­**Maureen’s Story...**

**Maureen Tyson interviewed by Amanda Delfois and Claire Sexton on 3rd October, 2012.**

**Summary:** In this interview Maureen tells many fun, sometimes shocking, stories to tell. Work ranging from being a relief orderly at St. Thomas’ Hospital and researcher in Harvard Library to selling handbags in Harrods- using books before there were computers- and becoming a teacher. As well as having been to art college.

**I’m Amanda Delfois, I’m with Maureen in her house. It is the 3rd of October. Can I ask you to spell your last name, please?**

**Maureen:** T-Y-S-O-N.

**And when and where was you born?**

**Maureen:** In Aldershot, Hampshire. On the 17th of the third, 1932.

**So can you tell us a little bit about your work?**

**Maureen:** What work? What work do you want to know about?

**All of it.**

**Maureen:** I’ve got a long list. Ha-ha- starting from when I was sixteen.

**Wow. Start from the beginning then I suppose.**

**Maureen:** Right, when I was sixteen, I had a job in my – I was at school at Notre Dame, which is at the Elephant and Castle. And err we used to– the girls there- we all used to get jobs in the holidays when we were old enough because the age group was lower then, you could go when you were sixteen – and I got a job in the income tax office just off Bond Street, and um, my job there was err mostly doing the things like what they called ‘creeping check’ in the files – seeing that all the paper files, which they had then, were in the exact alphabetical order. And we covered that office covered Notting Hill for tax purposes and then sometimes you were trusted after a while to send out forms that were required to be sent out, but everyone, everything had to be done rigidly by the things there. I took to taking two or three things at a time and then sending out the things and putting them back and I was told off. Cos’ now we always do it one at a time and put it back, and then we get the next one- the most time consuming terrible way of doing things. And I did get a bit fed up with it. Umm.

**Did you work with any of your school mates, or did you work-?**

**Maureen:** No, no I worked for myself there. I got the- I went there because I think, looking back – this is a long time ago – because one of the girls in my class in the 5th form, her sister who was in the 6th form – was older than us, she had got a job doing something like that, so I just, you know, went to try and get another job, which we, you know, we used to, wouldn’t have had any hot pocket money during the holidays if we didn’t work. And the other thing we did, which I did as well when I was still at school, which was, but I think I did that when I was younger – was fruit picking in Norfolk. Because after the war, there were not many men of course around, so the minister of agriculture set up these camps, and people used to go there and um do fruit picking, because they couldn’t, there were not enough fruit pickers and things. Eventually, when I was a student, we had student farm camps, that was when I was at College and then that was handled by the National Union of Students and they used to recruit students from abroad so they wanted to come to England, they could come and do a couple of weeks fruit or vegetable picking. And then you know, that was quite hard work, because we always worked in factories, we worked in factories canning fruit and stuff like that. Not, um, very good. And the days were long of course because you had to fit in with the harvest and I know some of the factory conditions weren’t very good cos’ one of the factories that we worked in belongs to co-op. If you wanted to go to the lavatory, you had to go with someone else because of great huge rats, as they said because cats in the lavatory, were all hanging around…

**Oh wow.**

**Maureen:** So, um, quite interesting doing a lot of things.

**How many hours did you work in the factory Maureen?**

**Maureen:** Well, I suppose we must have worked ten hours at least, we started very early in the morning because when we worked in Birds Eye- I worked in Birds Eye canning with pea can, canning peas – we used to have to sort peas as they came in cos’ they’d been picked automatically over night, so they had to be processed as quick as possible, so you’re better off really buying frozen peas than you are fresh peas in the market – they say cos’ they’re picked overnight, and they’re sorted in the morning and sort of cooked frozen, packed by the afternoon so they’re not even a day off the off the plants. Um, done fruit picking, raspberries at Hershel fingers and er, also when it was the student farm camps – but that’s further on – I worked- I worked in the kitchens, we were recruited beforehand. I did go picking once I think, and then we were recruited again um, blocks of us going and being the staff in the kitchens, doing the cooking and things, I mean I’ve got lots of tales, but as you’re only here for a short time, there’s no point in telling you any amusing tales and things.

**Oh no we’d love to hear!**

**Maureen:** Like when my friend, who I was cooking with, dropped a great big seven pound tin of jam on my foot, which wasn’t very nice. It just wasn’t her fault, she scooped it off the shelf in the stores, and it went right through onto my foot cos’ I was standing next to her. Err, we used to have lots of adventures of course, and some bit ofromance with the other students as well.

**Ha ha-ha.**

**Maureen:** And er, oh the other thing was when we started at this Hartley’s Jam – it was jam factory, and we weren’t actually picking, but we were being the cooks and the staff and we had um- we had err a big vat of potatoes to cook. But, of course, we were only students, we were only about sort of nineteen or so, and um we’d then cook vast amounts of food and we started the chap in charge of us – who was an ex servicemen, but a student, cos’ there were a lot of ex service students at that time, and uh he said: ‘Oh well, could you not – make sure you do it early’. And we did it and when we looked in it – ‘do you think ought to look like this?’ It was slightly yellow we thought**,** it was just boiling sort of, yeah – and all the potato’s had disintegrated.

**Hahahaha.**

**Maureen:** So we had to fish out what we could and make mashed potatoes. And another one of our adventures was when we put, or I- I think put salt in the sugar and this students – the foreign students kept complaining about the tea in the urn and we- the, you know the foreigners don’t like our tea. In fact, it was because I put- I put salt instead of sugar into it. So we had sort of lot’s of adventures like that so, um that was when I was a student. I also, when I was a student, I worked at St Thomas’s hospital as a relief orderly, and err at one point, um because Summer holidays and Christmas, they needed extra staff to cover the orderlies who were, well the staff that were away – but I was a relief orderly and err, that was okay, but you were moved around from one ward to another, according to who was off cos’ the work we were doing in the Summer holidays and over Christmas. And, in those days, the staff, like the doctors, didn’t talk to the domestic staff. And I remember I was once walking along the corridor, underneath the St Thomas’s hospital, and an old lady came up to me and said: ‘Ooh can you tell me where the kidney department is’ and I said, oh sorry I don’t know, I’ll ask someone, and a doctor came out of the operating theatre, which some of them were down there. So, I said ‘oh excuse me, can you tell me where the kidney department is?’ And he looked at me as if I was a piece of lino off the floor that had got up and spoken to him…

**Wow!**

**Maureen:** Well, it did make me laugh because we used to go to Chelsea town hall to dances and then the student, run by the student, the student’s union or something, and of course these young doctor’s used to turn up and cos’ they were always looking for art students to err to pick up. And I thought, ‘if you’d met me on Saturday’– hah.

**Hahahaha.**

**Maureen:** Too, pleased to meet mehe was, because I’d got a green uniform on, I wasn’t acceptable. Uh, the work it was interesting working there, um every ward, each sister in charge had her own little foibles – that you had to know what they were and fit in with. Um, all sorts of things like one, err, one of the sisters she always entertained doctor’s to tea in the afternoon, and of course we didn’t have all the facilities that they have now, we had big ranges in the kitchen, that we had to keep stocked up. The men used to come round for the porters and do it, but you had to keep an eye on it because you had to boil kettles for the tea, and you had to cook eggs, which was scarce, people’s relations brought in eggs and they would give you these eggs, and you had to cook you know: ‘Oh I like mine soft, Oh I like mine hard’. You had to sort of find some way of cooking them that they’d – at tea time, so that they could have their tea with their boiled eggs, which they’d brought in. Um. When this sister on one ward – in addition to making the patient’s tea – because no – no sliced bread – you had to cut all the bread up, and butter it and cut it up in triangles. Ha ha – and um and then serve it out, but she also used to order extra minced chicken or something like that, on the food wagon, and then used to take that and make little chicken sandwiches with, in triangles with all the crusts cut off…

**Heheheh.**

**Maureen:** Because in the afternoon she used to entertain the doctor’s – who were great big hulking rugby type – with these tiny little sandwiches…

**Hehehehe.**

**Maureen:** And selected nice biscuits in her, in her little parlor, cos’ the sister’s then didn’t have an office, they had a sort of like a sitting room with a desk and things like a drawing room – and that kind of thing. So that was quite amusing going round there, the worst job I did there, which I tell people and they used to say they don’t want to know – they didn’t have disposable bandages and things in those days, or napkins and part of our job was scrubbing off uh, the heavy weight bandages people might have on, on after a stomach operation, and the babies nappies – before they went to the laundry.

**Can you – how would you have done that Maureen?**

**Maureen:** Well, they were great big sinks, and we used to have to scrub them off in the sink and things, well the nappies used to soak in a bucket of water disinfect water and then you had to scoop them out and scrub off anything that was on them and rinse them so that they, well they would still be a bit stained, but they were fit to go to the laundry, cos’ they didn’t want all the shit going in the laundry with the other things.

**Wow.**

**Maureen:** And so, um and the same with bandages, I mean sometimes they’d got blood all over them or sometimes ladies had their babies and they had what they called Hampton pads – big pad, gauzy pads that they sat on, I mean and sometimes they’d leak, and you’d have to scrub everything off, so they would, they’d be fairly clean to go to the laundry. And uh that we got – for that, doing that – we got a remuneration of two and six pence a week.

**And how much is that today?**

**Maureen:** Two and six pence was um, half a crown – it was uh, it was about a quarter - 25p.

**25p – Wow. Hahahaha. Okay.**

**Maureen:** And it, that was our remuneration for doing that, and also you’d sometimes get a patient in cos’, you know, St Thomas’ hospital is in Lambeth – you’d get dirty patients in and sometimes they’d be lousy, and if they were in overnight and no one had spotted it and dealt with it, these we had to have these hucker Towels, and the lice would get behind the weaving in it andwe were supposed to pick those out as many as we could before they went to the laundry. Hahahaha.

Sometimes funny things happened, I mean it wasn’t all disgusting, sometimes funny things happened, well it was funny the eccentricities of some of the nurses – the sisters, you know, having to fit in with their little foibles. Then one day I was in the maternity ward and there was a lovely looking girl sitting up in bed with masses of dark red hair, looking very healthy and everything and the, the first job you did in the …… with buckets of disinfected water – and you had to wash down every bed and the window sills, and the lockers – and that was done every single day, so really, it was much more hygienic than it is now, and um that was my first job in the morning, cos’ that’s the orderlies were the top of the, top of the domestic order. And then there were um, there were pinkies who did the, the ward maid and she did the other sort of cleaning bits and then the, there were pinkies and the pinkies were like char ladies – they did the floors, and you know swabbing out the hard things,um, and I went to move her locker and behind it she was a lovely looking girls, all girls set up and everything, and behind her locker – there were false legs – she’d only got one leg. Hahahaha. So you got funny little things like that happened.

**Could I ask how much you got paid for that job?**

**Maureen:** I can’t remember, it wasn’t that – well, couldn’t by todays standards- it wasn’t very much, but it was reasonable pay – you know, it was worth you doing it. Um, I did that for a couple of years. Um, and I went to college and I did that still when I was at- I was at Art School, I went to Art School – I went to St Martin’s School of Art, and um I used to work there in the holidays, but that’s um, I used to work in all my holidays because um my parents weren’t hard up, but my mother said no – you’ve got to go out and earn some money, and I’m quite surprised that people would hand out loads of money to their, their kids now, and they don’t - don’t mount on the pressure to go to work and get their money, but of course someone said to me well nowadays, of course the trouble is that all that work has been taken up by Immigrants and people like that who are willing to work for low wage, just to get their foot on the ladder, and I’m afraid the working class in England have gone a bit lazy, you know they sort of, well they think that it’s not, it’s a bit beneath them now to do that sort of work, and so you know, and they’re better off living off benefits. So those jobs aren’t just available anymore like they used to be.

**Could I ask what course you’d done at College?**

**Maureen:** Pardon?

**Do you remember what course you’d done at College?**

Uh yes, I did the National Diploma Design, I did the, you did one year basic thing and then you chose what you wanted to do and I did Illustration. And um then I had an, when I finished at St Martin’s, I applied to go to the Royal College and I had to wait a year and so I had a job there in um, I had a job then for a whole year in after struggle – cos’ then it got really rather difficult to get jobs unless you have got experience, and of course the experience I got was useless to, a lot of the jobs I was applying for and I said well, you know, I’m quite intelligent, I can quickly learn a job you know. Oh no - not but eventually I got a job in High Lifts which was a big publisher’s – that’s the only time when I’ve worked in that area and it was in Stamford Street, um where Sainsbury’s headquarters’ used to be, I don’t know if you would know where Sainsbury’s headquarters used to be on Stamford Street.

**No.**

**Maureen:** Um, right down the end of Stamford street, the far from Waterloo – the other end, um and we were next door, and it was a big publishing firm it felt, it um it published mostly um technical things like water car, motor bus and coach, nursing mirror, amateur photographer, I mean quite well known magazines still some of them, um and they were setting up a team with um a man in charge and then two older girls, one of which I was and then two younger girls, and our job was sorting the post and getting it on the desks as soon as possible, and you had to be quite bright, cos’ a, it was a new job we were learning – and B, um you had to get it sorted into what was editorial and what was advertising, and you had to be trustworthy because, for instance in the amateur photographer they had a scheme where people were selling a camera, then we were the trustees who held the camera and held the money, and only gave the money when the camera had been bought you know, and so um, so you had to be trustworthy as well, and also you had to be able to get up at six o’clock in the morning and well, before six o’clock we started work at six because that’s when the, in those days you’ve got two or three deliveries of post so um, the first delivery was at six o’clock in the morning so you had to be on the job at six o’clock sorting out err all these mountains of letters through all the different magazines and delivering them and having them on the desk ready when the people came to work at nine o’clock and um, and also you sometimes handling blocks and things for the prints so you had to be able to know what they were and what to do with them and handling money so it was quite a responsible job, but we used to do that quickly and then we’d done that, we used to go to the café on the corner and get dripping toast bacon sandwiches for our breakfast, and then wait until the midday post came about half past eleven, and sort that and err, which was not so heavy, and then half of the team would go off so we’d have every other afternoon off, we only worked six till- till about one o’clock one day, and six till about half past three, four the next day because there was also an afternoon post, but not much in it, so that was easier to get around. Um, there were a lot of hanging around of course between the posts and um, so but we had to stay in the office, we weren’t allowed to go out, I know we got told off once cos’ we went out cos’ there was an organ grinder with his monkey outside and we went outside to see him. We got told off for going out, although we weren’t actually working at that time, it was in between posts. Um, it was alright, the team was nice and the man in charge of my group was really nice – Mr. Barley – uh, I’ll tell you how strange it was because one of younger girls that I worked with talking about what did you do at the weekend, and she said: ‘Ooh I went over the water’ and I said ‘Oh you went to France, that must have been nice she went just for the day– she said ‘No – over the water, over the bridge – over the Thames’ because people didn’t go that often, they were dead set in their places and they didn’t go, it was quite an adventure to go over to the West End, something to talk about to your friends. Um so I worked there in High Lifts.

**Did you have to work in silence, or was you allowed to talk?**

**Maureen:** Oh no, it were quite friendly, we were quite a friendly group you know, it wasn’t very strictly probably cos’ we did the work you know, we knew, got to know each other quite well. And err, what’s the other jobs I’ve done. Oh the other job I did do a job and I can’t remember when that was, I fitted it in,I worked in, I worked in Harrod’s for – oh a year.

**Oh, wow.**

**Maureen:** Um, I my mother worked in Harrod’s, that was her war work, I think perhaps it was before I went to St Martin’s or sometime, I’m trying to think when it was because I did work there for nearly a year, um I worked in, I can’t remember the name of the – I think it was DerianToms – It used to be in Kensington High Street.

**Okay.**

**Maureen:** And I got a job there on the handbag counter, which was really boring, cos’ the handbags were expensive. I didn’t get any commission on my sales, cos’ they’d say put, I didn’t have a book to write the sale in so the older ladies used to say put it in my book dear cos’ they were getting commission on my sales and also it was dead boring because there’s nothing to do once you’ve sort of dusted or tidied up things, it was just nothing to do except stand there, so my mother worked in the Harrods all during the war, so I think it must have been before I went to St Martin’s. Um, and so she had a word with the staff office and they suggested I went for an interview and I got a job in the library. And that was very interesting cos’ we used to lend books from there and had quite funny things happen there, like when I didn’t send some books ha-ha – because it was a holiday – that’s right it was a holiday vacancy so I used to cover there and then I worked in the book department as well which was interesting, looking up books in the – see there was no, no computers in those days, so you had to look it all up in compendiums of books. And also…

**What does that mean?**

**Maureen:** Well, we had, there were big red book that you could look up any published books in…

**Okay.**

**Maureen:** And uh, so no computers you see to look things up on, so you- you used to look them up in there and then uh, track down books and sometimes people hadn’t given you the right – um, the right sort of um, uh exact title and things, so it was quite adventurous looking for it and quite thrilling when you found it. We used to have heavy orders from people, some people ordered five or six big books every week – ‘Oh just pick some up for me dear – you know the kind of books I like’.

**Ha-ha.**

**Maureen:** And you’d just pick them out, and then there was some lady called – ‘Lady Bullo’. It was spelt Bullock, but she said ‘Lady Bullo’. And she spelt, she lived in Albert Hall Mansions, and she used to just ring up every week and say: ‘Oh send me 4 or 5 books dear’ – just perhaps you’d like this one on uh, decorating the home and that – it’s quite nice, got some lovely photographs in it: ‘Oh yes, well that will be alright’. And there’s a new book about – you know the Greek Islands, and you’d get to know the customers and make up an order and she said: ‘Oh yes, well if I don’t like them, she said I’ll just give them to the red cross – for the hospital’.

**Wow, and this was in Harrods?**

**Maureen:** In Harrods – yeah. And we used to have to treat the, I’ve been run run around the corner to get a book someone wanted that we’d run out of and they’d give me the money and I’d have to go out and go out and go around in Sloane street to the book shop – another book shop and see if they’d got a copy that we could buy. And then sell without any profit to the, to the, so that the customer’s always right. And I did get a phone call once, cos’ I’d forgotten to send some books out when I was working in the library, over the bank holiday and someone phoned up they were really furious and said: ‘I didn’t get my books – and it’s a bank holiday and blah blah blah’ they went on and on and on and I said Oh well, I’m terribly sorry, I can’t apologize enough Madam, I’m very very sorry. I will attend to it immediately myself on an express order get them out to you, wherever it was in Surrey or somewhere. Tomorrow you’ll get them – you’ll get them tomorrow at the very latest tomorrow morning, and I can’t apologize enough, but it is the holiday time and we’re employing students, we’re employing extra staff, and they’re not really completely competent with the work that was me – I didn’t say it was me, I hadn’t done the job properly.

**Hahahaha.**

**Maureen:** But she said oh thank you very much, as long as you’ll attend to it – ‘Yes Madam, certainly’.

**Did you used to have to call everyone Madam?**

**Maureen:** Oh yes, or if you didn’t know their name, if you knew their name then you’d call them Mr.’s so and so, cos’ in the library there was subscriptions and so they had cards you know, things on. And you got to know the people, it was very well run, we always had a- a staff meeting every morning which was really good. And uh so you were always in the picture, and you were allowed to get the books and read them so that you knew what to tell the people about. I don’t know if I preferred the book department, or I preferred the library – but in the book department the other thing we had, it used to be these – uh usually older men, very indigent and down market, but we- we used to have one or two, and they used to go to the trade counters and get book if we needed book. They used to have great big huge sack things that they carried around, and they’d come in in the morning and we’d give them all the book that we needed – not dozens of copies, but odd things, and they’d go out to the trade counters and they’re all centralized now – but they used to have to go round different trade counters at different publishers and collect the books and then bring them back in the afternoon. And uh that job doesn’t exist anymore of course cos’ it’s all centralized. Most of it at Amazon booksand books and get on the computer to get your books.

**Would you say compared to like today’s Harrods that it’s a lot different to when it was?**

**Maureen:** Oh yes its rubbish.

**It’s a lot….**

**Maureen:** No, I mean its rubbish today, it’s just money making, you know. I mean the food hall’s the same, more or less, but the actual departments aren’t the same, cos’ we had chairs and there’s and they’d – the people used to sit down on the chairs and um, you know sit down and be served and uh – my mother worked in the haberdashery and she was working there in the war, and yet she’d have her favorite customers you know, she’d say: ‘Ooh Madam, um we’ve had some curby grips – cos’ they were in short supply cos’ they were made of metal you see, and most of the metal was going for armaments, so things like hair pins came and very low thin and combs and things like that. ‘I’ve got some curby grips in would you like a card?’ – ‘Thank you so much’ and the actual er customers knew your name you know, and they’d say: ‘Thank you so much, it’s very kind of Maureen’. Hair nets – saves thosefor your favorite customers – so that was quite interesting little bits and pieces.

**So would you say it was quite personal, shopping was quite – going in to Harrods was quite personal…?**

**Maureen:** Oh, yes, yes, you’d. And you’d get anything that – well they used to say that you know, if a – you’d get an elephant if the per– customer wanted it. Ha-ha.

**Hahahaha.**

**Maureen:** And uh, I mean they do- do that a bit now with some things, but uh, it’s not the same, it’s just a tourist attraction.

**Mmm.**

**Maureen:** And of course there were no tourists you see, cos’ it was after the war and nobody had any money so, you wouldn’t have got, you might have got a few Americans I suppose, but you wouldn’t have got very, you know, you wouldn’t have got the hoards of people that stream in there now, and crowd the place up, and it wasn’t crowded at all. And uh, what else can I tell you – oh well I worked there and I’m trying to think when I worked there. Umm…

**Harrods – um in the like, when you’re talking about – was it like, obviously like now you have like a rich people that go in there was it like that or was it just like normal people that would walk in there?**

**Maureen:** Oh no, it was only rich people.

**It was rich people as well?**

**Maureen:** Yeah, cos’ poor people were much poorer, there was a bigger division between rich people and poor people then, and I think most poor people wouldn’t have really gone in there, it would have been a bit of an adventure to go in there you know, and you’d have felt out of place, so many places like Fortum and Mason’s you see, and uh, I mean I think Fortner and Mason’s is still a bit like that actually, ha-ha.

**Yeah I think so, ha-ha.**

**Maureen:** And, and you don’t get the service there that you used to get you see…

**Hahahaha.**

**Maureen:** One time we’d have make a query and a man in a frock coat would come to you to the counter and tell the person what you wanted and what you were looking for, I mean that’s – I’m only talking about a few years ago. But they don’t do that now, you have to find your own way around and help yourself. But um, the uh that’s – changed, see I’ve done lots of different jobs, and I’m not quite sure when I did some of those I mean, I suppose I could sit and have a really good think but I didn’t make a list because I’ve done such a lot of different things.

**I don’t think dates matter, it’s just the way that the story they were telling us.**

**Maureen:** Yeah, uh yeah.

**Was Harrods your favorite job out of the one’s you’ve described so far?**

**Maureen:** No…

**You liked all of them?**

**Maureen:** No, I mean I liked doing all the research into the books and that was quite interesting, and I mean it’s quite useful, cos’ if I went to the job Harvard library, I’d now, what I was doing looking for things, I’ve done that when I was teaching actually, looking up information about when our school’s hundred years old, going through all the microfiche while they, they’d dug and they have the microfiche because they had different ways of doing things, but um – anyway I, I was at St Martin’s, and then I was at the Royal College of Art, but when I left, jobs were getting very short – and uh, I got married and I got a, I got, I’m trying to think – get it into the right order. Um I had a job, I got a job part time job teaching in Graves End, so I lived in St George’s square in – which is in Victoria, it’s right up near, near to Vauxhall – near to the bridge – you know it’s not very far – it’s one of those squares that go off along the river and it was a requisitioned house – that’s right, cos’ my parents moved out of London and I wanted to stay in London, and we were living in a requisitioned flat, and my mother, my father was in the army and he was out of the army and he was stationed in Aldershot – which is my Mother’s home town, which was why I was born there, and um so my mother decided they were going to move down there, and they got a flat, which was a conversion – in a – it had been a pub, and they’d – it had been converted into flats, they got a flat there so I said I don’t want to go down to Aldershot, I want to stay in London. And I was a student and my mother went to the council and said well we’re leaving a flat, you know a family flat, uh, which was a requisitioned flat actually it was in a mansion block in um Stafford Place which is just opposite where the – you know where the stables are at Buckingham Palace?

**Mmhmm.**

**Maureen:** It’s across the road there – it’s a quite a well known place um – Stafford Place and it was a Mansion block that had been taken over and requisitioned and made into flats for people who were homeless. We weren’t exactly homeless, but during the war my father got a promotion and from living in the army flats in Victoria, which had just behind there between Vauxhall bridge – if you can imagine Vauxhall bridge road and Westminster Cathedral, there’s a block there, by um – and off um Rochester road. There’s two blocks of army flats there and we lived there but of course when he was an officer, it was only for people who, who were not not officers, and we had to get out so we got a place which was in Denby street, which wasn’t very nice then cos’ it was during the war and the war, Wilton road which goes down from, um, from Belgravia down to, down to uh Victoria station, was thronged with prostitutes and things.

**Wow.**

**Maureen:** My mother wasn’t very taken - by that time I was at secondary school and my mother wasn’t very taken with that so she made a big fuss about that and we we got re- redistributed to Stafford Mansions – which wasn’t actually a better pla – a better flat because it was a Mansion flat that had been sort of divided into half so you got these small rooms great big tall, tall roofs you know like a bedroom would be like half the size of this room with a taller - taller ceiling than this, so a bit claustrophobic and I didn’t like it. But my parents moved out of London and um my mother then went and got me this flat which is in St George’s square and I lived in there after I’d got married and even till I had my first baby and when my parents - when I worked in Peckham used to say: ‘Oh well it’s alright for you, you’ve got your own house’. I thought yes, but you don’t realize – when I was a young married woman, I did not live in a nice council flat like you do with a bathroom and lavatory. I lived 89 stairs up in one room at the top of a house and I shared a bathroom and lavatory and a kitchen with no stove in it, just a big sink with cold water – no heating with two other people. And when I was pregnant I used to climb up the last two flights of stairs on my hands and knees, cos’ I couldn’t walk up the stairs – and ha-ha – it was all full of people that they’d dumped from the um – from Pimlico which had been badly bombed and they’d been – and they were pulling it all down, and so there were other odd people like – there was a woman next door to me who had two rooms, one above the other, the one next to my room was her bedroom, the one underneath her bedroom was her living room and then next door to her there was an old, um Irish lady who lady who was a cleaner um and then below her there’s an older Irish lady who was a bit grumpy and they’d uh one woman who was a fine dress maker in one room. And then on the ground floor, there were two old men, the one in the front room was very grumpy, but he did have very bad arthritis and he’s not a very nice person anyway, but the old man in the back he had been a soldier in the First World War and as he said: ‘I caught shrapnel in me head’ he said: ‘I …… sixty, I …. sixty and I got shrapnel in my head’.

**Maureen:** But he was quite a nice old man, but he was a bit off centre – and he had a lady friend who used to come in every day and help him, but I mean the circumstances of living in were really sordid and uh that was Westminster Council, but my room was only 10 shillings a week – fifty pence a week rent. Hahahaha.

**Not too bad!**

**Maureen:** No, well it was, no it was reasonable on the circumstances. And when I was a student my mother used to give me a pound a week, but when I got married my husband moved in there with me, cos’ he lived in Portobello road, and before we got married I used to spend some time over there with him and that was another interesting job I had, short for a short amount of time because it was above the Bello Bakery which is in Portobello road, and he lived there and shared a kitchen with another guy who lived there, and uh we had a job one Christmas icing Christmas cakes, because the –Roger the guy who owned it was French man – and he said would we like – as we were artists, cos’ we were at art school – would we, would we like to ice Christmas cakes. And he’d ice them, but we had to decorate them with like a skating scene or something like that.

**Wow.**

**Maureen:** So we did that and my best one was when I had to do a cake for a Jewish boy who was having his bar-mitzvah with ‘Happy Bar-mitzvah Bernie’ on it and appropriate decorations.

**Wow.**

**Maureen:** So uh.

**How did you meet your husband?**

**Maureen:** Uh, he was living in lodgings with some girl I was friendly with and her husband in art school I think and he was just another one of the student lodgers there, cos’ um, and I just met him through them. Um, so uh what did I do – well then when I left college, I looked for a job um and I couldn’t get a - I mean, before I had my children obviously, before I got, I remember, I think that I was if I was married or not – I can’t remember – but I must have got married during that year and I found a job at – it was at GravesEnd and I used to travel down to Graves End every day, um uh.

**How did you used to get down there by train?**

**Maureen:** Well I was living in St George’s square in this one room that my mother had got, so I used to race over Vauxhall bridge and get the train to Waterloo, and then race from Waterloo main station to Waterloo East and get on the train to Graves End and get down there in time for school meeting early in the morning at quarter to nine.

**So what time did you leave?**

**Maureen:** I can’t remember, probably about seven o’clock or so in the morning.

**Early!**

**Maureen:** And uh, I’m trying to think, I didn’t – did I work there full time or part time? Well I know I used to go dance and that line was terrible, now it gets things about leaves on the line and it used to be like that years and years ago when I, that’s, I’m talking about fifty – sixty years ago, and er there were still, there were leaves on the line then and sometimes I used to go in on a Friday cos’ I needed a half day – I must have done a – I didn’t know whether I worked part time – I think I did. And uh, I used to go down and get there in time to come, turn around and come back, but just to show my face – to show I’d made the effort to get to work because otherwise I wouldn’t have got paid you see if I’d just taken time off. It was a Graves End grammar school for girls and it was um it was quite a good job you know, and I taught the sixth form, uh fifth and sixth form. I wasn’t teaching the little ones and er, teaching architecture and things like that um for their, for their exams. Um and there was another art teacher there who I was quite friendly with at the time who was older, much older than me. And then I got pregnant, so I left and had the baby and uh, then after I’ve come to the end of my story you’ll be pleased to know.

**No – I’m enjoying it.**

**Maureen:** As we, when I left I thought well, when it should – uh baby was bigger I’d get a job, um but we moved, we moved to – to a um Grove Park at the top, to Champ – no to Champion Hill first of all, which is the top of the dog kennel hill – right above Sainsbury’s and there are flats there now, but when we moved in it was a big terrace of houses and it just happens that um, someone I’d been to school with – her mother had been to school with a woman who was the head ofBessermer Grange School and she and her sister had a friend they lived with on Champion Hill and they offered, they were moving out of London, they were retiring at the same time and they were retiring and going to live down on the coast, and so they’d put our names forward to the to Crispin Estate – who owned the houses uh and said they’d got two very nice tenants you know who were teachers and blah blah blah and could they, could we have their flat. So we had a rather nice big spacious flat which was the top of the, the top of the one of the houses, there’s a big terrace of houses that had been private originally and, but half the terrace was a hotel – called ‘Moat House Hotel’. And we’d been living there for some time and I’d had another baby, and err the err they were pulling it down, um they sold the terrace and so we had to move – and so we were looking for somewhere to move to, and because they’d pulled down Moat House they came in one morning and went as soon as the Moat House was vacant they got the builders in with their big bashers and they bashed it down so it was you know, irretrievable and they developed it as an estate of houses which are there still, on Champion Hill opposite the council flats on the other side of the road. So our bit, they couldn’t bash it down cos’ there were people living in it but we had to look for a house and so we bought a house in Grove Park, and I lived there until about twelve years ago and um when I moved here, but um when I was there I thought well I have to get a job because we were paying a mortgage and things and so I um, they were short of teachers so I had planned to go back teaching art in the Grammar School when the kids started school, but I joined something called CASE – ‘The Confederation for the Advancement of State Education’ and err, we- we were battling to get Nursery schools opened in – anywhere in London cos’ there was only one I think State Nursery School and so we found that David Eccleston – who had been the Minister of Education had made a statement in a speech somewhere that someone had got out of a newspaper – saying that ‘If sufficient teachers would return to teaching’ – because they were very over crowded classes – if he provided nursery classes for their children, then he would reconsider opening nursery classes, and we said okay, we’ll go back to teaching in Primary school, we’ll go teaching Primary school if you give us nursery places. So we got, we did get six nursery classes opened.

**Wow.**

**Maureen:** And they were the first ones since before the war. So um, so I had to go back to teaching in a primary school and I taught in Dog Kennel Hill School and er then I taught in Grove Vale school, I’d moved there, you know there were personal reasons why I moved there, but I won’t go into those, cos’ it’s not relevant really. And I moved to Grove Vale school and then I got fed up being there cos’ I was part time job sharing and I found cos’ I was job sharing, I wasn’t getting all the information you know, about what was going on in the school and that, and so I thought, well I’ll move – I’ll look for another job and I then moved to John Dunne’s school, which is actually just by King’s road, Queen’s road station – opposite the Acorn estate, so it didn’t have a great catchment area and hahaha, yeah we err, so I moved, I moved there and I worked there for – ooh about 14 – 15 years at least and err, that, I took early retirement again – for sort of personal reasons that I’d had a sort of thing and rather disappointing thing happened – so I, I uh but I worked there and I was the, sort of the it was a – it started off as a junior and infant school and then err, a couple of years after I started the school was amalgamated and the head of the junior school retired, and the woman who was acting as the head of the infant school, while the infant school head was on her study leave at the Institute of Education – uh she applied for the job and she was head of the whole school so I was a sort of foreman of the infant school and I used to, I started off with a class, but then after a while um, I didn’t have a class you know, and I used to just sort of go around, sort of seeing that things were run properly and we, but um we opened a mother’s, a mother’s club, we opened a nursery first of all because the kids who were coming in they didn’t get much at home people when they started school, so we started two nursery classes there. And then uh a lot of our mother’s were foreign speaking and things and were semi-depressed quite a lot of them – you know. And so we started a mother’s club and uh that was run by one – someone who’d been a teacher and was a mother of children in the school and she’s called Theresa Early- and she now runs a theatre – the Children’s Theatre in err, in err it’s down the road, just behind the, the uh Town Hall – it’s been there for ages now. And she does a lot of work you know with children – they you know, doing theatre, arts and things like that plus they put on shows, and uh she ran the mother’s club very effectively cos’ she’s a very charismatic sort of person. And err, so I used to be in charge of all of that and we had one, two, three, four, five – five classes in the infant school, cos’ it big catchment from the acorn estate and a lot of those kids hadn’t come with any experience of school and that, so they needed really heavy input. But we did manage to up the reading age in one year – we upped it by two years which was quite good.

**Wow.**

**Maureen:** We got, I’d had a very good experience at Dog Kennel Hill School about how to teach them reading and things like that so – uh, but I did leave and I’ve been as my brother says: ‘An actual nightmare because I’ve been retired for 25 years now on my Teacher’s pension, and 20 years on my old age pension – ha-ha – so they’re waiting for me to pop my clogs. But, I don’t feel like doing that just yet.

**NO – um can I ask you – the prices of, um so when you’s a teacher and you moved schools – what was that process. Did you apply for the jobs and have to do interviews or…?**

**Maureen:** Oh yeah, yes you got interviewed by the Governor’s of the school and see if you were a suitable sort of person. I did apply for a couple of headships, but I didn’t get them, I think cos’ I was a bit too out spoken about things.

**And applying for teacher roles, were they different to when you, um when you went to Harrods or you went to the first job when** was 16?

**Maureen:** Oh yes, it was very different…

**How would you have applied?**

**Maureen:** Yeah, they were asking you about your skills and you know what your experience was of teaching and you know, what you thought of teaching methods and all sorts of things like that. So yeah, cos’ they were professional, they weren’t just looking for someone who would fit into the job. Hahah.

**Yeah – so for that first job when you were sixteen, did you have to have any skills, what was the process of you getting that job?**

**Maureen:** I can’t really remember to tell you, it’s such a long time ago. Um, I must have got in touch with the uh income tax bureau and said have you got any jobs going and that I’m at school and I’m, you know I’m sixteen now and want a job for the summer, well because they always needed new hands, because, I mean one of the jobs when I worked in the income tax office – the first job I did was what they called a creeping check – well you wouldn’t get any young person doing that now days.

**That’s what I was thinking – yeah.**

**Maureen:** Because what we went, that job was going through the whole, it was me and there was one other student and our job was going through ALL the paper files, putting them in exact alphabetical order, cos’ some people would think oh it’s C, I’ll chuck it in with the C’s – but it wasn’t CA – and it wasn’t then all the alphabet wasn’t in the exact alphabetical order, and so one of our jobs was that – well it were a really tedious job.

**But it sounded you’d like, for a sixteen year old, that you had quite a responsible – you know….**

**Maureen:** Oh yes, well it was grown up then, you see when you were sixteen, cos’ then anyone could go to work when they were sixteen in those days, so it was a responsible job you know, you were grown up, you were expect – well there was, you know there wasn’t this cult of teenagers and things in those days, so much and so you were a young grown up, and you were expected to behave like it. And you were expected – but you were also expected to behave, to behave as you were told by your elders, and that’s why they had all these, mmm, you know, sort of really aggravating um, you know – bossy people with their way that they’d got that you did things and you had to do it that way, there was no – there were, weren’t open to suggestions but it’s, it’s quicker if I take 6 files and go and do one, two, three, four, five, six – put them all back in order on the shelf. ‘Oh no, we don’t do it that way, we do it one at a time’.

**Hahahaha.**

**Maureen:** And when I worked in the factory, when I worked in one of the factory’s when Birdseye because we were sorting peas, and we were sitting at a long belt and all these thousands of peas would come and our job was to pick out any that didn’t look, the thing they were, they were you know – malformed, or they were grown moldy or something which wasn’t pretty likely. But we looking at and the guy came along once and he said – the foreman and he said: ‘You girls aren’t working quick enough – he said you’ve got to work a bit quicker than that’. And then he said: ‘I’ll show you what to do’. And so he sat down and he did it – you know, much quicker of course and then he got up and he said ‘Well that’s what I want’, I said: ‘But you’ve only been sitting there for fifteen minutes, we’re sitting there all day’. ‘You know, we can’t work at the same pace as you can work, you sit there with us all day and show us you doing it that way really’.

**Maureen:** You know but they were like that you know, and uh there were also things that you wouldn’t get away with now cos’ I worked in the Co-Op factory and we was – there we were doing um, put, we were doing plums – but I remember at one point and the Victoria plums – nice plums were coming on – now the the red VictoriaPlums went into one kind of tin, they were, they were the ones we were tinning. That was the – red, red ripe plums in the red plum tin. Then the ones that were under ripe they went as yellow plums, and they sort of treated them. Ha-ha they went in tins for different kind; they were a different kind of plum. But if there were any moldy ones – we would put them in a box underneath. And then guess what – they used to boil, I mean you wouldn’t get away with it nowadays – they’d boil – you’d boil them up and they used to once a week, there’d be this terrible sort of stench of some kind of acidy stuff that they’d put with them – all through the factory and we said oh you know, can’t you do something about it, because they were kind of sterilizing the moldy plums and making them into jam.

**Oh No!**

**Maureen:** Oh yes ha ha-ha, that was in Whyz beach in Cambridgeshire.

**Wow. So you** talking **at Hartley’s Jam then there’s the Hartley’s Factory in.. err.**

**Maureen:** There was one in Whyz Beach.

**Oh cos’ there’s also one, that used to be in Bermondsey, so they had two factories?**

**Maureen:** Yes, they did yes, yeah that was the, I know the jam factory- yeah, but the, but knowing, we worked for Hartley’s in South, because we were, when we worked there we were in a student farm camp and then uh, but there were also people who came from outside – you know, poorer people who wanted to earn a bit of money for holidays and also it’s a bit of a holiday, change of scene. And we were picking strawberries and things – strawberries and raspberries. We were the cooks. I did a bit of picking, but not strawberries, but I picked raspberries. Um, and then we, they used to go to the factory and um they used, we used to take the centers out of the strawberries by hand.

**Wow.**

**Maureen:** And uh, and of course then people used to get the pips down their nails, so then you had to operate on them, take them, the piece out of their nail, and get the thing out otherwise it would fester and you would get a poisoned finger.

**So you worked for a Grammar school and then you worked for a school that was predominantly for an estate. What changes did you see during those years that you were teaching?**

**Maureen:** Well, I don’t, the grammar school was just a grammar school and it was all very, it was very well run, we had a very marvelous head and we always – we had to be there by quarter to nine in the morning because then there was always a – she was very efficient – and we always had a meeting before school, so anything that happened in the school, there was never any gossip – cos’ we had one girl got into trouble for shoplifting or something like that, but you always knew about it because it was, you were told in the staff meeting. So there was no, you know chattering or backbitingor anything like that – or someone knows and somebody else doesn’t know – so we would have had all the information we needed. It was the same I must say when we worked in Harrods – the head of the books department and the library – a Mr. Page – we used to have meetings once or twice a week and we were filled in on all the new books, and any changes were happening or things like that. So it does, it does matter quite a lot that you’ve got a really good boss. I think that’s very important and, I don’t know how that works nowadays cos’ I don’t work nowadays.

**Maureen:** But I mean I’ve been very lucky that I’ve had good heads really. And um so I can’t say that they were different really, though I mean the job was different because of this obviously your aiming for exams in the secondary school, whereas in a primary school you were aiming at getting the kids competent really, well that’s what you should be aiming at is getting them to read and write and do basic mathematics and things like that. And uh, you just have to – well that’s, see I don’t agree with all this business of being - forms to tick and all that sort of thing, because there are methods and teachers know what methods for that, or they did do, and err, and so you know, you need to structure what you’re doing. I mean I’m glad I don’t teach now because, the the thing I enjoyed about teaching in primary school – D.. Hill was a very good school and Ivy Owen was a person who trained, we trained – we did a five week course at County Hall and she retrained us as primary school teachers. Some of the people had been civil servants, they’d never talked. They weren’t all ex teachers that volunteered to go and be teachers, and some of them were ex army and things like that. And they err, but she taught us all these methods that she’d worked out, which she calls her happy methods of learning, learn of learning and they were very effective and of course you would enjoy doing it because you were getting good results, and you were working with the children and um, you know we used to have shops to do, do it all graded for math’s and things really, but they used to make the staff in the shop so the kids were interested, and they used to make their shopping list and see how much they were going to spend or they’d get you know, so many pound, and they had to see what they could buy for a pound in the shop and add it all up like a shopping list and thing, I mean, so it was sort of good life experience and things, and the same with the reading, I mean I used to, I used to be in charge of the reading scheme when I was at John Dunne’s school, and um, you know, everything was colour graded so that if you were on the blue book, then the words from the blue book were on the wall, and the work cards were blue and everything, so you were in that section until you got onto the next colour say, and then but you’d see someone come and ask for a word I’d say**,**  ‘I’m not telling you that, what does it begin with – what sound, right well you know what it looks like that sound – b – b, so you go and look on the blue chart and it’s on there cos’ it’s in your reading book’. So they’d have to go and look for the word themselves, so it was self sufficient and so, you know that’s what I believe is a really good, well it worked, we put our reading age up the two years, which was really good.

**Yeah.**

**Maureen:** So um, that was err, you know and that was challenging and enjoyable and also the head and I used to go and, at the end of the summer term – summer holidays we used to go and work out some ideas for um – you know the staff if they’d like to put in some ideas about themes that we’d use and we used to sometimes do a whole theme right through the school and every class would do a different aspect of it, and then we’d have exhibitions all over the school of all the work and things. We once did, there was a thing at the um, at the Haywood Gallery – native American Indian stuff, and so every class in the school took a – took a, a tribe and they, and then they’d concentrate and learn what they could about that tribe and all their work was geared that way, and they made things and they talked about their legends and then you had to write your own legend about some animal or some, such thing – you know as you’re English workit was really stimulating, and it was nice to do and I, I wouldn’t have liked to have stayed on really, I mean that’s not why I retired to, took early retirement cos’ they were getting rid of all the experienced teachers, cos’ they wanted to save on your salary. And uh, so but they, um they’ve enhanced the pension up see, I was fifty-five and they enhanced it up to age sixty in order to get you to retire, and I had a disagreement, and that’s why I wanted to leave. And uh, but I mean I enjoyed that cos’ it made, it made it interesting for you as a teacher, and uh you know we used to have concerts and we had one of the teachers’ was very interested in music she was a, or had been a jazz singer herself, and she used to put on shows and we did – you know versions of Mary Poppins, sort of watered down and that kind of thing. And uh and, but we were good you know, we had a good time, interesting. So – there you go. That was enjoyable and I don’t think working to things given to by people who don’t know anything at all about teaching – just about aims and objectives and those ticking of the boxes. It doesn’t mean anything at all. And certainly, I don’t think a lot of the people been turned out of school nowadays are really fit to do anything, cos’ they really don’t have enough knowledge, you know, or ideas how to do things, and I, you know it’s just I’m glad I’m not involved in it.

**Hmm – what was one of the, so was that.**

**So did um, when the aims came in and looking for targets – did that have an effect on your work as a teacher and how you worked with children?**

**Maureen:** When what came in?

**When you said that it’s now targets, it’s very target driven and very aim driven – was that during the time you were teaching?**

**Maureen:** No, no they were just thinking about it then.

**Yeah – were, were there any out err, factors that had an impact on your, on your teaching and on your schools?**

**Maureen:** Um, what features about the education or directives? No cos’ we didn’t, though that hadn’t really started.

Okay.

**Maureen:** And uh, I would have, I would probably have tried to leave if I’d been, cos’ I’m just, I know that the people they were sending into to school, a lot of them were not professional teachers, or any kind of thing to do with education and they were just sort of there to nitpick – you know, and uh, and we had successful results in our school – it wasn’t, I mean I still see students because of the – see I live in the area and they’re doing quite well, even the teenage mothers are. Sometimes you see them, once saw one outside um the supermarket one day with babies and things you know, been one of these teenage mothers. And she said ‘Oh hello Mrs. Tyson blah blah’ um, next I saw her about 18 months later she said she was going to college. She was driving a bloody great sports car just across the road through the – as I’m going to the supermarket and I said ‘oh – stop the car hello, I said nice car’ ‘Oh yes she said I’ve got a job, I’m an accountant now’.

**Wow.**

**Yeah. Thank you for letting us interview you today!**