

## Interview with Mary Matusz by Al Dix

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### Good Sound Quality

*Mary's parents were Polish refugees and both worked in mills - father in one at Sutton, near Keighley, mother in another Keighley mill. Mary says she'll find some old papers and photos to try to identify the mills and their houses. Her brother worked there as a teenager too. Mother worked until she was 75.*

*They had one amazing holiday to France.*

0:00:00

**LMI:** ...on this computer. You might have to approve it.

**MM:** Ok. Yeah, so what I was going to say is of course my parents were both Polish refugees that came to this country after the Second World War. And they first went to a place near Sutton. Sutton near Silsden, you know, over that way. And then my dad still worked in the mill in Sutton, but... All his life till he retired, really. And then we moved to Keighley. They bought a little house. It was only, you know, it was... well, it was just two rooms downstairs. What we call two up, two down terraced house. And my mum worked in a mill in Keighley. Now, I've been trying to research the name of the mill, and I cannot find it. And it's drawn me in now I'm going to have to do my own research to find the name of the mill! But it was demolished. It's no longer there. I think it was demolished and then turned into a gym, a sports center, or something.

**LMI:** When would that be?

**MM:** When? I would think early 1990s when it was demolished.

0:01:50

**LMI:** Can you remember where it was?

**MM:** Yeah, exactly where it was. What I was going to say is, when I was 13, this little two-up, two-down house, the council did a compulsory purchase. There was quite a group of... a few streets of these terraced houses, which the council, as I say, purchased. So we had to find somewhere to live. And my mum was working at the mill and somebody at the mill said, 'Oh, well, we've got a little house you can rent.' She was already, you know, working there. So we moved there. And we thought it was great because it actually had a *bathroom*. And that was fantastic. The other one was, you know, unmodernized, still had an outside loo and everything. But it was beautiful streets and houses. It was a real community, and it was a pity, I think it was just totally destroyed, that little community. But anyway, that's another

story, I think. So we moved into this mill house... and that must have been... in 1968 we moved there. And my mum worked there the whole time.

**0:03:24**

**MM:** Now my dad was 10 years older than my mum, so he'd retired at some point. I'd have to work out the years. But he never worked in that mill. He used to travel to Sutton and back. So, the whole time from 1968 till 1990, my mum worked there. At first... when I was little, before we moved to the mill house, she used to work evenings. So it was like about half past five to half past nine, most evenings, every evenings. I'm not sure if it was Monday to Friday or...it probably was. Or Monday to Thursday, perhaps. Anyway. And...

**LMI:** Do you know what she did?

**MM:** Yeah, she did drawing. And that, as I understand it, is kind of. I think it's similar to carding. I don't know exactly the process, but it was drawing that she did.

**0:04:37**

**MM:** And also, my brother, he's six years older than me. He worked in the mill in his summer...two summer holidays. So, it must have been... when he was 18, he left to go to college. So, it must have been when he was 16 and 17. And when he was 16, he told me he used to go around collecting all the empty bobbins in a big cart. And that's what he did for the one summer. And the summer after he worked in the warehouse. And he used to have to move all these bales (he said they were about two foot by two foot) of raw wool in preparation for the processing.

**LMI:** So it was a spinning mill was it? Or did it do weaving as well?

**0:05:33**

**MM:** Well, I think it did weaving as well. I think it did. I'm not sure. It definitely did spinning. It might not have done weaving. 'Cos that'd mean they had cloth at the end, didn't they? So, maybe not. It might have been spinning mill. Yeah. I mean, I only went in a handful of times, probably. And what I remember when I went in – the noise was *unbearable*. It was so loud! I went in for some reason to find my mum, for something. And somebody always found her very quickly for me. And what's interesting is because my mum and dad were called Katarzyna and Wojciech. And Katarzyna became Kathleen. Because they couldn't say, they couldn't pronounce Katarzyna. So they called her Kathleen. And they called my dad, they couldn't say Wojciech. So they called him Walter. But what is interesting as well is that um... Ok, I might digress a little bit, you know...

**LMI:** You digress as much as you want.

**0:07:15**

**MM:** Ok. When she was no longer able to work there... We were pushing her for ages saying, you know, 'You really...' She was 75, getting to be 75. And one of the conditions of the house was that she had to work there. And of course, once you're no longer able to work, then, you know, they lost the house. So...

**LMI:** She worked until she was 75?

**MM:** Yeah, yeah. But I think in the end, she was just doing a couple of hours cleaning a day, rather than working on the machines. Because it was quite heavy going, you know, working on the machines.

**0:07:55**

**MM:** So, obviously, at the time I'd left, I went to university as a mature student. And I was in Sheffield. well, I was sort of negotiating with... well it was then Bradford... it was Keighley Council, I can't remember if they'd merged with Bradford or not, by then. But anyway, I remember having constant talks with the council for ages because my mum and dad were being made homeless by the mill. Because they could no longer work there.

**LMI:** Was the mill still working then or was it closed?

**MM:** It was, it was still working then.

**LMI:** Can you just try and tell me where it was because I've got a map open now.

**MM:** Yeah, now I can't find it on a map.

**LMI:** Well, we've got a special map with mills on it.

**0:08:57**

**MM:** Have you? Right. Well, the street names have now been changed. It used to be... the mill house was called 48 Low Bridge, Keighley. And the mill... I mean, it was on Low Bridge, but it looks like the name of the... it's been changed to is it ...let's have a look. I think it's been changed to a... Long Croft? Yeah, it's been changed to Long Croft.

**LMI:** So there is a Low Mill Lane here, I can see...

**MM:** Well, there's... It's a bit deceiving there, because if you go...

**LMI:** Is it near the station?

**MM:** No, not really. Not really near the station. There's Coney Lane... If you go down Coney Lane...

**LMI:** Just give me somewhere... I'm going to share a screen...

**MM:** Worth Way... There's Worth Way...

**LMI:** Yeah, yeah, I've got Worth Way. I'm going down...

**MM:** Worth Way. And then off Worth Way there should be a Coney Lane, that should still be still

**LMI:** Oh, got it. Yes, I've got that.

**MM:** So, if you go down Coney Lane... and then just before the bridge there's a little right turn...

**LMI:** Yeah.

**MM:** ...that goes sort of back on itself and up to... is it Worth Way?

**LMI:** Yeah, yeah.

**MM:** Well, the mill was there.

**LMI:** Oh, right. Ok. Well, we haven't got a mill there at all.

**MM:** Yeah, I know it's weird because I've been... I've been looking myself. I think I might have to go to somebody in the arc... you know, archives. I mean, it doesn't... There's a Low Bridge, but that's not it, because... look at that... and that's been derelict for decades. And it was derelict when we lived there. And that's Grade 2 listed. And I think somebody used it as a sawmill or something like that, or some joinery place for a while. But that's not the mill that was. It was demolished and it was turned into, like I say, a gym... sports place.

**LMI:** So it's on the junction of Coney Lane and Long Croft, was it?

**MM:** Yeah, yeah.

**LMI:** Ok, right, well, we'll have a look for it.

**MM:** Yeah.

**LMI:** See if we can find it.

**MM:** I mean I'll try and do a bit more research and I don't know.

**LMI:** An archivist who can possibly do that.

**MM:** Yeah.

**LMI:** Ok, so...

**MM:** So where was I?

**LMI:** You were talking about your parents and how they kind of had to change their names.

**MM:** Well, they didn't. They got them changed for them. The people, you know, people that they were working with, and English people that became, you know, their friends and stuff, called them Kathleen and Walter.

**0:12:09**

**MM:** And then, funnily enough, my dad's name became George. I mean, how do you get George from that?! But anyway, he became George. And eventually...when they had to leave that mill house, and I was in conversation with the council about getting them somewhere else to live, (because in effect they were being made homeless). The council eventually found them a place. And funnily enough, it was where they'd originally come from, in the little two-up-two-down house, where they'd built a block of sheltered housing. So they were going back to the place they came from 22 years earlier. But unfortunately, what happened was, my dad fell and broke his hip. And he was in hospital. And he didn't make it to the new house...to the new flat.

**LMI:** That's a shame.

**MM:** Yeah, he didn't survive. It's a real shame. Yeah.

**0:13:27**

**LMI:** So, go back to the mills then...

**MM:** Yeah.

**LMI:** What were your particular memories or things that you were told by your parents that you want to get documented?

**MM:** I think it was quite hard work, you know, but there was a lot of camaraderie around. I mean, my mum, she worked...There was another Polish woman that worked there in the mill, that eventually she became my brother's mother-in-law. Because he married her daughter, this Polish woman's daughter. But my mum also, she became friends with this woman called Edith, who didn't live too far away from the original house.

**0:14:23**

**MM:** And they became lifelong friends. And they were quite close to each other. And then when eventually my mum had to move into residential accommodation, this Edith took the dog, her dog, with her. But yeah, they used to...the Polish woman, she used to sometimes come around to our house at lunch times when these... in the lunch break from the mills, she'd come sometimes, just come around, and they'd chat and things. What else can I remember? They used to be taken to... they used to go out on day trips sometimes. The ones that, the one that I remember my mum going to, because she wasn't sure about going, and we said, 'Yeah, why not, you should do. It was all paid for and provided by the mill. They

went to Edinburgh to the Tattoo. And that's a sort of military display thing, isn't it? Yeah, yeah.

**LMI:** So did they do that in a day?

**MM:** Yeah, they took a day off. I don't think the mill shut down. I think... a lot of, you know the way... They hired a coach and then they went, yeah. During the day, definitely, it was in a work... you know, middle of the week.

**LMI:** They came and went back in a day?

**MM:** Yeah, they came and went back in a day. It was a day [trip]. They didn't stay over, no, there and back in a day.

**LMI:** That's a long day.

**MM:** Yeah, yeah. They must have gone early morning, mustn't they, I reckon.

**LMI:** Did they organize quite a lot of those kind of trips?

**MM:** Well, it was a yearly thing, I think it was every year they organised something. I can't remember the others.

**LMI:** Have you got any photographs of those times?

**0:16:37**

**MM:** No, I thought you'd ask about this. I've just been refurbishing my attic, and everything is packed away. But I have got a lovely photo of my mum and dad with the mill house in the background.

**LMI:** Oh, that would be lovely to see.

**MM:** Yeah, yeah. I know I've got it. I'll just have to unpack my stuff. I've only finished the attic, which you can see behind me.

**LMI:** Very good, it looks pretty good.

**MM:** It's still quite empty. I only finished it completely last week. The carpet was fitted last week, so I'm slowly unpacking everything. It's great.

**0:17:23**

**MM:** Yeah, that photo of them in the background, which I will find for you, is really lovely. Yeah. I have got... and I'm still, you know, in touch with... well, my brother and his, that original wife, they split up, but I'm still in touch with her daughters. I think they might... I'm going to ask them if they have any photos of inside, you know, the mill, because... I don't know why I haven't got any photos of the mill itself. That's strange. I suppose I never really went unless I was looking for my mum for some reason or other.

**LMI:** And what did it feel like when you went in the mill? When you were a child?

**0:18:08**

**MM:** Well, I felt... just really noisy, and I wanted to get out because of the noise. But I was a bit in awe of all the machinery and how huge it was. It's just all these massive machines seem to be, you know.

**LMI:** And nobody said, 'You can't come in here'?

**MM:** No. They came with me; they didn't let me loose. They just said, you know... either took me with them or said, 'Wait here with such and such, she'll look after you.' I remember, you know, standing next to one of the women at the machines until they went to get my mum, for some reason.

**LMI:** Did you think that you'd end up working in a mill?

**MM:** Oh God no! **No!** No, never! No, I've been thinking it was...yeah. I think I probably thought 'I'll never end up here, I'll never...' It was just too... I knew how hard my parents worked, and it wasn't easy. And I remember...I remember one time...yeah... this was towards sort of the end of the mill house, so my mum must have been getting on. And she was asked to clean these machines. And I remember I think that they...I think they brought some of a bit of a machine to the back door so she could be doing it.

**0:20:08**

**MM:** And it was horrendous. A really, really, really dirty job. And I mean, in those times, she didn't even use any protective gloves or anything like that. And it's not like she got paid well for it. And you know, looking back... and at that time, I was more grown up by then, you know...[I] might have been sort of 18, 20 or... You know, thinking, 'Hang on a minute, they're, I think, taking advantage of her a bit here. She shouldn't be doing this. And not for this... Because it...you know, it probably wouldn't have been anything more than... There wasn't even a minimum wage at that time, I don't think. But yeah, I was a bit outraged that she should have been asked.

**LMI:** And they brought it into the house as well?

**MM:** Not to the house, it was outside. Because there was quite a big area, and it was a cop... The back, which is all disappeared now, you could get to the back of the house from up near Morrison's, because there was this bit of a garage forecourt and there was a back street down. And at the top there was a little joiner's shop, and you walked down this cobbled street and there was quite a big area.

**0:21:39**

**MM:** And I think they did bring a bit of some of this machinery for my mum to work on there. But I think mostly, she did it there. But I think...you know, we were just horrified at what a dirty job it was. It was all very oily. And black, dirty. You know, it's not...

**LMI:** And they expected her to just clean it.

**MM:** Clean it. Like scrubbing an engine or something like that, do you know what I mean?

**LMI:** Yeah.

**MM:** But she did it happily because, you know, she worked there, and she lived in a mill house and how could she...

**LMI:** And how many years did she do it for?

**MM:** Oh, she only did that, the cleaning thing, was only over a year, was only one...

**LMI:** How many years did she work altogether in the mill?

**0:22:32**

**MM:** I really can't... I've been trying to work that out. I think, I'm not sure exactly when she started. But between 25 and 30 years she worked at the mill. But she lived in the mill house for 22 years.

**LMI:** And was it the same for your dad?

**MM:** Yeah. He never worked at that mill. As I say, he worked at one in Sutton. But...

**LMI:** Did you ever go to that one?

**MM:** I never went to that one, because we moved to Keighley when I was a baby. I was about two or something like that when we moved there. And but later when I went to Sutton, I thought 'We made a mistake here, they should have lived in Sutton and kept... stayed there. Because it's a really lovely place.

**LMI:** So did they come, what year did they come to the UK? Have you got any idea?

**MM:** So it'd have been, it would have been '48, wouldn't it? '48.

**LMI:** Was it just after the war? They came...?

**MM:** Yeah, yeah.

**LMI:** So they didn't come particularly to work in the mills, they came more to... sort of as part of the end of the war?



**MM:** End of the war. They went to ... there was a hostel in... It wasn't in Sutton, it was near there... the name just escapes me now. It'll come to me. Probably in the middle of the night.

**0:24:31**

**MM:** Anyway, they went to a hostel first. But my mum and dad had met in a camp in Germany before they came over. I think that they had to work in a mill, 'cos... I'm not sure if there'd had been any other work for them. They didn't speak the language. You know, they had to learn English. And I think... I didn't realize this till much... when I was much older... is that they had to work anyway. That was part of the deal of moving to the UK, that you had to work for... I think it was three years to repay the debt. Because I remember... some of the Polish community went... worked there three years. It might have been five, I can't remember offhand. We'll have to look it up. And then when that time was up, some of them moved to Canada, some moved to the United States... Because they'd worked...

**LMI:** They paid off their debts.

**MM:** Yeah, yeah, to the UK, yeah.

**0:25:46**

**LMI:** So did they go back to Poland at all?

**MM:** Absolutely not. It was... No, no, because, I mean, they didn't want to really. I think they had a really hard life in Poland. Long story here. My dad, he always said he had a really tough life in Poland. And my mum, she couldn't possibly go back. Where she was born, it's now, it went, it changed to... it's now Ukraine. It's near **LWÓW**, north of Lwow. And because what had happened, they felt... many of them anyway, many of the Polish community, felt cheated that they could no longer go back. Everything was sort of Russian controlled under the communists. And they felt they could never go back.

**0:26:46**

**LMI:** Was there a Polish community in the mill as well? There was this friend of your parents. Were there other people?

**MM:** Not in that mill. But there was a few. Like... one of the, she's still my friend... one of my parents' friends, they had a daughter same age as me. So we kind of grew up together. And their parents were really close to my parents, and... Yeah, I still see her actually. Saw her last week. So there was that community not necessarily just in that mill, but they worked in all different mills. And you know, they talked about work, and what have you. I mean, Christine and Danuta's parents, they both worked in the mill. And then I had a Ukrainian friend. Both her parents worked in the mill.

**LMI:** Oh really?

**MM:** In Keighley. Yes. There were many of them...

**LMI:** So, I'm just kind of looking here... I was looking at my maps to see if I can see any more. Can you remember anything else specifically about sort of mill life?

**0:28:00**

**MM:** I remember... Yeah, I remember my mum was very friendly with an overlocker...overlooker, sorry. And his name was Jimmy, and he was one of the nicest ones. He was a really nice man. And she became very friendly with him, and he was really chatty. And he knew the family, he knew all of us. And, you know, if we ever saw him on the street, we'd chat to him... And we got to know, well, my mum got to know his sisters as well. He had some sisters. And then, I remember... When my mum died, I remember putting a notice in the local paper, because, you know, she was quite... you know... A lot of people knew her around Keighley. Anyway, Jimmy and his sisters, bless them, they came to the funeral. And she'd left the mill - what...? I think it was 17 years since they'd seen her. Because she'd left the mill in 1990, and she died in... I think it was 2007.

**0:29:47**

**MM:** And obviously... maybe when she was more able, maybe they *had* seen her around town, because, you know, she was worried. But I thought that was lovely that they came to the funeral. That he came with his sisters. Yeah, that was lovely. What else can I think of? I think they used to get... Everybody got a Christmas... you know, something for Christmas. Like... I can't remember exactly, but I think it was something like a big box of biscuits or something or other. Every Christmas.

**LMI:** Did they have a Christmas party?

**MM:** I can't remember that. I don't know. No, I don't know about the Christmas party.

**LMI:** Did quite a lot of people work there for a long time?

**MM:** Yeah. Yeah, I think so. Yeah. And of course, they used to have... you'll know about these - The Feast Weeks, when everything shut down for two weeks during the summer holidays.

**LMI:** Yes. So did you go on... did you go away?

**MM:** We never went away. Never. The only place we went away was... it was a massive thing for us. We went to France with my mum. My dad didn't want to go because he stayed home to look after the dog. He really didn't want to go. And... you know, he wanted to keep the garden ticking over. But me and my brother went to France with my mum. And it was a massive thing because we never went away. We never went anywhere.

**0:31:49**

**MM:** We didn't have holidays. We probably couldn't afford holidays, you know. We were quite poor really. When I look back and I think, 'My gosh, she must have saved up so long to

go to France.' And she went to see, there were Polish people that they'd met in the camp in Germany, who she wrote letters to.

**LMI:** Was that like a prison camp or a concentration camp?

**MM:** No, no, no, it was a, it was like... it was a camp after the war, after everything had been liberated. And they had these... sort of liberation camps before people were organized, and you know, found out where they want... where else they wanted to go.

**LMI:** So she went to France. How long did she go for then? Or did *you* go for?

**MM:** Two weeks, went for two weeks, yeah.

**LMI:** Golly.

**MM:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was a massive thing. And of course, my mum was absolutely petrified of escalators and lifts. And some places, you know, like... I don't know how we managed it, but I think I was eight at the time. So, therefore, my brother must have been 14. So, to go across London and Paris, and then down to Tarbes, which is right in the...

**0:33:17**

**LMI:** I know Tarbes. I know Tarbes. It's in the Pyrenees.

**MM:** Yeah, yeah, it's near the Pyrenees, yeah, yeah. So, we went there. And to cross everything like that, when she was so frightened of crossing over things. But yeah, it was such a brilliant thing to do, to have done.

**LMI:** Well, listen Mary, if you have any other kind of specific memories, we can either do this again. Or you can write them down and send them over to me.

**MM:** Yeah, yeah. I mean, I hope it's been useful for you.

**0:34:12**

**LMI:** Oh, it has, it has. Listen, I mean, all of these things kind of become part of an overall sort of memory bank, if you like. And they're all contributing to a whole mass of collected memories with... And lots of things you've said, other people have confirmed as well. Things about holidays and trips out, and that kind of thing. And just the experience of working in the mill, as well. I'm going to stop recording now.