

**Ann Gray (AG) b. 27<sup>th</sup> November 1940.**

**Interview with Judy Caine (JC), 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018**

*[Ann asked to identify herself for the tape.]*

**AG:** My name is Ann Gray. My date of birth is 27/11/40 and I am Scottish.

**JC:** Tell me how you came to Corby?

**AG:** You're going to laugh. I came down here on holiday – most of my cousins lived in Corby – and I came down here on holiday and my cousin said, "I'm going to the Isle of Man for a holiday in two weeks' time. Do you think you could get time off and come?"

I said, "I haven't got a ticket!", but she said, "Don't worry about it. We can organise a ferry ticket because we've got a block booking." But I thought I've got to get the time off. I mean you don't just go into Matron and say, please Miss, can I have two weeks off. It just doesn't happen. She said, "Try it, Ann. I'll tell you what. I'll ring your next door neighbour *[AG: because we didn't have a telephone]* next week after you're back and you can tell me whether or not you got time off."

Anyway, I went into the hospital and spoke to Matron's secretary who was a snooty cow, to say the least, and just at that point Matron walked in and said, "What's the matter?", and I said, "Well, my cousin's organised a holiday, that I knew nothing about, and she's said that I can come. Tickets are booked and all that, but I've got no time off. I'm supposed to be working." Matron asked me what the dates were and what ward I was on. So I gave her the dates, told her which ward I was on, and a couple of hours later I got a call on the ward from Matron's secretary to say I could have the time off (she didn't like me very much!).

**JC:** What year was that?

**AG:** 1964 or 5 – I can't remember exactly. I was living in Bellshill, Lanarkshire, between Glasgow and Edinburgh – sort of the bottom of the 'V'. Anyway, I beat my cousin to it. I rang her and I said, "What do I need?" And she said, "Well, have you got anything you can wear on a motorbike?" I said, "Pardon!" "Well", she said, "I've a seat for you on a motorbike." I said, "Oh! Well look, I've got about four days extra, so I can come down and we can see what we can scrounge because I don't know anyone who's got a motorbike." She lived in Corby, Netherfield Grove, and we went out one night to the motorbike club – a weekly get-together – and this guy comes round and hands me a bit of paper, coz we were going to do a quiz, and he says, "Oh! You're Scottish!" I said, "Yes, I am." "Aye", he said, "you can't count, you Scots can't count." Well, I went mad – never spoke to him again that night. Two days later we'd scrounged trousers. I'd got boots, a crash helmet – various things that I needed – and off we set (me on the back of my male cousin Danny's bike). We got half way up the road and the bike breaks down. So the two of us are sitting on this wall, and he had spoken to the house owner and they'd let him put it round the back. Anyway, we're sitting on this wall and this motorbike comes by, and he waves and the bike grinds to a halt, and a minute later a van grinds to a halt – people I've never met before. Danny says, "We'll get you to the Isle of Man. You can go in the



van. I'll go on the back of the bike and I'll meet you in Liverpool." Well, I'm thinking I don't know this guy, I don't know Liverpool. I don't even know where Liverpool is! So, I get in the van, we get to Liverpool, took the ferry and they forgot to tell the lady where we were staying that I was coming. So, there was a lot of jiggling around to get rooms and we had to do the same thing the next day when another group came up and I ended up sharing with a girl I didn't really know, but turns out she ended up being my bridesmaid – but that's another story! We all got together that night and got to know each other and it was really great fun. I thought I've had a ride on a bike and thought that's it. No way, if I had bike gear I was going on a bike. I went up hills, down dales. I went down glens that you just wouldn't believe, but they were old bikes then and they could do a lot more things than modern bikes can do. Anyway, I fell in love with motorcycling. The next night we all went out together with the new lot straight of the boat. And this guy looked at me and said, "It's you!" (Mr. "No Can Count"! ). I thought you were rude. I'm not talking to you. So we sat at different tables. Then later on when we'd all had one or two he came over and joined our table, and he turned out to be a really nice guy and we ended up walking home together – well back to the digs. And we've been constant companions ever since. Two months later, back on the island we got engaged (that was September) and this was to a Corby guy – Tony Gray – who I've now been married to for over 50 years. We got married 18 months after we met in 1966.

*[Brief chat about the house they live in now that they moved into in 1968. A beautiful bungalow backing onto the Corby King's Wood – a lovely house with a huge garden that they take great pride in.]*

**JC:** So, you upped sticks and came down to Corby for love from Scotland. How did that feel?

**AG:** it was a hell of a wrench. I came down here with no job. Tony had come up two or three times and met my parents. I came down and was staying with my cousin and aunt (the ones that got me to go to the Isle of Man in the first place), and I think it was about two weeks later that I'd actually written to Leicester Royal Infirmary for a job in Accident and Emergency. I'd always fancied doing that job. I'd done it at home, but I hadn't got the certificate that said I was qualified to do it. So, I went there to do a course. Two weeks later I was taken ill and came home to Corby. Two or three days after that I was in hospital having major surgery. Anyway, I went back, but the course had gone on without me and I couldn't go back and join the course. So, I was looking for another job, I was fully qualified (apart from this accident and emergency thing). In fact, I'd got qualifications that no one else in Corby had. Anyway, I went into the doctors one day, actually to get signed off after my surgery, and one of the other doctors said, "Mrs Gray, I'd like to talk to you for a minute." Well, he took me off to the staffroom – turns out it was George Hattersley – and he said, "I hear you've done occupational health." I said, "I have, but I've only got half not the full certificate." And he said, "Golden Wonder are looking for a nurse. If you can furnish me with a CV of what you have and haven't done, I'll put it in for you with my recommendation." I said, "But you don't know me!", but he had been talking to Bill Sharman and, "Bill says you come highly recommended. In fact, if we had a gap at the surgery I'd be recommending you come here now."

*[JC clarifies that George Hattersley and Bill Sharman are old Corby GPs.]*

**AG:** So, that's how I came to stay in Corby. I worked for Golden Wonder for two or three years, got myself pregnant, and worked until a week before the baby was due because they could not replace me. I couldn't fit into my uniform anymore and they refused to buy a new uniform for me, so I had a

white coat on – a lab technician coat – and it wouldn't even meet in the middle. Part of the job of an Occupational Health Nurse is that you go round talking to people on the shop floor. You see what they are doing, you see if they are suited to the job they are doing, and if the job suits them and so on. I was walking around and someone shouted – “Anne, come quick!” and I had to run across the floor and one of the workers had slipped and landed across some packing cases. This is me days before I leave to have the baby, and we had to get an ambulance, stop the floor working ... what a curfuff! Anyway, we got her off to hospital and I'm glad we did it properly because she had fractured her spine.

**JC:** You mentioned home. Do you regard Corby as home or Scotland as home?

**AG:** This is my home in England and always will be. I wouldn't from choice move out of Corby because I think Corby is a wonderful place and I think the people of Corby are absolutely fantastic. But, I go back over the border, and the car window opens, and Tony say's all this Scottish comes out. He says I talk Scottish the way I did when he first met me. I can't help that, can I?

**JC:** What is 'being Scottish'? Can you define it?

**AG:** It's a heritage. My maiden name is Clacher. It's Gaelic and means stonemason. My ancestors built the But and Bens in the highland, simple two-room stone dwellings – English call them Bothys. They built the stone walls and put the wooden frame on the top and the thatchers came in and thatched or turfed because a lot of them were turf. And the choir sang a song not that long ago at a wedding in Corby, and I had to stand and explain to the choir what some of the words/expressions were [*in the Scottish song*]. And that is my heritage. It goes way back and we can trace it way back to the 1600s, and we reckon we can get back further. At the Reformation – on my mother's side of the family (this is another story really), my mother's maid is Graham but her middle name was Knox – and at the Reformation, a guy stood up in a church and threw a stool at a preacher and his name was John Knox, and that's my mother's side of the family.

**JC:** Do you think it is important now to pass your heritage on now to the next generation?

**AG:** I've done it to two generations. My children, both got married in kilts, with all the regalia that goes with it – one in Leicestershire, one in Northamptonshire – but my brothers came down with the kilts and all the bits and both boys say basically that they are Scottish. I mean, they are English but they are Scottish as well. They've got a sort of dual nationality. And then my grandchildren come and they say, “Tell us some stories about Scotland, Grandma, cos my Daddy tells us stories and we think we need to know new stories that we can tell him cos that's where you come from, isn't it. Technically Grandma, we must be a quarter Scottish.” I said, “You're more than a quarter Scottish, the way you two grew up.”

**JC:** Why do you think they feel so Scottish and want to be?

**AG:** I've no idea. They've never even lived in Corby. They live in Northampton. And I have never pushed it in any way shape or form. But I think they go to school and they have to stand up in class and tell them what they've done at the week-end, where they've been – all that sort of stuff.

**JC:** So what sort of things do you do then that is Scottish at the weekends? Do you have Scottish food?

**AG:** Oh, yeah! We do have Scottish food and they help me cook it – steak pie for a start. That is actually a New Year’s Eve dinner. And the first time I made it they said “What’s that?”, “It’s a Scottish thing that you have at New Year.”, “Oh, yes, we’ll have some of that then.”

**JC:** How’s it different from English steak pie?

**AG:** It’s not. It’s just steak, meat and a really rich, rich gravy with puff pastry my mother used to make. I use shortcrust ‘cause Tony doesn’t like puff pastry. But you don’t make it nowadays, you buy it [*the puff pastry*]. But then the kids said what else can we try?

*[AG tells JC about them trying and not liking black pudding, and about really decent Scotch pies that you used be able to buy from Bradbury’s – a butcher that closed down a few months ago in the centre of Corby – and that you can’t get them now. Ann gets friends and family to bring ones down from Scotland or stocks up when she goes herself.]*

They are something else – Tunnock’s [*Tunnock’s is a family run bakery based in Uddingston, Lanarkshire, Scotland. The company was formed by Thomas Tunnock in 1890*] makes the best Scotch pies - suet pastry on the outside and spiced peppery lamb on the inside. Oh, it’s lovely – full of meat. It’s beautiful. And then I tried making cloutie dumpling, but you need a great big saucepan, a steamer and everything, and I’ve not really got a pan big enough.

*[Cloutie Dumpling traditionally made in an old pillowcase or 'cloot', a square of muslin will do fine. Method. Sift the flour, bicarb, spices and salt into a bowl and stir in the sugar, suet, dried fruit and grated apple or carrot.]*

**JC:** Tell me about cloutie dumpling?

**AG:** You make a proper dumpling mixture with fruit and everything in it and you put it in a cloth – that’s the cloutie bit in it. Then you tie the top, put it in a steamer, well above and steam it for hours. Same as a cardigan or a jumper – a gansey! There are different names for things and people will say them and it will all come flooding back. When I first came to England I went into a butcher’s shop and asked for a cut of meat and they just looked at me as if I had horns. You don’t get the same cuts of meat in England as you do in Scotland! And when you go in to another kind of shop – in those days you didn’t have so many supermarkets – you’d go into a shop and ask, “Can you put it in a poke for me (a paper bag) and they’d just look at you?” I mean I’d grown up with it – sounds a bit odd now but it just was.

**JC:** What do you think about Scottish music, and are there any particular songs you remember from your childhood?

**AG:** When I was at school I used to sing all the time. We had a couple of Gaelic teachers – we weren’t taught Gaelic but they brought their music down with them from the Highlands. One of these ladies I will never forget – Miss MacDonald, she came from the Isle of Mull – and the very first song she ever taught us was called, “The Isle of Mull”, and I still sing it now. Some people call it the Mull Anthem – it’s not the “Mull of Kintyre”.

*[JC said would check it out online as AG unable to sing at present due to a recent visit to the dentist. See below for words – there are many different version – some a lot longer – but this seems to be the most commonly sung. There are many sung versions on Youtube.]*

### **The Isle of Mull**

*The Isle of Mull is of Isles the fairest,  
Of ocean's gems 'tis the first and rarest;  
Green grassy island of sparkling fountains,  
Of waving woods and high tow'ring mountains.*

*How pleasant 'twas in the sweet May morning,  
The rising sun thy gay fields adorning;  
The feather'd songsters their lays were singing,  
While rocks and woods were with echoes ringing.*

*But gone are now all those joys for ever,  
Like bubbles bursting on yonder river.  
Farewell, farewell, to thy sparkling fountains,  
Thy waving woods and high tow'ring mountains.*

*The Isle of Mull is of Isles the fairest,  
Of ocean's gems 'tis the first and rarest;  
Green grassy island of sparkling fountains,  
Of waving woods and high tow'ring mountains;  
Green grassy island of sparkling fountains,  
Of waving woods and high tow'ring mountains.*

*[JC asked AG if it was a Robert Burns song. AG did not think so. AG then goes on to tell JC about something not related that she just thought might be of interest about the history of Corby. AG had recently seen on Facebook on a 'Corby archiving thing' - saw images of houses being built and information to say that the Halifax Building Society had paid for most of the houses around Pen Green Lane and around that area circa 1930.]*

**JC:** Did any of your family come down from Scotland in that first wave in the 1930s?

*[28 mins 21secs in on recording: story of uncle's walking to Corby from Scotland in 1937/38.]*

**AG:** My uncles walked – two of my uncles walked. It was Uncle John and Uncle Robert – two of my mother's brothers. They lived in Mossend. They didn't have any work. They had nothing. They got together and had a long, long chat. There was no work nor any prospect of them getting any work. It was a complete shutdown/crash. They had a big steelworks in Mossend but it wasn't... you know.

Anyway, they were neither of them married at that time and they went to talk to their Mum and Dad and said look we're going to have to do something drastic, "Neither of us have any work. We can't even help pay for food or anything and it's unfair for us to do this. We have decided that we are going to Corby." So, they went to find out what the buses and trains would cost and they couldn't afford it. So, they decided to walk; there were other people walking at the time. So, there

was a group of them got together and they started out with £5 between the two of them and a pile of sandwiches – their mother did not want them to go hungry. She got an old fashioned Scottish loaf and sliced it up and made sandwiches. So the boys set off and I can't remember the places they told me that they stopped. Most of the time they slept under hedges. They used the rucksacks that they had for pillows and just took their jackets off to cover themselves.

*[JC asks for a date this happened.]*

**AG:** 1937-ish I think. Could have been '38. I can't be 100% certain as Uncle John was getting a bit older when he told me this. It was over 300 miles and they walked and walked. And then their shoes gave out and they had to find newspaper, rags, cardboard if they could find it and stuff it into their shoes to carry on walking. They got here. It took them 17 days.

*[In the interview AG says seven, but she called JC later to say she'd got it wrong and it was 17 days].*

They outwalked the group they were with, because they felt if they took too long they were not going to make it comfortably and I think they meant health-wise. They had £5 between the both of them for food, which is not a lot. And in this day and age it wouldn't even get two coffees. You have to think back and £5 was a lot of money then – the brothers and sisters had given them what they had, what they could afford. And they came down and it was 17 days of hard labour to get here. They came down here and had nowhere to go but they knew they wanted to work at the steelworks because that's what they had been trained to do. So, instead of finding somewhere to live they went straight to the works, said what had happened, where they had come from and what jobs they had done. And they were taken on straight away because of the expertise they had – they were both quite high up in their trades – I can't remember exactly what they did. But they were known at the works as the Ginger Grays, 'cause they were red-headed. The works told them to go to the welfare and they got rooms, sharing rooms, and they saved up every penny they got, cause their younger brother, who they reckoned was not fit to walk that distance (and that's why they left him at home), they wanted him down here so that he could get a job. So, they saved up the bus fare. I think it was Robin Hood coaches, and he came down on a Robin Hood coach, and by that time they'd already organised a job for him. I mean manpower was very, very scarce, especially people who could actually do the job, who had done the job before. So, he came and the three of them worked all the hours they could get until they could get enough money to rent a house.

**JC:** Where was the house?

**AG:** I can't remember. I think it might have been Netherfield Grove. I can't be sure. And my Aunt Lizzy came down and she had already met this guy (I think) and they got married and they lived there as well to get started. And then the boys eventually found girlfriends and got married. I remember I came down to the weddings and was a flower girl at one of the weddings. I was about two or three and I actually remember.

*[JC and AG chat about the fact AG came to Corby for the weddings during the time of the Second World War and the fact that when AG came to Corby, one of the first stories Tony (her now husband) told her was about the PLUTO (Pipe Line Under The Ocean) project – an underwater fuel pipeline made in Corby to help the war effort. Tony worked in the tube works. Tony is actually deaf because of the loud ringing sounds the dropping of the tubes made in the works. He was a crane-driver.]*

**JC:** So, what do you think of Corby being called little Scotland?

**AG:** At one time that was relevant. It's not now. I mean a long time ago, in Bellshill, when I went to school, there was several buildings and they were flats and they were called the 'Pole' flats and they were all Polish people who'd come over in the war to fight for us. And I went to school with Poles and at first they couldn't talk very much English but they soon learned. I mean I've worked with every creed, colour and language possible since, but these people were so intent on making a success of their lives and there's still a big Polish enclave up there as well. There are others there now as well, but at that time they were the only foreigners who ever dare set foot in Bellshill.

**JC:** Do you think that's what makes Corby such a friendly welcoming place – the fact that there are so many migrants – we have 18 different languages spoken in the town now. The Scottish community is still 19% of the community?

**AG:** Yes, got to be. I mean, when I was younger, I was aware of the Poles all the time and there wasn't really anybody else there. And then when I moved down here I noted that there were many other people here beside the Poles and sometimes I'd go into a shop and I was aware that I was the only person speaking English and I'd think I wonder what they are saying, what are they talking about? And still to this day you'll go in to a shop and they talk so fast, and they have a child with them who will reply in English.

*[JC shares a short story about her son with his friends from other countries who had similar experiences. AG goes on to say how much she enjoyed Mary Ann Kennedy's Gaelic workshops and the fact she understood a lot of what she said, but has no idea why because she was never taught Gaelic. She thinks she must just have picked things up as a child – she could not reply in Gaelic but did understand a lot.]*

**JC:** How did it make you feel singing in Gaelic and hearing Gaelic?

**AG:** I wrote a poem after the very first night of singing the Gaelic songs. It made me feel very homesick. In the end I wrote about four verses and I sent it to her *[Mary Ann Kennedy]*. I might have a copy on one of the computers somewhere.

*[AG did have a copy – below:*

### **CALLING US HOME**

*A songstress from the highlands came,  
To teach us of this singing game.  
She bent the words and twisted the tune  
Till out of our mouths this song did come.*

*With tapping foot and a gleam in her eye,  
This merry temptress taught us to fly.  
On the wings of the music we did soar,  
While all around were in great uproar.*

*The music got faster the heft it did swing,  
The sound of this music was calling us home.*

*To the land of our fathers ore hill loch and glen,  
Where our ancestors lie, in their great mountain home.*

*The tunes of this songstress make us weep,  
For we miss the wide glens, lochs and mountains so steep.  
The mountains of home where our hearts do bide,  
They are calling us, calling us home.*

**AG:** The first two verses were how I felt the night after the workshop and the second more a bit sentimental about home.

**JC:** What do you think of the DRTT project?

**AG** - I think it's relevant because a lot of the people you are going to, and I'm glad you chose the Scottish one first because they were here first if you know what I mean. And I'm glad the Polish are next and then the Latvian and Serbian and I would love to be part of it. But, my circumstances at the minute do not allow that [*Ann has recently had to leave the DRTT choir*]. And you'll find eventually this will help to integrate, I hope, all the different people in Corby.

*[There follow a chat about music being an international language and the fact she thinks we should have one big party at the end of it.]*

**JC:** Why do you think it's important to look back at your heritage and to keep that heritage alive? Should we not be looking to the future?

**AG:** Oh, you've got to look to the future as well, but you have to remember what you are and what you were before you can become what you are going to be. Because if you don't have, shall we say a backbone, you're going to melt. You've got to be able to look back and understand where you came from why you came from there and where you're going in the future.

*[JC thanks AG and interview ends.]*