

(1) Tell me about your background.

I was born in 1919, and my father was in the Navy, my grandfather was a doctor, and my mother - she didn't go to work; ladies didn't go to work in those days. And I enjoyed my life.

Where were you brought up?

Where? Plymouth; I was born and brought up in Plymouth.

Was your father away a lot in the Navy, or was he in Plymouth all the time too?

No, he was away a lot; used to go away a lot.

Would you say you were quite well-off as you were growing up?

Yes, reasonably well-off, yes. Shared a house with my grandparents. It was a very, very large house, and my grandfather was one of the first people to have a motorcar.

And what rank did your father get to in the Navy?

Petty Officer.

What are your earliest memories?

Well, I think I remember having pneumonia. I was very ill and they didn't expect me to live, and they brought my father back from abroad because I was dying, more or less; but I didn't die.

How old were you then?

I must have been between three and four, I suppose, but I don't remember any details of it.

What was your health like before you got diabetes?

Very good, apart from the pneumonia. And that less me... Every year I used to get bronchitis in the winter, but apart from that I was all right.

And did you start school when you were five?

No, I wasn't well enough - I never went to school. Bad chest and bronchitis and things like that. And they were always hoping that I'd be able to go to school, but I didn't; I wasn't well enough.

So, what kind of education did you get at the age that other children would have been starting school?

Well, my grandfather was very kind - taught me how to read and write, but I couldn't add up - I still can't add up - but really, I didn't have very much education.

No tutor came to your house or anything like that?

Well, yes, I forgot about that. We had a lady that came, and all she seemed to do was to teach me to speak French. Well, I didn't want... my grandmother was French, and I didn't want to learn French, really. I was more interested in the English things, so that didn't last very long.

How old were you then, do you think, roughly?

I suppose I'd be about seven or eight.

Now, you were eight when you were diagnosed with diabetes. Can you tell me how that came about?

Well, the only thing I remember, standing at the sink in the kitchen and drinking lots of glasses of water. And because I was drinking so much, my grandfather, who was a doctor, he sort of suspected something like that, and they did various tests - I don't know what tests they did in those days - but they found that I was diabetic.

What happened next?

Well, they put me on insulin right away, and I was told that I was one of the first people to have insulin in the country regularly.

Was this at a hospital?

No, it was a nursing home in Plymouth - the Charlton Nursing Home, Mutley Plain, Plymouth.

(2) Well, this was before the National Health Service, and that's why I went to a private nursing home.

Had you been to this same home for your previous illnesses?

Yes, I had; I'd been there several times.

Can you remember if the doctors and nurses seemed to know much about diabetes?

They seemed to know a fair amount. I don't think, in those days, anybody knew a great deal about it.

What kind of training did you get to cope with your diabetes?

Well, I remember very well to do a test for sugar. You had a little small spirit lamp and you'd have two test tubes, and there was urine in one tube and Fehling's solution in the other tube, which was blue. And you had to boil it over this little stove and pour one in the other. If it stayed blue, you had no sugar; if it went yellow, you had a little sugar; if it went orange, you had high sugar, but in those days we didn't do blood tests.

And would you have been taught to do this yourself, do you think, or was your mother taught to do it in the hospital?

Oh, my mother did it to start with. I didn't do it until I was older.

What about injections - did you do those yourself in the hospital?

I didn't do those until I wanted to get out and about! Go out for a meal, well, then I had to take my insulin and do it myself. But my mother, and my father when he was at home, they both used to do it for me when I was young.

How were they taught to do it in the hospital?

With an orange - stick a syringe in an orange, and they were great big heavy glass syringes and big stainless steel needles. It was dreadful in those days.

Painful?

Yes, it was. Now you can't feel these little tiny fine needles.

And what were you taught about diet?

Oh, in those days my mother used to weigh all my food. If I had a slice of bread, she'd weigh it, and the butter to go on it she had to weigh it, and all the food for many years she used to weigh it, but gradually got away from that.

That must have been quite a chore for her. Had you got any brothers and sisters?

I had a brother. Yes, I had a brother, but he wasn't affected by my diabetes, and eventually we completely lost contact.

Now, all this weighing that was going on - did you find this irritating or did you get used to it very quickly?

I got used to it very quickly. It didn't seem to bother me - it was just one of those things that had to be done.

Do you think perhaps it was easier for you to get used to it because you weren't going to school?

Oh, I think so. Yes, I think it was easier for me to get used to it. And, of course, I was spoilt as a child, because I was ill.

In what way?

Well, anybody went out, they'd bring me things back - presents to cheer me up and things like that, but, of course, they could never bring me sweets or anything.

- (3) In the winter I had bronchitis, and I was in bed usually in February - I was nearly always in bed for my birthday.

Were you in bed every winter?

Well, I can't really remember, but I know I was in bed most winters on my birthday. But my parents always had a party for me in the bedroom, and a lot of friends were very kind, and they'd come in with books and read to me, and I learnt to read. And I had - my father, before his ship was going to sea, there was a cat on board and had kittens, and they wanted to find homes for these kittens - and I had one of these kittens. And it was brought up on the bed with

me - I kept it warm in bed. And it was a beautiful kitten, and I used to dress it up in my dolls' clothes. It was a lovely little cat - it was called Tiger.

Were you lonely being at home, not at school, in bed such a lot of the time?

No, I wasn't lonely, because we had a lot of good friends. And there was one gentleman that used to go abroad a lot - he was a neighbour - and he used to bring me wonderful sort of magazines with the liners that he'd been on, and he used to talk to me all about these liners. And I got interested and used to save pictures and photographs in a scrapbook of different liners.

And were there any other children in your life?

No.

How much of each year do you think you were ill in bed?

Oh, February I'd be in bed a couple of weeks with bronchitis, and I don't really remember how long I'd be in bed. But I knew I had measles at one time, and then I suppose another year I had whooping cough, and I had chicken pox - I had all the childish things that were going about in those days.

Now, nowadays exercise is recommended for people with diabetes. Was that true for you then?

No, I didn't have any exercises.

Did you get much exercise at all?

No, I didn't. Not until I was much older - dancing and so on, but that was when I was much older. When I was about nine or ten, my mother and father and grandparents were told that I wouldn't live to be fourteen, but I beat them all and I did live!

And what was your health like when you were fourteen?

Well, my health started to get much better, and, of course, I got over all the measles and whooping cough and all that - I didn't have anything like that. So, I didn't have as much illness after I was fourteen, and I started to get stronger and manage to get out and about.

At what age did you begin to do your own injections?

Oh, I would think about... perhaps about sixteen. If I wanted to go out anywhere to friends and have a meal, well, then I had to do my own injection, and once I started to do the injections, I carried on doing them myself, and I've been doing them ever since - twice a day.

How did you manage to make friends if you weren't going to school?

Neighbours. Neighbours' children would... they'd come in to me, and come in and play with me and all that. They were very kind, the neighbours.

Once your health begun to improve when you were fourteen, was there any question of you starting school then?

No. I think, for one thing, I didn't want to go to school then, at that age. And I'd got away with it, and I just didn't want to go to school when I was older. But I had this lady that came to teach me things, and all she wanted to do was teach me French, and I didn't want that!

(4) How much contact with the medical profession did you have as you were growing up?

Well, I had quite a lot. I had regular contact with my doctor, Dr Hunter, and he saw to me and saw how I was getting on, and advising my parents how to treat me, with being diabetic. And he was very good. I remember he used to come every week to see me.

And presumably your parents had to pay for this since it was before the National...?

Yes, oh yes - no National Health in those days.

And can you describe to me, as you remember it, a visit from your doctor? When he was coming to check up on you, what would he do?

I remember he came on Boxing Day, and we were just having a turkey dinner - turkey lunch, and I was very cross about it, really. And he took me to one side, and he did a blood test in those days, but he got it from a vein - not like you do it today: prick your finger. He got some blood from a vein to do a blood test.

And then when would you have got the results of that test?

The following week; when he came the next week. As far as I remember, he used to come to see me nearly every week for a long time.

How did people, in general, react to a little girl having diabetes?

Well, some people didn't like the idea of their children mixing with me sometimes, but there were very few like that. They were all very kind to me, and most of the neighbours' children would come in and play with me.

Had people heard of diabetes?

Not very much, no. But I do believe - I've only just thought about this - that many years ago, before I was diabetic, there was a distant cousin - I don't know who she was or what she was - but I heard that she just died of being diabetic, but I think that was before there was insulin. But the general impression in those days, people thought that diabetics were always elderly people, and I don't think they'd heard of a child having diabetes before. I was the first one.

What did you do with your time as you were growing up when you weren't in bed ill?

Well, if it was raining or the weather was bad, I listened to the radio quite a lot, because there wasn't any television in those days. And if the weather was nice, my mother would take me up on the Hoe, because we were living in Plymouth, and we'd go up on Plymouth Hoe, and that was very nice, and then down onto the seashore sometimes. And I never ever seemed to be bored in those days.

Did you play any music?

I played the piano, yes, and passed several exams when I was playing the piano. And I used to enjoy that very much.

- (5) You said that you started going out and about when you were about sixteen, so that would be 1935 - before the war. What kind of social life did you have then?

Well, I wasn't allowed to go to the picture house, because I wasn't allowed to mix with crowds of people in case I picked up any germs! But it was mainly down on the beach or up on the Hoe or things like that. And I used to get out and walk about quite a bit - going out shopping with my mother. And I didn't mix with people till I was older.

What did you do when the war started, when you were twenty, in 1939?

Oh, I went to the Air Raid Precautions - I joined that and learned to drive an ambulance. And then I went in for exams for the Red Cross, and I passed the exams for that, so I was a Red Cross nurse for part of the war; the latter part of the war.

So, that must have felt like a whole new freedom after being at home so much?

Yes, oh yes, it was. I used to really enjoy it, apart from the air raids, and that was dreadful. We found, you know, some terrible... I don't know if you want to know what happened, but one thing that stays in my mind - there'd been a lot of bombing, and I'd driven the ambulance down the road. And there was a soldier and a young lady with their arms round one another in a shop doorway. And I never forget it - they were both dead. It was the blast from the bomb that had killed them. You couldn't see they were injured, but the blast had taken their breath. And that was a very sad moment for me during the war.

How did you cope with being a Red Cross nurse after your very sheltered upbringing?

Well, my grandfather, being a doctor, told me lots of things, you know, and I used to do first aid and all that when I was young. I was interested in medicine, and really, I should have been a boy, they told me, so I could be a doctor, 'cause we didn't have lady doctors in those days!

- (6) Were these wartime memories in Plymouth?

No, they were in Manchester then. We moved to Manchester after my father retired from the Navy. My grandfather, who was a doctor, was my father's father, and they lived in Manchester, but he used to visit us a lot in Plymouth.

But the grandparents you lived with in Plymouth, then, were your mother's parents?

The grandparents we lived with in Plymouth was my mother's parents.

How did you come to meet your husband?

Well, I was a driver for the Royal Ordnance Factory in Manchester, and my husband worked there and that's where I met him, and we got on very well together and eventually got married.

So, was that the first time that you left home, when you got married?

Yes, oh yes, first time I left home, yes. But I was quite capable of looking after myself, but I think in those... wartime, I still wasn't doing blood tests; you didn't do your own blood test as long ago as that.

(7) I was twenty four years old when I got married.

How did your husband react to you having diabetes?

It didn't seem to worry him at all, because I kept very well in those days, and as long as I was fit and well, it didn't bother him that I was diabetic.

Were you worried that it might be difficult to have children?

Yes, I was told I wouldn't have any children.

When were you told that?

Oh, when I lived in Plymouth, before I... oh, long before I was married, when I was reasonably young, and I think it was more or less soon after they discovered I was diabetic. And they said that I wouldn't be having any children, but I kidded them all, and I did have a daughter in 1945.

Did it seem a great risk, even then in 1945, to go ahead and have a child?

Well, yes. I had an induction at eight months, and she was very fit and well, although she was a month early. And I was in hospital a month when I had her, but we got over it very well.

Can you remember which hospital it was?

Yes - Hope Hospital in Eccles Old Road, Salford.

And what were hospitals like in those days compared with nowadays?

Well, they seemed to be, I would say, happier in those days, because there weren't all the strict rules and regulations and restrictions and so on. And when I used to go into hospital various times for little bits and things, all the nurses, they all seemed to have a happy atmosphere. And, of course, they had a matron in those days, and the matron would come round, and she'd always be very nice and very friendly.

What do you mean that they didn't have sort of rules and regulations in those days?

Well, I find now that it's sort of regimental, now, in a hospital. The nurses seem to be more like... they're ruled somehow. They seem to be not as happy-go-lucky as what they used to be years ago.

How does that show itself?

Well, I think it's just the way they'd come and talk to you and react to you, and they'd just be more friendly towards the patients. Probably they didn't have as many patients in those days as what they have now, and they had more time to talk to you and be friendly with you.

I would imagine when you were a child there were fairly strict rules, were there not, about visiting times and things like that?

Oh no, because I was in a nursing home, and my parents could visit me any time of the day.

(8) Did you have any paid work when you were married?

No, I didn't. I joined the amateur dramatics, and I was in nearly all the musicals for a few years, but when I got married, my husband didn't like me doing it, so I had to give it up.

So, you gave up amateur dramatics and you didn't do any paid work?

No.

So, what did you do after your daughter was born?

Well, sometimes... I think when she was about five or six, I had the chance of going into Granada Television, and I was in three plays called "The Verdict Is Yours", and it was on for three nights in one week. And I enjoyed doing that - that was very nice.

Did you have a big part?

No, only as a witness in a court case.

How did you get that - was that through amateur dramatics again?

Yes, it was through amateur dramatics. Another thing I did later on, I always liked poodles, and I got a poodle and I used to then breed poodles, and I kept several poodles. And I remember one of the first puppies was a dog, and my daughter wanted to call it Elvis, because she liked Elvis Presley in those days!

And what was your husband's job?

He had a furniture shop in Manchester - no, in Salford, sorry - he had a furniture shop in Salford, and he worked in the furniture business right up until he died in 1972.



(9) And how well were you managing your diabetes all the time that your daughter was growing up?

Oh, I managed very well. I seem to have been able to control my diabetes right though my life, really. And now people think I take liberties, but if I need some ice-cream, I'll have extra insulin. If I don't have anything to eat, if I don't feel like eating, well, I don't have as much insulin. I know how to restrict the amount I have, and if I'm going out for a meal, a big meal, I'll have extra insulin.

But you wouldn't always have adjusted your insulin, or would you?

Oh no, not until after I was married. Oh no, I never adjusted it beforehand. People used to say "oh, you shouldn't change your insulin without telling your doctor". But now, of course, the last, what, thirty years, I suppose, I've managed it myself. And I used to go to a diabetic clinic once a month, and then it went to once in four months, and then I was taken in hospital and had a hysterectomy. And when I came out - oh, when I was in hospital, they gave me a bigger dose of insulin in the morning than I was used to having, because they gave me a cooked meal at midday, which I never had at home. So, when I went back to see the diabetic clinic after my operation, I explained to the doctor that I wasn't having the big dose of insulin in the morning because of having my main meal at night, so that's when I had the bigger dose of insulin. And he looked at me and he took hold of my hand, and he said to me "my dear, you know more about diabetes than we do", and I felt very proud about that.

(10) And you've also just remembered that in your childhood they tried you on tablets. Can you tell me more about those memories?

Yes. I'd been having insulin for many years, and when these tablets came out they tried me on them, but I'm afraid they didn't work. And I was told that once you have insulin, you can't leave it off - you can't take tablets after you've been taking insulin.

Now, returning to the changes you've seen, apart from being able to adjust your insulin in a way you wouldn't have done, how has blood testing changed over the years?

Oh, it's changed terrifically, because I was never able to do blood tests myself - I had to have the doctor do it or the hospital do it. But now there are these little computers to do a blood test, it's really wonderful and it's so easy to do. And I always do a blood test every night when I go to bed, because I don't like my blood sugar to drop in the night in case I have a mini-stroke.

Have you had any mini-strokes?

Yes, I've had several, yes, and that's when I started to do the blood test at night.

But you presumably didn't have this sophisticated blood testing when you first started. What did you do when you first started blood testing?

Oh, I started with this. One Touch Ultra I use, and that's the first one I've had.

And have you had many different insulins over the years?

Well, they tried me on a insulin - I'm sorry, I've forgot the name of it - but it worked for twenty four hours; I only had to have one injection a day instead of two. But I'm afraid it didn't work for me at all, so I had to go back to the two injections a day.

And you've had two injections, then...?

Yes, all my life, really. Almost all my life I've had two injections a day, since being eight years old.

And has your diet changed over the years?

Oh, yes, it's changed a lot. I have a much better diet these days. It's really hardly a diet at all, because whatever I'm going to have to eat, if it's sweet or anything, I automatically have extra insulin. So, really, I have a much more varied diet now than I had years ago.

What would a typical meal have been when you were a child?

Oh, I suppose meat and two veg, and fruit, I suppose - raw fruit.

And what would you be allowed to have now, that you weren't allowed to have then?

Ice-cream, cheesecake!

(11) Have you developed any complications in your health over the years?

Not really. I had a stroke soon after I moved in here, and the hospital said it was through stress. And it affected my right side, and the right side of my face dropped and they called it Bell's Palsy, and it affected me walking. And - this is six years ago - and my right hand and arm are always cold now; I've no pain or anything and I can use it, but my right hand and arm is always cold. I think that was after the stroke.

Have you had any difficulties with your feet?

No. I've got a couple of toenails that are very thick, and I have a chiropodist to cut my toenails, and he always taps my calf and he says "you've got very good feet". I haven't got any corns or bunions or anything.

And have you had any problems with your eyes?

Yes, I have had problems, but the hospital said it's wear and tear, so I said to the doctor "is that old age?", so he said "oh, well, I didn't say that"! But I think it's because of my age my eyesight isn't quite as good as it used to be. But I only need glasses for reading - I don't need to wear them all the time, although I've had a car since I was eighteen, and three years ago, the doctor... the insurance send me a form to take to the doctor, he has to sign it to say I'm fit to drive. Well, three years ago he said I shouldn't be driving because of my eyesight - my deteriorating eyesight. So then, three years ago, I had to give up my car.

Can you describe a typical day in your life now, going through any treatment for your diabetes, and just what you do each day?

Well, I'm lazy, I'm afraid, and I have television in my bedroom. And if I'm not going out that day, I usually stay in bed till about ten o'clock watching my television in bed, and I enjoy it. I've got a kettle beside the bed and I make coffee, and I'm quite happy to have a lie-in in the morning.

And when do you take your injection?

Oh, I have an injection half an hour before my breakfast - usually at seven o'clock, and I have breakfast in bed at half past seven. And I have an injection at five o'clock at night, and I have my main meal at half past five - the main meal of the day.

(12) What do you do during the day?

Well, I'm afraid I watch an awful lot of television, and if the weather's nice I'll go out. And I go shopping, and I visit various people here in Wakering, where I'm living now: I've got several friends that live in the village. And I'm never bored.

And what do you have for lunch and your evening meal?

Dare I say! I usually, for lunch, have cheese and biscuits and a glass of wine - white wine.

And for your evening meal?

Well, I'm very fond of chicken and vegetables, and I'm very lazy at cooking these days, living alone. I usually do a meal in the microwave, and I can buy ready-made meals, and I just put it in the microwave and in four minutes it's all ready - a meat and vegetable and gravy. It's a lazy way of eating, I'm afraid, but I enjoy it.

And how often do you go for a walk or have any exercise?

Well, on a Tuesday I walk down to the Post Office and get my old-age pension. And I belong to the Good Companions' Club here, and they meet once a month, and I go to that. And then every other Thursday, the Evangelical Church have a coffee morning, and I go to that. And I walk round the local park here in the summer, when the weather's nice. I think that's about the lot.

And do you walk to your GP's surgery?

Yes, I do, but luckily I don't have to go very often. I don't go unless I'm worried about something, which is never to do with diabetes. I've just had a very serious cut on my finger, which had to be stitched up. I went for that and then I went to have the stitches taken out. But generally speaking, I don't need to see the doctor very often.

Have you had many hypos in your lifetime?

Well, not latterly, but I remember once, when I was a child, I must have passed out. And my father was at home and he took me to hospital in the car, and I didn't remember him taking me. I seemed to come round in hospital and wondered why I was there. That was the worst one, I think - that was when I was a child. But I haven't had any hypos, not for a long, long time - I think because I keep a check on my blood sugar; do blood tests. And if I feel - perhaps sometimes lunchtime, I think "oh, I'm not too good" - I'll do a blood test, and if the blood sugar is low, well, then I'll have some chocolate or some ice-cream.

How often do you do a blood test in a day?

Usually only when I go to bed at night, usually. Only if I don't feel too good during the day I'll do an extra one.

(13) How do you think your life would have been different if you hadn't had diabetes?

Oh, I've no idea. I suppose I would have been a career girl or something if I'd had a good education, but I don't really know how it would have... Must have affected me in some way, with not going to school, but it hasn't held me back at all - I've always done what I want to do.

But I think you said it was more the bronchitis that stopped you going to school than diabetes?

Yes, it was, my chest - I had a very bad chest... But I have just remembered something in my youth - I don't know if you'd like to hear it. When I was... I think I was about three, and I had beautiful blond curly hair. And I had my photograph taken and an enlargement done, and I won the Pears' Soap competition, so I was a Pears' Soap girl when I was very young!

But then, as you say, when you were three, you began to be ill and you had pneumonia. Would you describe yourself as having been a sickly child?

Well, yes, I suppose, really, I would have been. My chest was very bad. I've still, today, got a rattly chest, but I don't have bronchitis now; I grew out of that. When everybody hears me coughing like that, they always say to me "you shouldn't smoke", and I've never smoked in my life.

So, no vices then, except for the daily glass of wine?

No. I enjoy a glass of wine. I have a glass of wine my lunch, and a glass of wine my evening meal, and I enjoy it.

(14) And what keeps you going?

Well, I find living here in Great Wakering, it's a very friendly village, and when I walk down to the shops, so many people will talk to me. Even if I don't know them, they'll always say "hello" and "it's a nice day" or "how are you?", and it's a very nice... I enjoy walking down to the village and meeting the villagers.

And you're still able to look after yourself completely?

Oh yes, I can completely look after myself, yes. We've got a laundry room here - I can do the laundry easily. But yes, I can look after myself - do my own housework and my own cooking in the microwave.

What message would you have for anyone who was newly diagnosed with diabetes now, from all your seventy seven years of experience?

Well, if you're on insulin you've got to watch your diet. If you have anything you shouldn't have, you increase your insulin, and if you don't feel like anything to eat you mustn't have any insulin. But I think that really is... What I do, I adjust my insulin to whatever I'm going to have to eat. But I can't give any advice to anyone having tablets, because I've never had them - I don't know how they would affect anybody.

Do you have any memories of that short trial with tablets of what that was like?

No, I don't - I was too young. I know I was very, very disappointed that they didn't work for me, because I thought I'd stop having injections. But I was very disappointed at the time, but I got over it.

So, that suggests that you really didn't like injections when you were a child.

Oh no, I don't think anybody likes them, but it's a case of you've got to have it or you die. It's life for you, injections, when you're diabetic.

Would you say that your life has been dominated by diabetes?

I don't think so. I've always done whatever I've wanted to do. It hasn't really restricted me very much.

What effect has it had on your skin - seventy seven years of injections?

Well, sometimes you get a little red mark. I do in the top of my thighs and in my arms, and sometimes it will leave a mark, but other times it doesn't, because these syringes and needles now are absolutely wonderful. You really don't feel the needle going in at all.

(15) Have you travelled much during your life?

I have travelled, yes. When I was young - I don't remember a great deal about it - my father was stationed in Malta for five years, and my mother and I went over and stayed in Malta for a while, and it was very nice. But I've travelled since I've been older, and I like Majorca very much - that's a lovely place to go to. And for six years on the trot I went to Jersey, and I really love Jersey, but I had to stop going because I've got angina, and the doctor said I shouldn't fly because of the pressure in the cabin in the aircraft. So, my trips abroad, now, are over, I'm afraid.

But before you got angina, did you find it a difficulty in any way, travelling with diabetes?

No, I didn't find it difficult at all, no. And sometimes now, if I go out for an evening meal, I'm sitting at the table and there's a tablecloth, I can give myself

an injection in my leg through my tights, and nobody knows I've had it.

How long do you think you've been doing that?

Oh, for many years, and a lot of people don't even know I have insulin if I'm out for a meal, if there's a crowd of us. But I can always do it sort of down on my lap, you see, and nobody can see what I'm doing, and I have my syringe and bottle of insulin in my evening bag.

Well, now you do it through your tights, and tights didn't come in until the 1960s. Do you think you might have injected yourself at the top of your leg in the days that you wore stockings, or not?

Oh, I think so, yes, because I wouldn't have to go through the stockings - you've got a bare patch at the top, haven't you. But I don't think I would have injected myself in the days when I wore stockings. I've only done it more recently when I've been wearing tights, and I just pull the tights away from my leg - my skin - and just put the needle through it, and it doesn't ladder them.

(16) Do you ever go to a diabetic clinic for a check-up?

No, I never go to a diabetic clinic. After the doctor told me - I have told you this - after an operation I had many years ago, he took hold of my hand and said I know more about diabetes than they do, I never went back to a diabetic clinic again.

So who monitors your diabetes? Who keeps an eye on your diabetes to make sure you're okay?

I do. I look after myself - do my own blood tests and so on, so I don't really need to see a doctor for my diabetes. If I've got anything else the matter with me, if I've a very bad cough or anything, or something apart from diabetes that I have to go to a doctor, I go, but I never have to go... I've never - I've been here, now, eight years, living here in Woking - and I've never had to go to a doctor for diabetes.

What was your life like before you moved into these retirement flats?

Well, I had a very nice house and very large garden, and I was very happy there, but as I got older, I found it was - the garden particularly - was a bind, really. And I got a gardener to come, and all he would do was cut the lawns. And I asked him so many times to do the weeding, which is the hardest part of gardening, but he wouldn't do the weeding. And the house was getting a bit much for me to look after when I was getting older, and so I decided to sell it and buy retirement flat here in Woking. And it broke my heart, really, to leave where I was. I was very happy there in my home, but it was really getting a bit too much for me when I was getting towards being eighty - it was a bit too much, so I bought this retirement flat. But, as I've said before, the villagers are very nice, very kind and very friendly.

(17) What was the happiest time of your life?

Well, I think it must have been when I was first married. We were very happy, and it was wartime and there was rationing, of course - food rationing - but because I was diabetic, I had extra food rations, so that helped quite a lot.

Can you remember what the extra rations were?

Yes, I used to have extra butter, and if there were any eggs about - which wasn't very often - I was always managed to get one egg. And I had extra meat and bacon - not a great deal, but it was a bit more than what the ordinary people had. And another time I feel happiness, after my daughter was born. And when she was a little girl, she was really lovely, and she was very sweet and she was very good, and that was a very happy time for me.

Were you ever worried that you might have a hypo when you were at home with a small child and your husband was not there?

No, I don't ever remember having a hypo in those days. I don't know... I have had hypos more recently, I think - well, when I say recently, about twenty years ago - but I don't really remember having hypos when my daughter was young.

How have you dealt with them when you've had them in more recent years?

Well, I always - if I'm at home, here, or if I'm out - I always carry glucose tablets: Dextro. And I don't know why - you can only get them at a chemist. But if I go out, I always take a tube with me, and here, I've always got a tube next to where I sit, and if I feel a bit squiffy, I'll have some glucose. But luckily, I never get bad enough to have a bad hypo - I seem to have warning before. But I'm very lucky really; I hardly ever have any bad effects.

What did you do before glucose tablets were easily available?

I used to have a bottle with lumps of sugar in it, and carry that around with me in my handbag. Yes, it was a bit of a drag having a pill bottle in my handbag full of lumps of sugar, but it had to be done, you know, just to make sure I was all right.

Did you have to resort to lumps of sugar very often?

No, not very often, but I did have to on the odd occasion.

(18) Since I switched off the microphone, you've mentioned lots of things that you've done that you haven't told me during this interview, so tell me about a few of them. Tell me about the WRVS - what did you do for them?

Well, I delivered meals on wheels for them for twenty one years. And after I'd done twenty years delivering meals, I had a long service medal. And I'm very proud of it, and I always wear it on the eleventh of November when I go to the remembrance service at the British Legion.

And what else have you done?

Well, I was chairman of the Townswomen's Guild for three years, but I was a member for about twelve years before that. And then eventually I was chairman, and I enjoyed it very much, and if the speaker didn't arrive, I'd do a monologue for them.

What sort of monologue?

Would you like me to do one for you now?

Yes, please.

This is just a line to say I'm living, that I'm not among the dead, although I'm getting more forgetful and mixed up in my head. I've got used to my arthritis and my dentures I'm resigned, I can cope with my bifocals, but ye gods I miss my mind. Sometimes I can't remember when I'm standing by the stair, if I should be going up for something or have just come down from there. And before the fridge so often, my mind is full of doubt, now did I put some food away or come to take some out? So, remember I do love you and wish that you live near, and now it's time to post this and say goodbye my dear. At last I stand beside the post-box, and my face, it sure is red. Instead of posting this to you, I've opened it instead!

I hope you like that. I should have said, this was a letter from an old lady to her daughter, and I hope my daughter will enjoy it.