

Jane*'s story

(Edited transcript of a video interview on 23.10.19)

**name changed*

I was born in 1943. It wasn't 'till I was born that they suddenly discovered that the oxygen did not go to all my brain. It went so far and I was starved from oxygen. That's why my brain doesn't work as a normal person. I had to go to a special school. As a boarder. There's been jealousy ever since I was born, because [her sister Shirley] knew she was an only child 'till I came along. And then when I was born, and because I had this starved from oxygen which didn't go to all my brain, she was jealous for the rest of my life.

When mother was alive [until 1996], I was able to have my own cheque book. I was able then to shop for myself. When Shirley came up here [in 1996], she did some of my shopping which I didn't want her to do. She took it out of my own hands. She said, 'Oh, I'll buy you some of your food'. Then she started saying Oh, I'm going to arrange for everything to come to her, cheque book, statements. I never saw them. She kept my cheque book in her flat. I never had charge of it 'till she died. She wouldn't trust me with it.

The [weekly] pocket money was £4.50 to begin with, and then she changed to £2 because my room was untidy. She was in [address] and I was living in [different address, as tenant of a homelessness charity]. I asked for £5 for fresh food. She wouldn't give it to me. I lived on tinned.

S [a friend] said, 'How are you doing?' I said, 'I haven't got any money to buy any food'. She said, 'Why?' I said, 'Shirley won't give me any'. She [S, Jane's friend] has given me money for my birthday, and money for Christmas, and some extra pocket money. She said, 'Don't tell Shirley'.

I had a meter. It only lasted so many days, and then I was in complete darkness. [An acquaintance] gave me a bag of pound coins. Five, I think. He said, 'You can't go on in darkness'. Shirley wasn't giving me enough money for my meter. I talked to Shirley about it but she didn't do anything about it. She said, 'Save what you can from your pocket money'. I didn't tell her people were giving me money. She would have said, 'Well, give it back to S, you shouldn't take it from her'. I kept it all hush hush hush. I kept it secret. But it did worry me.

My diet was tins. I was in hospital. I collapsed on my bedroom floor. There on my floor all night, trying to crawl on my bottom. J [a friend] took me to the hospital. They kept me in three days because I had no proper food, and I collapsed. [Shirley] came on the morning I was leaving. She never came near me. I was in hospital three days. She never came to visit me. She said, 'Well, don't go out of the flat for a week. You're not strong enough'. I lived on tins for another week. I didn't dare go out because Shirley was walking around in the street. I still couldn't buy any fresh food. I think S [a friend] took it up then. I didn't tell Shirley I was using my birthday money and money for Christmas from S [a friend] to buy food. The doctor said I'd collapsed because I wasn't getting the nourishment from the tins, and I said that Shirley wouldn't give me any extra money to buy it.

She gave me a meal twice a week. I didn't like it, but I couldn't refuse it, because she'd promised her mother that she would feed me. She washed up in the kitchen. She didn't even talk to me. She gave me my meal and then, 'You can go home now'. I had to go there by half past twelve. If I was late she shouted at me. 'Why are you late?' She wouldn't let me have meals on wheels, I never saw the menu. I did have a meal up in [a day centre] every Tuesday. Shirley didn't pay for that. C [a friend] said 'I'll pay with my money, so you can have a lunch'. She went on with that until Shirley died [in 2018]. Then [after Shirley died] I got my cheque book and I could get my own money out, and then I was able to pay for my own lunch. She took all my money away from me, which she never gave back to me. I couldn't

disagree with her about anything, or she would say, 'I don't want anything more to do with you'. I thought I'd better not disagree with her.

She used to say to me, 'Now, you are going up to [a local church], aren't you? What time do you go up there? What time do you leave there? What time are you going to be home?' Sometimes she used to treat me like a flipping child. She wanted to know what time I was leaving the house, what time I was going back, 'What time are you leaving [the day centre]? What time are you going back to [the day centre]?' I haven't got a life of my own, 'till she's dead. I don't think she was interested in where I was going, I think she just wanted to check on me. She just wanted to know where I was, in case she wanted to 'phone me.

When I started going to Mencap, she found out one day. I don't know how she found out. She wasn't very happy, because I didn't tell her I was going. I decided not to go any more. She stopped me from going there. She said, 'You're not going there'.

She stopped me seeing my friend Monty too. When we were in Marks, she came up behind me. She wanted me out of the way, so I went behind a pillar. I knew what she was going to say. She said [to Monty], '[Jane] needs looking after. She can't look after herself. She's very handicapped'. [Later,] she said, 'I've told Monty I'm cutting your things down, you can go once a month to [a nearby town] with him, and once a week to Marks to have a cup of tea with him'. I used to see him quite a lot but she stopped it. She put a time limit on it. I couldn't stay any longer. She arranged the time. One day she was standing outside the café waiting for me to come out. She sneaked up on me. She just told me, 'You should come away'.

One day she said, 'I wish you were dead' to my face. She didn't want to look after me. When mother was alive, I didn't need anybody to look after me, but Shirley thought I needed looking after.

Other people used to give me money, but I couldn't tell Shirley. She'd only just stop them. What S [a friend] gave me and what [a church] gave me I kept secret.

[The day centre] tried to get some help. But I said 'It's no use. Shirley won't let any social services near me. She'll just tell them to go away. It's no use you trying, either'. People have tried, but I said she wouldn't let anyone near her. She'd just tell them to go away, because she thinks she's looking after me properly.

I couldn't take my walking stick to her flat. She'd say, 'There's nothing wrong with you. You don't need a walking stick'. I do, because my back was so bad. I was working in [a care home] as a domestic. I was doing heavy stuff, and I went to the doctor and said, 'I've got an awful back'. He said, 'You've got bad back for the rest of your life'. I told Shirley about [the back pains], but she wasn't in the least interested. She said, 'Oh, they'll go away'. Well, unfortunately, this will not go away. I've got this for the rest of my life. I will never get rid of that pain. When I went past her flat, I had to hide my stick. I had to slide past her window, and move my stick from this hand to this hand and put it down here near my coat so she couldn't see it, and then when I got past her window swap it from this hand back to this hand. So, she didn't even know that I was walking with a stick.

I could go and see the doctor if I wanted to, but then she would probably find out. She would probably ask me. 'You should have told me first and then I would come with you'. Huh! Come with me! She never had the time to come with me to the flipping doctor.

[When 'Jane' was working:] I could get my money out if she gave me my cheque book. Then I took it to her and she took it all away from me. And then she gave me my pocket money. She probably spent the rest of it on my food, my peanut butter or whatever she wanted to buy.

If I wanted new clothes, she never came with me. S [a house warden] came with me and paid for them with her own money.

Now I write my own cheque, I keep my own money, now she's no longer around.

[About Shirley having power of attorney:] She meant she was my guardian, and she was going to look after me. Shirley is next of kin and she would look after me. When I knew what she was up to I was absolutely flabbergasted. I'm not allowed to keep the documents. I don't even see my bank statements. They go straight to Shirley. I never know how much I've got in the bank. I didn't like it.

I was petrified every time I went to her. I didn't know whether she was going to be alright, or whether she was going to shout at me. I was petrified, because I never knew which way she was going to turn. Am I going to be safe with her? Sometimes she could be nice, and sometimes I could get up there and she could be shouting at me. I never felt safe at all.

[After Shirley died, Jane's contents insurance policy came up for renewal:] It had the payment of her flat, though it was addressed to me. At the bottom, it had 'Shirley [surname]'. I thought, 'What the hell is she doing now?'. Fortunately, she wasn't alive. Now, am I paying for the containers of her flat as well as mine? I think I probably was. We took that part off.

[Jane's Will:] I left everything to Shirley, that was full stop. It was next of kin, she was my sister. I had to leave everything to her. I could not decide [who to leave anything to] until after she was dead. After she was dead, I made a new Will.

My relationship with Shirley was absolutely horrendous. I can't believe she's done all that to me. I really can't believe she treated me like that. I still, still, still can't believe she's done that to me. I just can't. The things she did to me.

Now I buy Spaghetti Bolognese once a week from Marks. I heat it up in a saucepan. I buy one, it's two meals, two evenings. I cut it in half, and the other half I keep for the next evening. I'm able to choose my own food.

By the end, she started going into my clothes. She said, 'Well, how long have you had that skirt on? Isn't it time it went in the washing machine?' I said, 'Shirley, I'll put it in the washing machine when I want to'. 'It needs washing, have you got another one to put on'. I can't even decide when my skirt is going to the wash. Now I do that for myself. I said, 'Shirley, leave my clothes alone, please. I know when I need my clothes washed'. 'No you don't, you need to be told'.

It was going to the point where I was feeling like almost committing suicide sometimes. I felt like jumping off the pier, and getting in the water and drown. Or else I'd walk into the middle of the sea and drown. Only because she was shouting at me. I said, 'If you shout at me one more time, Shirley, I'm going to do it. You'll have a dead body. I can't take any more'. I was thinking seriously of doing it, yes I was. If I hadn't got my - you know - brain saying, 'Don't be so stupid', I would have done it, because she kept on shouting at me.

Honestly, it was absolutely hell, hell, hell, hell.