

## Who Cares? project

### Transcript of podcast episode 7: Bobbie

*[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 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 Bobbie. 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](http://www.whocaresproject.co.uk).

Bobbie: Oh Alexa. Alexa? Alexa, can you tell me a joke about bananas?

Alexa: What did the banana say to the elephant?

Bobbie: I don't know.

Alexa: Nothing, bananas can't talk.

Bobbie: They're stupid. They really are stupid jokes [laughs]. If you're miserable you can keep going for hours.

My name is Bobbie Silva. I'm 101 years old and I don't know how I'm still here.

Comfort: Hello Bobbie.

Bobbie: Hello.

Comfort: How are you my dear.

Bobbie: I'm very well thank you. Yes. I'm much better today than I was yesterday. I'm not quite so tired today.

Comfort: That's good. See you Bobbie, are you coming for lunch?

Bobbie: I will be coming up for lunch.

Comfort: Okay I will see you later.

Bobbie: I can't miss the shepherd's pie.

Comfort: You won't miss it. So, I'll see you lunchtime.

Bobbie: Okay.

Comfort: I would say Bobbie is lovely. She is kind. She is very friendly and when some of the residents are not well, she pops into their room to see how they are. She makes sure that she knows everything that is going on and we love her. We love her so much.

Bobbie: I came to Nightingale first on respite. You know, for two or three weeks and I enjoyed it so much, when I went back to my lonely flat in Hove, I kept thinking, I wish I was back at

Nightingale. There's always somebody to talk to there, you know, instead of being all on my own in the flat. I'm very happy here anyway. I don't get lonely or anything. I've been here for five and half years.

Jackie: Hi Bobbie.

Bobbie: Good morning. Oh hello.

Jackie: Hello.

Bobbie: How are you Jackie?

Jackie: I'm alright, how are you?

Bobbie: Another one of our wonderful volunteers.

Shelley: I describe mum as a little ball of bubbly energy and curiosity and happiness. She's not quite as fast moving as she was but she still is a smiley, happy, chatty person.

Bobbie: I'm very keen on playing bridge, and what else? Oh, I was thoroughly enjoying the pottery that they did here. I've never done anything artistic at all. Pottery was just lovely. It's like playing with playdough or something and I made lots of things. Managed to give all the family vases, and you know little bowls and things, I was very pleased with them.

Sharon: Hello Bobbie.

Bobbie: Hello Sharon, okay. Oh right.

Sharon: Are you going for a walk in the garden?

Bobbie: I don't think we'll go outside; we're going to the café.

Sharon: To the café, okay, for a lovely ice tea.

Bobbie: I'll be out before lunch.

Sharon: Alright then, see you later.

Bobbie: Yes, okay.

Comfort: My name is Comfort, one of the senior healthcare assistants. We are so pleased to have Bobbie. Anything you ask her to join in, she takes advantage of it and then takes part. She goes to the garden herself. Whatever she wants to do, she does it herself. Bobbie is one of our residents who motivates other residents.

Bridge leader: So, Bobbie you've got to – Dina will shuffle these my darling? There you are.

Bobbie: So, we play four hands.

Bridge leader: And then we'll draw and the lowest one, you start and then Fay will come and play.

Bobbie: Right.

Bridge leader: Okay?

Bobbie: Yes, yes. Fran, do you play, if I open two of a suit, that shows a strong hand. A strong hand, not a weak hand anyway.

Fran: I'll try.

Bobbie: I do enjoy bridge very much. They don't have enough organised games and we find it very difficult even to get a foursome because I think there are more people here, who do play, but won't because the standard is unbelievably low. You can't even call it kitchen bridge, you know, almost. They're really terrible and I think I'm one of the few people, who will play with them because it's so bad, but I just like to keep up playing sometimes and my husband and I, played as partners and we used to go into some of the competitions. I did have quite a few cups and things. I wonder what Shelley did with them? They were quite decorative.

Gerald: Who dealt this? I did?

Bobbie: No Gerald.

Gerald: I didn't deal.

Bobbie: Yes you did, very carefully.

Gerald: Oh, did I?

Bobbie: I watched you and it was very careful and I thought, we cut the deal and you drew the king.

Gerald: Right.

Bobbie: You'd better wake up if you're going to play, ha.

I do like music from the shows, all the popular stuff you know. My Fair Lady, of course, is lovely. Singing in the Rain is wonderful, ha. Alexa play my music.

Alexa: Playing music based on your liked songs.

*[Music plays]*

Bobbie: Oh, that's Gene Kelly, lovely, lovely.

Shelley: I'm Shelley Charing, and I'm the daughter of Bobbie. She'll tell me I did nothing today. I didn't get any jobs done and I say, what do you mean? What jobs have you got to do? You're in a care home. You know, you don't have to worry about doing things and she well, well but I need to sort out this and I need to sort out that, and I haven't put my food stuff away from lunch or whatever and I've got to write a birthday card, and whatever. What she enjoys doing most is socialising. If she's ever feeling low, the thing that makes her feel good is talking with other people. Mum is one of the – I mean the most mentally able and cognitively wonderful, in probably the care home [laughs] potentially and she still wants to go out.

We went out to a Phillipian restaurant so she's keen to try new things. So yeah, she's curious and she's so knowledgeable. Her memory is amazing.

Bobbie: I was born in London, in Stoke Newington, above my grandfather's grocery shop. We lived above the shop. The very earliest memory, I suppose I must have been about three / four

and I was playing outside the shop, there used to be a piper would come around, playing the Scottish pipes. I was dancing up and down outside the shop. I can see myself there. This pretty dress, which I'd had for an uncle's wedding and then shortly after that, I can remember my brother being born. My mother had him above the shop as well, you know, and then the midwife coming out and saying, 'you've got a little brother'. We've moved then into a house, in Clapton, East London. I lived there until I got married. Well, we were a very happy family. Very close.

Dad was very, very hard working. One time he had three groceries, all things like dried fruit and stuff. It was all delivered in big bags and you used to have to weigh it up and put them into little bags and drag these bags of things around and although he had staff, he used to really roll his sleeves up. We didn't see a lot of him when we were young, but he used to like the family to be at home. He didn't really like us going out too much. I did have an older sister, seven or eight years, and I never queried it, and I found out, much later, that was my half-sister.

My father had been married before. He'd lost his wife at the end of the first world war, with Spanish flu. She died from that, leaving Anne, five years old at that time. Did they know it? I didn't realise it till a very nosey kind of friend of a friend of the family, she said to me, you know Anne isn't your proper sister. I said, oh don't talk nonsense, cause she is [laughs]. I mean I've known her all my life but she said, no, no she's not. That was quite a shock. They're both gone. Actually, my brother died quite young, he was only 58. Sounds very, very young to me [laughs].

He had heart problems. None of my family lived long at all. My father died, the first year of the war, in 1940 and he was only 50.

*[Music plays]*

Bobbie: I just love them, little romantic.

Gerald: One diamond.

Bobbie: No, boom, boom, boom. George, you haven't really got enough?

Gerald: No:

Fran: You've still only got 12.

Gerald: Okay.

Bobbie: I was actually 18 when the war broke out. I was away from home because at that time I was a civil servant for New Scotland Yard, which sounds exciting, but it wasn't. It was a receiver's office which did all the finances and our office moved to Wimbledon and so I was in the bedsit. I had a bike in those days and I used to cycle home at weekends and I rode home from Wimbledon to Clapton. I'd ride all the – cycle around Piccadilly Circus. Wobbling on my bike, can you imagine? Because it was practically empty. There was very little traffic

in those days. The bombing wasn't very pleasant of course. I remember going to the cinema one night after the alarms had gone off. It was night time. I was by myself for some reason.

And when I came out, you could see all the searchlights, you know, the sky. The anti-aircraft going. Still walking along. There were two very tall guardsmen, who'd just come out of the cinema. I said do you mind if I walk along with you? They said, 'no that's fine'. So, we were walking along whilst there's all this going on. I never remember really being scared. It just seemed like so normal [laughs]. Normal existence really. Another time coming home, I was cycling along and there was this buzzing overhead. They'd go over, buzz, and then you when you then touch out, you knew you had to take cover because that was when they came down. I thought should I stop and just cover, now I was going try to get to where I was going before it cut out [laughs] so that was quite scary at that time.

I never took shelter in the underground or anything like that. Oh, I would have hated to take shelter with loads of people, I think that would have been more scary. I used to think, well if they bomb us, they bomb us you know. Ha, fortunately we didn't have a direct hit. During the war, people were very friendly. It was a very different atmosphere. It was much better than living under Covid. There weren't half the restrictions. I mean the theatres and dance halls, the shops, where they could be opened, if they hadn't been bombed or something. You know everything sort of went on.

*[Music plays]*

Bobbie: Oh, it's Rain in Spain I think.

Being civil service, I was reserved occupation. I didn't have to go in the forces but then, I got a bit bored and my very good friend had joined the women's auxiliary service, ATS, and she seemed to be having a wonderful time and I thought I'd like to join the services and I took the test and when it came to the medical, I was too short. You had to be four foot ten and I was only four foot nine, and I sort of piled my hair up in a beehive style, thought I might get away with it but no. But they said, 'we do need nursing auxiliaries, in the civil nursing reserve, so maybe you'd like to try that'.

So, I thought anything to get away from the office, you know, for a change. So, I did become a nursing auxiliary which was pretty depressing work. It was all the geriatric patients. Well, all moved out from the big London hospitals. They'd be huge wards and they'd be kept in bed all day long. It wasn't all romantic like, ha, the Red Cross or something. Scrubbing bed pans and things. They don't do any of that nowadays [laughs] but the social life was more interesting. Because the other nurses are very nice, very friendly group and we used to go out and we used to go to dances.

There were a lot of Americans there at the time. It was very nice. You were off duty. You could have a nice time. I did get a posting for nearer home and it was [Ribs Cross 15:04] hospital but that was very miserable. I was put on night duty and I didn't get to know anybody. I just used to come home, go to bed. Go back to work. Used to get my meals on a tray to eat during the night. We'd sit in the kitchen and there'd be coach roaches crawling out. I'd sit there and they'd be everywhere. It was horrible. Absolutely horrible.

By then it was 1944, and I was going on duty VE night, when the Europe war finished and I could see people celebrating with bonfires and things. I was going back to work and I got so depressed, I really – I could burst into tears for no reason at all. Went to the doctor, and I got released and I went back to work at Scotland Yard.

Bobbie: That's nasty [laughs]. I want you to say one spade.

Fran: Sorry. One heart, two clubs.

Bobbie: I don't like it [laughs].

Fran: You don't like it.

Bobbie: I don't like it [laughs].

Fran: I'm sorry but I like it.

Gerald: What does two clubs mean?

Bobbie: That she's got clubs. It's not – oh it can be if you play conventions, but you don't get any conventions.

Gerald: Oh, I see, that's conventions.

Bobbie: I don't think we even realised too much about what was going on in Germany. In fact, I lost an aunt, in Holland. It was my mother's sister, married a Dutchman, and when war broke out, my aunt wrote and said, oh come to Holland. Holland will stay neutral. You know you'll be much safer here. Thank God we didn't go to Holland [laughs]. But they were lovely people. My auntie Rosie was a lovely lady and they arranged with somebody, privately, to get back to England and they paid a lot of money to this person, for the trip. Like they're doing now, to come to England, you know. Same idea.

And he just betrayed them. They were arrested, went into concentration camp. She died very shortly afterwards but my uncle he survived in poor health and the rest of the family, most of his family were wiped out.

Comfort: Bobbie's nice to everyone. She never gets upset. She wants answers to her questions and we make sure we respect that. Like when somebody died, she wants to know, so she will be the first person we will tell because she wants to actually know. She is still mobile, she still does everything for herself. The only thing that we have to help with is her medication. She can dress very well. She's absolutely beautiful.

Bobbie: I wasn't all that young when I got married. I was 28 and my husband was 33, something like that. He was in the army, during the war because he was away, in the forces, from the beginning. He got called up quite early. I think 1940. He was in Africa for a long time. Long period. North Africa, so six years? He finished he was a staff sergeant I think, something like that. At the time we met, he was a salesman in the menswear shop. We met at a charity

dance, which would have been about 1948 and we got on. He did ask for my phone number and we got married about 18 months or so after we'd met. I am thoroughly Jewish and I had a traditional Jewish wedding which the ceremony is very nice. I remember I thoroughly enjoyed it and I was very sorry when it all came to an end [laughs].

My husband, he was great. He was a great family man. You know he really just loved his family. Everyone else were fools and he didn't have time for anybody much. You know, I can't think of any people that he really liked, except apart from the family. He could be quite funny, jokey. Bit too jokey at times. It was difficult to have a serious conversation and we worked together because he'd just taken over a shop. Sold a bit of everything really. Haberdashery and ladieswear and menswear but not fashion goods. You know really basic things but he was alright with the menswear but he said he would really need help with the ladies side of it.

Foolishly, I think, I resigned from the civil service and I became a shop assistant [laughs] but I did enjoy it because, well I like meeting people and serving customers and things. He wasn't very keen on customers; they were a nuisance. You know they interfered with him rearranging the stock and doing things he wanted to do. The counter was very high. One of those high counters on the ladies side and I had a little step ladder and when I was talking to people, I'd sometimes stand on the bottom couple of steps, so I was a reasonable height. So really we were together for 24 hours a day so he felt like a bit of a philanderer, he didn't have any opportunity so we had our moments of squabbles and things, but we had a very long and happy marriage truly.

*[Music plays]*

We did belong to the orthodox united synagogue. We'd be going to synagogue three times a year type. Like you only go on the new year and the yom kippur. We always celebrated the first two days of Passover, you know, and did all the service and ceremony and I enjoy them here as well when Dr Bauer does it one night and it is fun.

Bobbie: Oh yes, here's Comfort again, the lovely Comfort [laughs]. Yes. Okay.

Comfort: I'm always happy when I see Bobbie, you know. See you later Bobbie.

Bobbie: Yes dear, oh she's so lovely. The carers here are lovely really.

Bobbie: So, we had the shop until we retired in 1985 and that's when we moved to Hove. Yes he's just passed the anniversary of death. He died in 2014. We'd been married 64 years then. We had two children. My daughter, Shelley and my son, Geoff. Shelley, I can't believe she recently celebrated her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. You'd never believe it. I mean if you met her or knew her, that she's amazing. She's got two daughters, so I've got two granddaughters and two gorgeous great, great grandsons. I never dreamt that'd I live to this age and have great grandsons. Absolutely a joy. My daughter comes very regularly.

My son, the old saying something like that, what is it? A son, is son until he marries a wife. A daughter's a daughter all her life and it's really true. He phones every night so he thinks he's done his duty, you know, but visiting not so much. Family is very important to me, my family. Well, they're my first priority in everything of course and it's family that keeps me going I think, on the whole.

Shelley: I would say the great grandchildren, give her great pleasure because we send photos. She can look at the photos on the internet. They absolutely adore her and think she's incredibly amazing.

Bobbie: I think because of Covid and all that, it was like a big hole in your life somehow. It made the years disappear somehow [laughs]. I think we did have one or two cases here but they were very few and nothing serious.

Comfort: During the pandemic, what happened is we tried to create an environment whereby the residents would understand so we used to call a meeting every week in the dining room, when all the residents will come but with a social distancing. Trying to explain what was going on. From the beginning it wasn't easy but staff are going to the individual rooms talking to them. They were okay.

Shelley: It wasn't easy not being able to visit but for mum, because she uses technology and we were able to do a lot of video communication so she could see me. She could see the grandchildren and because of being mobile, she was able to come downstairs and we were talk on the phone through the window. I'd be outside, she'd be inside and we would chat that way and I would drop things off to her. Having the gardens is very important. Mum does go out every day if the weather's reasonable, which is just amazing at her age now. I think they did handle it well. They were able here to bring in much earlier than other places, the essential care giver, having one person who could come in and that was brilliant from the time that happened, then it was wonderful.

She definitely said she felt safe here during the pandemic which was lovely.

Comfort: We all worked together. Yeah, we all worked together.

Bobbie: Oh right. Whoops. Whoops. Wow. Have a look at her.

Fran: She plays really nicely.

Bobbie: Yes I know, mm.

Fran: You know you're going to give us the vote. I hope she's got hearts for you.

Fran: What is she playing in now?

Bridge leader: Four hearts.

Bobbie: Well, I just passed. I just passed didn't I?

Bobbie: I couldn't celebrate my birthday, because of restrictions. We'd got everything arranged. My daughter had been here the day before decorating the large lounge here. There was about five tables all set. I had a banner with 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on there and a tiara as well, ha. Alistair came around that morning, and says, 'I'm sorry it's all been cancelled'. There's a few cases



of Covid and we were in lockdown again but he did say, which was lovely of him, I think you're allowed five guests so we just had the immediate family. So, we were just sitting at one table, as though aliens had been here and kidnapped everybody, you know but it was lovely. We had a lovely time. I'm very lucky to be here, you know. I really love it here.

Gerald: I don't know what's going on.

Bobbie: We're playing.

Fran: Here we are. 12, 8, 9.

Bobbie: She said you're suits because you bid diamonds.

Fran: Got a little one.

Bobbie: Mm-hm.

Gerald: Are you being personal?

Bobbie: [Laughs].

Fran: Sorry I won't say it again.

Shelley: I think I've always been able to talk to mum about things. I have always found her to be open and not judgemental and mum, used to look after my older daughter once a week. I'd drive her over there and she would stay there and it was lovely. And from the time I retired I would go and stay, because they were living in Hove and I was in London. I would go and stay with them for a couple of nights and then as dad got more difficult, I was helping mum more. I would say, I feel that we were, yeah that we were close, yeah.

Care worker: Hello Bobbie.

Bobbie: Hello, thank you.

Care worker: What would you like?

Bobbie: What I like and what I get, aren't always the same. Ha. A very small soup please.

Care worker: Soup, coming up.

Bobbie: Thank you.

Bobbie: Of course, with the medicine now, I really think they keep people going too long because they can. They can give you so much better medication for heart problems. They've got blood thinners and all kinds of things which really do keep you going long after you've got any quality of life. I'm very lucky. Looking around, I'm the only one who doesn't require any help here or isn't in a wheelchair or something like that. When I get depressed I tell myself off and think, you're brilliant, you're wicked you know. You grumble and you're here. You can get around on your own, you're so lucky. It's not the family necessarily that pushes

because I'm always saying to Shelley, I shouldn't be here. I should go and then they get very cross with me [laughs].

I said, well I'm using up all your inheritance, there won't be anything left, 'you spend it' that's fine by us. You know. We don't need. We can carry on. You've got to stay here as long as possible [laughs]. But I think if it was assisted I definitely think it would be much better for the family.

Bobbie: Oh, isn't this exciting [laughs].

Gerald: What are we doing? Sorry.

Bridge leader: Just a minute. No, no, no you're playing.

Gerald: Yeah, oh.

Fran: You with the spade and I supported you. Okay.

Bobbie: And now [laughs] the end is nigh.

Bobbie: I never, ever dreamed I'd live this long, maybe it's because I'm always pretty cheerful and I don't grumble and I'm not envious of what other people have got. I've never wanted a lot of material things or anything. Easily satisfied you know. I don't grumble all the time like some of the residents in the care home and in fact, I do annoy them by being too cheerful at times, you know. I talk too much, as you can see.

Gerald: Am I a winner or a loser?

Fran: You're a winner.

Bobbie: That's a winner. Your lead.

*[Music plays]*

Bobbie: Oh right, shut up. Is that enough, we've gone right off the topic [laughs]. Alexa stop.

*[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 Sasha Neal and directed by Rachel Edwards and Sasha Neal.

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