**Oral History Transcription**

**Rewind – Leonard Cheshire Disability, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund**

**Participants:**

Jill Roberts – archivist

Biddy Murray – volunteer at Heatherley and Mayfield House

**Duration:** 50 minutes 29 seconds

**Date of Original Recording:** 25th January 1996 **Transcription Date:** 8th December 2016  
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**Summary of Main Points:**

00:00:18 – Biddy talks about how she came to volunteer at Heatherley Cheshire Home

00:05:49 – Biddy discusses her experiences with Pamela and Rowland Farrell

00:13:24 – Biddy talks about Peter Marshall – resident at Heatherley and author of the book which was behind the film ‘The Raging Moon’.

00:23:18 – Biddy talks about a trip to Lourdes with Vic, a Heatherley resident.

00:28:38 – Biddy discusses her trip to Turin to deliver a film about the Turin Shroud to a church there on behalf of Leonard Cheshire.

00:34:30 – Biddy talks about how she has returned to volunteering with the Leonard Cheshire Foundation at Mayfield House in Edinburgh.

**Start of transcription**

00:00:08 - Jill: This is an oral history tape made with Mrs Biddy Murray on Thursday, the 25th of January 1996.

00:00:18 – Jill: Biddy, you were a volunteer with the Foundation, I think at Heatherley Home. Some years ago, in the sixties, was it? What was your first contact with the Foundation?

00:00:29 - Biddy: Yes, that's correct. It would be very early sixties, let me think. Let me see, probably 1961, I think.

00:00:41 - Jill: Yes.

00:00:42 - Biddy: My contact was because partly one had knowledge of Cheshire and Cheshire's exploits as we were young children influenced by our father and the war and actually born before, just before the war. And although my father was dead by that time, but had been interested in what he did, as many people, and then the time came when I happened to have a job with plenty of spare time, and I thought it would be nice to do something for somebody. I've always had this inkling. Whether I've come out doing any better, I don't know, but so I found out information...where the office was, somewhere up in the West End of London.

00:01:39 - Jill: This is the central Foundation offices, yes?

00:01:42 - Biddy: Yes, I don't think it's there now.

00:01:44 - Jill: No, no, in London. So you phoned them, and...

00:01:48 - Biddy: Yes.

00:01:49 - Jill: And they put you onto...

00:01:51 - Biddy: Well they suggested an interview with one of their people and I went along with a friend of mine who was also working with me and by chance, Cheshire was there at the time.

00:02:04 - Jill: Really?

00:02:05 - Biddy: Yes. He happened to be at the office. We obviously knew who he was. And I think he just said some casual word like, "Well, good luck with the interview," or something, obviously knowing what the point was. And I remember talking to Sally afterwards, how lucky we were to have met him. And I wasn't even sure that I would see him again, because I knew he was already at that stage of being quite busy, and anyway, I wanted to help in one of their homes. The trouble was, I lived in Middlesex and I hadn't been able to find anywhere too near or near enough. And he, that is, Mr Markham, told me the only place he thought would be in Sussex, the other side.

00:02:53 - Jill: Mr Markham was interviewing you, is that right?

00:02:55 - Biddy: Yes, that's right, yes.

00:02:57 - Jill: And he suggested Heatherley Home?

00:02:59 - Biddy: Yes, that is correct. And, um... As I travelled quite a bit, because I was quite happy on undergrounds and trains, I thought that would be nothing. As it was, it was a bit further than I thought. But I had partly my... ..my underground partly by, as they called it, Southern Electric and I was often picked up by a very nice lady that worked... ..gave a lot of her spare time and money to the home.

00:03:29 - Jill: How many times a week did you go?

00:03:31 - Biddy: Oh, I only went once a week to begin with, and as my own work got heavier, I went once a fortnight. But for a while I stayed overnight with my friend. That made me go more often. Then she wasn't available, so I just kept it for most of the years. I decided not to get into this habit and then let them down, rather, you see, so about a fortnight. And I used to go home at night, probably leave about five o'clock, I can't recall exactly. But it was always a very most wild day.

00:04:11 - Jill: And how many volunteers were there, do you think, at the time? Was it mainly run by volunteers or paid staff?

00:04:19 - Biddy: There were a lot of paid staff then, I recall. There was a matron, in the real sense. She wore a uniform. There were, the paid staff, I don't know what, such a long time ago... ..I don't know whether they were qualified nurses, but there were plenty of volunteers. But they would come at many hours that I didn't come, in the evening, local people. And because East Grinstead was quite a good community, seemed to be a friendly place, also wealthy, and that really does sound awful, but it does make a big difference to how a home is going to be run, if you've got big money in from people. And they never stopped giving. Always at the home they gave, always arranged things. The lady that picked me up, she did this, she did that, there were open days. Well, not an open day as such. There was one open day a year where Leonard Cheshire came to see us. But there was always something going on. Even though, of course, I didn't participate very often. So I would say it was like an average home today is run, with qualified staff more than... ..perhaps much more than now, maybe. But it was professionally organised, and with Mrs Farrell, the wife of Mr Farrell...

00:05:49 - Jill: Dr. Ginger Farrell?

00:05:51 - Biddy: Yes.

00:05:52 - Jill: Was he a resident at that time?

00:05:53 - Biddy: He was a resident when I arrived. He had Parkinson's. He had been a bomber pilot. Actually I think flew with Leonard Cheshire. He certainly was a friend of his. And um, he um...

00:06:10 - Jill: I believe it was through Dr. Farrell that his wife became quite a figure within the family.

00:06:15 - Biddy: Yes, that's right. Her children were at boarding school, her two sons, and I think she wanted to keep occupied, and I don't suppose there's too many jobs round that way, and she was involved and she was very good at it, and she went on to be more important, and she always spoke to me every time I went there.

00:06:42 - Jill: What was her position at Heatherley at that time?

00:06:44 - Biddy: She had no real position, no. She was unpaid and nobody who had unpaid positions...

00:06:50 - Jill: Had a title.

00:06:52 - Biddy: ..had a particular title, no, I don't think that was what would be decreed by Leonard Cheshire at the time.

00:06:58

- Jill: No, no.

- Biddy: I don't know.

00:07:00 – Biddy: But I think one of the perhaps funny, or not so funny things is Leonard Cheshire himself, by that time, was well into organising other homes, in the north of England, abroad, India, and he wasn't, didn't have all the time in the world, but of course because they considered they were one of the forerunners and important, like most of his first homes, was it, Le...

00:07:29 - Jill: Le Court.

00:07:30 - Biddy: Le Court, of course, was very important, down in Hants. And then went further up north. They wanted him there all the time. But I don't think they understood that he couldn't come, but…

00:07:42 - Jill: That was a problem, was it?

00:07:44 - Biddy: I think so, because they... ..are wholly influenced by

Cheshire or Cheshire's name. The patients, the residents, as they called them. Became the word "residents" but they didn't seem to mind at that time being called "patients". But anyway, some didn't know him, of course, as they joined. They wouldn't have known much about him. As time went on, particularly, they'd have known, heard of his name. So as time went on, it didn't matter so much that perhaps his influence was there. So perhaps he was free to see other things, and it's just everyone had their own point of view. Not so much the staff, but the patients, who after all lived with... But he was always very helpful when he came.

00:08:31 – Biddy: I always felt he was a strange man, because he had a lovely sense of humour, he spoke to people, but at the same time, well, I always felt that there was a reserve there, continually, that was kept there. Not that you couldn't say anything to him, because he would answer back quickly or laugh. But that reserve, I think, had to be there. Maybe it was this religious reserve that he had found. Or maybe it was a reserve that, if you give all, you would never get further than the Channel, let alone halfway around the world. Obviously ambition in his mind was already forming to have as many homes to help people that he could. I don't know, it was just my own interpretation. But he is always vivid in my mind, whereas many other areas, perhaps, I don't recall.

00:09:33 - Jill: Other people have mentioned that, a reserve they sensed, too.

00:09:36 - Biddy: I never had any opinion on whether he'd show up or not, but then I wasn't sitting in the chair. But as I said, I think later, I don't know what the influence of his later years was, because he wasn't too well, but before that, whether people expected him, I don't know, now that I'm connected with Mayfield House in Edinburgh, whether they have expected him to come, I don't know. But probably some of the people have gone anyway.

00:10:09 - Jill: Let's talk a little bit about the residents at Heatherley at that time. We're in the sixties now. I believe Dr. Ginger Farrell was quite well liked, was he?

00:10:17 - Biddy: He was loved, he was absolutely loved. And although he was getting worse, really, he had an operation to try and help his Parkinson's, but he still would shake, he always arrived for his meals, everything, and could, for a long time, could speak clearly, but after that he couldn't. But at the same time, they made him like an honorary position, I believe. He was the medical advisor. But I don't know how. For a while he probably could advise different things. Different aspects of medical knowledge. But I don't know what happened in the later time.

00:11:01 - Jill: When did he die?

00:11:05 - Biddy: I uh...

00:11:08 - Jill: Later?

00:11:11 - Biddy: He died before I left, but I can't recall. It seemed to be quite sudden. Looking at a photograph of him, with myself, I was thinking what a lovely home it was. The extension then was really nice. And some of the homes were not so good, I believe. They were very old. I suppose most people were fairly happy. Moving to another resident... ..just reminded me, a lady, I don't remember her name or anything, she was about 45 with two children. Her husband was a farmer and she had MS, and she came to the home. And because he had so much work to do, the children were young, and I don't know whether he could afford to have a so-called nanny. Anyway, there was somebody that was looking after them. Someone.

00:12:17 - Jill: And the lady was unhappy, was she?

00:12:19 - Biddy: Well, eventually, she was told by somebody else, I recall, not her husband, I think, I don't know really, that she was living in the home as a replacement. Which, a replacement for the wife. And with the husband, living with the husband, because he had to have someone for the children, of course. Anyway, but she got very ill after that, she just went downhill. She couldn't cope with it, and I think she willed herself to die. I remember that very...

00:12:55 - Jill: That's sad.

00:12:56 - Biddy: ..Yes, she wasn't there very long. But we didn't, there weren't many cases that I know of like that or I can recall. Lot of people were on their own. There was the twins, girls. I don't know their names now. 17, 18 they were, when they got in, and they went on very well. One became a good artist and one, I think, got engaged, I believe. So there's always hope. [Jill: Yes.] Biddy: They had Muscular Dystrophy.

00:13:24 - Jill: I believe there was a Peter Marshall?

00:13:27 - Biddy: Yes.

00:13:28 - Jill: Tell me a bit about him.

00:13:29 - Biddy: Peter was a polio victim, as they called them, and so many polio people around that time. And Diana was another one and they were friendly, and my husband Bob, he used to come occasionally, and he got very friendly with Peter, same sense of humour, same distorted sense of humour. And we used to take Peter and Diana out sometimes when we could get them in the van for a restaurant, but that wasn't so easy, and sometimes Bob used to just take Peter out for a meal and that. Anyway, they wanted to get engaged, Diana, but really nothing could come of that, because the difficulties, the financial difficulties would have been too much. So Peter eventually met one of the helpers later on, a couple of years later, and she became engaged, and by that time, Peter was always writing, and he wrote books. He got a good editor, publisher, Hutchinson, who helped him tremendously, and they were published, and the first two were very well known. The first one was an autobiography, already at that age, his full autobiography as up to that young age of about 28, 29. And the second one was a fiction based on two people in wheelchairs who fall in love and that was taken up on, um.....taken up by Bryan Forbes, that then-famous director. Made a film of it, made quite a lot of money off it.

00:15:10 - Jill: Called The Raging Moon?

00:15:12 - Biddy: Raging Moon. And the book was very good, and it was very popular, but not perhaps quite as much money for that time because people were still wary of publicising people in wheelchairs, and it's really through Cheshire and of course his wife that people have become aware of what... It's a human being in a wheelchair.

- Jill: Yes, yes.

00:15:38 - Biddy: And however bad someone quite looks were terrible and especially dreadful, but they're still human beings.

00:15:46 - Jill: Did Peter stay long at the home?

00:15:48 - Biddy: He was there a couple of years. He got some money.

00:15:54 - Jill: Why did he leave?

00:15:57 - Biddy: Well, he was... ..when I say "Yorkshire," that's not meant to be detrimental, because I...

00:16:06 - Jill: Down to earth, down to earth.

00:16:08 - Biddy: I was quite fond of him, but he was quite rude at times, but he was impatient because he knew what he could do, what he couldn't do, and he hated voluntary people. He absolutely had a horror of them.

00:16:20 - Jill: That must have been difficult for you, as a volunteer.

00:16:22 - Biddy: No, no, because I was also very blunt I think at that time, I don't think I've changed very much, and I got friendly with him in the beginning, and it was, we used to talk about books and I was... ..he was very anti-establishment, anti-anybody that spoke terribly well. And I used to go around seeing most people and speaking to them and then going back to the ones that I knew better, or... It varied.

00:16:53 - Jill: So you think if you have a difficult patient to deal with as a volunteer, you just have to deal with them on their own terms? Do you think that's true?

00:17:00 - Biddy: Oh, absolutely, if you can do it. If you can't, then you should leave. And get away and go to somebody else. If it's because they're so bad health-wise. You know, when someone can hardly speak and you can't hear, the voice is gone, you can't hear, that takes a lot of courage, or patience, not to say, "Oh, I can't hear, I can't hear anymore," you just say, "I'm not hearing you, "I'm not getting with you," or something like that, you see.

00:17:32 - Biddy: So Peter, going back to Peter, he didn't, when he found out I was a stewardess at that time with an airline, had no time for me at all when I used to walk in, because, "Oh, well, you're this, you're that, "you're that," and anyway, I kept persevering, and then I got friendly with Diana, the other lady with the polio in the other room, and we all used to get together, and in the end it was all quite funny. But he couldn't bear—it wasn't the volunteers-- he hated what you call "do-gooders". And there is a difference between do-gooders and helpers, but do-gooders do not mean badly. They mean well, as it says. And he was quite rude to some of the people. And this really came to the years of Mrs Farrell and upset any of her staff or any of the people that were coming who were contributing...

00:18:25 - Jill: So it must have been a difficult situation for both Mrs Farrell and Peter.

00:18:29 - Biddy: Yes, because she wanted everyone to be happy there, and she also realised his potential, she had met his publisher at one time or other, and he was a talented young man and needed privacy. But he didn't mix. But he certainly needed the privacy. But he didn't give very much. But everybody sort of tried. It wasn't desperately bad, but I think by that time,

he was getting, he was engaged to one of the young ladies, a paid worker, who used to help, and he was ambitious, now, with the money that was due

to him from the film, he was hoping to get his place to live anyway, some time or other, so I think because of his future, he lost, almost lost interest,

naturally, in where he was, because he felt he was wasting his life, and some people in wheelchairs are very anxious to use what they can, and eventually the Polio Fellowship helped with some money, and by the time everything was organised, Peter, I've forgotten his wife's name, they moved to Worthing. [Jill: Right.] Biddy: And there was also a polio home up the road, actually, and they were very happy. Unfortunately later he died younger than he should have done, because he had a very bad dose of pneumonia and, sad to say, the hospital didn't cater for the iron lungs, as they were called, and by the time they got one into Harrowgate, it was too late for him. And this, I think now they're realising, you can't just write off illnesses, because with polio, you always get lung trouble. So it was a tragic finish to his life, but at least he had achieved a tremendous lot. Amount, sorry, amount for someone in a chair.

00:20:48 - Jill: With his disabilities.

00:20:50 - Biddy: Yes, with his disabilities. And there's just one final thing on Peter. At the time, in the sixties, The Woman's Own was all the rage, compared to what, all the dozens of magazines now, and a famous man called Godfrey Winn. He owned television by that time, this sort of Agony Aunt, the radio and the magazines. He interviewed him and his wife and had a three page effort which was written very well, about them, photographs and their wee boy.

- Jill: Is that dated?

- Biddy: Dated, I'm ...

00:21:32 - Jill: So we don't have a date on that article

- Biddy: No.

- Jill: Never mind, never mind.

00:21:38 – Jill: So, just looking at the experience of being a volunteer for the Foundation over the sixties, what do you think Leonard Cheshire's attitude towards voluntary help was? Do you think he encouraged it? Or do you think it was part of his philosophy that the residents should be looked after by professionals? Which do you think?

00:21:58 - Biddy: To be honest, as much as I would like to give a point of view, I don't have one. I didn't see Leonard Cheshire very often, and I wasn't interested in that time, I suppose, a certain age, being busy at work, I just was working, I didn't have any knowledge. I think he would have encouraged volunteers, I'm absolutely convinced of that.

00:22:23 - Jill: Well certainly, I think they were used extensively. I think they were welcomed in most of the homes over the...

00:22:28 - Biddy: Well, I think also, apart from any personal reasons, he felt that was good for them.

00:22:34 - Jill: Good for the volunteers?

00:22:37

- Biddy: Yes.

- Jill: Yes.

00:22:38 - Biddy: The financial side would be, they couldn't manage without, and a lot of charities have failed in this, and I don't think they have ever failed at all. Neither charity or his wife. But I think that would be so. There was one other thing. I don't know the person, which would be interesting, because Leonard Cheshire is a devoted Catholic, or devout Catholic. I took Vic, my friend who had, I think they call it cerebral palsy now, I was very friendly with him.

00:23:16 - Jill: Was he a resident at Heatherley?

00:23:18 - Biddy: Yes, he was, he was a little man, and I used to take him down the road for a walk and that. And sometimes we popped into a pub and had a drink. Anyway, there was a trip going, an organised flight to Lourdes, and I said I would accompany him. And as a matter of fact, I don't remember who it was organised by, but Leonard Cheshire was on the flight and it was a five day trip, so it would have been partly, possibly, of the home or the Church. And so we went, and the volunteers had one particular place to stay in overnight, like big dormitories. And then of course the hospital was for the residents from all over the world. And Lourdes was always supposed to be... ..one of these places that was over... Oh dear.

00:24:21 - Jill: Over-commercialised.

00:24:23 - Biddy: Over-commercialised. There were shops, there were all these things, but they were necessary, I didn't get that impression. It was quite a beautiful village, and it was sort of dipped, where the grotto, where the churches had obviously been built even more over the years, and this special grotto where many of the volunteers, and I remember young ladies, young women, come and they would often sit at the grotto at night, after their work, and often into late hours. By the time, maybe because of my age, I was far too tired, and would go back. Because you worked from about

eight in the morning helping until, you had your supper in the evening, and I used to look after Vic particularly, but then saw others. I met people that were lepers, and I'd never seen that before.

00:25:16 - Jill: When you took Vic, was it organised by the Foundation, or was it a personal trip?

00:25:22 - Biddy: I can't recall that. I don't think it was the Foundation. I remember paying the correct amount, although it was a reasonable amount, like all these organised trips. I don't think it was, I think it was an agency, possibly, that organised it, for people that wanted to go to Lourdes, and I came across it through Leonard Cheshire being there, I think, but there were about five or six people, helpers, from Heatherley, and the rest from somewhere else, who I met. So, anyway, I felt quite good about it all on the whole, especially as I was, really had no religion at the time, I was always frightened I might be the only one on the trip, however that probably wouldn't have mattered. And so that was quite successful. But I remember Vic, because it hurt him to go down, put into the waters, he didn't really want to go. I believe he had gone on previous occasions, where you're sort of dipped in. Anyway, I would just take him for a walk, and then sometimes because it was France, you had your little outdoor places you could sit outside and have a wee martini or something, so I gave him the occasional drink. Not a lot, just one. And anyway, after we had got back, a woman who had organised it, I think she was a volunteer of a Cheshire home, and her husband, I had a letter condemning me because I had given him drinks.

00:27:00 - Jill: A letter from whom?

00:27:02 - Biddy: From these two people, I think they had partly organised the trip, now I come to think of it. But I think one of them... Anyway I think they were organised by the Cheshire home or by Heatherley, I don't know, but they thought it was wrong. And I remember replying or going to see them and saying that how could anything be wrong when someone was so twisted up and so bad, I had never come across anyone quite so bad before. I have since, but he didn't lead a good life. However, that was just about the only flaw in my character over those years. But I don't regret it.

00:27:46 - Jill: I don't know if it is a flaw. You've mentioned Leonard Cheshire himself several times. Do you remember in particular any occasion when he came to Heatherley?

00:27:54 - Biddy: Yes, a couple of times, but I couldn't be there on other times. I was always asked to go to the open day, which was always on a Saturday, but it was such a long way away, and I was married by that time. And I had, so I couldn't really manage if it wasn't on a weekday. So I didn't go, but he always went.

00:28:16 - Jill: But you said you met him at least once, you mentioned this reserve that he had.

00:28:21 - Biddy: Yes, well I met him again later. And again, it's a blank, really, how it came about, but

00:28:29 - Jill: But when abouts was this, then?

00:28:32 - Biddy: It would be after I'd been there about four or five years, I think.

00:28:36 - Jill: So late sixties.

00:28:38 - Biddy: Yes. Probably it would tie in with the... ..his beginning of his extreme interest in the Holy Shroud. I don't know when that was, it must have been the sixties.

00:28:51 - Jill: Yes, he was interested, yes.

00:28:52 - Biddy: I heard about it or something, but I knew that he had written, he had made a film on it, because he believed in it so much, and I don't think it was all that well known over here and he wanted Catholics to understand about it.

00:29:09 - Jill: And your involvement with this film on the Turin Shroud, Biddy, what was that?

00:29:13 - Biddy: Well, he had to have this film assigned and checked by the Turin Cathedral, the body of people, the administration, because the Shroud is kept there in the dungeons, and always has been, I gather. But he couldn't get over, and I had a cheap ticket, I had a special ticket as I worked for the airline, and I was going to Rome anyway, to visit a friend, so I said I would go there. And I just found a bed and breakfast for a couple of days, I didn't ask him for any money, I said I was going anyway. And the arrangements were made between him and the people of the church and someone would come to, I think it was a small hotel now I think of it, yes, and take me there.

00:30:12 - Jill: Take you to the church?

00:30:13

- Biddy: Yes.

- Jill: With the film?

00:30:15 - Biddy: With the film. And I didn't know what that involved, really. I thought they might even just take it from me when they met me. But anyway, I was ready at the appointed time. The old-fashioned Fiats rushing through the city. One stopped outside, screeching brakes, I remember. Mind you, everything screeches in these cities, especially Turin being the home of the car industry. And out got this very fat, small priest, come to see me, and great handshaking, et cetera, and I got in. And I think, we then proceeded through the city, to the church, just as if we were doing a Nigel Mansell as everybody else did at that time, and I couldn't believe this priest was going about 80 miles an hour and I clung on for dear life... ..and, um, they very kindly showed me many of their special chalices and beautiful ornaments, that of course the Italian churches have so much of, and they were very helpful to me and looked after me with great... ..it was a great moment for me, really. And anyway, I was taken back. I don't think we went quite so quickly this time and arrived. And before I went home, I remember buying a small ring to put on my little finger, as a souvenir. And it was a great occasion.

00:32:06 - Jill: Was the film approved, do you remember?

00:32:08 - Biddy: Yes, the film was approved, but again, nothing is done quickly, and it was a long time before it was finally approved and even longer by the time Leonard Cheshire had edited it. It would be some months, I think. And then he must have written to me. I can't believe

I haven't got the letter. Someone had let me know that it was going to be shown in Trafalgar Square, which seemed a good idea. And I went to see it as well. So I think he was quite pleased with it.

00:32:39 - Jill: Yes, well he would have been. His interest in the Turin Shroud was extremely important.

00:32:44 - Biddy: Yes, and it got stronger. Of course, I used to read so many things about it after that. And of course he went through all sorts of difficulties to get it proven, which I don't think actually happened in his lifetime.

00:32:59 - Jill: No, no, well there's still doubt, isn't there?

00:33:01 - Biddy: Yes.

00:33:02 - Jill: So, we're now in the late sixties, and I believe that you stopped being a volunteer for the Foundation. When was that?

00:33:12 - Biddy: Well I stopped when I had ceased my job, ceased flying. Because I went on in the airline, I had another job, but I was grounded, and I used to work from more or less eight to five

00:33:32 -Jill: So it was your personal circumstances?

-Biddy: every day and I was married, and therefore there wasn't a lot of time. I did occasionally go to special days. So, kept in touch, used to write to them, and I thought I would have made more on odd bank holidays, but eventually I didn't make it. And a few years later I came up to Scotland.

00:33:58 - Jill: And when was this?

00:34:00 - Biddy: Scotland would be, I think it was 1972.

00:34:04 - Jill: Right, so you were involved with the Foundation for a good decade. Over years when it was...

00:34:10 - Biddy: Not quite so fully.

00:34:12 - Jill: Towards the end, no.

00:34:17 - Biddy: No, not so much. But I've always read about it, and I used to receive information.

00:34:22 - Jill: Yes.

00:34:23 - Biddy: I never felt that I was away from it, but I don't think my contributions were very high at that.

00:34:30 - Jill: So now we are at the beginning of 1996 and I believe that you've started back in touch with the Foundation. You've started working at Mayfield House here in Edinburgh.

00:34:45 - Biddy: Yes, it's just about five months since I actually started, now. I had for a long time, I had been thinking that, um... ..I would like to do something again for somebody. But again you have to think of the reasons you're doing it for, and can you continue, and not drop it, and this sort of thing. And I had originally thought of helping the blind, and now this may seem irrelevant, but in the end, it's sort of something somebody said that sent me back to the Cheshire home. We have one particular friend who's blind who lives near us who is from Nepal and he has taken Edinburgh by storm, as most of the Gurkha types, although he's not Gurkha, he just he has this marvellous personality. And he's a brilliant musician, all his family are. He plays, and we have been accepted into their home. They are very religious, but they do not mind that, that we aren't, and when you go there, there's almost every nationality somehow staying or sitting on the floor or doing something. And because of this, I've got to know a few blind people, and I thought I would perhaps go to an advert in a local paper that a lot of blind people no longer could get out, could someone go and help them read or do things for them, and I thought this would be a nice idea as I knew a little about how to handle the situation. And I went to Berendo, my Nepali friend, and I said, "I'm thinking of doing this, helping someone, maybe once a week," and he said, “Well, I may be blind, too, but people in our position can be very demanding. You might go to their home one day, they'll phone you up another day, they'll want you at different times if you are only with one person." And I said, "I don't think I could manage that." And he said, "Well, did you not work for the Cheshire homes?" And I said, "Yes," but I hadn't really given that much thought, and he said, "Well, think it over."

And then one day in Edinburgh, so many people put these cups in front of you wanting money, et cetera, et cetera, and sometimes you give and sometimes you don't, and someone in a wheelchair had a Leonard Cheshire...

00:37:45 - Jill: Collecting tin, yes.

00:37:48 - Biddy: Collecting tin. And I spoke to the lady, and she talked about it, and I said I'd never seen this before, I didn't know they were interested in getting money this way, but it was a good idea, and I said,

"Well, you know, nice to meet you," and she said, "Take a leaflet or two." I said, "Oh, I don't need them, really." Well she said, "Take them." And when I looked at the leaflets, I realised I did need the leaflets because so many things had changed.

00:38:20 - Jill: How interesting.

00:38:22 - Biddy: There was information. I knew the home had been into

Mayfield, we have a lot of apples on our tree, my husband catches trout and we take them along there. But I wasn't sure if I could manage doing what I did 30 odd years ago in a home exactly on the same lines. I didn't know if I could cope, really, now, later. Anyway, the idea of the Mayfield Cheshire home was to abandon it eventually, not abandon it, close it down. There are six sub-homes, units, and modern, and I thought I would write to the volunteer coordinator, find out about these. Although none of them were particularly near me. I never find anything near me by bus, but I knew the places where they were. And I phoned up Jane Owen the coordinator and she arranged to come over to my home and we had a long chat and got on very well. And then she said, "I do have one or two people that do need just to see somebody, just to talk to, just to put things away in their home, in their room, et cetera." I said, "Well that's an idea," so we went along.

00:39:41 - Jill: This is out of the main Mayfield House home, correct?

00:39:44 - Biddy: This was actually called Wardieburn Unit I went to first before I went back to the home, and to see Jessie and what I would be required to do. And Jane Owen is obviously completely right for her job because without realising it, she's talked you into things you had no intention of doing. And she mentioned another lady I thought she said was an accountant but sitting in a wheelchair and needed help at the Mayfield home, maybe once in a fortnight or something. So later on we went along to see Lisa. I got it all wrong. She is quite paralysed, but she speaks very well still. She was a top teacher, she knows exactly what she's about, what she wants and what she requires.

00:40:38 - Jill: And what do you do for her?

00:40:40 - Biddy: I said at the moment, I would just see her once a fortnight, because the difficulty of getting to this place, although it's so near, I thought, "Well I'll be in buses all the time," I wouldn't get through my week. Although my husband has managed to take me once or twice when he's been home early. But with Lisa at Mayfield... ..she wanted, originally... it was a few weeks before Christmas, she wanted all her presents wrapped and everything, cards, et cetera. And she was so organised, it was so easy. And then after Christmas, I'd been tidying up her drawers, the wardrobes. I put birdseed out for the bird. I had to put things down for the cat that belongs to the home but appears to have taken Lisa on full time. And she faces a part where there was a garden with a big... bird table which is a bit derelict. But her original room, the foxes came at night, and she's fox-crazy, so it was rather sad to have to give up the room for the computers. But of course, you're not there to have with the foxes. So she misses them, but still.

00:42:16 - Jill: What changes have you noticed in the Foundation, or have you not noticed any?

00:42:20 - Biddy: Well in the running of it?

- Jill: Yes.

00:42:23 - Biddy: Well, these units, well, that is, Mayfield with Lisa, but having now gone even more to Wardieburn Unit, where Jessie is, it's like another world, it's completely different. I'm not quite with it yet. It's very modern, very nice, all got their own home, a good lounge. There are volunteers, but I don't know how many. I've not been able to work-- I don't see many.

00:42:55 - Jill: Do you think the residents are more independent?

00:42:58 - Biddy: Yes, they are independent. The people that run it, when I say the people that run it, that organise looking after them, putting them to bed, doing the more medical side, I think there's only one that is actually qualified. Well, this wouldn't have happened once, probably would have been more. But now, these are people that you can handle, in the sense that you don't have to be qualified, as long as you learn how to do it. And they're not patients, they're not in bed, and probably that gives them more independence. I don't know the relationship, either, between the volunteers, there, because I see so few. And the residential helpers, who are paid, paid helpers, I'm not sure, once or twice I've wondered, I felt that I was just ignored completely, but then I'm not really there to be noticed, either. I was just working it out, whether you are a nuisance or not. Because there's always been trouble between volunteers in most homes, I think, any type of home.

00:44:14 - Jill: We've mentioned earlier the problems that can happen with them. The do-gooders.

00:44:20 - Biddy: But not so much necessarily extremes like we mentioned before. But I just think maybe a slight resentment. But on the other hand, getting back to Mayfield, there was a Christmas lunch organised by Jane Owen for the volunteers, and a lot turned up. It was very nicely done in the big hall. And very Christmassy. And I noticed about eight or nine young people in their 18s, 19s, 20s, some lovely looking girls. Beautiful, all seemed to speak very well. And I couldn't work out this at all. And I found that these young people came from the Loretto School in Edinburgh, which is a little unique. It's a boarding school but it's smallish and it's more individual. It's not Catholic, although it sounds it. And these people, these lovely people, come every single week to help them. I think some come every day, every other day, I think there's every day or every night some come. It's worked out, obviously, there's a rota. And they are studying. They're obviously, at their ages, they'd be getting ready to a University, type, you know. How nice they were, and popular. And I thought that was very different. I mean, I don't suppose that would have happened in a home a long time ago. Whether it happens in many homes. It depends on how many these type of schools you've got.

00:45:59 - Jill: You think people might be more community-aware these days?

00:46:02 - Biddy: Yes, I, well...

00:46:04 - Jill: You see it is part of young education?

00:46:06 - Biddy: It was a padre... Well I don't think I can call him padre, I don't know, no...

00:46:11 - Jill: Priest?

00:46:12 - Biddy: No, no, no, reverend, reverend, that's right. He's not a Catholic reverend. A young man, 35, 36, who brought them along, and it was his idea originally, apparently, and he was very with it in every way. And I think this must, may well, happen, maybe the church is involved with more homes as well.

00:46:32 - Jill: Yes.

00:46:33 - Biddy: Oh, well then, that's not the church, it's a school. But I believe, I have asked around. Edinburgh is full of what in England you would call private schools. I suppose you call them public schools here. Called merchant schools, there's about four or five of them, and they probably participate in different directions, I expect, because they're quite grown up, these young people. But there's not many schools like

that. Bristol is the same.

00:47:02 - Jill: So there's more community involvement, perhaps? Would you say that there was a difference in, well, obviously there's a difference in the way the homes are run. If these units you're seeing now are much smaller, presumably? With sort of six or seven residents in a large home?

00:47:16 - Biddy: Yes. Only certain people can go there, it's people that don't need someone actually... medically... ..knowledgeable to stay overnight. I don't think that could be 100%.

00:47:35 - Jill: So they live on their own, then?

00:47:37 - Biddy: They have other, they have the other paid helpers stay part of the night or something. But not say, like, originally, which, I suppose, is correct, but not at Mayfield, they still have the more difficult people to handle, in the sense that they need someone to put up the hoist.

00:47:57 - Jill: Their care needs are greater.

00:47:59 - Biddy: Yes. But when that closes, I don't know what is going to happen with them. They maybe have someone equivalent to a matron in another home that's being built now.

00:48:08 - Jill: I think they're dispersing into smaller units.

00:48:10 - Biddy: I would like to know whether this is through the whole of Britain, or whether this is quite revolutionary.

00:48:16 - Jill: I think it's a general trend, certainly within the Foundation.

00:48:19 - Biddy: Is it?

00:48:20 - Jill: I don't know about elsewhere.

00:48:22 - Biddy: It is very good, but I think... ..I heard Lisa in Mayfield, who has very definite ideas. She said the food had deteriorated since they'd broken up the home, which I suppose it would, I expect there'd be a proper cook, chef or cook, you know.

00:48:44 - Jill: There will be teething problems when you change the administration.

00:48:47 - Biddy: Yes, I think there would be quite a few problems to begin with.

00:48:50 - Jill: But nevertheless, there must be similarities. Residents with the same problems and carers with the same desire to help?

00:48:58 - Biddy: Yes, yes, definitely. If someone's going to do that type of work, they do care. And it's just slightly different circumstances I would say, that's all, in Mayfield. I think there's about five or six people still there. I was early one morning to see Lisa and a lady who helps her with the breakfast three or four mornings a week, anyway. At least nearby. Was very helpful to her and got on very well. She was a lady probably in her late sixties, and she got up every morning to put the breakfast, to mix it up and get it all laid out for them. And another lady, another resident was there, also she was there. And then when she goes home quite early, somebody else would come. One woman came in while I was talking to Lisa. She wanted to know if there was any sewing to do. So everyone has their own little patch. And the time they can give. I think this is still appreciated. And they feel, as if I can see, from having been... they've been there a long time, I haven't, coming in, they feel as if they're just like a family, I think, together.

00:50:10 - Jill: Right, well I think that's always been the case with the volunteers and the Foundation, they've always been very much part of the backbone of the whole setup.

00:50:19 – Jill: Well, Biddy, I think we'll have to finish our conversation here. It just remains for me to thank you very much indeed for your time. It's been very interesting.

00:50:27 - Biddy: Marvellous to talk about it.

00:50:29 - Jill: Thank you.

**End of transcription**