

Interviewee: **Edie Martinson [Transcript 1 of 2]**

Interviews conducted by Nicky Leap and Billie Hunter during research for the publication '*The Midwife's Tale: an Oral History from Handywoman to Professional Midwife*' (1993; 2nd edition 2013)

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Duration of audio: 3:39:30 [Interview 1- 2:54:42; Interview 2- 0:44:48]

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Description:

Transcript of an interview with Edie Martinson covering her experience as a young mother in London (1918), including childbirth, midwives, social conditions, death of her first baby to enteritis and third baby to poverty, her service with the Land Army during the First World War, her different jobs to support her family, marriage breakdowns, sexual knowledge, contraception, abortions, benefits, and health during pregnancy.

Edie Martinson was born in London in 1902 and came from a working-class home. She married in 1920 and had five babies between 1920 and 1935, two of them dying in early infancy. Edie had various jobs throughout her life, including washing-up, waitressing, cooking and factory work.

This transcript is for the first of two interviews conducted with Edie and is made up of four audio files.

Topics include: Midwifery; Maternity Services; Childbirth; Caesarean section; First World War; Contraception.

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[START OF FIRST INTERVIEW]

Edie You're on, you're on.

Interviewer On the air.

Edie ((laughs)) I was just having your little bit of air...

Interviewer Yes, don't worry about that.

Edie No, it, um-. When that baby was born – that first baby – I was 18.

Interviewer She was born in 1920?

Edie Yes, 1920 and I was 18, er-. Before the baby was born my father had stalls and he was pretty fairly well-off. He was a drunkard but had loads of money.

Interviewer In the market stalls?

Edie Market stalls in Clerkenwell – Exmouth Street, Clerkenwell. We had two thriving stalls then and, er, I married an east end boy. I used to marry anyone who had a nice face, provided they were good looking. Anyway, I married ((laughingly)) an east end boy and, er, my father coaxed him to leave his job, which, which was in a tea wharf. Now, I'm telling you more about me than the baby.

Interviewer No, I want to know about you, so tell us this.

Edie My father coaxed him to leave his job in the Orient tea wharf and work for him haddock smoking and I'd worked on the stalls as cashier, weighing up and taking the money and he got Jack to leave his job and come and work for him haddock smoking. I knew the haddock smoking trade. Anyway, he said he'd put us on piece work. So he left a good job, came and worked for my father and Sunday morning we went up to get our wages – my father was always in bed doing his business – er, and we'd earned £7. "You can't have £7" he said, um-. "Here you are, here's 30 bob. Take that chest of drawers over there." So he gave us 30 bob and a chest of drawers. I said "Dad, we've got a home now", I said. Anyway, that's all we got, so we left, which meant we were newly married, out of work. He went onto the dole. I went and used to do washing for half a crown a day from about ten in the morning to four o'clock at night out in my little yard. They were the people that had our

neighbouring stalls next to us – Italian fruiterers they were – and I used to go and wash for them for half a crown a day, take my baby. Now, I had my baby then. I'm trying to recall how I had the baby. I think I must have worked for my Dad. He must have left his job after I was going-, when I had the baby. Time confuses-. So we carried on, on the dole and me doing this washing. Well, then come the great day baby was born and we used to-. All the new curtains were ready and some red bows to tie up and this one little room what I've described there with a table, two chairs, the bed and a gas stove, little table beside the gas stove and at the bottom of bed we had a wash stand with a bucket under it and a bowl, then you're ready for your confinement.

Interviewer So you only had one room to live in at that time?

Edie Only ever had one room for a very, very long time. From there and on and on I only ever had one room and I rented that from my sister for three shillings a week. She paid nine shillings a week for three rooms in Penton Street-, Pentonville Road and I had one room from her for three bob.

Interviewer So whereabouts was your little house?

Edie This was in Penton-. All this happened in Pentonville, er, Pentonville Road. In Penton Street actually. The baby were born in Penton Street and I remember we had a seven hours labour. I don't know if that's interesting.

Interviewer That was quite quick, wasn't it, for your first?

Edie Tied me – seven hours, the first baby – they tied me hair in plaits and to my dismay they took me red bows what I had for the curtain and tied me hair up-, me plaits up with it and they kept calling me Mummy. ((laughingly)) They kept-. “Won't be long Mummy.” Mummy this, Mummy that.

Interviewer Who came to look after you when you had the baby then?

Edie No special-. I had a midwife. Nurses we used to call them, we didn't call them midwives. “Go and get the nurses” they used to say.

Interviewer Were they the nurses from-.



Edie From Claremont Square it was, Claremont Square. That was the-, that was where they came from.

Interviewer Yeah, so they were the trained midwives then.

Edie They were local midwives and a woman in the house helped, so had the baby. She had yellow jaundice. Well, not exactly yellow jaundice. She was a bit yellow but it went off after a couple of days and she was a beautiful baby. I went and got a job at Millers in Grays Inn Road washing up and somebody minded the baby. Well, she was a beautiful baby right up until ten months old when I lost her and during that time we had extreme poverty. I moved from there. We got out. One room in Northampton Street, Clerkenwell, again and my husband used to buy a bag of winkles for ten shillings down Billingsgate, bring them home, boil them in the copper and take them out on a barrow with a white sheet over a board and that used to come to 30 shillings.

Interviewer And that's what you had to live on?

Edie So that was, er-. Well, I think he had the dole as well, I think, if I can remember rightly. So we had 30 shillings that used to come to from ten shillings. Then his mother lived at Stepney, said "Come over here if you like." She said "We've got one room." They only had a Coronation Street house – two-up, two-down and about six or seven kids. Anyway, we moved over to Stepney. One room again, smaller than what we had. My baby was still lovely – beautiful baby. Every time I took her on the bus people would say "Oh, lovely baby", so I got a job in Whitechapel washing up again. They had a big night trade there and when I went in in the morning it used to be great big wooden sink. I used to have to stand on a box and the piles of plate-, piles and piles of plates all ready for me to start on. Well, I left the baby and my husband being out of work, he used to mind it. I used to go home at night and find him sitting in gutter playing Up the Wall, they used to call it, with cigarette cards.

Interviewer Was that throwing them up?

Edie I don't know what they used to do but I know it was called Up The Wall and he was minding the baby. Well, what happened, we had an extreme summer then. Enteritis started, she



vomited and I was ignorant of illness. I was a very healthy girl, always. As she vomited one bottle I would give her another, which I know now, was wrong. Take them right off their food and give them just boiled water or nothing. Anyway, she was taken in Bancroft Road Hospital and, cut a long story short, I lost her there, and 50 babies died in that ward that week from enteritis and that was in, must have been 1919. They must have records in the hospital there then, so I lost my baby.

Interviewer That must have been terrible for you.

Edie I must have been pregnant because I know I had two in 13 months. The following year I had my son what I've got now – married son – and I didn't want this baby. I used to walk the streets at night. I missed the nappy washing and we only had a little backyard there and freezing cold water. I used to go out there and do a bit of washing. It was a-, looking back it was a horrible life and at that time I used to always accept it because we knew no other. We never knew carpets or fridges or heating. So I'd lost that one and I was pregnant and after a very bad time in that house the mother there committed suicide, my first mother-in-law, over poverty. She got into such a lot of debt she took carbolic acid and I moved away soon after that. Oh, I tried to mind her kids, what were my in-laws. He had a paper stand, the father did. He was a dear old boy. He had a paper stand up Leadenhall Street and he used to bring home half a crown a day to keep his family. Well, we tried to carry on for a little while and he said, er-. He used to give me the half a crown a day. Well, I've always been very clean and that house was bug-ridden – millions and millions of them behind every picture – so I started cleaning up, burning this, burn that and one bed I had out and I was burning it in the little back yard, just like the little Coronation Street yards, no different. The daughter, Nelly, must have been about 12, just old enough to resent me taking over, so my father-in-law said one night "Edie" he said, "I think I'll let-. Would you mind if Nelly takes over?" I said "Not a bit." He said "She's upset about you burning different things." I said "Well, they're so bug-ridden" and filthy heads they all had. I learned how to clean – put it plain – lousy heads and get rid of ((laughingly)) bugs.

Interviewer How did you used to get rid of the lousy heads then?



Edie Lousy heads? Soak them in paraffin, saturate them in paraffin and turn them up for a few hours, then wash them off and I had about four or five lousy heads to clean that way.

Interviewer But it got rid of them?

Edie Yeah, the children. I moved back to Islington where we had a very nice big room, very nice big room and the dad used to bring – my Father-in-law – used to bring the children over to see me and then he got ill with cancer, they were put in a home and that broke up but that was the first baby and when she was buried – as I put it – it was £5 for burial.

Interviewer That was a lot of money, wasn't it?

Edie Yeah. You could insure for about-. I think I had that in insurance. Five pounds was a lot of money because you only dealt in-. You can ((inaudible)) for half a crown, three and six a day and at the time you used to bring home for feeding them. That was the first experience of first baby, erm-. The second one was healthy – John. I've got a lot here but, of course, this is what my daughter-in-law says: "Mum", because there's such a lot of my life, the nicer parts, meeting nicer people. That bit there was not to do with babies, that's right. I didn't know whether you wanted to deal with babies. Nearly all my babies went into a nursery, see, so apart from the third one, the history of that one, little-. I had a girl, boy, boy, girl. The third baby, he went into the nursery again at two weeks old. I was working up Kingsway. I was there for a lot years in that restaurant and this third baby developed wasting disease a few weeks after he was born. The food they were giving him, and each time I went to pick him up-, well, not every day but every few days they said "Well, we've changed his milk. It don't agree with him." So none of the food-. That's why I think if I'd have stayed home I wouldn't have lost that first one because she wouldn't have been minded by her dad and developed-, and there was no pasteurised milk either those days, and I wouldn't have lost this second one if hadn't gone to work. He had-. I lost him at 13 months, the third one, but he had wasting disease on and off and just pulling him out of it, he was getting a nice normal little boy and he developed pneumonia. So I lost the third one but only through poverty, going to work.

Interviewer But you had to go to work, didn't you?



Edie Well, nothing else for it unless you were-. I suppose I could have managed at home on just bread and marg or something like that in those days but, er, that's the first and third baby. I never-, I had never been kept with a wage like the girls of today are. It's always a little bit of money. My first husband used to have a bet. He'd come home from work and have his dinner and I always cooked a hot dinner, it was very strange. I can remember a pound of chops for six pence. Three chops, they were, at six pence and you could get a dinner for about nine pence – two pound of potatoes. They were four pound for tuppence in those days. I had two pound a penny potatoes. See, prices were small.

Interviewer Were you able to have meat every day or was it too expensive to have it every day?

Edie No, I think meat was pretty cheap. You could get for-. Well, we-. No, we didn't have meat every day. We had-, one of my famous dinners was three 'penneth' of bone – bacon bones – put on with lentils and we'd have a whacking fine pot of stew out of three penneth of bones and in Northampton Road, Clerkenwell, where I lived, I had a lady live below us, still had one room. The lady downstairs was a big woman, her husband was a printer and she had three boys and a girl and we used to take it in turns inviting each other up. I'd call down "Mrs Waldly!" Up she'd come, share my stew. She'd call up the stairs "Ede! Come down" and I had a big plate of her stew and they used to have a great big table with no tablecloth and she used to sling the bread over to the boys: "Two for you, two for you, two for you", you know, ((laughingly)) that sort of living, but while all this was going on my father had stalls and I applied once for help. It was called the, not assistance board, something else. I can't remember what it was called those days and they came and interviewed me and they said "Well, we can't help you" he said, "but you can come in if you like." I said "In where?" "Well, workhouse." So they didn't give me no help, offered to take me in, finished up giving me a couple of tickets for bread but, erm, that was the accepted condition, so he said "Your father's got money." The means test was on. I remember selling two-, a picture for half a crown to get the doctor in. I suppose they were reproductions. Everybody had a lot of pictures those days. I expect that's why they had a lot of bugs, I suppose.

Interviewer I've heard people say that before, about all the pictures and the bugs.



Edie Yeah, everybody had that and I remember selling a picture for half a crown to get the doctor in. I remember so many things it-.

Interviewer How about the pawn shop? Did you have to go and pawn?

Edie Oh, pawn shop, I had two experiences only, I think, or three, in my life with pawn shop. One was my first wedding ring. I pawned that and I didn't pay the interest so I lost it. If you paid the interest you could have kept it, so that was my first wedding ring, which-. My aunt worked for jeweller in Clerkenwell where the jewellers are and she was a housemaid or something for them – domestic service – and she had it made, so that was the first wedding ring, went for a burton. The next thing I had was when I lived in Ockendon Road, Islington. There was *Jades* (?) at the top, the pawn shop, and I didn't know how much to take to get a few shillings – two or three bob I wanted – so I parcelled up anything I could find: quilts and sheets and blankets. I made a whacking great parcel I could hardly carry it out. He said "How much do you want?" So I said "Well, how much will you give me?" So he said "Eight shillings", so I got eight shillings for all this bundle of washing but as I got a little better off and we used to go-, I used to have me washing done and that woman used to pawn my washing. We used to pay three 'ha'pence' a dozen for mangling. If you wash it yourself you pay three ha'pence a dozen if you sent it out to be mangled but, er-.

Interviewer Because the mangling was the hard work, was it?

Edie Yeah, well they, they made a few shillings on their mangling, I suppose. Three ha'pence a dozen and one and six a dozen washing. If you send your washing out one and six a dozen. Three ha'pence a dozen if sent-, washed it and sent it out for mangling. Eight shillings I got off of this great big bundle of washing and the next thing is when I had David in '35. He's spastic David. Fine, healthy chap, picture of a boy, picture of a man but he's spastic and I pawned my wedding ring then because I was so hard up and I've made up my mind I wasn't going to work. My girl was 11. I lost my daughter at 46. Marvellous girl. It was like losing my right hand. Oh, lovely nature, lovely face, lovely everything and I lost her at 46. What made me fetch it round to Joan?

Interviewer Your son you were talking about.



Edie When David was born he was born under better circumstances. I still had one room in my sister's house but now we're over at Dulwich and I had one room there when David was born. There was something else I was going to tell you before that. ((pauses)) But, erm, through, through growing up, see here.

Interviewer What year were you born in, Edie?

Edie 1902, February the seventh. Things I remember: Washing: I was sent out one and six a dozen. Mangling: three ha'pence a dozen, er, five shillings a week, my very first-

[RECORDING STOPS AND RESTARTS]

Interviewer That's better.

Edie My Mum came from a little, er, a respectable little family. Her Dad was a clock repairer. A very old-fashioned, respectable family. My father came from a debonair, mixed-up family. The mother was a lady, the father was a taxi driver with a button hole and a straw hat and he married this lady that was born in Germany and I think that's why the family was so mixed up. One was into classical music and very gentlemanly. My Dad was a giggler and a boozier and he loved to talk cockney. What, make, you know, er. His sister was ladylike, so terribly mixed up and he married my Mum, a little servant girl, and his favourite expression of upsetting my mother would be "Oh you go. You're alright with a row of scrubbing brushes round your neck" because she was always cleaning. She had no brain, he reckoned. All she knew was a row of scrubbing brushes and he taught her to go up and down the theatre lines with oranges in her apron. She never sold in her life. He taught her to-, never taught her but she did when she used to-, always leaving him. She'd run around even, go down the market, buy something, get a barrel and sell it. Now, that came from a little woman that-, from a little old-fashioned little family. They hadn't been on the streets but she loved him so much she just always took him back, going to live with him. We were very, very clean, kept very clean.

Interviewer How many children did she have?

Edie My mother had the first one born dead then three girls. Of course his favourite expression "What, another pot with no handle" every time he got a girl. He was a-. I always look on

them-. When my memory goes back I don't think about my Dad much because he had such a good time through life. I think about my Mum, my sister who was a saint and my daughter. Three people in life, never met anybody in this life to touch them, never. My Dad, I give him an half a thought here and there but he was a giggler, he giggled his way. He made a lot of money, he had a Midas touch. If he opened a shop or a stall anywhere it was a goldmine. Never gave you big wages. He used to reckon you're to take it if you want them. You know, pinch it, he called it. He used to call it-, what was the expression he used? 'Pulling'? "How much you pull?" he'd say but, erm, a funny old mix-up but in later life I married and had four children in seven years and I had a husband that used to come in, have his dinner and go straight round the little beer house, like Rovers Return. He had his dinner and went straight round the corner in Wall Street, Islington. Probably there to this day, the little beer house, so I was never taken out. Never knew what-. Well, finally the whip cracked. Now this is my life story, not babies.

Interviewer No, it's really interesting.

Edie Finally I cracked. After seven years I got a job as a waitress in the City and I worked with a waitress. Her name was Ada. She'd been about; she knew the world. A little dainty little thing with a mop of dark hair. She used to get hold of me directly I went into work. "Come here you" and she'd do me face up. Now, I'd been a mother all that time working in kitchens in poverty. I got this job as a waitress and it changed the whole of my life actually because I used to serve some hairdressers from the City. I know the name of the hairdressers just from round where I worked and, cut a long story short, I fell in love with one of the hairdressers and him me. So we had a few clandestine meetings. He had a-, he worked as a hairdressers and he was a bookmaker on the side, although he was only about 23 or 24 then but he was a, he was a gambler I suppose. Any rate I left, I left my husband eventually. I broke the marriage up and though he'd never paid me any attention he, he chased me from pillar to post.

Interviewer I bet.

Edie Every job I went to in London, I had a job in Aldgate, next to the church in Aldgate and one of the girls said to me "There's a chap waiting outside, Edie." I thought it's my husband



again and they let me out the back door and they had six-foot high railings when I got into this churchyard. I couldn't get over them, so I said to a paper chap "I can't get out", so he bought me a box and put it over and I got on the box and I got away that way.

Interviewer Did you take the children with you when you went?

Edie No, my Aunt was minding them because she sent me-. The way I made the break was she sent me away on holiday to her friend at Cliftonville and her friend was religious because they used to put a bible by my bed every night and my Aunt Edie, she was religious. She had a shop at the Elephant. That's where I was living at the time then, over the shop, and she minded the two children while I had this fortnight's holiday. Well, during the fortnight's holiday I contacted this Ernie, he was, again, and I never went back. So I got lodgings and got-, I'd got Joan with me first. John stayed with his father for a little while. Any rate, I, I knocked about with Ernie for about three years but it was sad for the children because I had them both by then and they were being minded in a lodging where I lived at Southend. I'd got a room on the seafront at Eastern Esplanade and I was a waitress at Southend and it was-. I regret, although he was nicer looking and I was taken to nicer places, restaurant or theatres and I was told I looked nice. I was taken to a theatre and I remember a play one night. It never leaves you, these things, because you're not-. "You look lovely tonight, Edie" and they stick because I'd never been-. I had an east end boy that didn't know how to say "You're nice" or anything.

Interviewer It must have been lovely for you.

Edie Nor does this one what I've got today.

Interviewer Not many of them don't, do they?

Edie No. ((quietly)) I won't talk about it. ((laughs))

Interviewer I know what you mean.

Edie It's too long a story but that's how my marriage broke up, through falling in love with a hairdresser.



Interviewer That must have been quite unusual in those days, wasn't it? For a woman to leave her husband must have been quite unusual in those days.

Edie Yes, I think it was because they had nowhere to go, half of them. See, the only place I had was this holiday, a fortnight, then I got job as a waitress straight from there. So I've got trained in the City as a waitress. I was a good waitress by then and I could always make-, but in the seaside anyone can get a job in the summer. Well, they could then. Anybody could go and be a waitress and I worked at Garons at Southend and I earned very big money for those days because we used to get £4 a week in wages, which you treble that in tips and, although I say it myself, I think I was a-, must have been a very good waitress because when I went up to lunch or meals up to the staffroom all the girls used to put their tips out. They used to say to me "How much you made Wharf?" That was my name in those days – Wharf. "How much?" ((inaudible)) spread out and then there was 25 waitresses on duty there and they'd stand round the wall and they'd be going like that me – crawly crawly – as I was pouring out the tea. Say you've got a party of farmers in I'd say "Who's going to be Mama?" I'd say "Will you do it?" I'd pour for them, see. Well, I always got bigger tips and then I always done the late shifts from 12 to 11 at night because Ernie was in London and he'd only come down on Monday because barber shops didn't open and he had his own shop by then so that was-. I had the two children.

Interviewer How old were they then when you lived down there?

Edie Joan was about six probably, seven, and John was four years older.

Interviewer So they were at school.

Edie They used to enj-. They went to school and they used to enjoy the seafront and I never went to work until 12, so I used to take them along the seafront. We'd go into the water or I'd buy them, on them little stalls, buckets and spades and rocks and hats, you know, but, um, my boy, he's a very sensitive son that I've got. He's 60, 62 now, 63 but he's a nice boy and him and I both regret because I said "Well, I left your Dad" I said "because he-, well, because I fell in love. That's all about, nothing he did at all" and I said "I never got

nothing better in the end." I wonder whether I'd have been better staying with my east end husband and his dart playing. He wasn't a vicious man, you know.

Interviewer What happened with Ernie in the end?

Edie Oh, I separated voluntary. I couldn't get married because I wasn't divorced and Ernie was married. He'd separated and it began to, it began to-. Oh, I know what happened. I was looking after my Aunt's shop at the Elephant. She had a working man's dining room there, a very big place, with rooms above it and they used to let the rooms. We had sixes. One room we called the sixes, one room there's three beds in. They used to let them to working class drivers. This merchant – he'll kill me – came to lodge there, didn't fall in love but a bit keen on him and one night-. I used to run the shop with my cousin in those days. He had a hotel at Ramsgate but yet he was only a boy at the time and my Aunt was religious, always away on religious meetings, so she used to rely on my-, on me and my cousin, my cousin Fred and he was courting the wife he eventually married. So one night he said "Will you come out for an evening?" At the time we hadn't met before. "Will you come out for an evening? It's my sister's anniversary." So I said-. He said "Ask Taffy to come." I only knew him as Taffy for months. After I was going out with him I only knew him as Taffy. He said "Taffy?" and I said-. We crawled up the ((laughingly)) stairs in this big place. "Taffy, want to come to a party?" And he said in broad Welsh ((laughingly)) "No, I've got no clothes." I said "You ain't got-" He said "My firm's gone bust." I wondered why he hadn't been down to pay his six shillings rent. They all paid six shillings a week rent. I used to charge them a sixpence for early morning tea, sixpence for-. They paid for their own laundry and we never used to give them their laundry until they paid, until they paid for it. Because my Aunt went away that weekend I said "Well, Taffy hasn't been down with his rent", so she said "Well, don't give him his laundry ((laughingly)) until it comes down." Clean shirt and- you know. Anyway, this party business, he said he had no clothes. He told us his suit was in pawn so I gave him ten shillings or five shillings – I'm not quite sure – to go and get his suit out of pawn. It was a little brown suit with wide bottoms and ((inaudible)) coat. That was the fashion for the chaps and we took him out. We got home in the early hours of the morning and I was in charge of this place. I had to get all the men



breakfast, so none of us went to bed. I started-. I put him on the mincer. That's a favourite job in a coffee shop. Everything goes through the mincer. That's where you got your rissoles from, whether it was lumpy Yorkshire or a bit of fat or anything, it all went-. So we put Taffy on the mincer but of course he had a big breakfast: two eggs and bacon and bubble and everything that goes with it. Everything with bubble those days: bloater and bubble, kipper ((laughingly)) and bubble and he never left. He was too well-fed so, so I was never even done with him. My sister said "You'll have a job to get rid of him." My Aunt come back and she "I'm going to take the shop over myself now. I'm not going away no more", so my cousin and I had to find-. We took a flat. ((laughs)) We took a flat all unbeknown of the district was in Brixton, a notorious prostitutes' district. Didn't know at the time and it said right here. Everybody knew it. My Neddy was at sea and he said his mother had moved in. He told one of the boys at sea where he'd moved. They said "Oh, everybody that's prostitutes." Well, we had a five-bedroom flat there, a maisonette place for 25 shillings a week, so my cousin, he was quite a business man really, he had a terrific brain and he-. We took this flat. The two children were still being minded. I got them home. It was when we made our first real home. We had no furniture, so we went up to the sale room when we bought our home. I had a bed for five shillings, I had a table for two shillings, I had a great big red plush armchair for five shillings and I got my father to go and get me some lino and there's another story of my father's drunkenness. He said "I've got a big fine roll of lino over there," he said, "blue and white check." He said "I'll get that for you." So we left Dad to get the lino. He's got his catalogue and he marked off the number and he thought Oh, I've got plenty of time now. I'll go in the pub. Plenty of time by the time that comes up. As he got back to the sale room at the Elephant they were just bidding for this lino. He put his hand up for ten bob I think he was. "Knock down to Mr Baker – ten shillings." So he said to the chap that was seeing the stuff out "Very fine buy that was, wasn't it," he said "that roll of lino?" He said "You ain't bought a roll of lino," he said, "you've got that harmonium." ((laughs)) So we had a harmonium and no lino but that was our first home and my cousin, he had £2. He went down to the fire station where they sell the salvage and he got his home for £2. He had a seven-piece suite with Queen Anne legs, he had a big brass bed. Anyway, he was still courting Dolly, the girl he married, so on a



night her mother came over from Clerkenwell to visit us in our new flat, so he took her into his room to see his home and as ((laughingly)) she sat down on the chair it collapsed. It had woodworm in it. Any rate, we were very destitute then because we'd left the shop and we'd left it in a hurry because my Aunt Edie had come back and hadn't give us much warning because every Friday night we used to make a little bit on the side in that shop. We used to hold Moseley's, Moseley's-. They used to have these ((inaudible)) meetings there. We used to let the shop out for five shillings. It wasn't known as Moseley's then. Of course I'm-, and we used to make rock cakes and tea and that was all our 'bunce'. We got the five shillings for letting the room out and we got the money we sold for the refreshments. We had to clear all the room up after they'd gone. Anyway, Aunt Edie had heard about the meetings and she was coming back to take over. So Fred and I were out and got this flat. He bought it home for £2. Then he had-, we had £3 between us, so he said "Well, I can set-, I can buy." He said "I can buy and sell" he said, "but I can't push a barrel" because he only had one leg, so Alec was the strong one of the lot of us. We were living together by then, not married. He was the strong one. He said "Well, I can push a barrow", only he'd never pushed a barrow in his life because he was a Welsh village boy, you know. So they go down to the Covent Garden and they buy £3 on bananas and you went down Camberwell Green selling these bananas. Well, each night they come home and Fred was very romantic, rather a nice type of boy. He wasn't rough. He used to bring in a fruit pie from Lyon's and some firewood, so in the meantime-. Oh, you hadn't-, we hadn't even told you about the grand piano, because he was very artistic, Fred. He used to play beautiful music because he did come from a nice mum, so we had this grand piano in on hire, no lino. I had my bed in the room where the-, I had my bed in the room where the grand piano was. The children had a bed with two single beds in, Freddy had his own bedroom up the back, so that was our family and, by the way, I had to clean Joan and John's head directly I'd got them back. That was two more heads I had to clean, so Freddy used to come in after being at the Camberwell Green with his bananas I suppose for going on two weeks nearly. They were getting blacker and blacker. They were only selling a few every day, you see. Alec would go and take the barrow down and each night he'd bring this fruit tart in from Lyon's and the wood. He used to put the wood on the fire and we'd



draw our brocade settee up, what we had from the sale room – about ten bob, five bob – and there we would be with our blaze there, Freddy on his piano and the brocade thing, the children washed and put to bed. So that was Alec, myself, Freddy and Dolly – the one he married, so they never carried on. They were a nice ordinary young couple. I'd started living with Alec then. That was the first time I'd lived with him, when we took the flat. So things are going from bad to worse. I get a job over Hammersmith, King Street, in a pub as a cook then. I'd graduated up. I've gone backwards and forwards on this story.

Interviewer No, it's fine. It's very interesting.

Edie I'd graduated as a cook then and I took a job in a pub as a cook and the governor wouldn't have anything used up the second day. I used to say I had a whole leg of lamb perhaps for dinner that day and there'd be about half of it left, so I used to bring the leg of lamb home and anything else going about I'd bring. Alec used to meet me at the Stockwell station and I always had a little case and he'd meet me there with all the loot, so that was feeding the family. Well, then Freddy had the shoes off his-, his shoe off his feet. He had to have a pair because he had an artificial leg, so I went over and saw Freddy's mother. She had a shop at Tottenham. I said "Freddy's in a bad way and won't ask for help." I said "He needs a pair of shoes badly." Anyway, she sent some money back for Freddy to get shoes and he never looked back. He went to his mum, helped her in the shop and from there he graduated to a hotel at Ramsgate and went into big business but Alec and I, we plodded along on this shop in the Kingsway. He was getting dole. It was 15 or 25 bob. I can't-, must have been 25. Well, that's where we got the bailiff in. We had the bailiff there and she was ((laughingly)) covered in jewellery. We owed one week and a half rent. I suppose in law it would have been two weeks and a half because it was paying in advance. In my mind it was one week and a half and I says to her "What happens?" I got pregnant and I had a miscarriage. Happened on the train, going to work on the train, so I could feel something happening on the train, so just as I get on the platform to go in the lift to go up to Charring Cross this miscarriage started. I crouched down by the wall and I covered my face. Now, two ladies came. One had an ear trumpet and it must have been her maid or-, because she said "Anything wrong?" I said "Yes, please help me." I said, I said, I said "I've got a



haemorrhage." I said "I think I've miscarried", so they got a porter, cleared the lift. I was taken up in the lift and a sacking, canvas thing was put round. I don't where they got it from or whether it was kept there, you know, the sacking and two or three poles, that was put round. I had my face covered up all the time in case anyone knew me. I wasn't known there of course but I'd been travelling from Hammersmith to Stockwell regularly and I was taken away to Charring Cross. I was-. I was taken from there to Saint Joseph Hospital. I was kept there for a few days, they let me out. What happened, it hadn't all come away, I went back to work, had another big haemorrhage at work. Had a wonderful mistress there. Miles of tablecloth she bought and helped me. I was taken back to a hospital again actually what they put on the paper was the size of a tennis ball, so they hadn't cleared all the clots out. So we were in dire poverty then, so that's where we didn't pay the rent. I owed half a week I reckoned, so when she came to see me I said "Well, we're moving out this week." I said "We're going up to my sisters at Dulwich", so she never said anything. She said "Well, I wish you well" and she was loaded with rings and diamonds and my bed was tipped up. I had ten haemorrhages in a week, so you can guess how ill I was but it was tipped up, every time the bed put down-, so she never said, er, anything else. She said "Wish you well." Well, she went. Well, I'm in this bed ill and we sent them to take the piano back and Fred had a brother Jack, a gay, bright chap. He just recently died, Jack. In those days he was from one job to another and the playboy of the family and when we lived near him he used to come into that flat. So he came in that morning, put the kettle on, threw some biscuits down and he was playing this piano. We always used to play jazz – bang, bang, bang, bang- very bright. So I said "Jack, they're coming to take that away in a minute." He said "Who?" I said "Well, the bail-, she-, they're putting the bailiffs in." So while he was playing a ring came on the door and the piano people came in. They were unscrewing the legs and getting it ready to take away, so while they were doing that another ring came. In came this man and sure enough he had a bowler hat. They were worn ((laughingly)) a lot those days, so he was talking to these piano chaps. He said "Oh, you beat me to it." He said to me "Can I have a look round?" I thought he wanted to see the flat. I said "Yeah, help ((laughingly)) yourself." I'm like that then; I'm like that today, you know. So he went in the other room. There's only this old plush chair there and the table and by that time it

was full of fat because we'd bought from the shop a ten pound box of white fat. We took that from the shop the Friday we left or the Saturday and some butterbeans we'd taken – seven pound of butter beans – and a big packet of tea. We brought that order away with us so they were all frying chips. My Dad gave us a sack of potatoes, so you can guess the state of the stove and all he had to put down was an armchair and a table and dirty old gas stove full of fat. I hadn't been out there. I'd been taken ill and was in my bed, so I said "Excuse me, are you with these men?" He said "No" he said "I'm the bailiff." I said "Bailiff? What for?" I said "We only owe a week and a half," I said, "I'm going Friday." I said "We're leaving Friday." "Sorry," he says, "she put the bailiff in." I couldn't get over it because she was-. It wasn't a big lot of rent and, erm, he said "If you like" he said "you can call your doctor in" he said "and I won't be able to touch it if you mustn't be moved." I said "Well, I mustn't be moved but we're going up my sister's because we can't afford to stay here – 25 shillings and me not working." There was the two children and only Alec's dole, so there was no question of being able to stay there. So I made arrangements to go to my sister's on Friday. Alec took the home. My mother's grand piano, that had gone on a barrow with the bed He'd never pushed barrows ((laughingly)) in his life, so he pushed the barrow from Brixton up to Dulwich...

Interviewer That's far enough, isn't it?

Edie ...top of Dulwich with our home on it. So I had to wait in the bed until my sister called for me after she'd finished work. She was a cook of a big restaurant in Drury Lane and so I had to wait until she'd finished and Dolly, who was courting my cousin, her mother came. They'd both come to fetch me, so they helped me dress in this bed, they helped me to a tram, arm-, both holding an arm each side. I was alright until we got out to Bromar Road, the top of East Dog Kennel Hill, the village at the top of the hill, and, er, as we got off the train and they were just helping me I haemorrhaged. So my sister picked me up in her arms and ran me quick down the street to her house. I was put into her front room, her bed and bed tipped up again, doctor sent for and although-. That's why I say people should always be careful when they speak in front of unconscious people because nine times out of ten they can hear. I heard every word what was said. I kept sinking down into a black hole.

That's the only way I can describe it – a black hole, kept sinking down – but I heard the doctor say-. They sent for an ambulance. I heard the ambulance maid say “We can't move her, she's got no pulse. We'll come back in the morning.” I heard the doctor say “Well, I'll come back every hour.” So that was-.

Interviewer You must have been very ill.

Edie Yes. That's happened about four, five occasions in my life.

[AUDIO FILE EDIE MARTINSON (I) 1 ENDS AND AUDIO FILE EDIE MARTINSON (I) 2 BEGINS]

Thank you very much, erm, but you can't come in yet. We're still talking, although we're on now to, erm...

Male voice ((laughs))

Edie ...Anford Road, Hackford Road. That's the name of that little-. We're on to Hackford Road.

Interviewer Where's that then – Hackford Road?

Male voice Oh right, don't worry. ((leaves))

Edie Brixton. We're on to Hackford Road now. Oh, that was notorious turning of prostitutes. As anyone came home late at night they were all accosted. My cousin with the one leg, if he went to see-. Oh, there's a little bit more about Fred. I gave him tuppence to bring in a loaf. I said “Fred, when you go and see Dolly on the bus or tram” I said “will you fetch a loaf in?” I said. No, not fetch it in. It was too late. “Leave me tuppence. I'll get the bread in the morning.” So the next morning I said-. “Oh” he said, he said “I've got enough for a loaf.” I said “Good.” I never bothered, so he went and saw Dolly home and she lived in Clerkenwell, which was a long way and instead of putting her on the tram like he was used to he got on with her, spent my tuppence for a loaf. Next morning I said “Got money for the bread Fred?” He said “I saw Dolly home” he said. He said “I didn't like to let her go on her own”, so that was that incident. Now we're back in Hack-, we're back in Bromar Road now with my sister and the two children, Alec and I, and that was my-, one of the occasions I think quite a few when I've been given up. Last two years ago I was in intensive care for three weeks with a pancreas-. The doctor at Dulwich called me his miracle woman, so I've



had luck on my side. I was in 13 weeks but, er, I don't know what part you want now, whether you carry on from Hackford Road. Alec was out of, oh yeah, we were still out of work, Alec was out of work and I'm the invalid, so after a long time he gets a job for £4 a week driving for a chap in-

Interviewer Was this before the war still?

Edie 19-. Now, let's get the dates, try and get some dates. Yes, yes, yes. I hadn't got David. I hadn't got David then. David was born 1935 and I was 37 years of age when I had David.

Interviewer Let me just write down the children because the first little baby you lost was-

Edie 1920. The second one is still alive. He was born 13 months later.

Interviewer That's John?

Edie Next one was about – John – 1924, I think.

Interviewer John.

Edie It was in six years before.

Interviewer So who was the next one?

Edie Freddy was the next. There was Edith, John, Freddy and Joan. Joan was 1926. I was 24. Each year they were born I were two years younger, so I had those four children-.

Interviewer Freddy, he was the one that had the wasting disease.

Edie He had the wasting disease caused through different feeding, changing foods and on national milk at those days.

Interviewer And is David the one who was spastic?

Edie No, no, the one I've got now by Alec is spastic. He's 48. I had him in 1935, this one I've got now – spastic. Alec got a job driving before the war because David was born before the war, so it must have been about '33. I know I'd been with Alec about six years before I had this baby and if he was born in '35 it must have been '29, about '29, um-. He got a job. I went back to work at Drury Lane. They put me on a night job doing salads. We had a three-floor restaurant there and I was second cook there under my sister, only she worked there

16 years. I worked on and off because I had time off for David. That was one of the happiest times of my life, one of the happiest. Good hard work, 22 girls and I must have been the clown of the-, of them because we used to dress up and that – silly games. The butcher would take me for a run around the block in his great big basket. They had a big basket. Men had a big basket.

Interviewer Yeah, I know what you mean, on the butcher's bike.

Edie I used to get in there with my white overall on and my plimsolls sticking out and he got fined five shillings for having me in his basket in the Kingsway. Got fined five shillings that boy did for that but there was a terrific lot of fun at that restaurant. It goes on and on whenever we're talking about the ((inaudible)). It's a story on its own and a lot more is a story. The Land Army was a story on its own. I joined the Land Army after my Dad stopped-. 14-18 war I joined the Land Army off my Dad's stall because he used to come back so drunk and swear. Nine times out of ten I would take the pocket off and throw it on the stall and walk away. Well, during one of those fits I joined the Land Army. I was only 15 and a half. We were sent up to Gloucester on High Green Farm with Mr Page, the farmer was, and the lady we lodged with was Mrs Reed and they used to feed us like birds. When we got out at Gloucester we went to a little café and we always called that the White Blancmange Café because you got a whacking great helping of white blancmange for three pence. So went to a big hall where they were dishing out all these Land Army girls. We went away with a party and they were dishing them all out to-. Farmer take one or farmer take two and I was left at last with another girl. We wanted to stick together, so Mr Page, he said "I want two girls", so we went with Mr Page to High Green Farm, Gloucester and lodged with this lady. She was a lovely girl, Lilly, a very ladylike girl and we were great pals and we used to creep down early in the morning. We were always hungry. We used to go out at six and do so much work and come back to breakfast and she used to give us a little ladleful of porridge, a half a-, then follow that with a half a streaky rasher and a little bit of fried-. We were fed like we were children. Of course, we used-, to go-, and we looked robust, the funny part about it. I was always writing home. One day my Mother sent me 12 penny stamps because I said how hungry we were, so instead of going back to work

after breakfast we went down to the road and waited outside the little village shop for it to open and the sun was well up, about nine o'clock, I suppose, went to spend our 12 penny stamps. So we bought a loaf of bread, four Oxos, gave her half a loaf and I had half and we broke it open, squashed the Oxos in-between. Oh, it was heaven. We were having a real good tuck in. Anyway, we had to make our way back to the farm where we working on a field thistle budging – cutting thistles down in the corn. We used to go up and down the lines singing like nightingales. We loved it and they used to keep a bottle of cider and about every so many rows he'd let you have a little drop of cider. So there'd be Mr Page, his cowman Cecil, they had an odd boy Jack that used to hang around and myself and Lilly and he used to try and find out about how long as I was at home in London and when he found my Dad had a fish stall and that I was courting a boy named Jack that was-. The first husband had gone in the army then about First World War. "When your Jack comes out you're going to sell herrings" and the fisherman they used to sing Alive Alive Oh. It was a happy time, um-. August Monday came round and we went-, done our usual thing, went out early, then back to breakfast. I sat and we were both looking at each other. I said "They work out here holiday Monday!" We were both looking with long faces, so Mr Page said "What's wrong with you two?" So I said "Well, Mr Page, it's holiday Monday." "Well, what about it?" he said. I said "Well, in London we don't work holiday Monday. Everyone has a holiday." So he said "What do you do?" I said "Well, we got a pram and the swings and roundabouts." I was only 15 and a half. "Swings and roundabouts? Well, here you have to work." So, anyway, he must have relented because he came up to us a little while later. He said "well, you can go another half an hour's time" I think it was. He said "I'm going back. I'll tell Mrs Reed to get you some sandwiches ready." So he goes away, we leave work and get back to the house. She'd got a tiny packet of sandwiches for each of us and we're going out for the day and we're ten miles from town. ((laughs)) So first he said "Where we're going to go?" So there was a dray. Do you know what a dray is? A long mow cart very low to the ground with a horse trundling. We sat there. He was going into town and I don't know how many ((laughingly)) miles an hour it was sitting there and these sandwiches are gone a few miles out the road. So I had one and something and she had one and something. I said "Well, let's go to the blancmange shop." We never got there



midday, one or two. So "Let's go to the blancmange shop." We had three penny-worth of blancmange and tea, so I said "Anything on down here" I said, "holiday Monday?" "Oh" he said "well, out Norton barracks" he said "there's something." And when he said barracks I thought Oh, barracks. ((laughs)) I go back on that story when we first got there. Mr Page was showing us on our first day round the farm and he said "This is the calves, this is that, and this here, you must never come to this door – never." He said the bull was kept there "and we never let him out. He's very dangerous." "What's the good of him, Mr Page? What's the bull for then?" Of course it was tricky question. Anyway, he says-, so he took us back where the calves were. "Now, this is the daddy of these calves." Well, we were learning to milk. We were going trained-, we were being trained as milkers. There were three sections of Land Army: forestry, forage and general agriculture. I went in for general agriculture, so milking was our thing. So when I got home that home, went up to the cowshed there's all the village boys up there all shouting "What's the bull for Mr Page? ((laughingly)) Mister, what's the bull for?" This was London girl was laughing stock, see? We settled down and, erm, we never saw a living-, ((inaudible)) for a long time. Suddenly we're out in the field one day and a lorry went by with soldiers. We raced it to the edge of the hedge, because I was a flirt, I suppose. I must have been a flirt. Never had brothers. So we had to ((laughingly)) talk to these soldiers. Now, back to the day out at the Norton barracks. We had a rickety old tram ride in that town to head to Norton barracks. I said "You going to Norton barracks?" He said- had it written up, in fact. So when we got there I said "Look at it Lil" I said, flag flying, big-. We had army boots, used to wear army boots, corduroy trousers. We were racing on. When we got to the door the soldier held his hand out for the ticket because-. I thought "Sorry," I said "we ain't got a ticket." So he said "You're in uniform, that's alright." So in uniform in you went. Well, we never looked back. Everybody wanted to treat us, everybody wanted to buy us something. We had a red letter day and there weren't many Land Army girls about then. They were novelties I suppose, so had a marvellous day, it had not cost us anything and suddenly they said "Well, dancing on the green is going to start soon" and the fairy lights began to light up. We'd got ten miles to go back, no money, no vehicle, only a few coppers, so I said "Oh, let's stay a little while Lil until it does start." So we stayed and the band struck up and there we were with



the 1914 soldiers club, turkey trots, you shuffle along – that was the thing. ((laughs)) I don't know what the time was, I forget. It might have been ten, nine, it might have been 11 but it was dark, had to get back and we walked back, up lanes, up lanes. We got two miles within home and Mrs Reed had a husband who was a weekend soldier, a very strict man, and Mr Reed-, I suddenly saw a light coming towards us and Mr Reed it was outside. I've never been so torn off a strip ((laughingly)) in my life: "Disgraceful! Brazen hussies!" I said "Well, we only went to Norton barracks. ((laughs)) It was their fair day." It was open day, like fair: "I'll see you in the morning", rushed upstairs, no drink. I know we were in disgrace but we lived it down but that was the August- that was a big red letter day. After about six week's training we were shipped across. We were in training there. We were sent down to Bedford and we were called-. Lady Dimmock was the lady in charge of the Land Army those days and we were her showgirls. Every time she had friends or anybody come these two showgirls were brought and we had cream bands by then with red crowns on – passed your training – trained milkers. I must go back on the milking though. I had an old grey cow given to me and Mr Page said "Now, get-, put your stool down and tuck yourself well into your cow. Tuck well in." I used to get well into this cow. Every time I used to keep squeezing little drops and as I squeezed one little drop would come and a bit of dirt, another little-. I had a little drop of milk at the end, about two pints, a load of dirt because he showed us the right way. He would wash the teats off first, which is end with the milk and wash them off with the milk, no scrubbing like the do today, wash off with the milk, and he'd get a steady rhythm. You'd have a bucket of milk with a froth on it in a few minutes and there we were squeezing. That's why they had to give us the old cow, so that we didn't ruin their good cows. I used be smothered in old grey hairs but turned out as trained milkers and Lady Dimmock used to call us up and we were given the job of kitting out all the new recruits as they came in and what a job! We had a whole store full of-. We had Australian hats with straps under and up one side. We used to have new hats and new-. We had smocks those days. We had two white smocks and they used to come – long thin ones, short fat ones. They'd get these hobnailed boots on, dance about them "I can't wear these!" especially from 'brum' with their broad accent, you know, but that was very, very funny. There was something I was just going to tell you about, funny things that went on.



We used to pinch the eggs on the farm. We were given a row of huts to clean out, cowsheds, with a pitchfork. We had to make piles of dung but we used to sneak the eggs and on our-, when we washed our clothes on our washing day we'd boil all these eggs up very, very hard and I had them all over the shed hard-boiled eggs. Then we went away. We went to Bedford. This is where our trouble started and we had this job kitting out. We were-, that's right, we were going to be sent to Luton on a rally. We were going to have a procession carnival and we were supposed to ride on a hay cart, one ride and one lead. Halfway through the procession one leads and one rides. Well, they gave us a train permit. In the meantime at Bedford we'd met two London soldiers. One used to call me London, I suppose because of the accent – always called me London. So he said "You know how to get home, if you want to get home?" he said. So I said "No." He said "Well, when you get your train tickets in Luton" he said "you can hire a bike there and get home." The only training we've had on bikes was up in the village boys, a little ride and drop it and falling off, you know. So we get our train tickets to Luton and I remember to this day number 12 Alma Street. My memory goes back so clear. Number 12 Alma Street my memory goes back to. We went to the bicycle shop in the high street that-, told them we lived at number 12 Alma Street and we hired two bikes, three and six for the weekend. So away we come with our bikes and we've got two little attach-, it came with. Woolworths used to sell small attach cases at sixpence each and they were popular. People had them for lunches or-. So we had our nightdress in that, well, our belongings, er, both our belongings in the one case and that was it, I suppose. So we walked through the town. I said "Well, we won't ride," I said, "Lil, we'll walk through the town" so we were walking through the town and on the outskirts of Luton there's a hill, so I stop on the hill. So at the bottom of the hill we're going to start off for London. So I said "What about the case?" She said "Well, I can't ride with anything strapped on" and I said "Nor can I." So we tossed up for it and she got it. ((laughingly)). She got the bike, so we're getting off from the curb like learners do: going, going, suddenly you're away, and you're afraid to look back and see if the other one's away. So I got away and I was pedalling up to the top of this hill. I couldn't hear anyone. I kept shouting "Are you there Lil?" I couldn't hear no sound. I looked down at the top of the hill. There was Lil at the bottom with her case spread ((laughingly)) all over the road.



It fell off and everything went. Well, we made that trip. We had one left from Luton to King's Cross. We got a trip on a Royal Air Force lorry. We called in at an old lady's before we got this lift at Barnet. I'd asked her could she give us a drink of water. ((laughingly)) She not only gave us a drink of water, she gave us lemonade and cakes, all her son in the war, all her son was in the army, all his photos, so we got all her son's history instead of a glass of water. When we got to King's Cross, well, anyone would think we'd won the war or been out: "Good luck girl, good luck girl", pats on the back, everyone was. As I say, there were rare. There weren't much about with the Land Army uniform and they were patting us on the back as though we'd won the war ((laughingly)) at King's Cross. I went up to mother's stall at Exmouth Street and my Mum was a little matter of fact woman. We went to the stall and everyone was saying "Don't they look well. Cor! Don't they look fine!" I was about 16 by then. Not quite 16. I wasn't 16 until the February. "Smashing!" So my Mum said "Get back round 'ere" she said, "causing a crowd" she said. "Get home with you." "Is there anything indoors to eat, Mum?" She said "Yeah, there's a pot of cold rabbit in the hearth." There was wrought black iron pot that they used to cook in in the hearth. Sure enough there was a rabbit being stewed, whether it was somebody's or what but we had a feed of cold rabbit and Lilly had to go to her house at Woolwich. By then we were experienced cyclists by then but of course we couldn't stop. If a policeman had his hand up we shouted "Turn left", we couldn't turn right or left. We had to drop the bike and fall off. Keystone cops would have been nothing in our ride from Luton to London. If ever there was a copper, which there was, we had to turn: "Turn left Lil, turn left." To save stopping and going off he'd let us turn left but we were experienced by then and I had the bike a week, instead of going back. Lilly went to her home and, er, I went with her because her mum was a lovely woman. They were poor, very poor but her Dad was a gentleman, very refined family and her mum washed our smocks and ironed them all in that couple of hours and ironed them. We come away clean and I was at home at my mother's house in Clerkenwell. I used to remember all the hours on my bike and went to a theatre in my Land Army uniform and thinking everyone would look and they used to look, so we loved it but her dad made her go back. We got locked up. One day-. They kept sending telegrams: "Return at once, return at once." No one called but these telegrams kept coming and I'd got a job.

I-, we were in the 'munition' factory. After this week, we had a week running about, and I got a job in the munition factory. No, this came after the-. No, this came after the munition factory. We were taken back. We decided to go back. Her father said she'd got to go back and I said "Well, I'll go back." We were sitting on my bed in my Mum's house sewing black garters. Everyone wore black elastic garters. I was sewing new garters. Knock come at the door and two men: "You Miss Coombes?" She said "Yes." "You Miss Baker?" "Yes." "Well, I'm afraid I'd got to arrest you two girls for stealing two bikes." We said "We never stole them." Oh, the idea of stealing had never entered our head. "We never stole the bikes." "I'm afraid so. You've got to come with me." I said "You're not going to hold our arm, are you?" "No," he said "just take you down the road." So he took us to King's Cross police station and they wheeled the bikes and we walked with them and when we got there we were put into a ((laughingly)) cell and they kept sending the coppers along as they come off duty: "Go and have a look. See what we've got." So, erm, they kept looking, looking: "Oh, two little dears. There's two little dears", so we'd got our little case with us, so we had a label in it so we wrote on it 'The Two Little Dears' and tied it on the bars on the door. We tied the label on and all round was graffiti, swearing: 'PC so-and-so is an old so-and-so.' Under the bell pusher if you want to go and ring the bell, so I rung the bell. "So what do you want?" I said "I want to go home. I'm here." So he said I must have a cheek. So he said did you want to go to the toilet? I said "We want to go to toilet then." So he sent a great big woman there – they called her Audrey or somebody – to take us to the toilet. Shall I fill your glass up? She stood with the door wide open while we were-. Would you rather have tea?

Interviewer Tea actually. Would you like one?

Edie Yeah.

Interviewer You must dry, all this talking.

Edie Well, ((inaudible)) since I got home I could talk forever. My daughter-in-law said "Mum, you should write a book." ((inaudible))



Interviewer You've done so much work in your life, haven't you? I mean, some women don't work much but you've worked all your life.

Edie I've worked all life, very hard, very hard. Always had the donkey parts.

Interviewer How old were you when you left school then?

Edie Fourteen and I started work on my birthday. I couldn't get in there quick enough on my birthday. I thought Oh, five bob wages and I went-. My Mum went to give me a shilling back: "No, I don't want that, Mum" I said. I said "Well look, what about what I done with me wages? Me pocket money?" I had sixpence pocket money and I used to-. I must have been a little girl then because I used to like them tupenny novels, the unmarried mother or was she to blame or driven from home? And I used to go to the Elephant and Castle Theatre with my sixpence: tuppence to go in, half a pound of cherries for a penny, penny a programme, might have even been ha'penny, so I got me entrance, I've got me cherries and I've got tuppence still.

Interviewer Where was that then? Where was the theatre?

Edie The theatre? Oh, the Saddler's Wells. The Elephant, no-. The Elephant, no, no. The Elephant was where I used to go with that sixpence pocket money. They had a small theatre then. Every week they changed the plays and then the heroine with baby wrapper in a long black shawl, she had powder all over her face, bits of driven paper for snow. Women used to come in with a moustache, stalking her, you know. It was driven from home, was she to blame? No mother to guide her, all those plays one after the other and my sixpence would be gone Friday night, same night as I got it, on that outing. Then I was going ((inaudible)) the next week. My mother said "You'd better have another sixpence" but my first day I was greasing tins for the pastry cook, scrubbing benches, scrubbing the ledges. They used to make me the beer girl in the lunch hour to get the men's drinks up the pub up the road and then I went down in the basement to scrub in all the afternoon. Twelve hours a day, that was. See, we were strong and we'd grown up with a tough father and he'd been not a throw out but he'd been the dodgy boy of his family because they had a drunken father and he used to take his sister, the one that turned religious on Highgate.



He'd say "Come on my mump, I'll get you some cake." So he took his sister up to these big houses up Highgate and he used to open-, when the lady opened the door: "Please, have you got any stale bread? I've had no breakfast." His sister, the story goes, used to say "You said we were going to get cake!" And he's asking for stale bread. So, they come from the dodgy-, and my father was always the home out, selling it. If we come from school one day we'd have a home, one day we wouldn't. It would be sold and perhaps the next day well, I'd let him go out-, with the first-. Never discussed my first marriage much. He knows I had the two children. I've never told him, he's never asked but all this part he could have come in. I'll ask him if he wants a cup of tea. Do you want a cup of tea Alec? ((laughingly)) He's gone.

Interviewer Can I just use your bathroom?

[RECORDING STOPS AND STARTS]

Interviewer Oh, I'll tell you now.

Edie I've got you in the cell.

Interviewer We got to the cell, but on the level, it wasn't a basement cell. It was on the level with the charge room and, um, I said we wanted some tea. He said "Well, you can have a tea sent in." Sent out a cop stop coffee shop across the road. He said "You can have a tea sent in", so we did. We had some tea sent in with some sugar from a coffee shop. Just after we'd had that tea my father sent us down a can of tea – a billycan. They were ((laughingly)) used a lot those days – a tin can with handle over the top. He sent us down a billycan full of tea and some kippers because we had a fish stall, kippers and a couple of big oranges. The coppers took the oranges, kippers we had, they were eaten, but we'd already had a tea, you see. Anyway, six o'clock-, no, before six o'clock, erm, we had to wait for detectives to come from Luton to pick us up so-.

Male voice Getting a woman's life story.

Edie They took us down to King's Cross station, again with the bikes, took us down the King's Cross station with the bikes, went and bought us some sweets and papers and took us

back to Luton. When we got there they said-, they went in a huddle with the sergeant in charge of the-.

Male voice Put them on charge.

Edie They went into a huddle and said "Well, sorry, you'll have to stay here the night" they said "and you'll be brought up in the morning charged with stealing the bikes." Lilly screamed. Oh, she screamed blue murder: "I want my Dad, I want my Dad. I'm not going to stay here. I couldn't possibly stay." ((inaudible)) and she was screaming so much I said "Well, can we sleep together? Can we have the one cell?" I were going to be my old tough self again. I'd have put up with it provided I wasn't alone. I said "Could we either sleep together in the cell?" "No," she said "I don't want to stop here at all" she kept yelling, so they went into a huddle again and the sergeant was off. So they said "Well, ((laughingly)) if we let you go will you promise never to do this again?" Well, we couldn't get the words out quick enough, could we? Of course we'd ((laughingly)) never do that again and they come and saw us into the station and got us a ticket in Harpendon and said "We're sending you to a training centre at Harpendon." It was pitch black by then so instead of going home we went to Harpendon and a great big low building. I'm just thinking about the carnation vase. Big low building, it was. Rung the bell, like a prison. It looked like a morgue, you know, so down come this trainer. She had a dressing gown, long fair hair over her shoulders. I can see her now standing there. "Are you the two girls that stole the bikes?" Of course, up sizing the game. "We never stole-." Of course we weren't thieves, you know. "We never stole bikes." "This way." She ignored what we were saying: "This way." Up a long corridor, this way, that way, in. "I'll see you in the morning." Put us in this room, switched the light on, went out and shut the door. We looked all round, ((laughingly)) looked about, it was a lovely dining room: long table right through the middle and nice, comfortable chairs and there we are. "I'll see you in the morning" and that was the end of her, so about-, after we got comfortable, took our boots off and sat in the armchair I said "I want a wee." Well, where? That was the first thing? She said "Why?" So I said "See if you can open that window and step out. We'll go outside in the bushes." Of course, all about it was all countryside round there. Well, probably built up by now but all countryside, so



((laughingly)) I went to step out. I said "I can't go out there Lil." I said "I can't go out there." I said "It's all shadows." I said "I couldn't go out there." "Nor can I" she said. None of us could get out, so we shut the window and we were sort of sitting there: I want to go for a wee, I want to go for a wee, so I parked my eye on this carnation vase on the table. ((laughs))

Interviewer You didn't?

Edie Yeah. It's a very old story. Yeah, so we took the flowers out and laid them on the table and I done a wee first, wet all over the floor, wiped it up with our nightdresses what was in this case – same old Woolworths' case, the six penny case, tipped it out the window and then she went. Well, we sat there until about five, the early hours of the morning and a door opened – it was a very long room – and these girls started going through. We hadn't mixed with no other Land Army girls, you see, only ourselves and they were all sorts and all sizes, little fat ones, long thin ones, trudging through from that door to a kitchen door out there. So I thought When they going to come for us, but no one come for us. Eight o'clock come round, half past eight. It appears these girls used to have to go out early in the morning, similar to us, only we went for a more comfortable home and do quite a lot of work and then come back late for breakfast, so a different arrangement. It was a centre with a lot of girls, so suddenly someone called us out and we went in the kitchen. There was a blazing fire there and a cook there. She sat us down on a little bench, gave us a mug of tea each, some bread and jam. So she said we were to go after the train when we'd had our breakfast. We had to go and be-, go into a-, see what punishment we're going to get. So our time come after nine, I think, when we were finally called in. "Now, your punishment, you two girls" she said "will be you say here for six weeks for training." I said "Well, we're fully trained." I said "We've done our training." We had our green and our red crown, you know. "I'm going to ring Lady Dimmock." She said "Well, you're free today" she said, "but tomorrow you start work." So she went out and left us. We were free, free as the air, so I went on the phone and got Lady Dimmock. She was in an office at Luton-, Bedford. So she said "Well, stay there, be good girls and I'll come and see you" so I said "When? Today?" "Oh no, not today" she said. So I was very disappointed. We hung up and we ran away, we

came home. That's when we were on the run. She went to Plumstead to her home; I stayed home and got a job in the munition factory because it was all Land Army girls. I used to take the uniform in every day for someone and they used to go to Stickybacks up at Upper Street, Islington, for their pictures. They had hundreds of ((laughingly)) Land Army girls knocking around.

Interviewer Have you got a photo of you in your uniform?

Edie No. There was only one ever taken and that was taken in London Road and a cousin of mine had it. I've often wished and wished. You know how you-. I've often wished I had. I can see the picture now. It was a strange picture. When it was taken it was more like a white-, black outline. I suppose the early days of photography. Yes, we did have one sitting side-by-side, one behind the other and we had to stare for hours and hours – well, hours – long, long time we had to keep staring into this lens and he finally took it and that was taken in London Road, um-. So her-, Lilly, her father made her go back and she married a squire of the village. She married quite comfortably off. I don't know who told me that even but I never went back. I signed a-. I was never-. I worked in the munition factory until the Armistice Day come 1918 and when the gates were thrown open there on Armistice Day I wonder to this day where the flags come from because the lorries were going by and I finished up on a lorry along with a lot of other girls. Great big Belgian flag. I don't know to this day where the flag come from but the memory's there and we were finished up in King's Cross, dancing and, you know, we used to dance to organs.

Interviewer Must have been a great feeling.

Edie That was the Land Army, munition factory. I must have been a naughty girl there because I sat next to a-. I was on a big press, pressing the numbers. Every shell got all numbers round it. Each shell got a big number on a press, pressing the numbers round and I were working next to a German girl called Adele. She used to run our men and our country down and of course it was a bad war. The 14 war were bad. They were all being killed in the trenches, weren't they? So we got in such a bad way we were going to fight, so after factory hours there was a crowd waiting for the fight to come and we fought from Grays

Inn Road where Molins was to ((laughingly)) King's Cross with crowds following us cheering us on. So I don't know whether it came naturally or-. That was, um-.

Interviewer Who were you fighting?

Edie Pardon.

Interviewer Who were you fighting? I don't understand.

Edie This Adele, this German girl. Adele her name was. I remember her face and she used to run the country down in general and we were at war with Germany, a bad war.

Male voice Course we were.

Edie See, and all the girls used to row with her. I'm a bit of spitfire. I suppose I still am in some ways though age stops you, you know, and we fought all the way from Molins to King's Cross, this girl. So that was the munition days. What did Dolly, my daughter-in-law said you should-. Had the Land Army days, ain't we? The poverty-stricken start. We've had our days when had the grand piano, ((laughingly)) no lino. A grand piano, no lino and no work, didn't we?

Interviewer Yeah.

Male voice Yeah.

Edie And the bed tipped up. I was talking about the night where they wouldn't take me away in the ambulance and the-. We had some poverty and about 25 shillings a week. When we went to my sister she used to give them sixpence a day for three packets of woodbines out of the sixpence a day and you used to walk miles, didn't you?

Male voice Yeah.

Edie Over Covent Garden you used to walk, shunting lorries. It was very dodgy old days, they were, but, as I say, you got a job. I don't know what year you started work. Before you went in the Navy, wasn't it? You didn't go in the Navy until the war was well on, did you?

Male voice About three and a half years in the Navy, didn't I?



Edie But them very early days, them poverty-stricken days I think it was a good job we've grown from them because half a crown, two and six a day we managed to have about three and six and give them half a crown.

Male voice I'm glad you thought of me anyway.

Edie Well, I've thought of you once or twice but I can talk better when you're not around. It all flows out, you know.

Male voice ((laughs)) I don't think wants any winding.

Edie Not once I get going. I thought to myself Now, I wonder what she wants to know about feeding the babies?

Interviewer Let me get my list of questions. Let me look at them and it'll jog my memory.

Edie Have them biscuits. You won't have a sandwich, you might want to eat biscuits.

Interviewer When you had your first baby can you actually remember being in labour?

Edie Yeah.

Interviewer What was it like?

Edie ((inaudible)) now and they kept calling me Mummy.

Interviewer And what were you doing when the pains were coming?

Edie Just sitting on the bed, sitting about, laid down at the very last minute. David, when this one was born, 1935 I don't know why he were spastic.

Interviewer Was it right from the beginning?

Edie Mm? No, didn't know for two years. Beautiful baby born. The only thing, I'd a girl next door to me who had a baby at the same time. Her baby was sitting up and David, I used to have to prop him up with pillows and I wondered why and they just said he was a lazy baby round the centre because I didn't go to work for three months purposely. I thought poverty or no poverty I'm going to stay with this baby. I didn't want no more trouble. When we finally took him to a specialist at Exeter a very big man was there, because all the nurses were all "Shh!" He was very touchy, this man-, and he said what could have caused it and

he said too quick a birth could have caused it or “extreme worry on your part before he was born.” ((inaudible)) He couldn’t settle down. He kept going out at night, drinking and drinking. He could not settle down. See him about six years ago, getting around, me pregnant, not working and life changed from then on all the way through life. He was a man that likes his drink, he worked for his drink, worked for his cigarettes and, as I say, I went back when David was three months old. I got a job down in Molins at Deptford, the munition factory. Not Molins before the war, Molins again but in the post-war. No, they were just preparing for war. They were changing over from making cigarette machines and chocolate machines to munitions. There were 3,000 men there and I was cook over 30 women because they said to me “Have you ever held a job being in charge of women?” and I said “I’m afraid not,” I said. “I’ve always worked with them as a worker.” He said “We’ve got 30 girls here” and he said “Keep them down.” I remember that. That wasn’t nice and good workers too. His name was Mr Fox. “Keep them down” he said. I couldn’t keep anybody down because I’m too frank. He said I was, what do they call it, gregarious.

Interviewer That’s one of the best ways, though, isn’t it?

Edie Yes ((inaudible)) No big secrets. I suppose the secret was I wasn’t married. I finally married when David was quite eight or nine. He said “Where are you going Mum?” I said “Up the insurance office.” I had my black coat ((laughingly)) on. I’m-, I knew-. I thought after I got married in black I’ll go into mourning ((laughs)) in the beginning.

Interviewer When you had your first baby, how much did it cost? Did you have to pay the midwives?

Edie Oh, I can’t remember paying anything. The midwives, I think they were supplied. No, we were out of work. I can never remember paying anything, so we had the midwives. They came in for the first three days, then they’d come in on the tenth or-. You had to stay in bed for ten days. In those days they thought your insides would drop out if you got out of bed. That’s how we were taught. You’d be afraid to put your foot out of bed. I mean, it was so ingrained that ten days you had to stay in.

Interviewer So did someone come and help you at home?



Edie Only the woman that was-. I had a woman in the house. No, nobody. We didn't have no home officer, no council stuff of any description.

Interviewer How about handy women? Did you come across handy women at all?

Edie No. No. I think that must mean a woman you knew, a woman you knew that come in, you'd pay her.

Interviewer Yeah, that's right.

Edie Yeah, that's the one you paid. You paid the woman that come and helped you. With all the four births I had a woman I knew because one used to come in starving hungry. "Bit for my lips, Ede", so I put the kettle on and go round the corner and get them to buy a cake, 12 for sixpence. A dairy used to make them out of the cracked eggs, so she used to come and look at me. She turned round. "I'll have a bit in my lips" she said, "Ede." So I'll get the kettle on. I had some dodgy looking after. I didn't tell you about the midwife. I was telling someone else. On one birth, it was either Freddy or Joan, I had a midwife. She kept calling her out on a Sunday. A big woman, cropped hair like a Sergeant Major. "Oh, you naughty girl" she said, "calling me out at this time." "I'm ever so sorry." "I've got a terrible head." "Well," I said, I put a pillow there. I said "Lay ((laughingly)) down." I put a pillow at the foot of the bed and this big woman, she got on and got down. I said "I'll make you a nice cup of tea", so I went struggling over ((inaudible)) on the bed. So before she started laying on the bed she laid on the couch. I had a seven-piece leather suite

Interviewer Yeah.

Edie ((laughs)) I had one big room but we were well off then because I had a curtain across the bed, about 12, 14 yards of curtain I put across the bed. That was shut off, big round table in the centre, a seven-piece suite I bought for £3. Some man's wife had died and I had a piano on hire. Always had a piano. So that was the position when I had this baby and the big midwife and I said "Lay on the coach." "Oh," she said "isn't it hard?" I said "Well, have a lay on the bed" and I put a pillow from the top to the bottom and I put her on the bed. Suddenly I said to her "I'm afraid you'll have to get off." I had to get her off to get off myself. So that was one-. She wasn't the handy woman, that was a neighbour. That's what

they must have called the handy women. I always knew it as a woman. You had a woman in the handy was the proper ((inaudible)).

Interviewer She was the trained midwife, that one, in her uniform, was she?

Edie All born in different places, so I had one in ((mumbling)) Penton Street, the very first one. That was Pentonville Road. The second one in Ockendon Road. No, the second one in Northampton Street, Clerkenwell, the third and fourth one in Uppingham Road, Essex off Essex Road, were nice houses and I had a very big room there. I suppose coming from poverty we were very well off. We were-, but-. I still had one bed and a bucket underneath, bed in the room but the bed was curtained off. It was a big room, piano, a seven-piece-suite. Funny, you can see your homes. I can see them now. I never used to work Saturday morning. I used to spend all Saturday polishing that. I've always been a strange type, a bit of a dreamer, always wishing for something nice and my period with Ernie I think was my most romantic time through my life. He was a more gentler type of man, a nicer type of man. I met 15 years later at a racecourse once. I was up there with my grandson and he said to my grandson "I should have married her" so my grandson said "Why didn't you then?" So I said "Well, complications, complications."

Interviewer How about when you had your babies? What sort of women were the midwives? What were they like?

Edie Rather nice. I don't think I've had one bad-. Oh, I had one. I had one, just going to leave. "Oh," she said "It's not ready yet" she said. "I'll be back in an hour" so she said. She'd hardly open the door before the baby was born. She was just going out, so she was not much good but I think my experience of the ordinary midwife, they were capable, they would wash him, you know, on the bed and they wash it through the warm water into a-

[END OF AUDIO FILE EDIE MARTINSON (I) 2 AND START OF AUDIO FILE EDIE MARTINSON (I) 3]

her job but you had your baby naturally, healthy people. I'm not going to say that there were cases but ordinary people had their babies naturally. The woman was just there, took the baby and washed it, and wrapped it up and done her job but the caring, if you had an unlucky woman, which I had twice, I had two unlucky women but you were unlucky then.

Interviewer How are they unlucky?

Edie Well, you wouldn't get cooked for, you wouldn't have a meal, you wouldn't get washed yourself because they expect you to, er, you know, to wash and look after yourself and then in such a strict era about not getting out of bed. If we'd have known then that you could get out of bed I could have got up and had a good wash but you wait for your woman to bring you water, then the nappy washing. See, well, with a woman that wasn't so good I think it depended more on your-, apart from the actual birth I never had a bad midwife, bar the one that-. She wasn't bad I suppose but she misjudged her work because she felt my tummy. "I'll be an hour" she said and I was in pain and all. She was just going out and come back.

Interviewer It was more to do with the woman that came in and then looked after you really?

Edie Yes, how your nappies are washed or how you were cared for. They'd only come in for an hour or in-between looking after their own family. You never got much. I suppose there were. I never had a woman that gave me a lot of care. As I say, Mrs Manton was a close friend. Her daughter went into films with Monty Banks and, er, she was a close friend but she used to come in full of poverty and "I ain't had a bit in my lips, Ede" and that was mostly consisted of her work, you know.

Interviewer Did she used to go and do other women as then?

Edie No, one off. Most of the women were just local friends but there wasn't many regular handy women. I can't remember anyone doing it for a job because they only got paid what you paid them. I don't know quite how much it was. It might have been a few shillings each week. It won't have been much for the ten days because there wasn't a lot of money about so they wouldn't make any money and you didn't pay your midwife, so that's about as much as you paid out.

Interviewer The midwives, when they came, they were more like professional, rather than like a friend.

Edie They were nurses. We used to call them the nurses. Oh yes, they were professional, although, mind you, that first one with her six or seven-. Six hours or seven hours? Started



about 11 at night; born at six in the morning. She was nice: "Won't be long now Mummy" because I remember at the very last minute I said "Oh can you-." I realised where it was coming from and it shocked me.

Interviewer You didn't know before?

Edie No. Well, I don't know what I thought but suddenly knowing that this child the size of a-. I was so shocked. I said "Please, please can you stop it coming?" I said. "It don't mind what pain I have. I'll suffer any pain but can you stop it coming out?" "No Mummy" she said and that was a strong, strong, hard birth, tugged on you but I always-.

Interviewer They had to pull those days?

Edie That's why I had my face in a pillow. Always I done it, the-, all the children I had ((inaudible)) made a funny noise or anything. That's what I-, that was the usual thing with me. That first one, I'd have given me life, I think, even to stop that child coming.

Interviewer You must have been frightened if you didn't realise where it was going to come out of.

Edie Yes, I never dreamed of it coming from there. The very idea of your body opening there.

Interviewer You can't believe it could work, yeah.

Edie You can understand people that don't want them.

Interviewer You didn't have any painkillers though when you were in labour?

Edie No, nothing, no, no injections or anything, not with the four of them and David was born later in life, wasn't he, 1935. There was nothing then, but I've got a funny feeling that his trouble could be-. I was under a clinic in Southampton Street, Peckham in the war and I got a strong feeling that they was wrong. I went down there and like you had to have a check-up every now and again. I went down there for my usual clinic and I remember I was on a table laying there and I heard-. The man that was doing the talking to these students saying "Now, this is what we would call a poor patient." Now, I immediately-. "No," he said "I don't mean in clothes or money," he said "I mean in feeding." He said "You have plenty of pudding and two veg and potatoes, don't you?" I said "Yeah", so whether it showed on



your body I don't know what he meant but he said to these chaps, because I had no clothes on, so it was nothing to do with the outdoor clothes and he said "what we would call a poor-," and I jumped and he said "No," he said "you don't get a lot of fruit and you-." "No," I said "I never have fruit. We can't afford it" but they says to me another month, I had to go another month. Now, listen to this bit. I had that check-up that day at that clinic. I went home. On the night-time I went to bed. I began to get pain. I thought I've got cold in my tummy because on that birth I had a different thing on that birth, which I've never had before and I sat about losing water. We had burst pipes in the house and the joke was in the house anyone got any water, it's Edie, and I used to sit about with a blanket and I never had that with other babies.

Interviewer Did that go on for quite a while?

Edie A day or a couple of days, so whether that was to do with it, losing the water, I don't know, but this day at this clinic they said I had a month to go. I went home on the night and pain started. I wouldn't call anybody. I thought I've got a cold in the tummy. I thought I've only been today and they've said I've got another month to go so I never called anybody. Finally, they got so-, got so-. Of course, they couldn't understand it: "You'd had a family, you must have known." I said "I didn't. They told me I had a month to go and I didn't want to make myself look silly." Suddenly I said "Alec, quick, go down and get Anne." That was my sister. I said "I think the baby's coming." He jumped out of bed. She sent him for the nurses, once again, the nurses. I don't know how long he was gone. My sister were there and I started walked about. "Gosh, I think it's coming Anne." She said "Well, get on the bed." So I got on the bed quick and the baby shot out and she covered me over, so nothing was done, that baby-. She didn't handle nothing but our sisters were like that. I probably would have covered my sister over ((inaudible)) touch babies. Perhaps today with a bit more knowledge I might have done but my sister covered me over. She said "Lay still. I won't be a minute." I lay there ten minutes, quarter of an hour. I don't know the time, I lose count and Alec came back with the nurse. Now, whether that was-, it happened then while it was laying there or whether it was a month, whether he was a month beforehand or one more thing had happened, I've often wondered. Apart from him being a drunk and



stopping out all night I went to put my head in the over one night. I was half-gassed and pulled out and windows open, hysterical because he'd been out all night and I'd got this-, going to have this baby. That's when the doctor said extreme worry but I can't think extreme worry done it because my-, I had a friend who had a triple lot of worry. She had a fine baby. The consultant, a big man said "Extreme worry or too quick a birth" but one more thing happened while he was a few weeks old. We used to have little tupenny bottles of olive oil and camphorated oil. You wouldn't remember them. They was all on a card in the grocer shop – small tupenny bottles, camphorated oil, olive oil, it might have been other oils. They did little aspirins, tuppence a box. So I had two of them bottles, one olive oil. I used to give him a spoonful of olive oil and there was a camphorated oil. One night I gave him-, one day I was bathing him. I was round the fire with the towels and all the bits and I gave him a spoonful of, I realised afterwards, camphorated oil. Baby never moved, baby hadn't murmured. He was alright, you know. Didn't look abnormal, no crying or-. I panicked. I thought I've given it camphorated oil! Someone run and-. I went down the doctors with somebody, must have been Alec, to King's College and they took him away and they brought him back stretched out like that, perspiration, saturated he was. Whether they'd put a stomach pump on him or whether he'd been left without oxygen there, I don't know what happened when they took him away. They brought him back prostrate. That's how the baby came back ((inaudible)) saturated here with perspiring and whether that happened there...

Interviewer You'll never know, will you.

Edie ...whether it happened at the too quick a birth. It must have been a-. What they said were another month to go, he must have been before his time, mustn't he, if that was true and I had extreme worry, so those four things and I don't know which one to pick on. I'm inclined to pick on the hospital at times.

Interviewer It was bad they didn't tell you what they'd done, wasn't it?

Edie Just got our baby back and "You'll be alright now mother, take him home." I'm a bit like that with the hospitals. I don't half-, even with me own illness. I bet they're doing their best. When my daughter was dying someone said "Ah, what's wrong?" I said "They're

doing their best" I said "I won't worry them" and I didn't let- When they gave me the baby back. I don't know if they used a stomach pump or whether he'd been without oxygen too long or whether it was laying there waiting for the midwife but he didn't show no signs of- He was such a beautiful baby, so, as I say, I got landed with a spastic son.

Interviewer How bad is he?

Edie Well, he's very strong, fine pair of shoulders. It damaged his brain a bit, they said, but he's not mental by a long, long way. He'll chat to you like, you know, as good as I am. ((laughs)) Got a terrific memory, got a block in his brain that holds telephone, car numbers. If you called up here in the car once and a few years later he would tell you the number. There's something terrific there.

Interviewer Does he live here at home with you then?

Edie Oh yeah. He's got a nice battery car, he'll get mobility money and he got a beautiful battery car. I bought him a powered car-, powered chair, he won't go in it because I was trying to sell it. I paid £1,150 for it and I was trying to sell it for £800. He never used it. It's under the stairs. Beautiful one, big-, nice big wheels and he won't use it because it's a chair. With a battery car he drives it, so one's a car and one's a chair. He won't have anything that's not manly, except me ((inaudible)) family all go "Here Mum." My daughter-in-law, they come up every Thursday. He says "Mum, I can't. Give me a coke Mum." Diet coke. It's no good. I've grown up with him. He's part of me and he's so close. We never leave him. We don't go anywhere without him and that's David. Probably it's not good for him in afterlife. I daren't think what's ahead, you know. I was hoping my son would have him but his wife said "No, I can't have him." I said "Well, he dresses himself, he washes himself, don't want feeding," going out today up in Streatham to see his mate. He's sitting outside the Odean at present with a chap. He likes to get out of his chair and sit on the seat, see, but-

Interviewer He probably keeps you going as well, doesn't it, somebody to look after?

Edie That's it, that's it, yeah. He's not keen on his Dad but so am I because I've got to live with it. I say to David "Don't." He's such a drunkard. Now he's in old age his eyes are bad. He's still got a car but I don't think he'll pass his driving licence. In October it comes up again. I

don't think he'll pass his driving licence. We take our life in our hands every time we go out. ((laughs))

Interviewer Going back to when you had your babies at home, did you have to get the room ready beforehand?

Edie Oh yes, big do. You always had to have-, well, you had to have enough things. You had a nice piece of blanket or two or three-, enough sheets. We didn't have piles like we have these days but we had three or four nice sheets, fresh curtains to go up. Everything had to be got ready, buckets and bowls, plenty of hot water. You had to, er-. Yes, it was quite a performance and two of everything for your baby. They used to wear belly bands and this-. It's different to what they do today. I don't know whether they still have belly bands.

Interviewer I know what you mean, binders.

Edie Yeah, they put a 'pinny' over the navel and bind it and terry towelling nappy. Most people never had under 12, unless you were very poor you had six but I always had 12 got me terry towelling. That's why you needed such a lot of-. Everything was washed, there was no throwaway nothing, no tissues or no throwaway. Everything was wash, wash, wash. You had a blanket underneath, brown paper. No, brown paper on the top, then your blanket, then your sheets. Once you were in confinement it was all taken out and they would burn the afterbirth in the grate.

Interviewer They burned it? I was going to ask you that.

Edie They burned it in the grate, yeah. Someone would make the midwife a nice cup of tea after she'd done her job.

Interviewer When you were actually giving birth to the baby were you sort of lying on the bed?

Edie On the first one I remember plain I was knees up, pulling. I think the same position each time, always on my side pulling. Yeah, I was always on my side pulling with the birth, never on the back because you see pictures on the telly, on their back, don't you? You couldn't have kept still long enough. You want to bend over when you've got a pain, don't you, naturally. No, my four, I lost my daughter at 46 and Joan. I had five altogether but, erm,



they were all born in a crouching position on the bed, every one. Even with David I got on the bed at the last minute and- I remember my sister just covered me up.

Interviewer Did you have to have stitches any time?

Edie No.

Interviewer That was lucky.

Edie I was fairly wide-hipped I suppose, ain't it. It was the small narrow-hipped girls get trouble, don't they? They say it's the small narrow-hipped girls that get the trouble. Well, not trouble but any case they get injections now, don't they, and drugs, don't they? You've got a child, ain't you?

Interviewer He's 18 months, he is.

Edie ((inaudible))

Interviewer Yeah, it's a book about what it was like having a baby then, yeah, so I'm interviewing women like you that had their babies then.

Edie Do the stories differ much?

Interviewer It mostly differs with how much money you had, like if you were middle class or working class.

Edie I was poor. I shouldn't have been poor. My Dad had plenty. My Dad had plenty of money. We never should have been poor really. I told you what he gave us for our first week's wages after we left him: "30 shillings and take that chest of drawers." That's why I walked out and left him. Then I had that extreme poverty doing washing – all day long washing.

Interviewer That must have been such hard work when you were pregnant.

Edie I suppose it was hard but I had me baby with me. I had me baby with me when that happened, yeah. It must have happened-. I must have been working a bit with me Dad for a while because I'd only just had this baby when I had that poverty and I used to take her out in an old-fashioned wooden pushchair, little bit of carpet seat. I don't know if you've ever seen one. Very old fashioned, a little bit of carpet on the seat and I had to take her down, put her out in the yard, put the pram in the doorway, a copper in the corner. She

liked the copper and they were Italians. They had great big sheets. They had very luxurious beds and she'd keep throwing things out the window, our Edie.

Interviewer What was it about taking the baby to the kitchen?

Edie That got them things I remember on that bit, is it?

Interviewer Yeah. What was that bit about taking the baby?

Edie Oh, when I went to-. That was Freddy who had that wasting disease. I was working in Drury Lane at the time.

Interviewer In the kitchen.

Edie The crèche closed for holidays and I had to put him in a little box beside me in the kitchen and we used to keep putting his dummy in to serve or something and that's how we got over the week or fortnight's holiday when the crèche was shut. Our missus used to contribute to that crèche. They said "We've got a place in at nine pence a day." Nine pence a day we used to pay there and I used to have to come right up from Dulwich on a tupenny tram to get the baby in. Do you know, I was still in Essex Road with one baby holding and one in a sarong in a foggy morning at half-past seven to get up to the Kingsway by eight o'clock, get it in the crèche but sometimes I had to think to myself Oh, poor babies. It's wrong, weren't it? Well, it was wrong, never being kept up. My husband was a labourer. My first husband was a labourer and if he had six pence over he'd have a bet with it or if you left half a crown on the mantelpiece he'd-, when you'd gone out it would be gone. That was the only half-crown you had and then wonder why-. My son said-, my boy said "Well, Mummy wasn't intelligent enough for him." He knew his Dad. I said "Well, I wasn't intelligent but I had a lot of, erm, ((inaudible)), which I learned through life" and I think I always wanted nice curtains, cushions, flowers. As I say, I didn't- the first one, east end boy, labourer. Second one, he was out of work when I met him and all he ever worked for is cigarettes. We've had a lot of money go. I've been in business a lot, ain't I? That latter part of my life I was in business. I had a boarding house at Ramsgate with a café on the seafront and the rented rooms above. That was the hardest job in my life, that was. That was the hardest job. I used to crawl up the stairs like that, you know, and I remember



saying one night “Oh god, is it worth it?” And every job I had I made hard. I wouldn’t just put Spam and chips on or corn beef. I used to make a whole menu because I’d worked with a menu on Drury Lane so I used to put nice menus on. As I say, it could go on. This one, what I think on, what I’ve known and what I’ve lived through, I could go on and on and on I think forever. I’ll tell you one thing though, I’m a different person today than when I was young.

Interviewer What way?

Edie Whether old age made me cheap-. I was a romantic person young. Now, of course, sometimes as hard as nails. Got my spastic son, got my ((inaudible)) husband. You’ve to think for my husband and that’s the right word. You’ve got to think for him. He’s a bit senile now, he forgets and loses. The lady next door but one she said “You’re husband’s a ((laughingly)) gentleman” she said. I thought “Well, just as well you think so.” Should’ve seen my husband want to go down somewhere take the car and take me. We can only do local stuff. I’m afraid to do long journeys now. We used to go out and picnic a lot. I can’t think of much more than early birds but I’ve tried to push him but as I say it was nursery. I didn’t have the pleasure of bringing them up.

Interviewer No. Do you think you missed out?

Edie I’d have probably had a lot more to have known and say but I can remember when I had these babies young I had a bag of flour one Sunday, nothing to eat. I made a dumpling with flour, with no fat, boiled it, put a droplet ((laughingly)) of milk on it one Sunday. I remember another Sunday I had one big herring and I remember cooking that for me and John, the big boy, and yet I’d been to work, paid out the rent and then I had a club lady I borrowed from. She was a local money lender, a Coronation Street money lender. There’s always one with plenty of rings and paid her back, paid my Dawson’s cheque. We used to have Dawson’s cheque from a shop in City Road – drapers – and I remember having no money, having this-, boiling this flour up with dough. Another time in the very early days I had a bit of English lamb. I don’t how I got English lamb, I can’t remember. It was English and it was lamb so I thought “Well, you make more”-, you can make more gravy with English. It’s better. I thought it was richer, more gravy so I popped it on the back saucepan,

a nice lot of water in it – clean water – and I thought What can I put in it? I found some dried mint. I thought Well, lamb and mint sauce, that goes, but I put it in the pot when it was boiling and it looked a mess but I had nothing else to put in it so-, because it was English. Someone said “That’s English lamb there.” I put a bit of dried mint in it. With Jack, first marriage and sitting out- The Stepney one was a poverty-stricken life, that one little room with the bug-ridden house.

Interviewer Where did the baby used to sleep when the baby was born?

Edie I had my baby in a coffin by my bed too for a week, by my bed, yeah, Edith, the one that died. She used to sleep in the little cot by my bed – a box. Jonny had a – that big boy of mine – he had a banana box made up with curtains and bits. They did it up and Edie in this one room. I had her and when last they brought her up I had her in this little while coffin beside the bed and I bought some flowers and put them there and they told me I shouldn’t have done because it turned her. When I went to look at her again it was discoloured under there. They said “You shouldn’t have put the flowers in the coffin with her” and I slept with that coffin a week there. People wouldn’t realise it, would they?

Interviewer No. Did you ever know of any women who died as a result of being pregnant, because in those days women did used to die when they had babies, didn’t they?

Edie No, I don’t think so. I haven’t known anyone die in pregnancy, only one, and I never met her. In the war I had French refugees living with me and one was a boy named-, a very good looking French boy and he married a delicate girl. They never told him she was TB. What was the boy’s name? And he came to see me with a little girl. In fact last night we were going through pictures last night and I was tearing up unwanted ones. I tore the picture of this little girl up. He bought his little girl to see me, the mother had died and she died in pregnancy and you rushed into the room where they had her on a – he was telling me – on a couch – what do they call them – a stretcher where they were trying to save her. He said it was like a blood bath. That was the only time I’ve ever heard or a-. She died giving birth and he’d still got the little girl. Well, she’s probably a big girl now. I had 22 refugees during the war living in Brixton Hill. I lived on Brixton Hill for nearly 30 years in them big old houses and I took-. I used to let furnished rooms out. When the war broke

out they asked me to take refugees and we took 22. I had 22 ration books but that was the only one I heard of, that his wife died in childbirth.

Interviewer Did women know much about the facts of life in those days?

Edie Well, I never knew anything until I was-. I thought a French letter was a letter you wrote. I went into service for a while, about six months. I had a lot of jobs in the first year, two years of my life and that's what I thought they were. It was done under cover I think. I never knew anything. I suppose I went in the Land Army. I was still a virgin and then we met these two soldiers in Bedford. Well, you'd have to be getting undressed. We had britches and braces. We never thought to but I can't remember discussing sex when I was a girl in London and you just used to talk then. I was 16 then. I'm trying to think the first time I heard things about it. Girls got-, you heard of someone got pregnant and had the baby. They had babies but they were scared to let their parents know. It was a bit Victorian. I suppose it was a crafty age. I don't like this age. My own personal view, they should never have taught all this sex at school because you find out quite naturally and when the time comes you find out quite naturally. To teach them now exactly what happens and-, but they teach them everything, don't they, and I don't believe in that, but a lot of people will differ. The modern people will differ.

Interviewer What used to happen to unmarried mothers then in those days?

Edie Well a lot of them got put in a home, loads of them. I'm trying hard to think now, hard. Oh, I don't know, a lot of mothers-. I suppose a half and half. Some mothers would-. They'd go to their mothers, mother would help them. No, I don't think-. No, I think more mothers helped their children than put them away. Hearing of someone not being able to go to their mother was unusual. The majority of poor people-. In fact, yes, a case has come to me now, over Stepney. Mary Molliner her name was. She got pregnant. The boy went to France, fought in war. He was in France and she had this little boy and the whole street stood by that girl and when that mother-in-law of mine committed suicide the whole street had a big collection, enough for two black outfits, one for Sunday and one days, a lot of money then. No, they-. Friends see all poverty. The poorer people – I don't know how the rich people went on – stood like glue now. I could have gone to my mother with



anything. She might have said I was a bloody nuisance but she looked after me like mad and I would my girl, my Johnny. I've been very fortunate. I loved that girl, that girl I lost, too much, Joan. They weren't brought up rough, I suppose. My boy never needed nothing. My Joany was nice refined little girl. She worked in the Ministry of Defence but yet they-, my boy don't disagree with a lot but I-, he regrets a lot of what I done and I said to him once "You are carrying a" – what do they call it, where you carry a grudge against something?

Interviewer A chip?

Edie I'm trying to think of the word.

Interviewer A chip on your shoulder.

Edie A chip, yeah. I said "You've got a chip on your shoulder, John, against me." Now Joan, I could have been on the streets prostituting, my Joan would ((inaudible)) because I left his Dad, I went into-. "I had so many schools" he said. He told me the number of schools he had, me changing jobs and different people minding him and I regret that very, very deeply. I begrudge it very deeply, especially more with Joan because she was her mother's girl. She was so much part of me it was like this had been joined on, even when she was married. She had beautiful home, no children. It was a lovely home. She missed a lot, Joan. I couldn't think of anything else but I'm going to bring one picture in.

Interviewer Yes, show me a picture.

Edie There you are. Yeah. These are the bits I keep out. That's Joany and her husband at a Masonic do.

Interviewer She's beautiful.

Edie Oh, she was lovely. There's Joan normally, as she was normally, as she was growing up. That's my niece's little girl. Oh, she was a lovely girl. Where that little one of her? They done this last night. My daughter-in-law, we had all the photos out last night. I lost something when I lost her. That's the one at 68 now when he got married, young John. That's my daughter-in-law. That's my sister. I used to have a wonderful sister. That was my



sister. She was wonderful. If ever my memory's goes back there's her, my Mum and my daughter but this was a part of me, my Joan. She died of leukaemia.

Interviewer Did she? She has lovely eyes.

Edie He dropped dead two years before her. She come up into our flat because her flat was underneath her. She slept in my bed for two years. Alec went into David's room. She used to cuddle up to me and cry: "Mum, was I a bad wife?" I said "No." She wasn't keen on sex. She said "Oh Mum, I wasn't a good wife for him" but because she was a wonderful wife in every other way. He was a very snobbish boy, this one. That was Harry and when he stood waiting for the car to come and take her Masonic do he said "I married ((inaudible))" He was like that. He was a foreman at Boots the chemists in their big Sandford Street factory when it was there. One job from when he left school, a very steady bloke.

Interviewer They are beautiful photos.

Edie Yeah, she was lovely, my Joany. That was her face. She had a lovely face, right until the end.

Interviewer She's got a beautiful shape.

Edie Her eyes. Her eyes were her outstanding feature. I haven't got no milk or have they done? They've delivered for tomorrow, I think.

Interviewer I know what I was going to ask you: was there much going on in the way of family planning then, like contraception?

Edie Well, if there was about, I suppose. They were never spoken of.

Interviewer And you never ((inaudible))?

Edie I never used anything. When I had those four children perhaps it would only happen about once, perhaps twice, so anyway, so it wasn't ((inaudible)) never knew what love was. I never had no fuss made of me. It automatically happened, you went to bed and perhaps this sort of suddenly happened and finished and away you go to sleep, no love, no care and this man very much the same, he was, when I first met him. One of my neighbours, we were talking deeply one day and she said "He loves you." I said "Oh, funny love" I said.



I said "I'd rather have never met that sort of love." See, I was an affectionate girl. With Ernie I had three years real love. He worshipped me and I did him but of course there was-, met the wrong way. We met at work and then when I went as a waitress, in the kitchen, I never met a living soul. Directly I was done up and directly I'd get in and this girl used to get hold of me. "Come here, I'll put you right" and I thought she had fresh underclothes every day. I thought she put lovely petticoats on. Cami-knicks were worn then. I found out after I started. "You have a lot of underclothes, Amy" or Ada – I forget. Ada. So she said "No," she said, "all fronts." So I had 12 fronts made – blues, pinks, wide lace, silk or satin, giant, with a piece of lace sewn underneath – and I had new underclothes on and bowtie there and my eyes done up. She used to do me up directly I got to work and that was my undoing really because I was quite contented as a kitchen hand and going home, getting the baby from the nursery, going home, getting the dinner on. Always cooked a dinner every night. A man would come home, eat his dinner, go straight round the beer house just like the Rover's Return it always reminded me of, proper Coronation street houses, you know. No, I can't think of a contraception. I can't remember anyone that ever used them because when I began-. I was told how to get rid of them. Now, my sister was a very boyish type of girl. Never talked about sex or men or nothing. She was a – how can I say – so down to earth: work, children. Me and my sister never talked sex but one day she was telling me she'd found out how to get rid of babies and that was the time we were having babies when you first just get looked at you got a baby. Soap and water injection. Now, I put myself in hospital twice with bad miscarriages and the hospital-.

Interviewer You used to put it up inside?

Edie Yeah, make the solution with soapy water, get the syringe and she said "You can just feel your womb inside. Just feel your womb" she said. "Don't press inside, just put the nozzle to your womb and get the soapy water to it" and that's-. I done that that day before I went to hospital when I was taken away on the train. Where I was taken away at Charring Cross, I'd done it before I went to work that morning, you see, and we never knew. We never knew any-, how not to have them because I had-. A respectable husband, wouldn't have thought of using a ((inaudible)) with his wife, only, I suppose, outside women but they



were never mentioned inside a marital-, working class married homes, so there was no other way and that must have happened to me. I remember my sister telling me because the first time we'd ever talked sex in our lives. We grew up together and worked together, lived together but she told me then and she'd done it. Of course the next time it happened to me I never came on unwell and best yellow soap. You had to have a pure soap, not any old soap, had to be a pure baby soap and I must have done one in-, I had when I was working in the kitchen there at work. That baby must have been-. Maid picked it up and put it down the toilet. She said "It's fully formed Edie" she said. She said there was a head, brain. Oh god. I had to push it out, like I did with my daughter's death. I had to push it away because you'd never live if you thought of what you'd done and she said- They used to wear black aprons, bar maids. She put an apron over it and put it down the toilet. I had one there through using a syringe. Now, I had a job to go home. I had a big haemorrhage at the City. I had to go down the ladies toilet. I worked half my life – my young life – with the haemorrhages.

Interviewer It could have been ever so dangerous for you, couldn't it, as well?

Edie I can see it now in later life but then you get up and go to work ((inaudible)) go out the toilet and it was always in a state of haemorrhage. I never knew anything else and I'm sure all the people I knew never did. That was the first thing I knew how to, not prevent, but how to get rid of, and the hospitals weren't very kind to-. They're not today either. They don't like abortions. "Did you do anything?" You told a lie up to your teeth: "No, I never done anything" but of course I must have done it, once at Leadenhall, once at Hammersmith. I suppose poor times really. I'd caused a bad illness over it and I used to get pregnant very, very easy. That first marriage there wasn't much sex in it at all. Perhaps twice a week if that and there you were, suddenly you were pregnant and not even a love affair. See, a girl today falls deeply in love and you think Poor devil but those days you weren't, you were just going to work to bring home some food. That's why I think today I'm a much harder person. This old memory don't shut much out either. It goes over the worst parts. Sometimes I have to block it out and think: Well, let's think of some nice things. When I go to bed I have to. When I think what's going to happen to my David I think

Now stop it Edie, stop it Edie. You've either got to take a second sleeping tablet or you've got to get up. You can't live with some things you've done. You can't live with trouble you've got to face. I said to David-, he says "I hope you live to be 100 Mum." I said "I hope so, love. Let's do our best." He said "Wait until you get ((laughingly)) the Queen's telegram" he says. I said "Well, look at this woman, 90." I'm reading out cases out the paper. No, no contraceptions, I can't remember.

Interviewer So you don't look back on it as being the good old days then?

Edie Well, you didn't know much different. There was some very happy, lucky-. I was a happy girl growing up, even when I danced to an organ down at Bermondsey. I can remember dancing to an organ. My Dad was in the army and I used to go home. I used to catch the very last bus, the number four bus. This was in my heyday between 16 and 18 probably, a teenager. There used to be a load of boys and girls down at Bricklayer's Arms. I used to come all the way from Clerkenwell to get with my gang. I remember dancing to an organ down there. I think it was an empty brain at the time. It wasn't empty when I lost my first baby. I walked about for about six weeks. At nights I walked the streets missing her, missing holding her, missing washing her nappies, missing getting ready for work the next morning. That was a nightmare. Freddy had been here all the time I'd had him, so I suppose I recovered from that quicker than the first one. Sad little baby, he was. Well, one part I don't like to remember is when I went to see him when he dying. That baby, he was so-. He was 13 months and knew me so well and my baby's dying and they said-. He put his arms out and tried to get to me as I sat on the bed. That won't go, that memory, stretching his little arms out. That memory won't go. Some memories though-. Mind you, there's only one outlook you've got. You've got to-, this boy of mine, if I was to sit and cry, and as I say I'm suppose I'm naturally gregarious, probably through growing up with a rough Dad, hard-working Mum. I've seen my poor Mum go down. We lived over stables. ((laughs)) My first wedding was funny. I was getting married and having a white wedding. Everyone said "You getting married Edie? I said "Yeah. Anyone. I don't mind who come." My father got in crates and crates of beer, right up to the ceiling, crates of beer, a great big lump of beef was out in the kitchen. There was five rooms over these stables. We lived in the corner of

a mews. One half lived there and one half there so we had five big rooms. One of them had a hay cutter in where we used to cut the hay – chaff cutter – and we used to feed it with hay and turn this big wheel for the horses. We used to let out horses. Wedding day comes, I've got me veil. I buy me frock for £3, an ivory, they called it empire line.

Interviewer ((inaudible)) there?

Edie Empire line, yeah, and, um, all this terrific lot of beer's there. I say "Now Dad, don't get drunk." Minding my Dad all the morning, I was, to keep him sober. They had emptied the- We had horse-, where they put the horse dung, obviously when you were outside our stable too. They were emptied and whitewashed and the taxi come down. "Alright, Dad?" "Yes girl, I'm alright, course I'm alright girl. Come on." So when we got down to the church he got out of the taxi first saying "Come on my darling" ((laughingly)) he said. I can see him now. "Come on my-." I've got my bit of curtain hanging down and I was standing at the altar. You know what I was thinking at the altar? I hope Georgie Johnson's outside and can see me. One of the boys. Now, what a way of getting married. It's ridiculous, getting married. I hope Georgie Johnson-, ((laughs)) and he was only one of the boys. Never-, weren't a boyfriend, just that I liked him. He was a nice tall boy; my husband was short. Oh, I hope Georgie Johnson outside can see me in this veil – at the altar! I always think of that.

Interviewer You were ever so young, weren't you, really?

Edie Eighteen. I thought: What a way to get married? You shouldn't be allowed to, should you?

Interviewer You've had a tough old life, haven't you?

Edie Oh some of it's very tough. Some parts are. As I say, it'll take you weeks to sort all out what I-. Even in the cafes has been very hard work.

Interviewer It makes me feel so lucky that our life nowadays is so much easier, isn't it?

Edie We never knew a refined life. If we hadn't have had such a good mother, my mother was a wonderful Mum. She kept us so perfectly clean. She had a terrible life. Cathleen Cookson's books don't come up to my mother's life. I read two of them. I couldn't read no more. I thought Oh, they are all poverty-stricken, three penneth of this and it was true but,



the books, I couldn't read her name- rubbish but it's the life. It was true but the poverty was extreme, weren't it? You see, in our case, you see, although my Dad used to sell our home he was a drunkard. If you wanted money on a barrow down Caledonia Market, sell the home, got a few shillings, bring in some food then. Then you got a wood fire and a tin lamp on the wall. Six penny tin lamps they used to sell.

Interviewer Was it oil lamps?

Edie Oil lamps – six pence. Well then, perhaps a week later we'd come home. We come home one day from school, we had an Arabian bed with curtains hanging down, we had a piano, had a bit of lino. You know, there was no sentiment in the home or nothing was longstanding. Take out for stop money he would call it but of course when he went into fish, when he came out of the 14-18 war he went and bought a barrel of herrings for £5 and that was his first thing with fish. He made a fortune. My father was a very rich man through the war-, after war. Had two big thriving stalls, we had a-, us three girls were working, not the younger one, used to do the housework at home but he had-. That sister, what I was telling you, she used to manage my Dad but he used to knock my mother about. If Em come in that would be his lot. Em was the stalwart one of the family. She was a boyish type of girl. She was the tough one of the family. I was the cry-baby. I used to stay beside my Mum and I used to love it. I used to hear her say to her friend "That's my delicate one." I used to love it. I thought delicate was nice and refined. "That's my delicate one" I'd hear her say and yet I'm the one-. My, my sister died of cancer. I've still got another sister alive but I've been the delicate one and I'm the one that's still here.

Interviewer So your Dad used to knock your Mum around then, did he?

Edie Yes. He threw boiling water over her one night. She used to be out on the stalls until 12 o'clock at night, you know. I remember I was a little girl about eight and they used to send down-. We used to cook our own beetroots and they used to send-. Here's Alec.

Male voice ((laughs))

Edie They used to send home for more beetroots and I must have been eight or nine, not much-. I might have been a wee bit older, ten and I used to have to get the box of beetroots what



had been cooked in the copper, put them in a box and take them up the stall 11 o'clock at night. They were out until 12. The stall was open until 12 and my mother had got home from-. After having the stall put away she had an odd job man to help her. See, my father, dead drunk round the farm with his mate the other side and I remember she only said to him one day "Why don't you put these children to bed?" and he swore at her and she finished up with boiling water thrown over her. I see him kneel on my mother, punch my mother. She worshipped him, didn't she? She worshipped my Dad, right until the day-.

Male voice Yes, she certainly did.

Edie "Don't Dad look nice?" she'd say when he had a shave and I remember he had a blue shirt on when we had the place at Ramsgate. They used to sit on the balcony. Nice balcony there. We were letting the rooms then. My Dad used to come down there, stood about, you know, and he'd have a shirt, nice brush up and she'd go "Don't Dad look nice?" She loved him right until she died, didn't she?

Male voice Yeah. He had a gold ring ((mumbling))

Edie If anybody loved anyone-. Time she went back-. She was always leaving home. I was always with her. She'd go round to her sister's in the little top attic room, her sister lived and we used to go round there and my father would come round a couple of days later yelling up there "I want my daughter!" Then my Mum would say "Go round home and see who's there. See if it's all clear." I'd go around home and as they were-.

[AUDIO FILE EDIE MARTINSON (I) 3 ENDS AND AUDIO FILE EDIE MARTINSON (I) 4 BEGINS]

I say he would-. They were both laying the floor with beer, bare boards, blind drunk and I sued to have to sneak round every night and see if the coast was clear, you know, and when she did come back "Well, I'm going back to Dad now" oh, he'd make big arrangements, he'd have a big fire going and get some tea and sugar in and a new six penny oil lamp would go up and then we'd go back but always with my Mum. Always run away-, every time she went away I went with her. Now, I can't remember the Sundays the table was tipped up just as we were going to have dinner, running up City Road. Mum would be running, I would be running with her. See that-. I mean, nature must change when you go through



life like that because I was a giggly kid. I was a mixture of Jekyll and Hyde. I was a giggler at school but I was sad at home, so it's a Jekyll and Hyde life.

Res Must have been very hard.

Edie Didn't realise it was hard. It was your life. It's like a child covered in poverty. He won't want to stop in your lovely house, he wants to go back to his old house, doesn't he?

Interviewer That's right.

Edie You can't take them out their environments.

Interviewer Your home's your home.

Edie We were always going away and coming back, going away, coming back, even when we were quite young when my Mum kept running away and he'd send stuff home from market onto the stall. We had thriving stalls but he'd come home in the afternoon well drunk. He came home with a band load of stuff, an auctioneer, he said-. He used to wear a gold ring there, a silk scarf with a ring through there. He'd auctioneer a load of stuff, oh hundreds of pounds worth of stuff he'd auctioneer in a couple of hours. He opened a shop at Southend in York Road Market and he used to send the fish down there. Me and my sister used to get the shop ready. I used to mind her baby. He'd come down by train well cut, make the people laugh. There'd be crowds waiting for him to come. "Pair of soles 18 pence, shilling." He'd auctioneer all this stuff off and he'd go back to London drunk as a lord. Went back with him one day, me and my sister, and he was holding up socks at the window. "Don't come in here. Someone's sick." He was disgusting when he was drinking, my Dad, and yet giggly loveable man and people liked him.

Male voice Yes.

Edie My father was disgusting at times, bringing up three girls. We didn't have brothers. Ed was the nearest thing we'd got to a brother but for man like that to have the care of three girls. We should have had businesses, houses when he was earning all this money. Give me some typewriting lessons or violin lessons, we'd go there but, er, never your future.

Interviewer You had violin lessons, did you?

Edie That's what I hold against him, I suppose. My sister said and my daughter-in-law said "Well, I used to like Granddad." I said "Yes, in probably old age he was-." Sit there and his fire and my sister well looked after him in their old age because she had her own house and they lived there and so she used to give them an allowance and they were well looked-after right until the day they died but he giggled his way through life on my Mum's back. My sister what's alive can't understand why I feel like it. I said "I don't feel no bitterness. I'd have looked after them if it had come my turn to look after him." Of course it didn't come my turn. I looked after my Mum for two years. So we've had the Land Army, the very early days. We've had our empty rooms with our piano on... ((laughs))

Male voice ((laughs))

Edie ...had haemorrhaging on the station. They want food they used to meet me at Stockwell waiting for me. I have my attach case with all my-, and I did say to the governor at that pub "We've got a lot of meat on that bone." I said "We'll go on again tomorrow." "Oh no," he said "do away with it", and of course I had to do away with it. Apart from that I'll put a tin of sardines and we'd go home with some extra every night from the pub. King Street, Hammersmith that was. No, there's been no soft stuff. Every business we went into has been hard. Letting rooms in Brixton was an experience. That's a story on its own, that's a story, the types of lodgers you had and what they done and who they were. That's a separate book, 30 years of letting rooms.

Male voice That's true, that's true, yeah. I'll leave you too it now.

Edie I could have made you a nice plate of sandwiches, didn't I?

Interviewer What time is it? Have you got the time on you?

Edie Yes. Quarter to five.

Interviewer That's okay.

Edie I never knew how long we were going to be. I had plenty of food in. We've always got a lot of food. My name should have been Mrs Grub. My life's been cooking food and everybody I see I want to wrap up and keep them warm, men or women. It's the motherly instinct, I suppose, because I've been too motherly to be loved. I've got the mother-. I read in one



of the-, I read the papers a lot. Women of America say they're more mothers and housewives to their husbands than what they are wives-, what they are lovers. They are treated more as housewives than mothers. I'm sure I mother him more than anything, see?

Interviewer Yeah. That's true of a lot of women, isn't it?

Edie Yes.

Interviewer It's what you become in the end.

Edie Some men don't let the wind to blow on their wives "You alright dear?" He couldn't say dear to save his life, this one. My Ernie could say "You look wonderful tonight Edie." I loved that, I used to.

Interviewer At least you had that, didn't you?

Edie Yeah, a hairdresser. He was nice. Now, whether we'd have got married and that would have all gone sappy I don't know but I don't know. I think he made quite a lot of money. When we've been to the races on an August Monday-. The family go to the races in about four cars, picnic up there. We get the cars in a circle up on the hill at Epsom and the rugs in the middle and then have a good day ((laughingly)) "Look at Mum." I've got my eyes glued to the binoculars looking at the bookmakers on the grandstand wondering and hoping Is he still there? At 85. My Granddaughter, she's very close: "Oh Nan, you make me laugh" she says. ((laughs)) "You still looking for your boyfriend?" I said "I can't help it. I have a look to see if he's still there?"

Interviewer When did you last see him? It was a long while ago.

Edie Yes. Just before my Grandson got married and his children are about 11 or 12 now. He was just courting the girl. We went to the races with my grandson. We went into silver ring where the bookies are and the grandstand is and I was just going to go one of the tents where they sell teas and things. I was telling John come along and we were talking about it. "Who's John?" So we shook hands and I said "My Grandson," and he was talking to John a lot. He said "I should have married her" he said. John said "Well, why didn't you?" He said-, and I chimed in "A lot of complications." John went around doing his bit for my

Grandson and I sat on one of the little seats in the grandstand ((laughingly)) staring at him. I don't know whether I-. I wouldn't want to marry the same people again. I'd have liked to have grown up if I had my life again. Mind you with a Dad like us and the rough element, rough and ready environment, you'd have had a job to have met anybody a bit different to your own circle. This east end boy I married he was an east end boy. He worked in Norton Market in a poultry shop, so it was-, you'd only met them type working that way, like you work in an office you meet a better type and, I say, working a waitress in the ((inaudible)) that was, in the City I met better type boys. I never felt sorry for leaving. He gave me three years of nice living although the children didn't worry my conscience then. I used to say "I work and I keep them." I've always kept them. I never had an allowance ((inaudible)) and I always worked hard and I kept them, but, of course, from the children's point of view, being minded by different people is a different story. I can see that very, very plain now, so plain. My John's got the chip. He said "Where could you finish up in the end, Mum?" I said "What?" He said "It's no good going back, is it? It's all happened."

Interviewer That's right. You've got to accept it, haven't you, really?

Edie Yeah, even fighting this German girl and all refined up the West End, a nice outing all ladylike. I wasn't a rough child, I was a quiet child, a bit of a Jekyll and a Hyde. A giggler at school and a sad-. They always called me the cry-baby of the family, cries easy, but now I'm as tough as nails. I don't inwardly, I don't inwardly. Inwardly I feel very, very sad, terribly sad, but outwardly I always put a show on: "Hallo!" Don't matter what happens, come what may I'd always put that show on. Sometimes I feel like a clown wending your way through life. You've got to giggle and a laugh and insides-, it bleeds for such a lot of things but then once again, it's life. It's all happened and crying now won't help my son I got now, won't help my life, will it?

Interviewer That's right.

Edie I envy people that have got a nice background but I do-, I like nice things but now you can't spend your money on nice things, you've got to save up for a funeral. Three funerals to save up for, what bit of money you've got. It's £800 or £900 for-. To me, this is ridiculous.



This I'll never fathom. How many people have got that savings because our joke here is the first one to die gets the funeral and the others have got to take potluck ((laughs))

Interviewer It's a terrible lot of money, isn't it?

Edie It's dreadful and not a lot of people have got £1,000. I've got that and David's got about £1,600. I give him a bank book on his own but my £1,400 or £1,500 wouldn't buy a funeral, so how do you go on from there? What insurance I've got is £60 with interest on but I don't understand. That should be sorted out before now. They say if you go on supplementary you go to supplementary. Who wants to go to supplementary when they lose somebody for a funeral and how the devil do you pay £800 or £900 or £1,000? That's another subject that's taboo, isn't it?

Interviewer Yeah.

Edie As I say, I laugh at that: first one dies gets a burial, the ((laughingly)) others have got to take potluck.

Interviewer Birth and death are both taboo subjects, aren't they?

Edie Yeah, yeah definitely your subject.

Interviewer Yeah.

Edie We've had enough of that but I can't, as I said over the phone, it's a bit empty. It's work and crèche, work and crèche. As I say, waiting for that tram with the-. It must have been-. I know I had two at the one time. Before Freddy died it must have been Freddy and Johnny. I had Freddy as a baby, taking him up to the crèche wrapped up, foggy mornings. They used to go up and find me a seat, the people that knew me on the train. They'd always get up and give me a seat and it weren't like-. 25 shillings a week I earned then during that time, nine pence a day on the crèche, tuppence a day each way, the fare. You didn't have a terrible lot left, did you, and about £1 or 25 wages from your husband. That was the central income but that's what most people got ready with: plenty of brown paper, piece of blanket, plenty of sheets. You had to have three or four sheets at least. They take ((inaudible)) and then you had your clean bed made. Nearly everybody would have clean curtains ready to go up- clean counterpane. People were poor but there was a lot of

cleaning and washing and scrubbing that went on. A lot of washing and scrubbing went on. We didn't have hot in the taps, so there you are getting your jugs of water in, emptying the slops in the bucket, emptying the bucket.

Interviewer It sounds like there was a lot of support from the other women that you knew as well.

Edie Well, I think everybody that-, yes. Nobody had hot water, nobody had carpets, they had lino and-. When the war broke out we were just getting well-off. I had three new rugs. 25 shillings each, they were. I had nice curtains, I had lino, I had three new rugs for 25 bob, I had a press-button gas stove. That was a long while ago when this war broke out but we just had a new gas stove – press button – and a wireless – press buttons – a wireless and the gas people used to give you your pots, thick aluminium. They were marvellous. They came with your stove – nothing. If you wanted a three-way one you could have a three one or two big thick ones. They all came in with the gas stove. Now, of course, they'd cost a fortune to buy now. ((pause)) David's birth, Freddy. Yes, I had Edie by the bed. That's a memory, in this little tiny room. We had a bed, coffin, a little table. You wouldn't think about today, would you? They'd take them away now. See, then you kept-, your dead were brought home to you, see.

Interviewer Maybe it's better in a way because you could see her, couldn't you?

Edie Well, you lived with it. ((inaudible)) I had the outside- use to hold her hand.

Interviewer It must be awful to have them taken away and you never see them again.

Edie Yes.

Interviewer I think that would be terrible.

Edie They cover up death but some people say it's a good thing and I don't know. They brought Freddy home but they said he'd mortified so he was screwed down when he was brought home. They said "We had to screw him down because he's mortified." I had him in a room for nearly a week, in the one room, because it was always one room. That was a very big room. These others were little hovels, you know.

Interviewer What was it like living in one room?

Edie Well, I thought my big room was a palace. When I had the piano and seven-piece suite and the bed curtained off-. I had some lovely-. I can see the curtains now, they were floral. Had it all curtained off with a big spread and a piano on the side, round polished table with one leg and the claws. I give them £3 for the thing. My Mrs lent me the £3 and I paid her back a shilling a week, right? I had a posh home then but then the one room, well, I think you were so pleased you were married-. The very first marriage, man and woman and got my own home. No more Dad selling the home and I suppose we thought it was good. I used to make a big fruitcake every Sunday – dripping cake. I used to make it with dripping. Didn't know about margarine cakes then. It was always if you had any dripping you made a nice cake and I always had a big fruitcake every Sunday, always had a tablecloth on, we had bed valance at the top and bottom of the bed. I used to-. I done my own washing in that little period just before I had that baby and they used to reckon washing them by dozens and they used to say "I done three dozen today." Everyone would talk about washing would always say how many they dozen: "I've got a couple of dozen washing to do" and my wash day was three dozen accounting for valances and everything I had. It was a lot of washing, weren't it, was 36? I counted them. If you put it out to iron or mangle it was in dozens.

Interviewer Is that a dozen articles, was that?

Edie Yeah, any article. My wash day was three dozen.

Interviewer Did you used to wash on the same day every week?

Edie Every Monday. I had the cot by me. My sister had three rooms in this house in Penton Street and I had one room off of her. She paid nine shillings. I paid three shillings for my one room, wasn't all that big but I had the use of a copper outside and every Monday I'd light the copper up and, you know, washing- I didn't have a washing machine until I was well in my fifties. I had a shop up at Norwood, I had, when I had my first washing machine. It seems uncanny doesn't it, to think of the days when you didn't have a washing machine?

Interviewer Yeah, my Mum was like that as well.

Edie Yeah.



Interviewer Hard work.

Edie See now, that's what they say. They don't- people don't have enough hard work, some housewives that don't go to work, they keep fit even. They got their washing up machine, well, you know, microwave and got every mortal thing there is. I wouldn't want a microwave. I'm too old-fashioned with me cooking. I don't believe in a lot of- cooked delivery. It's always a pork chop because I keep a lot. I spend 200 every time I fill this up and it's always in rump steak and sirloin and pork chops and lamb. I don't buy no stew meat because I don't like stews so we had fresh steak last night – rump steak. My daughter and son come up every Thursday, they stay up all day and I call that my big day. We have fruit and cream and ice cream. We have all the lot that day but David has what he wants. He can pick up a coke up when he likes. There's always a case of cokes there for him, ice cream and crisps when he wants them. We don't want, er, well, I don't for anything now, fair play, um-. We are on supplementary because of these rents are nearly £50 a week here, so we are on supplementary and the savings I'm allowed to have I put so much in David's book, see. I have about-. When Joan she left £6,000 and a beautiful home she left and she put in her will 'I want my Mum to have it just for herself to enjoy personally,' so-, but I only had a few hundred before that. We run a car on David mobility. That costs a lot. I can't save at all these days. It's the mobility that helps us to run this car. That keeps us fairly well off, so I get Alec's allowance of 40-something, mine is 23 and David's is 40, 39. Nearly £40 David's allowance is, then he gets his mobility £85 a month, so with our allowances it keeps me and we don't have no social life. I don't know what it ever to go out at night, not been out at night for years. I'm no good in a club or a pub. It don't appeal to me no more. I've seen it all, you know. Now and again we have a bit of company and if they've got company that drink I'll get a drink in – sherry. I've got company coming next Wednesday or Thursday. I've got Canadian niece over and they're coming up with my royal family from Tonbridge Wells. My sister, her daughter, we've always called royal family. ((whispers)) ((inaudible)) ((talking)) She was a supervisor in the telephone exchange but she'd always been, right from a child, fastidious in her home but they're all coming next Wednesday or Thursday, then I'll put a table in the front room near the window and put a buffet on and a good buffet. I'll have-, there's prawns, turkey and *vol-au-vents*, pizza. One

at Tonbridge Wells, she'll bring in pizzas and *vol-au-vents* and I'm getting all the extras. So we can put up a good table, we're not that poor, but we don't have no social life. I haven't been away on a holiday for years. We find it difficult with David's battery car. Not so much with David. Alec's driving now. Every time he goes out we've got someone hooting and shouting at us and swearing and we had a trailer made to put behind the car to carry his battery car in. We can't use that because Alec's not capable of handling it so much now. We do chance it down to my sister's or down to Vauxhall or Sainsbury's or little local trips.

Interviewer When you were pregnant did you eat special food when you were pregnant?

Edie Never.

Interviewer Never had any sort of supplements or- ?

Edie No, nothing. That's what they must have meant when I had that-, they said "what they call a poor patient." I was plump.

Interviewer Maybe you looked a bit anaemic.

Edie I don't understand that then. I always looked normal in pictures. I remembered being normal, I had a 38 bust but why he said that, and I had no clothes on, so it wasn't a matter of dress. I said "I have plenty to eat," I said. "I'm not poor." "Oh yes," he said "you mean you have plenty of puddings, don't you, and potatoes but" he said "do you have any fruit?" I said "Oh no, we don't buy fruit," so whether it showed on the body I really wouldn't know. That's what he said, that day. He said I had a month to go but never any special food, never. In fact, my friend that had a terrible rough time, she nearly starved, she had a beautiful baby.

Interviewer Was she sick when she was pregnant?

Edie Yes. I used to faint a lot. I used to faint a lot with all pregnancies but, no, never had no morning sickness once. Never had any morning sickness, just ordinary healthy-, I call them healthy pregnancies.

Interviewer You carried on working the same as if you weren't pregnant, did you?

Edie Exactly, exactly.



Interviewer No concessions.

Edie Exactly. I, I did used to faint. I couldn't stand still. If I stood still talking I had to sit down. If I stood still-, and even now, to this day I can't stand long without this-. I always plonk my bottom down. That's why I got so big. ((laughs))

Interviewer Were there any sort of like remedies and things that you'd take that weren't things from the doctor's?

Edie To keep you well or make you-.

Interviewer Well, both really. Perhaps sort of home remedies that people would make up themselves?

Edie No, I can't remember myself. Probably other people might. I can't remember myself. I just got pregnant and I went through normal living right until-. I never had drink because I was never a drinker much. I used to like a social drink. Through life I'd just like to social drink but I've never been a big drinker, which was as well. I had other vices, I suppose, like changing my jobs. The hardest-, a hard job in Drury Lane but a lot of, lot of fun. Oh, a lot of fun. We used to dress up every dinnertime, grown women, a young married woman but there we are dressing up. We used to have a slosh party. Never heard of a slosh party, have you?

Interviewer No.

Edie We had a big table and it sat 22 round and I used to have-, when we put the dinners out, so I'd put all the dinners out and last of all if there was any dishes I'd put the dishes through the table in case they wanted a bit more of anything – marrow, potatoes. We used to have a slosh party and ((inaudible)) I was on cakes. After two o'clock I used to have to make cakes – fruit cakes, sponge cake, Swiss rolls. That was my job after two, so up this end we'd have all the cake-making material, so the slosh party was you got your collars right up like that, ((laughs)) put your hair back and you stuck your face out for anything that would come in and we had a waitress called Kitty, a very refined, nice girl and after the waiting was done she'd put a green overall on, come and have her dinner. The office was just outside where we had our dinner. The two ladies that owned the restaurant add up sat in

there so Kitty would join the slosh party. She'd put her green overall up and she had dark hair and she'd take anything that went in – margarine, marrow, sauce – anything. So suddenly a little voice would say "Kitty!" They'd call out for their coffee or sweet. I've never seen anybody put their self-straight so quick. She'd put her collar back just like that and her hair and she'd go in and if I had a slosh party I'd have my hair messed up, never quite got it all back, you know. Oh, every day, all dressing up with your silly things, carrots all lined up and piano, all have a sing-song, so although I went to work a lot of hours when I got me babies at six o'clock I'd had a lot fun in-between. In fact, I think me life was in work. All my fun was at work.

Interviewer That's what it sounds like to me.

Edie Yeah, all my fun was at work all the time and when I've had cafes and business since my interest has been putting my menus on and- I wouldn't like to say ((inaudible)) the brown sign up, arrange it nice. I couldn't slosh it up, I couldn't put the gravy over this and that. I took my meat and greens and veg and baked potatoes all nice, all the brown side up, never just put on. I think that's been-. I've been very interested in my cooking, very interested, and always anxious to please whether I was a waitress or in the kitchen. I find I do it now. If someone comes to dinner I've got it all cooked nicely and my daughter-in-law said "Mum, count ten." I still try to add it up. She stops every time I ((inaudible)) she said. I said "Alright darl, you serve" but it's still this anxious to please. I think that's why I never tell my son off when he comes up for his money. I want to tell him off like mad because he's a gambler like his father, first father, and yet I never want him to fall out with me. I think if he fall out-. He did fall out with me when I told him-, when they said they couldn't have David if anything happened to me. I said to him one Sunday morning "I laid awake all night long thinking: They're not going to have David if I did die thinking that automatically they would go to him." I was livid. Now, that's better. "I think it would be best if you don't come up for a while." I said "I'm shocked at what you said, you couldn't have David." So-and-so-and-so-and-so-and-so-and-so. I said "Alec, take this down quick." They live at Vauxhall, Sainsbury's. I said "Alec, take this down quick before I change my mind" I said "and drop it in the letterbox" because I thought they were away. When he went down there John was

outside cleaning his car and Alec took it out the pot and give it for Alec to give him because but he's not very popular, my husband, over the way he's treated me. Alec gave him it. He said "Oh well, if that's how she wants it" and he never come up. I can't think how long it was – two, three, four weeks. When I was taken away when I had three weeks intensive care and 13 weeks in hospital and Alec never told them I was dying. They gave me a 30 per cent chance of living. One of my neighbours rang my son up: "I don't think your mum's coming out again" and he come straight up the hospital with his wife and we never discussed it no more. We carried on as though the letter had never been written. I've been going to bring it up once or twice. I thought No because my neighbour said "You shouldn't have stopped him coming up." I said "Well, it's done now. I've stopped them coming up" but it was the illness and my neighbour ringing him up that bought them back. That's why I never want to fall out them again because actually he's all I've got, you know, him and David and Alec. My daughter-in-law is very good to me but she still won't take David. I can't see it because I think-. Some-, one of my neighbours that looks on it differently. I said "Well, I don't look at that. We were brought up that family looked after family and if you got one in the family that need a little bit of help" I said "not a lot, don't need a lot of help, strong, healthy, never a day's illness, never a cold, strong as an ox." So they've got their right to what they think. I used to push my opinions on people once but I find now that it leaves such a worry all the time there. I'm afraid to die. I'm not afraid of death ever but I'm afraid to leave this boy. Well, he's a man but I'm afraid to leave him. ((pause)) Yes, if there was other episodes I could have told you I would have told you more...

Interviewer Well, it's been fantastic.

Edie ...but you've got an outline of a lot and that's why I can't read Catherine Cookson's books because one of their books they- **[recording stops and restarts]** poverty-stricken and the daughter of the family risen in service, she get pregnant by the-, the mother looks after her but the mothers did look after their children and Catherine Cookson was true to life. I don't like squalor and I don't like four-hour bar men. My husband would drink some years back in the pub, a sawdust bar. So would my sister in Brixton. I can't mix with them. See, it's something inborn that when you can please yourself and choose for yourself you

wouldn't do. I couldn't choose my Dad, I had him. He was there. I can choose my later life and I don't like squalor of any description. If you're poor, well, hide it up and don't-, and I don't like going out and round. I'm a cockney but the way they put the cockneys on the telly – knees up mother – I don't like that. I always turn that rubbish off, portraying people like that.

Interviewer It's not true to life, is it?

Edie Not now, no. I think it was. I can remember the old Southend days when I was a waitress, the Monday outings with my coach parties as crude as anything but you don't have to dwell on them, do you? I've offered you no more tea.

Interviewer No, it's great.

Edie There's plenty in- **[recording stops and restarts]** I can remember when I was four and my mother's kitchen. My Mum used to go out minding her stalls and her old Mum used to look after, I can't remember anybody else, only me. I don't know where my sister was and I can remember my Granny being with a knife peeling the potatoes. I can see her face now, my Grandmother, and I was four. I was telling my mother once about it. She said "You were four then." Yeah, then we had my grandfather, my father's father. He was something like my Dad, old King George beard, er, boozy old man, boozed his way through life. He married a lady, that one. I didn't know him then but I knew him when he was an old man and used to live with us for a little while, while my mother was out and he was supposed to-. He used to send over for his beer. He used to warm his jug, dry it, warm the jug, dry it, warm his-. He'd go for half an hour warming that-. That jug had to be bone dry before he got his half a pint or pint of beer or stout or whatever it was in it but when he was clearing up he used to get hold of my sister. We used to call him 'Polly-Wop-Wop'. He was a bit rough with her, throw her on the bed, because she said "I remember him, being-, throwing me over on the bed" and, er, he was a rough old man. I remember my grandmother and my father's father, both of them, they were two very different people. My mother was more of a quiet, refined family, servant, you know, domestic and he was, erm, although he had a lady as a mother-. My Aunt Annie, she was a ladylike one. There was about seven of them. Her and Uncle Charlie were very refined, both of them. Charlie was all classical

music and Aunt Annie ran shop. She was very ladylike, never rough and she used to say that her mother used to stand in the middle of the room: "Oh William, whatever shall we do? All the kids have died out" and he came in drunk. "They'd all waste away" she said and they lived on contents of her trunk for a lot of years. She had valuable lace and things and her mother would send something every now and again from this trunk to feed these kids and that's the family my Dad came from, very much like his father. He was twinkling blue eyes, laughed his way through life. He was a William, my Dad was a Fred. My father laughed his way through life but he bought all the rough parts of life to us. I think the other thing, as I got older, I wouldn't like a public bar. I wouldn't like a cheap seat in a theatre. I like a nice seat in a theatre. It's something I'm not sorry I had but there was enough of both sides to take me through, you see. ((pause)) My Joany was a nice type of girl. Her and John, the two that lived, they must have had the rough end of the stick because I used to have to keep having them minded while I was still doing jobs, you see. I was always working and I paid them to be minded. I always paid there. Spent a lot on them but Brixton days was quite a different story, renting them houses. I rented three houses up there with 16 rooms in each one, so you can ((laughingly)) guess how many lodgers we had. The stories from them lodgers, that's another story, different to the type of one that you're doing. My daughter-in-law said "Mum, you should have, er, you should have written a book."

Interviewer Yeah.

Edie That's why I just started putting down things I remember and as I remember the price of a loaf or sugar, three ha'pence two pounds of sugar and-.

Interviewer Can I take this one with me?

Edie Yeah, take both, yeah. Taking my little bits with the things ((inaudible)).

Interviewer Yeah.

Edie They're all-. I'd have had a lot of that. I've only just started that last week. She said "Jot them down Mum as they pass through your mind." I thought it was a smashing job with that first job, greasing the tins and cutting the rhubarb up. I thought I was the cat's



whiskers with that. My Dad used to knock my Mum about a lot though, always drunk, always knocking her about. He'd pick on my Mum. She had no little boy.

Interviewer That must've been horrible to see.

Edie That's what I say: "How can they be nice?" People who say "He was jolly, he was nice. I liked your Dad" they say. I liked me Dad but not all that much. I'd have looked after him.

Interviewer Not if you saw him doing that sort of thing.

Edie Eh?

Interviewer Not if you saw him doing things like that.

[END OF FIRST INTERVIEW]