

## Helen Hood 22.09.25

**Interviewer:** So this is Lauren Beatty interviewing Helen Hood for the Young Women's Movement Young Women Remember project on Monday the 22nd of September 2025. To begin, for the recording could you please confirm the following for me. So your full name.

**Interviewee:** is Helen Hood.

**Interviewer:** And where are you from?

**Interviewee:** Originally Doncaster in South Yorkshire.

**Interviewer:** And could you tell me your current or your former role at the Young Women's Movement?

**Interviewee:** I had various roles mainly in management, ended up as Scottish President or President of YWCA Scotland.

**Interviewer:** Great, thank you very much and so would you mind sharing when you were born, if that's okay?

**Interviewee:** I was born in 1955.

**Interviewer:** Thank you, and so you said, did you grow up in Doncaster?

**Interviewee:** Yes, yeah. I moved to Edinburgh at the age of 18 as a student, came to the university here and then never went back. Well, only to visit.

**Interviewer:** Okay, yeah. So that was, another question was, where have you lived? So is it just Doncaster and Edinburgh?

**Interviewee:** Just Doncaster and Edinburgh. Yeah, yes.

**Interviewer:** That's great, thank you and what jobs have you had?

**Interviewee:** Not very many. I was, apart from student jobs, I was briefly a school teacher, taught Latin and Greek and classical studies in Dunfermline at the Queen Anne High School [laughing]. Um, until I left for my son to be born in 1981 and after that, the only other paid work that I did was a few years part-time teaching RE at St. Mary's Music School and for, from 2000 to 2006, I worked in Edinburgh but for the World Council of Churches, coordinating their project on overcoming violence against women. So that was done mainly through the internet, online, but we also organised a couple of seminars in Scotland that people came from different countries in the world to take part in.

**Interviewer:** That's great.

**Interviewee:** But apart from that, I was very fortunate in that my husband had a well-paid job and so a lot of the 20 years that I was bringing up the children, I was also volunteering with the YW, as it was called.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, thank you and so what year then did you join the organisation, the YW?

**Interviewee:** I joined in 1981, shortly after Andrew had been born.

**Interviewer:** So how old were you when you joined the organisation?

**Interviewee:** I was 26.

**Interviewer:** And then how did you find out about the organisation? What sort of drew you to it?

**Interviewee:** I had a friend who was volunteering with the Roundabout Centre. She was volunteering to tutor English as a home tutor, teaching English in the home to women, in those days, it was called English as a second language, as if nobody ever knew any other languages apart from their mother tongue until we taught them English but the women who had home tutors were, for some reason or other, not able to come to any of the community-based classes that were also run, some of them by the YWCA. Maybe they had babies and children at home that they couldn't get out with, or in one or two cases it was because it was a Muslim household where they were quite new to Scotland and the rest of the family were being a bit overprotective and didn't really want them coming out. So there was this home tutor scheme that my friend was part of and she thought I might be interested in joining, which I did and I became a home tutor. First of all, I taught a woman from Hong Kong who had come here to join her husband's family. So that's how I started.

**Interviewer:** How did you find that experience?

**Interviewee:** I loved it, I really enjoyed it. After a while, there was, one or two of us got some additional training and we taught maternity English, because one of the experiences that my friend Ming described was that she'd given birth to two children, two girls, in hospital in Edinburgh and certainly the first one, she didn't know any English at all and she'd been saved by the fact that there was a doctor from Hong Kong who could speak to her in Cantonese, otherwise she would have had absolutely no idea what was happening. So a woman called Joan Weir devised this course where we taught women not only what would happen when they went into a hospital in Scotland to have a baby but also essential language like push [laughing] just so that they knew some of the words that people were going to be saying to them and I taught a young Pakistani woman who came, she was married in Pakistan to a young guy and then brought back here, she knew no English at all, got pregnant almost instantly. So I taught her, I taught a young Czech woman, in those days Czechoslovakia still existed and she and her husband were in a group that jumped ship at Leith. They got permission to stay because she was pregnant and in those days it was before the law changed so that her daughter, although she was born to foreign parents, her daughter was a British citizen so then they got permission to stay because they were the parents of a British citizen, so she didn't know much English when she came so I taught her

and then there was a Moroccan woman that I also taught some maternity English to before she had her baby. So that felt really kind of purposeful, in particular the Pakistani girl because she was really only a girl and it was good that the staff and the, it was the Elsie Ingles in those days, said afterwards that it had been such a relief to them that she seemed to understand what they were saying and that the birth had been okay.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, it was like such a rewarding experience for you.

**Interviewee:** Yes, yes, yes.

(9:21 - 9:36)

**Interviewer:** Yeah, it's amazing, incredible. So obviously you started off with the ESL courses.

**Interviewee:** Yes, yeah.

**Interviewer:** What other sort of projects and initiatives were you involved in or did you take part in?

**Interviewee:** Well, at that point it was only really the staff at the roundabout centre but an elderly friend of mine was the treasurer at the time and she persuaded me to think of going on to the management committee and first of all becoming a member of the YWCA and she really promoted it as a not only, well the roundabout promoted it as not just a Scottish organisation but, you know, this is a world movement that you're part of and in those days the word movement was only really used of it as a world movement. So it's quite good that the word movement's in the title now in Scotland as well and by the time my daughter was born, which was 1986, I was becoming the chairman I think I might even have been called? But of the chair of the management committee at the roundabout centre. I was very much involved with the roundabout for quite a while and [pause] it in some ways found it slightly difficult to be part of the wider YWCA in Scotland apart from the sort of sister projects in Dundee and Glasgow. One of which was called the International Flat, I think that was Glasgow, and Dundee Women's Centre but they were the three Scottish YWCA projects that very much worked with new Scots, particularly new Scottish women. When the roundabout was initially set up by the churches as a sort of ecumenical group, churches coming together wanted to do something because they realised there were a lot of isolated women, particularly some of the Muslim women who were kind of stuck at home because their husbands knew English but they didn't and their families were really quite protective of them because the churches didn't want to do something in their own name because they were absolutely certain that they didn't want to be converting people to Christianity but they thought that particularly the Muslim community would be apprehensive that if the women were going to a place that was labelled as a church that that would be what would happen. So in order to get the support of the Muslim community, the churches funded it but the YWCA set these places up and so they were women's spaces, women-only spaces at first, that it was known that it was safe for the women to come because some of the Muslim community were really quite conservative in those days and just very protective of the women. So, that was the kind of origin of it and not all the other bits of YWCA Scotland kind of understood that ethos that was just a bit different but we soon persuaded them [laughing].

**Interviewer:** Yeah well I was actually going to ask just following on from that like obviously the organisation moved away from the 'C' and I was just wondering, like dropped the 'C' just to make it more inclusive and do you...What was your thoughts on that?

**Interviewee:** It was something that I mean even in the 1980s was being very much discussed. It was always difficult because for the world movement the 'C' is really important and it's the ethos behind the organisation but it's like we could have men join in Scotland and not feel threatened. We made sure they didn't get to be the leadership but you know we were, whereas in a country like India for instance you couldn't possibly have men join the YWCA or they would just take it over because there were countries where women didn't even really count properly as people, so for them to have a women's organisation was really important and quite often for it to be a Christian organisation was also important because Christianity in a country like India was seen as the, the religion that would accept everybody as an equal whereas you've got caste system in in Hinduism which means some people are kind of better than others or at least different, so, I could, we could always understand that the Christianity was important for the world movement and to some of us it was, I mean the reason why we were doing things in many ways, it was the, the motivation for doing the kind of work that we did but clearly if you made anything much of it that was going to put, increasingly that would put more and more people off. There was a point at which there was a young, I think she was the training officer I can't remember at what point it was, whether it was, I think it was before I became president but no maybe not, anyway that's not really relevant. She had a really strong Christian motivation to her whole life and was a member of St Paul's and St George's Church in Edinburgh which is a quite evangelical one. Tragically young she died while she was still in post, of a cancer I seem to think. That all happened really quite quickly before that she and I had this idea that we would, she wanted to do some training for just for the rest of the staff, not to convert people to, well maybe she did really want to convert people to Christianity, she was quite evangelical, but we both had this feeling that, I mean generally in Scottish society if you talk about Hinduism or Buddhism in particular you know people are really interested, they think that's really nice. If you talk about Christianity they sort of, oh no, they don't want anything to do with it, probably because of the way it's hung on in schools with this kind of horrible churchy idea and so we kind of wanted to get people to understand that Christianity can also be a really open faith, you know, that it's actually all about love and being inclusive, well from some people's perspective anyway [laughing] but I was I was not surprised and not particularly upset when the organisation changed its name to the Young Women's Movement because I could see how, you know, really being the YWCA, unless you never said what the C stood for, was not going to make it easy to attract people. It's funny because the YMCA was always a religious organisation, very definitely, I mean I don't know if it still is now, but because you've got a trendy song where people go YMCA, people never thought about it. It was a kind of sports club and organisation that people would go along to and never think about the fact that it was Christian, even though actually in their ethos, in my day, they were much more openly Christian, you know, their General Secretary and Assistant General Secretary were the Reverend This and the Reverend That, but somehow people didn't notice that they were a Christian organisation and then we were really sensitive about, oh what can we do about this Christianity thing, how can we attract people without putting them off and, sorry, I'm rambling, so I'll stop.

**Interviewer:** Not at all, not at all. I think it's really interesting and it's an important part of the organisation's history and so it's just interesting to open up that question and find out your perspective.

**Interviewee:** Similar to what's happened to churches.

**Interviewer:** Yeah [pause] so you said, so you were mainly, when you were volunteering, you were based mainly at the Roundabout Centre, is that correct?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, yes.

**Interviewer:** And so would you be able to tell me a little bit about the Roundabout Centre as a physical sort of space, what it was like and what, you know?

**Interviewee:** So it was a basement in Elm Row, at the top of Leith Walk. Historically the YW had owned the ground floor as well, but as money got short that was sold off to the Christadelphians, who were a very small church, but they were really friendly towards us and quite supportive. There was a spiral staircase down at the front, but there was a, not very adequate, but possible disabled access at the back, so from that point of view it wasn't too bad a building, but because it was a basement it was always damp and having all sorts of difficulties. Quite big rooms with reasonably high ceilings even at basement level. At the front there are, yeah, I think there was a sub-basement as well, actually, I'm sure there was, and it occasionally got flooded, but it was just kind of used for storage and that kind of thing. So there was really quite a big room that we used to have parties and gatherings in, a tiny little kitchen, another big room that was the multicultural creche, so there were creche facilities alongside all the classes and things that happened. There was a Muslim, mainly Pakistani and Bangladeshi, I think, women's group who had their own leaders and were a really good, strong group and, yeah, I think I can probably tell you this story. There was... which I heard from one of the staff at the centre, there was an occasion where one of the younger women was being abused in some way by her husband. I don't know what kind of abuse or level of abuse it was, but she confided in the group of women and then two of the feisty older women turned up on his doorstep and said that, you know, if it didn't stop, the whole community would know, and as I understand it, it did stop, just, you know, the strength of the women together was something that was really pretty good. There was a young women's group at the centre as well. I'm trying to think what age they were, sort of late teens, probably. The coordinator, Susan England, we've moved house recently, for the sake of the recording, and I've been sorting through loads and loads of stuff and I came across postcards that Susan sent me from Greece when she took this group of young women to Greece. They went to visit the YWCA in Greece, but they had all sorts of adventures [laughing]. They were not always reliable at turning up at the right time and being in the right place at the right time, but yeah, there were wonderful opportunities and just bringing together mainly women, well, almost exclusively women from different cultures and different backgrounds, just to spend time together. There was also a, it was called Rainbow Families Group, for which we were essentially just the premises really, but it was for mixed-race families, many of whom were somehow not acceptable to either community that they'd come from, you know, to come together and support each other.

There was also a summer school, which was huge. I mean, I think something like 200 kids maybe, for three weeks of the summer holidays, which happened in Drummond Community High School, and was run by Susan and usually a couple of her children and other volunteers and staff from the centre and members of the management committee would take in lunches every day, you know, take it in turns to prepare lunch, but it's maybe not 200 kids, but it was a lot of kids. It was, it was, we made it as cheap as we could. People used to queue up to book their places, because it was an absolutely invaluable facility for families over the summer who, well, there are families today who struggled to pay their, to feed their kids over the summer holidays, and places have, schools have to open and provide free meals during the summer holidays because families can't afford to feed them, but there always was a lot of poverty, but also if parents were working, they couldn't afford paid child care, it wasn't necessarily available in any case, so that was a huge service that was provided, and there used to be a concert at the end of the summer school, which was just amazing.

**Interviewer:** Sounds great, amazing. And what was the sort of neighbourhood and the wider sort of community like at that time?

**Interviewee:** In that part of, I mean, that's why the Roundabout Centre was there, because that's the Leith Walk area, and further down into Leith was the area where the majority of the, certainly Indian subcontinent ethnic population lived. We had close contacts with a lot of Chinese people as well, the Hong Kong, they were mainly Hong Kong Chinese in those days, rather than mainland China. A lot of them were at Toll Cross, as is still the case, and we did have some men on the management committee, there were a couple of Chinese men took places on the management committee, both lovely chaps who, one of them was a dad of several of the kids who came, and he, he as the dad looked after the kids most of the time, which was I think fairly unusual, even in the Chinese community, but he took a big part in helping us to run things, and the other one became vice chair. It had to be explained to him that it wasn't racism that meant us not making chair, it was because he was a man, I'm sorry, but [laughing] we couldn't have men running the YWCA, it just wouldn't have been right but yeah, that was the other thing that was offered from the centre for anybody, and particularly for organisations, and Susan and some of the staff used to go into other organisations, it was partly money making, but anti-racist education or anti-racist training it was kind of predecessor to diversity and inclusion, and Susan did expand it into diversity, not only anti-racist stuff later on. From her in particular, but from my involvement at the Roundabout, I learned an awful lot, but I might have learned in church, but I think it probably would have taken me longer, just about how to treat everybody as an individual, and how to, and the fact that we all grow up with prejudices and we have prejudices foisted upon us, and how to work against that and be as inclusive as possible in your thinking and the way you treat people and that was a huge lesson to me, which was then invaluable because I was really fortunate to get involved in the International YWCA, and was meeting people from, women from all over the world of all ages, and it was just amazing and to hopefully go into that with as open a view as possible, so that I wasn't judging everybody before I even had spoken to them.

**Interviewer:** What else was on the agenda within the movement at the time that you were involved?

**Interviewee:** Well, I started to represent the Roundabout at what was in those days called the Scottish National Council, because it was still a kind of subset of the YWCA of Great Britain and so, there was quite a lot of working in different centres on providing opportunities for young women and girls. There were very often young wives groups, which had become somewhat older wives groups, or they called them women's groups and there were several places, there was one in Morningside, in Edinburgh, there was one in Livingston, because I visited some of them when I became president. There was one in Livingston, there were some up north, one at Portlethen, I think, near Stonehaven, um, different places where there were these women's groups that had been mainly young wives groups rather than young women's groups, although there were single women who had been members of these young wives groups [laughing]. There was a project at Pilton, which was very much aimed at families, not just women. There was a scheme called Play in Hospitals, where, in hospital clinic waiting rooms, there were trained volunteers with a box of toys who would play with the kids that had come with mum to an appointment, you know, maternity clinics and that kind of thing and later that moved into some GP clinics, places like Westerhailles, where there were quite a lot of families with young children, and mums or dads had to take the kid with, the toddler with them when they went to the doctor, and in some of the places [pause] there maybe weren't many toys in the home, or in other places there were toys, but actually the parents didn't know how to play with their kids, because their parents hadn't really played with them and so it was a, without making it obvious, it was a kind of gentle way of showing parents how they could play with their kids, just because they could see somebody else doing it and that, certainly the response from the doctors and staff in the health centres where it happened was really positive, because it took a lot of stress off the parent who was having their own appointment, but it also had pluses for when they went home with their kid as well. It seemed like whatever the Y did was what was needed in the particular area. It was never an organisation to come in and say, we think what you need here is a youth group, or we think what you need here is you women need to get together. It had always been the members coming together and saying, what we want, or this is the kind of work we want to do, this is what our neighbourhood needs. So it did vary very much from place to place, but was kind of on a shoestring very often, and funding went up and down and I always felt sad when staff members were having to spend quite a bit of their time actually working on getting more funding for their own posts. You know, that just, it didn't seem right, but that always seemed to be the way it was. But yeah, it was [pause] and I got that sense as a worldwide movement as well, that it's always been an organisation that responds to what the members want, or what they need.

**Interviewer:** What initiative would you say, I mean you've touched on a lot there, and it's obvious that the organisation's done so much, but would you say is there a particular initiative or programme that really sort of meant something to you at the time, that you felt really strongly about?

**Interviewee:** There were so many of them. I mean, yeah, it kind of went through phases. The, what was called, what became the Neighbourhood English Teaching, which was community-based English classes for women. When I was chair at the Roundabout, that was running out of funding, and in those days it was Lothian Region rather than City of Edinburgh, they had said that they would take over the English classes the following year

and so we had to persuade them to give us money to keep funding it for a year until they took it over. Actually, it was costing so much less for us to run it because we had volunteer teachers. I, in addition to the home tutoring, I used to help with a knitting and English class that one of the paid teachers ran, where the women used to come together and some of them were just learning to knit, or some of them wanted to knit a complicated knitting pattern and they didn't understand the English knitting pattern, or we just chatted in English, which helped their conversation, but, these different classes, and some of them much more structured than that, they were mostly being taught by volunteers with some paid supervision and so we said, look, it'll take you much more effort and cost to set it all up again if it disappears, so please will you fund it for another year? And that was, it wasn't hundreds of women, but it was quite a lot of women in the city whose lives were really enhanced, because some of them worked really hard, learned English really well, and then went off and got jobs and were really, no that's terrible, I'm not going to say it, they were just able to take part in society so much better than they would have been able to otherwise and so the teaching of English was really important to me, but I think just the whole aspect of bringing people together from all sorts of different backgrounds, the working against racism and prejudice, and just that was what inspired me, I think.

**Interviewer:** What did, you've kind of touched on this, but I'm just wondering, what did sort of working for the movement look like for you on a regular basis? But I know that would have evolved, but...

**Interviewee:** Yeah, well initially it was, you know, I did a training with the roundabout, and then it was once a week going into somebody's home, or twice a week going into different people's homes, or going along to one of these classes to help out, and then once I joined the management committee that was going to an evening meeting, probably once a month or something like that, and then I... Gradually it became less tutoring, I eventually stopped doing that and more committee meetings and so my involvement in the later stages was very much, in committee meetings, and a huge privilege of travelling around, and I used to go and give talks about the work of the YWCA. I told you that much later I worked for the World Council of Churches in overcoming violence against women, but while I was with the YW, Joan Bree, who was the training officer, I think, training officer, she organised this amazing exhibition, the 104 pairs of shoes, you heard of it, which, and this wasn't controversial in those days, included the pair of shoes that J.K. Rowling had worn for the premiere of the first Harry Potter film, which were in a glass case in the exhibition and it was such a powerful exhibition, because you walked around it looking at all these... It's 104 pairs because two women every week were, and presumably still are, killed by their partner or former partner. So these shoes had all been donated by different people, and a lot of them had a story attached to them, which was on a little notice next to the shoes. And one of the places where that was exhibited was St Mary's Cathedral at the west end of Edinburgh, which is where I'm a member and we had it laid out for the festival on the floor in what we call the Resurrection Chapel, which is quite a large area so that people could walk around it and the senior man on the clergy at that time said, you know, he hadn't quite scoffed, but he'd been, he'd said to me, yeah, yeah, yeah, that, you know, yes, of course you can have your exhibition Helen but afterwards he said, you know, it was one of the best exhibitions we'd ever had, because it really spoke to people and then really quite a long time after that, it was in the in the sort of bar area laid out in the festival theatre, and they were looking for

volunteers to help to steward it and I went along one day for a couple of hours and was paired up with a, I can't remember her name now, I'm ashamed to say, a young woman. I mean, she was more, less than half my age, I'm sure, who was a goth, who was just lovely but after all I said about my sort of being open and inclusive and everything, I confess that when she came in with white makeup and completely in black, black lipstick, and I, oh, I wonder if we'll have anything much in common, I thought, which of course, you know, I mean, she was just lovely and we had a great time. We had loads of time to chat because actually there weren't that many people came into the festival theatre during the day. It wasn't the best place for the exhibition, but it was some really good conversation. But yeah, so [pause] I can't remember what, yes, what was, that's led out of the question.

**Interviewer:** I was going to ask, yeah, no it's great.

**Interviewee:** [crossover of voices] Not at all relevant, but I think probably I would say that that kind of aspect of women's rights, that was really important for me, that it was a women's organisation. Sometimes it was frustrating that it was a women's organisation. I don't know if you've ever spent a lot of time on committees that are just women, but some women have a kind of idealised, you know, oh, you know, women do things so, so well and we don't do any of the other horrible stuff, but actually women just do the horrible stuff differently and so it was really important to me that it was a women's organisation and it was fighting for women's rights and that kind of thing and run by women but also the management committee at the Roundabout Centre was an easier one to chair because it had some men on it because I think men and women all behave, both behave better if it's a mixed group, somehow, I don't know.

**Interviewer:** No, I get it, [laughing] it makes sense. I was going to ask how long you were involved with the organisation before, do you know?

**Interviewee:** I think I stepped down from being Scottish President in 1996, so that's from 1981 to 1996. At that point I went to New College at the University of Edinburgh to study for a Bachelor of Divinity degree, just for the fun of it, which was a wonderful thing to do, just to sit in the library reading books and that was what I was supposed to be doing, not doing other things but also, I've always had a thing that if you're in the sort of senior position somewhere and then you step back, you should completely step back. It's not fair to still be sitting on the committee with somebody else trying to chair the meetings and you're sitting there in the corner tempted to say something or just, you know, it's just not right. So I just completely stepped back at that point, kept up my membership, but turned up at a meeting, at events that I was invited to, but kept out of the organisation of the movement. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** And I was wondering how your involvement with the organisation interacted with your everyday life? That's quite a big question, but I just don't know if you could touch on that.

**Interviewee:** It did mean that my children, when they were young, spent a lot of time being dragged around, my daughter has memories of being in the creche at the Roundabout or sitting in the corner drawing while mummy was at a meeting or something. Later on, it meant that I missed one of their birthdays because I went to World Council meetings in

1991 in Stavanger and 1995 in Seoul in South Korea. I mean, that was an incredible opportunity. I went, I and Isabel Carr, who was the executive director, I think we'd given her the title by that stage, we went together to the World Council in Seoul and on the way back, we stopped over in Hong Kong and a guy called Alfred who had worked for the Roundabout Centre but then was back in Hong Kong, he had fixed up for us to go on one of these bullet trains across to Guangzhou in China and we had Monday to Friday at the YWCA in China before we came back. I mean, that was just amazing because we were able to see a side of China that most tourist visitors wouldn't see because we were seeing the work of the YW and we'd never met Chinese YW people because Taiwan, the YWCA of Taiwan, always goes to the World Council meeting and because of the dispute between China and Taiwan, the YWCA of China weren't allowed to go to the World Council meetings because they couldn't be there at the same time as the... Because that would be them recognising Taiwan as an independent country. So, Hong Kong was there and Taiwan was there but not China and so this was an opportunity to see something of the organisation in a country that most people didn't see and that was amazing.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I can imagine.

**Interviewee:** But, meant I was away for a couple of weeks, I think, when my children were quite young. Fortunately, Alan was a university teacher and he could take time off in the summer to look after them. But yeah.

**Interviewer:** I can see that it did, it would have played a big part in your wider life and relationships as well. That's great. I feel we've already touched on this, so we might skip it. So I was going to ask about what was going on more broadly within the organisation, but I feel that you've kind of gave a summary of most of the initiatives. Is there anything else that you would want to add that you've not discussed, you think, that was going on? Maybe you weren't directly involved in it, but it was going on at the time.

**Interviewee:** There was a lot of joint work with the YMCA in the joint centres, as there were joint centres in the new towns, Glenrothes and Cumbernauld. Cupar, was YMYW, I think, as well and also, there was the movement to, instead of there being a British Council of the YWCA, which then had a subsidiary, Scottish National Council, which reported to the British one. It became more like a kind of federal thing with YWCA of England and YWCA of Scotland, and a sort of British one umbrella body, because it's the British one that's represented at world level and that was one of the good things about the Y of GB was that there's funding to send women to World Council meetings every four years. So it didn't matter if you couldn't even afford your bus fare into Edinburgh, you could go to a World Council meeting in Seoul in South Korea because the YW would pay for you to go from that funding. There were other countries that were always represented by the same wealthy women because they were the only women from their countries who could afford to pay to go to wherever it was. So that was something that was really good and something we inherited from the foresight of the women who set it up, the women and Lord Salisbury [laughing] but, you know, that there should be a fund to ensure that you can always send your delegates to a World Council meeting.

**Interviewer:** That's brilliant. Yeah, great. Did any organisational changes take place when you were involved?

**Interviewee:** So I suppose that was the main one, was becoming YWCA Scotland. It's a kind of separate independent organisation of which we've just celebrated the centenary. Yeah, yes. On a world scale, I was at the World Council in 1991, I think. That was the one that we, there became a YWCA of Palestine before that, the women were part of the YWCA of Jordan. I also remember women from South Africa voting in the elections at World Council and say, I'm voting for the first time, but soon I'm going to vote in my country because black women hadn't been voting in the elections. Yes, the [pause] YWCA of South Africa was split up because there was a Dutch Reformed Church version that wasn't allowed to be part of the world movement and a black majority YWCA that was part of the world movement and things like that, I was pleased to be part of an organisation that had principles but yes, I think probably the Scotland independence bit was the main reorganisation.

**Interviewer:** Great, and I wondered if you could tell me a little bit about your relationships with the other members, whether that be members of staff, volunteers, service users?

**Interviewee:** I had really good relationships with them. I mean, it was much more of a friendship than, obviously, in the national offices, there had to be a bit of kind of, you know, we were the managers and the staff were the staff. So I like to think that they were friendly relationships and I'm certainly still friends with four of the, four of the women that I have managed, if you see what I mean [laughing]. I did some training in assessment and supervision, support and supervision, just so that we could do that kind of thing properly, because in the past it's been a bit like the way churches kind of ran. The feeling that, you know, we were all really nice people and we were all doing it from the right kind of motivations. We didn't need to think about words like professionalism and that kind of thing. So I would like to say that most of the time it was an inappropriate relationship. You wouldn't expect to be best friends with your boss, to put it really crudely but I mean, Susan England, who was the coordinator at the Roundabout Centre, but then retired, she and I are really good friends.

**Interviewer:** So are you still involved, obviously you've got friends that were part of the movement, are you still involved with the movement at all today?

**Interviewee:** Only in the sense of a smallish donation, a regular donation, and following on social media and I've really enjoyed coming to the 100th celebrations. I really love seeing that the Young Women's Movement is a movement of young women and that the kinds of things that are happening and because I'm still a member of the YWCA, I still feel I'm part of that. Oh look, what we're doing in Parliament! I don't feel the need to be there, and to be honest I probably don't have time to be there but yeah, it still feels like I'm part of it.

**Interviewer:** You might have touched on this when you spoke about stepping down from the board, but I just wondered if you could explain a little bit more about what made you move away from the movement, or step down from the board, what made you do that?

**Interviewee:** I mean, I had fulfilled my term of office and was going off to be a full-time student, well part-time student, so that was, you know, the point at which I stepped down. It was the right time to do it.

**Interviewer:** And what did working with the organisation mean to you?

**Interviewee** [Pause] I just... I learnt such a lot about myself, about women's lives all over the world, but particularly in Scotland. The importance of keeping awareness of the issues. I'm not sure where it's at now, but there was a period when, you know, feminism became a kind of dirty word. It was almost as if, who needs that? Feminists are these sort of fairly horrible people who don't want to know anybody and things are better than they were, clearly, but it's not perfect, is it? [Laughing] There are still large amounts of domestic abuse mainly being perpetrated against women. There are still women politicians getting a much harder time than men, their counterparts. You can't take your eye off the ball, actually. So the idea that there's no need for feminism any longer is, well, maybe use a different word, but those kinds of things, I think that's what I've valued... And I've got a lot of friends out of it as well.

**Interviewer:** I was going to ask this later, but since you've touched on it there, so did you then feel that the organisation is or was, certainly is and was, a feminist organisation? So at the time of your involvement, did you feel, sorry, that it was a feminist organisation?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, I think it has always been. Not all the women in it have been feminists, and certainly there were, there were some of the generation who joined as young wives, who I wouldn't have given the name feminist to, and they certainly wouldn't have wanted it, who, yeah, I think were, because they themselves were quite happy being stay-at-home wives or whatever, didn't notice that other people were having a bit of a battle but as an organisation, right from the start, in different ways, it has been.

**Interviewer:** What do you think made it a feminist organisation, in your opinion?

**Interviewee:** [Pause] The struggles that some women recognised that either they or others were going through, just to get anywhere at all. I mean, in its origins, obviously, the sheer need for things for women, because everything was for men, [laughing] to today, where, well, as I've already said, you just need to look at what happened recently to the Deputy Prime Minister, in contrast to what has happened to her male counterparts, who've done much worse and survived and, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Was it your intention to work in a feminist organisation, do you think? Or was it important to you to work as part of a feminist organisation?

**Interviewee:** I think, in the same way as it's important to me that the church that I belong to is very open and inclusive and has a strong focus on justice and peace and the importance of working against the climate crisis, I couldn't have worked in an organisation that wasn't intrinsically feminist. It didn't need to be a women's organisation, sorry, just ignore it, for it to be feminist, if you see what I mean. So, it probably, it wasn't because it was the YWCA that I got involved. I got involved because of the work that was happening and what I

wanted to be part of, but if it hadn't been feminist, I would have been out of there [laughing], if you see what I mean. I wouldn't have stayed. So, yeah, I suppose it was important.

**Interviewer:** Thank you for that. I'll go back to more sort of explore questions, but it was just while you touched on that, I thought it would make sense to discuss it a bit further. What were your hopes for the organisation at the time that you were involved?

**Interviewee:** I think, I probably didn't start to have hopes in that respect until I got involved at the Scotland level. At that point, I think I did want us to become a bit more professional. [Pause] It was all very amateurish. I was involved just because I was kind of heading for officer status. I was invited to be part of the selection process for the general secretary a couple of years before I became president, and, I mean, there was a personnel staff member came up from London to be involved with it, and I'd never really done very much into... Well, I hadn't done very much at all in terms of recruitment and that kind of thing, but I was pretty sure we weren't doing this very well and the woman appointed didn't last more than about 18 months. She was just in the wrong job. So we got a consultant in and did some training in recruitment and selection before we made the next appointment and brought in somebody who had some more professional experience. So that was one hope, and I think the other hope was just that young women would take over the management of the organisation, not just be working for it and young volunteers. That we wouldn't be... That it would cease to be a group of entirely older women. I didn't think everybody over 60 should be sacked [laughing] or told that their services were being dispensed with, but that actually the majority of people running a young women's organisation should be young women. So that was my hope and I was... Maybe I was 40 or in my 40s when I stepped down, whereas my predecessors had all been over 60. The entirety of the group that managed the YWCA in Scotland, I think, was a group of retired people, you know, who met during the day on a weekday and nobody thought anything about it and then I came along and asked them to provide a creche. So, yeah, it was that my hopes were for it to all be a bit more professional and for... Oh, I'm sorry? For women to take over, for young women to take over.

**Interviewer:** I appreciate that you'll have quite a lot of memories from your involvement, but I wondered if you had a favourite one or something that you really remember.

**Interviewee:** It's difficult to choose, to be honest because the more I think about, the more things you remember.

**Interviewee:** I mean, I certainly do remember wonderful summer school concerts at the Drummond High School at the end of the summer school and all the kids doing their party pieces and that kind of thing. I also... They're kind of slightly mixed feelings because my husband caught some strange form of streptococcus, but we didn't know what it was and he was in hospital in Edinburgh when I went to my first international meeting. Which was... It was women and new technologies. A wonderful seminar in the Netherlands, which was for young women. Young women in world terms was under 35 and I was 34 and a half. That was an amazing experience. Being in workshops, learning about computing and I did stuff on the delegation from the group of... No, was it just me from GB? Maybe just me from Scotland and somebody from England and we'd taken stuff on genetic testing and that kind of...

Things to do with birth technologies and remember these wonderfully strong women from India, talking about how they've been to speak to the government and had got amniocentesis testing. Is that right? Restricted. It was the first test that came in where the test was actually to find out if your baby had spina bifida or Down syndrome or something but you incidentally could find out whether it was a boy or a girl and there were private clinics offering the test and it was something like... The advertising was something like, why not spend 200 rupees now and save 20,000 later? Which meant if you spent 200 rupees and had the amniocentesis test, if you discovered that you were having a girl, you could abort it now, and then you wouldn't have to pay a dowry and these amazing women had got all the women's organisations together and they'd gone to the government and they'd had private clinics doing amniocentesis testing banned so that it could only be done in hospitals and things and I think there was some agreement about only revealing the sex of the baby if that was important medically to try and get... Because they were already, you know, gradually, there were fewer girls being born in India and more boys.

(1:28:02 - 1:28:37)

**Interviewee:** It was just... It was inspirational to know what was happening in other parts of the world.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, that's incredible. So the next question actually leads on quite nicely because it's, what did you learn from your time at the organisation? You learned a lot and some things that would have come as... I mean, I was quite shocked you telling me that there, so I can't imagine how...

**Interviewee:** Yes, I'm sorry, because I've known it for so long that I forget what the shock value is.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, it's just incredible to think that, yeah but as you say, that sort of cultural understanding and appreciating, whether it's, you know, different cultures, is obviously such a core element of the work that the Y was doing and trying to support people without, yeah, and understanding their kind of needs from a cultural, sort of perspective as well.

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Wow, yeah. So yeah, so what other things would you say that you've learned from your time at the organisation? I think, actually, that was a good example of the strength of doing things together, working alongside other organisations, collaboration and that kind of thing.

**Interviewee:** If, I don't know, if you want to get something done, don't just go off by yourselves and try and do it, but, you know, get together with other people. Sisters are doing it for themselves [laughing].

**Interviewer:** Again, you've touched on this with your travel and things, but what other opportunities would you say that you gained from being part of the organisation?

**Interviewee:** I did actually have other opportunities for leadership, but I know that there were a lot of women who, were it not for the YWCA, they would never have had the chance

to exercise their kind of leadership skills and to be involved in the running of an organisation, to get training in different things. That is something which has improved and changed a lot but there were one or two women who, clearly, this was their power base, because there was nowhere else they had any control over their lives. They might be in a very subservient post at work and when they got home they were more of a cook and skivvy than a full partner, but in the YWCA they were important and that was an opportunity that it gave. But I mean, for me, the travel in particular, I would never have got to some of these places otherwise.

**Interviewer:** And would you say that you've gained transferable skills from your time at the organisation?

**Interviewee:** Oh, absolutely, yes. Yes, because all the training and experience in the diversity and inclusion stuff, I now volunteer with teaching English to refugee guys who are in hotels nearby the church that I go to. I've used the trustee skills that I did with the different kinds of trustee training through the Y. I've used those in other voluntary organisations. I've been a trustee of Christian Aid and Church Action on Poverty and church things as well. So, yeah, yeah, lots of things. Very grateful to the Y for starting it all off.

**Interviewer:** And again, you've touched a bit on this, but did the organisation, would you say, influence your life outside of work? So you've, I suppose, you've gone on to work in other voluntary sectors?

**Interviewee:** Yes, yes, yes. It was really what started me off on the rest of my life in some ways. Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely.

**Interviewer:** What would you say were your greatest achievements while you were part of the organisation?

**Interviewee:** Having a few more crèches alongside meetings and, I mean, the fact that it, it wasn't long before young women were running the show. I think a hope means that I made some contribution to that. Just in trying to make it more possible for young women to take part. I don't think there'd been any effort to invite young women to do other things than join our project or maybe become a staff member before. They hadn't said, would you like to join the management committee? So, yeah, not that I was the only person doing that, but I think the fact that I was 20 years younger than the others encouraged some of the staff alongside me to sort of, okay, so, yeah, we'll do that.

**Interviewer:** That's great. Do you feel like the organisation impacted your local community?

**Interviewee:** Not particularly because I was living in a different part of Edinburgh from the centre. Yeah, yeah.

**Interviewer:** How did it feel to be part of the movement during the time that you were involved in it, if you know what I mean? Like...

**Interviewee:** It actually, there were kind of two levels because in the UK it was a small and apparently dying, possibly, organisation. In the rest of the world, it was huge, you know, millions of members in Uganda, I seem to remember, or Nigeria, I can't remember which, I think Uganda. Some of the African countries where the women all have the same fabric made up into their dresses and hats and they come in, like they're in a uniform at the World Council. This is only tangential, but the world Y had a group that visited Israel-Palestine. It was a delegation from different countries, a fact-finding thing, and the Israeli authorities realised that they were there only as they were leaving, and so at the airport they were all searched and really, you know, interviewed for a great length of time and all taken off individually and everything and one of the women who'd gone from England said to me, you know, I will always remember that whatever it's like here, somebody at Ben-Gurion airport spent two hours trying to prove I was a member of the YWCA. You know, and I thought, yeah, it's that, you know, I'm part of that, even if we're just a little women's group in some obscure bit of Scotland or whatever, you know, we're part of this, actually sometimes really important movement and so sometimes it felt kind of small and even small-minded here. Particularly in the early stages, not at the Roundabout, but that was where there was a slight disjuncture. But then when you realised what you were actually part of, women fighting for their rights in so many parts of the world, that, yeah, it meant a lot.

**Interviewer:** So there's a question here about there being, if there was any photographs or objects from the time you were involved that you'd like to share with us. Now, I just wondered if you'd like to, for the recording, give us a little bit of an overview of some of the archival objects that you've ended up with from the time that you were involved with the organisation.

**Interviewee:** I do have lots of photographs. I can't access them at the moment because that's before digital and they're all printed and they're in boxes. I've had to clear out quite a lot of stuff. I've still kept some badges. The smallest one is in some ways the most precious because it's a tiny little World YWCA badge. That's what you get if you've been at a World Council meeting.

**Interviewer:** The blue triangle.

**Interviewee:** Yeah, it's the blue triangle in a gold circle and that was from the centenary of the World YWCA. That was celebrated at a World Council meeting in Seoul, which was actually in 1995 and the centenary was 1994, but it was near enough and there's my Young Women's Movement 100 badge. Together we can make a difference. It's our world as another world Y one, but I've got, yes, so I've got lots of little bits and pieces, including a shalwar kameez in the wardrobe, which was made for me by one of the young women at the Roundabout Centre when we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Roundabout, and I was the chair at the time. So there are photographs of me somewhere in the shalwar kameez with a curly perm, which was very fashionable in those days, but looks dreadful [laughing].

**Interviewer:** Thanks so much for sharing that. Were there any major political or social events that happened during your time at the organisation?

**Interviewee:** [Pause] I mean, there were things happened in the world, obviously, but I can't, I'm sure there must have been, but I can't think particularly.

**Interviewer:** That's okay, if nothing comes to mind.

**Interviewee:** I think there was, there was quite a movement towards independence for Scotland. It got a bit stronger for a while and it was probably during that time that we became YWCA Scotland, rather than just the Scottish National Council of the British YWCA but that's probably the only thing, I think.

**Interviewer:** And did it feel like you were part of a global movement?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, definitely. It's always difficult to convey that to people who'd never seen it outside Scotland. I don't know if you've ever been to an international meeting, but if you have, it's really difficult to communicate when you get back without doing the kind of, I've had such a wonderful time and you lot haven't, just to convey how amazing it is to be part of this big organisation. I know others who've done the same have also found it really difficult, because it's, when you come back from anywhere, if people haven't been there, then it's just a bit difficult for them to appreciate what it was like but yeah, from my point of view, very definitely.

**Interviewer:** Were there other movements that the Young Women's Movement were involved with or partnered with at all, would you say?

**Interviewee:** We didn't do enough of that, I don't think. I mean, apart from the YMCA, obviously. In some local places, you know, they would work with the council, or, I mean, in Edinburgh, we worked with the council on different things, like the English classes but not to the extent that the Young Women's Movement does today and I think that was probably a lost opportunity. I suppose we worked with the NHS in terms of the Play in Hospital scheme. Yeah, maybe we did just as much, and I just haven't thought about it [laughing].

**Interviewer:** How do you feel about how the movement has evolved?

**Interviewee:** Essentially really positive. I don't know whether the Young Women's Movement still feels very much part of a world movement. I'd be sorry if it didn't, and I hope people still get the opportunity to go to international meetings, the World Council meeting, that kind of thing. Or even just to link up with a YWCA somewhere else and have an exchange visit or something. Use the internet [laughing] if you can't afford more than that because the opportunity to learn from other people is always worthwhile but yeah, when I see what's happening in terms of the young women's leadership training and things that happen in the parliament and that kind of thing, yeah, all very positive. It looks good.

**Interviewer:** What impact do you feel that you achieved during your involvement with the movement, would you say?

**Interviewee:** I hope I had some influence on the fact that it did become a bit more professional and run by young women for young women. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** And what would you like the future of the movement to look like?

**Interviewee:** [Pause] I would, yeah, I would like it still to, I'd like its influence to increase, probably and, sorry, more young women to be involved but I think it is quite sort of respected organisation and certainly I would want that to continue because to be known for the quality of the work and that it's, in Scotland, if you want to know what young women feel about something or how they're affected by something, that the young women's movement would be who you would automatically turn to.

**Interviewer:** That's great. We're nearly coming to the end. I wondered if you would say that you experienced any challenges with the organisation or during your time at the organisation, or the organisation maybe faced challenges, you would say?

**Interviewee:** Funding was always difficult, although not as bad in my time as it became subsequently. I think we had an image problem when I was first involved. The YWCA was known as the Twinset and Pearls Brigade and so, yeah, it had an image that we needed to work against in order to be recognised as actually for the work that we were doing. Yeah, so probably that was it.

**Interviewer:** And is there anything that you would like to see improved still in the organisation?

**Interviewee:** [Pause] I think I don't know the organisation well enough now to know, I mean, whatever the organisation, there are always things that you can improve on, but I wouldn't be able to identify them.

**Interviewer:** And before we finish up, is there anything else that you'd like to share, anything we've not touched on?

**Interviewee:** I don't think so. I think we've touched on an awful lot. Yeah. Just, I'm very grateful to have found the organisation. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Well, thank you so much. Thank you for your time, for sharing your experiences. It's been great.