



War Widows' Stories

History. Memories. Heritage.

An Interview with Lady Primrose

Lewis

12 December 2018



The War Widows'
Association
of Great Britain



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To do so, and for any other questions about this interview, how you may use it, or about the project, please contact Dr Nadine Muller via email (info@warwidowsstories.org.uk), or by post at the following addressing: John Foster Building, Liverpool John Moores University, 80-98 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool, L3 5UZ.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent / Interviewee

[] = Clarification note

I: Okay. This is Melanie Bassett interviewing Lady Primrose Lewis on 12th December 2018. Can you please state your name and your age?

R: Primrose Christine Lewis. I'm 87.

I: Can you tell me a bit about your current life?

R: My current life? I live in a house that was originally a holiday house but when I was widowed, obviously it was a perfect house because it doesn't have a large garden or anything. So I've owned the house for 50 years – I'm well known here - and I suppose my life has been involved with local charities and local restoration and the historical part of, of the town. Very much to do with the sea. Until recently, I had a beach hut, and that's been very much part of life here, and until quite recently I had young grandchildren who were only too happy to come here for holidays and things. Um, that's been most of my life. Immediately after my husband died, I was very much involved with County things, County events, which I found very flattering. I hadn't expected to be invited. And that went on for about, oh 20 years, but now, of course, as he was 13 years older than I am, I was - most of his colleagues and friends are now dead, unfortunately, so I've withdrawn from that part of it as there are so few people who remember him. And anyway, I don't like driving very far so it wasn't possible to get any of these County events, if you like. That's really my life at the moment.

I: Thank you. Could you tell us about your childhood and early life? Where was your hometown?

R: I was born in London. I had a traumatic childhood, which was caused by an irresponsible father. So, my sister and now were born into, looking back, what was luxury, which ended dramatically when we were 7 and 9. And then the War came, so my mother was obviously working, as most women did, and I think, looking back, we children had a very limited and a very tough time, when I think of the things we saw

and knew about, and I was only 14 when the War ended. I think that's why we're a serious generation and look upon the snowflakes [laughs] of the present ones with aghast. I then joined MI5 at the age of 18 and worked there for 6 years. I was the youngest, one of the youngest ever upgraded at 20. They upgraded me and then discovered I wasn't old enough to sign the Official Secrets Act, which was rather nice, but they said, "We trust you anyway." And then at 24, I left to marry a South African. Went out to South Africa and had two children: a son and a daughter, and after six years, when South Africa left the Commonwealth, my South African husband who'd had an English, or Scottish mother, and an English grandmother. All the women had all been non-South Africans, he said, "This is all too much. I don't want our children brought up having to learn Afrikaans as a full subject from the age of 5." And we were - he decided we would come back to England, and we did. The marriage was dysfunctional and we divorced after 21 years. The children were then 17 and 19, and I, by then I been - had done a Sociology diploma and had trained as a Probation Officer. And he said how lucky I was that I had a working model at home to work on. [Laughs].

And I came down here, to Harwich, as the local Probation Officer. I had, ten years before, bought this house, which was derelict, had no water, no bathroom. The kitchen was sort of a hut at the back, and I slowly did it up; keeping lodgers and things like that. And I then married again, a cousin by marriage. That was a terrible disappointment to both of us and I left after ten months. Never, never marry someone you think you know! Then I came back here again and worked in, because someone was obviously sitting in my job, then worked for social services for 4 years, then Barnardo's for a year, and then the NSPCC who, were then expanding. I worked for them for two years and then met my late husband. I'd been out in South Africa, staying with friends, and a great friend of his had said, "When you get back to Essex, please look up an old friend of mine and find a wife for him." And I said, "Oh, only too easy. I know lots of widows who are dying to get married again." I, of course, had always sworn after two marriage failures of marriage that it wasn't for me. I was going to be a career woman forever.

Anyway, I contacted my very, very glamorous relative who had a nice house in London and plenty of money, and interested in opera as he was and I got in touch with him and said, "Could I bring her to tea?" which I did, took her out to the farm. She'd got a daughter living in South Africa and he'd just been there on holiday, that sort of thing. And I was enabling them both and doing what I thought was a fine job. Then as we drove away, I thought that I would write to his friend in South Africa and say, I'd done my bit. I've introduced him to somebody and even if anything doesn't come between *her* and him, at least she would introduce him to a whole lot of new people. It would be lovely for me if anything came of it because she would be in Essex and there would be other parties at the other side of the County.

I thought I'd done a good day's work. Two or three days later, the phone went, and it was him, and he never believed this but it was true, and as I heard his name I reached for the address book because I thought he'd rung me for her address. Instead of which, it was a list of dates for the next three months. And I put the phone down and thought "You've got that wrong" and within two months, I think, he had

proposed. We married seven months later. And it was love at both sides - on both sides, for both of us. Never in my life before had it been instantaneous and, and, and both of you ... I've forgotten what the word is, but you know what I mean.

I: Mutual?

R: Mutual. Sorry, [laughs] I've got to the age where ... It was extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary. It was a, um a complete meeting of the minds; he had first-class brain you don't get from being a poor ... sorry, not poor; you don't get from being a vicar's son to be Second Sea Lord and being called 'Boy Andrew' because he was always promoted very, very young. Apart from Collingwood, he was the youngest ever Captain appointed in the Navy. At one stage they had to send him to Northern Ireland to kill a year because, on some trumped-up job, because he was too young for the next upgrade [promotion]. He was incredibly bright when he joined the Navy, they do a sort of 5-subject university course, equivalent to a university course, and he got a First in every single one. And apparently they said he must be fast-tracked, which he was. He in fact, he spent 17 years in Whitehall. As far as the sea is concerned, he didn't have a terribly... But I think having done the Arctic convoys, which he did in the war; I think that rather put him off on that side of it. But anyway, as he said, he was a "Whitehall sailor" really. Battling, he said, against free wigs and teeth. [Laughs]

So that was life-changing for me. I was, as I say, an NSPCC Childcare Protection Officer when I met him and um suddenly I was wife of the Lord-Lieutenant, which is what he was. I knew he only had two and a half years before he retired so I thought that I could probably get through the sort of various social things, all of which was very different to what I'd ever lived before. And he very sensibly suggested that I carry on working part-time, which I did, until I was 60 so that I could retire then. And after 2 and a half years he, as I say, I knew that he was retiring. He was due to be taken on holiday fishing, he was a great fisherman, to Russia, and I discovered that he couldn't breathe at night. So I said, "I think before you go to Russia with a whole group of men," none of whom I thought could cope with anybody being ill. I said, "I think you better go to the doctor." And I said, "I think I'm coming with you, too." And he did the usual what men do, you know: "Oh, I'm fine, I'm fine," you know? [Laughs] And I just said to the doctor, "He can't breathe at night." So the doctor tapped his lungs and one, of course, sounded quite different to the other. I'd worked with the doctor briefly in social services, and he picked up the phone and said he wanted an x-ray that day, which we had. The radiographer said, "Please come back, I need a side view," and I knew then that they'd found something. That was literally on the Friday, he was due to retire on the Saturday. And on the Monday morning, the GP rang me up and he said, "Primrose, I'm glad you answered the phone. Can you get him to agree to go National Health?" because Andrew had said to him, "If there is anything wrong, I'm going BUPA because I've paid a fortune into them and have never had anything out of them." But he said if you would agree to go on the National Health, he can be seen earlier. Because it's the same chest specialist; if you want to see him privately you've got to wait until the weekend. It's what people don't realise, this. But if you see him on the National Health ... He said, "Can you get him to Addenbrookes by 8 o'clock?" I said, "Of course I can." And so that was two days later, he was in Addenbrookes, and the chest specialist said, "I'm pretty certain it's

Mesothelioma from contact with asbestos in the Navy," which, of course, it turned out to be.

And there was a very nice registrar there, a Pakistani, who had only been there four days, and he said, "I've just come from a chest ward, a teaching hospital." He said, "There is no treatment that works. Don't let anybody try anything on him because it won't work, just let him keep his quality of life." And I said, "Well, how long has he got?" And he said, "He's got three months, maybe six, but certainly not nine." And in fact he lived for 15 months, so they don't always get it [right] ... It depends on how, how fit you are. And he wanted to die at home, which he did, and it was a terrible death. Wouldn't wish it on anybody. So that's it, really.

I: If I could just backtrack slightly and find out a little bit more about you as well. Can you tell me about your family? What did your parents do for jobs?

R: My father was also the son of a vicar, in London. He had six older sisters so you can imagine, well I can only imagine just how spoilt he was. My grandfather apparently was a kindly, typical kindly vicar, unambitious. He was vicar of St Ethelreda in Fulham all his life. As I say, after having had six girls, they then had this boy, and a right little tyke he turned out to be. [Laughs]. But he went to Colet Court because as son of a vicar, he would get hugely reduced fees, and then went to Dartmouth but didn't stay in the Navy. He started a company, following his godfather, who was a man called Crow Catchpole. And 40 or 50 years ago, if you travelled on the Northern line, you would see at every station publicity things for Crow Catchpole; they were road builders. I don't think it's there any longer but anyway, that was his godfather.

And he should have gone into the company but my father was very independent, and slightly arrogant, and felt that he could start his own company, which he did. So by the time he married my mother, and he would only have been about 26, he'd started his own company, and another company for using the by-products from road building. He built the Barnett Bypass, for instance. So they married; I mean, they had – he had two cars and a chauffeur and my mother had a maid, and you know, they lived in, what we would call now, luxury. But unfortunately in 1937, I think, or '38, something like that. He had a very bad accident. My mother was always told that it was a car accident but an uncle of mine told me years ago that it was – and she always said it was very strange that she never saw anything about the car and there wasn't anything about insurance – well an uncle of mine told me years later that, in fact, my father had been in a bar and had insulted Princess Marina the Duchess of Kent. And he'd had his arm on the bar like that [demonstrated the position of the arm] and somebody had knocked his arm in anger, and his face had gone down into a champagne glass. He certainly lost his eye and I can remember being taken to St George's Hospital in Hyde Park [Corner], in bed with this...

Anyway, during that time, his firm went broke because everybody undercut his prices, and he'd been so arrogant and so, *overconfident* rather than arrogant, overconfident, that he hadn't gone into any partnerships or anything so if anybody undercut his prices, there was nobody to back him up. Anyway, he went broke and disappeared, and really behaved very badly indeed. My mother never recovered; she

was the sort of generation that hadn't worked, didn't have her own bank account. You didn't, you know. Then the war came and there she was with two little girls. It's not surprising really that she couldn't cope, never recovered. Died at 53 of emphysema, was a chain-smoker, you know? All her family, all my mother's side of the family died of emphysema because they all smoked. My mother used to turn off the alarm then pick up her cigarettes and light one before she got out of bed. She said she couldn't have got through the war without them so I can't criticise her, and anyway, nobody knew it was dangerous. My son, when he went to Dartmouth the first thing they did, that was in 1976. First thing they did was hand him a carton of cigarettes. He said, "But I don't smoke," to which they said, "Well, I think you should try them." That was 1976. That's disgraceful, isn't it? It took him years to get over it, to give it up later. He doesn't smoke now, nobody smokes now, I don't think, anybody over sort of 40 or 50. Anyway, so where did we get to?

I: So I just wondered about your education, was it affected by the War?

R: It was affected by my father and it was affected very badly in that, because of the War and moving around, I think the worst thing was because my father went bankrupt and disappeared, my sister and I had been at the Froebel Demonstration prep school in Baron's Court, which was amazing, fantastic school. But in those days, if your father didn't pay the fees, you were, you couldn't stay at the school, because what the trustees said was that they couldn't be seen to be supporting an irresponsible father. So nothing was then concentrated on the children. Nowadays, of course, that just simply wouldn't happen. So we had to leave and I think for a short time we shared a governess. Somebody very kindly said, "Well, my daughter's got a governess. Why don't your two join them?" So we did that for a short time, then we left London because the Blitz was coming, and we were lent a cottage near Cambridge, in a place called Whittlesford, simply because my mother – my sister's godmother owned the village.

So we had a - I thought I'd died and gone to heaven, having been born and brought up in London. There was this thatched cottage with no running water and no inside loo, and a farm opposite, and I just, I just thought I'd died and gone to heaven because it was just *me*. My sister was completely the opposite hated it all. I don't think my mother was too keen on it all either really, but I just loved it. Loved it. After that, my mother got a, a couple of jobs in schools and things, to get us by. While we were in Whittlesford we went to the village school, obviously. That was after I'd taken my tricycle and pails and had got drinking water, as we had no, no drinking water. I thought it was lovely. And then, then my mother took - the last job she took, which was for about three or four years, which was running a guesthouse for Odeon Cinemas at a place called Bourne End. And it was a lovely old house and a large garden. I always had goats and canaries and cats. I had 17 cats at one stage as we'd keep keeping kittens from people, you know. There again, I was in heaven with 6 acres of garden. Absolutely gorgeous.

But the moment my father came out of the army, from the war, the small allowance that the army gave my mother stopped. We'd been at a school in Taplow, my sister was then 16. She'd taken the School Certificate so that was alright, she left anyway.

But I was 14 so I had to leave and start work to support my mother, which I did. I started working on a farm. There again, absolute heaven to me. Then she married, after a couple of years, she married again and he worked at the Swanbourne House prep school, which was one of the places she worked in during the War. So I went as an assistant matron there at 16. The boys were – the oldest boys were 13 so you could imagine...! I was there two years until I was 18 then I went to MI5.

But people go on about education, and as I say, mine virtually finished at 14, but when I did, I did my Diploma in Sociology, we did - the year we did Social Psychology, we did an IQ test. There were 20 of us and I think four or five had already got degrees and things, I came top. And the social psychology lecturer said to me afterwards, "You do realise that your mark was genius rating?" So. My mother always said that - I always thought she said that to make me feel better - but she always said that "The experiences you get when you are not at school are often just as useful," and I think in my case it turned out... I don't think I would have been a social worker for 22 years if I hadn't had all, all that, you know? I remember being asked by the gardener at Bourne End would I visit his wife on various Sundays for tea? Because his wife was so depressed about one of their - their son being missing in North Africa. And I think, looking back, that was my first casework relationship, and I would be about 12, you know? So there *are* things you learn by other routes, that's my, my feeling now. So when people agonise over GCSEs, I often feel like saying, "Oh, for goodness' sake, it doesn't matter," you know? [Laughs]. But there we are, everybody has extraordinary experiences. By 87, you can really clock them up. [Laughs].

I: Can I ask you about MI5, what role did you go into?

R: I went into the Registry, which I think we were 200 girls, all girls. The main head of Registry was a man but all of the section 'heads' sort of thing were all women. It was very well organised in a way, because obviously it has to be run on trust, otherwise it simply wouldn't work. So even in those days everybody was Christian names, which was very unusual in the ... I mean, I went there in 1949 so we're talking about the '50s, everybody was Christian names. As I say, I was upgraded to a sort of supervisory role at 20, and when I left to get married, and there was some doubt in my mind as to whether I should get married and leave this country and this sort of thing. But the Head of Registry held up the current decisions about upgrading to the next level, he said, because, "If there is a chance of having you, Primrose, I'll wait." And he did, he waited four months to make sure that if I was to go to South Africa, then he would obviously have to appoint someone else.

So really, looking back, my responsibility was huge, and in fact, purely because two grades above me, both were ill at the same time, I found myself for the last six months I was there in sole charge of the Central Index, with a staff of 75 and making decisions as to how much work could be done. I remember giving an answer to the Cabinet Office; being rung by them and being asked, "Could so much vetting be done? Could we, could we cope with it?" It never occurred to me that I could ask anybody's advice before I gave the answer. I was 24! Going on 44, I suspect. So when people talk about young people, they don't realise there is a boldness and a

clarity unfettered by other things really. You're unfettered by family and you haven't had children and things by then, and you know you can sort of see things in a very clear way. It never occurred to me to think 'Oh, I can't possibly do this!' you know? [Laughs].

I: So it must have been a bit of a culture shock when you left all that responsibility, moved to another country and then you started a family?

R: Yes. Yes.

I: So obviously you had the marriage bar as well, so...

dR: Yes. I worked for two years because my first husband has, although he was South African, he'd done National Service because he thought he wanted to be a regular in the army, and he thought to do National Service was probably the best way to try it before signing on as a regular. And he decided after that he didn't want to be a regular, didn't want the change of, of home life and that sort of thing. So when we married, he'd only been working for ICI for about six months, so we were extremely hard up. So obviously I walked into an employment agency in Johannesburg and the man said, "Sit down and work for me," which I did. Then a job came up in a Colonial Development Corporation in Johannesburg. And he said, "I'm reluctant to ask to let you go. But this would be the perfect job for you." And it was. Lord Reith came out, and we were all agog because he was coming. As you know, he started the BBC, and we were told that his tremendous interest was waterfalls and that he'd seen most of them but hadn't seen the Victoria Falls, and how were we going to arrange this, and everything?

I had a cousin by marriage who was working Anglo-American and I was talking about this in the car going into Johannesburg and he said, "Oh, Anglo-American have got a plane. They'll lend it to you." A six-seater, you know? So I went into my boss and said, you know, "Anglo-American will lend us a plane," and he picked up the phone and the whole thing was done in an hour. And he said, "We've got a spare seat, Primrose. As it was you who fixed it, then you come with us," you know. And he was an incredible man to meet, about 6 foot 8, you know, and just so interesting about Victoria Falls, how there'd been five previous sites. And we flew over it, which was the most perfect way to see it. Then we had lunch at the Victoria Falls Hotel and flew back. This was all at 25. [Laughs] And he was interested in me because I'd married into a family which was third-generation South African and very tied up with De Beers. My husband's father ... Great-grandfather had been one of the founders, had been Rhodes' associate, all skulduggeries together. [Laughs]. Yes. So he was interested in me, as I was interested in him, and I flew back with him because the person who was supposed to sit next him was the Anglo-American wife was feeling airsick, so she asked would I do it. I said, "Yes, of course."

So that was quite an experience, yeah. But I did find it very difficult, yes, having had all that responsibility, and I think it was more difficult, actually, when I gave up work and had our first child. I mean I think, to be perfectly honest, I found it very, very difficult stuck on a South African farm, which everybody kept saying, "Oh, what a

perfect place to bring up a child." I said, "No, children want other children. They don't want acres and acres of barren land." So I found it very difficult, and I think that's why when we came back, very soon, pretty soon. As I say, I studied and knew I wanted a career and enjoyed being a Probation Officer enormously. I wouldn't like it now, it's changed so much, but in *our* day: "advise, assist and befriend" and all that sort of thing, doing court reports that sort of ... And having been a probation officer here, and of course, the scallywags are now grey at the temples with mortgages and children at university themselves. One sidled up to me the other day and said, "My son's gone to Oxford." Well, you know, it doesn't get any better than that, does it? [Laughs]. So.

I: Can you elaborate on your time as approbation officer and working for numerous childcare organisations?

R: I started with Probation as a volunteer, which was when I was studying, and they test you by giving you a murderer to start with. He was a local murderer; he'd even murdered the girl in the garage adjoining my daughter's grammar school. So it was a local family. I discovered then, which so often happens, I was thinking of this girl in New Zealand this week, people think that murderers go out and slaughter. They don't. Very, or vary rarely is it that. In this man's case, it was a chapter of every agency failing him and his family. Then his mother failing him, and he then goes out to drink with a friend of his at lunchtime. They run into two women who have come over from Harlow to find a new group of men. They get drunk and they go off to a garage, and he's not able to perform because of drink. She laughs at him, and he uses a piece of wood and she bleeds to death. But he didn't set out to kill her.

I don't think this New Zealand man set out to kill her. I think it was very probably a sex game which went wrong, which very often is the case. But the press, I mean in John's case, his solicitor, his barrister, his Judge, everybody were men, and they branded him a monster. He was a 23-year-old young man with three little girls, the mother-in-law was dying of stomach cancer; the hospital had discharged her to their house, which was a small little council house. So he was having to sleep on the sofa, so there was no sex because his mother-in-law was in their bedroom with the daughter, his wife, looking after her. Three little girls, hadn't got a job, goes round to visit his mother, she says, "Don't come anywhere near me, it is the anniversary of my mother's death and I can't take it, blah-blah-blah." Everywhere he went, nobody gave him the support he needed at that particular moment. I say, age 23, that's all he was. He did 17 years in prison and then was released. He was a painter and decorator in the West Country and as far as I know he's absolutely fine.

Our justice system needs a lot of looking at, and I think in a lot of cases that's what happens, it's an accident that goes wrong. A lot of these little girls it's because ... We had a recent case this week of one being re-done from Brighton. He touch ... They will touch one girl, probably no more than touching, but the other one will say, "I'm going to tell my dad! I'm going to tell my dad!" So they have to shut them both up in fear and panic. If only little girls should be taught ... Well they couldn't be obviously, but you know ... They don't ... Very rarely do people actually set out to kill, nearly always it's an accident, but our legal system chucks the book at them. Should you get 17 years for an accident? I mean, a lot of criminologists say that very often, the

victim has put themselves in that position. And that girl from Harlow, you know? She wasn't coming over to look at Hatfield Woods. If you come to a different town and you're looking to work as a prostitute, which is what they were, surely you realise the risk you're taking, you know? Murder isn't as clear-cut as people think and that's, I think, what you find with Probation; very rarely are things as clear-cut as the media would have it. For one reason, is most people who get put on probation are the ones who are *failures* at being criminals. I mean the ones who are successful never get anywhere near a probation officer because they get away with it. So we see the ones who aren't ... The ones we dealt with are the ones who didn't even achieve that. And I ... One young man, he told me that he has his own business here, and I ran into him and he said, "I told my wife at breakfast that if it hadn't been for you, we wouldn't have our own house and our own company, and everything."

So, the 'powers that be' changed how Probation works, but in the days when I was a Probation Officer, it did work with a lot of people. Not, not professional criminals, but then that was - they were never meant to have any effect on them, except for preparing court reports, that was a very vital bit, and that was enormously satisfying. I did a court report on a man in Hertfordshire; that was before I came here. He was a bank manager, who was expecting to go to prison. And I, I did a report, which his barrister said was superlative and he was given a suspended sentence. So that sort of thing, doing the social enquiry reports, I found enormously satisfying.

I always did a home visit; never did one without a home visit as well. I'd see them in the office first and then see them at home. How do you, how do you really get the measure of somebody without seeing them at home? As I say, that was a good third of the job satisfaction, was court reports. And, of course, we had lovely relationships with the solicitors because they would arrive at the Magistrate's Court not having seen their clients. "Primrose, can I see your report?" [Laughs]. Well fair enough, if it helps the client, why not? It was allowed. It was a very satisfying job. Hideous working hours, there were no laid-down working hours. They couldn't, because we used to see people all day or would be in court all day, then we did home visits at night, so it was nothing to get back at 8 o'clock or 9 o'clock at night. I'd be surrounded then by teachers who were all complaining that they stopped at 3. Oh no it was a ... And you got very little money. I think when I got Clacton, and that was with a Diploma in Sociology, this Certificate of Qualification in Social Work [CQSW]. I started in Clacton and I think my take home pay was £157 a month - and you had to drive your own car. [Laughs]. I mean? So, nobody went into it for the money.

But it was as I say, then, a very satisfying job and friendships were built up which have lasted long after we all retired. Interestingly, when I got to Clacton, nearly everybody was a Methodist. That was an eye-opener, I knew nothing about Methodists and they were the kindest, nicest, most straight forward bunch of people I'd ever known. That was quite an eye-opener, that. But I was very conscious, I suppose, that the children suffer more than the wives. The wives nearly always admitted to liking the excitement, and if the men were in and out of prison, the endless honeymoons. So when I came back and went into social services in Clacton, very soon I was, although I was doing two days here as a Social Worker in Harwich

and Dovercourt, they put me onto the child abuse enquiries, there's children who suffer in all these cases, which led me, of course, onto Barnardo's and then NSPCC.

And the effect of this disruption and things on children is horrific, absolutely horrific. The lies that children are told; "Your father is working away," and all that sort of thing. People just can't bring themselves to tell the children the truth, and then when the children find out later of course, it's more damaging. So I ... And, of course, my last job, because when I met Andrew and married him, I couldn't remain at the NSPCC because he was patron. He said, "You've got to work somewhere where I'm not patron." So I went back into Probation as Divorce Court Welfare, doing mostly custody reports and things like that. There again, it's the children who get damaged... Well, damaged, yes, then but as I say, I wouldn't have been a social worker if I hadn't had all those experiences. But when I was training in Enfield, we had a laugh. We were all sitting around lunchtime, all the trainee Probation Officers, and somehow the conversation suddenly got into our backgrounds and why we'd gone into it.

One person had seen her parent killed by the other one, and one person ... It went around the table and everybody had had the most traumatic ... I mean you'd think the sort of experiences which would have sent them off their rockers. There wasn't one sitting at the table who'd had a sort of 'normal' upbringing. So there's always a positive. Always something to be learnt from any experience, it doesn't matter how awful it is, if only that you've survived it. I remember a very nice woman who was an Assistant Chief in the Probation Office. She said, "The great thing to remember Primrose is that it's never as bad the second time. Anything you come across in Probation," she said, "The second time it's not so bad." It was a very, I suppose "worthwhile" is an awful word but it was worthwhile, Probation. I learnt a lot and I'm conscious of the little bits of work that I did quite well.

I: Could you tell me about your relationship with Andrew? Do you mind if I call him Andrew?

R: Do!

I: Obviously, you were working for the NSPCC and he was the patron, how did that come about that he was the patron, and did you know him as you were working there?

R: He was Lord-Lieutenant, and a Lord-Lieutenant in any county is patron of every charity that the Queen is patron of. So he is the sort of local patron, if you like, representing her. I had seen him at ... Well, the first time I saw him was just before I was about to marry for the second time, my cousin. He'd come to open our Maritime Museum and I had said to my daughter, who was 17 and lying on the sofa as they do, "We've been asked to go because they want as many people as possible. It will be interesting because the Dulux dog is going to be there," because ICI had given the paint and there was a lot of publicity about the Dulux dog. I thought that the Lord-Lieutenant was still somebody called John Ruggles-Brise. I didn't know that he'd retired, I wasn't in those circles, I just knew, I think his name was just so memorable,

and that's who I thought we were going to see. Anyway, we put on our bobble hats and anoraks because it was an autumn day and sat on a breakwater. I was looking out for this dog and so was my daughter, and suddenly I saw this extremely good-looking man in naval uniform and said to my daughter, "My God, that's an attractive man," and she said, "Mother!" [Laughs] I thought no more about it, and the next time I saw him would have been seven or eight years later when I was then working for the NSPCC. The team leader had said, "Now, it's our AGM and we're going to have it in a certain hall and all the fundraisers will be there, and our Patron will be there. All of you are to stand at the back so you can be identified at the end. But in the early part of the meeting, before the meeting starts, you are to mingle and talk nicely to all the fundraisers." Which of course we did, so it was very much a working evening. I remember chatting away to somebody and looking up, and Andrew was looking at me and smiling. I thought "Hmm, you're either a very lonely man or you're a womaniser" and just discounted, you see? Thought no more about it. I was right course, he was lonely; he'd been a widower for six years by then. So as I said, I had this great friend in South Africa who asked me to do something about him, I said, "Oh, I know who you mean." He said, "Oh, you know him?" I said, "Oh, I don't know him, I've just seen him." So I knew what he looked like but I'd never spoken to him or anything like that. He was our Patron, he was on the stage with our chairman and all that sort of thing.

But I used to tease him afterwards, I said, "I looked up and you were, you were definitely watching me." He said, "Well, yes, I would do, actually." [Laughs]. Extraordinary. It was the most extraordinary experience, really. And I was ... I think one of the nicest things was how quickly I was accepted by everybody. Nothing to do with me, really, but they'd seen him be a very efficient Lord-Lieutenant and very polite and that sort of thing. But as a lady who was running the Red Cross told me, she said (the word went round) "We thought, what on Earth has happened to Andrew Lewis?" She said, "Suddenly, his whole demeanour changed, and then we saw you together and we realised what had happened." So, especially men, everybody, I think, because they thought I'd made him happy, they naturally accepted me. They didn't care that I was an NSPCC Child Protection Officer or I'd been living here and, you know... Nobody cared a hoot about anything like that, all they knew was that he was happy, and, and we were known as "that stunning-looking couple" too [laughs], which was rather nice. I heard that afterwards, yes. So that made that much easier, otherwise it could have been very difficult.

I: Did Andrew have children from his previous marriage?

R: Yes. He had a son who was then 45 and in the church, and one who was 35 who was a shipping broker, just become a shipping broker. And they are now ... Well Christopher was here the other day, he is now 75; he is now the same age as his father was when he died, which I think is quite something, really. The younger one, I don't have much to do with. His behaviour after Andrew died was not ... Well, I was glad his father never saw it, put it that way. But Christopher and Rhona, he is retired; he retired as Dean of Christchurch, Oxford, which he was for seven or eight years. He was as clever as his father. He did five years in the Navy and then said, "I don't want this anymore," and went to university and got a First. I forget now where he did

his Master's, but certainly he went to Harvard and he did his PhD probably at Harvard. But anyway, as I say, his last job was perfect for him. He was tall, very good-looking and very much an intellectual Christian, not a pastoral Christian at all. And with the University students, I said to him, "This is just *the* job for you." He said, "Yes, Primrose, but it's going to be huge." I said, "It's *the* job for you, Christopher." I think it was. Anyway, as I say, he is now 75, so there we are.

I: Can I ask how your family reacted as well to your new relationship, so your children or your... and your cousin as well, who you obviously pipped?

R: Oh, he'd died by then.

I: Oh, I mean, was it your cousin that Andrew wasn't interested in?

R: Oh, I see. She was marvellous, she was absolutely marvellous. I got married from her house. She saw the funny side of it. Because she'd arrived for the weekend with a silk dress and Ferragamo shoes and things, and I'd gone out to the farm in a Marks & Spencer shirtwaist and espadrilles. I mean, that was what was so nice about her, our relationship never faltered. She used to come and stay with us regularly, and after he died and everything, we went out to South Africa together and all that sort of thing. No, no, it never ... And I think that was the measure of just how nice she was; she saw the funny side of it and she was delighted *for* me. She said she was so thrilled to be there when it happened. She said, "I watched you both. I saw it unfolding." My children ... My daughter was working in Bermuda but rang me up because I think her brother had rung her up and had said something's up. I can't remember if it was her or him. One of them knew by my voice, I think it was my son, actually. I think he said, "Mum, your voice is different, what's happened?" I could hardly tell him, could I? [Laughs] They were absolutely delighted, they were delighted that it was all so straightforward. I'd been alone for eight years, seven or eight years, vowing that I would never marry again. And there was ... Essex farmhouse north of Finchingfield with 20 acres, what was there not to like?

Andrew was delighted to have a stepdaughter; he'd only had two sons. She wasn't around much; she just used to fly in from Bermuda every now and then, so that was ... And my son was married with two little boys. They used to come, and they loved coming. My children were delighted and, of course, heartbroken when they realised how ill he was, as everybody was. I mean, if you put it in a book nobody would believe you. As I say, the x-ray on the Friday, the retirement on the Saturday, being told on the following Wednesday that he was terminally ill and there was absolutely nothing that could be done. As I say, if you put it into a novel, people would think "don't be daft, life doesn't happen like that." But it does.

But, I was there to look after him, and he died with me sitting holding his hand, which is what he wanted. He was terrified of ... Well, I don't say he was terrified of dying, it wasn't so much that, but he was terrified of how it would be. He kept asking the doctor, "What will happen?" and the doctor would say: "I can't tell you, I don't know. It can be different." He was only bed ... Actually only *totally* bedridden for the last week. I'd turned the dining room into a sick room and there was a French window in the

garden, which was open all the time, and his mother's portrait was on the wall opposite. Looking back, I think I did that all right. Christopher, funnily enough, had come the night before. He'd been lecturing in Oxford, he was still then, still at Canterbury as a Canon. He and his wife were supposed to go straight back to Canterbury but she had a cold and hadn't gone, so he was on his own. He said, "Can I come for the night on the way back?" I said, "Yes, of course." So he was there that night and was there the next morning, and funnily enough, Andrew had said: "The only people I want are you and Christopher. I don't want anybody else around." And Christopher went off to ... To go to the loo actually, and I was still sitting holding his hand. He just gave two sort of sighs, which apparently is the air coming out of the lungs, and just slipped away. He'd been in agony the night before so the doctor had said to give him as much Oromorph as he will take, which I did. And when he woke up the next morning, I said, "I'm not moving you until you've had this," and gave him two or three spoonfuls. He just smiled and squeezed my hand; he wasn't able to speak by then. It's the wives who dish out the morphine, I'd rung the doctor and he says, "Oh I can't come." So much for their Hippocratic oath. I was handed a shopping bag of painkillers, which of course he insisted I gave back. [Laughs] "I'm not taking those." When the end comes though, as I say, it's the wives who do it. But, "Give him as much morphine as he will take," he said. What's the difference between that and assisted suicide? I mean I don't have any regrets. I didn't want him suffering like he did the night before. He was screaming, saying, "Get a gun, go and fetch one of the guns." So I wasn't having that again. But, as I say, the doctor was squeaky-clean.

I: Can you tell me about the support from the family after Andrew died?

R: His family? [Pause]. It was a surprise. [Pause]. They ... Well, to sum it up, one daughter-in-law said to my son at the memorial service, which of course was at the cathedral about two months later. She said, "I can't understand why they're behaving as they are towards Primrose." She said, "I just don't understand it." And I've had 25 years to think about it, I have made it up now with Christopher, and all I can think of is that because he married so quickly ... I mean, to be fair, Andrew was a little bit 'bull in the china shop' really. I mean, he rang up his elder son and daughter-in-law, who were then Canon Librarian at Canterbury Cathedral and said, "Can I come to lunch on Sunday? I will be bringing somebody called Primrose with me, and I'm going to marry her." Now, they'd never met me, so they'd had no time to even get to know or feel that they'd been ... not asked, but do you know what I mean? I was just plonked into their lives. I was a stranger, and I think because of that ... People want to be polite. They want to be [pause] ... Yes. They want to be polite in the situation, but once the person dies, any resentments come to the fore because it's safe to show them, where it wouldn't have been safe before.

I know a lot about their mother's marriage to their father and I think what haunted the boys – I call them "the boys" because Andrew called them "the boys". I mean, they were men, obviously ... Was either that I was happier than their mother, who was a recluse. Her sister described her as somebody who spent her life trying to avoid seeing people, and she said, "You're so different, you're so much better for him, especially in doing the job." She wouldn't go anywhere with him as the Lord-Lieutenant's wife or anything like that. I don't know any reasons for that, but as I say,

my feeling is that either I was happier than their mother was, or that he was happier with me than he'd been with their mother ... That's only my guess, but I would think that for grown men that would be very difficult because they adored their mother, because he was always away at sea? So I think it was difficult for them, but it was incredibly hurtful at the time.

One of them said, "Where's all the silver?" [Laughs]. I said, "It's wrapped in plastic bags in the silver cupboards so I don't ever clean it." The other one was going through his wallet taking out the money, and I said, "Um, you know, there are five of your family staying here. I need that for food." They were both incredibly resentful that I was going to get a pension from Andrew's company that he was chairman of, a retired chairman. I was bewildered because I'd been so focused; for 15 months we knew he was dying, and that had been my focus. That he should be ... And have as happy and easy time as he possibly could, and I don't think I got much of that wrong actually. I don't have any regrets about that. But then this sudden being slapped in the face, being treated like [pause] a cheat and you know... Extraordinary. As I say, one of the wives, she couldn't understand it either, and she wrote me the most gorgeous letter, which I've kept, saying, "You have to believe that my children had so much an easier time and a much nicer time with their grandfather because he was married to you." I think a lot of people go through that. I've heard similar stories of people being asked to leave the house the next day and things like that. Well, Lady Diana's stepmother was chucked out the next day. Raine McCorquodale; she left Althorp the next day. Nobody leaves the next day unless you're asked to leave.

It was the other way around with me. We wrote Andrew's Will together, which was that the boys, as we all them, the sons, got everything: the farm, the contents, absolutely everything. I had this [Primrose's house in Harwich which was used as a holiday home during the marriage]. But I said ... Andrew had asked me to put this [the holiday home] on the market because he didn't want me to retire here. He wanted me to retire to Thaxted, somewhere more central in the county. He'd said that Thaxted was full of music festivals and all sorts of things and, of course, Stanstead [Airport] was only tiny at that stage. It didn't have aeroplanes zooming over like it does now. So the house had been put on the market when, or we knew it was going to be, when his new Will was drawn up. I think he'd said three months, and I said, "Well, hang on, it might take me more than three months to find another house. Can we make it a year?" He said, "Yes, of course." So as it was, as the house hadn't been sold because there was a drop in the market in the 1990s, the property market just went 'woomph', just like that. So having told him I was worth X, Y, Z, it turned out I wasn't at all. Anyway. He said, "Well, don't sell it then. We don't need to sell it, just keep it." My children used to come and have holidays here and things. Then by the time we knew he had cancer, I thought 'well I certainly won't sell it now, I'll keep it' because I had friends here and that sort of thing. And um, I've lost track now, where was I?

I: It was just support from family and your – ?

R: Oh yes, so because the Will said that I could stay at the farm for a year, his two sons assumed that I would continue paying the bills. So when I said ... I had change of

address cards printed as I would be leaving in three months, and this is typical, but one of them said, "Well, that's not convenient for us," meaning that they would have to start paying the bills. So I said, "Well, I'm very sorry, but I do have my own house to go to, and I will be leaving after I've had a holiday in South Africa." And they were absolutely furious; "But it doesn't suit us." I said, "Well, tough!" [Laughs]. I mean ... I don't know?

I: So who did you get support from, who were the people that – ?

R: Oh, his friends. Particularly there was a couple in Finchingfield. She - they had been lifelong friends, Mark and Zara Farrer. Mark's father had died while he was still at school so Andrew was almost a father figure to him. They'd been also very friendly with his first wife and we lived a mile apart that was all. And Zara kept two horses and she kept them with us; she didn't have any land for horses. She grazed her horses and used our stables, so she came up every day to look after the horses so I got to know her. In those four years I was there, I got to know her extremely well. Every Sunday if we both ... We were all around, all four, we alternated who would have supper; we either had supper with them or they had supper with us. This went on for four years, so I got to know them extremely well, and they were hugely supportive, absolutely right 'til ... Zara died earlier this year and a great many of Andrew's friends were very, very supportive and made absolutely certain that I knew what they felt about how I'd looked after him, and about our marriage and everything. I got the most amazing letters after he died. And um ... But Mark and Zara, every time I needed to go anywhere near their house for any form of occasion, I always stayed with them. The only time I've ever known them criticise me was when they thought I hadn't been enough. I hadn't been for six months or something, and she said, "I'll take you to the spare room, if you can remember where it is." [Laughs]. But they were lovely, and as they were Andrew's closest friends, to be that supportive of me was...

As I say, this was all 25 years ago now, and as it turned out, I was sitting with Mark in a hospice at Harlow when he was dying. It was the morning before he died and I just happened to be going because I had come back from South Africa and heard was in a hospice so I rang his brother and said "Does he want visitors?" Because some men don't like it, but he said, "I'll ask him." And he rang me back and said, "Mark would love to see you." So I went on the Monday morning and sat with him. The nurse came and said, "We've had a very bad night, and I have suggested that Zara come at once." So I knew what that meant. So I stayed with him, obviously and ... Until Zara came. And I heard afterwards, from a mutual friend that Zara had said, "She's the only woman he would have wanted to see." So that's how deep the friendship was. And I said, in my Christmas card to their daughter, I just said "My eternal thanks to you for being the sort of daughter you were to your parents. They were fortunate, so fortunate to have you." She's a lovely girl, and I feel that [pause] they were a remarkable couple, and remarkable in their depth of friendship and loyalty. [Pause].

I: Are you okay?

R: I shall miss them both terribly. At 87, life is all losses, or it's the losses that go deep. It isn't all losses. No of course not. But the losses go ... They accumulate, and friendship of course is, because I knew them for 29 years, or I knew Zara for 29 years. And I discovered, to my amazement, that she moved to be near their daughter. She had Parkinson's and a malignant melanoma, and I discovered I was one of the two people she wanted to see. We were the only two that she wanted to see.

I: **Can I ask you about the Navy? Did they offer any support?**

R: I got a very sweet ... I got a very nice letter from the Navy Board. No, it's called ... Hang on, let's get it right, it's called "the Navy Club" I think, and what it's a sort of charitable offshoot from the Navy Board. And what they ... They wrote to me immediately after Andrew died and said, "We do have a sort of, small piggy bank, so if you're short of money..." But I wasn't, I mean, Andrew was chairman of the local water company, and although he didn't pay himself one these silly salaries, I knew I wasn't going to starve. Also because of the Mesothelioma from asbestos in the Navy, I was told almost immediately that I would be classed as a 'war widow'; he was thought of as having died of war wounds. So I wrote back and said, "I appreciate it enormously what you said, but at the moment I'm absolutely fine." No, they did, they wrote to me within days. So from that point of view, yes, there was, there was support. I wouldn't have starved, and I had this house, and I know it's ... Life here is not expensive. It's extraordinary how communities operate at a financial level that people can afford. I mean, my son and daughter-in-law who live in Horsham, which is very much a commuter town, pay twice for their cleaner that I have to pay mine here. People don't understand that. And people don't stock things in shops here which are expensive, because they know that this is an officially declared deprived area, although you wouldn't think so when you go to Morrison's and watch the huge trolleys of food and things. [Laughs]. So, I know it's not an expensive house to run, you know.

But anyway, I appreciated that they did make that gesture, and at once ... I say think I got it within three or four days, got this letter. I think they virtually said, "Please contact us if ever you're ..." You know? I got the feeling that if I was destitute, that they would help. Also, one of the Deputy Lieutenants, a lovely, lovely couple, they had me to stay. He rang me up and said, "What are you doing for Christmas?" Andrew had died in November and I said, "Oh, my family are coming." So he said, "Well, what are you doing for New Year?" I'd said that I didn't know but he said, "Well, you're coming here." I said, "Robin, the last thing you want," they had got several people staying, I said, "the last thing you want is a drippy widow. No, I'm not coming." He said, "Yes, you are." So I did go. There were three other couples, I think, staying, and one of them was that rather glorious blonde who was on *Antiques Roadshow*, do you know the one I mean? Bonnie ... Bonnar something? [Bunny Campione] Anyway, and that was rather nice because at midnight Robin went out for some drinks or something, and he came back with a tiny little Paddington Bear in his hand. He just quietly put it in my hand and he said, "That's for the woman of the decade." But over breakfast, his wife said to me: "Now, Primrose, I know you're not a Lloyd's name, and you probably think you're alright," sort of thing, but she said, "If

ever you're short of money, don't worry," she said. "Robbs..." that was Robin, "Robbs will have a whip round, if anything happens. Don't ever worry." Robin, unfortunately, has since died. But I mean it was immensely kind. She said, "I know he's done it for other people." I mean, there are 60 deputies at any one time, and a lot of them are quite sort of well-off landowners and things like that. She said, "Don't worry, Robbs will have a whip round amongst the boys," as she called it.

Oh no, people were ... I got the feeling they were immensely appreciative that Andrew had been happy in the last four years. In fact, in his speech at the County Hall when he retired, he said, "The first person I must thank is Primrose, who has made the last four years such fun." And there was a roar, you know, of men stamping their feet, because they liked the idea of men having fun. [Laughs]. I won't elaborate on that! [Laughs].

I: So, you mentioned the qualification for the War Widows' Pension.

R: Yes.

I: Can I ask how you felt about his war service, because his death had been hastened by it?

R: I feel I've been cheated. A lot of his colleagues made ... Lived 'til their 90s. I don't feel cheated now because he would have been 100, and he wouldn't have liked that, not at all. But, I see, as I say; admirals are normally fit, otherwise they wouldn't have got there, you know? One of things they're supposed to have are frightfully good bladders, because you can't say when you are on the bridge, "Hang on a minute..." [Laughs] I remember reading that admirals, surgeons and judges all have to have fantastic bladders. And it's quite true. He could go in the morning and then not go until 6 o' clock at night. I used to think that was marvellous. So yes I felt terrible, a terrible pang of resentment at times because he was only 75 when he died, which is - nowadays which is nothing. And without the asbestos ... He was incredibly fit, incredibly active. We did the 20 acres [of land on the farm] together. We had someone in to brush up the gravel on Fridays, who lived in a sort of caravan on the property, but most of it we did ourselves. He would go out all day and do all sorts of investigations and inspections and that sort of thing. Then come home and climb onto the mobile, you know, the grass cutter and off he'd go. He'd have lived to his 90s without it.

Yes, I felt, I felt cheated, and *he* felt cheated. *He* felt so angry. I'd never seen him angry like that over anything else. He was absolutely furious that he'd been cheated out of retirement and the plans we'd made to go to New Zealand where he had relatives he hadn't met. We'd got it all planned out that he was ... We were going to ... He'd been to Hong Kong but he didn't know China at all; I was very keen to go to China and in fact I have been to China since, several times. But no, he was very angry. Livid. One day, he was even livid with me, "You're going to live for 15 years after I've gone!" I said, "Yes, but you did have a 13-year start on me." Then I said, "And yes, alone." And for the first time really, he ... He was so embroiled with his own anger, it was the first time he actually thought that, yes, I was going to be left. Left

alone, at 62, that's all I was. There was a lot of anger in both of us, really. I can't bear even now to see white-haired people holding hands because we were great hand-holders. I was actually holding his hand when he died, thank goodness. It makes me feel quite sort of, awfully ... I mean *badly* envious, you know? And when I hear women grumbling about their husbands, you know, I long to shout at them: "For goodness' sake, you don't know how lucky you are! Even if he does leave his socks on the bathroom floor!" [Laughs].

But, then I say to another friend: "Thank goodness they don't know what might be ahead of them." Some may never know. Oh, no there was a lot of anger. As I say, just either he was working or he was dying; we didn't have a *week*. That I was cross about, I must say. And he'd done everything in his life, because he'd been brought up in a vicarage where there was no electricity, and a very simple life, and he'd done everything so that his retirement would be comfortable and he could have lovely food and live well and all that sort of thing, and he didn't have a minute [pause] to enjoy it. Because he knew, he knew. He was Second Sea Lord when all this business of asbestos was out, you know, publicised. So he knew perfectly well what it was all about. What was extraordinary, was the behaviour of the hospital. This was nineteen-ninety-thr ... 1992, and they were talking about 'plaques' and 'raspberries'. They said you'd got things like 'raspberries.' Nobody mentioned the word "cancer". The first person to ... I think we must have been to the hospital four times because Mesothelioma creates fluid in the pleura, which collapses the lung; that is how you discover it. So the fluid has to be drawn off. And they said to me, "Oh, it won't come back." First of all, they said, "We'll have to do it today," and the Registrar said, "Will you come with us?" sort of thing, and I said, "Yes, of course." So we followed him, and he said, "Forgive me if we get lost, I've only been here four days." I said, "That is quite understandable."

So we eventually found a ward and he went off to ask a nurse something, and he came back and he said there was no bed available, so they led us into a sort of cupboard, a stores cupboard, and Andrew was told to sit on a sort of kitchen chair rather like Christine Keeler, you know, sitting ...¹ And he said, "You'll have to help me because there isn't a nurse." I thought 'I haven't even washed my hands'. I'd driven from Finchfield and parked the car. And he stripped Andrew to the waist and put in some local anaesthetic, produced a knife and a tube, and a sort of plastic jug. One thing I did do, after he'd done the local anaesthetic and I ... He'd produced the knife, I moved so that I could see Andrews's face in profile. As he put the knife in, Andrew's face didn't flicker so I was alright. I thought 'if he flinches, I'm going to say something' and then the hose went in and I thought 'I'm not sure that I'm going to be able to take this'. The liquid was clear, so that was alright. But I do remember saying to Dr Ali, "Shall I look for another jug?" Because the jug had sort of filled up. But he said, "No, no, that's fine." So anyway, the chest specialist said it was fine and it won't come back but of course within 5-6 days it had come back. They said, "Right, well, he needs a shunt."

¹ Christine Keeler was the model embroiled in the Profumo Affair, 1961. Keeler was famously photographed posing nude seated on a reversed chair.

I: So could you tell me about the qualification for the War Widows' Pension and what has happened since?

R: If somebody is thought to have died from Mesothelioma there is an autopsy and they have to find the asbestos fibres. If they do then the Coroner says, "That's Mesothelioma," and that's obviously reported to, what was then the DSS, and you're ... I don't like remember what happened in between; nobody came to interview me so it must be just from the Coroner's report, because then I got a letter or a form, I can't remember now, and told that I would be getting a War Widows' Pension. And of course, it is tax free, which is enormously helpful, and it's index linked so yes it's very nice; made a lot of difference. And you get a ... I was very surprised to get from ... When Boris Johnson was Lord Mayor of London, he suddenly gave us all free Oyster cards. [Laughs] So a couple of times when there have been inspectors on buses, they've asked what it is, so I explain that it's sort of from war disablement. "Oh." So there you are ... It's very handy not have to worry about coins for buses and, of course, it goes out as far as, I think, Potters Bar. So of course in the days when I still used to go to London quite regularly, one would only buy the ticket as far as Shenfield, I think, and from then on of course your Oyster card covered it. So I thought that was a thoughtful perk, and for somebody who either lived in London or went to London regularly, it was enormously helpful.

And you get a retired, a reduced railway ... Senior Rail Card, instead of paying, I think, £30, I think it's something like £24, from memory. So there are one or two ... And it's nice, it's not just the money, it's nice that it's acknowledged that your husband paid a penalty, so there we are. I think I'm right in saying the War Widows, a few of them walk in the Cenotaph service but I think most of it is done on the day before, which I don't think is quite right. I think war should be made ... Some of it is quite apologetic really which ... Anything that's done for them, which I think is quite wrong. I mean some, I remember when I was training for the NSPCC, there was a young widow there whose husband had died in an air crash, training, so she was only in her 20s probably. Maybe she would marry again but maybe not; in which case she may be a widow for ages and ages. Some of them, some of the war widows are really quite young; from the Falklands, and the Gulf War, Afghanistan. Afghanistan; many young widows aren't there? Terrible. Waste of it. Absolutely frightful.

I: Can I ask you about the War Widows' Pension in terms of the post-retirement campaigning you were...?

R: There used to be a lady up North, Helen... I can't remember her other name now. She was quite active and I did everything I could to support her both financially and every other way. In fact, the last time I saw her, she said: "We're presenting a petition outside St. Stephen's Gate," or entrance, "would you join us?" I did, and we were all photographed and all this. They were campaigning and then I'm afraid I blotted my copybook because I had a knuckle-duster in my bag, and suddenly she said: "Oh, we're going into Committee Room 23," or something. And of course, without a thought I followed her and then you go through an airport security thing and all the red lights went 'ding-ding-ding-ding-ding'. I said to the young policewoman, "Oh, just keep it, I'll just pick it up on the way out," and she just looked at me, no sense of

humour at all, and said, "That is an offensive weapon." I said, "Well, yes, exactly. That's why I carry it," you know, if you went on the Tube like I do. Anyway, I was frogmarched off. [Laughs] He was a lovely policeman and he said, "May I ask first how old you are?" I said, "Yes, I'm 72." And he said, "May I ask where you got this from?" So I said, "Yes, my husband was issued it as a midshipman. In those days, you weren't allowed ashore in Hong Kong without one." I said, "In fact, he had two." I said, "So when he was throwing them away, I'd said I'd have one because really, when you're on the Tube it would be quite handy just to produce it." [Laughs]. I used to carry it regularly. My sister had been mugged several times in London. Brave man, to take on her, I must admit.

So anyway, so the policeman was rubbing his eyes, not knowing what to do, so he then went and rang up his boss and I heard him say, "No, no, Governor, it's alright, it's, it's got rust on it." So the only interest really was whether they were being sold on the streets. And he said, "Well, why do you carry it?" I said, "Have you been on the Tube lately? Nobody's getting my handbag." I said there was one evening when I was admittedly reading, studying, which was silly. I was on the Tube at 9 o'clock one Saturday night and there were a group of lads, jumping from seat to seat. You know how they try and distract you and unnerve you? I said, "I happened to get it out and I held it under the underside of the book," I said, "and they melted away." [Laughs]. So I said, "They work." He said, "Yes, but really you shouldn't be. You do realise it's an offensive weapon?" I said, "Yes, only too well." He said, "Well, I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know what I'm supposed to do." He was at his wit's end. He said, "Well, you'll have to leave it here." I said, "I quite understand that."

So about six weeks later, I got a telephone call: "This is the Superintendent - something or other of Police at the Palace of Westminster." I thought 'Oh, Lord ...' He said, "I'm afraid my sergeant made the most frightful mistake with you." I said, "Oh, did he? I thought he was charming." He said, "He thought you were charming, too. That was the whole trouble; he should have arrested you and cautioned you." So I said, "Okay," I said "I'm glad he didn't, really," because, not terribly good. And he said, well anyway, he said "The problem is now what to do with the knuckleduster." He said. Because you can't collect it because we can't let you leave the building with it." He said, "I can't have anybody ..." I said, "Well, I do. I am a member of a naval club." You know? He said, "Well, we can't send it there because it can't go through the post, and nobody could collect it." So I had a brainwave, so I said, "Well, would you like it for your museum?" Because I happened to know through my Probation days that every police station has a museum of things they've collected and - I'll tell you another story about that afterwards. Then he said, "What do you mean? Here, at the Palace of Westminster?" I said, "Yes." He said, "We can keep it here, can we?" And I said "Yes." And he said, "Oh yes, that would be marvellous." So I'm sure it's got a huge label: 'Found. On Admiral's widow. Aged 72'. So that was the end of that. So after that, I don't know what happened to Helen. I suspect she might have died because she had, I think, rheumatoid arthritis or something. But I don't think anybody has taken up the cudgels. And there are so many people who are sympathetic - an awful lot of the Lords, because every time we had a campaign, we were asked to contact people, and I did, and each one said, "Yes, we couldn't be more sympathetic. It's totally wrong. This something that should be put right. But, of course, we can't

afford it at the moment, especially in a time of austerity." I think that's when the campaign went cold. But I have actually just written to the Officers' Pension Society, saying, "Are you still campaigning? Is there anybody?" There are six pensions advisers, so one would hope that somebody... They haven't answered my letter, I might say, because it is totally wrong, really.

I: Can you just clarify what the legislation is and what you are campaigning for?

R: Well, because I married Andrew after he left the Navy I do not get his pension. Now, as an admiral's widow I would get, what to me would be a huge pension, and after all, I say, he paid into it, he paid in extra payments so that his widow would get an increased pension but Rachel predeceased him so that disappeared. So, as he saw it, the government are making – would be making quite a lot of money out of him; out of the last 25 years, an admiral's pension ... I don't know, I could work it out if we looked up the latest payment but I think it would have been something like £23,000 when he died, so with index linking that would be considerably more. And nobody seems to think that. What they say is, "Well, they retire early enough to get another job and should provide for you out of that." In a way, that's probably correct, but on the other hand, it's, it's money that is rightfully for their widows, and as I say, the BBC and the Police and various other people, they all pay the pension to the post-retirement widow. You don't have to have married during their working time.

So it's changing in all sorts of ways but not in the Services. And as I say, there can't be, now, all that many really. So, it's, it's a wrong, really, and it should be put right. But for me, of course, not that they would pay back ... Nothing is ever paid retrospectively, but to me it would have made a tremendous difference. Alright, I didn't help him in the Navy, of course not, but as I say, especially even if they just paid me the extra payments, which he didn't have to pay in, he did it purely for Rachel, his first wife. And he was very angry about that; he thought he'd been sort of tricked, almost because no man expects their wife to predecease him. And he didn't and no, it's ... But he was, I think, just a year... I think it's after '73, if I'm right – you'll probably know more than I do on that. I think if they retire after '73, they get it, but I think he retired in '72. I know he was just a year so they I think I should have popped off anyway, you see? Well, as I say, he would have been 100 so they probably just think there's no necessity, there aren't any of us left. Well, there are.

I: Also it says something about a second marriage or third marriage...?

R: Yes, yes, yes, very much so, yes. You're not a 'real' naval wife, or widow. Yes, and yet, as Andrew put it: Men are hopeless at looking after themselves, they *need* wives. And if you retire at 54, I think, which is what he did ... And Rachel died, I suppose four or five years later. He said, "I wasn't going to live as a single man. I married the first person I fell in love with." He said, "And all men do that. All men are hopeless on their own! Of course they're going to marry again." [Laughs]. He was so against the whole thing, you know? He thought it was definitely a wrong, but he didn't see it coming. I mean he did do away with the rum ration while he was Second Sea Lord. Well, he thought it was ridiculous in this day and age. The rum ration was to get people who had been press-ganged into the Navy to stand rushing up and down

those dreadful ropes and things. But the Navy isn't like that now and he said really the last thing you wanted was men who are slightly 'tight' with all that technology around [Laughs]. He said it wasn't very popular, mind you. It wasn't the most popular thing he did.

I: Can I ask you about how you dealt with your grief after Andrew passed?

R: Well, I suppose I was helped enormously by the fact that Mesothelioma is so terrible. The Macmillan nurse described it as like tar, she said, "If ever you've watched tar being laid in the road and then it goes solid; that," she said, "is what happens to the lung." And because, as I say, if you watch somebody die slowly, by inches; he lost four stone in weight and then was in agony, I think that helps enormously, because you feel your grief is almost selfish. How could you possibly want him...? I mean, for the last month he'd said every night: "I hope I don't wake up in the morning," and I could understand that perfectly, you know. He said, "Not only am I withering away but I'm watching *you* suffering it." You know, so that was a sort of ... So I mean, compared to somebody whose husband dies suddenly, your grief is much easier to cope with. I went through the usual thing of being frightened of the dark, having to sleep with all the lights on in the farmhouse. Well, Andrew couldn't have protected me while he was alive, you know what I mean? But somehow when you're suddenly on your own, and I'm not somebody who has ever been frightened of the dark or frightened of being on their own. But yes, I used to have all the lights on. That was totally out of character.

I lost a huge amount weight. I remember somebody saying at the memorial service as I turned sideways, you know, there was nothing of me. She said, "I've seen you in bulky sweaters. I hadn't realised." The doctor said, "Keep his diazepam because you'll have panic attacks." I only had one. I remember standing in our sort of utility room, seeing his face and then the absolute panic that you're not going to see it ever again. And it's absolute ... You can't move, you can't breathe, you can't do anything. It's never happened again thank goodness. I gather, [with] some widows, that goes on for a long time. I know one, a friend here, whose husband died, and she is still having them. Terrible.

I didn't take to drink or anything like that. I suppose I was lucky in that I was incredibly busy with all the letters, and I answered every one. They were lovely for me in that because we'd only been married four years, they were all from men, and they were all, and they were all telling me things that I didn't know about him, or things that he's said about me. I mean, one, which was from a Gordon Lennox, I think he's Charles Gordon Lennox, I remember going to dinner with them. He said: "Where did you come from?" I said, "From the blindside." [Laughs]. Andrew had apparently said to him, and he put this in the letter, that I was somebody with the strongest character he had ever come across. But people went out of their way to... So that was enormously helpful. I found that, as I say, there was a much bigger picture to my marriage, when nearly half of it had been hospital visits and pain and fear and adjustment. The thing about somebody dying slowly is you are constantly adjusting, and you can't suggest that you put in an extra step so that they can reach the bathroom until they absolutely need it because if you suggest it too early, you

hurt their feelings. You're always sort of doing things almost too late sort of thing, if you know what I mean? As I say, so rather like setting up the sickroom, that was only really for the last week. I remember producing a commode from here, a nice wooden one. "What's that? Take that away," he said. So as I say, it was constant, constant adjusting and always having to be very careful that you weren't rubbing it in.

Because, like so many people, Andrew went into denial that he was ill. I remember him sitting in the kitchen while I cooked dinner, which he loved doing, and saying you know: "I'm fitter than I've ever been before." I was thinking 'God, where do we go with this?' "I'll live till 85," he was saying. It's the only way some people can cope with it. And, of course, for the first few months he ... [because] Of the cancer, he began to lose his middle-aged jowl and that sort of thing, and the slight loss of weight ... So for the first six months, he looked absolutely smashing. Nobody would have thought, well nobody realised he was ill. I made no secret of it; I can't do denial, I'm hopeless at it. My face shows the opposite of what I'm saying, if you know, so I just don't do it. I told the children everything first. One son went into denial, the younger one. He said: "Oh no, Dad will get better," and with that, he slammed the kitchen door. I said to the elder one, "You will have to cope with David, I can't cope with him." I've never able to, and I think it's dangerous to, go into denial. And I think, in a way, Andrew regretted it too, because he said to me towards the end: "Why didn't we go travelling like a lot of people?" I said, "Because you sat there saying 'I'm fitter than I've ever been before'." You know? So he regretted the fact that he hadn't faced it at the beginning and we could have done all sorts of things for the first year. But, you know, everybody's different.

The doctor said to me, "You will be fine, you faced it at the time he was diagnosed." I did, and I went and sought out the one person I thought I could let my feelings go with, and I went to the day hospice at Braintree, which Andrew in fact had opened several years before. And I went and saw the sister and said, "I've come to ask what you can provide when the time comes," and she went through the usual thing of what the day hospital can offer in the way of apparatus and all that sort of thing. Then she said, "I must ask, for my records the name of your husband," because I hadn't said who I was, and I gave his name - and during the time, I'd become very angry and very tearful, had done a lot of crying with her. And I wasn't guilty about that; I thought 'No, this is what you're paid to do, actually, as a sister of a hospice.' I wasn't cringing about it or anything. I was very angry, as you can imagine. And when she asked, "Who is your husband?" and I said his name, then tears welled up in *her* face. She said, "I've just been showing photographs of him to one of the people here, because he opened it." I said, "Yes, I know he opened it." So we ended up crying together. But that's where I went for my support. Yes, I saw her as a professional and as somebody who ... As I say, it was her job. I think, looking back, there is so much anger about it, and maybe the younger son, he couldn't cope with his anger, probably, but I didn't find it terribly helpful. And he was the one who wanted to know about the silver. [Laughs].

I: Can I ask you about how you felt you were treated as a widow? Was there a remarkable change in status or in the way people treated you afterwards?

R: As Andrew's widow I was treated um, um, mostly very well. I remember being asked to lunch at the Essex Show, and the chairman and his wife were both great friends of ours, and he said to me during lunch: "I said right at the beginning that you were to be treated exactly as though Andrew was still alive." So I sat on his right and all that sort of thing. So there was a tremendous lot of that. I was amazed at the sort of things I was invited to, and I was, as I say, treated as not like a widow at. I think, as I say, that reflected the fact that they acknowledged that he was happy. Yeah, I was continually surprised by that. And because of that, because Andrew had said to me, "Don't just go to the parties," you know, "do the work, too," sort of thing. So I was very careful to trudge around the less jolly things, because if people appreciated me coming then that was fine, I was quite prepared to drive to Thurrock and things like that. Yes, so there were two or three people, one was a Catholic bishop and one was a man who was Vice-Lord Lieutenant for the next ... Who both said, "You are absolutely amazing, the way you drive." I used to be quite happy driving at night and everything like that. One did say, "You must have a mobile phone," and the other said to me, "You must take off all your jewellery when you drive home," and that sort of thing.

And one lovely man, and Sen Neave who was Airey Neave's cousin – do you remember Airey Neave who was ...? He was murdered by the IRA, his car was blown up under the House of Commons. Julius Neave. Sen was the wife. Julius Neave, it was his cousin. They were a lovely couple and they gave a cocktail party every summer for almost the whole county, and I always went to it. It was on the other side of Ingatestone so it was quite a long way to go. But he took me to one side and said, "Primrose, I must tell you how much I admire you. After Andrew died, you picked yourself up, you took yourself back to Harwich and you made a new life for yourself and I admire you so much for it." But I think also what men were thinking was that they found it a relief to see that a widow could cope, and they thought 'well, if a widow can, then my wife will cope too'. There was almost a sort of ... That was almost the sort of feeling. They were a lovely couple and when there was memorial service for him in the cathedral the Anglican Bishop, John Wayne, in his address, he spoke of Sen, the widow. Then he said what an intelligent, nice man Julius was and how much he had helped me when Andrew died. I was the only other person mentioned, you know?

I've had some amazing support and in some ways, sort of accolades, almost, I felt. As I say, I think there was a general feeling that widows don't always have to, you know, be depressed and not cope and things; some people can and do, you know. I was helped by the fact that because we'd only been married four years, that I knew what I was going back to. I mean, I was very fortunate compared with other widows; they're going into an unknown world, I wasn't. I was returning here [to her former home in Harwich]. A lot of people just thought I'd been on a long holiday. I remember a Co-op freezer van pulling up on West Street and the driver jumped out and said, "Oh, nice to see you again." I hadn't a clue who it was! Maybe it was one of my clients from years, I don't know. But he just thought I'd been away. [Laughs] Some people to this day, here, don't realise that I actually [left] for four years. [Laughs]. Harwich is very like that, you know. It's a bit, sort of, sleepy.

I: Did you come across any resentment, because now you were – it's a horrible phrase, but "back on the market" so to speak. Did anyone see you as a threat as you became widowed?

R: One of my great friends said some to me, with some rancour in her voice, "Of course you will marry again." I said, "Jane, nobody would want to be somebody's fourth husband." And that was the end of it. No, I don't think so, no. I don't think I gave out signals that I was available, or I probably did when I met him without realising it. No, I think he was so much still part of my life, and the fact that I was still included in the County thing kept him probably more alive in my life, part of my life, than would otherwise have been. No, I don't think anybody saw me as a ... I think there might have been mild irritation, that their husbands felt protective, yes, but then I think those sort of people were secure in their way of life so I don't think it was more than a fleeting ... I think even I might have imagined it. I think people were just generally sorry for me that, having found happiness and a new way of life, because it was a new way of life. I never made any secret that it was a completely different way of life. You know, I hadn't been used to going to Buckingham Palace every year and that sort of thing. And having found that, and having made him happy, and it was so *cruelly* cut short, I don't think anybody felt any feeling of anything other than pity. They felt that I'd really picked out the short straw, and as a result were very kind. Every time I was asked to dinner, I was always asked to stay the night and that sort of thing, you know. People *went out of their way* to be kind. As I say, I was always treated as if he was still alive. I still seated on the right of the host always, and they were incredibly kind. And this would have continued except that they have all died, which was bound to happen really because, as I say, he was 13 years older. No, people are ... People come up trumps sometimes.

I: Can I ask you, do you remember, thinking about birthdays or anniversaries or...?

R: Birthdays are the worst. I don't mourn him on the anniversary of his death because I felt such relief that he was no longer in agony, and he, as I say, he hated ... I remember him saying, "My hands are like claws." And I said, "When the grandchildren come, turn them over." The palms never get, you know, the palms are always fine, it's only the backs. So I said, "Just turn your hands over on the bed." No, it's his birthday which is the worst. Christmas is not so bad because as the son of a vicar, he said Christmas was a working day all his childhood, so he didn't make a ... He wouldn't have anybody in the house except me on Christmas Day. Boxing Day fine, it was open house, and everybody, his son and daughter-in-law and their three children; they all came to stay for a week on Boxing Day. But Christmas Day, it was just me that was all. But his birthday, that's the one I ... Because we always celebrated, it was always a happy day, and that is always very bad, even now. And as I say, I see people holding hands and I'm a wreck. [Laughs] I just long to say to them, "Do you realise how lucky you are?" You can say that to people you know very well but you can't go up to strangers. [Laughs]. No, so birthdays.

I: Do you commemorate Remembrance Day?

R: Yes, very much so. He died on 8th November so the Remembrance Day is very much ... very close, yes. And, and he said, the worst bit of his naval life was the Arctic Convoys, and he said to me that the worst part of waking up in the morning was seeing a gap in convoy and knowing a ship had gone down in the night. And he said, you know, that three minutes is all you can survive in that cold, he said that was the worst, worst bit of the war, He would hardly ... He wouldn't talk much about it. I did get his Arctic medal for him, which his son now has, and quite right. They only did it, what, three years ago? Disgraceful. We had two people here in white berets but unfortunately they disappeared before the medals were issued. And it means a lot to people if they've been through a terrible experience. So yes, Remembrance Day because it's so near, more so because it's so near his death. I have a great friend here, her husband died on the 10th of brain tumours, five brain tumours, so we do something on the day between. We something together, except that nobody else really understands and I'm glad they don't really.

I: How are you taking your life forward since his death? What sort of things have you been involved in?

R: I became, I became a care worker for SSAFA. I did four years with SSAFA. And SSAFA, as you probably know, if something is referred, you have to see them within 24 hours. I approved all that. And then after the end of the four years, I did have a couple of people who hadn't been terribly truthful. So I thought 'now this is where you bow out.'² Four years is, I think, enough. I enjoyed it, but by then my daughter had married and had started having babies. And she worked in the Caribbean, so even good grannies have to go out to Barbados. And she had been asked to start an ... She's an addictions counsellor and she been asked to start a treatment centre in Barbados. She had rung me and said, "I can only take this job if you can come out for the school holidays, because both of us would be working full-time and although there will be a local help, you know, I couldn't really leave the children." So I went out 12 times in 3 and a half years and it was lovely. They are now 23 and 21, and our bond is absolutely unshakeable because I spent so much time with them. So I really didn't have much time then for, for SSAFA so I gave it up.

Then I got very involved... well, I've always been involved here with the Harwich Society. In the late '60s, the council wanted to pull down half of Harwich and build a lorry park. [Laughs] And we have a 1911 cinema; it's the oldest cinema in the country, which has never been anything else. It was derelict for several years and then several local people got together and formed a trust and they restored it, and we've been having these live shows from London, you know, ballet and opera and everything – because it's within walking distance. I mean, it's absolutely fantastic. So I was very active with the Harwich Society. I became a trustee for the church, one of the financial bequests, and at the Harwich Society I was asked to go on this committee to restore a house we'd been left. And somebody had said to me, I've left it now obviously, somebody said to me, "Primrose, you've left such an aura in that house." Because when one of the people wanted canteen tables in the meeting room

² Interviewee also adds that she sat for several years on the Educational Appeal Tribunals for parents who did not get the school of their choice for their child.

I said, "No, no. Let me look for second-hand ones just to save us money." But it ended up that I got an artist to design and make an oval, a sort of onion-shaped table, which is in pieces, in beautiful wood, and I ran a campaign to get it paid for. And I'd raised about ... I needed £2,000 and I'd raised about £800 I think and somebody who, I was never supposed to know who it was, walked into the secretary's office and said, "How much does she need?" and he said, "Oh, about £1,200." He got out his chequebook and wrote it out. So we had our money, and that table is absolutely beautiful.

Another woman and I, she's unfortunately got Dementia now, but we, we furnished it mostly from a second-hand shop in Colchester, and curtains we got made by somebody for nothing. I hadn't thought of it as it being something which people see as something I did, you know, it was just ... Well I just helped. But as I said, the house and the sitting room were always as it should be, as it was. We've added a few things we were given and things. But this friend and I, we were careful that nothing was done to the house which was not of that age and not suitable. So yeah I've been ... Then I was involved with the Residents' Association, which is very flourishing here. We have two events; one is the Christmas street market, and something called 'Secret Gardens'. Because these houses are all terraced, you can't see what the courtyards are like. They're all different. And we started, seven years ago, opening them for one weekend and it's become part of the diary. People come every year from miles around. We usually raise about £3,000 just from the programmes, and it's all to [the proceeds go to] local charities. We as gardeners we're allowed to vote on which charity ... Which three charities are to be supported. We're very careful to not give it to people who have already just had a grant, or that sort of thing and it's now become ... I think we had 27 gardens open last time.

People say it takes two days to get round them, you know. It is in July and usually we have nice weather. We did have one weekend when it was stair rods and people still came in their plastic anoraks. It was amazing. I didn't open mine this time as I didn't think I was quite up to it, to keeping it in tiptop condition. People say, "Oh, we still walked up the back lane and peered through your gate. Why didn't you have it open?" So I shall have to go it again next year. It's, so, it's a village surrounded by water, Harwich, and very much a community. The only time I've ever been criticised is moving away, and then they say, "Oh, we knew you'd come back." As my son said, "You always go to Harwich when things go wrong." [Laughs]. But I have been really quite busy. I've had a lot of cardiac investigations over the last year and really, I don't think there is much they can do. They are waiting for the last results, which I think is going to say, "Sorry, there's nothing you can do; it's your age." And so I've really found that I have got to give up quite a lot otherwise I just can't breathe, so you're not much use if you're gasping. People think, 'Oh is she going to have a stroke any minute?'

I think 87 is fair enough for bowing out. I have been very active really and I enjoy it. I mean, I love this place. I drove down here in 1967 and thought 'this is me'. And as I say, we'd been moved around by ICI with my first husband more than if he'd stayed in the army so I said, "I've got to have somewhere where if I put a piece of furniture," I say, you know ... Because I wanted the children to learn how to sail because I'd

sailed as a teenager. And they did, as my son says, "If you can learn to sail into Harwich Harbour, you can sail anywhere in the world." It's so dangerous. The tide is so strong and the wind is terrible, the ships can't divert for you because the shipping channel is narrow. So you've got to, you've got to learn how to sail properly. He says, "I can sail anywhere in the world." And my daughter was completely put off by it, because as the younger one, she always had to jump over and hold it steady and all this sort of thing. Sailing was not for her; horses are her thing. [Laughs]

I: Can you tell me if you think there are any changes in war widowhood from maybe in the past to now?

R: What sort of thing?

I: I suppose your perception of it?

R: I suppose people now think it doesn't exist. You know, because Afghanistan must be the last, and there weren't all that ... Well, 400 deaths, so there might be 300 widows but then that's receding into the past, isn't it? This is why I put my name forward because I just didn't think there would be that many post-retirement widows. I just think it's, I think we are forgotten. I thought the expression "deafening silence" was brilliant. There is a deafening silence over war widows. I mean I, if I say to somebody that I am a war widow, and the first time I said that to somebody, they just burst out laughing. They said, "Of course you aren't." [Laughs]. You know? Because war to them, you know, is the Second World War. How can somebody be a widow...? Yes, we are forgotten, totally forgotten.

I: Is there anything you would like people to know about war widows that you don't think people *do* know?

R: I think it's a sort of double sacrifice, though it didn't affect me because I wasn't married to him in - while he was in the service. But I think for people who did, I think they feel they've made a double sacrifice. There is quite a sacrifice while they're in the service, because of the partings, the continual moving, not being able to have a proper home, and then to lose them. I think they feel they've lost out double-time, and then to not be treated with respect ... Because it's almost that we are an embarrassment, that politicians actually really know in their hearts that we should be treated better but they can't do anything about it because the Treasury, the feeling I get discussing it with politicians; people would really rather we just went away and weren't quite so vocal. Especially me. [Laughs].

I: Have you been involved in the War Widow's Association campaigning?

R: Yes. Yes, yes, in my small way, yes certainly. And when asked to write to various people, I've done so. And I've have been quite impressed by the support, but as I say, they then get up to the brick wall of the Treasury. I mean, I had a relative of my first husband who was Defence Minister at one stage or something. Yes, I think he was. Of course, I was up and had put pen to paper in a minute. He said, "I quite agree with you, Primrose, but you know, just at this moment..." But to be fair, I think

that was in the middle of the recession when nobody was getting fair treatment at all, quite understandably. I just, you know, I think they just hope we all fall off our perches then they can get on with something else. Because people don't like death anyway, do they? I mean, I talk about it openly. I went to a lunch party a couple of years ago and I was asking people what they felt about Dignitas? And they were absolutely horrified! One woman said, "This is a most extraordinary discussion to have at lunch." I said, "I don't agree. Look at the age of us, how can it be extraordinary to be talking about dying?" We were all in our 80s. [Laughs].

I picked up a booklet last night at the surgery, it says, "Preparing for Death." And I thought 'yes, well, thank goodness.' I mean, five years ago you wouldn't have found a booklet in the surgery, saying all the things... And the phraseology, some people don't know what "palliative" means, or "prognosis" means and all this is explained. Then if you're going to talk about it with your family, then not only pick a moment but prepare them and prepare yourself. Well I've done all that. My children know perfectly well; my body is going to be offered to Cambridge University, and not only do they understand but they agree with it. But there are people who just don't discuss death. For people in their 80s to say that it's extraordinary to talk about death over lunch? I mean, one of them has already died anyway; the one who said it was a most extraordinary thing to be talking about, she's already buried. So people just don't ... They want to deny the fact that we are going to die, which you can understand of Andrew, in his 70s, but in three years' time, I'm going to be 90. [Laughs]. Of course I've thought about it.

I've got a lovely book, *I'm Dead: Now What?* Have you seen these? It's fantastic, you put in everything, everything about yourself, who your grandparents were, where you were born, where everything is, all the details of your electricity board, gas board reference numbers, phone number. Then where is everything, have you hidden any jewellery or anything? That is absolutely vital, the amount of people who said you know, "I've never found Granny's diamond bracelet because Mummy put it behind the radiator, we've never found it," sort of thing. Then what you want done, what you want done with your body, what you want to be given to whom and... Everything in this book. Absolutely marvellous. The first time I showed it to a friend, she said, "Oh, I don't need that, I've got everything in files and everything." Then about a month later, she rang up and said, "Where did you get that book from?" and she has now given one to all her friends.

I: So did you find that your experience of losing Andrew prompted that, to have things in place for your family for when you die?

R: Yes, yes, because when he died, he hadn't even made any specification about his funeral or a church service. All we knew was that he wanted to be buried, which I found absolutely ghastly. I just have a thing about putting people in the earth. I just find it horrific, but he didn't know that, I didn't say anything. He wanted to be buried, and he wanted to be buried next to his wife. He upset his sons terribly and I can understand that, and I think he was ... One of the problems between me and the sons was caused by this. When his first wife died, they bought a double grave, and she went into the bottom, obviously. And the idea was that he would be buried in the same

grave. But just before he died, and he never said anything to me, so no trust was broken or anything, but he said to his son: "I want a separate grave because I want Primrose to be buried with me." Now, he knew perfectly well that I want to be cremated and my ashes to be scattered from a lifeboat as you know ... But he didn't like that. What he said to Christopher was, "I'm hoping that Primrose will change her mind." But he'd never said anything to me so I'm not breaking any promise. But, of course, the boys, the sons, I think they felt that deeply, that he didn't want to be with their mother. And one of the daughters-in-law said, "Typical of Andrew; one wife next-door, one wife with him." [Laughs].

Obviously, it's what he wanted at the end, but it did make terrible trouble. I think they felt their mother had been slighted really, and I've written to the elder son and I said, "I'm not going to be buried in Finchingfield. I'm not going to go into the grave with him. He never discussed it with me. I never said I would. I've always said I would be cremated and I'm going to carry on with that," as I felt, I felt they would be so hurt. So he hadn't made any preparations at all, and I discovered that my stepsons had no sense of humour because when we were talking about the funeral service, I said, "Oh, for goodness sake, let's not have everything so gloomy, you know. After all, you know, he was in terrible pain, let's have something like *We Plough the Fields and Scatter*. And to my absolute horror, they'd taken me at my word. I picked up the Order of Service and there was *We Plough the Fields and Scatter*. I meant something positive but they'd taken me at my word.

I said to the Catholic Bishop afterward who had also been in the ... I said, "I hadn't meant for that." He said, "Oh, I just thought it was because it was Andrew was, you know, sort of liked to think he was a farmer," sort of thing. No, this is why I think everything has to be organised beforehand.

I: Is there anything we haven't covered in the interview that you'd like to bring up now?

R: [Pause]. No. I feel I've almost said too much, really. [Laughs].