

Who Cares? project

Transcript of podcast episode 12: LILIAN

[Music plays]

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

In the spring of 2023, 40 A level drama and acting diploma students, 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 Lilian. 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.

[Music plays]

Lilian: My name is Lilian and I live in a care home. I was born in 1921 so I'm getting on a bit [laughs].

[Music plays]

Comfort: My name is Comfort, I'm a carer. I've been working in this home about 20 years. Lilian is a very nice lady. She came to this home when I was working on the second floor. She came about five, more than five years – I forgot. It's about six years ago. She's over 100 years. Lilian is a very charming lady. She likes to go out on a bus ride. She loves it. When she comes back she will tell you - wherever they went she'll come and tell you and it's so amazing. It's good when she comes back. You can see that, you know, she relaxes. When I tell her, oh Lili, I'm getting old, 'oh you're not getting old. Look at me' and she likes to go to the hairdresser to do her hair every two weeks, she likes her hair to be done. She looks glamorous.

[Music plays]

Lilian: I was born in Walworth in London. I was one of a big family growing up, yeah. There were 12 of us all together. Six of each. Six boys, six girls. I was the fourth girl. One was born, she had a medical problem, Lucy, and she spent most of her life in hospital. I remember that. It was before the National Health and it was paid for by the church itself. I remember she had scars all up her legs and they took a bit from one leg into the other. I remember going to see her in the hospital. My mother was French. When she was younger she was quite beautiful. She had gorgeous black hair and she was very, very pretty.

My mother was strict but she had a good sense of humour, very nice. She used to say, 'you'd laugh to see a pudding roll' and I used to say, 'who wouldn't?' [laughs]. My dad was a British soldier. He was a night watchman. My mother met my dad because her mum used to do washing for the soldiers. She was 16 when they met.

[Music plays]

Lilian: We were a happy family, yeah. I used to sleep in the bed with three others. There was four girls in the bed I was in and one particular night, I saw one of my sisters climbing over the back of the bed. I said, 'what an earth are you doing?', she said, 'you said, get over' [laughs]. That's what she was doing, she was getting over. I think we all used to muck in together really. I used to do the Sunday dinner and over at the local bakery, as long as you put everything in a tray, they'd cook your dinner for you. You know, meat and two veg, and the veg used to be got by my two brothers, who'd go down East Lane and it was picked off the pavement, you know.

The sellers, bits that they'd dropped. They'd be picking them up and that would become our meal yeah [laughs]. We loved it, so... I seem to remember dad used to go out at the weekend for a drink like they did in those days and I seem to remember him bringing a handful of sweets. I know that always pleased me because I knew that he cared about me, yeah. Dad used to have a pickled onion and some cheese on a Saturday. That was heaven to him.

[Music plays]

Lilian: I was Roman Catholic. That's how I've been brought up. I went to a Roman Catholic school. It was very, very nice. They were always very good to me anyway. The first hour in the morning was taken by a nun or a priest and then the rest of the day was by the ordinary teachers. I never got lower than fourth and twice I came top but I never got lower than fourth. Then mum was cross with me for getting as low as fourth [laughs]. I found that the nuns and everything were very, very kind to us. They even used to go around begging so that they could clothe us. I remember one day two of the nuns came to see us and my little sister, who I was looking after, because the other children had been evacuated. It was just me and the youngest one left and I was looking after her and she wanted to kiss the nun and I thought that terrible, you know, but anyway the nun let her [laughs].

Rachel: Do you remember the bombs? Do you remember the blitz?

Lilian: Yeah I did once see four of them dropping. Yeah. And at the time, [laughs] I was out myself and I know I dashed in a butcher shop and dived under the counter. I felt safe. I thought God was looking after me and I felt safe. In point of fact, so did my friend, because she always came straight to me, because she thought that God was looking after me because I was too important to the family [laughs].

[Music plays]

Ron: My name's Ron Wallis and I'm an activity coordinator. I've worked here for just under a year. I joined this care home in the middle of April, last year, just after Easter and there's a good vibe in the home. On a Tuesday afternoon, we'll always have a ladies' afternoon. It keeps their mind stimulated. It also creates good bonds with other residents on each floor

in the little groups that we have, or the clubs that we have and they get to meet new friends.

So how is everyone? How are we all feeling?

Residents: Wonderful. Hunky dory.

Ron: How did you feel when you got the Telegram from the Queen when it was your 100th birthday?

Lilian: I've got it up on the wall?

Ron: Oh, have you? December 1st this year, Lilian here will be 102.

Residents: Really, wow. Who'll be 102. Who'll be 102. [Claps].

Lilian. I was 100.

Ron: You're 101 at the moment.

Lilian: Yeah.

Ron: Don't forget the 1. I'll tell you what we might do closer to your birthday Lilian. I might take you up towards Buckingham Palace, on the minibus.

Lilian: Oh, wouldn't that be lovely.

Ron: Quite close to your birthday.

Lilian: Yeah [laughs].

Ron: What we'll do is we'll take your plaque with us, where you've got the Telegram from the Queen.

Lilian: Oh lovely, yeah.

Ron: Because now, if anyone turns 100 now, they get a letter from the King.

Lilian: Oh yes of course, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Ron: We had a lady upstairs in June who turned 100 and she actually got a Telegram from the King.

Lilian: Oh, how lovely, yeah [laughs].

Resident: Wonderful. It's a good age, yeah.

Ron: Very good age. And you're still very active.

Lilian: I'm very lucky because I've had a very happy life.

Ron: That's good.

Lilian: [Laughs] you'll set me eyes running...

Ron: As long as you can look back and say I've done some good things in my life, that's the main thing.

[Music plays]

Lilian: For my first job, when I left school at 14, it was a factory and I wouldn't, I refused to go after a week because they were really rough. They were always swearing and cursing and I was a bit prim and proper then. I didn't like that so I left. But that was my first job. One I remember, I was a buyer for a little while. That was quite good, that one. But I didn't have many, no. I worked, not only did I work on the telephones, I trained people coming in. I used to say, 'number please' [laughter].

Ron: 'Hold the line please'.

Lilian: Yeah, 'I'm trying to connect you'.

Ron: Okay and where was that? Where did you do that?

Lilian: Battersea Telephone Exchange.

Ron: Okay. Did you enjoy it?

Lilian: I loved it.

Ron: You loved it?

Lilian: Yeah, yeah.

[Music plays]

Lilian: My pleasures were joining the Operatic Society and I used to love to sing [laughs]. Things like 'The Gondoliers', you know 'The Gondoliers'? Yeah. I used to love that. We used to work on a show for six months and then we'd be doing it for a week, yeah. They used to section us off, contraltos, sopranos. I was with the sopranos. When you're in a choir, you know, everyone's your friend then. I've always got along well with everybody [laughs]. I was so pleased because mum was worried about one of her boys. She said, 'I'm a bit worried about Dennis. He's getting into bad company. Will you take him with you to your, if he'll come, him and his friend, would you take him to your music sessions'.

So, didn't do me a lot of good because I had to find them something decent to wear, which he didn't have. One of the things I remember, seeing him walk along the side road with a pair of girls shoes that my mum had bought down the lane. And I was embarrassed for him, as he was embarrassed for himself. Anyway, he did join, he did come along with me, with his friend and they ended up, well when we did 'The Mikado', he was the Mikado. They always ended up with good parts and that was it, he was hooked. I loved it, yeah. I managed to be pleased because my mother always came to our performances.

[Music plays]

Comfort: She talks about her husband a lot. Her husband passed away and unfortunately didn't have no kids. I said, 'it's okay you've got your nieces and all to come and see you'. 'You say it, but it's not the same'. I say, 'no, no, no, no, you are so blessed. You are so blessed to get people

like us, we are your family'. But she really misses the husband. She says sometimes, 'I can feel in the room that my husband is there'.

Lilian: The day I met my husband I was going for tea at my friend's house and she said, her boyfriend was bringing a friend of his with him. I enjoyed the tea. They said to me, on the way home, they said, 'Lili lives on that route, would you like to see her home' and he did. Then I didn't see him for a fortnight so I thought, 'ah he's not interested in me' but apparently, because he'd been in the Forces, he'd had malaria and was quite ill and as soon as he tried to find me, when he was better, that's how we met. Yeah and I was going with him for 18 months before we actually married. I shall never forget when he held my hand, because I walked in and I said to the cat, 'he kissed me. He kissed me'. I told the cat [laughs]. Miaow! [laughs]

Ron: Lilian, can you tell me a bit more about your wedding day?

Lilian: About my wedding day?

Ron: Yeah, what do you remember about your wedding day?

Lilian: Oh, about 50 people there.

Ron: Do you remember where it was? Where you got married? Where did you get married?

Lilian: Wimbledon.

Ron: You got married in Wimbledon, not too far from here then.

Lilian: Yeah. I was happily married, as long as 60 years. My actual wedding day, I can remember I had to hold Darryl's hand and his hand was frozen. The night I got married, his auntie had let us have one of her spare rooms for our wedding night and all of a sudden there's this crash, we weren't doing anything but the bloomin' floor got a hole in and there was a loud bang and we thought the bed had gone through the bottom of the floor [laughs]. He was the most lovely man. I still love him dearly, you know. Yeah, yeah. One particular day that stands out in my mind, we had a car at this time, he said, 'wait a minute Lili'.

So, he got out of the car, he walked over, he stopped all the traffic so this man, this frightened man could get out of the side road. So, he stopped all the traffic until he was gone, and then he come back.

Rachel: Very kind.

Lilian: Oh, he was, yeah, yeah.

[Music plays]

Lilian: Great.

[Music plays]

Lilian: I had a nice little bungalow on the borders of Wales, yeah. A place called Llansantffraed near Brecon. That was where we lived at first, yeah. I know we renamed it, after the

Exchange because so many people there had helped us to get it. All we could see from our main window was animals, sheep. It was lovely. I can remember waiting for him to come home and it seemed a long, long day without him and then all of a sudden, I could see him running along the road. I was pleased. I think that he'd come home and he couldn't get back to me quick enough. He was running [laughs]. He always brought me in a cup of tea in the morning [laughs].

[Music plays]

Lilian: He belonged to a scooter club, that he started originally, and I know I rode right over him once because I was driving along, singing away as usual, and all of sudden, I ran right over him [laughs]. He was Chairman of the British Legion. Yeah, and he was very interested in life. I also belonged to a cycling club. We used to go cycling a lot, especially on a Sunday. He was the most lovely man. I still love him dearly, you know. He was a gentleman and a gentle man. Very happy marriage, oh yes. I was lucky because I had a good marriage. Very good. He died of a brain tumour eventually.

His last words, with the friend who'd come with me to the hospital to see him, was 'look after Lili for me'. They were his last words. He knew he was dying, yeah. She looked after me, yeah. There were Macmillan nurses. One of them came home with me from the hospital and they did look after me, yes. It's like I say, I have been lucky. Yeah. You know, I can still think clearly. I'm still happy. I'm too stubborn to give up [laughs]. And here, it's jolly good being here. I'm very lucky. As you can see the table is all nicely laid [laughs].

I'm very happy here, yeah. Oh, it's very nice. I'm still having a very good life. You only get one chance at it, so you've got to make of it what you can.

[Music plays]

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 Pete Roch and directed by Rachel Edwards and Sasha Neal.

[Music plays]



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