

Marie Jones with Patrick McNeill

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Patrick

Marie, your son tells me that you are 96.

Marie

That's right. I was born in London, East End, in 1928.

Patrick

So you were a little girl in the East End in the 1930s and then the war broke out in September 1939. How did that affect you?

Marie

I was evacuated at the beginning of the war when all the children were evacuated, especially in the East End of London. We lived quite near the docks and we had really bad times there. I mean, I'll tell you one incident, which is unbelievable. My mother's aunt had a shop at one time and we lived above the shop. It's three storeys up and we had no air raid shelter, nowhere at all. Literally. We had no garden. We had a yard but there was nowhere there you could take cover. The odd thing, and everybody that lived in those times will remember this, whenever a house was bombed out all that was left was the basic house but there was always the staircase intact. So it became known that the safest place was under the stairs. I can remember having the flu, when I was really ill and Mum used to sit up in a hard chair or kitchen chair with my sister on her lap. All through the night. During the bombing. And I can remember the cupboard under the stairs was where the coal was put and I slept on the coals with a dressing gown or something like it flung over the top. But you could feel the lumps up through it. That was the only feeling of safety that you had until the all-clear went and then you could get up and go to bed. But in one of those raids, we got a bomb drop outside. It was a crossroads and the paving stones came through the top of the house. Right through the roof. Through the bed. Right the way through. And the water mains went and so all our clothing was soaking wet. I mean, this was how bad it was.

And Mum sent me with a case and said "Go home with Dad and see what you can salvage." Well, there was hardly anything that was in good nick so the Council used to give you... Oh, I don't know, some kind of place to go in these cases. There was a big place, big like a theatre in the East End, called the People's Palace. They used to have people donate things and it was all on rails. They would give you entrance to it and you could go in and see what you could take that would fit you. And it was all free because none of it was new. I mean, some of it would have been nice. I can remember picking up for myself a quite pretty navy blue... the most unsuitable thing you could say, but I was only 12.

Yes, it was the beginning of the war. Then we were evacuated, but the other funny thing... I was living in this, as I thought, pretty dangerous place near the docks. Because it was well known that the bombers followed the river so they could bomb everything that was being unloaded. And I was right near the river. And if it wasn't that, it was the railway lines they could follow. You couldn't get away from it. You know, you were gonna get it or not. And that was it.

This is only what I think but our schools lack in teaching the children about this war. Nobody has even dared, it seems, to give them lessons on what the last war was like, but the people that went through it are still alive and they can tell you what it was like.

I was very lucky. My family, a lot of my family, all my relatives came through the war. My mother and father. My sister. They did come through the war.

When they evacuated us, I thought that was the oddest thing. They sent us down near Brighton. We were going towards the enemy, going closer. And I thought "Who plans these things?" I mean, wouldn't it seem strange to you? You'd think to go further away, wouldn't you? Sending a crowd of children down to Sussex to a little tiny village that didn't really have the capacity for them. It had a railway station.

Patrick

How long did you stay in that village?

Marie

In this little village? Gosh, how long was I there? It wasn't long because the woman they sent us to... Ah, that was sad. When we got out at the station, the children from the school were all packed up to go to this village. So we got to the station and we went into this room, some part of the school, all standing there waiting. It reminded me of a film "No room at the inn." People came, like farmers who wanted to take children to work on a farm. So they were allowed to do that. And it went on till gradually the numbers went down. And then there was just twin girls and myself. My sister went with my mother, she was evacuated somewhere else. And just us three and nowhere for us to go. Nobody had a vacancy. Not a house or anything. There were a couple but there was always something wrong. One man had something wrong with his chest so they couldn't consider him and that's how it went on until the only person left was a youngish girl and her husband, and she was pregnant. And she was very young. And they had this little two-bedroom house. I think it was two or three bedrooms, but it wasn't a huge place. But she said "Oh all right", she'll take us but it wasn't fair. The young girl; it was her first baby.

There was a hill behind the house. And on the top of the hill was two windmills which they called Jack and Jill and the last time I went to see it they were still there. Never forget that. But this young woman was so kind to us. She took all three of us.

They took over one of the schools in the nearest town, which was Hurstpierpoint. That's quite a well-known place. Well, they took over a house there, a really nice manor house. And we went to the school there. God knows what it looked like when us lot had gone. I can remember lovely staircases sweeping down, you know, but anyway, that was that. And we stayed there until the finish.

After a few years, my mother said "You and your sister, you're coming home." The bombing had dropped a lot and I said "Why?" and she said about the woman. She said it's not fair. She's having a struggle. She had another baby by then. But she was like, you know, an aunt to us. My mother was one of the really old-fashioned East Enders, very shy, and never told us anything about babies. Nothing. I mean, that was a hidden story. So the woman gave us our sex instruction, but she put it over so sweetly, you know. And we were just looking forward to this baby. But I never saw it because I came home. We went back home to London because things had quietened down by then.

Patrick

So you were there for only a few months.

Marie

Well, it was a bit more than a few months. It must have been over a year.

Patrick

And you went back to London?

Marie

Yes, and we went and stayed with an aunt and slept in her shelter because they had... I don't know if you know what an Anderson shelter is. Well, there was about six or seven of us sleeping in there. That's where we slept whenever there was bombing because they were in Dagenham. But we still couldn't get anywhere to live. Terrible time that was. But you know, these are Londoners. They get through everything.

Patrick

So there you are back in London and you're into your teens by now, aren't you? Towards the end of the war and you left school.

Marie

Yes, I left school at 14 and started work straight away. For John Lewis in the West End. I used to have to go up there on the bus. That was my first time earning money. And I've worked ever since. I've never not worked. Never indeed. And I've always liked work. You know, I was always... not fantastic, but reasonably good with maths. So I've got through everything there, but I enjoyed school, loved going to school and I enjoyed working.

When I was 15, I went into hospital with TB and I spent some years in hospital. Then I got married.

Patrick

How did you meet your husband?

Marie

I met John at a place in Shoreditch where there was a warehouse, a shoe warehouse where I worked after John Lewis. That was my first knowledge of shoes but that was basic, I was just on the floor, you know? It was at the time when you had to have coupons. I was in the coupon office sorting out how many coupons the customer had to produce before I could give him any shoes.

That's where I met John. He worked there too. And we started courting. We found two rooms at the top of a house, which cost us a pound each room.

And that was the start of our marriage. We got married in London and went on from there.

But we always had my chest as a background, you know, and being ill. When we were in the house, we lived at the top with these two rooms and the roof leaked and it was coming through into the bedroom and all that. So I twisted a couple of arms at the Council and said "You know it's running all down the walls." So they gave me a flat near Romford in Essex and I moved into that with John. We were in there for a few years and then managed to swap the flat for something else.

You know, the flat was a Council place. But that got us out because the neighbours were East Enders and a right family. I would try to pretty everything up, hanging flower baskets and all that. And one of their kids would... Every time I went to London to see my mother at weekends, because she missed seeing me, he'd come along with all the pots of geraniums I'd hung around the door and smash them up. And I said to John, we've gotta move out of here because I don't want my children growing up like that. We decided we would start to save to buy a place because, as I say, we were in a Council house. Not the best of neighbours, but you couldn't pick and choose. And that was the reason for moving out here.

John was a travelling salesman. He travelled all over Britain which meant he was away from home quite a lot. I used to make him sandwiches and drinks and stuff for his lunch 'cos we weren't very well off in those days. His work took him all over Hertfordshire and he discovered this place by going to one of his customers in Hemel Hempstead. Cutting through Nomansland was the straightest way from Essex.

I'd been evacuated to that village in Sussex and I was very taken with that, you know, a small village. I suppose I must have talked to John about it. And when he came home from having been here, he said "I think I've found the place you'd like to live. We'll go over there at the weekend and have a look." They were building the estate.

And we came up at the weekend and a funny thing happened. I had our oldest son with me; he was only little at the time. We went in to look at the houses and there was no one working there. So we just had to look round, you know, poking in the rooms to see what they were like, how big they were, and we went upstairs. Entered the front bedroom. I don't know who did it but one of us opened the window and was looking out at the view. You know, admiring it all. And then what happened? One of them came into the bedroom that we were in and, because the window was open, the wind blew and shut the window and also shut the door. So we were locked in the bedroom. Nobody's working there and nobody within sight to let us out. We didn't know what to do. Oh, what a pickle.

So we're working out, you know, would it be easy to get out the window and get one of the others? I mean it was only two storeys. None of us were that tall. You know, it wasn't a case of standing on someone's shoulders. John had in his younger days worked with a building firm and he saw somebody in the road and called him over, he said "Mate, could you do us a favour?" and he said "Well, if I can. What's wrong?" John said "Well, we've locked ourselves in. We've got no keys. No way of undoing it this side. And we can't get out. And there's no workmen inside." So the chap said "What do you want me to do?"

John's remembering his working days and he said "If you have a look round, you might find two pieces of metal like that, about the same size." Just holding up two fingers like that and flat. "And if you put them together, you might find they will go in the lock and will turn the lock."

I mean, you don't have to be a burglar, do you? You can pick it up anywhere. So the man found two pieces of metal, sticks them in the lock of the door and there we are, we're out. So, if you want any tips on burglary, remember what I've told you, but don't tell them who told you. But that was so funny. We found it very amusing, but we'd had a good look round the place.

We found out the people that were selling these places, the developers. I can't remember what their name was, but what I liked... the whole thing about it was the country feeling. We found out who was selling them and their address; that was somewhere on the Thames.

Anyway, we went there and asked to see about these places. So they said "You want to see the map" and we had a look at that and we talked about it and the more I talked the more I was falling in love with the place. So we asked when they would be finished and all that, we got all the information we could and then we followed it up from there. I did some calculations. How long was it gonna take us to be able to buy? Well, at that time the cost of it was 3,000 or something like that. Very, very cheap. It went up to 4,200 before we got in. This was at the top of the hill. It was a four-bedroom house, a garden equally as big as this one, very long. A garage, much the same as this, but not a chalet bungalow like this.

And so that's how we went on from there. Saving like mad, you know, going without every single thing we could. People coming into my house must have thought I was a poor thing. Ragged curtains, you know, 'cos the dog had clawed at the curtains. And things like that. And we really did cut it fine. But we saved. I used to do a lot of handicraft like dress-making, things like that. I did City & Guilds and passed that. And I was earning, I was even doing outside machining. You know, when you collect it, bring it home, machine it and then take it back and they pay you. So gradually, as I say, we've got the deposit. And we moved up here.

Patrick

So you moved into the house in Butterfield Road and lived there with the children, and your husband working as a travelling salesman. That's in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, there were two big employers in Wheathampstead, Murphy's and Helmets. Did you have anything to do with them?

Marie

No. The only thing I had to do with them was my next-door neighbour worked for Murphy's to do with analysing soil samples.

Patrick

Did you do your shopping in the village?

Marie

Yes, and I'll tell you what I liked about it... you were talking to people, your neighbours, you might say. You spoke to the people that you see day after day and you bought your food from them. There were a couple of people like our baker in the village. He was on the television. He was interviewed because they liked his bread. This was a bit of a pat on the back, as far as we were concerned. The people from Harpenden used to come down to Mr Hall to buy his bread. And particularly his doughnuts. My eldest son, when they interviewed in the village, they spoke to Paul, and said "What do you think of Mr Hall's doughnuts?" And Paul says "He doesn't put enough jam in them."

I used to go to a friend who lived near Woburn. I used to take the children to the zoo. And there was always a trip down to Mr Hall to see if he had any stale bread because it was Easter and Good Friday, something like that. My friends used to come up to me over the Easter holiday. He'd always let me have stale bread. And we used to take them because in Woburn they used to have the elephants roped in, and you could stand to feed them. And so that was a special treat. I don't know if it was more for the elephants or for us.

I knew Mr Hall's bread and he used to make baps, do you know what baps are? They're flat and brown. Flat rolls. But they were so sweet. Lovely bread and he was very popular. And he lived a long time.

But the other thing that was funny, and a lot of people would remember this. The river, you know, runs through the village. Well, Mr Hall's shop is right by where the river used to go over the road. The quay. The swans used to come over and cross the road. And if you did leave the door open to the baker's, they'd be in the shop. That was a certainty because I've seen it happen and they'd be in. So you didn't dare go in and leave the door ajar. You know, you'd be in and out, shut the door behind you, otherwise the swans would be in with you. And before Mr Hall died it was a regular thing that he used to gather up all the stale bread and take it over, cross the road to where the river was, and spread the bread for the geese or the swans. And again, if nobody came over, the swans would come over and with their beaks tap on the door or the window. Yes, and I'll tell you another thing. That wasn't anything to do with Mr Hall. It was later than that. But at one time the other baker, coming up the hill, there was a baker's there. And I wished at one time I had had a camera with me because the baker's was closed and they were waiting to open, I think. And there was a queue of geese or swans outside and I thought at the time "What an advert!" It would have been wonderful to have got them all queuing out very neatly outside the door.

But you know this is the kind of charm you get in a place like this.

There's always people. Nobody has to beg for someone to do something. They get offered. I mean, there's a place that was just a piece of ground, quite nice. You could go and walk there. Now it's been made into a little flower garden. Nobody asked anyone to do it. They just gathered people together and built it and decorated it, did everything themselves. And a friend of mine who has died, she's got a seat down there with her name on it. If you're talking of anyone doing good, it would be Audrey. She did loads of things. She started something in the doctor's. It was something you could post in if you found anything could have been changed for the better. Sort of suggestions box. And you put your name, you know, and nobody's gonna make any trouble. It was just a suggestion.

Patrick

Did the children go to the local school?

Marie

Yes. They started off in Saint Helen's. Then it was about the time that Matthew was born that Beech Hyde was built so he went there. I liked Beech Hyde and the ideas about the school. They were much more advanced as far as I was concerned than Saint Helen's. I always had a lot to do with the school. It was not all of my choosing. Matthew was terrible. Anything that anybody wanted he'd say "My Mum will do that". You know, he volunteered me. For everything, whether I was dishing out the orange juice at the races or taking them on holiday. Took them to Wales. School group. I was one of them. I said to the teacher "Look, I can't do the work. I can't look after them. Not climbing." I knew Wales from holidays and I said "I can't do that." "Oh" he said "You won't have to do anything like that."

And we were in this kind of big house that was like a hostel and the first day we were going out, he called them all out and he divided them into groups of eight I think it was, and put eight on one side and said to me "They're yours". And I said "You said I wasn't to look after them." "Oh" he said "It'll only be simple things. They'll be doing some of the things as well, the children themselves." But I knew it. We finished up climbing up the hills and up the, what was it, Caernarvon Castle? And I had my heart in my mouth watching because I felt responsible. Yes, which in a way I was. Although I wouldn't admit they were any responsibility of mine. But you know when they're climbing on the ramparts, all these young children. But anyway, I still know some of them. They're all grown up with their own grandchildren, but they live down this road

Patrick

And it was at about that time that they opened the secondary school in Butterfield Road, wasn't it?

Marie

Yes. I'm really sad to say it was the most stupid thing of all, in my opinion, only in my opinion, that they pulled it down. That was a school... well, you've seen the room we've got up here, all that space. And that school had had a new science room. They had done a lot to make it up to date. And then they pulled it down, and it was a question of that or the one in Harpenden. And I can't stand it when something unnecessary is done like that because I couldn't see any reason. The room that was over here, where all those houses are, which were opposite me. All went to houses. The school was demolished. I always felt that it could have been better used.

Harpenden has got a step up on Wheathampstead. A lot of the women that I know from Wheathampstead preferred a Harpenden postcode. It gave them a more... what do you call it? A bit more status. And I said to my friend, "Why did you move?" because she had spent a lot of money on work done on the new house that she bought in Butterfield Road. I said to her "Why did you move?" And she said "I was fed up being a chauffeur to my kids." The children belonged to the Cycling Club and everything they could belong to in Harpenden. They were in the Tennis Club, whatever there was. But they couldn't or apparently couldn't get in unless they lived at an address in Harpenden. And it was status.

Patrick

Did you or the children have any connections with the secondary school here? Did your boys go to that school? They started off in the primary school, but which secondary school did they go to?

Marie

Paul, the eldest one, won a scholarship to Saint Albans Grammar. The others went on from the same school into the secondary school. But they've all made their own way. Strangely enough, all doing the same thing. They're selling. I can only think it's their voice that makes the difference. Like their father's.

Patrick

OK, so there you are living in Butterfield Road and looking after the children. When they grew up... you said that when you were younger you were a salesperson yourself. Did you pick that up again in later life?

Marie

I didn't start selling straight away. After I had done my City & Guilds, the school opposite had a teacher there who was a handicraft teacher but she had arthritis. And I'm looking ahead thinking "She's going to have to give that job up. You can't do sewing with arthritis." So I'm thinking "I'm living right opposite. Ideal job for me with the children within reach, local, come home for dinner or whatever." And so that's what I kept in my mind. So I thought, well, I'm going to need a teaching certificate. So I went for a teaching certificate. And I got that.

Patrick

How old were you then?

Marie

I would have been somewhere about 50, bit younger maybe. I did my City & Guilds and I quite liked that cause it was the job I liked. Sure, you know, handicraft.

But then John died when he was 50. He had cancer. And so that left me a widow with the children. I didn't start selling straight away. Well, I did. Because after John died, I said to the manager "Would you consider letting me take over from John?" Now this was not a job for women generally. I don't know if you know anything about shoes or carrying them, but he had very big cases with the shoes all laid in pairs. Everything had to look nice to show your customer. But it was heavy because the cases that John had and I took over were made of wood. So that plus the weight of the shoes, there's not many women would take on a job like that. But this fool did and I took over and made a success of it.

Really. Yes, I took over my husband's business. And then Martin came in and worked with me. So it's the whole family, they're all salesmen. Salespeople. I'm one of the few ladies in the kind of selling I do.

In fact, it was an extremely nice job because the people were so nice. But the reason it was so good was that John was a very nice man and there wasn't a person that said otherwise. So all the customers transferred their attachment to me. And although I knew my boss, the person who owned the firm, was not very keen on taking me on, I think his brother probably pushed him into it. He suggested we went out for a meal and had a chat. But anyway. I've got the job. I went out with the cases and as I say, I know that it was John's... I don't know what you could call it, but his way of selling. Well, one customer said to me, "John never sold you shoes. He let you buy them." And he would never sell you anything that he felt wasn't worthy of you to have. These were old ladies' shoes. Wide fitting, but good quality leather. You know, the best. And so that's how it went on. And I went on selling and selling and that was it.

Patrick

So you were selling shoes, but you did the teaching certificate as well.

Marie

Yes, yes. I can't even remember whether I've still got it because it didn't come to anything. See, I'd transferred my earnings to the shoes, so you know anything else was scrubbed out.

Patrick

So the idea of taking on the handicraft teacher's job, that never went anywhere.

Marie

That had to be scrubbed. I knew I could earn more money selling the shoes because, as I say, I had John's history behind me. And I didn't have to put on any salesmanship. It came with me.

Patrick

I was introduced to you at the Thursday Club. Have you always been involved with local clubs?

Marie

I do lots of things. I'm always into handicrafts and I'm doing these (*shows crocheted shawls*). Several of them here. I made shawls for the Over 60s Club. I did this some years ago before I'm at the Club I'm in now. There was one previous to that and I started doing the shawls and they went into raffles, people liked them and wanted to buy them. Most of it is voluntary work. I don't charge. And I don't spend any money. It's all given. My sister is a terrible one for starting things and never finishing them, especially when it comes to knitting. So it gets passed over to me. I finish up untangling it all and make it into something that's useful.

There's loads of things that go on in the Club. We all went to the local school. Aldwickbury. And you can either have a lunch or breakfast. You paid for it. I don't know what they did with the money. I never asked. I went and I had it because I liked it, but I'll be quite honest, I won't go again. But it was a get-together and, you know, chat and there's a golf links there as well. I had avocado with poached eggs.

That sounds quite posh, doesn't it? Well, I didn't find it posh, but it wasn't my kind of thing. I think it would have been better if we'd been sitting in smaller tables and had a cosier chat but everybody was talking loud. It was a long table, so you couldn't talk to each other. You could only talk to the person next to you and that was it.

Well, I do what I can for the club because... These were one of the first things I used to do, these shawls and these are crochet.

When I first got into **this** club I went to look in the door to see what it was like, 'cos I'd forgotten from the first time I'd seen it. And they were at these lovely tables and all these ladies were sitting there colouring books. I looked at them and I thought "This isn't for me, no."

But my children were saying, you know, "You ought to go. You don't know, it might be nice, you know, try it." And I thought "Yes, I can't just cross it off." So I did go and I said to the woman that ran it "What do I do?" "Oh", she said, "phone Violet. She'll tell you what to do." So I did and I went on the first Thursday that they invited me. I took my knitting with me, and they were still doing their water-colouring. Some of them were very nice. You know, colouring, blending and all that, very nice. But it just wasn't me. So I took my knitting with me. Now I'm sitting at the table, only doing a little bit, and someone said "What are you doing?" I said "Oh, I'm making this shawl" and told her what I was doing. Another woman came up and she said, I don't know if it was the same week or the following week, she said "Hello Marie." Of course, that was nice, everyone where they sat had their name on the card they've written, hand-written, very nicely done as well. But your name was there and that was your seat. I was at the top of the table. I had to laugh at that. So I'm sitting there knitting. This lady came alongside of me. And the thing is, it's nice that they can say "Hello, Marie." Immediately you've made connection.

And she said "Could you show me how to cast on? I used to be able to and now I can't remember how to cast on." Fortunately, I had some needles. Someone had given them to my friend and I didn't know what to do with them because they're all marked in metric. And I couldn't change them but my eldest boy has a what-do-you-call-it machine and got it changed. And he's got them all printed out and he's had it copied and I can get it copied for

anyone else who wants it. And now I've got all these needles and they are both in English and in metric.

Also this German friend of his gave him knitting patterns, in German. I couldn't read German but there's a knitting class down in the village. So I went down there one day when they were having their knitting class and I said "I don't know if any of these are any good. I'm just hoping someone here, or someone you know, speaks German." And as it happens, somebody did. And so I said, "Well, perhaps you might be able to transcribe these or do what else you like with them." And gave them all the knitting patterns. So that unloaded me, and I'm sure somebody will be using them. It just shows you what you think is rubbish, someone else can always use it. Things like that get help from one to the other.

Living in a small place, you get all these links. People know each other and somebody knows somebody. Yes, you bet your life there was other people that spoke German. I mean it's not unheard of nowadays to have a German friend or a German-speaking friend. They're given languages now far more easily than when I was at school.

Indeed, I'd love to have been able to... Well, I'll tell you one stupid thing. Three times, I think it was, I went to an evening class for French. One of the times I had to give it up was because I was pregnant and I couldn't sit in the desk. That was only one time, I can't remember what the others were, but I know there were about three times when I had to give up French. But what annoyed me, I'd paid my money, you know, you have to pay up front. I'd paid my whole term's money, and I've never got even half a term. Didn't get my money's worth. But I'll never forget that. It's always got a laugh at parties, you know.

I've had some funny... because I've travelled a lot. I've been on holiday and travelled quite a lot but I've had some very funny things happen to me when I've been on holiday. I went to Kenya and I went on my own. Really looking forward to it because I love to be where the real thing is. It's all right being in a zoo but to be out in the wild like that, it really thrills me. And I was amazed at how well they did it. You know, there was a lovely swimming pool. Lovely beds to lay on. Food was great. I couldn't fault it, it was like first class.

So one day they had all gone up to the swimming pool and I went up there for a while and then I said, "Well, I'm going back to my room." Because I was on my own in the room. I said "I'm going back to my room because I want to wash my hair and put my rollers in." I went back to the place and I was going to wash my hair. So I went in the bathroom, which was a shower, and washed my hair and I came out and it had a louvred window in the door so I could see through. And what I'd forgotten was I had left the door open into the wild so anything could come in, the door was open. And I remember looking out and seeing this baboon come into the room. And the next-door neighbour called out to his wife ". Oh, a baboon's just come out of Marie's room. He's got something, but I don't know what he's got."

I had paid something like a hundred pounds to borrow a movie camera and I thought "Oh, please don't let it be that." Anyway, when I went there, it wasn't. That was on one of the beds. I was terrified that it was the camera or something else. But anyway, I watched him and he went up over the grass and the feller in the next cabin went after him and I called out "Oh Bill, don't chase him." He said "Why not? He's got something." I said "I know, it's my makeup and I can't get any more. Don't chase him." So there's a baboon sitting out there with my makeup bag. He's got the makeup out and he's got hold of the tube of face cream and he bit it because he couldn't get the top off. So it was all round here. Then he got hold of the lipstick. And he was poking with great long fingernails poking down, but he could get it out and he tasted it. And something else he got hold of. Anyway, at the finish, I went back

and all I was worried about was whether he took my passport. My bag was there. That was funny.

But, you know, I've had occurrences like that that have stood me in good stead if I went out for a meal with friends. When you go out with people that you know very well you can be a bit cheeky and let your hair down.

Another story. Going back to when I was working. I've called into a shop next door but one to my friend Rob who had a shop in the market and somebody came to the door while I was in the shop. The shopkeeper I wanted to see was serving and said "I can't see you, I've got someone." He looked round. Of course, all he could see was me and not expecting a woman salesman, so he ignored me. And he said "Where is he?" And Rob said "Yes, of course you don't know. This is Marie Jones." He said "Oh sorry, Marie. I knew your husband but I've never met you before." And when he was going out he said to the shopkeeper "Oh, sorry for interrupting, I'll make an appointment with you." He said "Yeah, do that". And then he turned to me and he said "Do you know, when you come in the shop, I never think of sex." And I said "Thank you so much, you've made my day." But the way he said it, you know, so casually. But of course nobody expected a woman salesman.