

Interviewee: Ena Forteith (EF)	Interviewer: Margaret Smith (MS)
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MS: My name's Margaret Smith and I'm a field worker here to interview...

EF: Ena Forteith [REDACTED]

MS: And when were you born Ena?

EF: 1935, December 1935

MS: Whereabouts?

EF: In Annan.

MS: Ok, and we have agreed that we're going to concentrate on your nursing career, so tell me Ena, what prompted you to take up nursing?

EF: I've always known since I was four years old, I knew then I was wantin' to be a nurse. I wanted to help people and make people better, I didn't know whether I was gonna give them medicine or what I was gonna do, but I was...all I wanted to do was to make them better.

MS: That was quite young?

EF: I know but, an' I never changed my mind, all the years I worked. When I left school at fifteen I went to work at Cochrane's, that's a boiler works down near Annan and I was there for two years until I was age to get into the pre-nursing an that's when I went on the first of April 1953 I started at the Grove Hospital as a pre-nurse.

MS: You said earlier you were four, was there an incident there that...?

EF: No, I was walkin through, there was a big house called Kinmount and that's where the wounded soldiers were during the war and, one of the ladies asked me what I was gonna do when I was a big girl an' I said I was gonna be a nurse because I could see the soldiers and they were getting help and they needed help and I felt that I would be able to do that, and I never changed my mind.

MS: So you didn't know any other people there that were nurses?

EF: No, there was nobody else in the family ever wanted to do anything like the that, and that's what I did.

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MS: So you started at the Grove, did you have to be interviewed?

EF: Was interviewed before that, and they asked why I wanted to be a nurse and I told them I just wanted to help people and make them better and that was it and then I started.

MS: Was there any other people started at that time?

EF: One, there was another girl, but I think she'd had previous experience because she had been an auxiliary in one of the other hospitals. I had no experience at all, and I remember the first day I was going round with one of the senior nurses and I went into this male ward and this man shouted he needed a bottle, I said 'a bottle?' an I said yes I need a bottle and the nurse was saying 'don't mind him, because he gets up', an I thought what's getting up got to do with a bottle? I didn't think that it was that cold that he

needed a bottle, I thought it was talking about a hot water bottle! [laughter] So I came out of there wi' a face like a beetroot. [laughter]

MS: So in fact he was referring to...?

EF: A urinal! And that's, well I didn't know that they even used a urinal in bed I'd no idea, I couldn't...I was just so naive about nursing in general when people were in bed.

MS: And did you have to stay in, there?

EF: Yes, yes we stayed in.

MS: Right, and your new uniform?

EF: We got our uniform and the dresses were twelve ... it had to be Oxford lacing shoes, then black stockings, and the uniform was twelve inches from the ground and that's where it was measured, and we had all these collars and cuffs to put on wi' a back stud and a front stud and buttons where rings in the back for paper cuffs on in their sleeves. Antiquated! [laughter]

MS: How did you manage to put it together the first time you ever had to put it on?

EF: Well, there was always somebody else there and they said 'we'll have to do this to our uniform' and then the hats! Well that was an ordeal to make a hat because it was just like a big triangle and then you had to pleat it and catch it at the back and then it's like a butterfly with the tail at the back. It really was an ordeal to get it all done but you just got used to it.

MS: So did you have any training there or you just...?

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EF: No, you were just, you were with a senior nurse all the time and when a senior nurse came into the room you had to stand until they told you to sit down, and that was in the sittin' room, you always stood for a second year or a third year nurse.

MS: Oh did you?

EF: Uh huh, we stood up for them and then we sat down when they told us to sit down.

MS: And what did you call one another?

EF: By our last name, we never called each other by our first name.

MS: Even when you were off duty?

EF: Even when you were off duty you'd called them their last name that much you automatically called them by their last name. Even when you went out with them, you automatically opened your mouth and called them their last name, and ye'd an awful job of trying to change round and call them by their first name. That's the way it was.

MS: Amazing. So what hours did you work there?

EF: We worked from half-past seven, was it half-past seven till three? Or you started at one o'clock to half-past nine, and sometimes you had a break from ten o'clock till one if you were on to nine o'clock at night and then... or a break in the afternoon from two till five. Those were the hours that you did.

MS: And days off?

EF: We had one day off a week.

MS: And during your day off you went home, did you?

EF: Yes, but ye had to ask permission to go , you had to let them know that you weren't staying in, you'd to go, and if you wanted to go out at night, you know, to a dance or something, you had got to be...you got a late pass to eleven o'clock, but you'd got to report in at eleven o'clock. It was very strict. [laughter]

MS: What was the layout? This was at the Grove Hospital, so what, can you remember the layout and the type of patients?

EF: Well downstairs, it was a big house that used to be a big house and each of the rooms were into small wards. Downstairs it was all convalescent patients that came

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there, and then upstairs they were orthopaedic patients and there was a theatre upstairs and they did the operations, orthopaedic operations and they had an annexe up across from the, well outside up a few steps where the TB patients were, when they were on spicas, you know hip spicas and all the rest of it when they were nursed up there, because they had TB in their bones and things, and they were kept up there.

MS: So was it a separate staff that looked...?

EF: No no, you just used to go up there and look after them as well.

MS: So how long were you at the Grove?

EF: Nine months, until I was age to take my training, so that's what we did.

MS: Any funny incidents when you were there?

EF: No, I can remember the first time I was taught how to do injections and it was morphine and you had the teaspoon and the pill, and then you put a wee drop water on it an you boilt it up in this wee burner to dissolve the tablet, I think that's what the druggies'll use now. But that's what we used to do.

MS: And then draw...?

EF: Draw it up in the syringe and we gave it to the patient. And ye practiced on people that were on the way out, which was quite sad, but we did. But I remember these wee tablets...white tablets, they were just like wee saccharines an you put them in the spoon, an ordinary teaspoon, and some water an you heated it wi' this wee burner.

MS: That's amazin.

EF: That was in 1953.

MS: What about the theatre upstairs you said, were you ever in...?

EF: No I didn't go in there because the surgeon used to come from Dumfries Infirmary and they operated there and they brought mainly their own staff and they did their operatin' there.

MS: And did the patient remain at the Grove?

EF: Uh huh, the orthopaedic ones yes.

MS: So what kinda operations did they do?

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EF: Bone, it was legs and arms you know, not huge operations but they did them there, aye, there was a theatre, like we had to wash all the walls and that, no, but we didn't go in at the actual operations, and they used to plaster...it was an orderly that'd do all the plastering. So, it's all changed. And then there was places up the stairs where staff slept and then in the basement, that's where the nurses slept as well.

MS: Did they?

EF: I remember one night I wis hauled out my bed because the night sister that'd come round and she said to me there was crumbs on the lid of the...there was a bin in the kitchen an that's where the slops went in, and of course I'd left some crumbs on the lid, an I said 'Och! It's only the pig bin!', well she hauled me out of bed an I'd to go upstairs and clean that bin. That was half-past eleven at night, because I had said 'Och, it was only the pigs bin', I got reprimanded for that! [laughter]. So after that I made sure there was no crumbs in the lid o' the pig bin I can tell you. That's terrible.

MS: Gosh, amazing. Patients would be there for their convalescent, patients came from...?

EF: The hospital, the Infirmary.

MS: An I guess they were able to get outside?

EF: Yes, oh aye, they'd got there nice grounds, lovely grounds and they were always out, aye, it was very good, they enjoyed it.

MS: I bet they did. And what about the food that you got?

EF: Oh food was good.

MS: Was it?

EF: Yes, and we all had...there was a wee dining room and she was an assistant matron that always looked after the Grove, and when she, if you were at first dinner ye'd half an hour, and she came in and she sat down an then we stood up for she sat down, then we all sat down. She got her meals first and then everybody else got their meal and as soon as she finished, put her knife and fork down that was it, you couldny eat any more because we'd to stop then because she was finished.

MS: Irrespective of whether you...

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EF: Irrespective whether I was finished or not. And we always stood behind the chair and said grace before our meal and then after the meal we got up when she got up and we stood behind the chair again and thanked, and did a thank you grace after the meal.

MS: Did you?

EF: That's the way we were taught yes.

MS: And that was for your, all your meals?

EF: Uh-huh, yes, if she was at the table we always did that.

MS: And if she wasn't?

EF: If she wasn't it was grand you could eat [everything] on your plate! [laughter] And we used to get you know two ounce o' butter, that lasted you for a week, and that was on a wee plate, everybody had their own butter, and four ounce o' sugar in your jam jar, that was your ration for the week.

MS: Oh right, of course it was rationing at that time.

EF: Yes it was rationing and that's what we had, and we kept it and sometimes somebody would pinch your butter, and the same wi' the sugar. I used to take sugar in my tea, but then no I preferred it in my cornflakes so I had to take it out my...I had to do without, I used to say I've taken it out my tea so I can [?] on my porridge or my flakes. But the food was great, that's when I stopped having sugar in ma tea. Anyway you only had this four ounce, four ounce was nothing, for a whole week.

MS: Amazing. Did you have your names on each of the items?

EF: Yes, our names were on the jars but that didn't stop people helpin' themselves mind you! It was an open cupboard you know you just put them in the cupboard and shut the door. That's true.

MS: And who topped them up?

EF: The kitchen. The kitchen laid it all out. So there you go.

MS: Ok, so you started your training, and where did that take place then?

EF: We started the training and then we went to Gribton where the PTS was, and that's where we were for twelve weeks.

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MS: And did you join more people?

EF: Oh yes, uh huh, different ones, because some came straight in at that age but they'd been to other hospitals, some of them had, some of the hadn't, and we started and that's where we had oor lectures and there were dormitories with five or six nurses in each one. And then of course we were fed there and we slept there and the night staff from the hospital, from the Infirmary, they slept upstairs, we had rooms up the stairs at Gribton.

MS: So what was your training like, in terms of...you had theoretical part?

EF: Oh yes, that was good we had the intense training to begin with, all the different subjects and we had them there and once you passed that lot you had to go, you went into the ward after that. And when you did your orals you went to Glasgow and that was your day off.

MS: On your day off?

EF: On your day off, that was your day off, you'd to go to Glasgow and you'd to pay to go there and if you had lectures when you were in your second year and third year you'd get surgical lectures on your skin and and all the different...renal and everything else, and they had to be done in your own time.

MS: Did they?

EF: You know you got away from the ward for your hour lecture if you were nightshift you got up and you went to your lecture and then you went back to bed again, you had to do that.

MS: Gosh.

EF: But your first twelve weeks was in it as your pre...as your training, and that was the last time you were in that class, after that they were just hourly lectures you would have to go to.

MS: So at the end o' the twelve weeks did you have to pass/sit any tests?

EF: Yes we did.

MS: And did all...?

EF: Oh well everybody passed, and then you were into the wards as first years.

MS: So how many were you in that?

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EF: Twelve of us, the classes were usually about twelve.

MS: Twelve. Was it...how did you feel meeting these different people?

EF: Well, there was one very clever girl, she wis brains, you know, she knew everything and she used to take everything in and she was really very good, Brenda Jeans was her name, I remember Brenda but oh she was so clever, but then she wasn't good as a practical nurse.

MS: Did you make friends with her?

EF: Oh yes, we were always friends, I think it was like working for a big family, and I think when we trained we all knew each other and you were friends with each other if you had somethin' to say you said it and then that was it over and done with. I felt they were very caring.

MS: Supportive?

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EF: Uh huh, very, very supportive. and then of course I had the problem didn't I, when I was pregnant. You knew that?

MS: No.

EF: Oh. When I was in my second year I was pregnant and my father wouldn't have anything to do with me, and I wouldn't get rid o the baby, so the Lady [?] spoke to me an she said well the only thing I could do was have the baby adopted. I thought you knew?

MS: No I didn't.

EF: And then when I was six months pregnant the assistant matron took me up to Glasgow to the Salvation Army home and I was there until I had the baby and then the baby was adopted. We had all...we had to feed our babies, breast feed them and then when the baby was three months old we had to go out and register...we went out at six weeks and registered the baby in Glasgow and we'd to buy the layette when it was being adopted. After the baby was adopted you'd to dress your baby and hand it over to the lady in the Salvation Army and then you were sent to your bedroom wi a lot of sodium [amytal?] we were given six milligrams of sodium [amytal?] to take, it wasny it was four hundred milligrams of sodium amytal to take, and then the baby went away and then I was brought back down to the hospital, I came down and I was at

the hospital.. I got the bus from Glasgow back to the hospital and then they put me into ward 3 which was the children's ward.

MS: Oh gosh.

EF: And I was on...I got into Dumfries about four o'clock and I was on duty at five o'clock and I was there till nine o'clock, and that's where I was when I came back from Glasgow. It was like a punishment, you know, you'd done wrong, you'd nobody to support you, but they got up there, they took you up there and then you came right back to your work. I thought you knew that.

MS: No I didn't. That must have been really...

EF: It was really hard, but fair enough I finished my training after that so I joined another class, not the original class but I joined another class and they were really very supportive, and they knew, they knew I'd disappeared and I came back. Some of them didn't know what had happened to me, but it was only the senior staff that really knew what had happened to me.

MS: But good on you coming back

EF: Oh yes, oh aye I had to come back and finish my training that was my life, nursing was my life and that's what I wanted to do, so there you go.

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MS: Good for you, good. So you qualified in...

EF: '56

MS: '56, and then what happened?

EF: No '57, cos I started in '53...the September in '53 I started and then because I was away for six months I joined another class, so it was '57 that I finished. And then I was in the surgical ward and then a medical ward, then you got...but before you went to the ward you reported to the matron and she would, you know, tell you if you had done anything wrong in the previous ward and then she just made sure your uniform was right and then away you went to the ward and then you got a report at the end of that and you'd to go back to the matron again. We reported before you went to the ward, after you came back from the ward before you went to the next one, you reported when you went on nightshift. [laughter] Ah deary me!

MS: This was when you were training?

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EF: This was when I was training! We did all this reporting because the matron was the mother, she was the mother figure.

MS: Who was the matron at that time?

EF: Miss Hutt, aye Miss Hutt, she was the matron and she was like a mother hen and this was all of us. [laughter]

MS: So once you qualified though?

EF: Oh once you were qualified that was fine.

MS: Was it?

EF: Uh huh, but when you were night shift you were a runner to your staff nurse or your third year nurse, and believe me you ran! [laughter] Up and down those wards you did. There was two of us in the ward.

MS: And that would be how many patients?

EF: Eh, thirty.

MS: Thirty, gosh. Gee whizz.

EF: And you worked. You got a half hour break.

MS: There wouldn't be any time...

EF: No. but the thing is you slept all day.

MS: And did you sleep at Gribton if you were on night duty?

EF: Aye, night staff slept at Gribton, [was?] the transport from the hospital.

MS: What about your social life then during...?

EF: Well we didn't have all that much social life, but you'd to ask for a late pass and you'd to go to the front hall and ask matron or her assistant matron, and we asked her for a late pass and then when you came in at night ye...because the doors were locked, the nurses home was locked where you stayed and you had to go and report to the night sister so she would come, open the door, let you in and lock the door, cause you were locked in at night. When you think about it...[laughter]

MS: It's a bit different isn't it?

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EF: Yes I know! There was one...there was a fire escape on the outside of the nurses home and there was blocks on the window so you couldn't open but there was the blocks on this window that you could unscrew and we used to come in late at night you know, if whoever had that room it was too bad, because the blocks were taken off if somebody was out and then they'd open the window climb in and go in, but, well it was just...the nurse that was sleeping in that room accepted that, then the blocks were put back on in the morning.

MS: What about, was there somebody in charge of the nurses home?

EF: Not at night, no no, you were just locked in. Then at quarter to seven in the morning you opened the door. [laughter] Aye it's true! Aw when I think about it imagine! This day and age telling them, no. And you got only one pass, one late pass a week.

MS: What kind of social activities was on out in the community, what kind of things did you go to?

EF: It wasn't really great, there was like wee dances, that's all, that's all there was really.

MS: Did people, did students go the pubs?

EF: Oh no you didn't go to pubs oh for goodness sake no!

MS: What about Christmas, what was Christmas like?



EF: Oh Christmas was lovely! Christmas was the...everybody was...all the wards were decorated and they all got a wee present and no, it was lovely.

MS: Really nice.

EF: Cause you made it for them because they couldn't get home so we had to make it, and we always used to go...Christmas Eve we used to go round the wards singing carols, I don't know if they do that now?

MS: I don't know.

EF: But we always went round and sang carols, we did. And when we were at the Grove we used to go the church at [?] on a Sunday, the transport [?] would come and take us and we could go in our uniform and there was special seats for us to sit in at [?] church.

MS: Was that every Sunday?

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EF: Yes.

MS: Were you expected to go?

EF: Well you could go if you wanted, but I was always there, aye. There was quite a lot of them went to church.

MS: And here at the Infirmary when you were doing your training?

EF: No it was only Christmas time we went to South and Town Head church in uniform at the candlelit service. We did, we went in our uniform. And we had our capes on and we turned them round...they were navy on the outside, no dark navy on the outside and red lining and we wore them the opposite way round at Christmas.

MS: And was it, when you were living in at the nurses home, was it compulsory that you had to stay in the nurses home?

EF: We had to stay in until you were in your third year. You had no choice.

MS: Even if your home was...?

EF: Even if your home was just down the road, no, you had to stay in until you were in your third year.

MS: Did they ever give any reason for that?

EF: Maybe they didn't think we were responsible enough. No, but that was...I remember one of my friends got married and Miss Hutt wasn't going to let her live with her husband up in [?].

MS: Right, so she got married during her training?

EF: Yes, she was the only person that was allowed to get married when they were doing their training because they didn't take married ones because...

MS: So did she...?

EF: She fought for it and she got, she was allowed to stay with her husband. Oh aye yes she really stuck her heels in.

MS: So once you kinda got to third year what was your options for accommodation then if your home wasn't nearby?

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EF: Well there was always somewhere we could get a room, I remember staying in Barry Avenue and that old lady is still running about, she's still going to Morrison's and I spoke to her a few weeks ago and I said to her an I said do you know who I was? And she says she knew my face but that was it and I said I had digs with you when I was a wee student and she could remember, she said 'that was a long time ago', she's in her nineties.

MS: My goodness.

EF: And she's great, aye she stays in Barry Avenue.

MS: So you had digs and that was...what did that consist of?

EF: Just a room, and we got our breakfast there and we got our meals at the hospital. I can't remember how much we paid but Charlotte Wood and I stayed there and it was great. I think it was freedom, you know you were out! [laughter] That's awful! We were out of the hospital, but you had to be in your third year your last year.

MS: Before you were allowed to do that.

EF: That's what I mean you were really kept under...

MS: And when you were in the dining room or socialising did you socialise between the qualified nurses and the sisters?

EF: No, the sisters, they all sat together in the dining room, they had the different nurses...and of course again when the matron was at that table with all the sisters we all stood up, we all stood behind our chairs to say grace before the meal and after the meal.

MS: Oh did you, even at the Infirmary?

EF: Even in the Infirmary, we did that.

MS: And what were the other staff then where did they eat, the medical staff and the porters?

EF: No the medical staff, they had a different dining room for the medical staff

MS: Oh they didn't...

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EF: No no they didn't mix with the nursing staff, but all the sisters sat together and the nurses sat together. But this standing up when a senior nurse came into the sittin' room, ye did it, showed respect.

MS: Amazing isn't it? So...

EF: Well look when I was nightshift when I was a night sister, the nurses always stood up when I went into the ward and they took off their cardigans until I told them to sit down, they always stood up.

MS: Ah that's right, uh huh. So you're talking there about when you...once you qualified, what then did you do?

EF: Well I went on...no I didn't, I was on day shift on different wards until I got married and then I went back to the nursing after I had my family and then I did nightshift.

MS: Always?

EF: Always, I always did nightshift because it suited my family life and it suited me and I could sleep during the day no problem, I was usually in medical and then I did surgical, so that's what I did.

MS: Looking back over that time span what's been some of the changes that you have seen?

EF: Sometimes there's too much familiarity between the nurses and the doctors, even with the nurses I could be friends with some of my nurses out of the hospital but when I was at my work they always gave me respect.

MS: Ok, what about nursing care, how did that change over...?

EF: Nursing care was good in the old days because you were taught basic nursing care and if you don't have the basic nursing care it's no good, and we always called them Mrs, or Mr, or Miss, we didn't call the patients by their first name and we made sure they were comfortable and we checked them all the time. Now they don't, well, they look all right so that's it they don't need seen to. And being as a patient I've noticed that, but...they don't have the same care of the patients, 'I'll be back in a minute' this is what they say, 'I'll be back in a minute', or 'I've no forgotten ye', and they have forgotten, there's too much paperwork nowadays. It's all changed and it's not for the best.

MS: Looking back Ena, is there any kind of funny incidents that you had involving staff or patients?

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EF: Sometimes the nurses didn't know the...I remember I went up to the ward, I'd phoned up a ward and asked if they had Zimovane which is a drug used in medical and they said yes they would have it, so I said right I'll just be up shortly to get it so I went up and I went down to the ward and I asked for the drug, and this wee nurse piped up and she said 'it's at the door for ye' and I said 'that's a Zimmer Frame, not Zimovane, it's a tablet I'm wanting, that is true! [?] And she laughed and laughed about me shouting for a pill and the nurse leaves me a zimmer at the door. [laughter] Another one, remember you used to get aminophylline suppositories for your breathing? Yes, this nurse was given two aminophylline suppositories to give a patient for breathing, now these were normally given rectally, but when the staff nurse went to check if the patient had got them he was sitting in bed with them stuck up his nose, she says how on earth were they gonna help his breathing if they were stuck up his rectum, that is the gospel truth, the poor patient! [laughter] Had these two things stuck out in his nostrils, cause that would help his breathing, no any other way. No I think that's enough.

MS: Well thank you Ena, thank you for sharing your life with us.

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