham and we used to have a lady named Mrs Roberts that always looked after us when my mum had a baby and she used to make - she couldn't cook - stout she was, and she couldn't cook. She made an Irish stew one day and we all went upstairs to my mum and said we were all crying and we said she can't cook, we can't eat it. She'd say never mind duck she said when she's gone you bring the vegetables up and I'll make you something. Well then my dad used to make a suet pudding and we used to run up and say to mum he's making a suet pudding, we're not gonna eat it, not with his hands. He was a bricklayer. She said bring the suet up to me and the flour she said and some water and she sat up in bed and she made it. They was in bed for 14 days in them days, after the 10th day they got up, but we wouldn't eat our dad's suet pudding.

Q: What about when the babies were being born, did you hear great sort of toings and froings?

A: No - we did they thought they came in an attaché case, really thought they came in this bag. Never give it a thought. Didn't hear anything. We used to sit ever so quiet. We never moved, no we never used to move and then we heard the baby cry. It's here. So excited I used to run up the street and tell everybody, my mum's got a baby boy. They used to say what another one? Cos she had eight. I was third from the top, I had five underneath me. I used to take them out in the pram, all the kids, I've always loved kids, always loved babies.

Q: Didn't you notice your mother getting bigger?

A: Well she used to say - see her now sitting on the stone - she - making things I'd say what you making, she used to say don't be query. She always used to say that. No, we didn't know nothing. The girl next door to me Dorothy Crouch told me everything. I must have been about 14.

Q: How did she explain it to you?

- A: We didn't know your mum's never told you anything. As far as we knew your dad used to say if you get in trouble I'll shoot you and the fellow as well, oh you aren't get in trouble. We didn't know anything, strange really.
- Q: How soon after the baby had been born would it be brought downstairs to be looked at?
- A: Oh not until your mum's got up.
- Q: So you had to go up and admire the baby up there?
- A: Oh yeah. When your mum had got up on the 14th day then my mum had my brother Ted on the 1st of October, Mrs Crouch next door had her Ronnie on the 20th of October so she done for my mum and my mum done for her. Q: What do you mean done for her? A: Well come in and did little bits, that's how they helped one another, she was a fortnight after my mum.
- Q: And this midwife who came in would she come in every day?
- A: Every day yes.
- Q: And what did she do?
- A: She used to bath the baby, I think she used to come in twice a day, bath the baby and look after the mums.
- Q: Was it all breast feeding?
- A: No I think the bottle fed.
- Q: Was that unusual I wonder?
- A: I don't think they had the strength to breast-feed; don't think so not in them days. No it was two of milk and one of water. I can remember that as plain as anything. Two of cows milk and one of water.
- Q: Dried cows milk?
- A: No not boiled just bring to a blood heat. Cos your s seemed to live on bread and milk in them days and when my mum was carrying she always had butter. My always used to make sure she had butter where we had g. and there used to be a sweet shop in Elmers End led Francis and they used to do broken up chocolate. Break it all up and we used to have to go round every day when he come home from the pub at 3 o'clock, run round and get half a pound of Cadbury's broken milk chocolate all for my mum.
- Q: Are you sure she didn't breast feed?
- A: Yes, yes. Because they had bottles the shape of the boat with a teat each end. One to stop it from running out and one for it to suck.
- Q: I wonder if the mother had the breasts bound by the midwife or what they did?
- A: I think they used to dry it up. Oh she could never have fed all them not with eight, a lot isn't it. Used to take them up the park, all day go up the park, bottle of lemonade, sandwiches, play up there, come home.
- Q: Do you remember any of them getting hurt or going into hospital for anything?
- A: My brother Bob yeah he was a terror. He used to play my mum up and I can see my mum now sitting in an armchair in the corner, she'd got a lot of shoes. He used to make - only devilment - I can see her now picking up this shoe trying to hit him with it, and one day he came in he said I've broke me leg, I've broke me leg, 'couse my dad went up to clout him and he had broke his leg. He was going like that on the curb and Doctor Joy -

very nice doctor - Doctor Joy took him himself down to the hospital in his car and he was in Beckenham hospital for six weeks, kept you in hospital in them days six weeks with a broken leg.

Q: Did you go and visit him there? Do you remember if it was plaster of paris or what did they do for a setting?

A: It was all bound up and he was in there till it held. Hard stuff yeah. That was in Beckenham Cottage Hospital.

Q: What about paying for that?

A: My mother used to pay in 3d a week to the Hospital Savings - HSA - that covered the whole of the family and we all had our tonsils out in Beckenham Hospital, all of us and I went in to have mine out, I was about 11, I remember the nurse, Nurse Sadler, cos I always wanted to be a nurse and I think you was in there for about 3 or 5 days. Anyway my mum never come to get me and I was crying. There was a mistake. I really thought she didn't want me. It was terrible, then forgotten it and when she come - because she was supposed to come the day before with me clothes you see, cos you took the clothes home and I was so upset I really thought she didn't want me that's why she left me there and it was a mistake with the nurse and her when she should have got me. And I can always remember going home having a new laid egg off of Mrs. Crouch's chicken, only egg you got.

Q: You don't remember anything about the treatment for tonsillitis?

A: I can remember coming to and ever such a sore throat and there was a girl next door to me named Rosey but she was a bit posher, but she was a nuisance in the hospital and I can always remember this nurse saying why don't me be a good girl like me you know. Us type wasn't any trouble, not when you went in hospital but she was a lovely nurse that nurse Sadler.

Q: What did you have to eat?

A: Mostly jelly at first but I always feared the medicine cupboard, cos when I used to see her go to the medicine cupboard I used to say oh please don't give me any cos it was such horrible stuff in them days what they used to give you, that was the only thing I really feared was the medicine cupboard. But you was only allowed visitors twice a week, Thursday for one hour and Sunday for one hour, only twice a week.

Q: How many in the ward?

A: About - there was only two wards in Beckenham Hospital that was a man's ward and a ladies ward, it's bigger now.

Q: And the children were in there too were they in the ladies ward?

A: Yes and I suppose there must have been about 10 beds down each side, pretty hospital, still there. My brother in law's given them a lot of money to help keep it open, he swears by it. Homely little place. We all went in there one after the other to have our tonsils out.

Q: So your mum was paying into this HSA, how much did she pay?

A: That covered the whole family, 3d a week.

Q: And who was entitled to contribute to that any family it didn't depend on them having a job?

A: Anybody could, oh no, no. It was worth that 3d a week. My brother Ted went in there with rheumatic fever when he was 13, he went to Canvey Island for a holiday with my sister

older than me she took him, and he came up the road and he was limping, and my mum said to my sister Ethel what's he done? She said oh I think he's sprained his ankle. Well anyway next day on the Sunday she sent for Doctor Joy and my mum had a bed there with the dressing table in the middle and she went up there and she saw him walking on pillows, trying to walk from one bed to the other and she sent for the doctor and it was rheumatic fever he had. He was in there 13 weeks in Beckenham Hospital. He was gonna have his tonsil out - this is true - and my mum had a letter saying that he was gonna run away. If they'd had taken his tonsils out it would have killed him because the thought of it, the fright. I used to go and visit him. I can remember having a nice grey pin striped costume on, aint it funny how you remember.... Navy blue hat and I used to go in every visiting time and sit with him and my husband bought him a watch, you know, and a chain what he always wanted. He had his 13th birthday in there but he went and got killed at 19, he got knocked down by an American lorry bringing new wounded over from Dunkirk in Southampton. Now he used to do your work entertain all the old people in Beckenham Rec him and his friends, sing and act. They used to go up there -all for nothing you know, but he got knocked down.

Q: This rheumatic fever that he was treated for what was the treatment there?

A: Not much treatment - well they pulled him through because it was touch and go. He was in there for 13 weeks and the doctor said he could never swim again or do any running or anything like that. Now that's funny how that comes up, that comes up with a swollen ankle red, you thought you'd sprained it if you looked at it. No cold or anything, nothing like that. We'd reckoned he'd caught something at Canvey Island cos there's a lot of sewage there isn't there - going back a few years.

(End of interview)