



Living with Disability

Housing journeys: Lyn's story

Lyn:

Hello, my name is Lyn, and I live at Heathmead, which is Sheltered Accommodation.

Heathmead was built in the eighties. it's mainly for people with disabilities but there are also people on the site, which are retired.

We have a warden that lives on the site who is very nice, called Stuart, and he's always got time for you and he's a very very caring man and we're very lucky to have him.

I have a private agency during the day called "Somebody Cares" and the council-run carers in the night which is run by Cardiff Social Services. They're very good carers, very very friendly and very very helpful.

I know quite a few of the residents on the site and it's a really good site to live on.

I've never had my own independence before. It's only since I've been here that I've actually been able to please myself what I can do, 'because my life is mine now. I don't have to, you know, do what other people tell me, which I've had in the past. Now I can budget for my own electricity and it might seem strange to say this but at least I've got a choice what I can have to eat, what I can do whereas before I had got no choice.

My sister was born just before I had to leave for boarding school so I suppose deep down I thought that I was, you know, why am I going, why, why am I being sent away, you know, when you've got another one in my place, so I suppose deep down I was a bit hurt to think that, I was only six but, you know, you still think well where's my mum and dad. Where have they gone, you know.

At school the staff were very very hostile towards us. They treated you like, well they treated you like dirt. You know they weren't very nice to you I mean they was always shouting at you.

We used to get smacked for every little thing that we did, you know. It was in the fifties and in them days they weren't very nice to you then, if you were disabled, it was a horrible, horrible school where they used to smack you for things like wetting the bed in the night and stuff like that.

We had to call them all 'nurse' and we had 'matron' and you know and the teachers, they were, well, in my eyes they were bullies, the teacher was in them days, awful. You know, the only thing I do remember was when I was in the infants, the best-behaved little girl at the end of the term was going to get an Easter egg and I always remember I was that little girl that won that prize. I'll never forget it. I won an Easter egg for the best-behaved little girl in the class. I'll never forget that as long as I live.

At the age of twenty-one I got the choice of coming to a residential home that had just opened for a year and I said 'oh yeah that'll be great, you know. I wouldn't mind leaving home for a year'.

The social worker brought me down and I'll never forget I came down. It was March the seventh nineteen sixty nine.

It was a Friday and we arrived at two o'clock by train and we came to Brunel House and the people that were running it were Salvation Army people.

I was excited because I was getting away from home. That's what I wanted to do anyway and I thought well I'm going to be here for a year and I'm going to really enjoy it.

It was actually for people with cerebral palsy, because that's what I've got, cerebral palsy, I don't know if they still think upon it as the word spastic which was a horrible horrible word. So now nobody uses that word anymore. It's cerebral palsy. It was a big house with loads and loads of bedrooms, a big living room. We all had to share bedrooms and I shared a bedroom with another girl called Joyce, and it was a beautiful bedroom. It had a great big bay window and the view was lovely. It was all like greenery and woods and it was lovely. It was very nicely situated.

There was no hospital smell or anything like there were in the school when I went, you know, but they still had rules and regulations and you never chose what you wanted for your dinner, or your tea or your breakfast. You had to have exactly what they wanted you to have and they'd go out and buy all your clothes for you. You wouldn't have no choice what clothes you had to buy and ...

How long were you there for?

Twenty six years.

From Brunel House I actually moved to the flats, which was just down the bottom of the road. The reason why I wanted to move was because I'd get more choice in my own life. I had my own freedom then.

I could go when I wanted to go out; come in when I wanted to come in, have me friends round. I didn't have to ask permission or ought like that, and um, that was of course then in nineteen eighty-nine. Then, then I had my Emily.

Your cat?

Yeah

I didn't have to leave it. I decided to leave it because, we had a very nice manager in the flats and she was hoping to open a residential home in Ely.

I was only there a few, two years and it actually closed down and we actually moved up to Llanelli.

We all then was there for three years and then we all moved back to Cardiff. We moved back to another house in Ely, which was a small house, which to be honest I didn't like it was too rough round there.

The people that I was living with, Maggie and they bought a place in France and they decided that they was going to emigrate to France and close the house down, so that means me and this other bloke that was living there, had to move out, but the trouble was they didn't really give us a long time to find somewhere, and well, just couldn't find anywhere, because it had to be that was accessible, I didn't want anywhere too near the road because of my cats and the only place the social worker could find me was in a nursing home for the old people, so I had to live there for a year.

Oh it was horrible. For a start I had a hospital bed which I didn't like, 'cos I liked my own bed, but the only good side of it was, even though it had a no pets policy, because they knew that I had to find somewhere to live quick, they actually let me take my cats with me. So it was a small room, a very small room with me and two cats. Well you can imagine it and of course I had to have the cat litter in there and, no it was just a total nightmare.

When I first got there the food, oh, the food was horrendous and because they were old people they used to give them very small amounts. I'm quite a big person and I like my food and I was, I used to be quite upset because I used to say 'Oh, I'm still hungry' you know, and in the first month I was there I lost ten pound in weight. I think it was the stress as well because I didn't want to be there.

And of course it was way out in the countryside. I couldn't get VEST transport, which is Voluntary Transport for the Disabled, that you can get every day when you're in Cardiff and they'll take you here, there and everywhere, I could only get, go out once a week, so I was stuck in there all the time except for once a week.

I just didn't enjoy living there, and so when this place came up, where I'm living now, I jumped at it.

Well it all started with my friend Jill Herbert. She used to be the director of Cardiff PHAB, well of PHAB Wales, where everybody mixes in together, and you go on holidays together and stuff like that.

She phoned me up one day and said 'There's a bungalow going in Heathmead, why don't you see if you can get it?' So I phoned my social worker up and I mentioned about this bungalow that was going and she said 'Oh' she said 'I'm awfully sorry' she said 'It's gone'. Somebody's got it.

I'm thinking oh God I'm going to be here longer than a year, because I was told I'd just have to be there for about a year. So then another one came up that I heard about which was this one and she said 'I'll try and get it for you'. So she tried and I was lucky. They pushed it through and said it's urgent. She's an urgent case, so that was how I ended up getting this one. But it took about, I'd say three months before it was all sorted out and everything.

It's a small bungalow with a few rooms in it. It's got a lounge and a kitchen, a bedroom. It's a one-bedroom bungalow.

Well my sister, whose name is Annette came down from Nottinghamshire and she helped me move in. It was absolutely brilliant the carpets was already down and the furniture came in on the Saturday and it was so exciting to think at long last I'd be having my own home that I could call mine, so it were really exciting.