

Lifelines

Introduction

People are living longer; consequently, more of us in the future may live alone or be supported only by non-family carers; and more of us are likely to suffer dementia.

The Milton Keynes Community Foundation's Vital Signs Report revealed that in 2013 there were 10,190 people over 65 living alone in the new city. Studies have shown that the more connected we are, the better we fare. We are highly social creatures. We don't thrive in isolation and neither do our brains.

Living Archive Milton Keynes' *Lifelines* project seeks to tackle these issues in a positive and unique way. It offers a chance for local elderly people living alone, in care homes or in palliative care, to leave an audio record of their lives for

their families and for current and future generations in Milton Keynes.

'Everybody has a story to tell' is the mantra of Living Archive Milton Keynes. The act of telling and recording a story enables people to establish their role in their community and to reflect on their life contribution and its legacy.

The *Lifelines* pilot project was funded by MK Community Foundation with additional support from MK Council. It sought to explore the potential of this idea and we worked with staff at Shenley Wood Retirement Village. A number of resident befrienders and family members were trained in interviewing and audio recording skills and in specifically dealing with people with dementia. Then 8 elderly people at the Village were given a chance to tell the volunteers their story, and through that process to reduce their isolation and reconnect to the rest of the residents in the Village.



Lifelines

Barbara Bennett, Born 1926



I started nursing on June 1st 1944. I was sent to this ward, it was in the gymnasium and there were 48 beds – they were all empty. I had to get a stretcher, fill it with hot water bottles and put hot water bottles in all of the beds! I thought, 'This isn't nursing'.

Then, of course, June 6th was D-day and then we started having convoys coming in and they would wake us up. "Half-past six, nurse". Your breakfast was at ten past seven and you were on duty at half past. But in those times if a convoy came in they would wake you up at two o'clock in the morning, or half past two and you would still have to go out – you used to be so tired! All these

young men would come in with no legs and no arms – it sounds awful but it was much nicer than that. They were so pleased to see us and we used to give them their breakfast.

People would come to entertain the troops. Well, of course, they came and they were so funny these people because they were singing to these young men...

"Some day my heart will awake..."

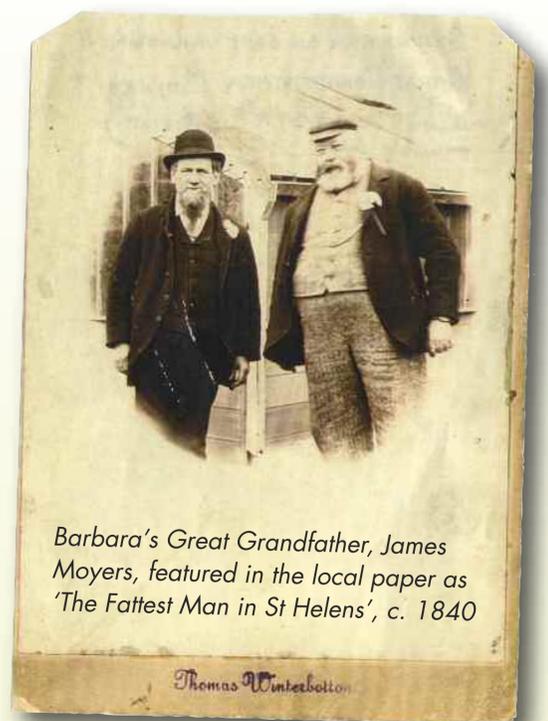
They thought it was hilarious! They didn't want to listen to that!



Barbara as a Ward Sister at Croydon General Hospital, c. 1950



This photo was taken to send to her brothers during the war, c. 1944. Barbara was very proud of being a nurse



Barbara's Great Grandfather, James Moyers, featured in the local paper as 'The Fattest Man in St Helens', c. 1840

Thomas Winterbottom



Barbara and her husband George, 1954



Barbara's brothers John Owen FRS, Professor of Anatomy and Phillip Owen, Priest



Barbara as a baby, her Mother and cousins, 1926

Lifelines

Lesley de Mattos, Born 1929



I was born in the Salvation Army Mothers' Hospital in Shoreditch which, in turn, means that I'm a genuine 'cor blimey limey' because it's in the sound of the bells of London.

We only ever played in the street. Never played in houses, never played indoors unless the weather was bad.

I can remember my father going to work on a bike with an engine on the back. It wasn't a motorbike but it was like an adapted bicycle and Dad was a salesman for his father.

I had a current account. I got paid and it was transferred to my father's account till the day I got married. I gave everything to him and I was allowed so much for train fares, so much for lunch, a little bit for bits and pieces and everything else, "Well, you've got a boyfriend, he'll take you out."

When we married, we had an Orthodox Jewish wedding. We were very lucky as we lived with my parents for six months which gave us a chance to save and we bought a maisonette.



Lesley's wedding day, 1958.
"Just about to set off from my family home in Stanmore to start a new married life with Harvey."



The wedding ceremony at Edgware Yeshurun Orthodox Synagogue



Lesley's parents, Annie and Isaac, c. 1923



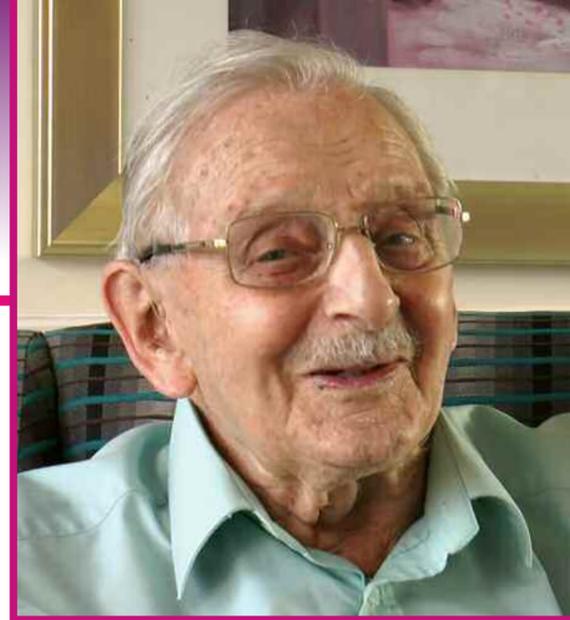
A family gathering in 1970. Lesley is in the front row, far left



RAF National Service Officer Cadet Training Unit, 1954. Lesley's husband Harvey is in the back row, second from left

Lifelines

Ted Prior, Born 1920



During the Second World War Ted was captured by the Japanese and sent to a POW camp...

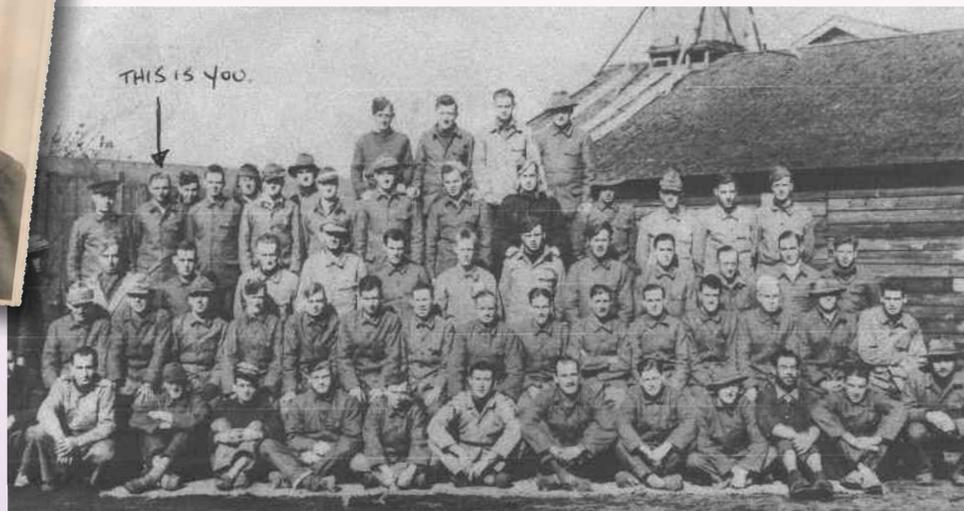
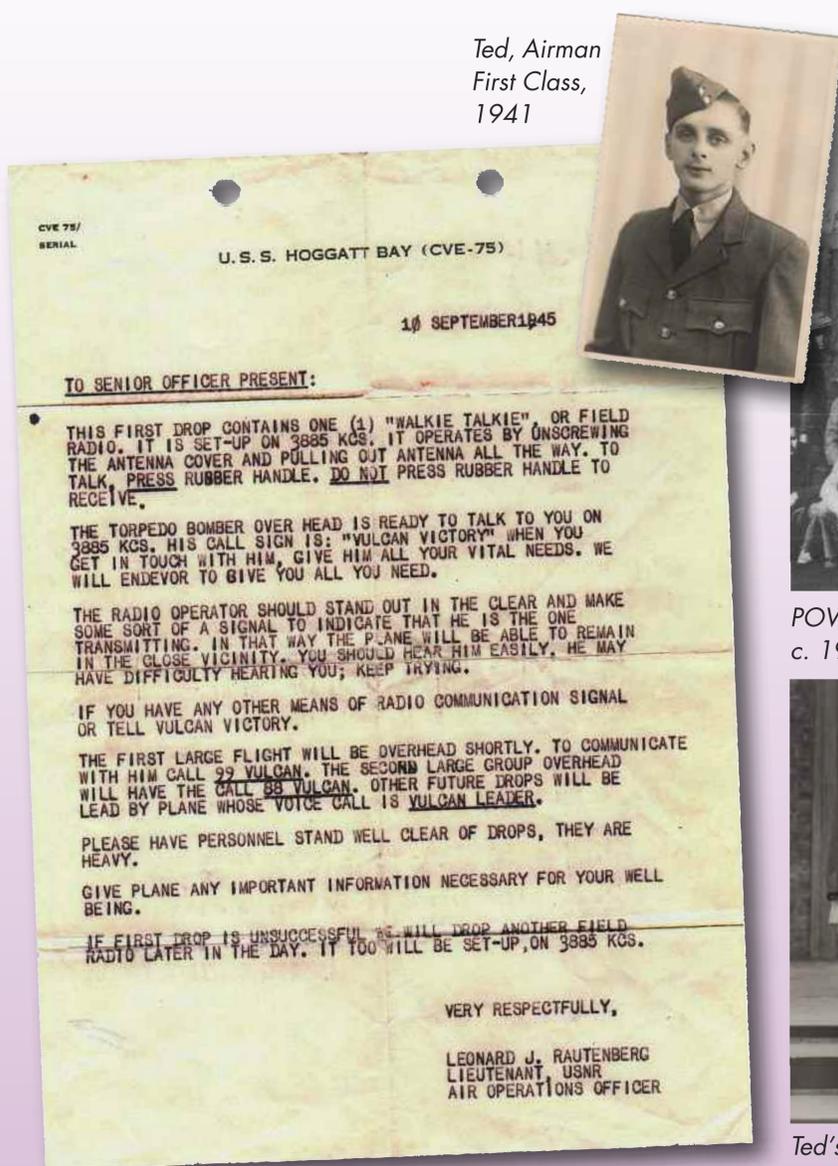
We were called to a meeting outside, everybody that was, including all the prisoners, and we were addressed by a colonel. He spoke practically no English at all but somehow he got round the news that the war is now over and we are all brothers. What amazed us was that everybody then had a bottle of beer.

Every Japanese had disappeared from the camp and so we had no interpreter, not anybody, and we were virtually left high and dry.

We saw this single American plane – we came to the conclusion that he was probably up there looking for our camp. We made a bonfire and we set it alight, and we tried to get as much smoke into the air as we could. As good luck would have it, the plane did see us and it was wonderful to see him switch direction and come over towards us.

They dropped a forty-five gallon drum type thing, hanging on the end of the parachute. I can remember that there were a hundred cigarettes per man and everything else you can think of was in those drums – we probably had six pairs of shoes each.

Ted, Airman
First Class,
1941



POW camp on the island of Hokkaido, Northern Japan, c. 1945 when the soldiers were repatriated



Ted's wedding, 14th May 1941



Ted before leaving Singapore, c. 1942



Batman to the Camp Commander, c. 1941

Lifelines

Joan Short, Born 1926



I am six weeks older than the Queen and among my cards for my birthday there was one that gave interesting events in 1926 which brought to mind how much things have changed since then.

Among the headlines it says that 1.75 million workers stopped work during the General Strike in May and the British Empire became the Commonwealth. New arrivals in the life of people were car radios, ICI, 16mm film, widows' pensions, transatlantic phone calls and hair perms. So, as a lady, that would have been very interesting.

During the Second World War...

Within a few weeks of moving in to our new home the 'hit and run' raids started. My mother and younger brother were evacuated, but my father and I stayed on. I often think that was the

summer I really grew up, looking after the house, washing, shopping, cooking what I could for us both.

In 1946 I was out of university and looking for a job. There were plenty of jobs going. I had several offers and I eventually chose that I would go and work for the British Drug Houses (known as BDH).

After about two years or so I had a chat with the head of my department and I said that I would really like to get further qualifications. I took Biological Statistics. I was able to put FRSS after my BSc and became a qualified statistician, which was really something that served me well throughout my career.



Joan with members of the British Insulin Manufacturers' Biological Cttee 1952



Joan and Peter Hey on their wedding day, 14th Sept 1957



Joan aged about 1 year



Joan outside 124 Mayfield Ave, Finchley, circa 1930



Joan as volunteer at MK Museum with her grandchildren

Lifelines

Joyce Reid, Born 1930



My Grandfather used to go shrimping almost before it was light I think, and we'd always have shrimps for tea, which he cooked himself. They used to be cooked in a great big saucepan and then he insisted on having a red-hot poker to put in the saucepan when they were cooked, for some reason.

We used to go down and catch dabs, like little plaice, dryer than plaice, some of them only two or three inches long and he'd bring those home – perhaps a couple of dozen of them. On the way home he'd call in at the Baker's and buy a hot loaf. He'd cook these little dabs and come in with

a great big platter of them for breakfast. That and hot bread and butter, it was lovely.

Biddy the Tubman had a big wooden barrel with a plank across one edge of it and the kids used to go for a ride in it. It was about tuppence a time, something like that.

He'd sit them in this thing and then paddle this barrel round so that it spun and you'd go spinning out to sea. But, he was a very bad tempered old man. "Sit still. Be quiet." So it was a sort of mixed blessing, going for a trip with him.



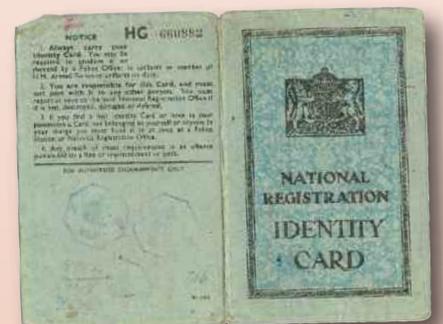
The wedding of Norman Reid and Joyce Walter, 2nd October 1950



Four generations; c. 1932. Joyce's mum as a baby with her mother, Winifred Walter, her grandmother Emily Ades (standing) and great grandmother Sarah Wilson



Joyce and her friend Veronica on Hastings Beach, c. 1937



Joyce's National ID Card

Lifelines

Olive Castle, Born 1925



Out on the street we played lots of games. Skipping a lot. We used to have one game where we had a long rope – often your mother's washing line. One stood one side – you used to jump in, and I remember you used to say "Here comes" – say it was me – "Olive Castle".

The only thing I remember at school, when it was the Silver Jubilee of Queen Mary and King George. We were all given books about it and I've still got the book in the drawer in the hall there.

I remember when the airship, the Hindenburg, came over – it flew over London. They always said that it was secretly filming, you know, where

all the places were, for when the war came, really, they always said that. I remember I was playing out in the street in the summer. All of a sudden this big shadow fell on the ground and, of course, we looked up and there was this – bit like a big silver cigar, really – in the sky. Yeah, it was huge.

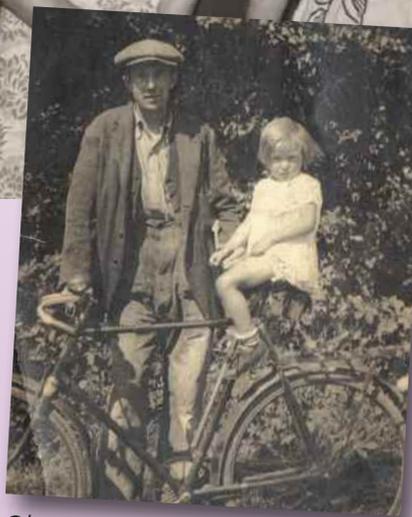
I didn't have a white wedding 'cause clothes were still on rationing but I had a very nice. I don't know if you remember Berketex dresses, do you? They were rather expensive ones which you wouldn't buy for everyday wear. It was a nice full skirt and a dusky pink colour. I was able to wear it for a long time afterwards.



Olive and Frank on their wedding day



Reunion of telegraphy staff, c. 1952



Olive and her Dad at Hordle, Hants, 1928



Olive and Frank at a Holiday Camp

Lifelines

Vi Hunter, Born 1937



My brother was a fireman on the railway. My brother had to lift me up because it was so high. They allowed me to blow the whistle, open the tender up and shovel the coal, pour the sand down to stop the wheels from slipping on the rails. Being a little girl it thrilled me to bits to be on that footplate... I've never forgotten it to this day.

I used to hate those Doodlebugs. They had such a horrible noise. I can still hear that noise in my ears now, and I can still see that fire coming out.

I was getting all agitated and screaming, crying "Come on Mum, come on 'cause it's coming over". You could see this thing coming over with all the fire coming out... a lot of force. Eventually she came just as it was going over and it knocked her backwards down in the shelter with the peg

box on top of her. It broke her glasses. Just across the road was a cemetery – we thought "brilliant, it's going to land in there as it was getting low". Eventually 'cause it cut out – it landed and killed three people in Montrose Avenue.

You obeyed the teachers. I remember at my primary school, the headmistress, Miss Mitchell was very strict and you didn't dare disobey anything she said. Our class was going swimming, she sort of pointed to me and said "right, you swim from there to me". I was so frightened. "Now do it again" she said, and that's how I learnt to swim, because I was frightened to not do what she told me to do.



Vi's husband, Graham, before they were married c. 1957



Vi in her British Caledonian uniform taken outside her maisonette home in Feltam, c, 1961



Princess Anne opening the new Occupational Therapy Department at Weybridge Hospital where Vi's husband Graham was being treated, 1988. Vi is seated in the behind



Vi, her son Steve and husband Graham, 1965

Lifelines

A Pilot Project...

The pilot project gave an opportunity to develop training materials, identify improvements that could be made for future projects. It also gave a chance to discover whether giving elderly people the opportunity to record their life story was beneficial to them and to their family.

89 year old Barbara Bennett was one of the first to tell her story; *"I enjoyed it, because you don't often get to talk about yourself for so long, do you? The best thing was remembering things that I'd forgotten or hadn't thought were interesting to anybody else"*

Barbara's son John is visiting from Australia and will be returning home with a CD of Barbara's interview. *"I think this recording's so important – not just for me and I'll value it greatly, but for society as a whole down the line, for we have so much to learn from what's gone before."*

"I think this project is fantastic, because not everyone is a writer and writing can take time and skill, whereas everyone has the skills of conversation. In Australia the knowledge of aboriginal elders is appreciated, whereas here older people are forgotten and so much has been lost".



Thanks to the volunteer interviewers, Danny Conway, Mary and Monte Page, Hilary McCoy, Wiebke MacLennan and Debs Mitchell; to Sheila Shiels, the Locksmith at Shenley Wood Retirement Village for all her help, support and expertise in ensuring this project was a success; and to Milton Keynes Community Foundation and MK Council for their funding of this pilot project.