

INTERVIEW WITH JEANNE CHATTOE

[D]

Hello Jean, thanks for seeing us. I'm Denise and you do know me very well actually because we were friends for a long time. I do know you very well Denise.

Yes and this is Lily, you also know quite well, who's doing the actual recording side of it. Okay, so you are obviously a well-known lady in Whitney, especially with your red hair. But let's go back to your childhood and you were born in Whitney I believe.

I was born in West End nursing home. Oh right, there was a nursing home in West End. And how long ago was that?

Too many years, 76 years ago. 76 years ago, okay. And you came from a well-known family in Whitney who were involved in a local business, is that right?

That's correct. And what was it? My dad was a master butcher.

Right, and his name was? Ron Hickman. Ron Hickman.

And he was quite well known in town as well, wasn't he? He was very well known, yes, because he used to, he was sergeant major for the local army cadets as well. Was he?

Yeah, so he was, yeah, he was a very well-known Whitney man. Oh right. And how many, do you have brothers and sisters?

One brother and two sisters. Yeah, okay. And so you, did you go to school locally?

Did I go to school, okay? No, locally.

[JC]

Oh, locally.

[D]

In Whitney. Back school. I went to back school and then on to Woodgreen.

Yeah, same as me. Yeah, same as, I don't even get that.

[JC]

No, I didn't go to that. Only rode on Woodgreen.

[D]

Yeah, that's from Woodgreen. And what, so did your dad have butchers in Whitney then? He did, yeah.

Where was it? Smith Estate. Yeah, I remember it actually.

And that wasn't something that you were likely to go into. Oh, you're joking. I don't eat meat to this day.

[J]

Do you not?

[D]

No, I don't eat meat. Did you get fed a lot of meat then, was having a butcher as a dad? Oh yeah, but I hated it so I was made to sit on the front doorstep with a bit of cheese and bread, which I much preferred actually.

Really, really? So I mean everything was a sort of meat-based meal. Oh yeah.

Yeah, but you rebelled at a young age then. Yeah. So you're a vegetarian?

More or less. I eat chicken and bacon but that's about it. Yeah, well I'm a bit like that.

Me too, I'm a bit like that. Yeah, absolutely. What's the fun in red meat?

I suppose, you know, when your dad's a butcher, he didn't really expect one of his children not to like meat. Two of them don't. My sister's always the vegan.

Your sister? What, the elder one?

[J]

Yeah.

[D]

Yeah, yeah. So how was your upbringing in Whitney? Was it fun?

What did you get up to? Oh, I loved growing up in Whitney. We used to go down the Lees.

I mean, you're out on your own with your friends all day and you didn't get home until it was dark.

[J]

Yeah.

[D]

So we used to play down the Lees and over by the river. Yeah. Amazing that your parents let you play around the river now.

Well, we did as well. Yeah, tag-polling. Yeah.

Minnowing. Yeah. Yeah, it was lovely.

Yeah, quite idyllic compared to how it is now. Yeah, yeah. And what sort of town was Whitney?

I mean, was it friendly? Did everybody know each other? Oh, it was very friendly.

Yeah, most people knew each other. It was very quiet compared to what it is now. It was a lot smaller, I suppose.

A lot smaller, yeah. Because I came in 1966 and I would say that the place has probably tripled in size since then. So you went to a good school and did you like school?

Not particularly, no. Couldn't wait to leave. Did you know what you wanted to do?

No. No? I just saw an advert for an apprentice hairdresser and did it, so I went for it and got the job and I absolutely hated that as well.

Did you not like it? I hated it. I had to sign an apprenticeship but it tied me there for three years.

Oh my gosh, really? Yeah, I've still got the forms. Blimey.

[J]

Imagine that. Did you have that?

[D]

You had to sign for three years as well. Well, I had to sign three years as a journalist, so maybe that was something everybody had to do.

[J]

Mine was hairdressing as well.

[D]

So you were stuck with that? Yeah. So how did you get through it?

I was a bit of a rebel. Were you? What did you do, Jane?

I think they got pissed off. I think they got fed up with me. Did they really?

What sort of things did you do that were naughty and rebellious? We used to have beer washes. Do you remember those?

We used to wash people's hair in beer afterwards. Lincoln Beer Shampoo my mother used to use. Oh no, this is pure beer.

[JC]
Really?

[D]
I used to drink that. And then you had little sachets of perfume to put on people's hair after a very smelly burn. Yeah.

I used to nick that. Drink it.

[JC]
No, nick it.

[D]
Why not? Nick it. Fine, okay.

So did they know what you were up to? I don't expect so. Did you get into trouble?

Oh, no, I got accused of going to a naughty nightclub by the boss.

[JC]
Where?

[D]
He said, I hear you've been going to a nightclub on a Sunday afternoon in Blackbird Lees and it was all blacked out with just disco lights and dancing. And I looked at him and I laughed and I said, it's a Christian one. Which it was.

Was it? Yeah, it was run by Christians. That was a bit exciting to go out of Whitney to get a bit of entertainment.

Oh, we used to hitchhike all over the place. Yeah, we could hitchhike in those days. Hitchhike to London, hitchhike to Brighton, hitchhike to Bournemouth, hitchhike to Oxford, hitchhike to a spotlight club.

Oh, didn't we all? Yeah. So did you meet somebody, you know, on your travels that, you know, a young man?

Did you meet a nice man? I met a nice, I did meet a nice man. His name was John Hunter and I married him and it lasted five years.

Did it? How old were you when you got married? 20.

We all got married young in those days, didn't we? Yeah. So was he in the RAF?

He was in the RAF and we moved to, he was posted to Anglesey. He bought himself out so he went to live in Blackpool where he was from and he ditched me for a night, a 39 year old woman with three kids.

[JC]
Did he?

[D]
I was 25.

[JC]
Oh my gosh. Wow.

[D]
Didn't do much with the ego. No, no. So what did you do then?

So you'd been living in Blackpool? Yeah. I had a hairdressing salon there.

Did you? So you'd stuck with the hairdressing then. I mean, you'd obviously learnt your craft over your three years in danger.

I've had two hairdressing salons. I've been in Bampton. In Bampton?

Yeah. Did you? What were they called?

Fleur de Lis. Fleur de Lis. That rings a bell.

Yeah, it does ring a bell. Wow. I didn't know that was you.

It was me. I had mad parties there.

[JC]
We missed out on that.

[D]
Yeah, we did pick, we didn't know you then, Jane. No, we didn't. No, no.

So what happened when you came back? So you came back to live? I came back to live in Whitney, of course.

Yeah, yeah. Did you come, you didn't go and live with your parents or? I went to live with my parents initially.

Yeah. And then my dad found me this hairdressing business with a flat above. Yeah.

I think he wanted me out. And so I went for it. And I lived there for a few years.

Yeah. So would you describe yourself as, as quite adventurous and fun loving? I used to be.

You still are. Yeah, you definitely are. So, you said two, what was the other hair salon that you had?

The one in Blackpool was called the Curling Tongs. Oh, you had one in Blackpool as well? Yeah.

Wow. I see you living in Blackpool. I loved it there.

Did you? Yeah. Lovely people.

Yeah, they're friendly, aren't they?

[J]
Absolutely lovely people.

[D]
Yeah. Sort of the earth. A bit like Whitney people.

They used to be sort of the earth and they used to be lovely people, but there's too many newcomers in here now.

[J]
Yeah.

[D]
You don't give a damn about Whitney. You're welcome. Well, there's a lot of new people, that's for certain.

Yeah. I mean, all the new estates and whatnot. I mean, I've been here since I was ten and Whitney was a lovely little town, wasn't it?

It still is, of course. It is. Having had our children here and brought them up.

I think it's a lovely town. I'm going to be political here. I think the worst thing they've done is close the high street.

Absolutely.

[J]
I agree.

[D]
Yeah. I think it's killed the town. The heart has gone out of the town.

[J]
Yeah.

[D]
Yeah. It's just, it's very sad. It is very sad.

Because the walk around Whitney was, you know, there was, you know, Marriott's closed, but there's no relation to how it used to be. I shouldn't say that either. It's not about me.

[J]
Anyway.

[D]
Then how did you meet Mark? Is that later, later in life? Or is it how did you have a big gap and lots of boyfriends and then move on to Mark?

Or what did you do? I'm going to wait for it. My sister wrote, my late sister, wrote a letter the day before she got married.

And in it, she said, I wish things would change, wouldn't change. I think, wish it would all stay the same. I wish Jean had more boyfriends than anybody could count.

I wish she still had more boyfriends than anybody could count. Oh, no. So now between meeting Mark, I think I was on my own for about four or five years.

And I met him through a planning issue that I had. And he was introduced to me by a mutual friend. So there's a little bit of conniving going on there.

And we went out for dinner to the Mason's Arms at Southley. Oh, very nice. Where my brother-in-law was a chef.

Oh, was he? Yeah. And we both had cow and steak.

Well, there we go.

[JC]
Good memory.

[D]
Yeah. And was it an instant attraction? No.

I think what made me double take was my portrait of Richard III. I've got a passion for Richard III and his lifestyle. And this man walked into my home and he looked at the portrait and he said, oh, Richard III, a much maligned monarch.

Now, I'd never met anybody before who even knew who he was. So that was sort of interesting. So he got a big kick there.

Sorry. Anyway, let's talk about basically your sort of persona in Whitney, how everybody's come to know you. I mean, mainly, you know, this red hair has always been a trademark.

Has it? I've had red hair for about 20 odd years. Yeah.

As long as I've known you about red hair. Yeah. Well, yeah.

So I mean, I must have met you probably 20 years ago, I should think, when I did that interview. 1998. Yeah.

Yeah, more than that. Did you have red hair then? I can't remember.

No, I can't remember. No. But I don't remember you not having red hair, maybe you did.

But how, I mean, let's talk about the fundraising that you've done for Against Breast Cancer and how you started that, which happened when your sister was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was first diagnosed when she was 30. Yeah.

And it came back eight years later and it spread to her liver. And I was desperate to try and find something to save her, basically. Didn't happen.

But breast cancer was not talked about in those days. No. People would say, oh, she's got cancer.

Not, oh, she's got breast cancer. So I wanted to not only raise funds, but raise awareness as well, because I've known girls who, young women who've been told by their doctors to go away, they're too young for breast cancer.

[J]

And that's just not true.

[D]

No, no. Have you seen a big change then over the years? Yes.

Can you think of a few examples of things that have changed in the sort of diagnosis and the way people are treated and the support? There wasn't a lot of support, first of all. In fact, there was none.

So we started a support group in Whitney, which was very sad, actually, in a lot of ways, but very uplifting in others. Diagnosis, well, my first breast cancer operation, I was in hospital for nearly a week. My second one, I was in and out the same day.

[J]

Oh, really?

[D]

So the treatment has changed drastically. And do you feel that's good? Oh, yeah.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So it was very different when your sister, who was... It was very different when she was diagnosed.

We were sat in this waiting room once. I just didn't remember this. And we were trying to keep our spirits up because we were both scared.

She was worse than I. And we were laughing and joking. And this receptionist leaned over and she said, can you two be quiet?

She said, there's very seriously ill people here.

[J]

Really?

[D]

So my sister said, well, what do you think I'm here for?

[J]

Gosh.

[D]

I know the attitude has changed in the last 30 odd years. Yeah. People are much more sympathetic now.

Sympathetic and supportive. And the surgeon who also operated on her and my older sister and me twice, when we first met him, he was all dressed in a suit and tie and a shirt. And then when I had my second diagnosis, he was much more casual, which made it much friendlier and easier to talk to him.

Yeah. So yeah, big difference. It's really important, isn't it?

[J]

Yeah. It's good. It's changed for the better.

Yeah.

[D]

And the really good thing is that people are so much more aware of it now as well. Well, I'd like, I mean, I would say that you and, you know, the fundraising and the team that have run Whitney and Pink Day, which is the major fundraiser, isn't it, for the Whitney team, have gone a long way towards boosting that really, because the awareness is there, isn't it? Yes.

I mean, I can remember the first time somebody, it was Sandra actually, who's on the committee, who asked me to come and shake a tin. And I can remember people saying to me, this is fabulous, but what's it actually for? The whole pink, why is it pink?

What's it for? And I had no idea. But as the years have gone on by, I can't remember how many years now, they're back and back in again.

People don't ask me that anymore. They know what it's for now. Yeah.

So that's a big difference over the years as well. I mean, there were mainly men, I think, in them days asking me, what's it for? But they don't ask now.

It's on the TV, it's everywhere nowadays, isn't it? Yeah. It seems the awareness is much better than it was, thanks to you, Jean.

And the team. And the team, yes. And there have been advances, haven't there, over the years?

I mean, in treating it and the numbers of women getting it or surviving it have improved. I think the same, about the same amount of women are getting it. But the earlier it's detected, the better it is.

I mean, my second bowel breast cancer, I had a mammogram. And she said, there's something there. And she said, this wouldn't have been picked up 10 years ago.

Really? That's amazing. Yeah.

And presumably, you've had good treatment from the NHS. Oh, yeah. The NHS has been absolutely amazing.

Yeah. It's good, isn't it? It's good to hear.

Because it takes a lot of stick. It does take a lot of stick. And as far as I'm concerned, it's all deserved.

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, yeah, I agree.

I agree. So, how did the fundraising start properly? Was this after Delia passed away?

No, it was before she passed away. I first started raising for another breast cancer charity, which I won't mention, and I would never support. And I raised £1,000 for it.

And as it happens, Mark and I were going to London. But before that, I read an article on Dr. Letham in one of the girly magazines. Dr. Letham being the founder of Against Breast Cancer, which is based in Aberdeen.

[J]
Yeah.

[D]
And I read about him, and I thought, what an inspiring man. So, I phoned his wife up. We had a chat.

I told her I'd raised £1,000 for this other charity. I said, I don't suppose you'd raise £1,000 for us, would you? So, I did.

And what did you raise it from? Carpet sales, book sales, cake stalls. In Whitney?

Yeah. What about? Strawberry fields.

Oh, the old strawberry fields.

[J]
Yeah.

[D]
Which is now Madley Park. I know. Yeah.

We used to do a stall there, and I thought, well, I might study doing a stall. I might as well organise the whole thing. Get more money in, which I did.

Amazing. So, presumably, the Lethams were very happy with what you'd raised and encouraged you to continue. They were inspirational, those two.

Yeah. So, what was that? So, you started off with small...

I started off doing carpet sales, book sales, and cake stalls, and things like that. And then we did a street collection. So, you had to get a licence, didn't you?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. So, did you have to set yourself up as a sort of proper subsidiary of...

[J]

No.

[D]

No? You just did a street collection? So, would that have been the groundings of Pink Day, the first sort of...

I suppose so. In a way, I mean, I was lying in bed one night, couldn't sleep. As per usual.

And I'd just lay there trying to think of different things to do to raise money. And I thought, paint Whitney pink, which is what it was first called, paint Whitney pink.

[J]

Was it?

[D]

And now, I've ended up taking it on, paint Avingdon pink. Have I? Instead of less brush of pink, yeah.

Yeah. So, I thought, oh, let's go for it. So, it's Mark and Richard putting the balloons up and taking them down.

Me and Lucy doing a cake stall. Mum and Dad helping on the cake stall. And collecting, street collecting.

And it's just grown from there, but mainly because of the ABC fundraising team. You know, but now we do entertainment and...

[J]

Yeah.

[D]

Huge tombola, dog show. Apparently, the entertainment is the best step of this year, being lined up for this year. And when you think about it, do you think it's an event that is unmatched in Whitney in its own way?

[J]
Oh, absolutely.

[D]
It's the only one that takes place actually in the centre of Whitney. The whole day? Yeah.

Yes. And people look forward to it. Yeah.

And it's consistent, isn't it? So, it's year in, year out. So, people think, oh, October pink day.

It's like September Whitney feast nowadays. It's October's pink day. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. But we're not in October now.

We've moved it back to September, haven't we? So... Only because we thought the weather would be better.

[J]
The weather would be better, yeah.

[D]
Weather forecast isn't looking bad. Oh, good. Let's hope not.

Anyway, so, you started. So, that was the first one. Can you remember how much you raised from that?

Oh, I can't remember. No. So, how did it roll on from that point?

Well, 20... So, that's 25 years ago.

[J]
Yeah.

[D]
At the turn of the century, I decided to form an action group. And basically, I took over pink day. Yeah.

But with their input, it made it so much better and so much easier to organise. Yeah. So, yeah, it was a lot better.

And it's fair to say that everybody knows you in Whitney for pink day. I mean, everybody wants to put the money in Jean's tin. Yeah, just Jean's tin.

And I always get people saying to me, oh, that's the lady that had the lovely dress shop. Yes. That's the lady with the dress shop.

What was the dress shop called? Renaissance. Renaissance.

So, you had Renaissance for how many years? 15 years. And that was pink day central.

Yeah, that's where we blew all the balloons up. I remember that was my first time I could blow balloons up. Was it on the floor in there?

Yeah. Yeah. So, I mean, before, or sort of in tandem with that, you held the Whitney group organised, well, you organised what was a very famous and well-loved fashion show for years before.

Yes. Before pink day, wasn't it? Yes.

[J]
Yeah.

[D]
So, what was that? I, the first fashion show I did was the year my sister died. And it was in Langdale Hall.

And I worked out the costs and it was going to cost a thousand pounds to put on. I phoned up Pat Ethan and I said, it's going to cost a thousand pounds. She said, you've got to speculate to accumulate.

So, I went for it and we raised about four or five thousand. And then a friend that was helping me said she knows this guy who does cabaret nights and he has it all tented out like a marquee inside. Why don't you go and meet him?

So, I did. And we arranged for him to have his cabaret nights on a Friday night. And we'd take it over and do our fashion shows on the Saturday.

[J]
Wow.

[D]
So, it was all decorated out. It's just like walking to a huge marquee in a sports hall.

[JC]
Yeah.

[D]
And that was Ian Holloway, wasn't it? Holloway, yeah. They were brilliant events.

And they were just, I always remember the one that was, was it school? The theme was school.

[JC]
Yes.

[D]
And Professor Latham had his school uniform on and a cap and a peashooter. It was just... We put peashooters on all the tables and those games that you used to do.

Oh, yeah. The ones, yeah, where you go, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, Lucy and I spent ages making those.

No, they were legendary, weren't they? The fashion shows. And lots of people from Whitney got involved in modelling and production.

And they all sold out every year. 450 people.

[JC]
It's amazing.

[D]
And they made... I just remember people just throwing money into buckets. I think, yeah.

Do you think charity and fundraising has changed over the years? I think certain charities expect, demand too much from people. By sending out these raffled books or flyers saying, please donate 10, 20, 30.

A lot of people can't afford to donate 10 quid.

[JC]
No.

[D]
They're happy to put a couple of coppers in a collecting tin and it all adds up. Yeah. Yeah.

I mean, look at this. 130 pounds out of two collecting tins. Yeah, it's amazing.

In a shop. Every penny counts. Yeah.

Even the foreign ones. There's some foreign ones in these bags. Those are foreign ones.

But the charity collect those and they add up. Look at that. So you've had 25 years of Pink Day and how much do you think has been raised over the years?

What, for me? Pink Day? It's got to be at least 300,000.

Yeah, it's got, yeah. There'll be more than that. 300,000.

It's probably well over that because we've been saying that for a while. I'd say we're probably going sort of three, two, five or something like that. But you personally have sort of spearheaded raising a million.

Is that right? Yeah. It's a lot of money.

It's a lot of money. It's all under my bed. How much do Against Breast Cancer value you?

I hope, I think. They think the world of me. They?

Think the world of me. Oh. And I understand that the Latham's have now sort of backed.

Yeah, they're retiring from the charity. They've all retired, yeah. But they still like to keep in touch.

Yeah, yeah. With the charity and what's going on. Do they keep in touch with you?

Yeah. Yeah? Have you seen them?

Not since they moved away. So, you've got a good team still at ABC. I'm sorry, Against Breast Cancer.

And we used to call them, didn't we, ABC? Yeah. Yeah.

What, a good staff? Yeah. Oh, the staff are amazing.

Rob and Bernie and... Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, after 25 years, there was a little letter that came in the post to you, didn't it?

Uh-huh. Maybe, actually, it was before that, wasn't it? Wasn't it a couple of years ago?

You got a letter from, telling you some news. Year before last. And what was that?

What were you being awarded? I was being awarded the British Empire Medal in the King's First Birthday Honours list.

[JC]
Wow.

[D]
Wow. And how did you feel when you saw that? About bloody time too.

[JC]
Absolutely.

[D]
I was absolutely gobsmacked. Yeah, yeah. And you were...

[JC]
Who actually sent you that? Who does it come from?

[D]
Cabinet office. It comes from the cabinet, okay. No more than you deserve.

I mean, it must have been hard work and so much emotion over the years with people you've known and sadly have breast cancer or passed away from breast cancer, especially when you were working in the shop, when everybody would... I had one woman come in the shop when I was down Waterloo Walk and I saw her walk past the window a couple of times with this man and then she came in and she said, you're the breast cancer lady. So I sort of said, well, call me that if you like.

I've got breast cancer. I said, look love, it's not the end of the world. And her husband was pacing up and down.

I said, is that your husband? She said, yeah. I said, tell him to come in.

So I just talked to them and I don't know who she was, I don't know where she came from, but I hope she's still alive. So it would be fair to say that these days it's not the possible worse scenario than it was years ago, although some people may be still. I think, well, it sounds very trite, but when there's life, there's hope.

And I think, because people are more aware of breast cancer, they are more upfront about going to their doctors earlier and getting sorted. So I think in that way, yeah, it's helped. Yeah.

So to go back to like your family, you've got two children. Yep. Emma and Lucy has got her own business, hasn't she?

Yep. Which is the Market Garden and Cherry Tree Cafe in Ensham, which they have built up from nothing to a really thriving, popular venue. Excellent.

And do they, because they grow, do they still grow their own vegetables? Yeah, yeah. And they've got a lovely cafe there.

They've got a beautiful cafe and the food is divine. Is it? Yeah, we must go there.

Yeah, but I've been once. Have you? Well, I've only been that time when...

About three years, four years ago.

[J]
Yeah, yeah.

[D]
I only went that time that you had your party, your biggie British Empire medal party there. Where did you get your medal? And who did you take with you?

I took Denise Barkley with me because I've known her for so long. Where did they give it to you at? Blenheim Palace.

Blenheim Palace. Yeah, it was beautiful. Except they only served tea and coffee.

Oh, no wine. No alcohol, but you just grew so much. Mind you, my cousin was, no, my nephew, was awarded the OBE.

And he went to Buckingham Palace and it was given to him by the Queen.

[J]
Oh, wow.

[D]
And there was no wine there, no alcohol at all. Well, maybe they don't want weary people there. Oh, certainly not.

Who gave you yours, was it? The Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire.

[JC]
Oh, wow, okay.

[D]
And the Sheriff of Nottingham. Nottingham. Sheriff.

Robin Hood was there. Robin Hood came too. Sheriff of Oxford.

High Sheriff of Oxford. She gave the... Oh, she?

Yeah, they're both she's.

[JC]
Oh, wonderful.

[D]
Can't remember their names, can you? The Lord Lieutenant is Geraldine. Yeah.

She's been invited to the reception, but we don't know if she's coming or not. Yeah, so we're going big with Pink Day this year, aren't we? Yeah.

Yeah, and we're having a reception to mark the 25th anniversary as well. Which we're inviting supporters to promote the last 25 years. So, yeah, we're going big.

We are going big. We're celebrating 25 years large. Gosh, I can't believe it's 25 years, can't you?

Does it seem like 25 years? No, it feels like 75.

[JC]
A lot of hard work.

[D]
It's a lot of work. It's a lot of work. It's all the background stuff as well.

All the admin, you know, getting the licences and informing people and having to inform the police about the pink car possession.

[JC]
Were they letting us go through Whitney this year? The centre of Whitney this time? No.

[D]
I did make hints to the police. Anyway, is there anything we've missed, Jane, that you'd like...

[J]

Anything else you'd like to say?

[D]

Any sort of particular memories of living in Whitney that you would like recorded for posterity? There's lots of things I could think of, but none of them are appropriate. Right.

Well, I think we've covered most of it, do you think? Yeah. Yeah?

Thank you very much. It's been great talking to you. You're welcome.

Thank you so much, Jane, for speaking to us today. This will go into the hours of time with Whitney Museum for people to listen to forever. If they want to.