**Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project**

File Title: 'Odette Hallowes 2.9.88'.  Odette Hallowes [in Underground during war in Europe] interviewed by GLC.  She talks about her experiences in prison during the war and her faith in God.

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Start of Transcription

00:01 Group Captain Leonard Cheshire: [Unclear] we discussed last time. You told me that when you were in prison and being punished, you realised that you had to learn something about yourself.

00:16 Odette Hallowes: Yes. I did. I did because obviously, I mean I'm not any braver or stronger than the next person and I had to find a way of accepting that I had to go to war without getting bitter without a feeling of revenge and also I had to find some strength. Therefore, I found my strength in God. In the love of God. From that moment therefore I was [unclear] no longer so alone and the choice was no longer mine in a kind of a way. You know? I don't think anybody in their right senses asks for pain of any kind, so as we don't ask for it, it is God who it is given it to us then we have the choice to end in it one way or another to get very bitter about it, to get [unclear] about it, get depressed or the rest of it or to find a way to wear it. You see with me I was very lucky because I thought it had something good. Therefore, if it was what I had to put up with I would put up with it as best as possible considering that after all it wasn't just my choice.

01:55 G.C: But when did the feelings you mustn't - You must overcome any feeling of bitterness count?

02:01 O.H: Well that came after a bad first year really, just before the end of the first year when I had been through quite a lot and seen a lot and all that, I thought it must be a very grave danger in being bitter because bitterness doesn't produce anything good at all, it’s like a prison in yourself, it leaves you no rest and what good does it do? None. So, I am going to protect myself in a way, selfishly if you like, by not suffering bitterness, that is to my mind a useless thing, and... I mean I know people who have suffered this bitterness long after the war was finished, and it was terrible. Terrible. I used to say to them, especially to why do you go on like that? You're punishing yourself every day. You know, you're going on with what was done to you in those days, it’s like a sickness, bitterness. And you have to overcome it like you overcome a sickness and so I was very, very fortunate that I never did suffer it and when I went back to Germany after the war as a witness the judge said, 'Well look at all the prisoners, you know most of them.' And I looked at them and I felt nothing, I wasn't interested at all, I knew I had to be there, not for myself but for my comrades who had not come back, I felt very responsible to them and to their family so I went there. Personally, I was never interested in what was going to happen their sentences, never.

03:52: It could be because it wasn't in proportion anyway and one cannot be interested in those things.

04:00 G.C: No.

04:00 O.H: They have to be because there is a code of justice... men have to judge other men and therefore you as a citizen [laughs] if you like of the world or whatever you have to accept the rules and regulations that are necessary but in yourself you cannot…

04:25 G.C: But overcoming bitterness in one’s self so as not to suffer from its sort of poisonous effects is one thing, but then there’s another stage of actually willing the good of the person who's inflicting [cross talk] harm on you -

04:41 O.H: Well that is the perfect thing of course and I think if one was a better person one would pray for that also. But in the circumstances which I was you knew very well that you were faced with such reality that it was too late to try to do anything about it having - when you see a man who's responsible for the death of thousands of people in Ravensbrück alone - you cannot see, I was always in the prison but never mind - there were 140,000 people who died there, it is so enormous the responsibility of that man that you know it leaves you absolutely without any way of beginning to deal with that. You cannot being to understand it, you cannot begin to - it’s too monstrous, too big to - and so you do agree that somebody like that should not be in the position to ever do any harm again to anybody and that is all its very regrettable, very sad. So, I took the easiest way if you like by being there if you like as a witness and not in myself taking any part in what was happening.

06:18 G.C: No but I mean that during the time that you were being punished you were fighting against bitterness in yourself.

06:26 O.H: No -

06:27 G.C: But were you -

06:28 O.H: I think more than bitterness I think it was almost a spirit of revenge, I think when you are being battered about, you are being badly treated like that, slapped about and all the rest of it, tortured, you almost wish them the same thing you know which is a normal feeling when you're still young, strong and healthy. It is the indignity of it all that is done to you. That you obviously at that time wish that they should experience something like that but that’s useless thinking.

07:06 G.C: Did you overcome that feeling?

07:07 O.H: Oh yes yes at once because I knew it was ridiculous that you can’t go on wishing onto others what has been done to yourself because if not there is not end to it.

[Both laughing]

07:17 O.H: You know you can't so… you can't, there’s no feeling against -

07:22 G.C: Well not many of us can't [laughs].

07:24 O.H: They are not feelings that can stay with you for any length of time [laughs] if not it is very very dangerous. And dangerous but useless too. You know? I mean what does it mean, it means you are going to be sick as they are already, I always thought that they were sick people anyway, I thought that they had a form of brain cancer or something else -

07:44 G.C: Yeah but it shows a sign of greatness in you, Odette -

07:47 O.H: Of what?

07:48 G.C: That you were able to overcome that.

07:52 O.H: Oh no I was saving myself when, that’s not the same thing. [Cross talk]. Don't you see a lot of it is really saving yourself.

08:00 G.C: Yes, that’s a good way of seeing it -

08:01 O.H: You see?

08:02 G.C: Yes.

08:02 O.H: Because I mean I can assure you I had two friends, one died a very few years ago in Guilford - two brothers, one took to drinks because we couldn't bare the memories of things, this one didn’t but he had an appalling death all the same - and he tortured himself everyday with this bitterness, with this that which is wanting to get his own back. I battled with him to the moment he died. But you see I used to say, 'Look Alfred, what are you gaining? It's not sensible, don't you want to be a bit more at peace in yourself?', and he used to say, 'It's all very well you are, you found a way', I said, 'But yes but you see I didn't find a way my way is very simple, I did not want to be what they were. They were sick. I wasn't going to be as sick as they were.'

08:58 G.C: No.

08:58 O.H: So, the only way I could protect myself from this sickness was by not feeling it. You know - what asked me - I had to find little ways you know, Leonard.

09:09 G.C: Yes I think that’s the secret, you find little ways [cross talk] and little steps - Like you're polishing the floor, what did you polish it with?

09:17 O.H: A piece of wood the size of my thumb. You see I had to find little ways because...

09:26 G.C: So, you polished the floor literally of your cell every day.

09:29 O.H: Yes, for one year! [Laughing] So much every day as I got weaker and weaker, I used to do less and less but I did manage the entire floor before I left it after a year. Yes. But you see Leonard, as I said if you are mediocre as I was you can only take little steps, little ways. And bless the day when you have achieved that day a little bit better than the day before. Without reacting too much in your own self-pity or something which I was lucky in that too, I didn't have self-pity. Again, I was protected from that. I don’t quite know why.

10:15 G.C: It’s very easy to fall into self-pity.

10:17 O.H: Yes, I should think it is. I was lucky - no I think of course everybody says my beastly character and all that I'm so obstinate and impossible, not obviously I wouldn't suffer self-pity [G.C laughs] because it was a permanent battle you see. [Both laugh]. So probably it as a challenge and a battle you know Leonard. And we can only surmount the small battles that we can cope with, that’s what I was doing.

10:48 G.C: Thank you, Odette.

10:49 O.H: Oh, merci.

Speech ends 10:49

End of recording 10:50

End of Transcription.