

Interview with Jean Crabtree on 18th July 2017 at Ellkington Cottage, Force Mills

J W. GOOD MORNING JEAN

J C. GOOD MORNING

J W. When did you come to the valley?

J C. 1958 when I married a farmer

J W. And was the farm nearby

J C. Yes, it's actually where we are now. And I'm not very sure whether I married him because I fell in love with him or the waterfalls. I'm very keen on waterfalls.

J W. So it was love that brought you here.

J C. Yes, yes

J W. You had a brother that was a forester

J C. Yes, I actually came to see the family and met up with my future husband, actually with my future father in law first, then my future husband.

J W. You've always lived in the environment here

J C. Yes, yes. I'm very much a home person. I like being at home

J W. Did you do a lot of work on the farm

J C. Yes, particularly, I'm very fond of hens. I kept an eye on those and we sold eggs etc and we had a milk herd, dairy breed Ayrshires and I'm very keen on them. I used to help collect them, bring them in and feed them etc.

J W. You also had a guest house or bed and breakfast

J C. Yes, later on, about 1996, we started the guest house. Just for a bit of extra income really. Started with two bedrooms in the farmhouse and then was increased to four because it became quite popular

J W. Did you meet some interesting people through that

J C. Yes, we had an M.P once and a bishop from Africa, and are still in touch with several people who used to come year after year.

J W. They presumably came for the peace and quiet of the area

J C. Yes, very definitely

J W. What are your most happy memories of living here

J C. Just the people and the atmosphere. It's so quiet and peaceful unless an occasional rally or something at Grizedale but I mean it's only once in a while that something happens. We are slightly just out of the way so we don't get disturbed with that sort of thing.

J W. But traffic has increased

J C. Definitely, yes, even though we don't have a bus service now . Very hit and miss, we do have the Mountain Goat which generally runs just in the summer.

J W. But there used to be a bus

J C. Yes, used to be the Thursday bus which I think must have been stopped about the latter part of the 60's. It was the Thursday bus, it went down to Ulverston and everybody did their shopping. You could buy anything down in Ulverston, bits of furniture or carpet, it was stowed away on the bus and delivered to your door when you got off, quite a good idea.

J W. Door to door service

J C. Yes

J W. Is the farm still a farm, is it still farmed

J C. No, no, unfortunately its lands been disposed of and some of the buildings converted, like this building's been converted

J W. So that's quite a big change

J C. Yes very much so

J W. Has that happened to a lot of farms in the valley

J C. Yes, yes. I don't think there are many farms with milk herds nowadays, there are quite a few sheep farms but a lot of them have been converted into second homes or sold off, the barns sold off.

J W. Were you affected by foot and mouth at all

J C. Not really, not the first time, not awfully certain of the date, it must have been late 60's, not sure of the date. It actually didn't really affect the Lake District at the time but of course every area was cut off and it was a very worrying time. Of course you felt for all the other farmers who were losing stock. Just a horrible thing.

J W. When we were talking you mentioned Chernobyl

J C. Yes, again, well it affected two of our animals and they sort of grew thinner and thinner and unfortunately died. I think it is still affecting areas of the Langdales, it seems to go on for a long time

J W. So you've got a lot of happy memories but there's obviously been

J C. Well, I think, in any lifetime you get mixed memories but sometimes even bad memories, you know something good comes out of them. I'm quite an optimistic person.

J W. And what particularly good can you think of

J C. Out of the bad? Well I think it makes you appreciate when things turn the corner and get back to normal again. It's really just a way of life isn't it.

J W. So the best thing about living in the valley in your opinion

J C. People and the quiet, I mean everyone knows one another. Where as when you, perhaps, live in a city you don't even speak to your neighbour, I probably would, they probably wouldn't be very pleased. I always think there is a happy atmosphere round and about. I've got the most wonderful neighbours and we all get in so well together which I think is good. The church of course is a big part of family life. My daughter and her family live very near in the old school premises. The school of course closed down in 2006 because it had been reduced to 9 pupils. An elderly farmer in the village told me when he went to school there were 80 pupils so a very big drop.

J W. The school closed and you say your daughter lives there so ...

J C. They changed it and they built quite a few properties as well and which, paradoxically, do have quite a few children so they're back at school

J W. But not locally

J C. No

J W. So the biggest change is the school

J C. Yes and I think the actual village doesn't seem to have many children living there because there are quite a few second homes and country cottages.

J W. You had some connection with the sculptures in Grizedale Forest

J C. Yes they actually used this top barn and lived in it and did all their sculptures. Some of them were fairly recognisable and some of them weren't quite! We had one sculptor called Robert who actually did a lot of four poster beds with carving down the sides. One of these beds was commissioned by Billy Connolly and his wife, Pamela. He used to paint the little sculptures as well in very bright colours which was o.k. We asked him if he would make us a four poster bed and he said that's fine and I said I'd rather it wasn't coloured in, just have it plain. Yes that's fine. We had some old beams from one of the barns and he used those to make this bed. Of course over the years cows and animals had been rubbing themselves on these beams and they were very nicely, what's the word? "a nice patina" patina, that's the word, on these beams and the bed is still in the guest house so hopefully be used again.

J W. When did they start the sculptures in Grizedale

J C. It must have been late 70's, early 80's. They had a contract, it was probably about a year and they had to do so many sculptures for the forest. Some of them are most interesting, really are good. We had one sculptor who came from Cornwall. We had a holiday a few years ago. He was at the Newlands school where he was based. We didn't actually meet him but we saw quite a few of his sculptures down in Newlands. He's become quite famous, David he was called.

J W. So a lot of them actually worked in your barn

J C. Yes, yes

J W. It's very much part of our local heritage

J C. Yes, exactly yes, yes

J W. Thank you Jean, very interesting. That concludes our interview

J C. Thank you very much. A great pleasure.