

Ellen 02.10.25

Interviewer: So this is Lauren Beatty interviewing Ellen for the Young Women's Movement Young Women Remember project on Thursday the 2nd of October 2025. To begin for the recording can you please confirm the following for me, so your full name?

Interviewee: Ellen.

Interviewer: And where are you from?

Interviewee: Well I'm from different places but I grew up in Glasgow, I was born in Cambridge, grew up in Glasgow, came to Inverness in 1985.

Interviewer: And what's your relationship to the, or connection to the Young Women's Movement or the YWCA?

Interviewee: Well the way my life went, I stayed with relations after my mother died and from there I went to stay in a YWCA hostel which I absolutely loved every minute, it just changed my life.

Interviewer: Thank you, so I'll come back to ask you a little bit more about that. So could you mind, would you mind sharing, sorry, when you were born?

Interviewee: I was born on Midsummer's Day 24th of June 1937.

Interviewer: And so you said you grew up in different places, could you talk me through that a little bit, where you grew up?

Interviewee: Right, my parents' roots are all in the Western Isles, but their parents moved to Glasgow, married there, so my parents were born in Glasgow, married in Glasgow, but then my parents went down to Cambridge and my father was working in a paper mill, he was a manager in the paper mill, and I was born, my brother was born in Cambridge. Then my father enlisted and the war started and he enlisted in the Royal Navy. He wasn't there very long but he developed pneumonia and died, he was only 34 when he died because there were no antibiotics in these days, so he came back to Glasgow and therefore I grew up in Glasgow.

Interviewer: Thank you. And so where else have you lived?

Interviewee: Well mostly in and around the Glasgow area. Having moved into the hostel, well the hostel just transformed my life altogether, but following that and going into nursing, I've lived in various areas around Glasgow, Alexandria, Clarkston, all that kind of area, and then I came up to Inverness in 1985 because of a job I came for and got and I've been up here ever since.

Interviewer: That leads on nicely, so what jobs have you had where you worked?

Interviewee: Well when I stayed at my aunt's, life was very difficult at my aunt's, and I was taken out of school when I was 15 and my first job was in a solicitor's office as a junior,

sticking stamps and that sort of thing. Then I was able to move into the council, a corporation of Glasgow as it was then, and I worked in the Education Department there in their head office and I was a school secretary for 18 months and it was during that time I came to be in the hostel and the opportunity moved for me to go and try for nurse training and so in 1959 I started my nurse training and all my life since then has been in the nursing world.

Interviewer: So what sort of, what nursing did you do? What was your sort of area that you worked in?

Interviewee: Well [pause] I will never forget the day I walked up the drive of the Western Infirmary to start my training because I never thought I would get the chance to do this and here it was all happening. So I really loved my training, very much indeed loved all of it, and after I had done my general training I did my midwifery training in what was called Broughton Road, the Royal Maternity Hospital in Glasgow, but during the time I had been in the hostel I got friendly with a girl called Margaret and through her I had become a Christian and she was a medical missionary and she was in Africa by this time so she said what are you going to do when you finish your midwifery? So the upshot was I went to Africa for a year and worked in a mission hospital there and came back in 1966 and moved back into the health service doing various jobs there and I moved around different jobs over the next 20-30 years.

Interviewer: And what was it you enjoyed about nursing?

Interviewee: Well the best job I've ever had, and they don't have it now, is a ward sister. When you were a ward sister you ran everything, you ran everything in your ward, you dealt with everybody in the whole hospital, you linked with the medics, it was the best job ever. So, I did that for about five or six years and then I went for my first promoted job and I went to work in Paisley and I was responsible for four wards and a coronary care unit and that was good and then I moved out of practise and into a research job that was called development, professional development, did that for two years then moved back into the health service and care of the elderly and disabled. I did that for five years and then I moved back into the mainstream and I was in a general hospital, the Vale of Leven hospital and then I came up to Inverness. Again at, several of these jobs came during times of reorganisation in the health service and I came up to Inverness in 1985 and just at the time that the new hospital here was opening so I was very involved in that and I retired a little early in 1995.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's amazing, what a career. So what was the year that you sort of became involved with the YWCA, when was it that you joined the housing there?

Interviewee: Well I mentioned I had stayed with an aunt and uncle, life was very difficult and I did gradually while I was there for about six years. I was doing a lot of the housework and all the washing, family washing, cleaning, all that kind of thing as well as working and I went to night school three nights a week as well so life was very full-on but and my aunt just took all my money. I got a very small amount of pocket money to buy my train ticket and that was about it, go to the pictures that was all and I couldn't see any way out, it just seemed to be never-ending and just all of a sudden out of the blue my aunt had been

crabby again and for some reason I said to her well it doesn't matter I'm leaving anyway... And I didn't know what that meant but she said well let us help you to find somewhere. So looking back, with my father being in the Navy, they have welfare people looking after the families of seamen you know and I have a feeling there must have been some link that they were able to contact because this... I met this lady in Glasgow and she took me to look at four YWCA hostels with a view to choosing to stay in one of these. I'd never heard of them before and so we looked at four, we looked at one right in the middle of Glasgow in Bath Street and we looked at three at the West End, all okay and the fourth one which was in Park Circus Place for some reason I just felt this was fine, this was for me and that's when I came to stay in Park Circus Place YWCA hostel.

Interviewer: Great and can you tell me a little bit more about your experience there? What that was like?

Interviewee: Well, I think this person who took me round I don't know who she was I will never find out but she probably spoke with the warden in the hostel, they didn't have a nanny, they had a warden, her name was Miss Beveridge she was quite a nice lady, a bit distant but quite nice and initially I was in a room with four other girls but very shortly I was in a room with cubicles and I had a little cubicle. Now the one I was in was Park Circus Place was a townhouse up in Park Circus area of Glasgow with all these lovely terrace houses and townhouses and I think the room I was in might have been a master bedroom that had been divided into four and so I had a hostel, a little cubicle all to myself which was absolutely wonderful and it was full board you got your breakfast, dinner and your supper and there were rules but there were not too much of a bother not from what I had come from, they were absolutely no trouble and I just loved it from the minute I arrived, the sense of freedom was amazing just amazing, I even had a key to the door and I didn't have to be in till 11 o'clock if I chose, at my aunt's I almost had to be in about quarter to ten for no particular reason so life was absolutely transformed.

Interviewer: That's great and what were your relationships like in the hostel with the other people that lived there?

Interviewee: Well I didn't know us all. I was very shy actually, I mean I'm a bit of a mouth now in a way but then I could talk to four but I was quite shy but there must have been about 20 or 30 people living in the hostel at that time different mix of students and a few people working some people who were in transit, you know, and one particular day because of the layout of the building and it was a kind of pantry thing where you could do little bits of personal washing and this girl was standing doing some washing and I just spoke to her and I asked her, her name she said her name was Margaret and I said what are you doing here she was a medical student so we got chatting and became really good friends and I got to know other people as well and there were one or two folk quite a few Christians there I discovered, but there were two girls used to go, I couldn't get my head around it to begin with they went to a church Bible study on a Saturday night and I thought a Saturday night for goodness sake they must be odd but they weren't odd at all but they were... They went there and I thought this is a different way of looking at Christianity that I'd ever seen people who were absolutely okay, and so through Margaret and going with her to her church I became a Christian, I realised that all that happened to me was in God's hands even the fact when I said to my aunt I'm leaving it must have been him because I wouldn't have said it

myself because I had no idea what that could lead to I don't think it could lead to anything so never said it, anyway it happened, and he had this particular hostel ready for me Margaret was there I got to know other people as well and my life was just transformed completely in every sense. I loved being in the hostel, I mean it was as I say, it was it wasn't Spartan but it wasn't luxurious but there was plenty food if a table had six places there were six scones six of the six of that so everybody could have something and I just really loved it and I got to know people there as well.... Yeah all of it, it was good it was good.

Interviewer: Lovely, how old were you when you moved there?

Interviewee: I was 19 but not like today's 19s I was a very young 19 more like a 15 year old because you know when you're hemmed in you just don't grow, um, so I was very... I mean had a good job and a responsible job so I wasn't [pause] unable but I just it was very different I was very young and so I kind of came into myself and I realised because you know God just started to change me and make me into what I could be and so... But as I say the hostel was just I just loved it every minute I was there I had nothing to say about the hostel that was negative I just it, it was just a new experience for me and the warden was a Miss Beveridge and there were a couple of relief wardens one was a Miss Campbell younger women she would come when Miss Beveridge maybe was a holiday and another time a lady came her name was Miss Howard Miss Howard was tall quite elegant obviously in her 60s or 70s an elegant lady if you like very well spoken she hadn't ever worked because she stayed home to look after father who went to business and she stayed for a while and I kept in touch with her and she was just a lovely, lovely person, so, and then I met other people in the hostel people who are living in the hostel I have a couple of pictures of one picture which was taken outside the door of the hostel why this was taken why I still have it I have no idea but there's a little picture of about five or six of us who were resident [crossover of voices] and that was taken about 1957/ 58.

Interviewer: Amazing.

Interviewee: It was taken at the door of the hostel just at 6 Park Circus Place and that's me at the right hand side.

Interviewer: Yeah, well you all look very happy you're all smiling...

Interviewee: Yes, if you can see at the left there was an older lady and then next to her a nearly older lady that, they were, the one at the very end worked in an office and so did the old lady next to her and she must have been well in her 60s she's quite a fragile little lady but very pleasant and one of the others was a radiographer and another one was dispenser in the local pharmacy, it's was a lovely mix of people.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's a lovely photograph, thank you.

Interviewee: And the other picture I have is of students two girls from the Western Isles who were from Lewis and I think they were probably a teacher training college and across from the hostel was the University McBrain's hall McBrain which is a hall for male students and in Park Circus area there were gardens in the middle and this was, these, were taken in the gardens with some of the guys with their guitars and some of us getting together in the gardens which was nice I went online the other day to have a look at Park Circus place using

Google and discovered these gardens have gone these have been made into car parking spaces as you do as you do as the years go on.

Interviewer: So is Park... I'm not overly familiar with Glasgow, is Park Circus place the West End?

Interviewee: Yes it's right about right above Charing Cross if you go to Charing Cross and head west up to the right there's Park Circus overlooks the art galleries and the University it's quite high.

Interviewer: It's lovely, nice area.

Interviewee: It's a township area you know beautiful, beautiful houses you should Google it and you'll see the style of houses.

Interviewer: I will, thank you. So a little bit... I'm interested in finding a little bit more out about the what it was like living in the hostel and the sort of could you tell me a little bit more about the sort of ethos there if you like and maybe some of the.... You said that there was rules but you know they were pretty easy rules to follow but I don't know if you could just tell me a little bit more about how it felt sort of living there and what you know?

Interviewee: Well in a sense having come from where my aunt was where she was very strict about some things and very commanding about things the rules were no bother, they were okay rules, I mean you had to be in by and live and that was okay and you weren't aware of there being rules I mean breakfast was probably about 8 o'clock and main meal would be about 1 and the next about 6 and you just turned up and there wasn't much choice there was a main course and you just ate what was there. Um, I never had any bother with the food I think one of the things I appreciated I didn't have to eat what I didn't like, when I was at my aunt's if it was plated I ate it and so that that was just choice was coming in my way. In the morning they had a short prayer in the morning because it was a Christian Association it was the YWCA of Scotland and there was prayers in the morning and there was a Bible reading and a little prayer and asking the Lord to bless, look after us all during the day kind of thing, and the warden did that and I always remember she had a quite a nice accent I don't know where she was from but at the end you knew the end of the prayer was coming when she would thank the Lord for health and strength and the use of all our limbs and faculties... Has stuck with me forever and I'm very grateful God has done that for me. Um...On the first floor was a lounge where everybody could sit and because of this type of building it was there was a kind of wing off the lounge and it had a grand piano in it, um, it was quite chilly they only had coal in the fireplace so you sat in a ring around the fireplace and there was heating of some sort but it was never that warm a place but it was okay you just lived there and there was a dining room and there was a lounge and you had your bedroom your cubicle or you were in the dorm one or two of the rooms had two people staying and living together, um, or it was rooms for two people and when you went up to the top to the attics there was a long room that had been made into cubicles as well must have been about 20 or 30 people there. Um, down in the basement they made a basement room into a study room for the people who were at college and a way out the back they made a long dormitory of which there were about eight beds all in a row, didn't know many people down there you kind of got to stay with...Friendly with the people that

you rub shoulders with really it was, in today's terms, it was very primitive there were two baths and there was a bath on the level I was on and there was another one for the people who were up in the attic and it was connected with a kind of big vent thing and I got to know quite a few of the folks that were over the time I was there and we used to sing wee songs to each other through this vent and harmonise and whatnot, so it was very friendly I just loved all of it it was good it was good... Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you have to pay to live there?

Interviewee: Oh yes, yeah, yes it was at that point my memory is I was earning six pounds a week and which in 1957 was, was an okay pay and my aunt took all of that of course but when I went to the Y it was full board at three pounds a week and I therefore had three pounds for everything else I mean you could buy a coat for two pounds, you know, you've got to you've got to take it back... I mean sounds... Three pounds a week for full board was... It was all this time 1957, so obviously I must have made an arrangement how to pay that and they didn't have bank transfer in these days I don't know how, I must have, I must have turned up every Friday to pay my amount I don't know I don't remember that at all but it was three pounds a week for full board and at that point I was working in Bath Street just along so I could walk to work so I didn't have any travel expenses I just walked to work and I had choices to make about anything I want out of what I had to wear but when I left my aunt to go to stay in the hostel I went my aunt came with me in the tram as it was and I had a small suitcase just a small suitcase about that size and paper carrier bag that was all I had of my possessions, my clothes and that's what I landed with in the YW so I was everything was very basic but it was just a huge sense of release and just I just keep thinking I loved every minute I was there. Um, I had to get into the way of making choices because my aunt told me what to wear and told me what to do so the fact that I could decide where I wear the blue blouse or the green blouse [laughing] but it all gradually came and I started to grow up.

Interviewer: How was it adapting to that new sort of independence and having your own choice?

Interviewee: It was a kind of awesome kind of thing I can, I can do this, um, it's like when, when the food arrived let's, let's for example say the plate arrived with Brussels I don't like Brussels sprouts but I had to eat them so I could say no Brussels sprouts thanks little things like that making decision being able to say no I don't want that or yes I will have that you know, that, that was a wake-up for me because my aunt was very crowding you know she made all the decisions so that was a wake-up for me the Y was just there at the right time in the right setting for me.

Interviewer: And you mentioned, when you were with your aunt you know you said you would maybe get to go to the cinema well how did your life change when you were at living in the hostel like what sort of things what opportunities did you have what could you do in your free time?

Interviewee: Well I mean I didn't actually go to the pictures a lot and of course I was in the south side when I was at my aunt's and there were three picture houses near that you could walk to. I think going to the pictures in town would have been expensive so a treat to go

into the pictures in the town so I did do that and I remember going to just a not far from where I was, was the Highlanders Institute which was where all the Highland folk gathered and they had ceilidhs and things like that and I remember going along to a couple of these as well.

Interviewer: Were you working long days while you were staying there?

Interviewee: Yes it was a 9-5 job yes, yes and it was along in Bath Street and Bath Street like all of Glasgow was changing but the education offices were a big big handsome building it's now a hotel and I was very happy there yeah I enjoyed nice people and enjoyed the job very much made good friends they are still, still in touch with people from that time they were in their 90s now and I'm still in touch with them we're all getting older. I'm 88 now so I have to maybe I'm very grateful for all the things that I can do but I'm still friendly with these people from that time.

Interviewer: And you mentioned the sort of Christian element of it obviously YWCA Young Women's Christian Association and you said that there was the prayers sessions that were led and in a way it kind of for you, it sounds as if you kind of got a little bit more in touch with your faith and that side of you while you were at the YWCA so I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that and kind of how strong you feel the Christian element was to the organisation at the time?

Interviewee: Right, well initially it came through this new friend Margaret, the one who was a medical student and who ended up being a medical missionary her family were medical missionaries and in Africa in Swaziland they've been there for many, many years and she went to a church in the west, the east end of Glasgow and she invited me to go with her so I went a few times and during that time they had some people over having a kind of campaign in her church it was on all week with music and one thing and another and a gospel was preached you know, about who Jesus was and what he came for and what it means to you as an individual what he has done the fact that he died for us this was a kind of wake-up, oh really? you know, and then you in the course of the week we went every evening because she was taking part in it all and the speakers would say you know what are you going to do about this you would decide that you're going to follow Jesus and just ask him to be your saviour and I was quite drawn to this as a sense you know this is for me, this is for me and so the very last night I had said to Margaret it was the last Sunday and I said are you going back ...Oh yes, I said can I come with you so we went and that evening when they were giving this talk and then he said you know you it's a time to make a decision whoever you are that's listening to this and I thought yes this is for me God's calling me to do this so it's a sense of obeying what he was trying to tell me to do. So, that evening I went forward and we prayed and I believed I accepted Christ was my saviour not just the world's saviour but he's my saviour as well and he did all this for me and that I was his he bought me he was my I was his and it was just a huge sense of coming home in a way yeah kind of rock under my feet I knew things were safe and so from that time and I was, without a doubt, it was confirming all that God had been doing for me and getting me to the hostel and one thing and another and just opening up a huge faith world for me and a sense of belonging and it was just also perfect also right so being in the hostel and in a sense with the morning prayers it was just a kind of anchor if you like it was there anyway but it was through Margaret being, telling me about her life and what she was doing and taking me to

church with her where I got the opportunity to hear again what it was all about it was all in God's hands and it just changed me altogether and it gave me a sense of worth and when I was at my aunt she was always saying how stupid I was and my cousins were clever and all the rest of it I believed that and so began to make me realise that I'm not stupid God's got something for me to do and so just around that time I was able to think well maybe I could do nurse training and again doors open for that as well I went to speak to somebody I had worked with in the education department I said I'm thinking of doing this do you think it would be okay? She said yes go for it and don't just go to one hospital and apply to two or three places and see what happens so I applied to three hospitals and they all said okay you can come but I particularly wanted to go to the Western Infirmary so that's where I went to do my training and again it all just happened God just opened the door and it was great a huge sense of being cared for.

Interviewer: Yeah, and you mentioned the, the sort of the prayer sessions you know they were they are they were an anchor and was that kind of just something that happened every day and you could participate if you wanted or was it something that was expected, that everyone who stayed there would go?

Interviewee: You were expected to be there, not everyone went there not all of them went with the Christian ethos of it . It wasn't an in-your-face hallelujah kind of setting that you had to be there and it was squirming, you know, sometimes if places are too, terribly religious you think this is not for me kind of thing it was there there was very gentle worship in the morning and I'm I think most of the folks went because they had to get their breakfast anyway and they would hear this short prayer every day and there was there was nothing organised in the hostel for Christian worship or anything like that or Bible studies there was nothing of that because in a sense everybody was out doing things working or college or whatever. Um, it had a nice feeling to the place it was a welcoming homely place but there wasn't any Bible studies or anything like that.

Interviewer: And was there anyone at the time that stayed there that didn't follow the Christian religion that you were aware of?

Interviewee: Oh yes I would say 80% didn't follow it, um, these two that I saw that went to a Bible study on a Saturday night I thought they were nuts. Who would do that on a Saturday night? You know you could go to the pictures on a Saturday night kind of thing. So it was a wake-up call that you could be perfectly normal and go to a Bible study and a lot of people didn't have any Christian interest at all but obviously the hostel had its recommendation of being a good place to be in. Now the other three hostels I looked at there was nothing wrong with them it just didn't click that this was where I was to be so I believe God said wait no there's another one to see, there's another one to see. Whoever this lady was she was the patience of Joab, she really was she was amazing and we must have just walked for miles because I don't remember us getting in and out of taxis or anything and she just did what she had to do and went right out of my life. I'd love to know who she was but I'm not going to be able to find that out. So, but as I say the hostel, Young Women's Christian Association hostel, it lived up to what it was. It was safe, it had a Christian base and it was there for you.

Interviewer: Did you get the impression as well that it would have been accepting of people of all different faiths as well?

Interviewee: Yeah, I would have said so. Having said that, if you hear me when I put it this way, this was 1957. There were not all that many what we would call foreigners around and people from other countries. There were some, but not like you have now. You can't compare then with now in the interrelationships of different faiths and I would have said the general essence of the whole country at that time was just say Christian shall we say. Some practising, some not, but they would call themselves Christian. Whereas people started moving around the world, people started to come to other countries. In 1957 that wasn't terribly obvious. The picture I have here of them in the gardens, there's these two guys there who look kind of Asian but they would be students so they would have come over. So that was unusual and there were certainly no folks, Asian or otherwise in the hostel. Possibly in the fullness of time they came because once I left the hostel I was totally into my nursing world where you lived in. You had to live it in your training and so I was never back at the Y. So I don't know how it changed over the years or if it changed over the years.

Interviewer: So when did you, can you tell me a little bit more about that then when you came to leave the Y and how your life sort of changed from there?

Interviewee: Yeah well it was quite amazing in many ways because I had a good job. I was earning about, I'd been there for two years so earning maybe even seven pounds a week and I had a good pay and it was secure. I had a job, forever kind of thing. I had accommodation, I was okay. I didn't look away to the future and think am I going to be in the hostel for the rest of my life. Never entered my head to think what's next because just the way things worked, I was able to go on and do nurse training which automatically you had to live in, so I wasn't worried about finding somewhere to stay. It was there for me at the time when I needed it particularly, and it meant everything I needed at that time. As I say there must have been about 20 or 30 women living in the hostel at that time and various permutations of twos or cubicles or a little dormitory or whatever and not everybody showed any interest in a Christian faith. Not that I was too bothered to notice whether they were or weren't. I was too busy getting my own life together shall we say.

Interviewer: How long were you in the hostel for?

Interviewee: Just two years, two years.

Interviewer: And then you moved and you went into nursing so you lived in?

Interviewee: That's right, that's right.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Interviewee: Well it was a requirement then, you had to live in. There was no choice, you had to live in when you did. It was a nurse's home and I mean I had been in my wee cubicle, my wee cubicle, if you can visualise that kind of shape. The bed took up that much. There was a chest of drawers there and the window was there and there was a chair there and a chair there. It was brilliant, I loved it. So I went into the nurse's home. I had a bed, I had a

basin, wash basin, I had an armchair, I had a cupboard. It wasn't that much bigger but it had everything in it. I had a carpet on the floor, a wee rug on the floor, oh my goodness, all this in heaven too kind of thing. Now the rules in living in the nurse's home were quite strict. They were very ultra strict about male visitors and they had strict rules. Every room had its bed light and its main light and corridors had their lights and at the end of each corridor were bathrooms and toilets. So, of course, for the nurse's home, all the main lights went off at quarter to twelve. All the corridor lights were left on but all the other lights, your bed light, went off at the main. It was switched off at the main at quarter to twelve and on at six in the morning but the corridor lights were on. You just accepted that. You're supposed to be in your bed at quarter to twelve at night but it was fine and of course attached to the nurse's home was a nurse's dining room and you had all your food there. So having gone from six pounds a week to nursing, I had nine pounds a month but all my food and accommodation was taken off already so my nine pounds a month was what was left so that was still mine. As life went on, that increased.

Interviewer: Do you think living in the Y, with it being obviously like a hostel and shared accommodation and things, do you think that set you up then and meant that you were more prepared for obviously living in the nursing home?

Interviewee: I think so. I think so. It was more or less a continuation but it was just a different dimension. And of course when you're in the nurse's home, you're all doing the same thing. Whereas in the hostel, everyone went round the front door and scattered. They went to different offices or wherever and you got friendly with a handful of folks. Even in nursing, you only got a handful of folk you were pally with.

Interviewer: So after, I'm interested in, after your involvement, obviously you stayed in the hostel, did you have any connection at all to the YWCA after that?

Interviewee: Not at all. Not at all. Life just, it was like a partition. I still knew one or two people who lived in the hostel but I have no memory of actually going back to visit anybody there. I was so friendly with them and we must have met in different ways... But I must have gone back to visit them. I mean, there were four or five folk that I became really friendly with. So I must have gone back. I have no memory of going back. I must have gone back, just socially, but it's not in my head to say I remember it particularly.

Interviewer: What impact would you say the hostel and the organisation had on your life when you look back? What impact do you think it had?

Interviewee: When I went back?

Interviewer: When you look back, what impact do you think it had?

Interviewee: Oh, it was pivotal and it just changed my life. I'd never heard of YW hostels before and this lady, whoever she was, had done her homework, took me to these three places and I think she must have been telling, she must have had some of the knowledge about me, where I was coming from, um, and maybe she put two and two together and made four. She must, whether she met my aunt and uncle, I don't know. But she appeared, I met her in town and we went looking. Her input to that and me going to the hostel was

about to just turn my life on its head because I never thought I'd ever get away from my aunt's. I had never had any money and nowhere to go to anyway. So the hostel just opened a world to me, just opened up.

Interviewer: And you said you didn't really, you didn't know about it at all at the time.

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's great, and when you joined and were there, do you, did you get the sense that it was something that was quite common at the time? You know, there was, you were sharing with quite a lot of women and you then found out there was different YWCAs in Glasgow. Do you think it was something that was helping a lot of women at that time? Did you get that impression?

Interviewee: I think so and I think because of its, you're thinking of the 50s and it wasn't that long after the end of the war, remember, the sense of security and safety and women were beginning to move away from home. I mean I was different in my sense because of my situation but I mean that picture has got two elderly ladies there. They were looking for somewhere to stay so it was safe for them and the medical student, and these students, they were in a known place where it would be safe. And as I say, it must have been about 20 or 30 of us living there. We only ever met at breakfast and at supper time or at lunch if people came in for lunch. It was, it was secure and there were five, that was four hostels. There was one in Bath Street, there was one lower down in, near Sauchiehall Street, one at a different terrace and the one I was a high up. So that was, well, three within very close reach of each other and one not so very far away, and there may well have been other hostels but these were the YWs.

Interviewer: Do you have any fond memories or, that you can share or you know, memorable moments of your time living in the hostel?

Interviewee: Well, if I take a step sideways, when I was, after I finished my midwifery and then I went to Africa for a year, I met up with a friend from my past and we went to Johannesburg and we stayed in a YW in Johannesburg and it was a big smart building and it was heaving with people and when we went to book in, she said, I'm sorry we've just no room, all I can give you is an alcove with a kind of camp bed...Right, we'll have it, you know, I mean you wouldn't be allowed to do that now, you know, it's fire safety and all the rest of it. So we camped out in an alcove, my friend Betty and me, and we did in Johannesburg, you know, in the YW, in the middle of Joburg, you know.

Interviewee: It was friendly, the Y was well known all over because my friend who was in Africa, she knew about the Y from her days, she grew up in South Africa, so the Y was in Africa as well.

Interviewer: Yeah, so did you get the sense then that it really was a global movement at the time?

Interviewee: Yeah, uh-huh, uh-huh.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's great. So, yeah, is there anything else that you'd like to share about your time at the Y in the hostel, any stories or memories that stick out?

Interviewee: Well, it was just such a lifeline, and you see, it catered for people of all kinds. There was another lady, she shared a room with a girl, there were funny things happen, she, this lady was called Netta, and Netta thought she was very posh, and she was a secretary to somebody, and we kind of laughed at her, she was very twee, and this girl here, with this one, I think, shared a room with her, she was a radiographer, and there were two, they had two beds in this room, and we got up this particular morning, she said, you'll never guess what happened to Netta, what happened to Netta, her hot water bottle burst, and Netta treated it as if she had peed in the bed, because she was, had the bed up apparently, the mattress up, cleaning it, and, and never would lose an estate, well, it was very, very cruel of us, but we thought it was hilarious, very particular lady that would happen to her, you know, so that was a funny incident, but also, there was a very nice shop in shop in Sauchiehall Street called Lyons, they did stationery and cards and things like that, and they had very distinctive wrapping paper, purple wrapping paper, so she would go to Lion's and maybe order something like this, and they would say, send it, so she would, it would be sent, and there was a big board with, with letters were stuck, and one of these crisscross boards with bits of tape, you know, and there would be a purple thing, this is Netta, she would get it sent, so she shops at Lyons, you know, so there were oddballs, and nice people, yeah...

Interviewer: And did you, I think you may have mentioned this briefly, but did you keep in touch with any, like Margaret was a good friend of yours, did you keep in touch with her when she left?

Interviewee: Yes, oh absolutely, I kept in touch with her for a long time, and in fact, one of my early days of being in the Y, she, her brother was a medical missionary in Swaziland, and the church had a college near Paisley, and she said the church is having, and the kids, youngsters are having a day out at the college, they're having a fun day, would you want to come, and I thought...And my brother will be there... And I thought, a medical missionary, this is not gonna exactly be a bundle of fun, you know, so I said, okay, I'll come, I'll come, so we were two trams through the city, and out to the other side, and we got to the college, and there was this obstacle race going on, and here was her brother, this missionary guy, with his jacket on back to front, doing an obstacle race, climbing a a tarpaulin, and jumping over a bench, and stuffing biscuits, I thought, hey, he's okay, you know, he's perfectly normal, and his wife was there, pretty, with her baby, I thought, this Christianity might be okay, you know, so then of course, I'll do all the way back to the Y, across the city, and back into the bare bones of the Y, but they're good, good incidents, good, good things, good stories... And one of the girls stayed in the upper cubicle area, she was a Christian, she sang, and I told you, there were two bathrooms with a connecting vent, so we used to go into the bathrooms at the same time, I would go to the down one, she would go to the top one, so we would sing songs, and she would harmonise through this big vent, it went from the bathroom right up to the top, and you could talk through one, you couldn't see anything, but you could talk, I mean, it was a very old building, but very cleverly put together, so we used to sing songs through the bath, through the bathroom vent, but in one sense, it was spartan, if you wanted a bath, you had to go early for your bath, because the water ran out, and then you had to wait for it all to heat up again, because they were looking after about 30 people. In today's terms, it wouldn't stand for 10 minutes, there are too many things, it

would have had to totally revamp the plumbing system to make sure enough toilets and baths for everybody, um, probably the lighting might have been needed to be adapted as well, and the fact that people were sharing rooms, it was of its time, and it was paradise for me, and for most folk, and the other thing, of course, that absolutely turned me on, I didn't have to wash my bedding, I did all the washing when I was at my aunt's, when the beds were stripped, I had to do the hand wash, it was all done by hand, and lo and behold, two sheets would appear on my bed, so all I had to do was change them, put the other one back somewhere, and have somebody else wash them. Magic. Absolute magic.

Interviewer: Great [laughing]. Was there any, did you feel that the, what opportunities do you feel like it gave you while you lived there, you know, like what sort of, you've talked about some of the doors obviously that opened, but I just don't know if there's anything else that you'd like to say on that, about the sort of opportunities that you were given while you stayed with the, in the hostel.

Interviewee: Well, it was there, it was an option for someone who needed somewhere to stay, to stay safely, and not an exorbitant rent with a landlord who... We hear the stories now of calamities people have, and then they're given ten minutes to clean out, you know, there was a thing on television this morning, some kind of order can be sent to somebody, we're selling the property, you leave now, and you have to pack up and go, it was, they didn't have that, there was a safety, and these, like, these four YWs met a need. I would have thought the one in Glasgow, in Bath Street, which is in among quite tall business buildings, I would have said there were a lot of business girls in there, and it would be somewhere safe to stay, and where I was, there was no doubt about it, that you were safe, and it was perfectly adequate. It wasn't lush, but it was absolutely adequate and safe.

Interviewer: Yeah, this is the theme that's coming through, I think, throughout speaking to you, is, you know, this, it provided a place of safety, and...

Interviewee: Yes, without a doubt, and it was a nice area, it was a very smart area, I mean, a lot of the houses up there, very few of them were houses, they'd all been split into flats and things, and it was funny, I'm changing the subject, but there is a link, you've heard of Iona, the island of Iona? George Macleod of Iona, he kind of resurrected it and got it built again, and all the rest of it. I was reading his life story a while ago, discovered his parents lived at four Park Circus Place, they used the whole house, I mean, these were way back in the days, a whole family lived in a whole house with four levels, you know, basic, three, and then an attic and they lived number four, and I was living in number six. It was a funny wee link, you know, and when you look, if you Google, I just Googled yesterday out of curiosity, six Park Circus Place, see what came up, and of course Google brings you up the thing, and there was six Park Circus Place, and I thought, that was my room, that was my bedroom there, you know, and it's nice, I don't know what it is, it's got very fancy curtains, I don't know if it's made into a hotel or something, I don't know, a lot of them were made into embassies, you know, around in Park Circus was the Italian embassy, and if you walk through from Park Circus Place, and then into Park Circus, if you would, you look straight over Kelvingrove Park, right over to the University, and the art galleries, and all that, fantastic view from up the top, you know, but yes, safe, that's the main thing, you know, I would say. And, to put it in another way, these two girls were from the Western Isles, these two, their mums would be happy to know that they were living in a place like the Y.

Interviewer: And do you think, did you get the sense that your family were, like your aunt, was she happy that you were living there?

Interviewee: Well, I mean, the bottom line was she'd be glad to have me off her hands in a wee, but it would be a wake-up call for her, and my uncle, because her own daughter and son, they were away, they were married, they would have to do all their own cleaning and washing, and because I was gone, so they must have had, how they went about it, I will never know, but putting two and two together... My father died during the war, and I know that the naval, the forces, look after the children of the people who die in service, it happens now, and I think there might have been a welfare officer, they were able to get in touch with, to say, you know, she's gonna go, we need help to find somewhere, but I have no idea who the person was, she was a lovely, helpful person, I might meet her in heaven, you never know, but she was lovely, and she came with me, and we went to all the places, all four places, and so she knew what she was looking for, looking at and looking for. So I guess like their parents must have had an idea of the reputation of the YW hostels.

Interviewer: And did you keep in touch with your aunt after you left?

Interviewee: Oh yes, yes, made a deliberate choice, that, um, people would say, look at her, they took her in when she had nowhere to go, and now she doesn't have anything to do with them...No, I made a point of visiting them. You couldn't go and just turn up, I always had to arrange to go, and in these days you had to write a letter, because there were no phones, very few people had phones, so I always planned to go out, and when I stayed at my aunt's, she was in a new corporation scheme that had just been built maybe about 20 years before, it was all very fresh, it was like a terrace, and it was like a walkway, a close between the front terrace and the back, and you had a front door, and you could go through this, and back in the back door, so when we stayed at my aunt's, we always had to use the back door, never the front door, only her daughter used the front door, so when I used to go visiting, I would insist on going through the back door, which wound her up, you must use the front door, and I said no, no, this was good enough when I stayed here, so the next time when she was standing at the front door, open, so I had to go in the front door, so it was different, but I went, yes, I didn't want anybody to say, she's ignoring them now, when she needed them they were there.

Interviewer: And one thing I wanted to ask, it's kind of backtracking a little bit, but you described the accommodation, the hostel, really well, you painted a really clear picture of it, and I just wondered, would you be able to talk me through a sort of typical day, like your routine, and how that sort of, you interacted with the hostel, but obviously your own, I know that you went out for the day, but what's a sort of typical day then looking like for you?

Interviewee: Well, it was like being in a hotel in a sense, say you're on holiday in a hotel, and you go out and do your stuff during the day, and you come back, you look into the lounge and you see who's there, or you go to the machine and make yourself a coffee... or you go into, you couldn't do that, there was no way of making extra odd cups of coffee in it, no one did that in these days, but people would maybe meet in the hall and chat to folk and that kind of thing, and then they must have rung a bell or something to say that the supper

was ready, and you chatted to folk when you saw them coming in and going out and that sort of thing, yeah because everybody was doing different things, I mean the college students, they probably could have eaten in the university canteen, I don't know about that, but there was a camaraderie around, but everybody was doing different things, as I say, this little group here, I think her name was Jessie, she and the other little lady, they worked in offices, so they would have been coming home about six o'clock, and this lady was a radiographer, so she would have probably eaten in the hospital or would have been called out and that kind of thing, and the one that was the pharmacist, she was the dispenser, the one that makes up the medicines, she stayed, she worked in a chemist shop just down the hill from the hostel actually, and then there was me, I worked in the middle of town, so I walked to work, she walked to work, and people were just coming and going. You tended to move into a kind of, where you normally sat in the dining room, but it wasn't fixed, but sometimes you'd think, oh you're sitting in my seat, kind of thing, well no, it's anybody's seat, kind of thing.

Interviewer: You had your routine.

Interviewee: Yeah, there was a bit of routine.

Interviewer: Is there anything else before we finish up that you'd like to share, anything I've not touched on, any key memories or stories?

Interviewee: No [pause] not really. [Pause] There was a girl, came from Dunoon, I think she might have worked in the YW office, would there have been a YW office somewhere?

Interviewer: Yeah, I would have imagined so, yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah, I have a feeling she had something to do with the office, and she was in one of the other cubicles, back to me, back to back with me, the room I was in had four cubicles, and she was in the one back to back with me. She was nice, she took Margaret and me home with her one time, and we stayed over a weekend, which was nice. I mean, some of the ones went home, they went back to their families for weekends or for holidays or whatever.

Interviewee: And the one who worked in the pharmacy, she took me home with her one time. She stayed at a place called Falthouse, which is on the Edinburgh Road. So, she was very kind.

Interviewee: It's another world, it's another world. I was so grateful, so grateful. I hope you're getting that message.

Interviewee: It was there for me at the time, and when I saw your thing on Facebook, I thought, I owe so much to that time in the Y, it was a saving thing for me in every sense of the word. Because I used to think, when I was at my aunt's, you know, I'll never get away because I've nowhere to go, and I never had any money anyway. It was a lot of coercive control in every sense of that word and there was nowhere I could go to complain or do anything, I just had to survive and there was just no way out until, as I say, we had a very

trivial, she gave me another row or something absolutely trivial, and out of my mouth came the words... Well it doesn't matter because I'm leaving anyway. And when I said it to her, she fainted, she dropped at my feet, I thought I'd killed her. Anyway, she came to, and so next day she said, well you'll need to let us help you find somewhere to go. Fine, absolutely fine, I had no idea where to start. So somewhere along the line, she and my uncle made contact with somebody, or some... Whatever you want to call it... Facility shall we say, and this was set up for me to meet this lady in town and go and look and choose a place to stay. I mean it just happened, you know, whoever this lady was.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's great. Well thank you so much, thanks for sharing your stories, it's been great.

Interviewee: I hope you've got something out of that.

Interviewer: Thank you.