An Interview with Sue Raw

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

I = Interviewer
R = Respondent / Interviewee
[ ] = Clarification note

I: This is Melanie Bassett, recording for the War Widows Stories project. It's 20th February 2019 and I'm interviewing Sue Raw. Sue, can you tell me what your age is and what you do, currently?

R: I'm 67 and I'm retired.

I: What did you do before?

R: I worked for 33 years for Fife Council, the first three years as a part-time cleaner. It wasn't really the kind of work I'd been used to doing but when the kids got old enough to go to school and I just wanted to get out and have a bit of independence, it was just taking whatever was there, and it just so happened it was a temporary job, a temporary part-time cleaning job, with the Council, but it meant that I was in there so that when the internal vacancy bulletins came out, I got to have a look through, got a shot, and eventually went back into administration. So for 30 years, the last 30 years, I was a senior – not for all of the years, the latter part of them - but I ended up as a senior administrator and supervisor in the Education Service. And I retired three years ago next month.

I: So can you tell me about your childhood, where you grew up and your family?

R: I was born in Darlington, in County Durham. My parents were older parents. My mum was 43 when she had me. I've actually started to call her 'Mum' since I came up here – she was always 'Mam' where I came from. [Laughs]. We said 'Mam'. Mam was 43. They actually got married on 18th February 1950 and I came along in August 1951. Dad was 10 years younger than her, she was a bit of a trendsetter, although you would never have known that there was 10 years between them. And when she became pregnant with me, she went to the doctor's and thought she needed treatment for the menopause, until the doctor said, "Well, actually, Mrs Hayes…" She said, "But I'm 43, I …" He said, "Well, you're pregnant." So when the same thing

happened again, a few months after – about six months after I was born, she thought 'it's *got* to be the menopause this time'. But no, she had my younger sister the day after she was 45. So, early years – we lived in a two up and two down; we didn't have very much. Dad was an unskilled labourer. He'd done his bit in the War, which I'm very proud of. And the one regret I have about my parents, particularly my dad, is that I didn't ask him more questions about his military service. But I am now the proud owner of his medals, that he never told us he had, or perhaps didn't even know he had.

Mum worked as a cleaner, mostly – two part-time jobs just to keep the wolf from the door. As I say, we lived in a two-up, two-down – we didn't have very much. They were unskilled, basically-educated people, but loving, hard-working people. Dad worked, as I say, as an unskilled labourer. Well, he was a baker's delivery boy when he left the military, the Army, and he was a delivery boy for place that my mother was a bakeress-manager, so that's how they met. Then he ended up with a better paid job, although still poorly paid, at the local steel rolling mills, because the area I come from was predominantly the steel industry; mining villages were kind of further into the centre of County Durham.

My younger sister and I had a difficult relationship, I'm never quite sure why. [Pause] But we tended to fight a lot when we were little, and I, actually years and years later, Mum acknowledged that she [her sister] did tend to goad me, to get me into trouble and that kind of thing. So we went through phases where we were okay, and we were friends – and I would defend her to the death outside – but the two of us didn't really get on. As I say, we didn't live in a very grand area, they were two-up and two-down terraces with the toilet at the bottom of the yard, and a bath was once a week, that was hauled in … A big steel thing that was hauled in from the hook in the yard. But we were always ... Carol and I were always well looked after, *we* were always well fed, but my parents weren't. Sometimes, I didn't know at the time, it was only afterwards ... Reflections afterwards, that there would be some times, my mum and dad would be having bread and dripping for tea and Carol and I would be having sausages and mashed potato; my mother and father were having bread that they'd dipped into the sausage fat in the pan, because that was … There wasn't enough money to go round for everybody.

Then my father died when he was only 50 from ... He'd contracted lung cancer and it spread to his brain, so he died two days before I was 17, leaving Mum a widow at 60. [Pause]. Just before he died, I met my first husband [pause], and that was … that was the biggest mistake of my life. But then sometimes, when you think, you do things because it's, it's there for you. It's a learning … It's a learning experience. He was quite violent and verbally – mostly verbally aggressive. We didn't get married until after Dad died, I hadn't known him very long before Dad died, and, you know, I've often said since then, that had my father not died, I don't think I would have had a first marriage. However, my mother reluctantly gave us her blessing, but it was evident fairly quickly that it wasn't going to last. He came from a family who – unlike mine, who had jars or envelopes of money for the rent and the electricity and money for the gas meter, and so on and so forth. His parents believed in going out and enjoying themselves first and if there was any money left when the rent man came,

he was lucky. And that was the way he thought we were going to live our life, so that was … That was kind of where the rot set in, and then we tried to resolve it. He actually went away and joined the Army – his theory was that if he joined the army and we got married a quarter and moved away from his parents' influence, it would give us a chance. And I became pregnant and miscarried, and my sole contact with the Army at that time – but we're talking about 1970 – was a visit from the Army Careers Office came just to check I was okay because he was doing his Basic Training. Then he met somebody else while he was away, so that was the final straw. So I went back home to live with Mum, with my tail between my legs, and she welcomed me back, but my sister didn't. She said some really, really awful things to me that I have never repeated to anybody apart from my Auntie – my dad's sister. I went to stay with her for quite a while, in Middlesbrough, and travelled backwards and forwards from Middlesbrough to Darlington, to my work, until my mother eventually persuaded me to go back and stay with her.

And then I met Alan, I met my sailor. It wasn't the most romantic of meetings. I had gone out for a night out with my friend, my divorce proceedings were in progress by then. I had gone out with my friend, and we'd gone to a nightclub, and he was sitting opposite me across the room and he just happened to catch my eye, and when the music started, and a nod of his head – did I want to go up and dance? And that was it. So yes, when he told me he was in the Navy, I thought 'ah …' [Sighs]. It was a bit of a 'heart-sink' moment after my experience with my first husband in the Army, but …

However, we spent the rest of the evening together and then he was home on leave, and we went out two or three times. We went out for drinks, went out for meals, and then we just kind of fell into a pattern that whenever he was home on leave, we would get together and have a night out or a meal or whatever, or a day out, a trip here and a trip there. Although, having said that, the first time … The first time he came to the house to pick me up, in those days it was quite fashionable to wear black shirts and white ties, and he came in looking quite Jack-the-Lad, and my mother just rolled her eyes. She did say to me afterwards, "I thought 'oh no, who the hell is she bringing home now?'" [Laughs]. But she actually, very, very quickly, fell in love with this guy, unlike my first husband. She had never, never approved of him or the way his family lived their lives. It wasn't how she was brought up and she didn't want it for me, but I was 18 and I thought I knew everything, thought I had the answers. And I'm now nearly 60 [70] and I still don't have all the answers. [Laughs].

Anyway, I met Alan, as I say, and he quickly won my mother round, and we had a couple of unpleasant run-ins with my first husband when he found out. Eventually, the divorce went through, and he kept putting a block in the way when he knew I had met Alan, and that we wanted to get married. So we just kind of … My mother welcomed him with open arms into the house, and we lived together as a couple in her house, and I became pregnant with Helen, our first daughter, because at that time we didn't think that my first husband was ever going to agree to the divorce. At that time, the divorce rules were so … So archaic compared to how they are now, and I expected having to wait five years. However, then he met somebody else, fortunately for me, which meant he was then of course quite happy to sign all of the

papers because it suited him. So we got married ... Alan and I, got married on 29th December 1973, and Helen was born on 29th May 1974, so we managed to get married before she came along. So that's … That's kind of my early life – is there anything else you want …?

I: What about your education?

R: Oh, my education – sorry, I did skip that altogether, didn't I? I went to Rise Carr Primary School, and I loved primary school. I loved it. The teachers were just … I just loved every teacher I had there. I don't think it would be immodest to say that I was … I was a bright pupil. I was studious, and things seemed to come naturally to me. So much so that at one point, I can't remember at which stage in primary, but I was skipped a year because I was too bright, I'd moved on too much. But then, of course, it meant that I ended up staying in the final year of primary twice, for two years, because I was too young to go on to secondary school, and those were the days when we had the 11+ examinations. So I passed the 11+. I was one of only four from my school, two boys and two girls, who passed, and Barbara Smith and I went to Darlington High School for Girls, and Alan and Jeff went to the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School for Boys, because if you went into grammar education, then you were segregated. Had we not passed the 11+ we would have gone to a secondary modern school and we'd have all been together. But for some reason, if you went to grammar school, you are segregated.

I didn't fit in quite so well in grammar school because most of the girls there seemed to kind of … I think Barbara was the same as well, we felt a bit like fishes out of water, because most of them there were the daughters of lawyers, or doctors, or professional people. We kind of came from the other side of town, so you felt like you never really quite fitted in. So I was kind of rebellious at grammar school a wee bit because of that, and I *have* regretted it since that I didn't make the most of that education opportunity. However, I did come away with O Levels in languages; that was my key strength at grammar school, and then went into administration work when I left school. I was one of those who couldn't wait to leave school and start earning my own money, but I think that was because we had been so short of money that pocket money wasn't a regular thing for us; it was only if there was anything left, and they could afford it.

And I was keen to leave and help out with the finances, so I left school at 16 and went into administration work, as an office junior to begin with. That's when you got to make the tea and the coffee and all that kind of stuff. I remember my first pay-packet – I was so proud when I went home with my first pay packet, and I just handed it over to my mum, because that's what you did. That's what we did then. She took out what she felt was a reasonable contribution, I really can't even remember what it was. I think it was something like … The equivalent of £1.50 or something like that. Sorry, not £1.50 but £1.10 shillings, which would be … [Pause]. Let me think, was it five pounds and a shilling I used to get a week? It was something like that anyway, it was about a third of what … The standard then for parents, they took about a third of your salary off you, for your "dig" money. Then my dad came in from work and he said, "How was it, your first pay packet?" and I gave

him two shillings, which is 10 pence, but that would have bought you … I think it probably bought him a couple of pints or something then, in those days. And I gave him these two shillings and said, “Go and have a pint on me, Dad,” And my dad cried because I gave him money for a pint [laughs] at 16. He said, “I can’t believe my bairn’s giving me money.”

So I had a couple of jobs before I settled into Whessoe Engineering, and that was *the* place to work then, where I came from. And I had a very good, very responsible job there, monitoring the, what we called then the ‘Traffic Department’, which was stuff in/stuff out, you know. I made sure the paperwork was in order, and the guys used to book transport and that kind of thing. And I made sure all the paperwork was in order and arranged travel and stuff like that for the guys, for the engineers who were going out on site. We built big things like heat exchangers and nuclear reactors and all that kind of stuff. So yeah, I loved working there, and I only left because I became pregnant with Helen and we moved up to Scotland.

I: So this was before you got married, wasn’t it, you moved up to Scotland?

R: Yes.

I: Was there…?

R: No, no, we were married when I moved up to Scotland. We had married, yeah.

I: So can you tell me about your wedding?

R: Yes, the wedding, wow. It was a bit of a subdued affair because I had been married before and Alan wasn't really fussy about having a fuss. However, it was, you know, close friends and family came along, because Alan, he’d just charmed them all. Unlike my first husband, who hadn’t. Alan had charmed them all. So because he was in Portsmouth at the time, on the *Charybdis*, HMS *Charybdis*, it was left to me to make the arrangements that needed to be made, and of course, a lot of it was done quite in a rush, because my first husband had finally signed the papers, then it was … In those days, you had to wait six weeks before a *decree nisi* became a *decree absolute*. So, that was actually, when I think about it, before we started arranging the wedding, I had just found out I was pregnant the day before I went to court for my decree. And, of course, we couldn't tell anybody, because had he known. Had my first husband known I was pregnant, he might have tried to scupper the process. So we didn't want … If I was pregnant, we didn't want anybody to know. And of course, in those days, you had to take a sample to the doctor and then you waited about a week before you got the results. There was none of these things that you got from the chemist then. So he said, “What are you going to do? Are you going to send me a telegram to let me know?” I said, “I’ll wait until I get the results and I’ve been to the court and know whether I’ve got the decree or not, and I’ll put it both in the same telegram.” And it’s still upstairs in the loft somewhere, he kept it, he kept it.

So I found out I was pregnant. I was suspicious that I was pregnant for some time before, but I got the confirmation the day before I went to court. And I went to court, I

got my decree, and went straight to the Post Office, as you had to do in those days, and the telegram said ... And the code we had was that if I was pregnant, I wouldn't say in the telegram that I was pregnant. I would just put the month that I expected the baby to be due as the last word of the telegram. So I just put: “Decree nisi granted,” and then had to say “dot”, and then there was a space, and then “‘May.’ Love you. See you soon.” So of course, he knew because I’d put “May” that I was having a baby and she was due in May. So that's how he found out that, yes, the wedding could go ahead, and yes, he was going to be a father. But, of course, again, in those days, if you got a telegram when you were on board a ship, you had to open it in front of the captain in case it was bad news and they had to make arrangements to get you home or whatever, depending on what the content of the telegram was. And, of course, when he opened it and read it and started jumping up and down, the captain said to him, “I take it it’s not bad news then?”

So then it was a couple of hurried phone calls. We always used to arrange ... He had the number of the phone box, because people didn't have phones in their houses like they do nowadays. So it was left to me to arrange the nuptials, and he was coming home on leave on Friday 21st December. He said, “Let's make it the 22nd.” And I said, “No, let’s not.” He said, “Why?” I said, “Because if anything goes wrong with your transport home, your travel home and you don't make it, and I’ve arranged it for 22nd, we’re going to be stuffed.” I said, “Let's make it for the middle Saturday of your leave,” so that's how we came to be married on 29th December, in between … He wanted to be married before Christmas, but I said, “That's not practical.” I was really, really worried then that that … The train service was even less reliable then than it is now, and so I was really quite concerned that he wasn't going to make it home in time or that he would cut it too fine. Because he had been known in the past to fall sleep on the train coming up from Portsmouth and end up in Edinburgh, and then have to get a train from Edinburgh back down to Darlington. So anyway, that's why we got married on 29th December. And he got married in his Number 1 uniform, and I was wearing a pink dress, and whenever we show Helen the photographs, we tell her that she was at the wedding, because I have a little bump – you can see I’ve got a little bump. Actually, Alan’s sister made the dress for me. Alan’s sister made it so that it would drape over the bump without making it too obvious. Not that I was bothered – we were quite proud of the fact that we were going to be parents.

And it was just a small affair in the Registrar's Office, and my mum had - because I’d had the wedding the first time, it was just a buffet and what have you, with family back at the house, but it was brilliant. Everybody had a brilliant time.

I: So you moved up to Rosyth, was it?

R: No, North Queensferry, actually. As I say, we married in December. Helen was born the following … on 29th May. And as soon as we got married, because in those days you had to be married to get a married quarter. I know that, you know, times have changed since then, but you had to be married. So since we got married, Alan put our names down for a quarter. However, there was a long waiting list at the time because in Rosyth, there was a lot of building work going on in the area and around, and Sherbrooke Road and Linton Place were still in the process of being built, so

quarters were quite thin on the ground. But occasionally, things like hirings came up, which were and privately rented, you know, people who owned property but would allow the Navy to rent them out, or other kinds of properties, if you were prepared to live away from the base. So we got the opportunity to live in one of the houses on the Signal Station, in North Queensferry. They were naval property – they weren't hirings; they were MOD property, but of course, quite a distance away from the base, but because Alan could drive and he had a car, it wasn't an issue for him. So we took the property on the Signal Station, but I can remember when he came home to tell me, he put the key to the property under the pillow of our bed, on my side of the bed. He said, "There's a present for you," when we went to bed and I thought 'we've got a quarter', well then he went on to explain. My heart sank because it was, it was great while I was looking forward to it and I wanted to be with him, but when the reality set in that I would have to leave my mum and take her first grandchild away from her, it was a different story altogether.

So we went up for the weekend. Mum had a look. She was quite … She seemed quite unfazed by it, but on reflection, and from some of the conversations we've had since, she was going to leave her 'bairn' who was only, not quite 23 with her first baby, out in what, for us, was the middle of nowhere. Because I'd been born and brought up in in a large town – a large market town, and this was ... The Signal Station was on the edge of the village, and it was a few minutes' walk down into the village, and it *was* a village. You know, it was like "wow". So it … It did, it took me a long time to settle, it took me a long time to settle. I remember the day that we packed the car up and came up here [Scotland] as our final move, me moving in and leaving my mother. I was just … I was heartbroken. I was heartbroken at leaving my mother and taking her first grandchild, because she absolutely doted on Helen, absolutely doted on Helen. But we visited. I mean, we went down regularly, and my mum came up. My mother loved Scotland. She came up here regularly. But we were in … We were in North Queensferry for – I think it was about the July time, Helen was born in May.

She wasn't six weeks old because I ended up having to get a train back down to Darlington to go for my postnatal appointment because I wasn't registered with anybody up here at the time. And so it was about the July time 1974, we moved in there, and we moved down into Rosyth proper, onto the married quarters estate properly, I think it was about the February time in 1977. So we were there about three years, something like that, and then I became pregnant with Catherine. And the location of where we were living, as well as the size of the property, didn't lend itself to being stuck with a toddler and a small baby. So Alan went to the married quarter's office and said this, this and this, and so we got a quarter – a bigger quarter – much nearer, you know, handier for Alan to get to the dockyard, and just closer to everything. Because being in North Queensferry meant we weren't really part of the naval community.

So I think it was the February time in '74, or maybe later than that. Catherine was born in September, anyway. I think it probably was about February/March time, something like that, and we moved down into Rosyth, and we were there for about nine years. The girls went to school in Rosyth, they went to Camdean Primary

School. And, as I said to you, I started work. I actually worked in the fire station, I used to pass the fire station on the way to the primary school. I cleaned it. It was handy for … They were happy for me to work my hours around dropping the girls off at school and picking them up and so on and so forth. By this time, Alan had been promoted to Petty Officer, but there was an element in married quarters – I'm sure it happened… In fact, Alan assured me it was worse in Portsmouth, I don't know, I've never lived there, but there was an element in married quarters that were 'rough,' if you like, for want of a better description, and they didn't have … It wasn't so much that they didn't have standards, that if they thought that you thought you were better than them, and I never did. I just lived my life the way … The way we wanted to live our lives. But if you spent money on a car or you … Like, we always had the girls dressed alike when they were little. I mean, they rebelled when they got older but when they were little: "You'll do as you're told." And we just liked nice things in the house, and all of our friends were like that, but there was an element that didn't like it, you know, it was, "Who do you think you are?" "Well, I don't think I'm anybody. I'm just me doing…" If you want to spend all your money going to bingo and stuff, then that's up to you, but that's not how I want to live my life or how we want to live our lives. We want to spend it on our children, on whatever." So life got pretty difficult and it wasn't … It wasn't even that they took it out on Alan and I, it was the girls. It was the girls that suffered. So that kind of prompted us in the end to come to Dalgety Bay to buy our own property.

And it came to a head because Alan was home one weekend, and actually saw what went on. He said, "How are you putting up with this?" Because there was one particular girl had got in for Helen because she just ... I think she was …. She was obviously jealous because Helen had nice clothes and … But she wasn't computing that it wasn't that she wasn't getting nice clothes, and it wasn't Helen's fault; it was her parents' fault, but she was blaming … In some ways, on reflection now, I feel sorry for those kids. But Alan witnessed it one night when this girl chased Helen home and actually forced her way into our house to try and get at Helen. And she was only, what, at the time, 11? An 11-year-old – "I'm going to *have* her." I was like, "Well, no, you're not." I put my hand up to stop her coming in and so the next thing I know, the Police are at the door wanting to charge me with assault, because I had restrained her from coming into my house. Then, of course, when the Police heard the whole story about what had been going on for months and months and months; then those were the ones that ended up with the warning and the threat of prosecution if they didn't stop harassing my children.

But they were the kind of people that that kind of threat didn't deter them, and the next day, the girls went to school and came out crying. Helen had spent her whole lunch break in the toilet because the big sister was waiting outside for her. That was the first time anything serious had happened when Alan was at home. For the last two years in married quarters, it was awful. Up until then, we'd had a brilliant community spirit, and I still meet up with some of the girls I knew then. But the last two years, there was an awful element came into it that didn't look after the quarters, didn't look after the children, and resented people who did. So that what prompted us to buy our own property. So we moved into Dalgety Bay in February 1986, into our first property, and then we moved here, into this house I'm in now, in July 1989.

I: Can I just backtrack a little bit because you had your first baby at Darlington?

R: Yes.

I: Was Alan there at the birth, or …?

R: He wanted to be. Yes, he wanted to be, and again, in those days … It's amazing how much things have changed. You had to write to the Matron for permission to be at the birth. So he got permission, it was a thing that they were just starting to encourage, and he was there through the labour, he was there in the delivery room, but right at the last minute … I was in labour for quite a long time. It was 29 hours before Helen made her entrance. And because she was laid what they call posterior, so she was face down, trying to push out … No, sorry, face up trying to push out instead of … Babies normally push out face down and kind of swim out like that, but Helen was coming out [gestures direction], so she was getting stuck in the birth canal.

So the doctor came along and said it would have to be a forceps delivery, so he was asked to leave the room, and that is the big regret of his life that he wasn't allowed to stay in. But he was right … He was standing outside the door. And all the way through my pregnancy, he'd wanted a little girl, because he … Although he had a sister, she was much older than him and she had left home really by the time he came on the scene. You know, there was five of them and there were big gaps, and so he had been brought up with brothers and he was desperate for a little girl. So when they opened the door and told him that – because, again, in those days, you didn't get to know the sex. There wasn't scans and things, the doctor used to listen with an ear trumpet to your stomach and that kind of stuff. And so when they told him he'd got a little girl, he went into the waiting room, picked my mother up and swung her around the room, said, "I've got my little girl, Faggot!" He used to call my mother "Faggot". I know, I know …

But it was an affectionate … None of us can actually remember how that started but she even used to sign her birthday cards "From Faggot," [laughs] and everybody – all the girls in that room who had either given birth or were waiting to give birth said, "Oh, I wish my husband was like that with my mum." But they were just … They just loved each other to bits. So no, he wasn't at Helen's birth – that was the regret of his life. But he was … He was kind of there, if you like. And the day I got the baby blues, I just started to cry, and I cried, and I cried, and I cried. When he got home, he said, "I'm going to have to go back. I can't leave her like that." He was hanging around outside my bedroom window at the hospital, because he couldn't compute that it was just hormones because I kept saying, "There's nothing wrong, there's nothing wrong." "You don't cry like that if there's nothing wrong." "You do, you do." [Laughs].

So yeah, he was a brilliant, brilliant support. He was a brilliant dad. And he took over – when he was home, he took over. He was very, very much a hands-on dad, with her nappies and everything, pushing the pram. He just loved it, he just loved it. But he was there for Catherine's birth. He did see Catherine. In fact, it was actually quite funny, they were all laughing at him in the delivery room because he was wanting to

comfort me and reassure me, and he had hold of my hand, but then he was kind of stretching … I was saying, "Alan, you're pulling me off the bed." Because he wanted to see what was going on at the other end as well. [Laughs]. So yes, he was there for Catherine's birth, and they always … Him and Catherine always had a special bond. Helen and I always used to call them "the twins" because they were just … As the girls got older, it was me and Helen and Catherine and her dad. And they were just so stupid, just so childish together. As I say, Helen used to refer to them as "the twins" and she'd say, "Mum, just stay back a bit so people don't think we're with them." [Laughs]. You know. But we were a close family, and my girls are close. I think that's the one joy of my life. If I've achieved anything, I've got two wonderful daughters who love each other dearly and choose to be friends, choose to be best friends as well as sisters. Because I never had that, I never had that.

My sister did come round, actually, after I had Helen. She was a wonderful, wonderful auntie. She really was. And our relationship did change for a while then. Then Catherine came along, and she was equally … She was the auntie that used to do all the things that I said not to do, like buy them horrible sweets and things like that. But it was funny, they loved her. They loved her, and I loved seeing her enjoying herself with them. But let's just say we drifted apart. And she has since died so there is, there is only me left now from our little nuclear family of four. She died five years, six years ago almost now. But I can't ever take away that she was a wonderful auntie to the children when they were little.

I: Brilliant. And I wondered also about how your husband came from … I'm presuming Portsmouth was his home port, so how did he get based in Rosyth, did he get a transfer?

R: It really depended on what branch [of the Royal Navy] they were in, what was needed where. He'd always preferred Scotland. He'd been in the Navy … He was only about 16 and a half when he joined up, so he had a year and a half of what they called "Boy time". They didn't start counting the time until they were 18. He always preferred Scotland, he always preferred the Scottish basis, either Rosyth or Faslane. So he always put Scotland as his preferred draft, but again, it depended on what branch you were in and where you were most needed. But he had been based – he was based in Portsmouth when I met him, and he … I'm trying to think, when did he move to …? [Pause]. We were together for a couple years before we actually got married and came up here. So he was away on the *Charybdis*, he spent some time … I think it was a couple of times he was away with the *Charybdis*.

You certainly won't remember this, but you might have read about the 'Cod Wars', when we were fighting with Iceland over the fishing wars? Well, Alan was up there, I think, twice with the *Charybdis* and once on the *Gurkha*, but the *Gurkha* time was after we were married and up here, I'm sure. Sorry, my memory of when he moved is … But when we got married, he was based in either *Cochrane* or *Caledonia*, I think it was *Caledonia*, the shore base. There were two shore bases at the time, in Rosyth – HMS *Cochrane* and HMS *Caledonia*. *Cochrane* was more an accommodation base, for shore-based sailors, or you know, if ships were in refit and that kind of thing, sailors would go and live in *Cochrane* and then go to work on the ship on a daily

basis. *Caledonia* was a training base for artificers and that kind of stuff. That was also an accommodation block. So he was based on *Caledonia* when he got married, and after that, he just always asked for a Scottish draft, or, you know you could swap drafts if someone would swap with you, that kind of thing. So apart from once in all the years we were married, he was always based in – apart from one ship – he was always based in Scotland. And the one time, and I can't remember, I think it was around the time we moved into Dalgety Bay, was his first Portsmouth-based ship in a long time, and they put him on the *Lowestoft*, but I can't remember whether he finished his time on there or whether he managed to get a swap draft, but that didn't last very long because he said there was no way, after what he had seen going on in my married quarters in Rosyth, he said, "There's no way you're coming to Portsmouth." So that was another reason, you know, bought our own place.

I: What was his branch?

R: Seaman. Sonar Operator. So he was an Able Seaman when I met him and then he was promoted to Leading Seaman, I don't if you know the rankings, but leading seaman is like a Corporal. And then he was promoted to Petty Officer just about the time that Catherine was born, actually. I think he was Petty Officer when Catherine was born, I think he was, yes. Yes.

I: So about that time, he was a non-commissioned officer, you had a bit more money?

R: Yes, yes.

I: You thought to branch out and get your own home.

R: Yes, yes. That was about the size of it, yes.

I: What was it like in terms of the naval wives? Was there a status thing as well that you got promoted to sort of NCO, then as a wife of an NCO, were you expected to do certain things or take part in different ways in the community?

R: Er, yes and no. I think a lot of navy wives, military wives, would probably say the same thing that, I think there was always an undercurrent that we were 'military' when it suited them and we were 'civilians' when it suited them, when it suited the authorities. But we had wives' clubs and we used to go round to the families' club and the girls used to go to playgroup, so you got to mix with the other wives. But there was an element that if your husband was an NCO, there was a little bit of "them and us" but it was more, I think, that the junior ranks, the junior rates felt, felt it more than ... We didn't think 'oh, my husband's a Petty Officer so I'm not talking to you.' I think they felt that 'oh, *her* husband's a Petty Officer, he's a Sergeant so I better not talk to them because my husband's only a whatever.' I mean, I take folk as I find them, I always did, which was why I got so upset with what happened to us towards the end in married quarters, because I didn't care how other people lived their lives – it was up to them, you know. I might have had my own opinions about it, but how they did … Just my way isn't always the way, and so on, but I just really couldn't

believe the level of … The level of envy, and that it was taken out on my children. You know, “Who does she think she is? Just because her husband’s a Petty Officer and she’s got a job, she’s got carpets, she’s got a phone and …” This is what came back to me and this is why my kids were getting it, you know. I was… *I’m just trying to make my home nice, I’m just trying to make it somewhere that’s a pleasant place for us all to come back to, you know, and for Alan to come back to after he’d been away living in a tin can for months*, which is what it amounted to, you know. So, I think the time that I felt it the most was, Alan was ... Catherine was born in 12th September and I really can’t remember the days, the exact timeline after, but I can tell you that he was discharged from hospital on Christmas Eve, so from 12th December to Christmas Eve, and what I'm going to tell you now, that all happened in that short time space.

He was on HMS *Nubian* when Catherine was born, and he'd spent a lot of time away at sea and had just come back from … hadn’t been back very long from a long trip away, and he only had a week left to do on the *Nubian*. And the day after I came out of hospital, it was going down to Portsmouth for a refit or something – it was going down to Portsmouth or it was setting off on another trip, it was something like that. Alan had to go to Portsmouth with it to do the handover to the person that was coming on in his place, and, of course, because we’d just had Catherine, he was really reluctant to go. He’d tried to get out of and said “Can the guy not come up?” and … But no, “Rules are rules, you’ve got to come down. You’ve still got a week’s sea time left.” Anyway, so off he went. And I went to change the bed after he’d gone, because, you know having a baby and all that, so I went to change the bed and I found this odd stain on the mattress. I thought [sighs] the position of where it was, he had this mole on his back around here, in the small of his back. I couldn’t compute it, but I thought it’s got to be coming from his middle, because it was on his side of the bed.

And I’d seen him doing this, you know, scratching and agitating at this thing, it was about the size my pinkie, pinkie fingernail. So when he came home and I saw him scratching it again, I said, “Has that been leaking? Has that been bothering you?” “Oh no, no, no …” And I had actually just read recently an article about melanoma, you know, so it was just *then* starting to become more known, if you like. He said, “Oh, it’s only a mole. It’s nothing.” I said, “Well, I don’t know, but …” So I showed him the mark. He said … But it was, it was kind of colourless, but you could see that there was something. I said, “It looks like something’s been weeping.” “No, no, no, no …” Anyway, it had been this mole – it was this mole. So I nagged him and nagged him. He went to work, he was based in Caledonia, in the shore base, and he was on Main Gate duty; he was in charge on the main gate, and he had a bit of a cough and he’d had a cold for a few days, and this cough.

Anyway, he went to see the guy in sickbay, and he said to the Chief, “While I’m here …” I think they gave him some cough medicine or something. He said, “While I’m here, will you have a look at this just to shut the wife up?” So the Chief had a look at it, and he said, “Oh…” and the next thing Alan knows, he’s phoned up the Duty Surgeon Commander to come in from leave. I don’t know if you are aware, but in the navy, in the military, they don’t go home after the day’s work, they go on “leave”. You

go on “leave” every night, you don't go home from work, or you didn’t then. So the Surgeon Commander had gone home for the day, but he was called in back from his leave, and the next thing we knew, the next day, Alan was sent to MRS [Medical Reception Station] in Edinburgh, which is a military hospital, and he saw a surgeon there. I was really starting to get quite panicky by this time. So, the surgeon made this appointment and he went to MRS the next day. And the doctor he saw their said, “Okay, this is not my field of expertise. I'm going to send you to see Professor Forrest at the Royal Infirmary,” which is obviously a civilian hospital; MRS is a military hospital. So the next day was another trip over to see Professor Forrest. I went with him. We went in the car, I went with him, and of course Helen was a toddler of three and a bit by this time, Catherine was 2 or 3 weeks’ old, something like that. Not very. And I think we thought that they were just going to kind of … I don’t know what we thought they were going to do, that they were just going to shave the mole off, or what.

But anyway, what they did was, they cut an area around it and kind of dug underneath it, so he’d ended up with nine stitches – some internal ones and some external ones. And we were to go back the next week for the results. So anyway, we went back the next week, and it was creeping closer to Christmas. I think we had a morning appointment, so he said, “We’ll take the cheque book, get the kids wrapped up, and as soon as we finish at the hospital, we’ll go down into the city and we’ll do some Christmas shopping.” He seemed to be gone ages. I was sitting in this – we had a little orange-yellow Mini at the time. I’m sitting in the car, and I had been feeding Catherine. Helen was strapped into her seat in the back and I fed Catherine while he was in there.

And he came out and he walked around the corner, and he was grey, he was ashen; there was no colour in his face at all. He came to my side of the car and opened the door. I said, “What’s …?” He said, “The consultant wants to see *you*.” “Why?” He said, “You just need to come; the consultant wants to see you as well.” So we got the kids out, and he's carrying Catherine and Helen’s holding my hand, and in we went into the consultant’s room, and that was when he told us that the test results showed that it was melanoma, the stage one melanoma, grade …? I can’t remember now, but the paperwork is somewhere. And that he was going to have further surgery, major surgery. I said, “Does that mean it’s cancer?” He said, “Yes, I’m afraid so.” So he was kind of explaining what they were going to do, that they were going to cut a bigger area out to try to make sure they had excised all the malignant cells, and that they would have to fill in the hole left in his back with skin grafts from one of his thighs.

[Pause]. And I’m just sitting there, thinking, ‘I’ve just had a baby’, and I said, “But he’s only 28,” and you could see this consultant’s face, he just didn't know what … He must have been thinking, because I'm sitting there with this baby and this toddler, and I said, “But is he going to be alright?” [Pause]. And he didn’t know, he said, “We can’t ever give any guarantees but we’re going to do our best.” So I can't really remember, I think it was the next day he went into ... It was … They didn’t hang around, they didn’t hang around, because he was in, had major surgery, had skin grafts, and was home … The only reason they discharged him on Christmas Eve was

because of Helen, because she was old enough to understand Christmas and Santa coming, and Daddy not being there and so on. So he was allowed to come home on Christmas Eve, but we had to have a nurse coming in every day for weeks, for weeks after that, to change dressings. They did say to us at the time that the skin graft site would be more painful than the actual excision site, which was true. It was true. And then this is where it kind of fell down that there was a District Nurse coming in to begin with, and then it was, all of a sudden, it was, "Why have we got civilian nurses coming in when he's military? So we'll get the military people in." So the naval people started coming in. But one of them, he was so ... He was sore, I could hear Alan crying from down the stairs because when … I mean, the skin is raw when you've had a skin graft, it's like raw meat, and I could hear him crying. He said, "Sue, please will you just do it." So I ended up changing ... Being the one to change his dressings because they wouldn't let the District Nurse come in, who had been making a great job of it. They said, "No, it has to be military." But military people are just like, "Whoosh" [indicates ripping noise]. So I did it myself. It was awful. It smelled and it was awful. But just to backtrack a wee bit, while he was in the hospital, which is where the difference is, I still can't believe to this day that they said this to me. I was told that I had to go and see him every day because he needed that moral support. And I didn't need to be told that, I was going anyway, but they encouraged me. They said, "Even if the military vehicles come over here every day, you can get a lift in. If you can come in the morning, we will …" Because visiting hours were stricter then in hospitals than they are now. "We'll be quite lax about visiting because we understand your situation, we understand you've got small children." So my mother came up, bless her, she was, she was a lifesaver. She came up and she just took over the children so that I could go backwards and forwards. So I went round to the Welfare Office, the Naval Welfare Office, and asked if I could go on naval transport, because, you know, they'd said at the hospital that these vehicles come over every day and surely, they can give you a lift.

So the guy who I was speaking to in the office said, "What rate is he?" I said, "What difference does his rate make?" I said, "He's a sailor and he's in trouble, he's very ill. He's had major surgery and I need help." "Just tell me what rate he is." I said, "He's Petty Officer." He said, "Well, you've got no chance." So I went home and told one of my neighbours, who was a Chief Petty Officer, who completely lost the plot at that. But he then advised me that, he said "Well if you get no luck there, go and see his Divisional Officer," who was a commissioned rank, who was Alan's boss. I didn't know that wives could do that; that's how remote we were sometimes, from the military machine. So I did, and he was lovely. He was absolutely brilliant. He said, "Just go home and I'll come and see you on the way home. I'll be at your house by 5 o'clock." Sure enough, he was. He explained, and I could understand it. He said, "You can't go in military transport because of insurance and regulations," and so on and so forth.

So I got that, but then he handed me a wad of cash from the Royal Naval Benevolent Trust, that the guy in the Welfare Office had told me I wasn't entitled to because I was a Petty Officer's wife. So that helped me then get over there. But I was lucky, one of my neighbours, who was a driver, who was home, he was brilliant, and he took me over most days and I just gave him petrol money, because at that point I

couldn't drive. I soon learnt, I soon learnt after that. So that was my experience, and as I say, Alan got home on Christmas Eve. He had to go in for further surgery. He was in for Easter, actually. He had to have more skin grafts. And we honestly thought on so many occasions that they were going to discharge him from the Navy, but they were determined they were holding onto him. I suppose they'd spent a lot on training him, he had a lot of expertise, a lot of knowledge, a lot of skills. But eventually, I think it was ... I think he went back to work, I *think* it was about the August time, so it was about eight months he was, he sort of didn't do anything very much. He went back to work August time, and I couldn't believe it, I got a message … I think we'd had a phone installed in the house by then, and he phoned me to say the doctor hadn't actually released him, but he'd said, "If you actually feel like going back, you can, but I still think it's early days after everything you've been through." So he had gone up *Caledonia* and said, "Can you give me something to do?" and the next thing I know, I got a phone call to say, "I'm on duty tonight, I won't be home." So of course, I said, "What…? I said, "He's just had major surgery." "Oh, we'll put a chair for him at…" So they put him on main gate duty, and they just … I know, I know! When I see what they do for people now, and the kind of treatment Alan got then, it's the difference between night and day. And even now I think they've still got a lot to learn when you hear some stories of how some military people have been treated. But it was kind of like if you're in the military, you're fit enough … But then after that, Alan's life was a story of 'in for surgery'… He had to have two-and-a-half discs removed eventually because he had a lot of problems with his back, which naval doctors said was completely unrelated to the melanoma situation – completely unrelated according to them. But he was in Haslar a couple of times having major surgery, having stuff done with his discs, then he had the discs removed, and then eventually, he had more major surgery and he had a spinal fusion. Again, they said it was all totally unrelated to the melanoma. But eventually … I mean, we honestly thought on more than one occasion that they would medically discharge him because of his condition, because of all the surgery he had to have. But, "No, no, no, we'll fix you. We need you, you'll be back to serve." And he did, he served his … Twen[ty] ... Well, a year-and-a-half as a Boy and then 22 years as an adult.

So he came out on his 40th birthday, having been asked if he would serve another five years, and he kind of, said, "Well, no. I think I've done my time now." We'd had a lot a lot to put up with, so he said, "Now is the time to go and spend it with the family." So that was in September '89, and we went on the most wonderful family holiday on 1st October. We spent three-and-half weeks touring America, doing all the things he promised the girls. He took the girls to Disney World and all the stuff. He took me to Graceland because I'm an Elvis fan. You know, we just had a ball. And I think we were meant to do that, we were meant to make those memories. Then in April, '92, so he'd been out two-and-a-half years … No first off. Sorry, let me backtrack a bit, when he first came out of the Navy, he applied to join the Royal Naval Reserves, and the Royal Naval Reserves wouldn't have him because they said he wasn't fit enough. He said, "But I've just been discharged as medically fit from the regular service. I've just done 23-and-a-half years." Because they'd seen his records and they'd seen all the scars on his back, and it was like, "No." And he just wanted to still be part of the community.

So that was that, we never thought very much about it. It was weeks later ... Again, I can't remember timescales, I really can't remember timescales, and it was maybe a long time after that, but anyway, it was Monday I think, we were in the supermarket, we were in Asda, and we bumped into Dennis. Dennis, I wish I'd got more details about Dennis because I could kiss that man, I really could have kissed that man in later years. So we bumped into him and he introduced me to Dennis, and they started Navy talk. He said, "You go and get on," so I'm wandering around the shop with the girls, getting the groceries, and he's talking to Dennis and I thought ... Normally, he likes shopping with us, and he was one of those that he used to wind the kids … He used to make the kids laugh by putting things in the trolley when I wasn't looking – things that he knew I would get annoyed, we'd get to the checkout and [laughs] … And he'd laugh at me because he knew I couldn't …"I'll kill you when I get you home, but I'm not saying anything now." And we just used to have fun even just doing the grocery shop. And he said, "Dennis has given me this name and address …" He'd been telling Dennis the story about coming out of the Navy, all his illness and everything, which Dennis had known something about because they'd crossed paths during their service, so Dennis knew some of it. Then, of course, Alan told him that he'd been refused entry to the RNR and he said … Dennis's attitude was, "What?" I think he was working in some capacity for the British Legion, and Dennis said, "They can't have it both ways." He said, "The regular service can't decide that you're 'A1 fit' and discharge you, then the Royal Naval Reserves refuse to take you on health grounds. You're either one or the other." He said, "I can't understand why you weren't medically discharged and awarded a War Pension." Alan was just like, "What are you talking about?" So we got this name and number, and the next thing we know, the British Legion had got in touch. Did they come out to see Alan? I can't remember. I think they did.

But anyway, we got this lengthy form to fill in and the really long story short for that is that Alan was eventually … By this time, as this process was going on, we were now in March '92, and I found a lump in Alan's groin. I just went [sighs] and I just ... I just knew. I can't tell you how, but I just knew that this was not good news. So he went over to see the GP. He was a guy; his name was Alan as well, Alan Cochrane, we had a brilliant relationship with him. He was wonderful. He was absolutely wonderful, and he had no right to retire but anyway, that's another story. [Laughs]. And Alan went over to see Alan, and he referred him to a consultant straightaway, because, obviously, he knew his history. So we got the appointment within days, so the next week he went in as a day patient … I can't remember if he saw the consultant first and then he went in as a day patient or whether he just went in as a day patient and saw the consultant that day. But anyway, he went in as a day patient to have this, this lump removed, and strangely enough, when I took him into the day ward, the nurse, the sister that greeted us was Peggy. Peggy was lovely. Peggy was a Chinese girl whose English was wonderful, and she was one of the stalwarts of the Navy Wives' Club. She was a Navy wife as well. And when she saw me, she said, "Oh, it's you," and then you could see her face change, her attitude changed, and she said, "We'll look after him. Don't worry." I said … I started to cry. She said, "Don't …" I said, "What do you think, Peggy?" She said, "Let's wait and see what happens," and I thought 'you *know*, Peggy. You just *know*, but you just don't want to say it to me

because I'm your friend.' And you could see Peggy just crumble when she knew it was us, when she recognised us going in.

Anyway, I went to pick him up at the end of the day, and we were to go in the following week for the results, which would bring us into April '92. And he was kind of ... My mother was here at the time, staying with us. He wasn't up or down, he said, "I don't know what you're getting into a state about. It's going to be alright. It's nothing." I went, "No, it's not nothing. It's not. I just know it's not." So we were sitting in the consultant's room and he said, "I'm really, really sorry to have to tell you, but the results have shown that it's melanoma metastases." I just looked at him and … Because up until that point, I had thought it was another cancer. I thought who is so lucky that they get two cancers in their life? It didn't occur to me for one minute that it was secondaries from the first, from the melanoma, almost 15 years before. I said, "From the melanoma? But that was nearly 15 years ago." He said, "It's been known to happen after 23 years, the secondaries come." Sometimes it's just there and it lies in your system and whatever. I often wonder whether it was the stress of leaving the Navy, even though he wanted to, and it was the right time. Whether, because military life was all he'd known since he was 16 and a half, or whether it was the stress, who knows? We'll never know. But anyway, it was secondaries from the melanoma all those years ago. The minute he said that, I just … Because I had read so much about melanoma, I just knew that this was not going to be a positive outcome, that once melanoma spreads beyond the mole, it's very … It's one of the most aggressive cancers.

But having said that, they were happy to try so he went into St John's Hospital in Livingston – no, he went into the Dunfermline and West Fife Hospital, first to have all the glands removed and the lymph nodes removed from his right groin. But the lump came back so we went in. So then they sent him over to a specialist surgeon in St John's in Livingston, and he was there for about six weeks. He had to learn to walk again after that; that was a massive, massive operation. Then about Christmas time, he had been hobbling around on crutches and things and had been coping okay, but then Christmas '92, he really took a turn for the worse. And Alan Cochrane came out to see him. I had him readmitted to hospital, to West Fife, with Dr Turner who'd been looking after him over in Fife. He referred him to Dr. Cornbleet, who was the oncologist who specialised in melanoma at that time, who wanted to try some new chemotherapy treatment, also wanted to give him radiotherapy to help with the pain. He was getting a lot of pain. He was in a lot of pain. So we were kind of between three hospitals: The West Fife in Dunfermline, there was St John's in Livingston but then the latter part of his treatment, was in the Western General in Edinburgh. So chemotherapy, which made him really, really ill and radiotherapy, which helped the pain.

Then one day, he was in a period … He was at home, I mean we had so much equipment in house, it was unbelievable. He couldn't feel his legs and he wanted to go to the toilet but … Oh honestly, what he … I mean, he had to use a commode, he couldn't go to the toilet without help. When I saw what he passed, I thought 'that's not normal', and he was rambling. Anyway, he had this awful infection and they blue lighted him over to Edinburgh and told us that they didn't think he was going to make

it through the night. So my mother came back up, his mother came up, my sister came up. Anyway, he did, against all the odds, he made it through the night, he did make it through the night, but he only had about six weeks after that … No, that was in the January, so he had a bit longer than that, but he never walked again after that. He was in a wheelchair. So then he could only come home after that episode once the social worker had put in a …

And I have to ... I cannot fault the social workers, they were absolutely brilliant, the social workers, the NHS, everybody – absolutely brilliant. We had a stair lift, a commode, we had special stuff for the bath and all kind of thing. District nurses were coming in the morning and at night to give me a break so that I could … They came in the morning, I would nip over to Tesco's just to get out of the house for a bit. The girls and I had to learn how to empty his urine bottle because he was catheterised all the time. The girls, I mean were just … You know, for teenagers, how they coped? I was only a teenager when I lost my father but, in those days, if you had cancer, you were in hospital and there you stayed until you died. But you know, they tried to make it as normal life as possible, as you can be, when you are living with that, and while all of this was going on, the British Legion came up trumps. They supported our application and helped with all these forms, the form I told you about, you know, all this kind of kicked in after the form; after Dennis had referred us for this. And he was awarded a war pension. I think at first it was at 80 per cent - I know that the percentages went up very rapidly after he was awarded it, and then as the illness progressed, we got things like an Employability Supplement and a Comfort Allowance and that kind of thing, which meant I could afford … If he said, “I fancy whatever to eat,” I would just go and get it because it was giving him what he could manage and what he fancied at the time.

But I remember the day that the guy came to do another assessment, because we had to contact them every time there had been a change in his illness, the GP had just left, Alan Cochrane had just left, and he was in bed. As he was leaving, I think he was going back into hospital that night, he said, “Sue, he’s going to have to go back into hospital.” He said, “There is nothing I can do for him,” and he used the phone, and he said, “They’ll be here soon.” And I just looked at him and I said, “He hasn’t got long now, has he?” [Pause]. And he said [Sobs] … My GP went away crying. He just gave me a cuddle, he couldn't speak, and he just went away crying. And then the doctor appointed by the Ministry of Defence came in after that, and he just ... I said, “We’re waiting for an ambulance, actually, to take him back into the Western General,” and he said, “Well, I am obliged.” I said, “I know, I know. Please go upstairs,” and he went upstairs, into the bedroom, and he just turned around and came out, and just said, “It’ll be one hundred per cent.” Then he died, I think, about six weeks after that, on 29th May, which was Helen's 19th birthday. [Silence].

I: Do you want to pause for a bit?

[Interviews pauses]

Can you tell me, Sue, the support you got, following your husband’s death?

R: Um, the support from friends and family, it was just, it was just second to none. My employer, I cannot speak highly enough of my employer. My manager at that time, just … I had actually been on sick leave from Alan becoming unable to walk and unable to do very much for himself in the January, and I didn't go back to work once that happened, once he lost the use of his legs. My GP was brilliant, he gave me a sick line and he put, I think he put, I think he put "stress and anxiety" or something like that. I said, "But I'm not really ill …" He said, "Sue, you will be ill if you go to work and you have to leave him here in the care of somebody else," he said, "So we're going to sign you off as well." And my manager was absolutely wonderful, she just used to phone and say, "Sue, you're going to need another sick line, so-and-so, whenever it runs out." They even … While he was ill at one point, when we were going through the really critical part of his illness, they organised a rota with my colleagues, and they used to come and take me to the hospital and wait for us, so I didn't have the stress of driving.

And afterwards, it was just, if I didn't feel like working a whole day, I didn't work a whole day it was just; I did what I felt like. My employer was, as I say, just second to none. Fife Council is just a brilliant employer, even now. They have been a brilliant, supportive employer. Friends and family – the girls and I supported each other obviously, there'd be some days where I'd have a bad day and they would support me. Catherine, because she was the youngest, was the worst, and because she'd had this such ... This special bond with her dad. But then, years later … Helen seemed to cope remarkably well, although her birthday every year obviously is an issue because it was her birthday. Her employer, the school – Catherine was still at school – were second to none. And I have to say all the paperwork went through with the Ministry of Defence and the War Pension's Office, I mean, there were lots of forms to fill in, but it all went through quite smoothly, really. Macmillan Cancer Relief were just … They were absolutely wonderful in the days afterwards - in the days and weeks, I should say. Yes, we had lots of support, lots of support. But if you're asking me about the military? Then no. Other than the forms, you know, that you get from the Ministry of Defence and that kind of thing. I had no visits from the military. From some of Alan's former shipmates, yes, but not formally from the military.

I: Do you think there's a difference because you were outside of the military then?

R: Yes, yes.

I: Do you think then your experience was different because he had been retired?

R: Yes, yes. Yes. I think it was probably a case of, "Well, he's a civilian now." Yes. So it might have been very different. I can't say I'm critical of them for that. I suppose my views have changed a little bit at the moment, having listened to Mary [Moorland, Chairman of the War Widows' Association] and some of the others that, you know, we *do* deserve better treatment, we *do* deserve to be recognised that we did give a lot of our lives supporting our partners whilst they serve their Queen and country. Alan always used to call her "the boss", the Queen, if he saw her on the telly; "Oh, it's the boss." But yes, I do think … At the time, you got on with it, but on reflection, I

don't think our contribution then was acknowledged as much as maybe it is now, and I still don't think it's enough now. I don't think military families are valued as much as they should be. Because if it wasn't for the family supporting these men and women at home and giving them some sense of normality outside of the military, they wouldn't be able to serve in the way that they do, I don't think.

I: Was your concept of what he was doing, did you feel that he was safe or was it that when you heard he was a sailor, you thought 'oh God, somebody in the services. This is a dangerous job'? Is it something that was ever present in your thinking when you got married, and were thinking about when starting a life with someone that was in the military?

R: I think you always … Yeah, you always think about it because, you know … It's a job, they get on with it, they sacrifice a lot for the *security*, for the financial security of service life. They do have to sacrifice a lot. I mean, I am not quite sure how it works for people these days, but in Alan's day, as I said to you before, you didn't come home from work, you came home "on leave" you know? And that leave could be recalled, and sometimes it was. If there was an emergency or if somebody took ill and couldn't do their duty you would get a call, and it wasn't, "*Can* you do it?" it was, "You *will* do it." I suppose there was always the underlying thing that if there was to be any sort of conflict involving this country, then your husbands, your partners, sons or whatever, were the first in line to rise up and defend the country against whatever threat. But I can't say you lived with it constantly, but there would be times, I suppose … The times that Alan was up in Iceland, I mean, there were a couple of times that really got pretty nasty. I don't think there were ever shots fired but the Icelandic gun boats were dreadful for ramming the Royal Navy vessels. Certainly, the *Gurkha* limped home with a hole in her side, when he was on the *Gurkha*, because it had been rammed by an Icelandic vessel. So when they're in those situations that are quite volatile, you think 'oh, could this escalate out of hand?' And then, of course, when the Falklands happened; we were still in Rosyth married quarters, actually, on the base at the time when that happened. And it just so happened that Alan had had major surgery around that time, so he wasn't called to go. But a lot of my friends' husbands went, and it really was … You know, the night that the *Sheffield* went down, when the first ship went down, it was 'Oh, this is really hitting home'.

I recall the next day that there were news people all over the place, and the captain of the base at the time did say to the media not to approach any of the wives if they saw us out and about, because it was like … The *Sheffield* was the first one, wasn't it? Or was it the *Coventry*? Anyway, when the first ship went down it was like, honestly, the atmosphere on the estate was just … You could touch it, you could almost touch it. And the captain of the base did say to the media not to approach us and their attitude was, "Well, their husbands are not involved. Not all of their husbands are involved," and he said, "Yes, but you kick one of them and they'll all limp." He said, "They'll all be feeling this because any one of their husbands could be called at any time to go and replace the ship that's gone down." So it came home to you at times like that. It really came home to you at time like that. But then there was also the community spirit and just the feeling that we were all in it together, whether your husband was there or not, because the lads who were there …

And there was one who was a particular friend of mine and she went way down to meet her husband coming home, but on the day before, there was me, two or three of the other wives and her, we put the flags up in the street and the Union Jacks and the bunting to welcome him home and it was just ... Those kinds of things were great, and when you saw the ships coming back after the conflict was over, it was 'phew', and you know, seeing these guys and just, as I say, having the bunting all over the estate and "Welcome Home" things. It was just brilliant. So a great community spirit, yes. But you didn't … You didn't live all the time with the, you know, that you could die, but you always knew that if there was, if there was any escalation of any conflict or any hostilities anywhere, that they'd be the first to go. But you didn't dwell on it, you didn't … It was more how do you get through six months of, "When's Daddy coming home?" Being asked that every day [laughs] you know? And getting on with the practical side of life. And, actually, my eldest daughter posted, and I can't remember what it was in response to, she posted something on Facebook recently that said she was so proud of her father and of all of our military, because of what they are prepared to do to serve the country and to defend our freedoms. But she was even prouder of people like me who would keep … I suppose keep the home fires burning.

I: He obviously got awarded a War Pension, which is great because it provides that income, when he can't work after coming out of the Navy.

R: Mm-hmm.

I: But you still then had that gap when you were leaving your work to look after him.

R: Yes. Yes.

I: Can I ask you then about how it affected your financial situation once he'd died – or actually, before, when …?

R: It was worse before he died, because we were in a limbo where he couldn't work, I was still only working part-time because of the girls. I didn't go into full-time employment until after he'd died so it was just a part-time salary I was getting anyway, so we were struggling. And I shall be eternally grateful to the British Legion because when this was going on, when this started and they were helping us through the process of claiming the War Pension, they provided me with food vouchers that I could go and spend in the supermarket to buy groceries. But that was really, really difficult, having to go into … I had never had that for such a long time, where I was in the supermarket with a calculator to see if I had enough money to get everything that I needed. So when the War Pension came through, and then very quickly the percentages went up; we'd got the basic award and then the percentage went very quickly. And then he got, as I said to you, the Disablement Allowance and Employability 'Comforts' – there was all kinds of things added on. Actually, before he died, money wasn't really an issue – I could go out and buy him anything that he wanted, you know, I could leave the calculator at home, thankfully. But I shall be

eternally grateful to the British Legion for seeing us through. And SSAFA [Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association]; SSAFA were great at helping with all the form-filling and making sure that, you know, we were we were applying for all the right things and doing all the right stuff. But money was … It was a problem.

I: Obviously, I mean, there wasn't … Was there anyone, at an exit interview, where they said, "Okay, you're leaving the service now, this is what you're entitled to. You've had this, this and this. When you go out to civilian life, you'll be able to still call on the MOD for this or this"? Was there any preparedness for …?

R: There was, to be fair, there was. But to be perfectly honest, I can't remember. I would only know what Alan told me and I can't remember how … What he told me now, because it was so long ago. But he did have what they called a "resettlement" interview and he did spend the last year of his naval career in HMS *Camperdown* in Dundee, which is a shore base. But it was helping to train cadets and the Royal Naval Reservists and so on, which is why he kind of thought 'oh, I wouldn't mind doing this as …" And the guys who were there at the time said, "I hope you're going to join the RNR and give us a hand to do this because your knowledge as a seaman, especially, is invaluable." It was kind of after that when it all kicked off, and, as I say, they said "No." But it was only months later whenever we bumped into Dennis that this all kicked off. I don't think, until we bumped into Dennis, once he left the Navy, I don't think we had any more contact from the military. I think it was some time before I realised ... I didn't even know about the War Widows' Association for quite some time, and when I did, I didn't join because I didn't think I really was a 'war widow.'

I: Can you tell me a bit more about that, what was your reasoning?

R: Because, I guess, for me, a war widow, and I suppose for most people, a war widow is somebody whose husband or partner, wife, whatever, has been killed in conflict. And Alan had not died in conflict, although he had given his entire adult life in service to his country. But when we got the award letter, when he got the award letter as a war pensioner, the Ministry of Defence were quite … There was no pussyfooting around, it was just, "Yes, we are responsible, because we sent him out to hot countries and …" In fact, when Alan used to serve in places like the Far East and the Mediterranean and, you know, when he was on ships that went out there, they were actually *expected* to wander around on deck without their shirts on and exposed to that kind of risk.

But I suppose in those days, people didn't realise just how dangerous the sun can be. But then, of course, there was all the subsequent surgeries that he had and all the other things, and arthritis set in, so they accepted ... I think there were about five conditions that they accepted responsibility for, but the melanoma was the main one, and the one that caused his death. So yeah, I had a bit of a conflict with myself over that. I couldn't quite … Even though it was called a "War Pension" and I was getting a "War Widows' Pension," it seemed a misnomer. However, having had a discussion with Mary – Mary Moreland, the Chairman [of the War Widows' Association] – when I had a similar conversation with her, she said, "Sue, you are a war widow." She said,

"Your husband gave his life in the service of his country – gave his entire adult life." And there were times on reflection that I think they could have medically discharged him, and we may have had more time, better time, with him. But he loved his job, he loved serving his country, and they wanted to keep him, and he was happy to stay, and I was happy to support whatever his decision was.

So it's actually really more down to Mary Moreland that I've been, I suppose, more involved with the Association, and she has made me feel that, actually, yes, my husband *is* dead because of his naval service. Just because he didn't die in a conflict doesn't make his death any less traumatic for his family and for us. We've lost him. Because he wouldn't have done some of the things he did that maybe contributed to his death if he hadn't been in the Navy. But I did struggle with that for a while, I didn't really think I was a war widow. I do think sometimes it is a misnomer but as I say, the meetings and chats I've had with Mary, and one or two others, I think for some of the campaigns we have to fight like the one we're fighting just now for reinstatement, I think "War Widows' Association" is quite a powerful name. It has quite a powerful impact. Whereas anything else that kind of said … I don't know, you know, if it was just "Due to Service" or whatever, it would not have the same impact as "War Widows". [Pause].

I: Can I ask you about the affect it had on your wellbeing and how you dealt with the grief following Alan's death?

R: Um, initially, I think I dealt with it quite well. I did get lots of books from organisations. There was on that I found particularly helpful called, *Grief Through the Bereavement Journey*. And I think I was concentrating on the girls. Catherine, particularly, because she was still at school. [Pause]. I think it was about … You know, when it really hit me, was about five years after he died. I think you concentrate, the first year, on … And I did read in one of these books that the second year is the worst, then I thought 'I can't see how that's the case' but it's true in reality, or for me, it was. The first year, you concentrate on getting over the first birthdays, the first Christmas, the first wedding anniversary - the first of everything. But when you start doing everything for the second time, that's when it hits you that this is forever now. This is forever, he's not going to be here. That's when it really started to hit home, I think.

But it was after … I think I'd got to about five years when I started to have panic attacks. I had a crippling, crippling depression. It was dizzy spells, and I just felt unwell, I just felt really, really unwell, and I went to see Alan Cochrane, who was our GP and who, as I said to you, was just wonderful when Alan was dying. He is just a typical GP and I'm just so sad that he's retired. But I went to see him, and he said, "This was always going to happen." He said, "Sometimes it happens with people earlier, but you've gone on …" Because I did see him quite regularly because I'm asthmatic, so I do have to go for checkups. He said, "New bathroom, new kitchen, you've had all these projects …" Because we were going to do all of this stuff to the house once he'd come out of the Navy, you know, we hadn't been in this house very long when he died really, and we were going to do all these things. So I kind of embarked on that, because by then, of course, I'd got the life insurance money and the pension, so I'd embarked on the projects. This is what my GP said; "You've kept

yourself busy with all these projects," and he said, "But now you haven't got a project so now you have to sit and grieve. Now you have to sit and think about what you've lost." So I did go through a terrible bout of depression about five years afterwards that I was on medication … I think I was off work for about a month. I was on medication for perhaps a couple of years.

And it has happened to me periodically since then when, you know, when life's hit a low point. Like, when my mother died and I lost her, and my sister, and one particular time when I was having a terrible time with Helen. She had left home, and she'd bought her own place just along the road. And then she decided, she's always been quite the entertainer, always been into theatre and drama and so on, and she decided she would like to do a stint on cruise ships. So she used to go off on six-month tours and then come home and stay with me, because she'd rented her place out. But there was one time she came home, and she'd been absolutely dreadful, she was home for about six weeks between contracts, I think, and she just wasn't her. She was just … She wasn't *nice*. She was being awful to her sister, and it was just not like her. There was one day, I got really cross with her and I said, "Right, there's something wrong with you." I could always tell when there was something wrong but normally she would talk to me. I said, "I'm going to take the dog out for a walk, when I come back, you either tell me what's wrong or you go and find somewhere else to stay, but I'm not putting up with your attitude." And I cried all the time when I was out with the dog because I thought 'this is *not* my daughter, this is not *like* her.' When I got home, she said, "I can't tell you, not you of all people," and that bit frightened me even more. I said, "Why me? You're frightening me now, you've got to tell me. I know there's something wrong." And what was happening around her was, she was one of a group of four best friends; two of them were married, one was getting married, her sister had just moved in with her boyfriend – Stewart who I loved to bits and she's still with – and they were just setting up home on their own, and of course, Helen is still single. And [pause] and … She told me that she'd been raped. While her father was dying, and she'd never, ever told us about it because her father was dying. Because she didn't think we could deal with the Police, and because it had been at a party and she'd had something to drink, it was her word against his. But it wasn't just the rape, it was that he'd tormented her at school afterwards; because she was still at school at that time. She was in sixth form. I think it had got to her that she could never …

I mean, we just thought she was independent and never really gave it a lot of thought, but she was seeing everyone else settling into relationships and she just couldn't because she didn't trust anybody. So not only was she having to deal with her father dying, and this person *knew* – it was someone she thought was a friend. They *knew* her father was dying, they *knew* what they were doing, and tormented her at school afterwards about it. [Sobs]. And she kept all that to herself all that time, then on top of that, her father died on her birthday. Then a year after he died, she had to have major surgery on her eyes because she had detached retinas, so she was in danger of losing her sight. So she's had a lot to put up with, she's had an awful lot to put up with. So I've struggled with that a lot … I've struggled with that a lot. And not having Alan here to talk to about that, but I sometimes think it's just as

well Alan wasn't here, because if he wasn't dead, he'd be in prison. Because he wouldn't have stood by and let somebody hurt his little girl. [Pause]

I: Are you okay, do you want to stop or…?

R: I'm okay.

I: So obviously, bringing up your daughters after he passed away was a very big thing, even though they were in their late teens and –

R: Yes.

I: - sort of, coming into their 20s, you'd still got to deal with all the –

R: Yes.

I: All the life stages. Can you tell me about things that …? Are they getting married, have they had children?

R: No, I have no grandchildren. Helen did get married, eventually. She went for counselling, to Rape Crisis, and she did get married. That was a huge, huge thing for her. And if I'm going to be honest, I didn't think, when I first met Jonathan, I didn't think that he was the kind of boy that she would bring home. I had my doubts as to whether he was actually heterosexual. I don't know whether that made Helen ... Because he was, kind of ... He was effeminate in a lot of ways, but I don't know if that made Helen feel more comfortable after her experience. But then, a month after their first wedding anniversary, he left her for somebody else. So Helen has needed a lot of support, a lot of emotional support. A lot of things have happened to her that … Life has been cruel to Helen. Life has been really cruel to Helen. [Sobs]. So yes, life has been very cruel to Helen, but I am so incredibly, incredibly proud of her. I don't think she appreciates just how proud, because … Just because I am anyway, because of the way she's dealt with everything. But after her marriage broke up, she decided, she was living in Edinburgh at the time, she decided to move away from Edinburgh and she went to university, went back to education, went to Abertay University and she now has a BSc Honours in Forensic Psycho-Biology. And has moved to Glasgow and is employing some of those skills in jobs through there, and does seem to be quite enjoying life in Glasgow.

Helen didn't have any children to her marriage, it was too short-lived. Actually, neither of the girls have been particularly maternal; they've both been more animal-orientated. Catherine, the younger one, all she ever wanted to do from being a very, very small girl was look after animals. So she is now a qualified veterinary nurse and has been for 25 years. Well, hasn't been qualified for 25 years, has been qualified for over 21, but has been in the business for 25 years. She started doing it voluntarily when she was, in fact, about the time her dad took ill. She would go out and muck out the cattery for a local vet's, then they took her on as a trainee, and she qualified and was head nurse until a year ago at Broadleys in Stirling, then she moved to a bigger practice in a different capacity about a year ago. She's been with Stewart, she

met Stewart when she was 21, just coming up to her 21st birthday. Stewart is an electrician, he's a lovely lad. He's quite quiet, and I think he was a bit traumatised when he met me and the girls together for the first time. [Laughs]. But now he's more than capable of taking us on.

He's just … I just love him like a son. I just love him dearly. He's been great for Catherine and they've been together now for, it'll be nearly 21 years. They've lived together for I think about 17 of those now. They live in Falkirk, they've got a lovely place in Falkirk, but no children. Neither of them have been that way inclined, but they do have a black Labrador called Jenny who I am "Gran" too. Catherine's always been a great keeper of guinea pigs and rabbits and things like that. But yeah, I think the thing I'm proudest of is that my girls are best friends; they love each other and look out for each other.

I: Can I ask how you celebrate milestones and birthdays together?

R: Mother's Day is usually me and the girls. Birthdays, it depends. We try to get together on each other's birthdays, but it doesn't always work but … [coughs]. Excuse me. It just so happens, this Sunday, we're all getting together because it's Stewart's birthday. Helen's had a couple of her birthdays away when she was on ships and things. Alan's birthday, we tend to celebrate in our own way. I usually get flowers for the house, and we do have a memorial plaque in the Garden of Remembrance at the crematorium. Catherine is the one that is more likely to take flowers and things. Catherine does like to have somewhere to go. Catherine did go through a terrible phase of grief, where Stewart was quite concerned about her for a long time. She went through the process, I think it's EMDR [Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing therapy], it's some kind of memory altering programme, because she just … She was really, really struggling to cope without her dad. There were times that Stewart would find her in the crematorium by her dad's memorial, just sitting, consumed with tears and grief. So she went through this, it's a kind of counselling process, but they use a light thing. It's kind of to replace bad thoughts with good thoughts, I'm sure it's something like EMDR. But she copes better now, she does cope better now, but Catherine is the one that is more likely … She likes to have somewhere to *go*; to put her flowers down. I've got beyond that a little bit. I'm not so … I'm not so bothered about that now. I'm more inclined to get flowers for the house and to acknowledge it in that way. Helen is the same, but it's not so easy for Helen to get to the crematorium anyway now from Glasgow. It's slightly nearer for Catherine. But we try to celebrate as much together as we can, as possible.

I: And because there's that conflation, I suppose, of your husband's death day and your daughter's birthday, are there certain …? Was there any conscious decision to separate the two?

R: Yes, yes. It's always been my attitude, my approach to it, and I know it would have been Alan's. I did say to Helen that I thought at first, when he died, on the day he died, I said, "Try to see this as he is letting you know how important this day was to him in his life, not because it's the day of his death. He is going on the day that was most important to him in his life, when he first became a father." So I think she's seen

it mostly like that. What we did, I mean, when the girls were still at home for the first few years we would ... In the morning, we would go to the crematorium or we'd do the flowers or we'd do whatever, and then after that, it's, "Right, we've done that. It's Helen's birthday. Above all, anything else, May 29th is Helen's birthday." We acknowledge his death, we acknowledge the anniversary, but it's Helen's birthday. So yeah, we do.

I: And is Remembrance Day important to you?

R: Yes. [Sniffs]. It's important to me. It always has been. Actually our younger daughter, Catherine, was baptised on Remembrance Day, in the year that she was born. She was born in September and baptised on Remembrance Day. It's always been important in our family anyway even before I met Alan, because my mother was one of a big family and she had three brothers who all went away to war. She didn't know my father at the time, but my father had done his … He served for six years, he did the North Africa and Italy campaigns. So yes, it's always been important to me to acknowledge my father and my other male relatives' contribution, and yes, since then, for Alan. It's important to us as military people to be, you know, just to say thank you to those that are still prepared to serve and still prepared to make that sacrifice if they're called on to do so. So yes, Remembrance is hugely important, hugely important. I will not go out of the house, from the day that poppies go on sale until the day after Remembrance, I will not go out of the house unless I'm wearing a poppy.

I: Do you get involved in the War Widows' Remembrance Service at Whitehall?

R: Yes. I did for the first time last year. I went to my first AGM in March last year in Bournemouth. I hadn't really had much time or opportunity to get too involved before when I was working, but since I've been retired, I took over as Regional Organiser at Dundee and then, as I say, went to the AGM and Mary asked me if I would get more involved. I think it was a chance conversation and I'd said that I'd been an administrator and so on, and that I'd spent 30 years in Fife Council as an administrator and then senior administrator and supervisor and so on, and would I help them out on the committee? Would I be Minutes Secretary? And now I've been asked if I'll be Secretary. But I have actually really enjoyed being involved with like-minded people, or people with military backgrounds or backgrounds as military wives or military widows. So yes, my first involvement … I mean, I've been to, for the last you couple of years, I've laid wreaths at the Law in Dundee or on HMS *Unicorn* in Dundee on behalf the Association. But this is the first time I've been in London and taken part in the London events, and that was just the most incredibly, incredibly moving experience. It was incredible. Yeah.

I: Can I ask you about what you do then, as part of your Regional Organiser's role, and also Minutes Secretary and co-opted Trustee and so on?

R: Yes, well, I've been going up to the meetings, to the lunches in Dundee. The lady who did it before me, Marguerite, is now 87, I think she's almost 88, actually. She always used to put a letter out twice a year and there'd be a lunch in June and a

lunch in December, so I used to take a half-day off work and go to them, so I kind of knew a few faces. Marguerite had asked me two or three times if I would be interested in taking over from her because she felt she was getting too old to deal with it. I thought 'oh, I've got enough to do, I'm working and what have you.' But anyway, it came to a head, Marguerite hadn't been particularly well, so I agreed I'd give it a shot, I'd give it a shot at being Regional Organiser, which is another thing that prompted me to go down to Bournemouth last year.

Because although Marguerite and I had reached this agreement, there is a process that you've got to go through before you can be an organiser. As I say, while I was there, it was a chance conversation and Mary asked me if I would consider coming on as Minutes Secretary because Moira, who is the Secretary at the moment, was trying to do both and there was too much work for a secretary and to do the minutes as well. Because the minutes, although it's only four times a year, they can be quite long and quite involved, so I said I would give them a … I'd see how it went, and I'd give them a hand. So I was formally appointed as the Regional Organiser. Now, that involves … I represent people from kind of the north of Fife and then Dundee area and central Scotland. We tend to meet … Marguerite always used to have her coffee mornings in the Queen's Head ... [corrects herself] *Hotel* in Dundee, so I kind of stuck with that, because it's easy for people to park, it's kind of central for people to get to.

So we tend to meet there once a month for coffee, and there's usually a pretty good turnout, and people either, if they're new to the group, will sit and tell their story, or sometimes it's just a bit of chitchat. Sometimes, like the last one, they wanted to hear all about what I'd been up to in London for the Remembrance events. Then, I think, so far in the time … I put a quarterly newsletter out, try to put a chatty thing out with photographs and things in, you know: What I've been up to, what the association's been up to, what we can do for them, if they know other people who are war widows but are not members at the moment to come and join us. Then we have our get-togethers, our lunches twice a year. I had a lunch in June, a summer lunch; that had a good turnout, there was about 25 of us, I think. Then we had a Christmas lunch. We had invited along the Commanding Officer of the cadet force who provides us with the standard bearer on formal occasions. Because the other thing we get involved in is Remembrance in Dundee. It's the week before official Remembrance. I think it's, after the Albert Hall, it's kind of the next biggest festival in the country, so they have a concert type, you know, it's along the same kind of lines as the Royal Albert Hall, in the Caird Hall in Dundee.

So I go along and represent the Association there, and hopefully get other widows to come along, because they do like us to take part. They do like us to muster on the stage, they like us to march down the audience and muster on the stage with the rest of the veterans. So we get involved in stuff like that; anything local that is going on. As I say, newsletters, lunches, coffee mornings, so that's what I do as Regional Organiser. As Trustee, at the moment I'm taking the minutes. I go down to ... Although the last meeting was in Edinburgh, just in January; the meetings usually take place in the Union Jack club. So we get paid expenses, but it does mean a trip away, which puts me in Tilly's [the cat's] bad books, but hey-ho, she comes round eventually. [Laughs]. So the meetings usually last over a couple of days, especially if

there's a finance meeting involved or maybe a RO training – a Regional Organiser training session or something like that. So I scribble down all the notes and then type them up when I get back and send them to Mary. Then once she adds her bit in, she gets them sent to everybody else, then they are signed and go down as record and a copy to our patron – not the patron, the patron doesn't get them, but our vice … I can't remember what they call them now? Presidents, or presidents then the vice-presidents get copies and so on.

I: So that's Baroness Fookes?

R: Baroness Fookes, Lord Younger, and [Lady] Sue Garden, and there is another one, I think. So that's my involvement at the moment, but at the last meeting, we were asked to apply for trustees … Well, applications were put out for trustee positions towards the end of the year, so I applied formally to become a member of the committee; because at the moment, I've only been voted on by other committee members, not by the membership. So I applied and I was interviewed at the last meeting formally, then I was asked if I would consider taking on the role of Secretary. Because Moira has put herself forward as Chairman-elect, so she will be wanting to give up her Secretary role so that she can concentrate on following Mary around for a year before she takes over as Chair. So that's happening in April. Well, the voting forms go out shortly. They should be out any time now, I think, and then it's a formal process at the AGM to be elected on. So I'm not quite sure what's going to be expected of me as Secretary. Moira is just drip-feeding it at the moment. [Laughs]. But they're a great bunch of ladies and I've enjoyed being involved with them, I really have. It's like being part of a … It's like being part of a *family* in some ways, that you've all got something in common that you wish you didn't, but you have anyway. Yes, I've enjoyed being part of it, yes. Yeah. I've enjoyed being more involved, and I think, in some ways, talking to these ladies has made Alan's service feel even more valuable. I feel even more proud of his service. I always have been. I always have been proud of him, but somehow now prouder. I don't know why, but it does.

I: Is there anything that you want people to know about war widows that they don't know yet? What's the big myth that needs busting?

R: The big myth? [Pause]. Well, I think "war widows", as we've already discussed, is a bit of a misnomer, but I'm not quite sure how you'd rename it and still have the powerful impact that "War Widow's Association" has at the moment. But I think that is that the biggest myth; that your husband doesn't have to have been killed in a conflict for you to be a war widow. And I'm not sure that there's ... I don't know whether we face some challenges from some, from within the organisation on that, I really don't know? Whether there is some whose husband *have* been killed in conflict think that people like me are not … Are not on the same level or shouldn't be classed as war widows, I really don't know. I know it doesn't make any difference to the people that I deal with on a regular basis; the committee. But whether that is generally the case, I don't know. I really don't know what the proportion of war widows whose husbands were killed in conflict is of the membership, to be honest, or whether they were actually … As I've been talking to people, and when I was at the AGM last year, I was actually quite surprised at how many I came across who were like me, whose

husbands died from service-related conditions or illnesses or injuries, as opposed to being killed in battle or conflict.

I: So, if I can ask you about your life since Alan passed away? Do you have any hobbies or interests, and especially since you've retired?

R: Well, after Alan died, I suppose a lot of time was taken up with the girls, my job. I actually spent a lot of time campaigning for Macmillan, fundraising for Macmillan, after he died, because the support that they gave us was absolutely incredible. I am very lucky that I've had … I have got a lot of friends, but I've got a circle of half a dozen that are particularly close, and one who is my closest friend who I've always been able to rely on. We've had shopping trips away and that kind of stuff. But since I … Well, before I retired, I got a … Because Catherine, well both of the girls are animal people, we've always been animal people but particularly because of Catherine and her kind of job, you kind of get suckered into it as well. She would come home and say, "Oh, Mum, there's this cute …" We've had so many rescue *beasts* through this house, you've no idea. Tilly is a rescue as well, you know, and so we kind of got involved with animal charities, and one of the things I always wanted to do was to go on safari.

So for my 60th birthday, I took the girls and Stewart, Catherine's partner, to Kenya on safari, and had the most wonderful, wonderful time. But one of the trips we did at the end – we were staying in Nairobi. We arrived in Nairobi and had the first night there but then stayed in various camps on the Masai Mara, Mount Kenya, Lake Nakuru but ended up back in Nairobi and went to Daphne Sheldrick's Wildlife Trust, which is an orphanage for elephants that have been orphaned either by poachers who've killed the mothers for their tusks, or perhaps the mothers who have just died, or sometimes it's human-elephant conflict. But Daphne Sheldrick, who – God rest her, has died since – but she was carrying on her husband's work and her daughter is now carrying on her work, and she raises these orphans and rehabilitates them until they are able enough to go back into the wild. And the work she does is incredible, and the amount I learned when we were on that safari from our safari guide and from the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust about the threats that wildlife faces, not just elephants but wildlife in general, and the impact it's going to have on this planet, because we all need each other. You know, there's an ecosystem. Elephants, particularly, are nature's gardeners, you know, they'll eat that tree there and then they'll maybe walk 50 miles that day, and as they are walking that 50 miles, they are pooping that 50 miles, and they are dropping the seeds from that tree and, you know. So they're pruning that one because it's got too big but they're planting other ones. I know that's it put very simplistically but that's … We rely on them.

We're all interdependent. They say if bees die out. Some species of bees have been put on the endangered register, but they say if bees die out, we've only got a maximum of 4 to 5 years after them because they pollinate so much. So I think we've all got a responsibility to wildlife, to the planet, to the environment, and so after that safari I got very involved with campaigning. I think it was the next year that the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust organised a global march to try and raise awareness of the ivory trade and the threats facing wildlife. That's been an annual thing since then,

that globally, I think it's usually about a hundred … Last year, I think, about hundred and 150-something cities took part. So I'm part of a small group; there are three of us that were involved with the first march, and we've stuck together and we either will go along and support each other peoples' marches if they are marching for something else, if it's to do with wildlife and the environment. We've got another march coming up in April, because we're going to petition CITIES [Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora] to be stricter on trophy hunting and the sale of ivory and so on and so forth.

So yeah, very, very involved in campaigning for wildlife and just for animals generally. It's just, you know, people are so, so cruel. The dog and cat meat trade in the Far East is just horrendous. It's just beyond belief how people can be so cruel, how people can think that the meat tastes better if they've tortured it before it dies, you know. There's a lot of work to do out there for the environment and for wildlife, and people like Donald Trump are not helping. If we took Donald Trump out, we could save a lot of the planet, because that man has ... Has just ripping up agreements and he's just laughing in the face of scientists who have proven otherwise. So I am very involved with groups who work for wildlife, with wildlife. I campaign on their behalf, and for the environment.

So yes, I am involved with that, involved with the War Widows. My best friend, I do spend a lot of time visiting her because she now is suffering from dementia, but she is still my best friend. So that does seem to run away with a lot of my time, but if I'm just sitting quietly in the house with Tilly, I like to do crosswords and jigsaws. I like things that keep the mind active. For a long time, for probably, I don't know ... It's 26 years since Alan died, this year. For probably about 16 of those years, maybe more, I was quite happy to just dodge along. There was nobody else in my life, no partner, but there were times when the girls used to say, "Well, Mum, you're a bit young, should you not …?" I was quite happy doing what I was doing. But anyway, against my better judgment, I let them talk me into joining *Match.com*, and so I did meet one chap, called Bob, who I thought it was going okay and then realised that my pensions were the attraction, rather than me, so that didn't last too long.

Then Ron got in touch with me, and that would be possibly eight years ago now. He had a lot of service in the military. He's never served as a regular, but he's been a reservist for many years and involved with the military for many, many years. He retired as a Major and was still working for the Ministry of Defence, actually, when I met him, as kind of the liaison officer between reservists and employers. You know, trying to make employers see the positives of recruiting ex-service personnel and reservist personnel, and to make sure as well that the reservist personnel in employment were getting the right treatment. You know, because there's been a big discrepancy over employers; some employers would give annual leave for camps and some wouldn't and that kind of thing, so he was involved in all that, still very involved with the military. So we wrote to each other for a while and then we met and would go out maybe every two or three weeks for dinner or something like that. Then we were talking about holidays one time, and he said, "If ever you need a holiday, somebody to go on holiday with …"

Because one thing, I did go on singles holidays! I've been to China on my own. I've been to Italy on my own. But it's not always easy, so he did say, "If you ever want a chum to go on holiday with, just let me know." And it kind of … I just really, really wasn't sure about getting into any sort of relationship and then there was one day, it was when Lynda Bellingham died, and she was one of my favourite actresses, she was just absolutely brilliant. And she'd had, I can't remember what kind of cancer, but I know she'd had cancer and it was her goal to live until Christmas, and she didn't make it to Christmas. And there were one or two other things that happened that year that kind of made me … Because I've always tried to live by the philosophy that life's too short, so to grab it … I mean, that was one of the last things that my husband said on the Wednesday before he died. He died on the Saturday, and he said, "Sue, if you want it, get it. If you want to go somewhere or do something, do it, because you can't take it where I'm going." And I've always tried to remember that but you know, sometimes you can tend to take it for granted and it goes past. But there'd been one or two things and I thought … I knew that Ron was just waiting for me to say the word. So I phoned Helen first and she said, "Oh Mum, just do it. Just do it. Stop it," you know.

So I phoned Ron, because I think I'd just seen him the night before, or we'd just had the conversation that day or something, so I phoned him and said, "Alright then, how do you fancy that holiday?" I think he was like, "What?" I think I took the wind out of his sails. [Laughs]. So anyway, we decided we would try a week first in Tunisia and see how that went, and that was in February 2015 – four years ago. And we've kind of been partners since. We don't live together. I think we're both too independent. I certainly am. I'm quite happy that he's got his place in Carnoustie and I've got my place here. He comes here and stays sometimes, and I go there and stay sometimes, and we go on holidays together and we speak every day. So since Tunisia we've been to Iceland, we've been to Budapest, we've been to Vienna ... Where else have we been? We've done two or three tours round Scotland, we've been to London a couple of times. We've actually been on quite a few holidays. We've been to Cyprus ... To North Cyprus. I was at one of his family's weddings at Gretna just at Christmas-time, he's been to family weddings with me. So it works for us. It works for us. But I've been Sue Raw for 45 years now; I shall be Sue Raw when I die.

I: Can you tell me if, in your opinion, there are any changes to being a war widow from when you became a war widow, as compared to someone who would become a war widow now, in 2019?

R: I think the biggest change, and I suppose maybe one of the influences for me in whether I went into another … I mean, I never wanted another relationship anyway, but there was always that thing that, if you went into a relationship and you lived together or you got married, you lost your pension. You know, that was always there at the back of your mind. That doesn't apply to widows these days. As for the change, I really don't know … [pause] Not that I can think of personally, other than that … As I say, it's really only been the last three or four years that I've been more involved with the Association, that I've got to know what goes on. I think, again, it's that big thing; it's reaching out to people. We know there are more people out there.

Like, for me, I didn't know for a lot of years. We know there are more people out there, it's just reaching them, but GDPR is the biggest factor in that; that we can't be provided with their names and addresses without their permission. But I can't think of any other significant … Anything else that is significantly different.

I: Are there any other topics that you'd like to talk about before we close the interview?

R: I don't think so. I think we've touched on a bit of everything, haven't we? I don't think so, unless there's anything else you want to ask me?

I: I think we've pretty much covered your whole life.

R: [Laughs]. You have indeed, yeah. [Laughs].

I: So thank you ever so much for talking to me.

R: No, thank you for listening. Thank you for listening.