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Date: 26 November 2013

Interviewer: Helen Hughes

Respondent: Janet Barnes

Good morning. This is Tuesday 26th November, Helen Hughes interviewing Janet Barnes. Jan, could you spell your name, please?

Yes, of course. Janet: J A N E T. Barnes: B A R N E S.

Thank you. We're in your home in the West End of Glasgow doing this interview for the Stepping Into Diversity project. Jan, could you first of all tell me where and when you were born, please?

I was born on the 16th of March 1944 in Sheffield, but I have lived in the west coast of Scotland all my life.

But not always in Glasgow?

Not... My parents brought me to Glasgow a few weeks after I was born, because my father had a job here, and I lived there until I was four. And then I grew up in Helensburgh and I came back to Glasgow when I trained as a teacher, and have lived in Glasgow ever since.

So, the majority of your life in Glasgow?

Yeah.

Yes. Thank you. In this interview we're particularly interested in hearing your stories of your relationship with Stella Reekie and the International Flat. I wonder if you could tell me when you... whether it was you first met Stella, or you first went to the International... how it was you came to know Stella?

Yes, I remember it as though it was yesterday. The first time I met Stella was in my classroom in 1971, which was in the Language Teaching Centre, which at that time was in Tradeston in a school called Centre Street – no longer there. The Language Teaching Centre had just been established that August, and was a place where we were to teach English to children, mostly from India and Pakistan at that time – a few from China – who had just arrived in Glasgow. We were all slightly winging it. I think I had eight children in an enormous classroom. There were, I think, five teachers in the Centre. At that time we only dealt with primary age children, and our head teacher was a remarkable Pakistani woman called Mrs Hamid. So, because we were new and nobody quite knew what our... the methods by which we should teach, we were all slightly doing our own thing. And we



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had a lot of visitors, because this was very new for Scotland at that time. I had the first class – I think the children were between seven and eight – and I think most of them had actually been here a wee while, but had not picked up a great deal of English. In my class they were all Pakistani and and a few Sikh children.

So, one day, into this huge classroom I had with this wee group of children, Mrs Hamid brought this woman, who – and I didn't even – I don't even think I remember catching her name properly – but she came into the room in this grey suit and suddenly... ignored me and spoke to all the children in this voluble Punjabi. So I thought, 'Oh, right, okay.' And so she spoke to the children, and they were quite astonished too that a white person could speak their language. However, she spoke to me and she said, 'Do come to my flat. I have a place in Belmont Street. Do come this evening.' And she was... sailed out and went to visit other classrooms. I was quite intrigued by her and her warm invitation so, I think, that evening – I lived in the West End anyway – I went up to Belmont Street. And this was a flat – it was 28 Belmont Street. I think it was one-up. And there seemed to be a group of people already, kind of, part of it. Somebody opened the door, and there was tea, and we all sat around – I think Arken [?] was there. But, anyway, a very pleasant evening ensued – talking, and people from different parts of the world. I think most of them were students at that time. So, she... Stella was extremely hospitable and, you know, 'Do come again,' and... yeah. So that was how it started. I started going to the flat, not really for any particular purpose, but the fellowship of meeting other people. And one gradually... I think we... you know, you just lent a hand; you made tea... And there was always somebody else who was new there, so that's how it was. She didn't... as far as I can remember, Stella, she wasn't too connected with what was actually going on officially in Glasgow. Stella tended to do her own thing. So my relationship with Stella always slightly, you know... There was what I was doing in school and what we were trying to set up as a community at the time, and what she was doing. But there was never conflict, but we, you know, we kind of went our separate ways, but we were always together as well.

And did she continue visiting the school?

No, she didn't visit the school. That summer, my friend Maggie, Maggie Chetty [?] as she now is, she also taught there with me. We established in Glasgow the first of the summer schools. Maggie and I, the summer before we both got jobs at the Language Teaching Centre, had spent a month down in Halifax with a family friend of my father's. He was a Professor at York University in language teaching, and he established this idea of involving students and working with Pakistani kids – and this was in Halifax. I think this idea had grown originally from Birmingham, working with CSV, but the idea that, you know, integration came from kids learning English but always having a good role model. So, Maggie and I had spent this month and we were very enthusiastic with what ensued. I ran the art room, because art teaching was always my sort of favourite part of the curriculum. Maggie, I remember, did a puppet workshop.

So, when we came back to Glasgow and taught in the Language Centre, we wanted to connect with the children we were working with, so we persuaded Glasgow City Council, and they generously helped us establish a summer school in Bellahouston Academy. They gave us money, they gave us buses, they gave us dinners, and we had about... I can't remember... 50? 50, maybe 70 children from different parts of Glasgow. And we recruited 70 students and sixth-year school-leavers. Each child was matched up with, you know, a Scottish student and they worked, like, in classes and they did art work and



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cooking and puppets and sport, and we had trips to Ayr and trips to Edinburgh. And also part of the fortnight was the children would invite their student, their helper, to their house and the student would ask the child to their house, so there was... And this was an incredible experience. These summer schools actually ran for almost 20 years, which was quite a thing. Stella, meanwhile, ran another summer school in Willowbank Primary School, which was a slightly more loosely-organised event. But, actually, the man I eventually married, he was involved with Stella's local summer school, which sort of became, from Stella, it became a kind of community event. And there the children would go to Willowbank and, much the same, they would have activities. The children weren't... it wasn't, like, one-to-one, but there were Stella's gang of helpers. Sometimes I felt she was slightly jealous that we had achieved... ours was rather official. But, no, no, it was...

So, she had this summer school. In fact, now I think about it, I do remember going to, I think, her first summer school, when she managed to... It was in what was then Ashley Street Primary School, and I actually ended up teaching in Willowbank and Ashley Street Primary Schools after my stint at the Language Centre. I was actually only there for a year, but I kept in touch with all these children. And, yes, the very first summer school that Stella had, which I think would be in 1972, she had the Countess of Mar and Kellie appear at Ashley Street and was... it was quite a comical evening of this rather grand lady talking and slight mild chaos of all these children [laughs]. Yeah, it was, that was her... my first introduction to Stella's summer school. I felt maybe in my heart I needed something slightly more organised, but Stella's summer schools also kept going for many years. I also knew that Stella ran a playgroup in the Methodist Church and quite a lot of the children I then met up with at Willowbank School, they had been there. And she also... playgroup... yeah, there was a Saturday Club. The Saturday Club. And one of the families I'm still very close to from Willowbank, they all went to the Saturday Club. And that involved more... some of the parents, the Asian parents from Willowbank and, again, her stalwart gang of helpers.

And what I did love about Stella's... about the Flat, was... you know, she had this group of mums, they were, really, the cooking class... And there was always food and, you know, everybody seemed to have... they knew their kind of place in the scheme of things. I can't remember when it was, but Belmont Street got too small. I think it was just a rented flat, which Stella had through the YWCA and the Church of Scotland, and then she got her new, grand premises in Glasgow Street, which was very, very much bigger and gave her more scope for doing things.

Another thing, of course, I do remember and which she was... you know, she dragooned our help for, was the Sharing of Faiths. And the first one, I think, was in the McLellan Galleries, and that was another unique experience of, you know, all these different... all these different groups of people and, again, followed by grand concerts and dancing displays. Yeah, it was something very special, and also the first time it gave the opportunity for ordinary Glaswegians and Glasgow children and secondary children to see, you know, to see and experience people of other faiths and be able to speak to them.

At that time there were quite a lot... I think Stella's work... there was something called the United... I think it was called the United Youth Club, which was run by Bob Chadha. He was, I think, a student at Glasgow University at the time. I'm not sure if that started before Stella's time, but that had... there were these kind of different kind of organisations that ran on their own and then became part of the International Flat, or the International Flat worked alongside them. So, there was what we... [laughs]. I'm trying



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to remember. So, there was the... what went on at the Flat, and then, at that time, like, the Asian community there was the beginning of – was it called the Asian Arts? – run by... managed by Mr Kohli and Dr Bedi, who were two Sikh people who have done... who both had businesses but they did a lot to establish the arts in Glasgow. And that was the beginning of having young people learning the dances of the Punjab, singing, music... and then there was the Sharing of Faiths, and what else? The summer school.

And the summer school then developed another strand of having a secondary layer. We used to take the secondary girls down to a hostel that was run by owned by the Art School at Culzean Castle, and we had two weeks down there where the girls would experience science. We did a lot of nature and craft and these kind of things, and we had a wonderful time, and I think they did too. If you speak to people who went to these things, they still remember this fondly. Miss Reekie came to... she would turn up at all these different events and say, 'Oh, this is marvellous,' or whatever. There was no competition.

And then there was also... in 1972? Maybe at the beginning of 1972, the Glasgow Community Relations Council was set up. I was involved with it at the beginning, and Stella was too – she was a member. And that also was the beginning of making community relations more official. I think sometimes Stella found that more difficult but, you know, it was important that there was a proper coming-together of organisations where they could apply for funding and support, and it was a place where people who had genuine problems with housing and racism you know, there was a proper framework and a network for that to take place. So, Stella kind of, you know, there was this great network across the city... Well, it was not a great... it was the beginning of a network which would then extend right through Strathclyde.

But Stella continued... The Flat kind of widened as it went along. You know, she had a whole programme... Because I was a teacher, I didn't have... wasn't available a lot of the time, but Sunday afternoons was the regular get-together and that's where, for example, I met Isabel Smyth for the first time and, you know, she would have a speaker and, again, lots of fellowship. I made many friends through the Flat. She... there was... I know there was a poetry evening. In some ways, Stella was quite dependent on people who appeared... what were they called? Alex and... I can't remember what she was called, but they did a lot with music and poetry, so there was a poetry group and there was a music group. And this widened the... it wasn't just the Pakistani and Asian ladies, it was students, of course, and there were some older people that she brought in who were lonely and wanted kind of a place to go, who lived locally. Quite a lot of people with sort of mental health issues – although that word was still quite new at the time [laughs] – they would come. Sometimes I felt it made life a little complicated, because sometimes there were people there who, you know, some of us found quite difficult to relate to or to understand. Yes, the door was always wide open and everybody could come in. There were times when I sort of backed off the Flat for a bit because I felt it was getting slightly too much. But I would retreat a bit. I got married and I continued to teach. My husband, who had been widowed... so I had a stepson, so I was quite busy, but you would always get the phone call from Stella saying, you know, 'Can you come and help?' And as often as I could, I did. Yeah, she was quite an extraordinary woman. The times I liked best, I think, was when, you know, you went to the Flat and it was quiet and she was there to just be herself.



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She was... I think it was possibly the first Sharing of Faiths was when she had her first illness, when she had breast cancer but, being Stella, it was all kind of hushed-up and she carried on as almost normal. But she had this amazing band of very close followers – well, not followers – but friends who helped her do the things she couldn't do, like drive her places and just give her a hand. She... you know, and then she was better for a while and then, sadly, you know, the illness came back again, but she never let anything like that get in its way. She was always there and she was always gentle and hopeful and... Yes, I seem to remember, I think her sister died and her having to go and look after her sister and she... yes, you were aware somehow with Stella that she had... Sometimes, in the Flat, you met people that she had known a long time before, from... often missionaries, who had come back either on furlough or came back to retire. And these were people who really, really supported her because they knew her. Sometimes I did find it quite difficult to kind of feel I could really do anything but, you know, the Flat just kept going but, you know, when she wasn't there any more, you realised how much she had kind of relied on people to give her strength and support. So... Yes, I mean, I do remember... When she was really ill at the end our daughter was born and, again, you know, she sent me a beautiful letter and a little present. She came to my wedding in 1978. Yes, she was there in her best dress. She was always amazingly elegant although she dressed plainly. Although she wore her deaconess suit, she always had a beautiful... lovely blouse, lovely scarves, and sometimes a beautiful brooch. Yes, she could combine looking very... she could always dress for the right occasion in a very simple but very clever way – nice colours. Yet she always looked quite plain as well.

What else can I tell you? Her driving was dreadful. Her driving was very hairy. I couldn't drive at that time, so I couldn't criticise, but it was quite interesting, her driving. I seem to remember when she very first came she didn't drive, or she had learnt to drive and had to sort of revise her driving skills, but she could get out in that car and she also had some of her much-loved students who did the driving for her. I gathered from people that quite a lot of the people that came to the Flat, particularly students from India and Pakistan, these were people that Stella had known from her time in the sub-continent and their parents had asked Stella to look out for them. And I was talking recently to a friend who I didn't realise had been to the Flat at all, but when he came from Pakistan he lived down in Otago Street and, yes, it turns out he was always there on a Sunday night. And he said, 'Oh, she was just like my mother. She would... you know, it was like going home for the weekend and we would have a lovely dinner and I felt very kind of loved and secure, and then I could face the week again.' I had no idea this is what happened with this person, but... And he still is in touch with some of these people he kept up with at the Flat. But I think everybody who I still see and who I bump into from time to time will say the same: that she kind of passed on to... she passed us something special. I wasn't a particularly religious person and I don't ever remember that really being of any problem. Everybody was valued for who they were and you felt you had... you felt you were sort of... you felt there was some sort of spiritual dimension to, you know, what you received in the course of spending an afternoon or an evening in that building. And it's all the small things she did for people that nobody really knew until she died, when you realised that there were just so many people that she gave a kind of sense of home to and a sense of hope to. And yes, I think knowing people like Stella was a very special thing and we are blessed to have known her. I think that's... I'll stop there just now.

**But you continued some involvement with overseas students after Stella died?
Is that... am I correct in saying that?**



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Yes, yes. All the time that I was at Willowbank there was a kind of conflict between what Stella had... Stella's version and Mrs Hamid's version. Mrs Hamid's version was, 'Don't get involved.' And Stella's version was, 'Do get involved.' So, somehow, we, you know, had quite a fine line. At that time, in the '70s, round Woodlands and Pollokshields, there were many families that had not long arrived. I got involved through the Community Relations Council in something called the Home Tutoring Scheme, and that... I ended up being the organiser. There'd been a person before me; she had come from England and had introduced it and then, when she left, I took it on in addition to teaching. And this was providing a tutor, usually a woman – there were some men – to go to the houses once a week and speak English for... help these women speak English. It was a wonderful scheme, really, and it still exists in certain different ways. It's moved on. But these women went to the houses and interacted with, usually the woman, but also the children. And, again, it was like a mini-International Flat, you know, they cooked and they laughed, and often the tutor would go to the park with the family or things like that. We also had bus trips. We went to... every year we would go to Ayr or Edinburgh or Largs and, again, it was an opportunity for women and their children to come together. Stella approved of this totally and we had money for that, again, from the Council. That was a... I'd forgotten. That was a really good scheme. What else was I going to say?

Yes, so I moved on from that. Then, later on, it was through Rosemary... After Stella's death, I think what happened was that the kind of interaction with international students that took place in the Flat, Rosemary Eldridge, who took on the running of the Flat after Stella's death, she did a kind of version of that of her own, so she combined the two, and she had a weekly lunch on a Wednesday for students who... to meet for lunch. There was also something at that time called... what was it called? The International Student... Glasgow Churches International Student Council. Because Glasgow University did have an International Student Chaplain and he, and often... or she... that was, I think, probably set up in Stella's time and that provided funding for, I think, the International Student Chaplain. Rosemary Eldridge eventually became the International Student Chaplain – in fact, she was the International Student Chaplain when she, sadly, died – but prior to that she had introduced the lunches into the chaplaincy of the university. So, I started going there on a regular basis when I retired very young in 1996, and I still go. But that, I think, is one of the lasting legacies of Stella. We still meet. It's changed in many guises; it's now run by the International Student Office and, from Rosemary's time onwards, funding was found to run an English class for spouses. So, these lunches are for, basically, families who come to Glasgow University, and it means that the spouse – it can be a husband or a wife – have the opportunity to have a free English class twice a week, and they run trips twice a term and we have the lunch. The lunch is provided by the university now because, in the days of strict Health and Safety, we are no longer allowed to all bring our pots and share our goodies, but... And I think the money now comes from, actually, the Scottish Government who, you know, this is the idea of making... welcoming students and making their stay in Glasgow a good experience which, if you think about it, is exactly what Stella was actually all about. So, yes, I still do that.

And again, you know, George and I have got many friends who, over the years, we actually met originally through this organisation. So yes, I'm still involved [laughs]. I just think, personally, Stella's gift to me was the idea of making people welcome – welcoming people to your house, talking to people in the street and, yes, making... just welcoming people. I'm still very, very friendly with Alka, Alka Sood, whose mother was Mrs Sood. Alka will be 50 in... next year; I will be 70, so we share a kind of... But I have known Alka since she was 12, at Willowbank, but her mother was one of Mrs Sood's stalwarts, away



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way back. Mrs Sood had five daughters and I think she would never have got by if it hadn't been for Stella. And also their father, Mr Sood, who was a bus driver. They were the first Asian family, I think, in the West End, certainly, to go to the Brownies. Mr Sood had this idea that his children should integrate and they used to go up to Wellington Church in the van that came to collect the children from Woodlands on a Wednesday night, if I remember. Sadly, only three of this family survive. Mr Sood died in 1977 very suddenly, and that's actually how I met George my husband, really, because, again, Stella rings up and says, 'Jan, I think you need to go round to the Sood family. Can you help?' So George and I were left with five girls while Mrs Sood ended up in hospital, because she was so shocked by the experience. And then, sadly, in 1994, there was a terrible fire in the Sood family house and, sadly, Mrs Sood and two of the girls were... died. So, now there's the three girls left. But Alka, who is now a mother herself with four daughters, she says, 'You're a bit like my grandmother, my mum, because it's what... I tell you all the things that I normally would have told my mother.' So George and I still feel very honoured to still do this. But her happiest memories are – as a child – of Miss Reekie and the Saturday class, and also, she says, just knowing that her mum could laugh and have good fun up at the Flat. And also I think it introduced for many families – it wasn't just Alka's family – but it gave a lot of these families a chance to meet other people, because there is a kind of thing that, you know, that it was much more difficult for them to integrate, you know, to meet Scottish families, to just... to feel welcome. And in the Flat, of course, everybody was equal and that, for a lot of the women, was absolutely a wonderful thing. So, yeah, that's one aspect of the Flat that still carries on.

Well, thank you very much, Jan, for welcoming me into your home and sharing very personal memories of Stella and your involvement with the Flat. Thank you.

Transcript ends 00:44:02