

# As I Lay Me Down to Sleep

Eileen Munro with Carol McKay



Mainstream Publishing *eBooks*



*For Craig and Georgina*

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# **AS I LAY ME DOWN TO SLEEP**

A Devastating True Story of Neglect and  
Abuse

Eileen Munro with Carol Mckay



EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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[www.eileenmunro.com](http://www.eileenmunro.com)

Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition  
from mediocre minds.

*Albert Einstein*

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# Foreword

In this memoir, Eileen Munro revisits what should have been the warm, familiar cradle of a Glaswegian childhood; instead, she takes a journey to the not-so-swinging '60s and '70s of the East End, where survival was crucial in a family pushing every self-destruct button imaginable. Dysfunctional doesn't start to describe it. Only the streetwise skills she learnt, her own intelligence, sheer persistence - which some might view as a bloody-minded, devious determination - and a feisty attitude to the Establishment, gave her not only the will to survive but also the emotional glue to thrive as an adult despite having odds any Glasgow bookie would have rated as 'nae chance'.

Eileen's resilience, coupled with an unshakeable sense of humour, ensures an authentic East End voice is heard, and she breezily portrays the era, the city of her birth and the bleak industrial landscape of the west of Scotland in evocative style. For the first time, a significant voice is given to those survivors of Scotland's care system - those who have emerged from shameful treatment that Government ministers now agree is a running sore in our history of looking after children who could not live at home. This book, however, is far from being a 'misery memoir' - gut-churning glimpses of poverty and abuse are mixed with a story that in true Glaswegian style makes you laugh and cry, and occasionally renders you speechless with the power of its testimony.

The publication of Eileen's story coincides with an independent review by Tom Shaw into how residential schools and children's homes were run in Scotland between 1950 and 1995. In 2008, dedicated funding has been put in place to support survivors whose childhoods were lost to

brutal, often soul-destroying regimes. It has been acknowledged that more than an apology is needed to help those affected throughout their lives by suffering experienced in care settings where vulnerable children should have been safe but were not. As a member of the Advisory Group taking forward a national strategy on childhood sexual abuse, I welcome the response of the new Government to our work and specifically to those tasked with raising awareness of the existence and impact of abuse on in-care survivors. There is a wind of change blowing through Holyrood at our Parliament, and traumatised victims of a terrible system are *finally* being listened to. It is clearly not before time.

I pray that this fresh approach, and a willingness to set up a truth and reconciliation forum in Edinburgh, will continue. A major tragedy exposed by Shaw's report is the low value that was placed on record keeping. Some survivors, like Eileen, have found their histories were imposed on them by manipulative individuals who held all the power, while others - in an eerie parallel with Holocaust victims - can find no trace of themselves in the system, never mind their family's details. Other former survivors have discovered siblings unknown to them for decades, and often now too late to contact - so many voices unheard, so many childhoods destroyed and far too many life-long consequences of the most devastating kind.

Eileen is someone who lights up a room through sheer personality and her story ensures that here is one who has not lost her unique identity. They did not manage to grind down her spirit. Her indomitable strength of character inspires, as does her underlying message: *to safeguard future generations, we need to keep listening to those with lost childhoods.*

This book ends as she reaches young womanhood. I look forward to reading a sequel and in the words of one of the '70s songs that kept her going: 'Come on, Eileen!'

*Sandra Brown OBE*  
*Scotswoman of the Year 2005-06*  
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# Prologue

WINTER, 1968

The fire crackles. My mother is sitting, one thick ankle crossed over the other, in her fireside chair with her knitting needles clacking and her mint imperials tucked down beside her. Her hearing aid whistles intermittently, the square, beige battery box breathing up and down on her chest. Occasionally, she puts down her needles and twists the earpiece.

In the far-side corner by the window, the metered television flickers, black and white. I'm on the floor by her feet, shoulder leaning on the side of her chair, dreaming about school or the story I've just finished reading in the *Dandy*. I'm trying to ignore the cold draught at my back and not taking much notice of the television programme.

'Do you see that?' she says.

It's something about children without families, about boys and girls in homes. I look blankly at my mother, then at the screen, confused, not knowing why she wants me to be aware of that. I understand from her tone that it must be significant but its relevance is lost on me. I'm only five.

'That was you,' she says.

I look at her familiar face, her eyes tiny behind her clumsy glasses, her brown hair with its curls loose. She jiggles her needles while I wait for an explanation.

'When you were born,' she says, letting her needles rest, 'you had another mother.'

I look back at the screen. Another mother? The pictures flick through faces of women gathered in a room, talking. Have I another mother on the television? I watch a rabble of

kids running about the grounds of a big old house and hear the word 'orphanage'.

The woman I call Mum seems breathless. 'She loved you and gave you away so you'd have a better life - with a good family.'

I'm sitting quite erect now, fully focused. All my dreaming's gone. 'How did I get here?' I ask her.

'Your dad and I went to the hospital and picked you out from all the babies.'

The coal fire spits and takes her attention while I think about what she's said. She picks up her knitting again, pulling at the wool.

A thought occurs to me, one that still does.

'Was I bad?' I ask.

'No,' she says abruptly, then recovers. 'You were special; that's why we picked you.' It's her rehearsed reply.

I smile. The room's still cold. It still smells of damp. Am I lucky? I'm thinking.

Later, she sings to me: 'Nobody's Child'. I hate it. She's always drunk when she sings it to me, her arm thrown round my neck, clinging to me, trapping locks of my hair. Her breath smells too minty as she breathes out where I'm breathing in. No other mum's breath smells the way hers does. She squashes me against her and I can't move away.

She must have felt relieved to have told me. Now when I started school, no one in the playground could surprise me by repeating anything they had heard by their own fireside.

Naive and pragmatic, I told my friend Beth, in front of our pals. 'See me? I'm adopted.'

Everyone stopped playing ball to have a good look at me. Being adopted was special. I had never heard of *illegitimate bastards* before. If I had, I'd probably have thought I was a special bastard.

## Cuckoo in the Nest

**A**t six weeks old, I was legally on loan. By 8 November 1963, and with the consent of Glasgow Sheriff Court, I was legally bound. I was nine months old.

My 'good family' life began at 74 Budhill Avenue, Springboig, in the East End of Glasgow. My adoptive parents were James and Dora Cooke. We lived in a tenement building, one storey up, with three doors on the landing. My aunt Helen - my mother's older sister - and her family lived next door to us on the same landing. She later told me they would often hear my father's drunken homecomings, signalled by the echoing as he urinated in the stone entrance close and usually accompanied by singing that was Orange Order and Irish in its nature.

When I was six months old, we moved to a new home, one with our own back and front door, in the so-called steel houses, which were set out four in a block, with two flats downstairs and two upstairs. Our flat was the bottom right, which meant we had a front and back garden, and this is where my memories begin. What came before this, I don't remember. My family history comes to me through paper documents and childhood images.

Grey paint on grey steel. The house at 40 Hermiston Road, Springboig, was ten minutes' walk from the tenement my parents had escaped from. Perhaps my arrival had earned them the right to escape it. Until then, they'd been childless for nine years. Cooped up in dour, overcrowded tenement flats, it was the dream of half the population of Glasgow to

have a house with its own back and front door and a garden. All that space and privacy.

Our back garden was sectioned into three parts. The middle part was the lawn, where my mother would hang out her washing and where most of my playing took place. For a short time, my father grew flowers and vegetables on either side of the lawn. I spent long days wandering about in that garden, blocking out the noises from the house behind me. I loved to search for caterpillars in the cabbages and was amazed at the white butterflies they would become.

There were caterpillars within the leaves of the privet hedges that enclosed our back garden, too: eggs and tiny green caterpillars, which I would find by searching for leaves with an uneven arc that had turned a papery beige colour. Splitting the leaves open, I would watch these tiny creatures wriggle around, helpless, their lives dependent on my whim. My other pets entranced me, too: my 'wee tortoises', which I later found out were actually 'slaters', though the English dictionary listed them as woodlice. I played with them for hours. I spent much time watching spiders in webs, never afraid of them, just watching and letting them run about my hands, sometimes up my arms. Looking back, I wonder if I was a contented child or an isolated one. Wherever I've lived, I've loved gardens.

My father used old railway sleepers to box and set apart the three sections of the garden, and spare wood lay around in great ridges. When he worked in the garden, the weatherbeaten tan on his swarthy body made him seem somehow larger than he was. He taught me how to create a whistle by placing a blade of grass between my lips and blowing. Many times, the grass split my lip and I'd be blowing away with a mouth full of blood. Time in the garden was good.

See-Saw Marjory Daw  
Johnny shall have a new master,  
He shall have but a penny a day



Because he can't work any faster.  
See-Saw Margery Daw,  
Sold up her bed and lay upon straw,  
Wasn't she a dirty slut,  
tae sell her bed and lie in the dirt?

When my friend Beth came round to play, we'd drag the sleepers together to make a see-saw. We'd pile shorter pieces of wood higher and higher, reserving the longest piece for the seat. I never tired of trying to work it higher or bumping down harder so either I or my friend on the other side would fly up fast and high - the faster and higher the better. Sometimes, with the sheer exuberance of our game, the wood on which the seat balanced would topple. We'd start again. Nothing mattered other than the thrill of near-flying.

I also spent hours in the back garden playing with a red plastic tea set. I would mix water with dirt till I got the right consistency to fill the cups, then I'd turn them upside down and pat them to reveal my perfect cakes. I can see myself: the elasticated slip-on penny blacks making my bare feet sweat, my knees brown from the sun and dimpled from crawling in the dirt, wearing my mother's favourite outfit of mine, one she'd had crocheted for me. It was a pink, grey and white flecked waistcoat and skirt.

The best muck was at the side of the house under a hedge, where it was slightly grey in colour. When mixed, it was smooth and creamy; it felt silky, without any grit, and it left chalky off-white trails up my hand when I squeezed it between my fingers. It was the *crème de la crème* of muck. It was perfection, or at least felt like the creation of it. Looking back, I suppose it must have contained cement.

The section to the left of the garden was completely filled with tall green stalks of white flowers. Potatoes. My father would sit and eat a plate of potatoes on their own - something I still do. I never made an Irish connection there till much later. It was normal.

In so many ways, it appeared to be an ordinary East End childhood, especially when I was very young. What can I remember of my earliest years? Sitting in the kitchen playing in a large soup pot. Skipping on the path then freezing when I felt the tickle of an earwig crawling up my white sock. For the most part, I slept, woke and accepted the drinking and violence and the wide, empty days.

My first and sharpest memory of being a new girl in primary one at Budhill School is of being put in the paint cupboard as a punishment. I have no idea why. I just remember that my knuckles stung from being rapped with a ruler and that I longed to steal the paint and brushes: all those different colours of paint in little circles set in a white plastic rectangle. Each palette contained six colours: rows and rows of lovely colours to wet and mix. Maybe it reminded me of my creativity in my garden.

Home again from school, I'd hear my mother's voice coming from the house and know that she'd been drinking. I escaped to the garden to avoid her. I didn't hear those peals of unreserved and uninhibited laughter from any of the other women in the streets and shops around me. Yet soon she'd come looking for me. I'd hear the catch of the back door open, then her voice shouting, 'Eileen!'

My stomach would turn and I'd keep my back to her, curling small, close in to the hedge at the side of the house, hoping she wouldn't see me.

'Eileen. Where are you?'

She would want me to run to the shop for her. When I was young, it was for cigarettes or a pint of milk. As time passed and I grew a bit older, she would call me in and send me to fetch 'a message' for her: a heavy bottle wrapped in a brown paper bag. I knew it was alcohol, though I never saw her drink from it - just smelt the masking mint imperials on her breath. To me, it's the way it always was. I don't remember a time when my parents didn't drink.

Behind the scenes and unknown to me, people were talking. Of course they were talking. People had been talking since before I arrived. Talking about how my mother and father shouldn't have been allowed the responsibility of children.

Did my mother care for me in her own way? She always let me have a pet, as we shared a love of animals. I was the one who named them. I had a budgie called Joey. How original! Found dead at the bottom of his cage. A tortoise called Horace, buried because he had supposedly died but who was most likely hibernating. A white rabbit named Snowy, that I later found dead down at the burn and brought home. Next door's dog, a boxer named Bruce, got the blame for that. There was a cat called Tiger, who had to be put to sleep after Bruce attacked her and left her with one eye hanging out and lockjaw. I watched as my poor wee cat meowed almost soundlessly and constantly, her eye wobbling. I begged my mother to save her. She took her to the PDSA vet to get free treatment but came back without her. I knew in my heart she would. There were several dogs, one of which went missing; another a collie whose name was Lassie, of course. She was always chasing cars. I remember the screech of a lorry's wheels outside the front door and she was under it. I watched from the living-room window as the lorry ran right over the top of her. She was on her back with her legs and paws flailing away at the undercarriage. Incredibly, all the wheels missed her. She appeared in the kitchen through the back door, untouched but shaken, and I ran to comfort her. Not long after that, I was told she'd gone to a farm to live. Various dead fish and a missing frog should be on my pets list, too. My family was made up of waifs and strays.

My last pet was a cross terrier named Queenie, so called because she was white with a brown spot on her crown. My mother and I found her wandering about the streets near the shop by the burn and brought her home. We contacted

the local police; no one reported the dog missing, so we kept her. I was relieved at this, as we had previously found a dog and had had to give it back. I wandered by the owner's house several times, sad and angry they had taken *my* dog.

I think it was in the late '60s that a new type of gas came out that was safer and cleaner - 'natural gas'. We got rid of the coal fire and had a gas fire installed then. For some unknown reason, however, it didn't last long in our house and soon the coal fire came back. But I do remember the gas fire stayed there long enough for my hamster, Hammy, to go missing behind it.

Maybe it was at this time that I remember our house having renovations done. My mother, sleepy, told me to play in the garden while she stayed indoors to keep an eye on things but through the windows I could hear her laughing. 'Come away, hen,' the workmen would tell me, seeing me standing at the doorstep. They kept me amused and out of the way. One, called Pat, would run me around the garden and the street in a wheelbarrow. It was years later that the proverbial penny dropped and I understood the probable reason why some of the men took turns in keeping me out of the way.

I had a swing in my back garden, too; it was red and blue metal, with four hooked stakes in the two bottom rods to keep it from toppling. Like the supports that were put in place to protect me, this swing's metal restraining rods weren't foolproof. Through a combination of an excess of vigour and Glasgow's wet weather, the swing sometimes toppled over with someone in the seat. Perhaps that's where I developed my attitude towards life: whenever the swing topples, you pick yourself up, dust off the dirt and get back on again.

As I got a bit older, my friend Beth and I would attempt daring and palpitation-inducing feats on this swing, like the 'runny under', which was executed by pushing the person in the swing so high that on the final push you could run under

the swing before it came back down again. The pinnacle in daring was the 'bronco'. Here, one person would be seated on the swing while another would stand up facing them, with one foot between the sitter's legs and the other foot free to push and start up the swing. Then, between the two of us, we would lunge in unison to gain height and speed. The crucial point of this feat came just when the right height was gained and the stander would use their foot on the swing to abruptly push it away from them, jump off to run underneath and hope to get out of the way in time. Meanwhile, the sitter would be flying high. Heady stuff and action packed. I guess I was an adventurous child but no more so than any others growing up in the area. Not at that stage, anyway.

Summer was the time for sheets to come out and be hung over the washing line. Not for laundry but for tent making. Once they were pegged over the rope, my friends and I would fetch our drinks and pieces and thought we could live in there for ever.

One summer, there was a large crate on our back grass. It had a section that opened like a door and, seeing it, my imagination set to work. I called it my summerhouse. This was the late '60s, when I was six. What did I know about summerhouses? I must have read about them in a posh book. I set about covering it in light-coloured sheets and filling it with jars of flowers and cuttings from hedges. At the same time, I kept a so-called winter house made from a darker sheet hung over the washing rope.

My mother didn't have many female friends but one woman was more constant than others. She drank with my mother. This woman, May, was visiting one day and her son Allen, who was the same age as me, was playing outside with me in the garden. We sat together in the winter tent, close, the smell from the crushed grass under our legs tickling my nose. I felt strange, awkward, yet a weird excitement was beating inside me. We'd played together

many times before, I had even been allowed to play football with him, but never before had I experienced this new sensation. I had no words to tell me what I was feeling. His sticky boy's hands and knees were close to mine. Beyond the fluttering wall of the sheet tent, sparrows were arguing and I could hear my mother and May laughing. He asked me if I had heard about 'shagging'.

'No,' I said, but my heartbeats were telling me something different.

'Do you want to try it?'

I wanted to say yes but I was scared. How could I reconcile feeling so scared with the excitement? It was just like on the swings. Did I enjoy the risk factor here, too?

I went into the house, recognising the familiar sweet scent as I tiptoed past the partially opened living-room door. On the other side of it, May and my mother were rowdy with laughter. When I reached the toilet, I stared into and beyond my eyes in the mirror, going over what Allen had said to me. Curiously, I remember thinking at the time: will it make me all grown up?

Back in the tent, we kissed, lips and eyes closed, and he lay on top of me. Where did he learn that? What door or window had he been peeking through? Embarrassed and awkward at not knowing what to do next, in true children's fashion we ignored what had just happened and returned to our play.

## Lavender and Lace

**D**irt doesn't appear overnight. It gradually builds up, like neglect. It takes time to show itself. Little by little, our house became shabbier and so did I. No kids except Beth and Allen came to my house to play, the rest pre-warned by their parents to steer clear. I was glad other kids didn't come, because then my shame wasn't on show.

Often when someone knocked at our front door, I'd stop what I was doing and hold myself stiff so as not to make any noise, in case they had come to collect money for something my parents hadn't paid for. Creeping to the window, I'd check to see who it was. If it was safe - Beth or May or a salesman - I'd relax and go and open the door.

I liked it when a certain travelling salesman came. 'Mum,' I'd shout. 'It's the Betterware man.' The Betterware man roamed the streets of Shettleston, Budhill and Springboig, going door to door and selling all his household wares from a suitcase. As I opened the door, there he stood in a smart trenchcoat and with his case already open and ready to put down so it would wedge the door open, his foot-in-the-door sample of lavender polish in hand ready to ingratiate himself with children. He always gave me a free sample and I took it, returning his fixed grin with one of my own. It was a ritual. I did it because I loved the smell of the lavender polish and I liked dipping the home-made duster in the waxy polish and shining up the teak wood of our radiogram. Once it was emptied, I'd use the tin in games of 'beds', otherwise known as hopscotch.

The debts must have been mounting up. Even as a young child I knew most of our money went on drink. Although I don't remember a time when my parents didn't drink, I know it was a gradual thing with my mother, becoming less secret as time progressed. Slowly, furniture and ornaments disappeared from our house. The radiogram I so loved to polish was the first piece of furniture to go to the pawnshop, followed eventually by the beautiful three-piece bedroom suite with the tallboy my mother was proud of. Everything of any value went.

Despite the drinking, my mother and father must still have been considered a 'good family' by the adoption agency. I vividly remember being in a neighbour's car when I was six, my mother and I in the back seat. I remember looking at the little baby in my mother's arms and listening as she told me this was my wee sister.

I was fascinated by the strawberry birthmark on her neck. Her name, my mother said, was to be Cathleen, after the daughter of the neighbour whose car we were in. This was my first introduction to my wee sister, whom I was to grow to love fiercely. I remember sneaking into the bedroom with my mother and laughing at the way Cathleen had fallen asleep sitting up in her cot. We laughed, too, on the occasions that my wee sister would throw yet another glass bottle of baby milk out of her pram.

Both my parents enjoyed teaching me to blow massive bubbles with the soap bar when it was bath time on Sundays. Mostly, though, my father was difficult; he was still the drunk my aunt recalled from the time I was adopted and I soon learnt that I had to be careful around him.

It was my father who taught me the words to 'The Sash' and other tunes that were never to be sung except on the occasions when he would take me to the Orange Walk. I felt slightly frightened yet thrilled by the emotions aroused in me when the Orange bands played their music and I could



see all those arms swinging in marching unison, the banners and bright colours; I felt I would be consumed by it all.

I had similar feelings when my dad, an ardent Rangers fan, took me to football matches. It was my mother who made him take me. Presumably she thought he might drink less and return home straight from the match if his daughter was with him.

All his football friends would give me money and he encouraged me to swear and shout when I was on his shoulders. He would roar with laughter when I was shouting. Maybe I shouted to please him: to hear him laughing. Maybe I enjoyed his attention. Part of me found his unleashed energy and that of the other men on the football terraces exhilarating but another part of me knew I had to be wary.

Back home again, his sense of humour would be cruel. His favourite game to play with me was to curl his fist up in a ball and place it onto the open palm of his other hand. 'Smell the cheese,' he'd say, then punch me on the nose as soon as I lowered my head to pretend to smell. Time and time again I fell into the trap for him and refused to cry.

I ended up having to go to hospital once after he hurt my wrist badly while teasing me over which hand he had a chocolate bar in. Too much rough and tumble. Another time, laughing raucously, he turned from stirring up the coal fire to jab me with the poker. It was red hot and I still have a faint scar on my face and leg from that time. He and my mother argued about that incident. Cathleen started crying and the dog jumped up and down, barking. I ran into the bedroom to keep out of the way but his big Irish voice rumbled through to me: 'Get those adopted bastards out of here.' To hide, I climbed into the big Narnia wardrobe. It was there I found his Orange Order sash and pulled all the silver threads out of it. I don't think he ever forgave me.

About a year after my new sister arrived on the scene, not long before Easter of 1970 when I had just turned seven, my

parents split up. I remember listening in my bedroom to my mother shouting before my father left. Crouched at my bookcase, I raised my head and tuned in my ear.

'You've been with Wilma Cairns,' she was yelling. 'That fucking conductress!'

In my bedroom, I sat with my books, arranging them in my newly learnt alphabetical order.

'Fucking shut up,' he swore. 'You know nothing, woman.'

Doors began to bang. His work boots would now be thrown in this all-too-familiar scene. I sat with my back to the sounds coming from my parents. As they grew louder, my books went more slowly into position on the shelves. The books weren't heavy but my heart was. My father's violence would be followed by my mother's increasing violence, probably as an eruption of her frustration. I knew it would filter down to me at some point. A punch from my dad to my mum had my name on it by proxy.

After the shouting had died out, I went into the living room. My mother's glasses hung by one leg on her ear and her hair was as distressed as she was. From the other side of the room, our eyes spoke to each other. I knew that if I went near her, she'd slap me.

'Where's Dad?' I asked her, my voice deliberately restrained.

She was reaching for her cigarettes. 'Pub,' she said, lighting one with shaky hands and taking a long draw. The Dalriada and The Pipe Rack were the second homes my dad's wages supported.

I watched the red glow of the cigarette become brighter and the white paper disappear. There was nothing else to say. I went back to my bookshelf. My comfort came from dusting my books: at least something could be kept in order. My mother's comfort came from a bottle.

Shortly after this incident, we had a visit from Social Work. I don't know who alerted them or why, though perhaps they had been told that my father had left home. I do remember

my mother telling me I wasn't to say anything bad or the social workers would take me away from her and put me in a home.

As we waited for them, I sat close to the hearth, on the floor by her side, quiet. That was my usual position, where she would sing another of her favourites to me when she was drunk, 'Have I told you lately that I love you?'

She wasn't drunk when the social workers came to visit us. She even tidied up the house and cleaned the dust out of the hearth. Baby Cathleen was given an extra bath and I had my face and hands scrubbed at the kitchen sink. I think I wore a stripy nylon jumper and skirt. Anyway, I was clean, if shabby, waiting anxiously for the car to draw up outside and the letter box to be rattled. As if they needed to do that to get our attention. I could tell from my mother's sober shakes that this was a caller we couldn't hide from behind the couch.

My mother opened the door and showed two strangers into the living room. Throughout their visit, I smiled and spoke politely whenever they asked me any questions, never leaving the floor by my mother's side. When the woman asked my mother about the bruises on my legs, she told her I was always climbing. Soon they were gone and I no longer had to smile. My mum and I stood at the door to nod to them as they got into their car. When she closed the door, my mother put her hand on my back and said, 'You did well, hen. You did well.' I could sense her relief. Then she told me to go away into my room to play and I knew she'd be going into the pantry for a drink.

After the terrifying visit from Social Work, we went on a day trip to Hamilton, to a place called the WRVS. For me, it was a lovely day out in the country. We went on the train and I remember all the baskets of colourful flowers when we arrived at Hamilton Central Station. A short walk from the station found us at the Women's Royal Voluntary Service offices. The woman there was very kind to me. I was allowed

to choose clothes from a cupboard and in particular I remember choosing a lacy party dress. I don't think I'd ever had a party dress before. It was blue taffeta with a chiffon top layer and it had a lovely silk ribbon round the waist with a blue rose sewn on the band. The attention made me feel special.

I wore this dress to the only birthday party I ever had. Prior to the party, my mother had painted the living room. It was the current interior fashion to paint one wall a different colour from the rest and my mother had painted the main wall purple. Despite her efforts, I cried at the party. We played a game of statues in which we had to stay still when the music stopped. Anybody who moved was out. I stood frozen but then Allen, May's son, pulled at my new dress and I was deemed to have moved. I was put out of the game. That was the source of my unhappiness. Years later, I came to realise how my mother must have felt about the visit to the WRVS - the unhappiness she must have felt and maybe even the shame. I hope today that in some way my innocence and excitement might have cheered her up.