

Kath Belfield

Kath was born in 1958 and now lives on a smallholding near Leek. Over the years she has worked in factories, as a coffin maker, at a slaughterhouse and knacker's yard. She even ran her own kennel business, but farming remained her passion and she was born to it. In this part of the interview with Sheila Hines recorded in May 2017, Kath talks about some of her early childhood memories on her parent's farm.

Part Five – Childhood memories

KB. I was born at Strines Farm, Upper Hulme near Leek. A little remote place just below Mermaid. Second to youngest out of ten. I had great parents, me mam and dad were reyt good folk you know, reyt hardworking, good character. Me mum was born in 1916. Me dad was older, I think me dad was born in 1908. Me dad had Polio when he was 17, which left him crippled. But other than milking, me dad could do every job. Ah, she was a good milker me mother was, because me dad couldna milk. But he had a thrashing box. So, it tended to be me dad was out with thrashing box all winter and me mum did all the milking. Like me, when I was born, we were all born in the middle bedroom and she'd never been in hospital until she was 82 and had ten kids me mother. And she milked in morning, and she had me at 11 o'clock and she milked again at night. Like me mother was always very proud that she'd had 10 kids and reared 10, cause not many did that. There was a lot of losses and there were a lot of folk couldn't afford to feed their kids, they had to farm them out. And like all our lads, as they grew up and once they left school, in a way they were farmed out, they went and worked away from home and lived in and me Mam and Dad went round and picked the places for 'em to go. In a way they were farmed out to make way for us little ones.

SH. Cos there wasn't always space either was there, in houses as well?

KB. Well, there was three bedrooms, mam and dad was middle bedroom, and girls were at far end with one bed and lads was first bedroom with stairs going up and just a wardrobe to separate it and they'd 2 beds. And when we was all at home, all lads were in two beds. And folk used to stop. When our Ann was courting Geoff, Geoff used to stop and sleep with lads, bunk in. But cause I was one of little uns, I was lucky really as I had 2 big uns either side of me, so I was always snug you know what I mean. But me mam reared us all, and I never had a cot. We all started life in a drawer, then you went from drawer to between two chairs and once you could get out of that you were big enough for bed. That's how we did us all. Happy days. They were good parents, good folk really.

SH. What do you remember about your child hood up there?

KB. Always happy really. There was always summat going on, we were always sort of busy, but its good busy when you're a kid in't' it, stuff happening. And like lads would go off working, they always come home for their Sunday dinner and brought their wages. Me mam had wages off them all, and then they all had pocket money. And that's how it was when I left school at 16. Me mam had me wage until I was 18 and

then she give me pocket money and then when I was 18 it's like you paid board and lodgings then and were responsible for your own money. And our Carrell bought a motor bike, he saved up and bought a motorbike, so as he could pick 'em all up and give 'em all an extra hour on a Sunday at home. They would come home, they'd all work and have a bit of dinner and go again. But they'd come home and happen bring you a toffee or summat, us little uns, so we were always pleased to see 'em.

KB. But, other than milking me dad could do every job, really. And like shearing they'd drive three stakes in and tie him up, us little 'uns would wind and big uns took sheep to him and sheared. He learnt all lads to shear on dead sheep. He started 'em very young but they all sheared dead sheep for to start with. Because anything that died, they used to do with hand clippers. Wool was often worth more than the sheep then, so all lads learned to shear very young. Cos when he had polio at seventeen, they said he'd never have children, so he had ten just to prove them wrong.

KB. Marvellous fella me dad, he had the patience of Job. If he were learning you how to tie your shoe laces, it didn't matter if you had thirty goes, he'd keep showing you. He showed me loads of stuff, he even showed me how to sharpen a pen knife, it didn't matter how long it took you learn it, he had patience of Job.

SH. So you left school at 16. Were your Mum and Dad still at Strines then?

KB. No, no, we'd moved to Padwick then, with electric and an indoor toilet. This is at Lowe Hill. (Leek)

SH. So, that was quite a turn up then, when you moved there?

KB. Yeh, it was all very exciting, we got a bath and everything.

SH. But kinder country, you'd moved downhill a bit hadn't you?

KB. Well, that was a funny thing, because when we moved in it must have been spring. It come a sunny day, so we all went out playing cricket in our t-shirts and shorts and Pickford's kids come up, they'd got duffel coats on and mittens and balaclavas. We called them snow kids and give 'em a bit of a slapping. We thought they were like penguins. "What's up with yer round here, suns out?" You see, we would be hard as nuts from up Strines. They'd think we were lunatics up there with no clothes on.

KB. Well, I don't care what anybody says, Country's well off. When I was a kid if you could feed your kids and put food on the table, and put clothes on their back, and I'm not talking wardrobes full or Nike trainers. When we was kids, you had a set of clothes for school, and they did you all week. Monday morning at the Belfield household, there was an old saying 'first up best dressed', you picked your clothes for the week. Our Cliffy had to go to school in a lilac jumper for a week cos he was late up and everyone hated the lilac jumper, so Cliffy got it. And it didn't matter if your clothes fit you, what you picked was yours for the week. And I've seen lads go to school in shirts that they couldn't button and we had big sloppies, cos we were little and didn't know what we were picking. But you picked em for the week and that was like, God had spoken. And there was no crossing God; and that was your clothes for the week. And as soon

as you got home from school, those clothes come off and you had your work clothes. And they was for the week. You was very lucky, there were kids at our school who didn't have as many clothes as us. Their work clothes--there was one lad as went to school with us at primary school, he had shorts all the time

cause he had one pair, and that was it, they never did get washed, he didn't come Monday with clean like us, he had the same. Yet today, if kids haven't got a mobile phone, nails done and hair done every week, and a plasma tv and Sky, "I've been abused." But you're talking there a hundred and fifty pound a month, before you start. Because they haven't got a mobile phone that's a tenner like mine. And they say the younger folk are poorer.....

SH. They are poorer in spirit.

KB. They're poor in spirit. Now, all I look back on in my childhood is happiness. Christmas, that excited we couldn't sleep, same present every year, a pair of jeans and a pair of pyjamas. In a sock were an apple, an orange and some monkey nuts, and we couldn't sleep. But Christmas come Christmas eve. Life went on, you did your things, you'd come in dinner time Christmas eve, not knowing it was Christmas eve, because we had no idea what date was. And when you're kids, you're too busy to even bother. We knew we'd just had fireworks, so it was somewhere on the horizon. And you'd come in, and Christmas had just arrived. I look back at my parents, and I think they were absolute star characters, won't they. Christmas appeared whilst you were out of the 'ouse. And then we'd be that excited we'd be singing carols until two in morning. My mum and dad would be sat there thinking, "I wish those little buggers would go to sleep". Cos, you'd get up next morning and your presents were there at the bottom of your bed. They'd waited up; you don't get when you're a kid, do you, because you think Santa does it. And it all arrived, and they'd be that pleased for you, and they'd be absolutely knackered and have to start milking. But they did it all with a smile, because it was Christmas.

KB. And we were saying about meals, we'd get up, have a cup a tea and a slice of bread and butter and then we'd go milk, well depending on what age you were, as to what jobs you did. I mean, I started off calf suckling and then you'd grow and that's how your pride comes. I'm allowed to muck out now and all this. I was allowed to put a unit on this morning, that were really good. But then, you'd go in and have your breakfast. There'd be porridge. You'd have your porridge, then you'd go off to school where you'd have a bottle of milk at morning break, a good dinner, and I think we had a glass of orange even in afternoon break. Then at 4 o'clock, my mother, when we got home from school, my mother thought we was hungry, so we always had a snack, it was cheese on toast or something. Six o'clock we'd go milk. Seven o'clock there'd be a roast come out and she'd do 'taters and everything. I don't know when my mother lived, cos all she did was work as I can see now. Then there was a big family dinner for everybody then we went off to play or whatever. We had to go t' bed at nine, earlier when we were littler, so at ten to nine you were shouted in 'Come and have your suppers.' We always had cereals. We never stopped eating. What a job for my mother

to always be on tap for all these meals, milk, do all the other work she did. Phenomenal!

KB. When the family were at Strines, our Ann would leave school at 14 and she worked at Hammersleys, which is on West Street in Leek. The bus drivers of the day wouldn't pick her up on Cat Tor, they'd only pick her up and drop her off at Three Horseshoes across Blackshaw Moor, which added another 1 ½ miles to her journey. A stretch anyway. And there come a big blizzard this night and me mother says, "That wench'll be comin' home now." And me dad says, "No she wunna, she'll a stopped in Leek if she's any sense, she'll have stopped in Leek." Me mother says, "She won't a done, she'll a come 'ome." It was absolute whiteout, you couldna see your hands in front off your face. So, me mother rugged hersell up and says, "I'm goin' t go look for 'er." And me dad says, "Well, I shall lose yer both, if yer go." Anyway, me mother went outside and she said you couldn't see a thing, so she felt her way round the buildings and she knew where she was when she was on buildings and she knew then if she went straight she'd end up in gully and if she could find gully she'd 'ear water runnin' and she knew she could get to what we called Wain's Big Medder. Anyway, she went round back of buildings roughly where she thought and she thought put me back to wall and go straight, I should hit gully. So, she set off and she hit gully and she knew in bottom of gully, brook run from top down and if yer climbed out of gully and ower fence yer were in Wain's big paster. She hit junction at gully and climbed up. She couldn't see a thing, but she'd just got it in 'er 'ead that she'd got ter keep goin'. She didna know how long she'd walked and it was absolute fluke of nature or stroke o' luck, she actually walked into our Ann and fell ower 'er. Not knowing she were there and started talking to our Ann, but our Ann couldna speak at all; she were hypothermic really, she were just wanderin' in snow. She woulda been made away if me mother hadn't a gone. So, me mother grabbed hold of 'er and thought, "I don't know which way t' go, I shall have go uphill, as long as I go uphill I shall hit gully and if I get down to water I shall know which way waters runnin' and hopefully sort summat out then." So, anyway she made her way up hill, hit fence and cobbled our Ann over fence and she cobbled over fence and it were a steep old gully, so 'ow they got down gully without getting' 'urt I shall never know. Anyway, she knew water was running down bruck, so she thought we'll walk uphill and we shall either hit water coming off our gully into it and follow that, otherwise I shall end up up on Waingate and then perhaps we can feel for road and follow road, because she didn't have a clue where they were. So, they started walkin' in bottom of bruck and as luck would 'ave it she 'eard our gully (water) coming in, so they turned off and once they hit top o' gully she knew if she went straight, they'd walk into buildings. It's a miracle really when you can't see owt. And they walked into buildings and she felt her way round till they got to house door and in they come and everybody was very surprised and our Ann was that frozen, she'd gotten an owd duffel coat on and a balaclava and sheepskin mittens and me mother took her coat off and coat stood up by itsell, it were frozen solid and our lads were takin' mickey, so me mother got one o' sheepskin mittens and thrashed 'em all with

one mitten and it were still stiff when she'd thrashed 'em. It just showed character o' me mother; she wanted look after us all.