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**Date:** 10 January 2014

**Interviewer:** Isabel Smyth

**Respondent:** Helen Hughes

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**January 10<sup>th</sup>, Isabel Smyth interviewing Helen Hughes. Helen could you just spell your name please.**

*Yes, it's H E L E N H u g h e s.*

**At 8 Woodlands Drive. Thank you Helen. Helen could you tell me a little bit about yourself really, when you were born, where you were born, growing up.**

*Yes I was born in 1948 in Aberdeen. I went to school and I lived all my life in Aberdeen till I was about twenty five. So I went to school there, I left school when I was sixteen and I went to work in the University of Aberdeen in the Administrative Office as a Secretary typist and carried on doing....I did my O levels up to fourth year and I carried on furthering my secretarial training at night school. And I was very involved in the at the Church of Scotland as I was brought up I went to Sunday School, but later on as a young person, I got very involved in youth fellowship and other activities in my own church and also within the Presbytery of Aberdeen. And I began to think about, about working for the Church. And also I'd changed from working in the University to work in the social work department as a secretary there and that gave me a whole other dimension to what life was like for people. I wasn't living an affluent life but I, I didn't realise till then the different problems individuals and families faced with poverty, disability all sorts of problems in.*

*So I think that and being involved in the church began to kind of come together and I began to think I might like to do some different kind of work and then I, through television actually I sort of watched a documentary about the work of a Deaconess of the Church of Scotland, She's Jean Morrison but at that time she was Jean Gruger and I was really interested and I thought, hmm that's the kind of thing I might like to do and then somebody came to speak at our, the youth fellowship I went to about opportunities for service in the church and through that also I, I saw the information about working as a Deaconess. So I, I applied to 121 George Street in Edinburgh, the headquarters of the Church of Scotland. And didn't just happen right away but eventually I was accepted for, for training and I did, I sort of left school with O levels but during that time I worked to the Social Work, it might have been when I was still at university actually I did a, a higher English exam at, at that was actually through, they allowed me to go to day release to do that. So I done that, so in 1973 I went to train as a Deaconess in the Church of Scotland at St Combs College in Edinburgh.*

**Now what is a Deaconess and how do you become a Deaconess?**



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*A Deaconess's at that time were all trained in a college called St Combs College in Edinburgh the Church of Scotland training college for people going overseas and also for work at home. A Deaconess will be doing very very different things but, most Deaconess's would be working in a parish working with, with people in their local parish area and people in the community. But some Deaconesses did specialised work in maybe in hospital chaplaincy, prison chaplaincy. I was really interested in the working in the community working in a parish. I think especially through the, my insight into social work I thought that would be the kind of thing that I wanted to do would be working in a parish. So you were trained for that at St Combs through the academic side where you studied theology, church history, pastoral studies etc. Christian education, but you also each year attached to a parish, I spent two years at St Combs, I was attached to a different parish, where you got practical experience of doing visiting, working with young people. You would spend about, maybe about two, part of two days a week in lectures were always in the morning. But you would spend time and you would go to that parish on a Sunday and I know that...and one of the parishes in my first year, I was at, I went to a church called Carrick Know out in Edinburgh and I also went back in the Sunday evening to a youth group and that was a really good experience there.*

*I would be given visits to do, each week I would visit different organisations and then as well as another part of the practical work was doing placements, you were sent to each term, one time it was going spend a week at the Chaplin at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. Another time it was spent doing a week with an industrial chaplain, that was in Dundee, another time in Dundee with Dundee Social Services. Spent a week in a school visiting, that was up in Aberdeen so a whole variety of practical experience. But the third part was living in the community and I think that was a very part of the training because St Combs was a residential college and you were, you were sharing in life with people who were doing training to work as you were for home mission also with Deaconesses training, people training to be Deaconesses when the church in Ireland, Presbyterian church in Ireland. People who are training to go overseas and also people who had come from overseas to study in Scotland and Edinburgh were staying as boarders so it was a very international interesting community to be part of. When I was there, there were people from India, Pakistan there were people who came from Germany to learn languages before going out to Ethiopia I think. A whole mixture of people you shared and learnt with, so that was, that was the part the training at St Combs.*

*But that time, we also had to do further specialised training and they really were quite keen for you to do maybe another academic training like a diploma course in Christian education or youth and community and I really felt I didn't want to do more academic study and I'd asked if I could spend a year working as a Social Worker assistant cause I felt that was really good experience when I working just as a secretary to social workers. I felt I'd like to have more insight into that and they....I'm not sure nobody had really done that and they were well if you can find a place to do it, you can, you can. So I was very fortunate in finding an area officer of Lothian Region Social Work Department who were willing to take me on. They had this post that was a Social Work Assistant but they were willing to let me do that just for a year, knowing that it was part of my training to go on to work for the church and that was invaluable experience working as part of an area team. Because you weren't a qualified Social Worker you couldn't do all the aspects of social work, like the children's case work, but you could go along with people who were doing that. They would often, maybe they were going to a children's hearing taking children along. You could go along with them, helping escorting children, getting an insight into that. The cases I dealt with were mainly people maybe with disability or older*



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*people and some very difficult situations. And it was, it was very very interesting just seeing the difference in working in that kind of situation as a church worker and as a social worker. Social worker it was very much laid down what you could and what you couldn't do and there were times you had to be providing a specific service for a person and often you felt like you wanted to continue contact with the person, but no if you weren't providing whether it was getting this old person into care or getting them support to be able to stay at home you had to just close the case and move on to other work. But in the church, I liked the freedom of not closing cases, being able always to be there for people and you couldn't there was....maybe give people things practical things like food or whatever but in the church you could be more, more free to respond to different people's needs. And often people were needing maybe moral support sometimes even in the social work area people wanted me to pray for them but you'd a much greater freedom in the church. But it was invaluable for knowing the services that are available for people, so I really really appreciated an excellent team and a lot of them happened to be very committed Christians and I think there was a lot of understanding of, of...there was actually a woman who had been a Catholic sister and was withdrawing from the Order, felt she'd been called out. The Area Manager was a very very active Catholic, there was somebody who was the Baptist Church so there was a very interesting mix of people.*

*But a very interesting experience I had at the end of my year was there was one man who worked in the office said his wife always went on a week, went away with people for a week's holiday to a place called Craig na Gower in Tinabruick, a house that's owned by the church of Scotland. He thought that would be a good thing for us to do with people in the, in the social work area. And he said that's something you'll probably be doing as a Deaconess would, could you do this. Well I was given the freedom to organise this, this week's holiday and I asked all the Social Workers if they could refer clients and they did and there was, he knew, his wife actually came with us as a helper and she knew a retired Deaconess who used to come as her group. One of the other Social Work Assistants who had no church connection but she was very keen to come as well.*

*So it was a very very very interesting experience doing that in a probably different way from going as a Deaconess cause I was going as a Social Work Assistant doing it. But had some church people there, like this retired Deaconess part of the, part of the group there and oh I mean it was a real baptism of fire. A lady fell the first night and broke her, broke her femur and had to be taken to hospital, there was all sorts of things happen but a wonderful, wonderful experience. And one of the Social Workers had referred a lady who'd had a big drink problem and said now this might be a problem for her but because she was there and enjoyed the company and the care it was not an issue, she didn't touch, want to touch alcohol. So that was a really interesting experience and then when I went on to work in a parish, that was one of the things I was expected to do, was to take people...and I'd had that very good experience so it was a very very valuable experience that year as a Social Work Assistant.*

**Great, so what brought you to Glasgow?**

*Well, by ...I didn't come to Glasgow straight from my training at that time you were really pleased you were brought into this. I've talked about one to one...*

**(Laughs)**



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*But you were brought through to Edinburgh and it, to talk with the person who's responsible for placing us and he says Helen we want you to go to a church called St Paul's church in Johnstone and I didn't, I'd never heard of Johnstone, this place called Johnstone. And what happened then, you went as a probationer Deaconess and then you would stay for your first placement. So I went as a probationer Deaconess to St Paul's church in Johnstone I was commissioned thereafter, by Presbyterian Priestly after my first year. And then I spent four very happy years my first year probation being commissioned and then three more years and then, I probably expected to be there longer but there was a financial situation arose within the church and the church offices were asking the congregation to contribute more and then they weren't in a position and said we'll have to lose Helen. Helen will have to go somewhere else, so I was again brought through to one to one and I was, I was, I was told quite early on. I'd started in September but quite early on in that, my last year I was told I was going to be moved but I didn't know where to and it was all a bit of a mystery. And they said it depended on some decision of the General Assembly but after...which happens in May. That's a big meeting, national meeting of the church and this turned out altered eventually turned out, it was because this church called Landsdowne was taking on an extra bit of parish a church called St George in the Fields congregation was being dissolved and all that was being added on to this Landsdowne parish, Landsdowne church at the Kelvin Bridge and the Minister said well we could take on this extra bit of parish but we'll need extra staff. And he said it would be good if we could get a Deaconess, cause we get an Assistant Minister but they would then move on to their own church. He said I would like us to have a Deaconess and the church agreed and the congregation agreed and the church offices agreed. And they had this in mind for me to go there so this big mystery eventually was solved, but that was where I was going. So I came in 1980 to work in Landsdowne Parish Church.*

**And how did you feel about that because you were sent really?**

*I knew I was really sent and it was quite an awkward situation because I was told that the congregation as a whole weren't to know that it was, that I was actually being moved, it wasn't my choice. And they felt very hurt that I didn't like them anymore, I had chosen to leave them. So I don't think, I was young and I don't think I would of accepted that if I'd been more experienced. That wasn't fair to me or to them, they really felt...and the other thing was, I was told after the General Assembly in May but the Minister decided I wasn't to...people weren't to know till about, till about the time of me leaving in August. So I was going to final youth organisations, school assemblies in the summer knowing it was my last. I was feeling really emotional and, and that was just the Minister's idea that, that I wasn't that people weren't to know until nearer the time. And again that was so wrong because I should...there should have been more time because I wasn't being replaced either because of this financial situation. So I think that was so wrong because it was a very very distressful, distressing time for me. And then I went back into school, schools were told I was leaving. So they were quite shocked*

**Yeah**

*As well, so it wasn't good, so it was a very difficult time.*

**So what was it like coming then to Landsdowne?**

*Well it was interesting because I was told I was coming to Landsdowne but I couldn't get a house. The Minister had been trying to get a house for me, but I was still living in*



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*Johnstone the first. But it was very exciting because I had, I'd come to meet, cause I was being sent there, but there was a choice. I was sent to meet with the Minister before and to decide whether I would be acceptable to the parish and whether I would like to go. And I really, was a Minister called Bill Christman an American man and I really was excited to be working with him and there was all sorts of interesting things. I think you find this in life, when I told friends I was going there one of my friends from St Combs who had gone to a missionary to Malawi said, he had a placement in... spent a bit of a summer in Lansdowne Parish when they were to take on this big extra bit of parish. Some of the divinity students had come to do a mission, a visit along with the church members. So he had given me a book that Bill had written called the Christman File which was about his work in Craigmillar before he came to Lansdowne. He suffered burn out it's a very moving book, so I had that understanding of Bill through that and he was also, my friend Graham was obviously able to tell me about some of the people of Lansdowne as well (laughs) so I had that. I was really excited to be going but I'd just really finished on the Sunday and then came straight through to start work again. It was a strange situation at first because I didn't have a house, it was quite difficult, I had a car and I could drive through. But I always remember the church was to be my base and it's this old Victorian building and I could go there and have my lunch and I came the first day I was going to have my lunch on my own in the church and I couldn't get the big gate open.*

### **Laughs**

*And I thought, god why have you sent me here I can't...I've not a house to live (laughing) I can't even get this gate open to get into the building to go into cause the vestry was to be my base. So that was all..and it was cold in the vestry, I remember that, it was really really...I found I was busier. I remember going out when I started off in Johnstone, the Minister said I'll have you standing on your feet you know by Christmas you'll be lucky. But St Paul's was a very big congregation and a lot of things kind of happen, people did them there's lots of Sunday School teachers. When I came to Lansdowne it was a smaller congregation, lots to be done and not so many people around. So I was and I was setting up the things, I had to set up a Senior Citizens meeting because he'd found from the visitation that all these old people they were living in that far part of the parish. Because that was to be my remit to be at that further end of the parish.*

### **Which is where?**

*It's, sorry its St Georges Road area. The parish was like a triangle and the church at Kelvin Bridge was like the apex of the triangle and the parish came down Woodlands to St Georges Road and round. So St Georges Field was this church on St Georges Road which had been the parish church. It had gone into ruin and there was just really nothing happening for the people there. And some had church connections but they hadn't moved on to, cause they were kind of newer houses there. There was multi, three blocks of multi storey flats and other deck access flats. A lot of them were filled with older people at that time. So I started up this meeting, so it was really busy that first year I remember. You had to take things from the church to the, we met in a school for the senior citizens meeting and I was rushing around doing all sorts of things and I remember being too tired to drive sometimes. Just having to sit in this vestry (laughs) to recover when I could sit. And there was lots to do, there was the soup run and old Bill told me there was a soup run and I didn't catch that it was at George Square, I didn't quite know where I was going and he didn't have a car, I had a car so that was great. He was really glad I would*



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*drive him down to the volunteers and the soup and oh, we were just driving down. Cause I didn't know Glasgow it was all a bit of a mystery to me, and at that time we did the soup run two nights a week, Friday and a Sunday and he mostly did the Friday but I drove on the Sunday night with him and the volunteers. So it was very very very interesting, very exciting.*

**So what other memories do you have then of you work in Lansdowne, how long did you stay?**

*Twenty two years, but one of the special things about it was being closer to a person. That became very, the important think about it, the first years in Lansdowne when I came to work in Johnstone I was part of the diaconate, the diaconate you went to a big diaconate council twice a year. But there were also, there were there was a local association called the Glasgow and West local Association of People and people of Greenock and Paisley came to it. I was so caught up in my work in Johnstone I was too busy to come to this and I remember when a lady phoned me one of the senior Deaconess she's called Stella Reekiand said Helen you've not been coming to the meetings, I would like you to come for lunch, because a lot of the Glasgow meetings took place in the International Flat and she was determined that I would come along. So she phoned me up and asked if I would come to lunch at the International Flat and then there would be the Local Association. So I thought that was such a clever way to get me there, I really appreciated because the Local Association became very important support. And I realised I thought it was so important just to be in the parish all the time, but I realised that it was very important. So she really got me into the Local Association, I got to know the other Deaconesses because part of being a Deaconess is not just your solitary work in the parish it was being part of the diaconate of the Church of Scotland and also the church the diaconate worldwide. So that was very very special. So when I came to Glasgow, I was much nearer, so that was a very important part of my early years in, in Lansdowne. We were part of a church workers meeting that I went to along with Bill and Stella Reekie was part of that.*

*So I got to know her through these meetings. But I was also able to go to things, before I just had gone to Deaconess meetings, but she very quickly invited me to come along to things at the International Flat and that was a very important part because I realised I'd...being part of an international community at St Combs but in Johnstone I didn't really have this international community. That I realised when I came to work in Lansdowne parish it was a very interesting community with a strong Muslim community. Particularly in the Woodlands area and that was very interesting in Lansdowne for example there was a boys brigade and they had a meeting of the boys brigade in Ashleigh Street school and a lot of Muslim boys came along and they, they made special welcome to them and respected their Muslim faith and didn't expect to do all the going to church on a Sunday sort of stuff. So I was very interested to visit the International Flat and I think that helped in that understanding of work in an area which was very, particularly I would say the Pakistani community at that time in the area also, the Muslim community, so I really valued going to the flat and getting to meet people of other of other faiths.*

**Could you tell me what the flat is, I mean what is the International Flat? or what was the International Flat?**



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*It first knew it as Stella's home because she invited us to her home for these meetings, but and it was probably more when I came to live in the area and spent more time there I realised it was important, I knew it was International Flat and I knew that Stella my understanding was that she had worked in Pakistan and she came back to Glasgow, she wanted to have her home a place of welcome to people and she really just did that in her own home. She's been appointed to do work with the Asian community, but she wanted to do things in her own house and it wasn't big enough so she eventually the church enabled her, the Church of Scotland and the YWCA supported her in financially to have this flat called the International Flat but it really was very much. It was her home, she lived there but there were lots of things happening there like sharing of faiths once a month. And I did go to that sometimes, I enjoyed the discussions but I also, I enjoyed going, I think it was a Friday night, there were different cultural evenings and I would maybe be have quite have free time and have Friday evening and one time it would be music, another time it would be poetry reading and I enjoyed poetry and lovely music. Because it was very high standard, she had people...one of our neighbouring churches were worked very ecumenical in Landsdowne was St Mary's Episcopal Church and there was some very talented musicians there. Some who are now, were maybe music students then and went on to be professional musicians and they would come.*

*So there would be lovely music playing and you'd meet very interesting people, people from all over the world and people from Scotland as well. I enjoyed these meetings, but sometimes she'd maybe ask me to come along to meetings where there were some, maybe some of the older people there who were coming to just meet socially. So I'd maybe go there, see it was just a very very interesting place to have nearby and Stella I found as a young Deaconess I found her really, a real inspiration and very very caring. I thought she was, she could be quite challenging in what she asked you to do and expected you to maybe just drop things and come along and be part of...but she was a very interesting and special people to have and I was very fortunate having her there. Also, another Deaconess called Jessie Adamson who is a very special friend of Stella's and she was, Jessie lived in the parish on Barrington Drive and was actually a member of Landsdowne. I always remember people, they knew I was coming to Landsdowne 'do you realise, Jessie Adamson is that, how will that be'. Again, it was another great character, a very strong person. She was just so caring and supportive as well. So they, they were very special people for me in Landsdowne especially in the early years, because Stella died, was it in 1980, early '80's.*

**'82**

*'82 and I was, I couldn't believe when she died, it had only been two years if that. In a lot of that time she was actually very ill, and it just I couldn't believe how much I missed her. Because I wasn't going every day to the International Flat but I saw her regularly. I realised that she and the flat were a very very important part of my life and I really missed her. I was very very upset when she died and I really missed her greatly. But I continued to have contact with the International Flat because another Deaconess had been asked to work along with Stella a Deaconess called Isabel McCully and even after Isabel left, she felt she didn't want to continue the job permanently.*

*But whilst she was there I remember she, she was asked...she'd asked me about maybe getting some people to help with one family, a Pakistani family. The father had had a heart attack, the mother had had a third child and I went along with some young folk from the church and formed a really lasting friendship, I'm still friendly with that woman*



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*and her daughters are all grown up, the husband has died, but I'm still very much....and that was through the flat. And I continued to have some involvement through, when Rosemary Eldridge took over the flat, so the flat was a very important part of, of my time in Landsdowne which was a very interesting appointment because it was a very interesting parish. There was lots to be doing, as the soup run led onto whole involvement with people who were homeless and responding in other ways not just giving soup.*

*And there was another interesting thing that Stella was involved in too a bit. It was called the Park Ward Community Care Scheme, I know she'd been involved and some students came from Cambridge as a visitation and she was part of that as well, so it was a very very interesting place.*

### **What happened to the flat?**

*The flat continued, it continued and then it, for...to be honest I can't exactly for how many years, but it would be into the '90's. (pause) I'm trying to remember because Rosemary Eldridge was the last person I knew working in the flat and sadly she took ill. But I know the church felt they couldn't support, they couldn't fund I think the appointment of the workers.*

*That was a very special connection because Stella was another Deaconess but Rosemary was funded by the same part of the church that funded me so we went to the same staff conferences and things so I used to give her a lift if we went to conferences. But that's terrible, I can't remember, but I know it was, it was about, about eight years or eight years I think after. So it was, the flat was closed and some interfaith work continued through the people who were part of the sharing of faiths...made sure that wasn't lost. And there was someone called Isabel Smythe who was very involved in the flat and the sharing of faiths who I know worked very...Isabel I know very well, but I know that Isabel was very much part of the group that kept inter faith work going in Glasgow.*

### **Helen, can you tell us a little bit about Stella. I mean, you've mentioned her a lot. What was she like? Any stories, and anecdotes that you can remember?**

*A very, very ... I found her a very gracious person. She was usually wearing her, her grey suit, the Deaconesses had a grey uniform with a blue blouse a grey hat and a badge. By the time I came a Deaconess uniforms had been voted out, so I never ever had a uniform, but Stella and not many of the Deaconesses at that time, but Stella always wore her uniform. So, hospitable she would always, always would be inviting you to the house. If you would go to the flat sometimes it would be just when she was there these were very special times when it was quieter and you could spend more time. But I do remember for a social occasion she would put on different, she wouldn't wear a uniform, she'd have a nice knee length floral skirt with a beautiful blouse with a nice brooch and a scarf. Very very hospitable, I found her a deeply spiritual person, I would be for meetings of the Deacons sometimes she would lead the devotions and I found them deeply deeply spiritual. And I remember taking a young girl who was interested in being a Deaconess along with me. She didn't get it, maybe she was very evangelical or whatever, but I found her reading in the scripture deeply deeply spiritual.*

*And I remember while we were there, there was a Songs of Praise recorded in Wellington church where Stella's a member and I always remember her choosing the hymn, God be*



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*in thy head and in my understanding and we sang that and it was at her funeral as well. But that was very much, I think, very much her hymn because she lived that out in God, she was doing that and God was in her understanding and deep. When I went to the flat she was never preaching at people or I never got the impression she was trying ...it was very much about sharing faiths. But I found from her with the family that I got to know when we talked about faith, we each seem to get stronger in our own faith. We talked about very deep things with, with people when you were at the Sharing of Faiths and I think it made you stronger in your faiths. So I remember that, she was a very very persuasive (laughs) in getting you to do, to do things (laughs) but in a, to me it was in a winsome kind of way. She got me, I remember she got, she asked me to do things like coming along to the sharing of the big presentation of faiths. And I didn't get, I wasn't actively involved in things like organisation of the flat but I remember I did go when I could to the Sharing of Faiths and really enjoyed that and the discussion and all that you learned about the different faiths. But I do remember it, 'right Helen, you will come, I've got the rota which day can you come' and at that time I was going, it was the city chambers and or things would happen like she had some St Combs students coming along and she wanted them to take, take them to another place of worship and 'could you come along Helen' and that was really interesting to do things like that. But she would just expect you to be able to go along, I remember that aspect of life with Stella, but she was very very very to me a very very special person and I know she was demanding of people.*

*She just lived such an opposite in such a different way from me, I would go and I got very involved in the community and I went to things like the management of community central hall and I would go along to the meeting, that was my commitment for that night. Maybe half way through the meeting Stella would come zooming in (laughs) with people in tow and just she was spending the evening and she would, her, there would be two or three different things in her diary. She would go to them all, I would go like right this is, sorry I can't go to that, I'm going to this meeting, but she would come zooming in (laughs) half way through the meeting with some people from the flat in tow with her and then right they would wander a way off, to go somewhere else and that was just Stella the way she operated and she would have people always, very rarely seemed to be on her own, she'd have people from the flat, people she knew from the flat with her, spending time. Maybe somebody who just needed the company of her and she would take them along or people like students who did placements with her. That was, that was very much Stella and what I remember of her. But I do remember towards the end that she was very ill, she was terminally ill and she knew that and she seemed to stop zooming around so much. She would of driven off, we went to this big staff conference we would go to in Crieff Hydro you went and you spent three nights there. It was a Monday to a Thursday and the Deaconesses we would go off and we would stop and have afternoon tea and that was all part of going. But Stella would just zoom up, you know drive up herself in her car, but that last time she was able to come, she wasn't able to drive and it was arranged that I would give her a lift and she just seemed more in the present rather than rushing around. I always, it was February when we went and she was the one, who could look around because she wasn't driving.*

*I remember driving behind her with people and she would turn around to speak to people in the back. But she was happy to stop for tea, she was noticing the new born lambs in the field that other people were too busy chatting. There was somebody else in the car, I usually had a car load, but..and we stopped at this lovely place at Dunblain for tea it was called Four ways and she probably have time to do that, but she did, she was happy to*



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*come for tea. There was a little gift shop and I always remember she brought the it was Welsh tweed pinafore dress and Stella, I didn't think spent much on clothes and I thought, wow I thought that was really so special that she, she was just head so down was seeing things differently and liked this and thought that would be a lovely thing to have, even though she probably knew she wasn't going to be living long and it would have been quite expensive but she bought it and I remember seeing her wearing it. I think she wore it at the conference and it was very much this kind of thing that she liked, because she didn't spend much on herself. That was a very special time with Stella, I always remember that and I was really glad to have had that, to see that different side of her at that time.*

**Helen, you've talked about the Sharing of Faiths, but maybe you could tell us what the Sharing of Faiths is, or what it was?**

*The Sharing of Faiths was a monthly meeting, people would come along. There was a group - a planning group - I know that (name 0:38:42.4) who was a local minister was very much involved in that. And she'd a group of people from all different faiths, there were I remember there was Muslims, Sikhs, Hindu's, Buddhist and also people who were involved from the Baha'i I didn't even know anything about. And the planning group would plan a different theme for the year and then each month a different a member of a different faiths would lead that, that that do an introduction on the theme. I can't remember what I was going to say, I, probably didn't really go much to Sharing of the Faiths after Stella (laughs) although I still had the involvement in the flat but it was more when she was around I went.*

*But I remember one day it was bridges and it taught about how different faiths worked with bridges to God to the community that and that...so they were very very very interesting challenging meetings too. And then there was this big presentation of faiths where all the different faiths had a, had a display and they did work sheets for children, all sorts of school groups came which was a very good thing. But that I found challenging too because I always remember I would be, I was on the Christian stall and I remember this, this man came up and challenged me what, was it right for me as a Christian to be there with these people of other faiths. Because it was all quite controversial work that within Presbytery it was considered by some Christians a kind of watering down of the Christian faith. And you were saying that your faith was the same as other, but I was saying was it wasn't what I would be saying, but I thought it was right to be sharing and learning from one another. But some people didn't think you should be doing that and you were compromising your faith by saying that. So that was part of the Sharing of Faiths.*

**Was life quite difficult then for Stella do you think? Within the church?**

*I think she was so strong in her conviction, I don't know how she found that but I think she was just so strong and she had a very good support of Maxwell Craig who was a Minister of what was quite a big church and would have been Acting Bishop. I think maybe he took more of the flack at Presbytery level than her and I think because he was so supportive of her and other members of the Church of Scotland would come to the meetings too. And I think the other, she wasn't like on her own within the church, but I don't know, just how hard she found that. I think she was just so strong in her belief that it was the right thing to be doing and did get the support of other people she wasn't left on her own to do it I don't think, especially when she had such good support from*



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*Maxwell that probably took the. Cause it can still be quite controversial some of the interfaith things that I mentioned at, the things I mentioned at Presbytery.*

**Now Helen, you've worked here in this, in the West End for twenty two years you were here. What...you must of seen a lot of changes? What do you have anything to say about, is it different from...**

*Yes, yes it is different, the community when I first came it was mainly the Asian, Pakistani community living in the Woodlands area. But there's a much broader mix of different nationalities around. For example when I first came, I got a flat through, eventually I got my flat in Lansdowne parish through a local housing association. I think it would have been all of would have been from the indigenous population who were in the tenants but now there's I have neighbours from in my close from Egypt and from Iraq in my close and other people round and about and I think that it's good, but it's a much more mixed. There were a lot of in Lansdowne parish there were a lot of older members who lived in flats in Woodlands who had lived there all their lives, brought up their families there and then their families had married and they were left. Maybe a lot of them were living in big flats just on their own, but as they became unable to live in those flats they left and a lot of the flats were to become multiple occupancy and more students came. There were always students, but more students came to live. Some of the flats got bought by families to give to the student families to live here, but a lot of them became multiple occupancy.*

*So that gave a different, an interesting... 'cause we had a lot of students came into Lansdowne parish to Lansdowne Church and they would get involved at ... The housing has changed some, some of the old tenants were coming down when I arrived, more flats were... And I think whereas in the olden days there would have been families who had lived there all their lives most of the young people who came to live didn't want to stay. The newer flats they could afford to buy were small flats and they often wanted them to move out to get a house with a garden, from the...so it was a much more moving, not such a settled community to live in. And also some of the ... there were some old people who were very isolated and that's why we had what we called the Park ward Community Scheme because that was what became apparent to some people.*

**What, tell us a wee bit about the Park ward.**

*It was found that there was a lot of very isolated old people, maybe old people that only had a home help come in. So it was, there was a woman called Madge Coccozza who lived in the area a member of St Mary's, worked in social work, became aware of this isolation and became very concerned and so we...eventually a visitation was done and there were two care cases. One that was based in Community Central Hall a local community centre with paid staff and one that the churches took responsibility for called the Park ward which had volunteers who visited older people who were quite isolated and arranged outings and eventually we started a monthly coffee morning and it went on for a long long long ... it had a twenty five year anniversary and it eventually, I think all the people involved were not so able to do it and so they found it wasn't quite the same need for it. Because the community had changed, but that was, that was one thing that had happened during the time I was there. The need for that was becoming apparent, so a lot of changes. And now Lansdowne church doesn't even exist there was big changes in the church over the years the numbers just because of the older members dying off and young people come in but then they're moving away. The congregation just gradually dwindled down so it really became enviable and just at the end of last year Lansdowne*



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*actually, the congregation was united with another congregation and the building closed as a place of worship but has been taken over by a trust who will develop it as a community centre, as a cultural centre and a place for, for there's a group called the Four Acres Trust who developed another church in the West End into a theatre and restaurant called Cottier's and they'll do a similar development at Landowners church buildings so that's good, that's a huge change in the area as well. But we went from having lots and lots of young people. I was very involved with young people and a lot of children to really ... there was still some children when I was there but it went there was no children, so that was just a whole, just a whole community changing over the years, so it's been*

### **Big change**

*Big change it is, yeah, yes.*

### **Well Helen thank you. Any just last memories or stories you want to tell us just before we stop? About Stella?**

*The West end, one of my memories are the kind of things she'd just phone up and be oh can you just come along. She said the BBC are coming and their doing a documentary and they want to come and film what the activities in the flat. I was like, I don't normally come to this group. I want to have lots of people there will you please come along (laughs) so I duly came along and it was one of her during the day time meetings. I wouldn't of been able to go along to when some old ladies came along and did cookery and they were making chapatti's and it was great fun. I was learning how to make chapatti's with these ladies and then, there was just such a lot going on that day, it was really interesting.*

*So that's kind of one of my memories of the flat and Stella, a really interesting experience to be there and I remember eventually seeing it on TV watching this programme. Cause Stella, people were interested in what Stella was doing and the BBC had obviously heard about the work of the flat and wanted to show some aspect of that, that was....and I think it was that kind of place where things did happen, I think because of the situation in the West End often people would just appear at the door of the church and Bill, who I went to work with first was actually there a very short time, he was that kind of man that things could happen about him and he would just phone you up and say can you come and help with this, we're going to do that. So I remember it as a very very interesting place to be, a very a very good, good place to be in the church and in the community.*

**Great, well thank you, thank you very much indeed.**

**Transcript ends 0:48:58.9**