

Who Cares? project

Transcript of podcast episode 1: IRIS

[Music plays]

Narrator: Welcome to the Who Cares? project podcast. Who Cares? is an intergenerational oral history project, generously supported by the National Heritage Lottery Fund.

In the spring of 2023, 40 A level drama and acting diploma student, interviewed 12 people living in six care homes, in South London. What you're listening to here is an edited version of one of those original interviews. This one is with Kyra. Additional interviews with families, friends and carers were recorded by the project producers. The Who Cares? project was created to give a voice to people whose stories might otherwise go untold. For more information, please go to www.whocaresproject.co.uk.

Maciek: Hello, good afternoon, how are you, are you all right? Good to see you. How you doing?

Iris: You'd be amazed at his voice [guitar plays]. Oh, I just want to listen.

Maciek: Hello Beryl, good afternoon Beryl.

Iris: He knows everybody's name.

Maciek: I'll pull up a chair [guitar plays].

Iris: My name is Iris and I live in a care home in London. I was born in 1938 and I've got one son and two grandchildren and have just become a great grandmother.

[Music plays]

Maciek: Do you remember that one, by Mud? [Sings].

Iris: He's got such a lovely voice.

My dad come from Scotland and he was a policeman and my mum was an eastender. They were lovely parents. Good. We had a good time. We had our rows, like you do. The boyfriends... they didn't approve of 'em [laughs]. I had three sisters and one brother. Good company for each other. No, they were good fun. Someone to have a laugh with, you know, after school. Unfortunately, they died in an early life and didn't deserve to go. Not so young. It was terrible. Losing anything. If you only lose a cat, it's terrible, ain't it? No, sad, sad time. But there you go; it works out, don't it. Memories you have. You can't get rid of them, can you?

[Music plays]

Iris: Ahh, lovely.

Maciek: No, we haven't started the session. That was just a quick little, just to get my fingers into that finger picking style.

Alison: My name's Alison. I'm the wellbeing co-ordinator at Ronald Gibson House. I've been here for five years now and yeah; I get to have lots of fun with the residents. Today we've got Maciek coming in. He is a member of a group called Lost Chord. He's absolutely fabulous. So engaged with the residents. So full of life that I think – and a lot of the residents go away

exhausted, but it's a good exhaustion [laughs] and the ladies love him. They all have a twinkle in their eye when he comes in. We even have some of them are saying, 'oh I've got to find my lipstick, because he's coming in today so I've got to put my lipstick on today'.

[Music plays]

Iris: We lived in Mitcham. Yeah, I lived there, oh, till I got married really. It was a council house but it was a lovely house. We had lovely neighbours. Round Mitcham it was all Labour, but it's Conservative now everywhere. But I don't mind really. I'm not into all that, as long as they treat you all right, it's alright ain't it. Church of England we were. So, we remembered there was God, you know. You still do now. You think, oh, I wish he was looking after me, or looking over me, you know. You still think like that don't you?

Maciek: We're building towards a Christmas concert, ladies, so I thought maybe during the Christmas concert, I can do one number to show off my operatic skills.

Iris: Oh yeah.

Maciek: Just for you guys to have a listen to now, before you get your chance to sing, and we do the session. Iris asked for Oh Holy Night.

Iris: Mm, I did.

Maciek: So, let's start with that.

Iris: Thank you.

[Music plays]

Maciek: Can everyone hear the backing track, yeah?

Iris: It's you I wanna hear.

[Music plays]

Iris: I went to school to learn. I done what I should do and done it but I never went to the higher schools or anything like that but I enjoyed it. I learned what I wanted to learn. I had lots of friends. I don't keep up with many friends nowadays but it's a shame, you should do. We used to go to Blackpool or Brighton. That was good fun. There on the old Brighton beaches. Well, you had to like it, didn't you? Didn't like the stones. Oh, blimey. My mum and dad couldn't afford to go abroad. They took us to the zoos and that was all.

Maciek: Oh, night divine everyone, oh night divine. Oh, holy night, what a lovely number. Thank you. Thank you, Kyra. Thank you, Beryl. Thank you, Iris. And thank you...

Iris: Thank you.

Maciek: Thank you.

Iris: You kept your promise.

Iris: I remember the war. Yeah, I remember that all right. The bombs dropping, oh and the noise, nnnneeeewerrr, and you never knew if it was going to hit your house. Terrible times. I was evacuated to Leicester. Only me because my dad had to go out every night, you know, look for bombs. I don't know where my brother went. Yeah, nice place it was and she was lovely the woman that looked after us. As I say, it's unbelievable ain't it. You don't want them days back again.

Maciek: Very good. I think we're getting there. We just need to get our diaphragms working a bit. Okay so we're now going to do a few breathing exercises, so you're going to repeat after me. You're going to go, sh, sh, sh. Sh, sh, sh. Do that one again.

Iris: I was 14 when I left school and I started work. Yeah, we started very early in them days. I worked for Frys Metals in Mitcham. I was a comptometer operator. It's a machine like that, and it goes 17 and sixpence, oh you wouldn't know that but it's a 50 pence, three and a four and two threes. I say you get your speed. Yeah I done that for years and it was nice. I'd like to do it now. I could still do it. I could still do it. Something you don't forget ain't it. Then I become an auditor. I enjoyed my work life. We had good fun.

[Music plays]

Iris: I didn't sing. I haven't got a voice. I jived. I was a jiver.

[Music plays]

Iris: Me and Ray, that was my partner, we used to go everywhere and jive. Because we never jived with anyone else, we were just us two because you have to sit and wait for someone to ask you to dance in the dance halls in them days, but, you know, you learn. When they asked you to dance, you learn. You have to or you don't get asked again. [laughs] With Ray, we went everywhere. Wimbledon Palais, we used to go there. My dad used to take me there and then he'd pick me up to come home. That was my life, you know. I'd like that back, that era, ha.

[Music plays]

Alison: Iris is lovely. Sometimes she's really outgoing and she can be really cheeky. If there's an inuendo she will pick up on it, she will give you a sly little look and you sort of just catch her eye and she just makes you laugh. She used to come and visit us so she actually used to live at home but come and visit us two or three times a week and just join in the activity and join in the singing, and we'd always be doing stuff. I think it was for company.

Iris: That's what started me off really, visiting every week, just to see them. It was good fun, with all of them. We used to have a laugh, we did.

Alison: She's always got a story. She's always encouraging the other residents, she's that type of person. You can go up and squeeze her and give her a hug and that sort of thing and she

loves to know about everybody. We have like a sort of a divide, a partition in the main lounge and she likes sitting at the very end of that, which is probably in the centre of the room and then she can see what the carers are doing at the hatch for the dining room or who's having dinner there. She can then also see anyone that's going up to reception, who's coming in. She really is wonderful and she's so caring but she can be very, very shy and she can get anxious and I think that's more so since the pandemic.

[Music plays]

Iris: My husband's name was Brian, about 50 odd years, 57 years we were married. Not many people can say that can they? He was a lovely man. Jealous. He was a jealous man, but a lovely man. Someone you can take home to mum [laughs]. Got married in a registry office at South Wimbledon. 11/11/61. Been waiting a long time to get married. Couldn't afford it you see. Weddings cost too much in them days. But it was nice. I had a green suit, green hat. Absolutely loved it. Not many of us. They all wore a red poppy. We went into a café to have our reception and it was good. We didn't have honeymoons in them days. We moved to Colliers Wood. We had some lovely times, my husband and I, there. We were happy with each other. You don't have to go and find another woman or a man. Or we didn't, well not that I know of. You never know, do you? It's only when I got married, Brian and I went abroad. Oh Spain, Greece. We kept going and going, you know. The Greek people are very kind, very nice. So is the Spanish. I wouldn't go on my own but I'd love to go. That's all over and done with now.

[Music plays]

Iris: The happiest time for me was when my son was born, I think. I had a good birth. I just wanted to know whether it was a boy or a girl. I would have pushed it back if it was a girl. I think because I had a lot of girls in my family, I just wanted a son, you know. His dad could be prouder. He was a very proud father. Very nice. We tried for more, but things don't happen do they? What's to be will be. He was a good laugh, my son. He still is really, you know, but no, he was very good and then I got a grandson but something went wrong because I got a great granddaughter [laughs]. Ginger. She'll be a year old next month. Unbelievable.

[Music plays]

Maciek: Well, done everyone. Well done.

Alison: During the pandemic, we obviously shut down to outside visitors which meant that Iris then couldn't come for her two, three times a week that she normally visited us. She was in her home for nearly two years, on her own. I think her son used to come and visit every now and again and she got afraid of letting anyone in.

Iris: Oh, the pandemic was awful. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't come to terms with it to be honest. It was just awful. Nobody about. Having to stay in. Being on your own's the frightening thing. You know you've got no one to talk to, to say, how are you, and things like

that. I was petrified to go out. I just couldn't go out. I didn't speak to a soul outside. If I wanted to do my shopping, I got Iceland, they come and done my shopping. My son ordered it and then they come and delivered it. I couldn't get past the front door. At the gate was the further they got. My front gate. I couldn't get into anybody's car. I was just petrified of people. You know, thinking, oh god, I might get it and that. It was scary, wasn't it? It just affected me like that. I just couldn't bear the thought of seeing people because they might think I've got it. I think that's what it was. It made me not talk to anybody. I think there was so long not having to talk, it must be that. I don't know.

Alison: Some of the staff would try and visit her. She would then only say to staff members to stand at her gate, whilst she stood at her door and I think that was like literally as close as anyone could get to her, which was really difficult for those staff members because they would come back and report, oh she's all right but we think that she's not really coping. I don't think until the pandemic, she ever thought that she would be here as a resident. Like so many others, she sort of deteriorated and she actually ended up coming here because she ended up in hospital because I think she had a fall. We have the rehab unit, which is part of St Georges. They could come in here before they went home, but they get physio but they were medically stable.

So, she came in on that, and it was literally one day, I was like, I looked at the name on our fire list, and I was like, I recognise that name and I think she'd literally come in the day before and I was like, well that's Iris [laughs]. They were like, 'oh who's Iris?' I was like, Iris, Iris that came into us. Used to come into us but when she did come in, I almost didn't recognise her. She was confused. She didn't know where she was. Wasn't saying anything but within a couple of days she was sort of back to her old self, like she used to be here but there was that slight difference in her, which I think was a knock of her confidence because she hadn't gone out for two years.

Iris: I really enjoyed coming back. I can speak to people and talk to people. It's because I've had to, so that done me a power of good really. People wanted to know me; you know what I mean. It was lovely. The more I met, the better it was and then I decided to go permanent. You know, live here. I done six weeks and then you have to either get out or join up. I'm too old to go on me own in the house. My son was pleased in one respect. I had to go to a home of sorts and I knew this one, so it's very nice. It's very nice. They're lovely people. It's been very good and they've been so kind to me. Now I can't walk and they got me a wheelchair so I'm very pleased.

Maciek: We got egg shakers and we got bells. Iris would you like a bell.

Iris: Yeah, I don't know why.

Alison: The pandemic was horrible, horrible. Obviously going into lockdown, residents not being able to see their families. It was really tough. It was really scary and it was just trying to be there to support the residents but the hard part was coming in, thinking, hang on, I'm coming in by public transport. Am I bringing something into the residents, which was a massive thing, especially at the beginning when nobody knew if people were going to die or survive. I mean, lucky enough, touch wood we didn't have that many that passed but if you did lose somebody there was that emotional strain as well, because it was like, oh is it

me. I've sneezed three times in a row, have I got it? Have I given it to them now? Yeah. Really, really hard.

I think most of us would come in here and wouldn't say, oh it's just a job. Basically, you wouldn't come here just for a job, because healthcare is one of the poorest paid jobs you can get. So, we all do it because we love what we do. They are like our family. We did still try to have groups when we could do. We did go and see everybody. So, it was just trying to keep it as normal for them as we could. We got through it and we're sort of out the other side and we're still here trying to protect the residents. Even with people having the jabs, it can still cause harm to some of our residents. Yeah, still a bit of a hangover from it. It's not just all done and dusted and gone away.

Maciek: Thank you so much for a great session. Thank you. Thank you. Brilliant.

Iris: When you back?

Maciek: Thank you for being wonderful. For really making it a special session and I'll see you in a couple of weeks for more fun. Beautiful, thank you so much. Great no worries.

Alison: Can we thank Mac one more time [clapping].

Kyra: You're my favourite, Mac.

Iris: I don't know how he does it with a voice like that. You just can't believe he's doing what he's doing. I can't anyway. I must be, you know, with a voice like he's got, I don't want him to lark about, I just want him to sing [laughter]. You know, [laughs]. You wouldn't think he was married or you'd think he's had 20 girlfriends, wouldn't you? Well, I would. I'd be one of them, and you'd be too. Wouldn't you, Kyra?

Alison: Tea or coffee?

Kyra: Tea please.

Alison: Tea / coffee?

Iris: Not bad this cake is it?

Iris: Alison is lovely. She's been my friend for about five years now and she always advises me, you know. She's a lovely, lovely lady. I love music, always have loved it. Used to jive all the time, Brian never minded. Just Ray, well there wasn't anything in it, just simply, you know, jiving partners. His bum never stopped, going backwards and forward and his legs out. Oh goodness me. You see it on the Strictly Come Dancing, and it's true and just a jive is like that. Brian my husband, he used to wait for me outside. I used to come home, from work by tube. By the pillar box there, he used to be standing there, with his arm on it waiting for me. He just liked me from the start. He never knew what my name was or anything, but he used to sit and he liked me.

'Do you want to go dancing', I said, 'oh yeah. So, I had Brian and that's how it was but then Ray, come along and we used to just go. Brian used to come as well but he wasn't my jiving partner. He liked to smooch [laughs]. Fifty years, and yet he died when he was 68 of bowel cancer and he died in my arms. He came home. He wanted to be with me. That's so sad.

Thank you very much for my lipstick. Oh yeah.

Kyra: Just a small thing.

Iris: Are you sure I don't owe you anything?

Kyra: No, no, no my treat.

Iris: That's very kind isn't it.

Kyra: Christmas treat [laughs].

Iris: It was good. I had a good life. Really good. Me leg's gone stiff.

Alison: Do you need to sit up more?

Iris: No, I'm all right. Thank you. Is it getting dark again? It draws in so quick, don't it?

[Music plays]

Maciek: [Sings] All you need is love.

[Music plays]

Maciek: Thank you very much everyone.

[Applause]

Narrator: The Who Cares? Interviews were recorded by students from Burntwood School, the Norwood School, Rachel Edwards and Sasha Neal, with additional material recorded by Rachel Edwards, Sasha Neal and Nic Wassell. This episode was edited by Sasha Neal and directed by Rachel Edwards and Sasha Neal.

[Music plays]



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