



Speaking for Ourselves: An Oral History of People With Cerebral Palsy

Tony Stamford
Interviewed by Philip Mann

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Tape 1 Side A [Track 1]

OK, well it's 17th November, and I'm talking to Tony Stamford at his home in Pitsea: and, Tony, perhaps I can begin at the very beginning, and ask you when and where you were born?

Well, I was born in Paddington, many years ago: in fact, well, as we said earlier, I was born in 1949 in Paddington, very nearly on a bus. I was six weeks early, and premature, and all sorts of odd things like that, which probably would explain how I come to have CP [cerebral palsy], and of course in those days they didn't know very much about it, and they wouldn't let my mum leave the hospital because they thought that she would go away and wouldn't come back for me. So, that was in Paddington. Then they didn't finally find out exactly a diagnosis of what was wrong with me until I was two. I don't know if I'm going too fast: if you want me to fill in any little bits before then...

So were you then your parents' first child, or ...?

No, no, I've got a sister. I have a sister who's a little bit older than me, although she always told me when she lived in a village somewhere the other side of what's it's, that if ever I saw any of her friends, that I was the older brother, because that was the situation she had with her friends, so I always remember that, although, in fact she is a couple of years older than me, and anybody can work that out for themselves.

Where did you live then Tony?

We moved from Paddington down onto the Debden Estate, and then from there, when I was nine, I went away to school – one of the society's schools, the Wilfred Pickles School – and I stayed there until I was 16, and I then went to the further education centre at Dene Park.

OK, if we can just...

There's lots of bits in between that which we'll go back to, as and when you think we ought to, or whatever.

So what have you been told, you know, about your early days then Tony?

Well my early days: I've always been an awkward child and I think my stubbornness – I've always been an awkward person, really – my stubbornness is one of the reasons why I've survived, if you like, and my parents always taught, I have a sister, as I said previously, us to be well-mannered and so that we weren't an embarrassment, either to yourself or to them. And even nowadays, you know, I spend a lot of time in one of the local pubs round 'ere, and I always say to people, 'I try not to swear in the pub for two reasons: one is that I don't like swearing too much, you know, one often swears when you're having a joke amongst your friends, but I'm always conscious of the fact that there are more and more ladies in pubs now, and of course there's always the thought that, perhaps, if they're in pubs on their own, they're not ladies, but that just proves how old-fashioned I am. [Laughs.] And I don't like swearing as a normal kind of thing, and I also believe myself that speech is an art, really, and I like to use the odd big word. I don't really think that was what you asked me, so I think, if I could ask you to refresh my memory?

So you were born six weeks premature, and you didn't get the diagnosis of cp until you were two?

Yes.

What memories do you have: what's your earliest memory?

My earliest memory I would think would be when I had my tonsils out, and I can remember, that was at Great Ormond Street Hospital, them putting the mask over your face with the Chloroform as they used to in those days: you didn't have any pre-meds or stuff like that. I can still remember that now, and I was three: so that's my earliest memory.

And, at that time, what was the effect of the cerebral palsy?

Well, at that time, wheelchairs weren't so much in evidence, and my mum or dad used to push me around in a big Royal Pram: not a pram... well, like it would be equivalent to a buggy nowadays, like: but a green pram, I remember that cos I can just about remember still being pushed about in it. I've just pulled the microphone off, I'm sorry.

That's all right, Tony. OK, we'll just put that back.

But I can still remember being pushed around in that pram. [Rustling noise.] Shall I come a little closer, then you can...

Mm.

... Make it slightly easier for you to pin it back on.

There we go. So perhaps we can go from the top there Tony. Tony, what was the effect of your cerebral palsy in your early years?

Oh well, I could never quite walk without sticks, and I used to spend a lot of time crawling, because that was the easier way of getting round, and I remember – I don't know if you've ever seen one – but my dad, who was a precision engineer, borrowed a Bona-ped from Great Ormond Street Hospital.

What's a Bona-ped?

It's a particular type of walking frame: I've never seen one for years. And being a precision engineer, my dad was able to adapt the... he borrowed one, took it apart, and worked out how to make something similar, but he made the handle that much different so they couldn't get him under patent rights, and stuff like that, because he certainly couldn't afford what I think it must have been something like £7.50 to buy one. So he, being rather resourceful, went and made one in his spare time, out of metal and stuff like that, and I was always a chubby child, so it was always difficult for people to lift me around, And I used to walk with one stick, or maybe two sticks,

and it was always an effort, but I enjoyed it. Then, as my weight progressed my knees sort of, you know, rubbed together as you walk, and then when I was 13 or 14 my left hip started to come in and out: I think they call it 'a sub-located dislocated hip', but as I told you previously, I'm not into medical terms, I don't really know. Now, Great Ormond Street, in their wisdom, operated on my hip but they gave me an operation which is the way you would operate on a baby with dislocated hips that were coming in and out, and although it was the right operation for then, it was the wrong operation for somebody who had grown, so I then had to go to Stanmore and they had to re-do it, but that's...

So when did you first begin to walk, even with the aid of sticks?

I suppose, I can't remember, but I suppose when I was three or four. And my aunt bought me a three-wheeled bike, which I suppose for that, I would have been about three for that. Really, I ought to ask my mum one or two of these questions so I could get you the right sort of years, but, you know, one tends to forget. I will be seeing her later today, so I'll try and remember to ask her, and next time we meet, we can fill in the proper dates, if it's that relevant: probably is, really.

So you were living in London: whereabouts were you living at this time?

No, this... we would already have moved to Loughton, and we had a two-bedroomed house there, and then when I was nine I went away to the Wilfred Pickles School, and I'd been there about 18 months, and then I came home for Christmas. I mean, I came home in the holidays other than that, of course, but as I remember, we were there about 18 months, and then we moved to a bigger house in another road on the estate, and that had a downstairs toilet and bathroom, and three bedrooms, because, you know, obviously being sort of nine or 10, and my sister was a couple of years older, she wanted her own privacy, and I needed it too.

So...

So we had a three-bedroom house, with a driveway where Dad could put the car, which was really up-market, to be able to have a house with a driveway. Then my

parents moved some considerable time after that – they moved up to Hemingford Abbots – but by that time, I had left school.

So what was your father's car, when you were living in [clears throat] Loughton?

Oh, he had some sort of little Ford. I think it was probably a Ford 8, and I remember it cos I'm in to cars, and it didn't have a boot: it had a boot, but you had to lift the back of the back seat up, to get into the boot, through the back door of the car. Does that make sense?

And what was your father's work?

My father is, or was rather, a precision engineer.

So did he work within the neighbourhood, or...?

It depends: most of the time he worked up in London, but I can remember when I was very little, he used to go to work on a bike, and he worked up the top of some big hill. I can't really remember where it was, but that would have been, I think it was Goldings Hill, which is somewhere around Loughton way, somewhere like that. And then he had various other jobs and he moved then up, and for a good part of his life he was working round Bow, in various light engineering, precision engineering firms. My father is a tool maker by trade, but I'm sure now most of that work would be done by computers.

And your sister, what was her name, Tony?

Pauline, my sister.

And what were her other names?

Her other names? Yeah, Pauline Lillian Joan, I think. Far as I can remember. Dunno, we very rarely use second names in the family. [Laughs.]

And you, obviously, were your parents' second child. Have you been told, you know, what their thoughts were when they got the diagnosis of your cp?

No. In fact, I spoke to my niece: my sister only had the one child, and my niece is about to have her second baby, so I spoke to my mum, cos I think we were watching *Casualty* a couple of Saturdays ago, and she said that Kelly definitely, that's my niece, would not keep a disabled child if they had a down's syndrome child. Kelly, she felt because she'd already got one child, she wouldn't be able to keep it, you know, cos she's an older mum – she was born in 1970, so she's 32-ish, no, anyway, we can work it out later on, she's that age – and her first baby, Alexander's, got some kidney problems, so there's obviously some concern of when she had the second child. And Mum was saying that she, Kelly, had said to her that if it had any mental problems, she felt that she wouldn't be able to keep it, and I said, 'Well, that's her choice'. I mean, I'm obviously a bit too close to that sort of thing to even get into that debate, and I wouldn't. I don't know what I would do if I were in that position, but, fortunately, I'm not, so I don't have to worry. [Laughs.]

So what kind of contact did you have with the Spastics Society in your early years?

Oh, quite a lot. I went away to the Wilfred Pickles School from when I was nine till when I was 16. Having said that, I lost a good part of the last two years because of my hips and, I mean, you will notice now that I'm sitting in a rather odd position; that's because I still have now a large metal plate from there, which is just above my knee, right the way up to my hip. And they decided, in their wisdom, and I was rather pleased, not to take it out, because they obviously knew that I wouldn't be walking for very long, and in fact I haven't really walked since I was sort of 16, 17. I could just about stand, but I can't do that now, and because of my weight, and because of the Health and Safety at Work Acts, I have to be hoisted by electric hoist. But I'm very fortunate, in as much as my home is all wired up for that. The only thing with that is, it makes one rather cautious about going anywhere else for the weekend. I am very lucky, in as much as I don't need holidays, cos I consider every day of my life is a holiday.

And, when you were growing up, Tony – what kind of contact did you have with other relatives?

Well, I suppose we saw them at Christmas and normal things like that, but we we're not a particularly close family. I mean, my grandmother and grandfather lived up the road from us, we saw them a lot, and my granddad has only died in the last sort of 10 years, but my grandmother died in 1968. My grandfather subsequently re-married. I've got an aunt; my mum has one sister, and my dad has, I think, six brothers, and we hardly ever see them, unfortunately, but my aunt (Mum's sister) I see quite a lot.

And what are some of your early memories of your mother, let's say?

Oh, [laughs] my Mum and I are very similar, in as much as that we tend to sort of blow... My father is, I think probably because of his engineering training, he's more quieter than what we are, whereas my Mum and I we tend to open our mouth and put our foot in it, [laughs], you know: we tend to say what we think, rather than what we should, if you understand what I mean, and I spend a lot of time having to, well not quite so much as I used to, but I have to apologise for what I said. But I'm beginning to train myself to sort of try and [laughs] think a little before I open my mouth.

But have you got, you know, any particular memories of her, when you were very small at all?

Yeah, I have because we were very lucky in as much as that we got to Great Ormond Street Hospital, and then we were going up there one time everyday, to the extra physio and stuff like that. I can always remember, went up to the hospital, and I said to the doctor, much to my mother's surprise, and I suppose really I shouldn't be telling you cos she'd be mortified, if she knew what I told you: 'Ooh, Mummy washed her feet in the tin bowl this morning!', cos you didn't have a shower every day in those days, did you? In fact, most people I'm sure they'd never even heard of a shower, and, I mean, I won't say it wasn't possible to bath every day, but people didn't because there wasn't so much heat. I suppose people didn't really sweat quite as much, so it wasn't normal to bath every day. And I can remember saying to this doctor, much to my mum's sort of embarrassment, 'Oh, Mummy washed her feet in

the enamel bowl this morning, before we came to see you', and my poor old mum's face would have reddened up dreadful. The poor old doctor, all he did was smile, you know, and thought, 'That's not the first time I've heard something like that!'

[Laughs.]

And, at home, did you have much contact with the neighbours?

No, not really, and that was nothing to do with the disability: it was because we, as a family, don't mix. I don't know why, but we just don't. It's just the way we are – we've got nothing to hide, but we just prefer not to... We mix with people who we want to. The fact that they're neighbours, I mean, obviously one is polite to one's neighbour, and I probably mix more in here with my neighbours than whatever I did when I lived at home with my parents.

And your father was going out to work, you know, through the week and so on: did you have early memories of him at all?

Yeah, many early memories of my dad because, I don't know if you know, and I expect you do, when you work with metal and stuff, you use stuff like Swarfiga, and I can always remember, even now, if ever I smell Swarfiga it reminds me of my dad coming in and cuddling or kissing me, and you smelt Swarfiga on his hands. And even now, if I smell Swarfiga, it brings back those sort of childhood memories to me.

What was your parents' attitude do you think, at the time, Tony? How did they take things?

What, the fact of my disability? Oh, they always worked very hard to make sure I wasn't allowed to get away with anything, just because I was disabled. I mean, we were very strictly brought up, I think probably almost verging on the Victorian, but you've got to remember that it's just after the War, and we were... I mean my father, even now, is quite strict and I don't think that's a bad thing. Not just saying that he 'it us, cos he didn't; he didn't need to, you know, he just said, 'That's enough of that', and I mean, even now, one of my last memories I have of my father actually rebuking me for anything was when we were at the hospital, when my wife was very ill, and

we were driving back from Bart's, towards where my mum and dad were then living, which is Barkingside, and I swore, and he said, 'What did you swear like that for?' I said, 'Well...' He said, 'There's no need for language like that, you know. I still got round the bloke, you know. What you worrying about?' I said, 'Well, he didn't need to cut you up like that.' He said, 'But neither did you need to swear.' And they were always very particular, you know: it's something of which I'm very proud. My father was in the Navy during the War, and he's one of the people that... I mean, obviously I've known him all my life, that's a silly thing to say, but in the whole time I've known him, he's only ever twice spoken about the war, always to say that it was horrible and that's all he's ever... I mean, some old chaps of his age, they glory in the war, that's the highlight of there life. I don't know. No, all he says is, 'War is horrible.'

And when you were small, before you went to school, what were some of the suggestions that you should do for school?

Well, I actually I went away to school when I was nine, but I'd been to a couple of day schools prior to that. I'd been to Benton Road which was, I believe, in Dagenham, and there was also a cp school, I don't know where that was, but it must have been somewhere round about Dagenham, and I believe there now still is a pre-school place in Buckhurst Hill which is still working now, and I went there, and I did a bit of physio.

What kind of set-up was that then? What kind of school was that?

What, the pre-school thing? As far as I know, and I can't really remember, but I can remember things that people have told me, and what I had remembered. It was a bit like, I suppose, it would have been something similar to the Peto stuff that they do now, except it was probably the Bobath method, because Mrs Bobath proceeded Peto in the way of physiotherapy.

Did you meet Bertie Bobath?

Yes, when I was at the Wilfred Pickles School, I met her, yes.

What are your memories of Bertie Bobath?

She was a very strict lady, slightly forbidding, and yet very, as I remember, tactile and very friendly, if you can be both things in one person: can you? I think you can, and as I say, I have warm memories of her, cos I think it's an honour to have met somebody like that, even if you only met her by default, if you understand what I mean. I didn't really go out to meet her, I was just the person that was having the physio at the time she came to the school.

And before you went to the Wilfred Pickles School, Tony, what else are some of your early memories of school?

Early memories of school, prior to that: I think, all I can remember is a lady called Mrs Stamp, who used to come with the car, and she was an escort. They used to have big taxis in those days, or just big cars, and obviously I wasn't in a wheelchair then, but they had sort of wheelchairs or prams at the school to push you around in, and then you would be brought back again at four o'clock, or whatever time it was. I really can't remember. I remember there was three of us in the car: there was a lad called John Poulton, and a lady called Josephine, whose surname I don't remember, it's probably not relevant anyway, but I haven't seen either of those for many years – although when I lived in Chigwell House I did come across Josephine once, but I've never seen her since.

And how was a typical day organised, do you remember?

I don't really remember. As far as I can remember, there wasn't a lot of structure to it, but then, you've got to remember, I was very young. It's over 40, 45 years, i'n't: probably nearer 50 years because... no, it would be about 45 years, I suppose.

And, in your mind's eye, can you go back there now? What are some of the things that come through to you of that time?

Well, I remember that my dad, always being handy and helpful, they had a set of parallel bars on a wooden stage; it was parallel bars with a wooden floor underneath it, and they wanted something like a bar in the middle so they could get people to put their feet... so they had one leg either side of it. And I remember that Dad actually designed something for them to do that, and obviously gave it to them. I don't know whether he charged them, or whether they paid him, or what, but I can remember he did that for them to help them, and he's always been sort of helpful in that sort of way: if he can do something to help somebody, he will do it.

Did your dad work at home in the shed then, or...?

No, he never had time to do that. He used to like to go fishing. My grandfather, who lived just up the road and on the other side, he was a carpenter, so if Dad wanted anything to do in the shed, he used to go over to 'Bububs' and do stuff over there, and he did when we moved to the bigger house. He did have a little garage, a little shed then in the garden, and we indeed had a asbestos garage for the car.

Was this the parents of your mother or your father, then, Tony?

My mum's parents, yeah. My dad's parents lived in London, and we didn't see them quite so often. My dad's father was a pewter and bath fitter, and I think my Nan – Nanny Stamford – worked in one of the ABC cafes, and prior to that, I don't know whether it was actually the OXO Building, but certainly something to do with Oxo. But for those sort of things I would have to ask me Dad, and I don't really know whether we'd remember: I'm not sure who else in the family would know that, but I'll certainly check up on that sort of thing.

And at nine then, Tony, you went to the Wilfred Pickles School. Tell me about your first memories of the Wilfred Pickles School.

Ooh, it was frightening: absolutely frightening. I remember that for the first night, I cried. Well, you all do, don't you, the first time you've been away from home? And I cried that much that I thought I had perspired, and I thought I had wet the bed. I hadn't fortunately, but, you know, you worry about these things. I can never forget

that, and I always think to myself, 'I hope that, if there's any way they have made that transition easier for people, that I hope they've done it'. I don't know how you can, because I mean, obviously, after you've been away for a week, or a few days, if you're lucky you mould in and everybody rubs along, and you get to be some sort of friends. I mean, obviously, you can't be friends with everybody, but you get to enjoy some of it.

How did the decision come about that you should go to the Wilfred Pickles School?

Purely and simply because I feel that my parents' marriage was probably in a very fragile state, and... not the marriage, but I was being disruptive, I was a pain in the bum, really. I was, I mean, I admit that. Bearing in mind that up until I was nine, because my dad was out at work all day, as everybody's dad was in those days, and my mum couldn't work because she had the children to look after, I wasn't even capable of wiping me own bum, cos for speed, Mum or Dad had done it for me. Of course, when you went away to school, there was nobody around... I mean, all right if you physically couldn't do it, then somebody would do it for you, but if it was thought that you were capable of doing it, then you were left to learn how... not learn how to wipe your... but I mean, left to cope with as much as you could, put it that way. And certainly, within three weeks, in my memory I'd learnt enough of getting dressed to make sure that I didn't miss any breakfast, and I'm sure that although they said you would miss breakfast, they probably always held some back for you, as long as they knew you were making an effort to do what you were asked.

And what time was breakfast?

As far as I remember, it must have been about half past eight: I don't really know. But I would imagine it would have been sort of between eight and half-past. I seem to have that memory in my mind, I don't know whether it's true or not.

What kinds of things did you have to eat?

Well, I suppose you would almost say it was like sort of a hotel full breakfast, and I do remember saying a lot of the time, 'Do we really have to eat this?', cos I was a

fussy eater: I still am now, to a lesser or greater degree. I mean, we had cereals and perhaps sometimes porridge, and then I seem to remember we had bacon and tinned tomatoes for one breakfast, egg and bacon was always on a Sunday: that was a treat. I still like egg and bacon, even now, although it's probably not very good for you to eat if you've got high blood pressure and diabetes, as I have, but I do still eat it [laughing] occasionally. I'm sorry, are we about to come to the end of the tape?

Yes -

[End of Tape 1, Side A.]

Tape 1 Side B [track 2]

So, what kind of numbers of children were at the school?

Seventy. There was round about 70, 72, and of that there were 10 day pupils who came in from either Stamford or Peterborough, so it was a relatively small school. And there was an integrated deaf unit, and that was apparently quite... I can't think of the word... was quite unusual in those days. I'm tempted to say 'innomative', but I don't know if that's the right word. We had that, and some of the lads and girls, as well as having cp, they were profoundly deaf.

And here you were, then, at the school: were children coming from all around, from different areas?

Yeah, all over the country. Apparently, as I was told, if you were considered of the right capability, intellectually-wise, you either went to Craig-Y-Park [School], or you went to the Wilfred Pickles School, depending upon where you come from, or what was available at the time because Meldreth Manor, I think, was brought on later. Meldreth Manor is one of the Society's newer schools, and indeed, the Wilfred Pickles School is now no longer. I was lucky enough – I don't know how relevant this is, but I'll tell you – I was lucky enough last year to go up to Tixover Grange, and to actually get in through the front door and to look at it, and it's now assisted housing for elderly people.

When you visited the site of the Wilfred Pickles School, Tony, what did that feel like?

Oh, it was weird, but it was lovely, and although I guard my own privacy, I would have liked to have gone in to look at one of the flats. And, certainly, I was very lucky in as much as that when I... [Rustling sound.] Sorry, I've knocked it off again, have I?

No, no, if you can just say, 'we found the place again, sorry.'

We found the site of the school, and then once we found it we sort of hung about a bit, and there was a nice lady – she was a bit like a retired army officer's wife, that's

what she sounded like, you know, the clipped accent and she sounded like she might have been a major's wife or something like that – and she said, 'Oo'. I said to her, 'I wonder if I might be...' I'd got out the car, and I was standing around the car, and this lady come up, and I said, 'Scuse me,' I said, 'I was here when it was a school', and she said, 'Oh yes, that was the Wilfred Pickles School, wasn't it?', so obviously the people that now live there have been told of the previous incarnation of the school. And I said, 'Do you think it would be possible... may I just come through the front door to see if it's been altered and to see what it feels like?' And it was really quite eerie, you know, because I don't know how many years ago it was... well I do, 1966 I left the school, so we can work that out, and it was last year, so we'll work that out later, if it's relevant... and it was nice to go back, and fortunately, I was well off that week, so we had a meal in 'The George', in Stamford. [Laughs.]

What kind of memories came back to you, Tony?

Oh, I felt sort of pleased to do it, pleased to go back. I felt that it would have been nice to have possibly gone back with some of the other pupils that were there, because I didn't, I still don't know, and it's quite weird, because apart from the day that I did it, and the few days afterwards, this is really the only the second time that I've analysed it in any deep way, and I actually find it, I won't say 'distressing', but I find that I don't really know how I felt.

And how was a typical day organised?

What, at the school? Oh, as I remember it, it was very regimented. I mean, you would go to classes at such and such a time, you would get up for breakfast, you would have physiotherapy during the school day, which was good if you needed it, which was a good thing, whereas nowadays, you see I'm not quite sure... Sorry, I'm going off at a tangent. But I'm not quite sure whether this new idea of putting people with disabilities into a mainstream school would work. It may be it's a good thing, maybe it isn't. I have my own theory on that, and I'm not quite sure where I am, cos I don't actually know any young people with disabilities who go to mainstream school, and I don't know how well they can integrate. I have the theory that, probably it's good for the first six weeks cos it's a novelty, i'n't, you know, somebody with a probably a

lovely red wheelchair or something, and a bit of a novelty. Have I said 'novelty'? If I have, I apologise. But something a little different, particularly if they've got an electric chair that's sort of got lights and bleeps and goodness what, and...

When you had physiotherapy, what are your memories of having physiotherapy?

Some of that was quite painful, but I seem to remember that from an early age I'd been told that physiotherapy might be painful. But it is important, and it does concern me now that we don't get it very easily, and certainly I haven't had any for years. I haven't had any since I left school. One of the things I used to like doing, and now can't do because I haven't found anywhere that's got a hoist and changing facilities that I would need, I would love to be able to swim, because I could the last time I did it. I could float on my back. But I've never yet, locally or even at a distance, been able to find anywhere that the facilities would allow me to do this.

What kind of lessons were you at, at school? What kind of lessons do you remember?

I always remember that I was good at debate, because I think I've always been able to talk better than I could do anything else. My co-ordination is bad, which means that my handwriting is dreadful. I do own a computer, but I find them frightening, so I don't use them very much. I'm thinking of getting voice-activated thingummy – you know, a voice programme on my computer – so that I can talk to it, and it then writes what I tell it to write, but I have never got round to working out how expensive they are, and how effective they are, but I'll do it one day, I suppose.

And what were some of your favourite subjects, Tony?

Oh, I always, as I say, enjoyed English, I loved comp... comp... you know, where you had to write stories? I can't think of the word, I'm sorry.

Comprehension?

Comprehension, and stuff like that: and all sorts of debates. I liked music, although I couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. I mean, I'm famous for that: I cannot sing a note. So

things like that. And I wasn't very good at things like in the gym, or anything like that, because I was always quite tubby and large and I found any exertion, as I said, other than swimming, too difficult because of my weight and my size, and I'm actually quite lazy, really. [Laughs] People don't believe me, because they say, 'You're never in', cos, yeah.

What...

But all I have to do is, I've got a van in which I'm driven, so I just sit in the back and fall asleep if I want to.

And what are your memories of your friends at school, at the time?

Yeah, I don't know, really. We've had one or two reunions since I left school, but I remember there was a few lads – there was one chap called John Cole, who had blonde hair, and there was another chap, another fellow, another Tony, but I don't remember his surname: I believe it was Tony Brown, and then there was a few girls, but we didn't seem to mix much with the girls. I suppose we were too young to mix with the girls then and things. And then there was... no, I'm not very good at names I must admit, but I remember there was a couple of lads that came from various orphanages, or their mum wasn't about, or their dad wasn't around, and a chap called Terry Barton. I remember him, and we were doing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, and I remember Terry Barton, he was very into football and he could walk quite well, and he got his football refereeing ticket through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award: and I do remember that.

What kind of contact did you have with the local community?

None as I remember. Virtually none.

And in the evening: what did you do during the evening, when you'd finished school?

Well, I think, in those days TVs were still quite... you know. To have a TV was... So I think we would listen to the radio quite a lot as I remember: I always have enjoyed

listening to the radio. Indeed, I still do, because of my difficulty with... I'm very slightly dyslexic, although I have been told, 'if you can say it, you can't possibly be it', which is a load whatsername in my opinion. So my reading speed is not as good as I would like it: I actually find it difficult to read a page of a book, but yet because I'm involved in various meetings and stuff, I can get my way through an agenda quite easily.

And what are some of your memories of some of the radio programmes that you heard?

I always enjoyed *The Archers*, and indeed still do, and I think there was something called *Out of Space* or something, about 1959, with Alfie Bass, who was quite a famous actor at the time and, indeed, David Jacobs, who I believe is still around. Alfie Bass has definitely died. And then, of course, you had things like *Educating Archie*: Peter Brough was the ventriloquist, the only ventriloquist on radio: a bit of a stupid thing, really, wasn't it? [Laughs.] And then you had things like *Meet the Huggetts*: I don't know how well up you are on old-fashioned radio programmes, [laughs] you know, but the radio, the 'wireless' as we called it then, well (I suppose, I'd better not move cos I'll pull the thing off) but a wireless would have been as big as the TV over there, you know. I mean, it was a jolly great thing with great big valves in, and you had to put it on and let it warm up. I suppose you're too young to remember that, or perhaps you're not, I don't know. Not if you're into broadcasting, you would probably know about all those things.

And when you were listening to the radio, where did you listen to the radio?

Oh well, we had one radio in the kitchen, and then as I got older, in order to encourage me to go to bed, I actually had a radio in my bedroom. That was lovely, you know. I had a collection of 78 records, you know, the old 'Shellac' ones, and I'll never forget when we moved into the second house my mum and dad had in Loughton, the first night I came back from school, my dad had shown my mum how to take the plug out of the back of the radio, and to put it into the wind-up gramophone, which my dad had put an electric motor in to make it easier for everybody (cos Dad was quite handy, he was quite practical). And [laughs]

unbeknownst to them, I'd obviously been watching this, and I knew how to do it. So four o'clock the very next morning, I got out of bed to play some of these records, and my mum and dad got up and were a bit concerned, because they thought, 'What the hell is all this noise coming from', and they still tell the story now, when we get together as a family, about the fact that they woke up and they thought it was a foreign station, because it was some church bells playing, and what it was – [laughs] it was a Christmas Carol record that I'd found. I even now don't have much of a concept of time, because I'm very lucky, I don't work for a living, so I can sleep, you know... when I'm tired, I sleep. If I'm not tired, I don't sleep.

And what were some of your favourite records?

Oh, I liked – I still do now – I love traditional jazz and at that time I used to like things like Sousa: you know Sousa? And the American sort of things like *Stars and Stripes*, and all that sort of thing. But I do love music although I don't play much music, and one of my great hobbies is, in fact, going to the theatre: and this Saturday afternoon, I'm lucky enough to have got tickets to see the touring production of *Round the Horne*, which is a theatre adaptation of the famous radio thing, which Kenneth Horne was in, and Hugh Paddick, and Kenneth Williams, and all sort of thing. And, of course, there's a lot of double meanings in that, so I do believe that if those scripts were new now, we'd never have got away with it.

And when you hear records that you heard as a child, what kind of memories does that evoke?

Oh, I think always happy memories, cos we're lucky: my memory, certainly, I try not to remember the bad things, cos like everybody we've all had nasty experiences, or experiences that we would sooner forget, but I think you've got to have some uncomfortable experiences, shall we call them, because otherwise you wouldn't appreciate the good ones, would you?

And at the Wilfred Pickles School, [clears throat] how did you get on generally with everybody there: with your fellow pupils in particular?

I think I was lucky, in as much as I wasn't particularly sporty, I didn't know a lot about cricket, although I know a little bit now, and I'm not particularly sporty but I do love cricket. I love to watch cricket. In my opinion, there's only one way to watch cricket, and that's to go on a Sunday afternoon, watch village cricket or (I live comparatively closely to Essex, which is a beautiful little ground) to sit, if you're lucky enough, in the Members' Enclosure, and have a vodka and lemonade in one hand, and just sit there and watch it all go by: not take too much interest in it, but if it's a nice sunny day, what can you do more pleasurable?

And what, Tony, are your memories of hearing cricket on the radio?

Oh, of course John Arlott is one of the greatest memories, and I remember when we were at school cos we used to listen to a few radio programmes. And I can remember, I suppose it must have been Terry Barton, or it could even have been Terry Cooper – I remember Terry very well cos I shared a two-bedroom dormitory with him for a while, and he lived in Hull, or Humberside somewhere, and he used to spend a lot of time, so he said, in the holidays, helping at a local boatyard, and I could never work this out because Terry was unable to walk, he used to push his chair backwards with his feet. And he had the big wheels – you must have seen them – big wheels in the front, so that they weren't in the way and that the chair wouldn't tip over, and Terry was one of the few people... I saw an article about him many, many years ago in the old, well, we used to call it in those days *The Spastic News*, but it's now *Disability Now*, isn't it, and [laughing] it's a bit more political than it was in those days, but I saw a picture of him in there. But I've never actually spoken to him. In fact, I did organise two reunions for the Wilfred Pickles School, but I haven't done any of that now for many years, and I suppose, if we wanted to get together now, the way to do it would be through email, but, as I say I'm computer-illiterate, so it wouldn't be very easy for me; but I'm sure, if people really wanted to get together, we'd have done it before now, really.

And what memories, Tony, do you have of people in the street? How did people react to you, do you remember?

Well, people were always, as indeed they still are, quite sceptical of how to approach. Personally, I hate the term 'disabled people'. I think we are people with a disability, in as much... 'Scuse me, I must have a drink [drinks]... in as much as it is the person that is first, the disability is secondary, unless you are very badly disabled. I've pulled the flipping thing off again.

It's all right, Tony. We'll have a break there, shall we, if you like?

Have you still got some water? Have you got enough water, or would you like some more?

Yes, thanks, Tony. No, that's fine, I'm fine, thank you. Yeah, when you were young, Tony, what memories do you have of going out as a family?

Oh yeah, we always went out at Christmas, to... When you say 'going out', do you mean for special occasions, or ordinary occasions, or both?

Any occasion at all, really.

Yeah, I always remember that we... cos bearing in mind I went away to residential school, as I believe I've said previously, so in those days I think we would be away for about a month, then we would have a family weekend, or a half term break weekend or something. In those days, you were never away for much longer than a month, and I always remember going out on a Friday, meeting my mum from my work, cos my mum did a part-time job, and my sister would then have to push me up the road. Or prior to that, I had one of these big three-wheeled bikes, which I could get on and off, and we could pedal up the road, you know: that was quite good fun. And we used to go out shopping, and then we'd go... My parents were never particularly into pubs, but I do remember at Christmas we always went to the theatre, you know, to a pantomime or something, and we used to... they always saved up and we went on holiday. I remember coming to Southend for the day: the fact that I now live very close to it's rather nice, cos I like Southend. I know it's supposed to be very sort of like a mini-Blackpool, but I don't care: it's good.

And your dad would drive, would he?

Yeah, he would drive. First of all, we had a motor bike and sidecar, and I can remember ... we were talking early on about early memories: I remember (I don't know how old I was, so I suppose I must have been very small, one of the first times we went out in it) we went to Hunstanton, which from Loughton would have been quite a long journey in those days, cos you didn't have any motorways, did you? I think the first motorway was in 1959, I don't know – you would know more about that than me, perhaps. And we went to Hunstanton, and we got so wet, but I didn't because Dad had one of those motorbikes and sidecar, and he had a sidecar with a big round, wooden sort of ... I think it was wood, I dunno... but it had a big sort of round curve, and I was in the front seat, being the smaller, and my sister was at the back, cos it give her a bit more leg-room, and my mum was obviously on the back of the bike, and Dad was obviously, well, I don't know about 'obviously', but he was driving it, and I'd slid down right into the cone, or the nose, of this thing, and I was the only person who wasn't wet [laughs]. And I must have been very small cos I slipped off the seat, didn't hurt myself, and had fallen asleep! [Laughs.] But I remember, we went to Hunstanton, supposed to go for the weekend to have a camping holiday with my uncle and aunt, and Mum and Dad's clothes were so wet that my uncle and aunt cut a hole in a blanket, and they drove back with their underclothes on, or not all of their biking clothes, definitely, and just a blanket over the top of them: each one. And I remembered being frightened of the thunder then, so I must have been very young.

And at that time, Tony, in your early years, were you using the trike that you talked about, and sometimes a buggy?

Yeah.

And do you remember being able to get about much at all?

I used to hold onto furniture, but again I would crawl or I would walk with a metal stick, rather like a lot of people still use nowadays, you know, one of those with the holes in, that go up and down? And then, of course, as my balance became less good, my dad would fix sort of bigger things on the bottom of 'em, to make them more

steady, cos as I said earlier, Dad was always quite handy at adapting stuff, and he could always sort of get hold of the odd bit of steel or something, or maybe it was a fixing for something else that he'd got, and he'd think, 'Oh, that might help: not too heavy', and he'd bring 'em home from work and I'd try 'em, and, you know, he was always very resourceful.

Do you remember how you felt, you know, around this time, really, about the fact that it was difficult to move around?

I was very resentful, because at that time, of course, I would have been about 13 or 14, and I was missing a lot of school, which was worrying me. And I was in a hospital and I was only seeing female nurses, cos you did in those days. There weren't that many male nurses, as I recall, and the only really male guy that I met was a guy called Mr Beaumont and he was a great Labour guy, and unfortunately I know that he died only a few years ago, cos unbeknownst to me, I became involved in local politics, and his son was a local Labour councillor round here. His son has now moved, but it was quite weird, because his son used to come and push me to local Labour Party meetings and about, I think, three weeks after he started doing this, I said to him, 'What is your name?', he said, 'Jonathan Beaumont', and I said, 'Well, come on a minute, didn't your dad used to teach...' He said, 'Me dad was a teacher'. I said, 'Yes, was he a teacher at Tadworth Court School for the disabled?' He said, 'Yes', and, of course it worked out that his father had taught me many years ago, and because the hospital patients were transit, you know, we became very friendly.

And Tadworth Court, then: just tell me about Tadworth Court.

That was, then, the country branch of Great Ormond Street, and if you were there long-term, you went to Tadworth Court. I don't think it belongs to Great Ormond Street any more, I think it's been bought up by a Trust, and is mainly used as a holiday home for respite care, but I don't know about that.

And so how long were you at Tadworth Court, then, Tony?

Ooh, for about four months, I think it was. I had some sort of operation: they cut the tendons in me legs and something must have gone wrong there, I think, cos it seemed to take a long time to be in hospital for four months: perhaps it wasn't a long time in those days.

How old were you at that time, then Tony?

Ooh, I would have been about six or seven, I suppose.

So this was an operation designed to help with the walking?

Yeah. Yeah, I'm not quite sure what it did but, I think it sort of ... you know, when you walk sometimes, you see some people with cp, they walk on their toes and their ankles are... you know, you're walking on your toes and your ankle's up like that: I can't really get the right sort of inflection really, somehow, to explain what I mean, but I think that's what that was for. And then I remember I was in hospital there for about four months, and then I was very lucky cos I didn't have much to do with 'hospitals, other than the visits that I always made. I didn't need much surgery up until I was about 13 or 14, and that was when I had all the trouble with my hip.

Sure, OK Tony...

[End of tape 1 side B]

Tape 2 Side A [Track 3]

Now, Tony, you said that you had an operation, aged about six or seven. Do you remember whether there was any discussion about that, prior to that at all?

Yeah, there was always lots of discussion about whether I should have operations. And of course, the other two operations, which were rather important, cos I forgot to tell you about, I had a squint, and in fact, as I get tired it's still very evident apparently, and I wear glasses for reading. I should wear them for distance, but I don't bother, cos I don't need to [laughs]. But I don't find glasses are particularly comfortable to wear, and I wouldn't consider having contact lenses, cos again my co-ordination is so bad, I'd probably try to put it in me eye, and end up sticking it up me nose or something like that, [laughs] or I'd sneeze, and they'd go across the floor, rather like the glasses just done.

So the decision was made to have the operation: do you remember being involved in talks about it, before you had the op?

Not the one for my legs when I was very young, no, but certainly the ones for my hips. Yeah, very much so.

And so you went into Great Ormond Street, did you, to have the first orthopaedic operation?

Yeah, I think so. Or did I go to the Tadworth country one? I'm not sure. I think that probably Great Ormond Street, but I wouldn't know how I could check that, or if, indeed, it's very relevant to actually know precisely where it was.

Did you have memories of your stay in hospital?

Yeah, didn't like it. Didn't like that hospitals very much, because I suppose the pain, you know, that one remembers. I did always get on well with the nurses, for some

reason. I think I was always a bit vulnerable. I mean, I even remember – it's jumping forward a lot, but – about 18 months ago I had a car accident, only a minor one, but as a consequence of that I had to stay in Basildon Hospital for four days. The main reason for that was not because I was particularly badly injured, although it wasn't very pleasant, but the main reason was because my wheelchair got smashed up, and the local wheelchair appliance centre, call it whatever you will, had to find me something to go home in [laughs]. So it took them four days to sort that out, because I was daft enough to have the accident on a Friday afternoon, so of course all the offices are shut for the weekend, you know. And they actually managed to get a wheelchair there for me by the Wednesday, and I was then able to go home on the Thursday afternoon.

When you were at home with your family, did you have [coughs] excuse me, did you have much contact with children of your own age?

Only cousins and relations. We didn't play out much in the street, and when we did, because I was away at school, I was sort of a bit of an outsider, you know, because they didn't know me very much, and, of course, as I've said previously, I wasn't able to move very well, so I got left behind anyway, you know. I was almost, I don't know, perhaps 'nuisance' is too strong a word to use in relation to children, but because I wasn't able to do what they did, that I suppose I got left behind because it was awkward for them to include me.

What sort of areas were there around the neighbourhood, to play in?

I seem to remember that there were quite a few, I won't say 'parky bits', but bits of fields and stuff like that to play around in, and it was an overflow, I suppose you would have to say, a council estate. But I mean, I suppose to a certain degree, not unlike Basildon, really, but you know, there was a fair few bits of green. The shops were a couple of miles away, as I remember, the main shops. I don't know whether there were many little corner shops: I don't seem to remember that there were, but

whether there were or not, I can't remember. And we had a cinema in Loughton, and then after the cinema shut down, it was made into a Co-op supermarket.

What memories do you have, Tony, of going to the cinema, in Loughton?

Ooh, went to see *The Rebel* with Tony Hancock, and I remember that. I've seen it a couple of times since on television, and I thought it was quite a funny film. And I can remember walking to there, with the help of my sister and one of her boyfriends, and I can also remember when I... and we were talking about this only... one of my aunts died earlier this year, and we were talking about the fact that when we walked... They lived in Wanstead, no, in Forest Gate, which is not far from Wanstead actually, but it doesn't matter, and so I got on the bus with my sister and one of her boyfriends, at this particular time, and we walked from the Princess Alice up to Forest Gate, to go and visit my uncle and aunt. My aunt was out of work, my uncle was a bus driver, so he did shifts, so he was at home, and Jackie, my cousin, was at home. And I remember Uncle Tibby, we used to call him, I'm not quite sure why – I think that was because he did boxing in the War, and apparently anybody called Watson was called 'Tibby' during the War, cos he used to box for the Army, and, as I say, he was then a bus driver, and he was at home cos it was his shift pattern that he was at home. And I remember coming to the door, and knocking on the door and was very thirsty, and Uncle Tibby was lovely but he was not at all domesticated, and my cousin still says to me now, 'Do you remember coming to visit us?', and she's about 10 years younger than me, 'Do you remember coming to visit us, and Daddy gave you a drink in the milk jug?' Well, [laughs] she said, 'Me mum has never let him forget that.' I mean, unfortunately, Uncle and Aunt from that, Uncle Tibby and Aunt Marjorie are now dead: Aunt Marjorie died earlier this year, and I haven't seen Jackie, unfortunately, since the funeral, although I hope very much that we shall see her over Christmas. Whether we do or not is another matter, but...

And I suppose memory is [clears throat] a selective process, really, but...

Yeah.

... how would you describe your childhood, really?

Oh, lovely. Lovely. I enjoyed my childhood. I can always remember thinking, and getting very anxious, the day of going back to school, because you've had three or four weeks, maybe seven weeks in the summer, where to a lesser or greater degree, mum had had to support you. You'd got away with a lot, you'd been to visit uncles and aunts, you know, because you don't see much of them when you're at school, and, of course, always, in the last few days, Mum and Dad were very good to me. So I suppose, to a lesser or greater degree, they spoilt us really, and made sure we went to the seaside or something like that, and we always had some treats. And I always remember that my birthday, which is in September, was always quite close to the beginning... well it's September 14th, so it was quite close to the beginning of the, I suppose it would have been the Autumn term. I can never remember what dates are what...the Autumn term... So, we would have some sort of party at home, a small party perhaps, with just my mum's mother and father, and neighbours above them, who we did get on quite well with, and perhaps my uncle and aunt, who lived quite local, and we always had a little party, a little get-together and we were very lucky, that I had great memories of my childhood. Always fought and argued with my sister, and in fact, to a lesser or greater degree, still do, cos I don't get to see very much of my sister, but I get on [coughs], excuse me, I get on incredibly well with my niece.

And what sort of things, Tony, did you get for presents when you were a child?

Oh, I always liked, well they were Dinky Toys then, weren't they, the little die-cast model cars. I seem to remember that I had a Hornby train set, which I exchanged at Beatties, up in Southgate (which is still there – the shop), for Scalectrix stuff. When my parents moved into a mobile home, in around '75, something like that, because they were down-sizing with regards to storage, we had to get rid of a lot of our childhood toys, and I remember that that was one of the things that we either sold or discarded. I can't remember what we did with it, but that was one of the things that went, but my niece still has some of my toys, because my mum gave them to my

sister, in case she had children, with my agreement, incidentally. But, as you can see round here now, I still do collect some of the die-cast models, not so many because you get to the point whereby there are almost too many, and they're not the modern ones, unless you get the really expensive ones, are just mostly all the same, with just various variations on the labelling.

And for you, Tony, again, taking your childhood, what are some of the strongest memories that shine through?

Oh, I remember when I was 14, or 15, when I was going through my operations, I remember being in a hallway waiting to go back to the ward, after some physiotherapy, and I saw a man who was probably a doctor or something, but he looked quite fit. I mean, he wasn't a patient, as I remember, and he was standing up blowing his nose, after having shaken hands with somebody, and I remember thinking, 'I'm never going to be able to stand well enough to do that', and I also remember thinking round about the same time that, 'Good gracious, I'm 15, 16 years old and I'm not going to be able to stand up when a lady walks into the room', and that still rankles now with me, you know, the fact that. I mean, it's quite old-fashioned now to do that sort of thing, but it's still something that is in the back of my mind, and I'm still conscious of the fact that I'm unable to do that, as a lady walks into the room, in spite of the fact that, probably, most ladies, if you did that nowadays, they'd give you a dirty look, unless they are of a certain age. But I think the one thing that we need to keep in life is manners, and some of the old-fashioned things.

And you talked earlier on, about going for day-trips and so on. What particular memories do you have of family holidays?

Oh, we were very lucky cos we, as I remember, were one of the first families in our street to go to Spain. Dad bought a couple of ridged tents from the what was then 'Headquarters and General Supplies': they advertised on the back page of *The Exchange & Mart*, and we used to... My grandfather always bought *The Exchange & Mart*, which as I remember, in those days, was an old fourpence. I'm not talking about

this toy money we have now: a proper fourpence, you know, when there were 12 pennies to the shilling, and 144 pennies to the pound. There you are, that shows my age: anyway, was it? Yeah it was 144 pennies, I think, to the pound, yeah. Anyway, it doesn't matter. And we used to get... what was I saying? We got the address to go and buy the tent from *The Exchange & Mart*, so Dad bought... first of all we had two, I suppose they would have been ex-W.D. [War Department] tents, which, I don't know where he got them from, but it doesn't matter, and then we bought a frame tent. And I remember the second time Dad put it up, cos we used to go on these lovely camping holidays, and you'd go across to France. I remember the first time we did it, we went from Lydd to Le Touquet, and then, in those days they had these very big planes, I think they were Dakotas possibly, and they used to put four or five cars in the nose cone: 'nose cone', is that the right word? Or the nose, anyway, used to open up, and you could drive the cars in to the... you didn't do it, I mean people from the planes did it, but they would drive the cars into the nose, and I think they took about eight cars, and I think there was about 18 to a dozen people in the plane, as I remember: it may have been more, it may have been less, I really don't remember, but they were really adventures.

And what car [clears throat], excuse me, what car was your dad driving at this time?

Oh, he had a 1954 Morris Oxford: lovely thing, great blooming' heavy thing, it was. I remember, going' back to the holidays again, one time we'd just got back, we'd driven all over Spain, and in those days you used to be able to buy an emergency kit of stuff, like extra tools and that, and you paid a deposit for it, and if you didn't break it open, if you didn't need to use it, you could take it back to the shop and you'd get a certain amount of money back on the purchase price. But, obviously, the more stuff you used, the less you got back, or, if you'd used nearly all of it, [laughs] you obviously didn't take it back. But, and I remember, we'd got to Dover, and bearing in mind we'd got all the blooming' camping gear for a family of four, and all the cooking stuff, and all the extra paraphernalia you had to have, cos by that time I was in a wheelchair, so you would have extra paraphernalia to deal with that, and extra clothes that you would need for two kids, and a mum and dad on 'holiday, cos in

those days you couldn't afford to buy extra clothes while you were on 'holiday, cos the money just wasn't there: I mean, I'm not pleading poverty, but, you know, things were different in those days. One was much more thrifty, you know, I mean I think a week's wages in those days was probably about, well I suppose we're talking about... I was 17, so I suppose a decent week's wages would have probably been 30, 40 pound, for a middle class worker. I don't know, cos I didn't have a lot to do with wages in those days [laughs]: it's the sort of thing you could look up, it's not really very relevant, but I seem to remember, cos Dad always worked hard and my mum occasionally had a part-time job working with Dad when I was away at school, so that if Mum didn't do that, we wouldn't have the treats, and the holidays that we did have. And I remember when the television came out, the ITV, my dad worked his fortnight's holiday, and he was still working locally then, and he came home on a bike, and he always said he would never do that again because it wore him out so much to work the fortnight's holiday, that he said, 'No, I'll never do that again.' He said, 'It doesn't matter what we need, because you really must have a fortnight's rest.'

And this was because of the work pattern at the time, was it?

Yes, my father was then still a precision engineer, but towards the end of his working life, obviously, he was up in management. He never actually owned his own business, but he was a very good manager, a very good foreman. I mean, that was in the days when we had some of the early immigrants coming over to England, or they were coming back to England, because they had right by birth so to do. And I can even remember the big, I don't know, this almost sounds racist, but the large negro ladies, sort of coming up to my father and cos my dad would never have swearing in the factory, cos 'e always said, 'People swear, people get excited, people pick hammers up, people throw hammers: it's dangerous', so in those days you could actually discipline people for swearing, and he always used to say, 'No, I won't have swearing, because that's when people get excited, they start throwing hammers about, and that's dangerous.' Another thing Dad always said, was if somebody came to him for an engineering job, and didn't have short 'air, he would never employ them, because he said, 'If they've got half a grain of sense, they know that they should have

short hair, if they're going anywhere near machinery', because in those days the guards weren't so effective, and were not so safe as they are now.

And, [clears throat] excuse me, what, Tony, are your memories then of early television? You described earlier remembering ITV beginning.

Yeah, I remember the beginning of it, but I don't think we... I know my uncle and aunt had the ITV television, cos they hadn't got any children. I think they must have had a little bit more spare money, perhaps, than Mum and Dad did. I don't know why, cos my aunt never worked, cos my uncle had had TB [tuberculosis] during the War, and he always said if ever he became fit enough to work he wouldn't allow my aunt to work cos that was, as he saw it, his way of paying back. But early TV: I remember something silly, *Mr Bean and His Funny Machine* or something, and this was a bit like, I suppose the equivalent would have been *Basil Brush*. And I was talking the other day, in the pub, and people were laughing at me, they couldn't really... There was this little metal figure of Billy Bean, and these people were, with no disrespect, younger than you (you're not young, you're not old), and when I was trying to describe this little die-cast figure, we were all a bit sort of happy, cos [laughs] we'd been in there for an hour or two, and we know each other very well, so we don't mind sort of gently taking the mickey out of each other, but it caused quite a laugh, me trying to explain about this silly little metal figure and the television programme. And I remember *The Appleyards* too: that was the first, like, soap opera. But in fact, the first true soap opera is still working now, cos that's *The Archers*, which I still listen to, but that's on the radio. [Laughs.]

And do you remember sitting round, at home, or at a relative's home, watching television?

Yes. I'm not quite old enough to remember the Coronation on telly, but I do remember my father was involved in the... cos all the streets had street parties and my father was involved in a street party. And I remember that I had a car, and it was one of those that you pushed along, and as you pushed it along it sort of helped the engine

to work, you know, it had like a friction motor in it, and it was a sort of maroony red colour, and the figure was yellow, and I can never remember it having a head, this figure. I don't know where the car is now, I rather suspect it's been thrown away, but I haven't seen it for many, many years [laughs], of course.

Did you...

Pardon?

Did you have other favourite toys?

Oh yes, not that I can remember, but as I say, I always was interested in cars, and from a very early age I liked to have my own radio. I thought that that was good, and I can remember having one of the very small transistor radios, of course, with the PB3 batteries, and the wires that when you changed the battery, they nearly always broke off, but I think that's probably because I was clumsy, [laughs] nothing to do with the wires!

What music do you remember from the early transistor radio time?

Oh, I think it would have been pre-Beatles stuff. I remember listening to the Beverley Sisters, and Uncle Mac, and things like that. In fact, I have in my collection, I've got a few CDs, not many cos I don't listen to music all that much, and I've got the *Children's Favourites* albums, I don't know if you've come across them, and they're quite good.

What are some of your [clears throat], excuse me, what are some of your favourite songs from those times?

Oh, I like *Nelly, the Elephant* for some peculiar reason, and I loved the song – I can't remember all the words but – *I know an Old Woman who swallowed a fly, perhaps*

she'll die, you know, the Burl Ives one, and things like that. And I'm still now very much into Stanley Holloway monologues.

And when you hear material like that, songs or monologues, what are your feelings?

Oh, always pleasurable feelings, you know, cos I'm very lucky, I've got a very selective memory. Unfortunately, because like most people, I've had some quite tragedies in my life, and I'm very lucky in as much as that I try to only remember the good bits. I think one has to have some sad things in your life, because otherwise you don't remember how good the good bits are. But I'm very lucky: I have very few good friends, but many acquaintances, and I'm very active in various things, which we'll probably come on to in further interviews, if you're going to have the patience to come down here and do them. I certainly hope that you will, cos I've enjoyed what we've done today, and, you know, it's really been enjoyable. And, if it's all right with you, I think we might stop now because I've almost worn myself out: talked myself to death, I think.

Well, thank you, Tony, for today's session...

Yeah.

... and we'll talk more. Thank you.

Yeah, thank you.

OK, let's just... I'll have to get...

[End of tape 2]

Tape 3 Side A [Track 4]

OK, one, two, three, four, five. We'll just test the levels a bit, Tony. There we go.

Yeah.

There we go.

Is that enough?

That's fine, Tony, thank you, yes. And here we are, then on 25th November, talking to Tony Stamford, and, Tony, I think where we were left off last time, you were just about to leave school. What sort of choices were presented to you, when you were just about to leave school?

Well, I don't know, I thought I would probably go to the office training place, I think, because I knew that I wouldn't be a lot of good in the engineering place, because my father, as I told you last week, is a precision engineer, or I should say, 'was' (cos he's still alive but [laughs] he's obviously a little bit too old now to be working). And I knew, from when I used to go to work with him on Saturday mornings, that I would be nothing but a danger anywhere near a grinder or a milling machine. I'd end up chopping me hand off, so I had an idea that I would perhaps go to... I've just thought, I think it was, the Spastics Society, as it was then, had a office training centre up in, I think it was Chester, but I'm not sure. So I thought I'd go up there, but anyway, that didn't happen, so at the time there was a residential home for young people with physical disabilities opening up, just up the road from where we lived, and they said, this is the County Council, 'Tony can go there three days a week', and my father and I, and my mum said, 'Fair enough: what does he do the other two days?' 'Oh, he'll have to sit at home', so my dad said, 'Well, that's not very convenient, cos he's not stupid, but we wouldn't feel we could leave him indoors on his own in case he fell over, because he can't get himself up, not safely, and we cannot afford to be indoors, my wife can't afford to give up her work, you know, be that she only does part-time work, because, then, we wouldn't have the holidays.' He said, 'I have to run a bigger

car to take the chair round, you know, we've always... I mean...' We weren't pleading poverty, but it was just a fact. So, anyway, after some discussion with the powers that be, the people at Essex Social Services and things, they decided that I could go there five days a week, and that I could live there. So I went from the Wilfred Pickles School to Dene Park Further Education Centre, and this was in April 1967, I was due... So I went along in the January to Chigwell House, and I met a very nice gentleman. It makes no difference at all, but he was a lovely man, old Jack: Jack Clapman his name was, and he was a Jewish gentleman, lovely man, and he showed us round, and I remember saying to him, as if it were yesterday, and if I told you this last week, well, somebody [laughs] will have to scrub it out, but, 'Will I be able to have a wireless in my bedroom?', so he said, 'Well, do you have one at home?', so I said, 'Yes, of course I do', because this was, as I say, some considerable while ago: we didn't have televisions upstairs then, you were... Yeah?

Mm. OK. So you asked him whether or not you could have a radio?

Radio, and he said, 'Oh yes, of course you'll have to have a radio'. So it was agreed that I would go there in the April, 1967, and I used to go from Monday to Friday and at the time, I had to share a room, because obviously the regulations on whether you shared a room or not were not like they are now, in as much as, I don't think, in residential homes, you're allowed to share a room, unless you wish so to do: and, of course, the fire regulations are much different. This was a modern building. It was built for all people with disabilities, from the ages of 16, 17, to the age of 40. It was hoped then, that by the time the people were 40, as in 40, not 'faulty', in as much as they were broken down, [laughs], the year, age 40, I mean, and that they would have built something... between the ages of 40 and 65, when one would have to go into an ordinary old folks' home. But, unfortunately, you know, money and stuff being what it is, I happen to know [laughs] that that never actually happened, but it sort of self-whatsited [ph] itself, because as anybody will know who knows about residential care, things have now changed, and they're trying to get people into smaller units, and the one problem is that, of course, people that have been in, I suppose what now would be considered an institution, don't want to go into smaller units, because they're happy in

a... I mean, it wasn't a particularly big unit, cos there were 32 places there, some double, quite a few single rooms, and I think there was one four-bedded room, but that was very soon cut down to two singles.

So what were the main priorities of the training centre?

Oh no, it was a residential home, and they had some day people coming in from the local area, as I say. They would come in, two or three times a week, and then there was 32 bedrooms for people to stay, and there was staff if people needed help to dress or personal care, you know, they could get it, but if they didn't need it, of course, they could come and go as they pleased.

So [clears throat] in that way, as you say, a residential centre. But what about training? Were any of these sorts of options on the table at all?

What, for me? No, and mainly because I was unable to drive: well, that was the reason given, so I was given one of those three-wheeler whatsits, you know. In fact, I saw one only last week: I thought they'd got rid of all. Anyway, so I got this in round about the same time, and anybody that knows me will know my co-ordination is dreadful: so I drove it, and I drove it across a... it shows you how ignorant I am of driving, I suppose we would call it a 'T junction' now, because the way they used to teach you to drive was, you'd have a person from the BSM, or whatever it was, either behind you or in front of you, and he would say, 'Follow me'. Well of course, clever so-and-so that I am, I literally did follow him, with no regard at all [laughs] of watching to see what was coming down there, and this poor person, he came across the front of me, bearing in mind that I had always had a three-wheeled bike, but I'd never had anything motorised: I'd always been driven. So I drove across, and I had this awful accident, and of course this chappy coming the other way, that way, you will have to...

Across your nose ?

He smashed into me, cos I... well, no, it was my fault cos I drove completely across him, without regard. He put his breaks on and smashed into me, and he wasn't at all worried about damage to his own car: he was more concerned that [laughs] he may have half-killed me, because, had I been a matter of a couple of inches further down, it wouldn't have gone for where my feet were, cos all it did was just smashed the bonnet, cos they were fibre-glass: it would have actually hit me.

So these were the light blue invalid carriages?

Yeah, the three-wheeled. It was an A.C., yeah.

But they were quite light and...

Unstable.

To a degree, I suppose. So that was the end of your driving experience?

Well, it was and it wasn't, because at the time it was, as I say, 1967, '68 I would imagine, and they were all issued from Euston Road up in London, and that was in the days when people didn't swear, and this chap, a doctor from Euston, said, 'No, I want to see this chap', he said. 'I am worried that he's been put under undue pressure to get rid of it because, obviously, his parents are concerned. He's concerned because he's nervous, and the people who are caring for him are concerned.' He said, 'I want to see him.' So I can remember that was in the days when you didn't sort of insist on taking your own wheelchair if you went in an ambulance, so I was put in a blooming... a thing like a... well just like big pram really, and pushed to this doctor. And I'll never forget if I live until I die: he turned round and said to me, 'Well', he said, 'in your position, I should, you'll have to excuse me, I should so-and-so well learn to drive it, because, you know, you're going to be trapped if you don't.' Because this is way before such things as mobility allowances were thought of, and specialised taxes which we now have in certain parts of Essex: I don't know about how good they are in your neck of the woods, or what, but I know they're very patchy. So, I suppose in a

way, this surgeon, whose name I obviously don't remember, was right because he was sort of concerned that I would vegetate, because I'd given up, as he saw it, my best chance of becoming mobile. But even now, to this day, and possibly because maybe I drink a little too much, I'm really rather pleased that I don't actually have the responsibility of [laughs] driving myself.

Because, in those days, then, as you were saying, the major means of independent travel (before these other schemes came in) was then the blue invalid carriage.

Yeah, and you see, how I came to have one of those was because I was down at Tonbridge, at the Dene Park, and I was taken to, I think it was Chatham, to get one of these push-me, pull-you... [laughs] you know... I can't... Have you ever seen one? They're like a great big... a bit like Boudicea's chariot really, and you used to be able to get two sorts: you could get ones that you just sort of pedalled that way, to...

Is that like a trike...

Yeah

... in fact?

And you sat in it, like, with your legs stuck out in front, and you sort of pushed the... it had a little... I can't think of the word... crank, I suppose is the word, and you could either go this way, which required very strong shoulders, or they did another sort which, as I say, you twisted it round somehow like that. I'm sorry, I wish...

So it was a hand-propelled

Yeah.

trike, really.

Yeah. I wish these people who are listening to this silly old fool [laughs] trying to describe things, could actually see the actions, cos they'd probably find them quite amusing.

So this is what was offered to you, then, in replacement for driving the blue invalid carriage?

No, this was offered before, and this was why the chap at Chatham said, 'Ooh no, he won't want them. We'll see if he we can get him to have one of these three-wheeled... Anyway, I didn't get on with that, but as I say, now I am in the very lucky position, I have managed to get 24-hour care through various means and I do actually have my own vehicle, in which I am driven, so it makes life a lot easier for me.

And just prior to going to the residential centre, and at school, what choices were you offered, in terms of, maybe, taking exams?

None at all, and mainly that was probably because, as I told you, or as I tell everybody, mainly because I had spent a lot of the last two previous years, in and out of hospital with my hips, and I'd lost a lot of schooling in that way.

And were exams taken by people at the school?

Some, but not many, and I certainly didn't take any, and I seem to have it in the back of my mind that [laughs] it was mainly on religious studies. I have no real reason to tell you why that was, but I seem to think I suppose it was something that we took a particular interest in. I don't really know, because, I don't think any of us were particularly religious as such, or whether it was something that it was thought that we, I don't know, may remember. But I don't seem to remember that there was anybody who took, you know... I know that at that time, I think, just after I left, people from the Wilfred Pickles School moved when they were 14 to Delarue at the time, but I don't know what happens now. I believe Delarue is still around, but I couldn't say. I honestly don't know.

So what about any kind of discussions, or talks with teachers over what you'd want to do next? Did that occur at all?

Not really, no, because I think they sort of thought, 'Oh, we've found somewhere to put him, so he may as well stay there', sort of thing [laughs], just in the hope that... I suppose, really, if it hadn't been for the fact that I met my wife and escaped, I suppose I'd probably still be there.

And what kind of thought was given to work options, Tony, when you were at the new residential centre?

None, I mean they used to do things like making baskets, and the cane. They would repair the cane seats and the stools, and that type of thing, but I was never very good at that. The only thing I was any good, and still am to a greater or lesser degree, is, as my Grandma said, 'I could talk for England', [laughs] and I think she's right there.

What were your feelings at this time then, Tony? Here you were, then, having left school, now newly-established in the residential centre: what did you feel at the time?

I think I was only 17, and Mum still came over to do my washing twice a week. As I say, I lived very local, so I would go home every weekend, and me dad would bring me back on a Monday morning, and this, I suppose went on for about the first three, four, five years. And then, of course, we realised, through whatever reason, that it wasn't giving Mum and Dad much of a chance to have much of a life, and it certainly wasn't giving me much of a chance to have much of a life. But then, a few years after that, they moved up to Cambridge, and by that time, of course, I had become very well-established there. I'd found my way to the local pub, [laughs] and I used to be able to push myself down the road in my wheelchair, to the King's Head in Chigwell. Indeed, when we got engaged, Tracy and I had two engagement parties, and one, indeed, was at the King's Head in Chigwell. And we got married in the church over

the road, and well fortunately for my wife, cos that's what she wanted, that's where Tracy is actually buried, in the churchyard at Chigwell, which is what she wanted.

When did you meet Tracy, then?

I suppose it would have been... I knew of her, but I it would have been round about... D'you know it's weird, I don't really... about sort of 1975, '78, something like that.

So what -

And we were married in 1983.

So what sort of age would you have been then, Tony?

I would have been about 35, and Tracy was 11 years younger than me, so she would have been, what, 23-ish.

And when you were living in the residential centre, after the day was done, what kind of social options were on offer?

What, for Tracy and myself?

I'm thinking prior to that, but...

Oh, prior to that. Oh yeah, yeah. The Rotary used to come and do films, and we got an old converted ambulance and we'd get taken out, you know, and all sorts of weird things like that. And it was still very much, 'Oh, let's give the poor souls a day out', for want of a better phrase. And, I mean, obviously things begin to improve, and we had a residents' committee, and various things. We had our own Wine Club, we had various things going on, and of course there was some of us who used to create stuff [laughs], usually, and as I say, there was my friend George, who unfortunately died a couple of years ago. In fact, I went to George's funeral on 9/11, and I came back here

and we were advised that we should sit and watch the awful thing on that afternoon, and I shall never forget my good friend George's funeral, because that was on 9/11. But I in fact stayed at Chigwell House from roughly 12th April 1967, until we moved in here on 16th, I think, of October 1983, which was three months after we were married, and Tracy and I were married for very nearly six years. Then, unfortunately, Tracy died, but we had very nearly six years of a great marriage, and I have many memories, which, fortunately, nobody will ever take away, and there's many people of twice my age who haven't got that.

How did you meet Tracy?

Well, Tracy had spina bifida, and her parents had decided that she ought to go away, because, you know, again they wanted her to get whatever sort of life she could for herself. One of her, I don't know, what would you call a 'courtesy aunt' of hers had told her about me: in other words, the woman wasn't really her aunt, but she sort of worked at Chigwell House, and she knew of Tracy. And she sort of said, 'Ooh, when you get there, you want to look out for Tony, cos he's quite a nice chap', she said, 'and he's...' (what they called in those days), 'one of the richest men in Chigwell house'. [Laughs.] I'm not quite sure why that was, cos no one ever got much money when you lived in a residential unit cos you had to give up most of your money for your board and lodging, and I think at that time they gave you about five pound a week to spend. But, indeed, Tracy and I did become quite friendly, and we used to go out. I would go and spend the weekend with her mum and her, and then after a time, I think it was a mutual friend of ours died, so I said, 'Oh', I said. I went into her room at 5 o'clock in the morning, I said, 'Look, old Mr So-and-So's died', I said, 'Don't you think it's about time we at least got engaged?' Anyway, this is what we decided to do, and then somehow Shaftesbury contacted me through somebody, and they said they would offer us a flat, but they wanted us to be prepared to go somewhere for a fortnight, or rather a weekend, with people observing us all the time, so that we... well, it's quite odd really, to prove that we weren't likely to set the place alight or anything daft like that. So anyway, we agreed to this, because we came to the conclusion that if we didn't do this we'd never get a place, and there was every

possibility that we wouldn't even after this, but we agreed to this anyway, and, yeah, they said, after we'd done this weekend in this flat, which was not at all suitable, various reports were given to Shaftesbury, and Shaftesbury did indeed offer us a flat: much smaller than the one I'm now in, and this one became available. The flat I now live in has two bedrooms, a rather large lounge and a good kitchen, which means now that I am not as fit as I was when we first moved here, I can have my own 24-hour carer living on site, and it gives me a greater freedom of choice: we can go and come, within reason, as and when we please.

So [clears throat], when you were thinking about getting engaged, and when you were engaged, what was the reaction of people you knew?

Ah, well most people said it would never last, because I was a very lucky man, I always did what I wanted to do, but then, of course, I think Tracy was cleverer than I realised. I think she knew what she thought I should do, and like most women – I don't know if you're married, don't need to know if you're married – but most women, or most people that we are close to, if they know us very well, they tend to engineer us into some of the ways that would be good for both of us, and we don't always realise that, do we? [Laughs.] I think that was what my wife was very good at: she was able to sort of protect me from lots of things I didn't even realise I needed protecting from. In fact, she always said to me, 'One of these days', she said, 'you're going to say something to somebody who's not going to take it as a joke in the way you meant it, and they're going to come up behind you, [laughing] and hit you on the head. They're going to hit you on the head with a dirty great hammer, and then it's going to be too late!' But fortunately, that hasn't happened yet cos I'm still waiting.

So were people encouraging of the fact that you wanted to get married and set up home together?

I think they were, once they knew that Shaftesbury was quite happy to offer us a place, because my wife's physical needs were such that it wasn't something that we could cope with, just ourself, and I think the one thing both Tracy's mum and her

stepfather were worried about, and certainly, my mum and dad were concerned about, was that we would live in Basildon. They were living up in sort of the outskirts of London at the time, and we would either be, you know, forever ringing them up, and saying 'Ooh, [coughs] excuse me, such-and-such had gone wrong', or 'Who's going to come and change a light bulb?' and stuff like that, because you don't get the sort of, or you didn't then, if you could, you didn't then get the sort of care that we have now, in as much as that they are able to tailor-make it to the individual. [Pause. Takes a drink.] Thank you. Provided, you can jump through enough hoops: and I think that's what you have to learn to do, you have to learn to be able to know where to go, and if you need help, not to be afraid to ask. Also, you have to be honest about things, and sometimes, if you can't do something or don't want to do it, you just say, 'No, I'm sorry, I would love to do this, but I haven't got the time, the strength or the energy to do it today, and if you can't wait till next week [laughs], well, I'm sorry, you know, I'll give you a ring when I'm ready.'

So an exciting time for you, you know, living independently, but with an amount of support to be able to call upon.

Yeah.

So, what were your hopes and ambitions then at that time?

Well, my hopes and ambitions was that, because my wife was not quite so physically-able as I was... but I always assumed that I would go first. I'm all right while I'm talking to you, or while I'm if you like 'performing', I suppose is the right word. It sounds a bit pretentious really, but while I know I've got something to do, you can sort of think, 'Oh well, that's good, I've got to get up and get dressed tomorrow, because Phil's coming or because, ooh, I'm going to a Buffalo meeting, or something's happening' but, when [you] get sort of three or four dark days in the winter, and they put the clocks back and things, you begin to almost contemplate your navel, and you start thinking, 'Oh, that's gone wrong, that's gone wrong, that's gone wrong', and you get to the point really, whereby, just because somebody's shut a box

of matches [laughs], the end of the world, you know, everything's closing in on you, and you don't seem to, if you're that daft, if you're that sort of much into yourself, you don't realise that everybody has bad days cos you become far too introspective, if that's the right word.

And were you then hoping or seeking work opportunities, or what were your thoughts on, really, what you wanted to do? Or did you, want, you know, in that way?

No, I've never really... I suppose, in a way, because I am always of the opinion that if someone who can run for a bus, you know, or can drive a car, can't get jobs, because most of the repetitive jobs that these sort of people would have done, are now done with the aid of computer, then what chance have I, someone who needs to be transported to a place in order to do anything? Why would somebody want, I mean... I'm not putting myself down because, believe you me, I know me own worth, otherwise I wouldn't be standing here doing this. I know what I can do, and I enjoy doing what I do, and I'm an incredible guy because most of what I do is what I choose to do, and for that I am probably too grateful.

All right, Tony, what we'll do is, just because we're getting quite -

We're getting dang...

[End of Tape 3, Side A.]

Tape 3 Side B [Track 5]

There you were, then, Tony, married to Tracy and newly-established in your flat together. Take me through a typical day: I mean, how, for instance, did you go about cooking meals?

Oh yes, well we both liked our food, and the flat was arranged so that we could reach the cook... In the smaller flat, we had a lounge, a kitchen dining room, and a double bedroom and bathroom. That all was very small, and that was a Baby Belling, three-ring cooker, and a Baby Belling over, because, I mean microwaves were very expensive in those days, and we didn't have one, although of course we've got one now. And we would occasionally go out in the taxis. There was only, I think, one wheelchair taxi at that time, cos, bearing in mind again, as I say we're going back to 1983, which was almost 1900 and frozen-to-death now, isn't it? How many years? A long while, anyway, and it cost I think £9 to go into Basildon in a taxi and back. Bearing in mind we had to do that twice, I mean, I know we had two lots of... well yes, we would have had mobility allowance in 1983. I'm forgetting myself, but I don't remember how much it was: so we could only do it perhaps once a week. [Laughs.] But then of course, Tracy's mum would visit quite often, my mum and dad would visit quite often, and of course we were all 20 odd years younger than we are now, and Tracy unfortunately died in 1990. She had been ill for three months exactly to the day, but it was in the days when the, you know, budgets for doctors and that weren't quite so much as they are now, and I always remember with a great deal of joy that, when they took Tracy from Basildon Hospital to Bart's, in one of those little American ambulances and with a doctor and a nurse on board, so I don't actually think they expected to even last the journey, but she laid in Bart's for what was 11 weeks, and then peacefully died on a Thursday night, just peacefully went to sleep and died. She was buried, as I say, in the churchyard where we were married, which was something else which I found out on one of our little quirky talks, because I'd gone down... We have a large Tesco's at the end of the road here, at the other end of Pitsea, and I went down there to get some food. I jumped on what we then had – an electric chair. Tracy had one, which she worked on the right-hand side, I had one on

the left-hand side. They were big old Meyra wheelchairs: beautiful German things, ooh, huge things, but they were very stable so you couldn't sort of fall out or knock them over, and they were lovely, and I used to enjoy driving that because it's a bit like a tank: they were easy to drive. Unfortunately, my one's worn out so I got rid of it, and I'm looking around occasionally for something to replace it, but unless it would fit in my car, it wouldn't be worth having it.

When you got married, Tony, just to go back to that: on your wedding day, what were your feelings then?

Oh, it was lovely. I haven't told you about one of... well I see him now, really our both mutual best friend. We weren't going to have a honeymoon, but Derrick, he actually worked as a care assistant at Chigwell House, and on my 21st birthday, which was long before I knew Tracy, I said to him, 'If I still know you in so many years time, I'll make a public apology to you', because everybody, when they came to Chigwell House to work, even if it was for a short time, they always said, 'Oh yeah, we'll keep in touch, we'll do this, we'll do...', as people do, you know, and of course Derrick was one of the few people that was true to his word. And in fact, he was then a struggling actor, but he now has his own pub, away in the back of Essex somewhere. I even go over to there a couple of times a year just to aggravate him, and he in fact has my rather large collection of beer mats, which he promises to put on the wall, but I'm sure he won't, because if he put them all on the wall, it would cover the whole pub, but there you are. So he came with us on our honeymoon, and he drove. We borrowed a big Bedford van from Chigwell House, and we went to a local motel thing, and he had a room next door to us, and he was able to... We went to London to see Topol in *Fiddler on the Roof*, and that was nice, and had a good couple of days there, and then, as I say, we came down here and moved, and we soon became well-known in and around Pitsea and Basildon, because, it's not very often you see two people in wheelchairs that are obviously together, obviously very happy, and obviously married: although there is, in fact, a friend of mine, who I've known all my life really, who lives just up the road, and he's married to another lady in a wheelchair, and they have three fit children, and indeed grandchildren, and they live

just up the road. But I'm sure that has no bearing on anything, really, except to say, yes there are people with disabilities who live in the community and function quite happily [laughs] without being a danger to themselves or anybody else, and this is what we like to do. We like to sort of disappear, if you like, into the ethos, and I sit in the pub most afternoons perhaps, and I'm accepted as 'Tony'. The bar people don't even see the wheelchair, don't even realise, that I'm in a chair, because the chair becomes irrelevant, in the same way as people don't realise, perhaps, that other people are slightly deaf: it's just accepted. But it's the sort of thing one has to work at slightly, but fortunately not as hard as you did way back in the beginning.

And so, when you were together, what kind of things did you like to do?

Oh, we always enjoyed the theatre. We went to the theatre and went to the cinema, and things like that. Tracy was always very interested in clothes. I wasn't really, as long as it sort of went together and looked half-right, and that suited me. And we liked to help, wherever we could. At that time, they'd opened up the idea of getting a hospice in Basildon, and because Tracy had frequent visits from the local district nurses, we got very involved with that, and it was a great pleasure of mine, when the hospice was opened, for them to invite me to one of the opening things, and to see now that the hospice is thriving.

I don't want to pry, Tony, but what was the illness that Tracy actually had?

Well, Tracy had spina bifida, and then her kidney – she only had one kidney, which didn't function very well – but she had a water bag, or a bag for her water, because she wasn't expected to live through her childhood, they sited it through her tummy button, which obviously made various parts of life not as interesting, not as easy as they may have been. But, as I say, Tracy died in her 29th year, but that was mainly because her lungs had gone, and I think really her little body was – and I use that advisedly, cos she was not a little lady, really, she was rather large and squat – but her body had worn out, and I'm not a religious person in the accepted sense, but she died

as much as one could do quite peacefully, with her friends round her, and that for me was all you can ask, really.

And, you know, from that time, as you said earlier, your memories remain and no one can take those away from you. What are some of the most sort of treasured memories, if you like?

Well, I think the fact that, you know, wherever we were, we were fortunately never jealous of each other. If I had gone to a function where Tracy was more involved, cos she loved to help at playschool, and stuff like that, cos we both loved children, but for various reasons, it was not possible for us to have children. Indeed, we had enough trouble coping with our own physical disabilities without the thought of looking after children as well, but if it was something that I was involved more in, then Tracy would be quite happy to sit back and let me take the limelight. There was not really any jealousy between us, and we very much liked to entertain other people in this flat because it wasn't [laughs] quite so cluttered up with rubbish as it is now, but I suppose that was because I had a lady to sort of chivvy me around and make sure it was a little more tidy. But, you know, when you're a fellow on your own, it's not quite so necessary, is it? Although my mother would argue about that, of course, but then, that's her privilege.

And so you had support to call upon, if you needed it as well, then, obviously.

Yeah, and as I have become slightly less able, I now have the luxury of 24-hour care, and due to the good offices of my father, he bought me a vehicle in which I am able to be transported in my wheelchair, and that makes life very much easier, because I go out now quite regularly to... well, I'm very heavily involved with the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, and various other organisations which are mainly charitable, and we raise money for charity, and enjoy ourself while we're doing it.

And when you were out and about with Tracy, either using the buggies that you had, or generally out and about, did you perceive a particular reaction by people? Do you remember how people sometimes...?

No, I think most people were sort of quite pleased to see us, and I mean, if they weren't, we didn't sort of worry too much about it, because it's their choice, you know. There are things that I don't find particularly easy to understand, so one has to be charitable, and assume that it's sort of almost 'normal' for people sometimes not to feel particularly comfortable with disability, if it's something that they haven't come across before.

And when you were out and about, you know, going to the theatre, doing other particular things, were you aware of particular aspects of the physical environment that were awkward, that meant that it was more difficult to do what you wanted to do?

Yeah. I mean, I'm quite a large chap as you can see, and Tracy mostly had her legs out in front, so there was always difficulties. In fact, when they built the new theatre in Basildon, there was some discussion over the disabled loo, or the siting of it, and somebody said, 'Well,' you know, they said to us, 'look at the difference between your chair and your wife's', and I said, 'Yes, that point is taken', I said, but what annoyed us is that within Basildon, or there was then, a particularly strong disability movement, and as far as we knew nobody had bothered to try and contact any of us, not alone all of us, to say that they couldn't possibly get a toilet that would suit everybody, because it just wasn't physically possible. I mean my argument to that was, they hadn't even tried [laughs] to get a toilet that would suit anybody, you know. I mean, they just stuck the toilet right in the middle of where all the other toilets were so, bearing in mind that we needed longer to get there anyway, because we were bang in the middle of everybody, we were actually holding up the people who could have got in and out of the toilet very quickly.

So this was, what, facilities on their own was it or...?

Yeah. This was the facilities actually in the theatre, so because there was a lot of discussion over it when it first went up, they thought they were going to have to close it altogether, because it was a small theatre with also a big conference room, in which they could have things, such things as car launches and that sort of thing – as you know, Basildon is comparatively near to London.

And what about things like seating arrangements in the theatre?

Well, in the theatre, they had very good seating arrangements. They did have some rather odd things which meant that they were all right if they worked, but when they didn't work, they were a bit of a nuisance. And then of course, we had the old thing of lack of funding, so they leased the theatre to some private people, and then, of course, [laughs] about two years later, when they looked at the accounts they found that lots of odd bits of money had been spent in the wrong way, so it was shut down again. And now it's only open for odd weeks here and there, when people actually buy the theatre, or hire the theatre, and are responsible for putting on their own shows.

You talked about there being, at that time, a relatively strong disability movement, or groups of people in Basildon: how were you involved in things at the time then, Tony?

Well, only because, I suppose, various people knew me through, I think it was articles we may have had in the paper when we first moved in. And of course, we had approached various people to get help with getting to see that we had the right benefits, and obviously these people would say occasionally to us, 'I think you might be able to help Mrs So-and-so. Is it all right if I pass on their name to you?' or whatever else, and I was, in those days, a card-carrying member of a particular persuasion, which I don't think it's fair to go in at the moment. And I was known very much through that and of course I've lived in Basildon since 1983, and I think my niece came to stay with us when she was 13, and she said, 'Good gracious', she said, 'I'm not going down the road again with Uncle Tony', she said, 'because he takes half an hour to get 30 yards down the road'. I mean that was sort of 20-odd years ago, and I'm now that much more well-known, you know.

This was because you'd been meeting people along the way and...

Yeah, and...

you obviously felt, then, part of a community.

Yeah, and certainly people say to me, 'Do you not miss Chigwell?', and the answer to that is, 'Yeah, I miss the area, but I don't miss the people', because Chigwell is very snobby, if you like. And I mean, that is why I laugh when I watch that thing with Dorian and... I can't think what they call it... oh, *Birds of a Feather*, because they talk about Chigwell High Road and all that, and I actually know what the High Road... well, I don't know what it's like now because I haven't been there much over the last 15 years, but I certainly know what it was like in the time that they're talking about, and it was...

So you were always happy to chat people? People were happy to chat to you?

Yeah, I think so, yes. And at that time we used to go fund-raising for MS [multiple sclerosis] cos one of the chaps in the home had MS, and we would go up to London once a year, and fund-raise for multiple sclerosis in Oxford Street. And I can remember once, being up there, and some chap come out of a posh tailors and he said, [laughs] 'Excuse me,' he said, 'would you mind moving away from my window, because you're upsetting my customers', so we did that. We didn't worry, you know, cos that's what people wanted. Well, you do it: you don't argue with them, do you?

How did you feel about that comment, though?

Well, the man's got a living to earn, and if we were upsetting his customers, then he has every right to ask us to move on, because when you fund-raise on the street, you are not allowed to cause an obstruction.

How do you think attitudes may have changed over the years, Tony?

I don't think they have very much. I think we kid ourselves that they have, but I'm never quite sure. I go to lots of bits and pieces in lots of different ways, and I sit at conferences, and I hear people sit up on the stage, and we all pontificate about various different aspects of it, you know, and we think, 'Oh that's good, we've done a good thing!' and then we go back home, and perhaps a week later we'll get a synopsis put through the post, or, if we're lucky, we'll get it on tape, so we don't have to bother to read it, and just listen to it while we're drinking a cup of coffee or something, and then we think, 'Oh', and then we go back, perhaps a year later, or six months later, and we have to go through a lot of the same stuff that we done before. But I do think that we're gradually getting slightly better, because lots of people are doing... because, again, of the work situation, lots of pieces of work are being taken on, on a short-term basis, rather like this is, and I feel that out of this may well come other stuff, and you know, everything builds on everything else.

And when you were living here with Tracy, and in earlier times, was there ever a thought in your mind, as I say, wanting to see whether it might be possible for you to pursue some sort of paid work, or had you...?

I have never seen that as a possibility, purely and simply, I think, [laughs] because I'm basically a very lazy person, and, while I can survive, if I'm careful, on the money that I'm given by the State, as long as I feel that I can give back a little, and I can... oh, this sounds very, I don't know, big-headed, egotistical, or something... if I can bring a little happiness into somebody's life, or whatever, and I can have a smile and a joke with someone, that's really all I need, because I'm not starving, I'm not destitute. I sometimes feel that, almost in a way, I'm almost a bit of a fraud. I was talking to one of my mates in the pub the other day, and he said, 'Well, if the government doesn't give you enough to live on, what's the alternative? Do you want to be stood outside the W.H. Smith, trying to sell copies of *The Big Issue*? And, of course, well, the answer to that is, 'No, you don't!' [Laughs.]

And when you were married, and with Tracy, did you go on holidays at all?

Yes, we did in the beginning, but I am very lucky: I don't like 'holidays. Every day of my life' is a 'holiday. So we did used to go on holiday together, because Tracy enjoyed it, but then towards the end, Tracy would have a 'holiday with her mum, cos she liked holiday camps and all that, and then quite often I'd just go and stay with my mum and dad for a couple of days, just to give us a break from each other. That was good because, as I say, Tracy's semi-complicated medical needs meant that it wasn't something that my mum felt confident enough to deal with, although, of course, we did go out a lot together, just having meals and stuff like that, as a family. I remember once, in earlier times, when we were on holidays, they did a *Mr and Mrs*, and Tracy and I at the time were engaged, and she said, 'Oh.' They said to her, you know, when they put you in the box and everything, 'What's your hobby?' She said, 'Eating', and they said, 'What's your potential husband's hobby?', so she pointed to me, she said, 'Can't you see him over there, the silly old fool's asleep!' [Laughs.] So that, of course, caused a laugh cos I don't really think I was asleep, I was probably nodding off a bit cos it was a bit warm, and I was sat in the bar and maybe had one or two mini vodkas [laughs], but I was on holiday after all's said and done. [Laughs.] I do have many happy memories like that, and, as I say, I suppose I come across possibly as a slightly superficial person, but that's the way I am, that's the way I choose to cope with life: because it's much better to see the good side, rather than the bad side, or perhaps a more positive, a more honest way of putting it is, 'It's better to keep your mouth shut, and be thought a fool, than open your mouth, and prove it.'

And meantime, then, as well you were able to continue with your various hobbies and interests as well.

Yes.

What were chief amongst those at the time, then?

Well, I was a member of, as I say, a political party at the time, and I saw on the wall a sign for the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, which I remembered my father had been involved with when I was younger, before the true extent of my disability was discovered. So I said to the guy in the bar, I said, 'Can you read to me what it says on that picture up there', cos it had the meeting times. So he read out the meeting times. I said, 'OK, fair enough'. So I went to the secretary of the Pitsea Leisure Centre, and I said, 'Is it possible that you can give me the phone number or address of the secretary?' 'No', he said, 'I'm not allowed to do that. But, if you would like to come along on a Thursday evening,' he said, 'there'll be a few lads in the bar from the Buffs. I will introduce you to them, and then it's up to you to take it from there.' Which is what I did, And on a Thursday night then, I popped up there, this particular evening, and I said to the chap, 'Ooh, you know,' when one of these Buffs come in, will you introduce me to him?' and he introduced me to my very good friend, old Freddy Pennicuick, and we shook hands, and he said, 'Oh, you know, what do you wanna do?' so I said, 'Oh, my dad was a Buffalo many years ago', I said, 'and I seem to remember that my grandfather was,' I said, 'and I'm very interested in joining. What have I got to do?' you know. And before you ask, no, we don't have horns, and we don't roll our trouser leg up, well not in public anyway [laughs]. We just band together and we raise money for charity, and we are very much family-orientated a group, and we enjoy ourself while we're doing it. And that's really my main hobby, I suppose, cos I go all around, locally, and certainly I'm known in quite a few... well, all the local lodges, definitely.

OK, Tony. What we'll do is...

Right.

[End of Tape 3 Side B]

Tape 4 Side A [Track 6]

So, you joined then, Tony, The Royal Antediluvian Order of the Buffaloes, and what sort of age would you be then?

About 39, I think, something like that.

Right.

I've been in about 14 years – I'm now 55 – so, 39, 40.

And you go, as you were saying, all around the local area...

All around the local area, up into Ipswich. I've been down to... well, there are in fact Buffalo Lodges all over the country, and indeed all over the world. I'm not yet sure if we have any in Russia. [Laughs.] We certainly have them in South Africa, they are a very strong thing in Germany, but it's only really a charitable organisation, and we raise money for people less fortunate than ourselves. The only thing I can't tell you, and not that you're going to ask me anyway, but people seem to think it's very secretive. It isn't. We are a society with secrets, and the only secret we have is the actual method of entry to a Lodge. Because, once you get into a Lodge, there are various things that are done that nobody else would know, unless they were a Buff. And there's nothing, [laughs] I mean there's nothing particularly sinister about that: it's just really a protection thing, because the Buffaloes were started when the travelling actors would move around from town to town, and the reason our meeting rooms are referred to as 'Lodges' is because when travelling the actors would go round on trains, and they would know that it was decent lodgings, because, you know, that's how they were set up. And then, of course, other people began to join, for whatever reason, and we purely and simply raise our money in pennies and halfpennies, and we look after the families of our own brothers, and we enjoy ourself while we're doing it.

What kind of groups and individuals have you been able to help over the years?

Ooh, all sorts, virtually anything. If anybody's only got to talk to me for a quarter of an hour, and they will find out that I'm a Buff, if they don't already know, because it's one of the things that one tends to talk about, if you go into any pub, rather like you would see the Rotary sign or, you know, anything... most pubs that have regular Buffalo meetings will have a set of horns on the bar, or somewhere in the building, that would denote when we meet. It's only, as I say, we're the same as the Round Table, Rotary, the Toc H, or whatever.

Yeah. So you meet weekly, do you?

Yes.

Mm. And, in joining, Tony, are you, do you suspect, the only person there who uses a wheelchair?

No, definitely not. Within one of the Lodges I go to, there's another guy who's in a wheelchair, and the only reason he joined is because when he was fit he was so busy, involved in working, that he didn't have time, you know... He had a family to bring up, and stuff, and since he had his accident (poor chap, fell out of a tree) he was unable to carry on his work, so therefore, he had more... Although he's always been interested in joining, and indeed, when he was fit he had actually come along to some of our fund-raising do's and some of our ladies' nights, and the like, but because he was then looking after a companion and youngish family, he didn't have the time to join. But, he has in fact joined, and he has become a very useful asset to the Lodge.

And again, over the years, Tony, what kind of contact did you have or have you had, with other people with cerebral palsy?

Very little. Very little, in as much as that, I choose not to be involved with people with disabilities, well, that is, very little really, almost until Scope did its re-launch,

and, you know, there was various bits of stuff in *The Spastic News*, as it was then... no, it would still have been then *Disability Now*, but about re-launches. And through Kevin and that, we were sort of asked if we would like to join.

Who is Kevin, sorry?

Kevin Smith-Galer and various folk like that. And I'm sure Kay and that, in their own areas, probably did the same thing, but certainly we've been... I was, in fact, at one stage Chairman of the East Anglia Partnership Committee, but due to my failing health I gave that up, and it's now being carried on by some very capable people, for which I'm grateful, because I can sit in the back and I don't have to feel concerned that the work that we are doing is jeopardised by the fact that I had to step down.

How did you feel, Tony, about the re-launch and the change of the name of The Spastic Society to 'Scope'?

I feel, personally, that it is a disadvantage. I still think about it, because I know that 'spastic' is a term of derision, I know that you get things like 'stupid spastic', 'stupid spas', and a lot of people find that most unacceptable in our new enlightened days, but everybody knew or had their own idea of what a person who was a spastic was. But people say to me now, 'Well, what's Scope?' In fact, I can tell you something, if I didn't tell you last time we spoke, that Scope in fact in South Africa [laughs] is a pornographic magazine: and I only know that because a lot of my carers come from South Africa, and when I told them I had to go to a Scope meeting (particularly when I used to have the young ladies, who unfortunately, I don't get so much now, because we can only work with the people that present themselves to us) they were quite off-put when I told them I was going to a meeting of Scope, and I had to find out what was wrong. And they then told me, rather sheepishly [laughs], that in South Africa 'Scope' is a pornographic magazine, but I find that quite amusing.

And, in your work with Scope, as it now is; what has been the value of that work?

What have you got out of that work?

Well, I suppose really, once you get into it, you do, in a way, look forward to meeting some of the people that you met last time, because you do form a relationship with them, really. I mean I only just realise now as I'm talking to you, that one of the people I didn't see last week was the lovely lady who is a retired paediatric physio, and I didn't realise until I came home last week that I hadn't seen her. I suppose she must be on holiday or something, you know, but you do tend to form a relationship with people, even if it be from a distance.

And, Tony, given the chance, as it were, to describe things to people: what would your main message be about the potential of people with disabilities? The potential of people with cerebral palsy?

Well, the potential is endless because if we want to, or certainly I would never do it because I'd get bored stiff, but if I would want to, I have enough time in my day to spend all day learning how to address an envelope on a computer, because I don't have to do anything else. Obviously, one finds other things to do, because that's what life's all about.

We'll just hold... [Break in recording.] ...off there like that... Yes, so you feel you've got the time to devote to things, but if you were able to meet yourself when younger, what would you now say to yourself?

Well, I think I could best describe that as... I think I should have, and I know I don't do this enough now, I think I should learn to prioritise more, be a bit more organised.

And, what do you hope, you know, what are your main thoughts about what you'd still like to do?

Ooh, I don't know really. [Laughs.] I'm sort of a bit of a silly old fool. I'm usually quite happy to sort of jog along in the way I am on the old adage of 'if it ain't broke, don't mend it', sort of thing, and I'm always looking out for something new, because you never know what could come out of, well, like what we're doing now, what could

come out of this. I mean, I have been saying for many years, 'Oh, I must do my autobiography, and I'll get it done on tape', well I haven't done anything about it. I mean, yeah, I've bought a sort of ordinary small dictating machine that takes the proper tapes, not as elaborate as what we're using here, cos it's not necessary, and I carry it around in me pocket, but I don't know whether I actually will get anything done. I think, once I've seen how clever you've been able to do with the bits that we finish up with from this, I think, I'm not sure if it might even put me off all the more, but I may have enough material from that to have a proper basis to continue. I don't know, that's what I'm hoping at the moment.

And again, over the years, Tony, what are some of the strongest memories that come through to you?

Oh, I think when my niece (who now has her own baby and is expecting another) was christened, I remember talking to my uncle: well he wasn't an uncle, he was a cousin, and my sister had asked me whether I'd be godfather, and I said, 'Well, I don't know really', I said, 'because I don't go to church much', and my cousin Len said, 'Well,' he said, 'look at your grandmother', he said, 'never been in church, you know, probably, since we all stopped getting married or whatever, but', he said, 'the more, good type of person you would never wish to meet' And, of course, when he said that, I realised how true it was, that my grandma was very much an influence on my life and, you know, I feel. I was in fact godfather to my niece, and now she's 33-ish, born in 1970, and she's just had her first child, and we think her second child is due in April, and we are very much, as a family, looking forward to that. And my parents are now... well, I'm quite ancient now I feel, and my parents are that much more, and family is very important to me: family and friendship is very important to me. And even, well this sounds rude, but I don't mean it as it sounds, but the camaraderie that you and I have built over... we've only met two and a half times, I suppose really, if you count last week as half a time [laughs], the sort of friendship that you build up, almost when you're not trying to build one, if you know what I mean, and they are important.

So, as you say, people are at the heart of it [clears throat], and we've got, you know, time ticking over, the seasons come, the seasons go...

Yeah.

Do you feel that times are different now from what they were?

Yeah, I feel they're different, but I feel that we have so much – or I can't talk about other people cos I don't know, everybody has different calls upon their time, everybody has different calls upon their money – but I feel that I'm in almost a very strong position, because I have my health, if I'm careful I have enough money to go to the pub two or three times a week, probably four times a week, and I go to theatre, I can go if I see a new one, I can save up a couple of weeks, or a month, or six weeks, and buy it, whatever it is, as long as it's not a sort of [laughs] £30,000 plasma screen television or something. And, you know, as long as my car is still reasonably, I can get out and I can do things, and I just think one has to realise that as you get older, and as the Health and Safety at Work Act impinges more and more onto your life, because you've got to use things like hoists to be lifted and all that sort of thing, you do have to take things just that little bit steadier, because if you want to be around for tomorrow, you've got to just save that little bit of extra energy.

And, in terms of getting the resources that you need, what have been the major elements in getting those resources?

Well, I think, again, to go back to when we first moved in at that time, Basildon had a very good welfare rights group, and as far as I know they're still in existence: and we've also got a very strong DIAL [Disability Information Advice Line] here, in Basildon. If you know the right people to phone: those particular people who you phoned last time may not be in post or may be shut down, because they only work three days a week now instead of four. But, if you have a pleasant and a fairly easy speaking voice to be able to understand, and enough people to write the odd note for you, you can usually get round.

And so what are your main recommendations, if you like, to somebody, perhaps themselves setting out in independent life?

Take whatever chances you want to, bearing in mind that you have to be careful, and, bearing in mind, if you have to depend on other people, it's much easier not to say it, than to have to say 'sorry' too often.

And, I mean, what kind of strength of character do you need, to be able to get what you need?

A hell of a strength of character, because you've got to... every day... I often say, 'I would like to be able to get up one day, and not have to fight', and I then think, 'No, come on, if I didn't have to fight, I would have given up years ago.' I would have given up cos I can never forget... again, if I told you this when we first met, I apologise, but... on the night my wife died, what a lovely lady doctor, and it could just as easily have been a man, but this lovely doctor came up to me, and she said, 'How are you going to manage?', and I said, 'I'm sorry, I don't know how I'm going to manage: I just know that I have to manage', and that, the image of that doctor who, as I say, could just as easily have been a man, there was nothing sexual in what she said, and the fact that she was a lady, I suppose, one remembers it more, but she came up to me, and she kissed me on the cheek, and she said, 'How are you going to manage?', and I said, 'I'm sorry, I don't know, but all I know is, that I've got to', and while I've got that strength, while I have my friends around me, while I have my good head on, if you like, rather than my sort of semi-depressed head, which one tends to get when the evenings gets longer and the days, the mornings, sort of, you know, once we start mucking about with the clocks, I suppose [laughs] is what I really mean, and you, it's not quite so easy to get out without putting on seven layers and clothing and everything, but I am in a very lucky position: I can do more or less, what I want to do, when I want to do it.

And so you adopt the philosophy, do you, that it's just one day at a time, really?

Really, yeah, definitely. And if you can't do it tomorrow, then it'll either wait till the day after, or you've just got to ring up and say, 'I'm sorry, we're stuck, we'll be there when we can get there, if there's no point in us coming, then tell us and we won't bother coming,' But, having said I'm going to do something, I do do my best with the amount of forward-planning one can do, and you will appreciate that, to a lesser or greater degree, you got to get on with it and kick it. Because I remember, when I went back to Chigwell House, after I left, because they were trying to encourage more people to move out, and they said to us, cos we went over there to give them a bit of a chat, this was before Tracy died, and they said, 'Well, why are you suggesting that we should move out on our own, when you didn't do that?', and I said, 'No', I said, 'you asked me to come over and talk to you about how I cope with life', and I turned round and I said to them, 'The one thing you won't know until it happens, is that when you are one person in a flat, and you're sat on the loo, [laughs] and you realise that you've sat on the loo before you've checked that you've got enough loo roll, when you're on your own, when the home help has gone home, or whatever words you want to use, cos bearing in mind we didn't have quite the cover that we now can get: until you're actually in that sort of a state, you'll never know quite how you're going to cope with it: but until you're there, you won't... You can sort of cover for every eventuality, but there are going to be dark days, there is going to be a time when somebody, with the best will in the world, has said, 'I'll come and visit you on Sunday afternoon', and, for whatever reason, maybe they're not well, maybe their car's broken down, and there are going to be things that go wrong, and you are going to feel fed up and isolated, but you've just got to realise that it's not because you're disabled, it's not anything bad, it's just something that happens to everybody, and the fact that you're disabled is nothing to do with it: everybody has bad luck.

And imagine again, a young Tony, just sort of setting out now: how different do you think that young Tony's position would be now, as against the circumstances for yourself, when you were young? How do you think things may have changed for a young Tony, setting out now?

I don't know really. It's a difficult thing to quantify really, isn't it? I don't know. As I say, to be able to go, to put yourself really 25 years back, well, I hope that he's optimistic and lucky as I am. You've got to get out there and kick it. You can't fight for... It's rather like some of the reviews I've heard of some of the changes in Scope, and I'll only say 'some of the changes', cos it's unfair to be too specific on this, see. They're not right: they're not all going to be right. Even if we shut Scope down tomorrow, and we gave everybody 50 quid, and said, 'Right, Scope's no longer about. The best we can do is give you all 50 quid.' That would be wrong, and whatever else would rise from the ashes wouldn't please everybody, but you have to work with what you've got, and if it's not right, you get in there and you try and bend it and change it, and if you can't, you've got to go with it.

And what are your reflections, Tony, on more people with disabilities themselves becoming involved in organisations?

Well again, I think you become involved, but you start... I said it Thursday, when I was there that a question came up, and a fellow said, 'How about if I want to go and try something else: will I be able to go back? If I can't manage what I've tried, will my place still be there for me to go back to, so I'm no worse off?' And I think that is so important: you've got to know that your base, somewhere where you coped four weeks ago, is still there for you.

This was at a reason Scope meeting, and somebody who currently uses a Scope service?

...[He?] was worried, because they were told that that service was going to be shut down, and I wasn't really sure, because it was difficult for me to understand exactly: I can't put myself in the person's head, but I think they were concerned that if they tried the new, smaller situation, would the situation that they'd left from this morning, still be available to them?

And, of course, we've got the situation where groups are forming for different purposes, some more concerned with the social side of things, some more concerned with getting the right kind of provision and services: that is a different trend to, even just a few years ago. What are your thoughts on those sorts of changes?

Well, I think the changes are OK, but I think, again, I can only say that each person can only be involved in what they think they're either more comfortable with, or best at. Because, if you want me to start sort of getting myself sat on pavements, and smearing fake blood all over me, I can't. I am too old for all that. I tried in 1970 to get on a train... what do you call them?... Yeah, an underground train, using the escalators, and they very kindly stopped the bloody escalators, so we could bump down the [laughs]... which was very good, but of course, it defeated the object. What we need is a greater, more 'wheelchair-friendly' public infrastructure, and we're never going to get that: or not within the foreseeable future.

You believe that those kinds of changes have been too few, and too slow?

Yeah, too few and too slow.

And so why do you think that has been so?

I'm afraid it might, and I could be wrong, I'd be very grateful if somebody might tell me cos I might learn something: I think everything is down to a price, rather than up to a standard. Also I think what is wrong, is that some people with disabilities, and I know I'm far too soft, are so loud that they frighten people off, and other people are so pleased for the little they get, that they almost go too much the other way, and I'm never quite sure where I am, because I feel it's so much easier to shout for somebody else, rather than yourself.

Sure. OK, Tony.

[End of Tape 4, Side A.]

Tape 5 Side A [track 7]

I'll do that if you like.

Yes.

That takes it off 'pause'. And it's now the 8th December and I'm in Pitsea again, talking to Tony Stamford. Tony, let's re-cover some of your thoughts about your early schooldays, before you went to the Wilfred Pickles School.

Before I went to the Wilfred Pickles School, I went to two schools, prior to that: I went to one, well, they were both over Dagenham somewhere. They were day schools. I don't remember learning very much at all really, apart from I suppose, a few hymns, and things like that, and just about remembering other people's names. I think they taught you to write [laughs] your Christian name, and that's about all. A little bit of reading, not very much. I remember on a Friday we seemed to play in the sandpit, and all that. Bearing in mind, I left to go away to residential school when I was nine, I'd had, I think, by that time, one operation on my legs: I don't remember what that was for. I think it was to stop my feet going up, so that [it would] stop me walking on my toes, and then also I had a squint corrected in my right eye, and my tonsils taken out, which I told you about the other day, when we were talking.

So you had a fair dose of hospital...

Yes.

... by a relatively early age, Tony.

Yes. Yes, I'm quite used to hospitals. I don't like them and [laughs] I don't like doctors. No, I don't mean I dislike... like most people, I prefer not to go to the doctor's. My mum says [laughing] I'm wicked, cos I send anybody else, but I never go myself, but that's a bit true I suppose, really.

What memories, Tony, do you have of your first day at school?

The first day at school, ooh, now that was peculiar. I don't remember how I got there, but I think I seem to remember it was very big and quite noisy, and then it was a small school, but I soon got used to it, and I seem to remember I was quite often getting told off for talking too much, but that's a trait that's followed me [laughs] throughout life, that you know. If you're ever in doubt, there's two things you do: you either keep very quiet so people notice you, but if you talk quite a bit people get fed up with you and they tell you to shut up anyway, so you seem to cope quite well both ways really, but...

So how old were you, Tony, when you went then to this main school? You went, I think, to pre-school, didn't you?

Yeah, I went to pre-school, it must have been, ooh that was up Buckhurst Hill... no, Epping Forest. I think that is in fact still running, but I don't remember what that was called. That was only just to do some exercises, you know, sort of kneeling up and trying to hold your balance, and trying to stand up in front of a mirror, trying to stand straight: probably something of the sort of things they still do today. I don't know. I know that some places in Essex do the Peto training, but I'm not too up on what they're doing at the moment. That's more over the other side of Essex.

So you were given physiotherapy at pre-school.

Yeah.

And then you went on, aged five, was it, to...

Yeah.

... to the...

To the Benton: it was Benton Road School, and I think that was in Dagenham. Then we went to another school, which was just a CP [cerebral palsy] unit, and that was also round there somewhere, but [laughs] I don't remember the name of that. I seem to think that the head teacher there was Miss Roberts. Now why I should remember that, I don't know, and it could be wrong, but [laughs] there's nobody about to tell me, so it won't really matter.

So what memories do you have of teachers at your early school times?

Not really, except that there was a Mrs Abbs, and I remember once Mum and Dad and I went to tea at her house, and I remember my mum saying, 'Ooh, it was a nice house', but I don't remember where it was. But Mrs Abbs – I seem to remember thinking she was a nice lady.

How would you describe the atmosphere of your first school?

I don't remember very much about it, cos you're going back quite a long way. I would have been perhaps five, or just a little over five perhaps, and I'm now 55, so going back 50 years, and I don't remember very much about it at all. [Laughs.] I remember that I used to always enjoy the journeys in the car, to go to school, and there was a lovely lady called Mrs Stamp, and I remember once, I must have been a bit cheeky to her I suppose, I don't know what I said, but she told my mum, and my mum wasn't very impressed, so of course I got told off for that, and I would probably get sent to bed early.

So how did you get to school then?

They used to send a taxi for us, and there was myself and a chappy called John Paulton: I remember he had very blond hair and glasses, and he had a younger brother, and he called him Tony after me, and I was very impressed with that, and his mum and dad, as I remember, I think were both teachers. And there was Josephine: she was a young lady with callipers half-way up her legs, and her father lived on the

police [sports] ground, up... ooh, where was that? That wasn't very far from where we lived, but I don't know where it was now: yeah, it would have been in Chigwell High Road, funnily enough: the police sports ground. I know that's still there now, that is.

Do you remember how you felt, you know, about going to the school that wasn't in your immediate neighbourhood?

No, what, you mean, when I went away to school? Yeah...

No, after you went to the pre-school, but before you went to the Wilfred Pickles School.

No, I don't remember very much about it, except that I always enjoyed the journey in the car: and I must have enjoyed it, because I seem to remember thinking some of the food was very nice, and one of the dinner ladies was a Mrs Emes, I think, and how on earth am I remembering these names? And then the cook was a Mrs Weatherall: she was a [laughs] rather large lady, you know: typical sort of cook lady. I always had this theory in life, anybody that cooks, you never see a thin cook: I don't know why it is, but it's...

And did you have a favourite school meal at all, do you remember?

No, well I think I always enjoyed as I still do now we call it 'spotted dick', like, sort of... it's got currents in it, and it's like a... ooh, I'm sorry, I ought to remember this: like a sort of a roly-poly pudding, if you like. Suet pudding! That's it, suet pudding, with currents in it.

And do you remember a typical day, what kind of pattern that might follow?

No, I think we used to have like an assembly at lunch time. Then they'd make us lay down for, perhaps, what seemed like forever, so I suppose it might only have been

half an hour but when you're young, of course, time does seem to take such a long time. And then we'd leave at three o'clock, and I remember they only charged us, I think it was 1/6 [one shilling and sixpence] for dinners, because they said we couldn't get home even if we'd have wanted to, so that's why our dinners were cheaper than people who could manage to walk home [inaud]

And were you aware that, here you were then, going to a school which was broadly in the neighbourhood, but wasn't, perhaps, your local school? Were you...

No. No, I think you just went there because you'd always gone there, you know.

And did you mind not going to a school that was closer to home?

I don't think I noticed it. Don't think it ever occurred to you that you would do that. Probably, it would do now, of course, because non-segregated schools are the thing, but...

What kind of range of disabilities did the other children have then?

Do you know, I can't remember. I seem to remember we had one or two who couldn't walk very well, rather like myself, and that's all I can remember. Obviously, I don't remember any of the names at all.

And I suppose there were particular activities, or particular emphases, depending on the time of year. Do you remember any particular routines like, for instance, coming up to Christmas?

Yeah, I remember we did a Christmas Nativity, and I think Mum still has at home, and if not my mum, cos she's moved a couple of times, certainly she will have passed on the pictures to my niece, of me with a little crepe paper angel's wings on the back, and a white sheet, looking about three. I've certainly seen this picture once or twice in recent years, when we've had to sort of tidy up other relatives' houses, you know, and

pictures get redistributed back to the original owners, or somebody who's close to them, so that they can be taken out and [laughs] embarrass people with them – birthdays and that sort of thing – so I've certainly seen that picture once or twice since.

And what about school trips?

Ooh, I don't remember any school trips, really, until I went away to school. Then we used to go quite a lot, but I don't remember any from my early schools.

And, during the summer, did they have any particular activities, do you remember, that you'd associate with the summer at all?

No, we as a family went away. We used to go, you know, Cornwall and Devon, with my nan and granddad who lived locally. But not from school, no.

So then, aged nine, you went then to the Wilfred Pickles School, in Lincolnshire,

Yeah.

which was quite an event really in your life, was it?

Yeah, I didn't enjoy it for the first few weeks. I didn't enjoy it at all. I always remember the first night: I laid in bed, and I was crying a lot. I suppose everybody did, really, I don't remember, and then I thought I'd wet the bed because I'd sweated so much, but fortunately I hadn't. So that was one thing to get over, and then within three weeks I'd learnt to dress myself, because, bearing in mind at home, there was only my sister and myself, and my mum was occasionally working, not every day, but occasionally used to work, and to get me ready to go to school, it was quicker for mum to help me, and get me dressed, rather than let me get myself dressed. But I remember, within being at the school in about three weeks, I learned to dress myself and be down in time for breakfast, which was half past eight.

Did you have a school uniform at all?

Yes, in the week it was grey shirt, a blue tie, a black... was it grey trousers or was it black trousers? I think it was black trousers for the older boys, and grey trousers for younger ones. Obviously when I first went at nine, it was short trousers, but I think I got my first pair of long trousers when I was 13. I remember those, yes.

And your junior school, just before you went to the Wilfred Pickles School, did you have a uniform there as well?

No, no I don't think so. I certainly don't remember it, so I wouldn't think so.

And this would be then, when you were at junior school, in what, the late fifties, I guess?

Yeah, in 1960. I was 10, so then for the next four years I was at the Wilfred Pickles School, then for the following two years. I was away from school probably more than I was there, because I was having trouble with my hip, and I was first operated on [in] Great Ormond Street, the country branch in Tadworth, and then from there they tried to stop the hip moving and couldn't quite manage it, so they transferred me to the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in Stanmore. I was then there for about, ooh, 16 months or so, on and off, and they re-set my hip, and then I managed to walk on a walking frame, but not for too much distance. I suppose I haven't really walked much since just before I came here, and I came here when I was 32.

And, just thinking back to those times at school, both at junior school and the Wilfred Pickles School: do you remember how it was you got on with other children there? Were, in terms of particular friendships: do you remember particular friends from that time?

No, I remember a few names, but I don't think I had any particular friends, and yet I was not unpopular, if you know what I mean. But I couldn't get around particularly well. Although I like cricket now, I love watching cricket, I was never very good at sports. I was always a bit of a fat chap, and a bit lazy. If I could encourage other people to do things for me, I would do that, and I used to like sort of sitting back and writing essays and stuff like that. I was never very... I never got any GCEs or anything like that, but I always enjoyed school. I still like writing long letters now to people, you know, when mum's away and that, and write long letters saying exactly what I've done all day, and then sending them off – perhaps just tearing them up and not bothering to send them – but I do enjoy that. I write, you know, with no full stops [laughs] and things like that, and don't worry about [that] sort of thing.

And when you wrote, Tony, what did you write in?

Just in school books – that was just about the time they were bringing in the very big old electric typewriters, you know, that were I suppose near enough the size of a blooming... well, half the size of a house, nowadays. But I mean, of course, things have progressed much smaller now, and things are much easier to use.

So did you use a typewriter then?

Yes, yes.

So you were taught to use the typewriter?

Yeah, yeah. I actually learnt more of that when I was in hospital, cos there was a lady there again, I'm dreadfully bad at names and she taught us to use the typewriter more. I couldn't use it properly, because I couldn't get my fingers to rest on the home keys but, you know, it helped me to find my way around a typewriter more easily.

And when you wrote by hand, what kind of pen did you use to write with?

I tried to use the italic pens, but I was never very good at that, so I mostly used a biro. But I've found, since then, that actually if your writing's bad, it's better if you use a fairly sharp ordinary pencil. It's just something that I use occasionally. And I like the effort of writing, because I have a computer now, which I don't use very much, but if I try and do something on a computer, you can do it so much quicker, I get annoyed with myself, and I find that my brain works much quicker than I can physically do anything.

And, when you were young, Tony, do you remember particular books at school?

Yeah, again I didn't read a lot, because I find by the time I've read a whole page I've almost forgotten what was at the top of the page, but luckily I've developed quite a good memory, and I now am involved in various bits for Scope, and other organisation which necessitate me having to read the odd page for an agenda, or something like that, and if I am in the right mood, and I haven't got things to distract me, I can manage to do that quickly enough that I can retain that sort of thing. But to actually read a book now... I suppose to my shame, I have to admit that I have never actually read a full book in my life. It would take far too long. But I'm very lucky down here, in this part of Essex, we can get most stuff on talking book, you know, and [laughs] we don't have to pay which makes it even more attractive, and the library down here in Essex is very good for that. We get them for free: and maybe we have to wait, because if it's a new book or something, everybody else is requesting it, and maybe they've only got one copy, which is the fact with Bill Hargreaves, [a] chap who used to work for Scope, and is unfortunately since died: he got a Millennium Grant to write his own autobiography, which I'm waiting to get hold of a copy of on talking books, so that I can catch up with Bill's life, having met him once or twice. He was a trailblazer, if you like, for people with cp, and he actually worked for many years in one or other capacity up at Park Crescent and Fitzroy Square for Scope, in the old days, when it was The Spastic Society.

So, when you went to Wilfred Pickles, if not, perhaps before, you were obviously then aware of the Spastic Society. Do you remember at all coming to the realisation that you did have a disability at all?

Yeah, yeah. I think I've always been aware of that, and I think you learn more, certainly when I was sort of 16, 17, maybe a little younger. I was in the Royal National Orthopaedic at Stanmore, which is, in my opinion, as good as Stoke Mandeville, but it serves a different catchment area, and there was a chap there, probably a doctor, he may have been somebody visiting somebody: and I remember this, and it's a bit of a funny thing to remember... I remember he took his handkerchief out of his pocket, and he blew his nose while he was still walking along, and I remember thinking, 'Oh goodness, I'm never going to be able to blow me nose while I'm still walking' Why that should impress me, I don't know, but it's the sort of thing that sort of sticks in your mind, you know. You think 'Oh, I'm never going to be able to do that', you know.

And do you remember, amongst children that you knew at school (whether at the junior school, or indeed at the Wilfred Pickles School) there was a sort of bond of understanding, if you like, that people shared a circumstance because of disability?

Yeah, yeah: and I think that I found that I didn't have many friends at home in the street, because I was never there. I mean, also we were not a family who mixed: we didn't mix very much. My father had a few brothers who we would go and visit, and he worked hard – he worked most Saturday mornings so that we could run a bigger car, because in those days we needed to, because, as you will know, in those days wheelchairs were big and heavy and stuff like that, and we used to like to go on holiday. We were one of the first people that I knew that went to Spain. We took two ridge tents to Spain, and that was... how old was I?... Thirteen, 14, something like that, and that was when (I mean, I'm not boasting, it was only because, as I say, me parents worked hard) we went to Spain for a fortnight, and that was lovely, and come 'home and tell everybody we'd been to Spain, and, ooh, it was good. I remember that, I enjoyed that very much.

And do you remember when you went to Spain? I guess that would then be the early sixties?

Yeah, '64, '63, something like that.

And do you remember at all circumstances – what people's reaction may have been?

Yeah, they hadn't ever seen... well, it appeared, whether they hadn't... we used to go in the little Spanish villages, off the beaten track, cos we didn't want to go to Blackpool with the sun, if you understand what I mean, we weren't in to that. We would go to the little Spanish villages, just past France really, because again bearing in mind we were going... we had a very... The first car Dad had, the first big one he had when we went was an old bull-nosed 1964 Morris Oxford: again, we've still got pictures of that around: I wish I had a model of it, cos as you can see round here, I'm into collecting models cars and all that sort of thing. But I collect a lot of old dust-collectors anyway, so perhaps it's good that I 'haven't got them. But I've got a very retentive memory, and I do have good memories of holidays in Spain, and the good weather, and, you know, sometimes we even get good weather in England for [laughs] about a fortnight a year, but...

What are some of the highlights of your memories of those holidays, Tony?

The holidays... I think, again, it was the journey, you know, and when you saw the... cos I think they were old Dakotas. They used to go from Lydd in Kent to Le Touquet, and then the nose cone... nose cone, is that the right word? Well, the front of the plane, anyway, would open up and they'd take about four or five cars in the front of each plane. Then there'd be a dozen or 18 of you sitting in the little plane, and you'd chug, chug, chug, chug, chug over to France: I'm sure you didn't go very fast cos it was too heavy for that. Then you'd get out at the other end, you'd drive your car all the way down to Spain, which would probably take a couple of days, and you'd have your 10 days in Spain, and you'd do the same thing coming back again. Ooh, it was

really such an adventure, you know, and you'd bring back a little present for your aunt or something: oh, it was really nice, you know. [Laughs] And then you'd start saving up your money, ready for next year, or something.

And where did you fly from in England?

From Lydd to Le Touquet in France.

Right, right. So this was before the package tour really took off.

Well yes, certainly for my... I mean, bearing in mind we were not a rich family, but we weren't poor, and I mean, again, you know, because Dad had to run a bigger car, because they had to get the chair in it, and, you know Mum didn't work much: she did sometimes, but not in the summer. We were lucky enough to be... Mum was working in a job where she could take the time off, so that she could look after me when I was at home from school, and that then meant she'd be... again, in those days, there was no such thing as equal pay for women, so of course Dad didn't get very much money. And I mean, I always had to have extra clothes because at that time, school terms would be about six or eight weeks, then you might get a weekend off if you were lucky, and you would have to go all the way up the A1 in the car, to come and pick you up. Oh, I don't know, it sounds as if I'm making it sound 'horrible, but I seem to only remember the good bits. I suppose that's all we do remember really, but I very much enjoyed my time at the Wilfred Pickles School, and, in fact, I think it was very late sixties, it might have been early seventies, I think it was 1970-ish, I actually organised a reunion in Fitzroy Square, from the Friday to the Sunday, and we did meet up with a few of us, and we enjoyed it, and they allowed us to have beer on the premises: we actually bought beer on sale or return. Poor old Bill Hargreaves wasn't too sure about that, but the lady, whose name I forget, she said, 'Oh that'll be all right', she said, as long as we didn't tell too many people, as long as nobody got drunk, and certainly didn't leave any empties about. I thought 'My goodness, I don't know what they thought we were going to do, [laughs] whether we were going to have an orgy or something!' I enjoy those sort of things. I like, you know, being able

to organise things, although I'm very lucky, I seem to be able to give people the idea and let them organise it, and then, just sort of stand there and see it all happen.

And taking the Wilfred Pickles School then, what are some of your particular memories of the school then?

Oh, I remember once, there was a chap there called Stewart Metcalf. It was a particular birthday, and his parents sent some money so that we could all go and see a film, and we went to see *The Alamo*, and I remember that, and I've seen it a few times since then on telly: but I always think of Stewart Metcalf, you know, giving us... we all had some money, we went off... I'm not even sure of the town: would it have been Stamford? Possibly: I'm not sure. Certainly, I don't think it was Peterborough. And we all went to the local cinema, and all saw *The Alamo*, about 14 of us, and then, of course, Bob Monkhouse's son was at the Wilfred Pickles School, for a little while. Unfortunately, Gary has now died. Also, one of the things that the Wilfred Pickles School had – they had an integrated section for people who were deaf, and they had a loop system all over the school. Cos I don't know how much people will remember about it, or even know, but the Wilfred Pickles School was an old grange, and it had some cottages around it as well, so you had some people in the main house, and then, of course, as the school, I suppose, became more prosperous, or needed more room, they built a school hall. I remember that being built and going up there, and then we had proper assemblies with everybody. Mind you, it was only a very small school: it was only 70 people: there was 60 people boarding, and then there were 10 or 12 that would come in: a couple from Stamford in, I believe, it was Mr Tilley's taxi, and then a few would come in the Dormobile bus thing: what on earth do you call it? It doesn't matter what you call it, but like a small bus, belonging to the school.

And, again, you know, let's take a typical day.

Take a typical day. Oh, that was a bit more organised then, because, you know, you'd have assembly in the morning, and a couple of lessons, and then you'd have a break for milk and stuff like that. Of course, the weekends were a bit different, but I seem to

remember we had some homework to do each night, and I wasn't very good at eating the food because I was very fussy at eating food: I'm still quite fussy now, but I seem to live on pork chops, but I enjoy those so I suppose that's a good thing really, but...

And then at weekends, what were the arrangements there?

At weekends: oh, I seem to remember we were always rehearsing for plays or speech days, or something like that, and occasionally we would go to a big park, Wickstead Park: I'm not sure where that was. We'd go there, and I remember once there was a few of us walking along on this park, and a lady stopped the house master who was with us, and said, 'Excuse me, how many children have you?' And I believe whoever it was may have said 'About nine', and she said, 'Ooh, could I give each of your children, and indeed yourself, an ice cream, in appreciation of my good legs?' and [laughs] I've never forgotten that, so, again, as I said, it's funny some of the memories that stick in one's mind.

And were you aware, in a sense, what school you were at? Did you feel that, 'Well, why have I had to leave home?' What were your thoughts?

Yeah, I didn't like leaving home, because in those day one didn't use the phone unless it was an emergency, or unless it was... I remember asking for permission to ring home, when I knew my mum was taking her driving test, and it was one of these big old 'Press Button B...' you know, and we managed to use that, and rung up and found out whether me mum had passed her driving [test]. [Laughs.] I don't remember whether she did or not, but you know you would never certainly use the phone to ring up, but you used to write letters. You used to write a couple of letters a week, and it was always good fun to get a letter back, you know: and a parcel, perhaps.

And when you were during term time, did they seem long weeks?

Yes, some weeks were longer than others, and of course, it was where the school was, up there in Rutland, it was very isolated. I think I may have told you this last week: well, if I did, you'll be able to edit it all out anyway, but the school was...

[End of Tape 5 Side B]

Tape 5 Side B [Track 8]

OK, yeah. So you were talking about the school being a little bit isolated, perhaps.

Yeah, yeah. I think it's less isolated now because of Rutland Water, and more people go up there for that: it's right near there. I went last year – I managed to get my care worker to take me up there, and I popped in to see it, and it's quite nice. It's now used for various sorts of sheltered living for various people, I don't quite know who owns it, I didn't have the cheek to go into all that, because what happened was we went up there for one journey, and a very nice lady let us go in the front door, and just have a look. I didn't want to go in everybody's flat, but I wanted to see whether the front door would evoke any memories of school, and indeed it did: and I wasn't quite sure how I felt.

And when you were, you know, in a particular lesson, how did the teachers allow for enabling each pupil to keep up, depending on what their disability was?

Well, I think the teachers mainly seemed to be, well, certainly Mrs Gibson, who I remember quite well, she was a congregational minister's wife, but they all seemed to be slightly, what would you say, a bit matronly, a bit slow – very kindly but yet very firm. I don't know quite how they did it I suppose, and of course, people would be taken out of school to go for physio, so one tended to lose a bit of schooling, but of course, you would quite often get people rather like myself, who were off school for months, with operations or such stuff, so I mean that's certainly why I missed a lot of schooling during the last two years of school.

Did the physiotherapy, then, take place in the grounds of the school?

Oh yeah, it was just in another room. You would go off for physiotherapy and, indeed, some of the people that had hearing aids and that, they would obviously have to go for speech therapy, and some, indeed, had to go for both.

And...

I obviously didn't [laughs] have any speech therapy, except to be encouraged occasionally, to be quiet, to give somebody else a chance.

And do you remember, from that time: you said you liked English, but if you come across things you studied at the time like History, or like Science, what are your memories of that and thoughts on that?

I don't ever remember studying any science. History, I always liked. Geography, I could never follow, because even now, people can take me past Tesco's down there at the bottom of Pitsea, and I'd be lost. And I think it's because I've never actually driven: that's what me dad says. He always says, 'Well, cos you've never actually had to physically get yourself anywhere, you don't sort of look in the same way that if you're a passenger in a car.' Apparently, you don't take as much in as you would have to, if you were a driver.

And do you remember how things were taught? Teachers used to write on the blackboards, I guess?

Yeah, write on the blackboard, and if somebody was deaf, I think, as I say, we had the loop system in certain classrooms, not in all, and they had the loop system in the main hall, where we had assemblies and such.

And you talked earlier on about rehearsing for plays.

Yeah.

Tell me a little bit more about that: what kind of plays did you take part in?

Well, I don't remember, really. I can actually remember a speech of one of them, but I mean, I won't bore you with that cos it's not very important, and I remember, you

know, you would become very close to the house parents, and that. One of them used to sing *Paddy McGinty's Goat*, and for a laugh the other day, I was trying to remember it cos we put on a concert of our own, and I got up and tried to sing *Paddy McGinty's*... well I got that. I couldn't carry a tune in a bucket, but when I got up on the stage and tried to sing this, this house master, whose name I remember was Mr Frost, [laughs] poor man, I've never seen him laugh so much, I think he must have almost had an accident. He certainly nearly had an apoplexy you know, [laughs] he couldn't breath for a while, it was really quite impressive, but it was quite fun, and we enjoyed that.

So the house masters: were they also teachers, then?

No, no. But when we were doing the concerts, sometimes we would do some of the rehearsing over the weekend.

And so there were a number of you in each house, then?

Yes.

What sort of numbers were there?

Usually about 12, I think, and there were four houses, but there were actual flats or houses for the house boys and that, but there were actually sort of about six or seven little cottages round the area. I assume it was part of... at one time, the Grange would have been something to do with a farm. And there was the main house, which was where most of the dormitories were, and then, of course, there were various sort of cottages outside, which also boarded various other of us.

And you were at the Wilfred Pickles School, from nine to...

From the age of nine to 16-ish, yes.

So, in a class, then, given the number of pupils...

There were about 12. Never any more than about 12, as I remember.

And there must have been then, obviously, an age range.

Yeah, I think it changed... [sneezes] excuse me, I think it changed a little after I left, but when I was there we would range from five, right up to 16 and a half, or so, and then, as I say, I went on for a further year to Dene Park, which was then a further education centre (I don't know if the Society still has it) and that's down in Kent.

So, in any particular class, at any particular time, there would have been children with different ages?

Yeah, yeah.

So how did they get the teaching, then, to match the different ages?

Well, I think you sort of moved up yearly, but you all moved up together, so your ages moved up together, and occasionally if it was something that might have needed, say, a projector or television, two classes would join together, cos obviously, if we had 12 classes, you wouldn't in those days have had 12 televisions, or even, 12 'wirelesses', as we would have called them then, cos not every room had a wireless radio. I'm sorry.

And in the evenings, after you'd finished your homework and so on, what kind of things did you do?

Oh, if you were lucky, you could watch, perhaps a half an hour of TV but most of us had transistor radios, and we would listen to those, perhaps, for an hour. Of course, the sort of getting undressed and stuff always took quite some time, and without

labouring the point, everything was quite an effort, so of course by the time it was time to go to bed, I always felt quite tired.

And what sort of time did you go to bed, then Tony?

Well, I would assume about eight o'clock. I mean, I really can't remember, but I would assume it was something like that.

Yeah. And it was a school with both boys and girls?

Yeah, it was a co-ed, yes.

And so did you have much contact with the girls at the time, then, or - ?

Not really. I think, [laughs] I seem to remember there were less girls than boys, but I think, without noticing it, I assume we must have been kept quite separate.

Different dormitories and so on?

Yes, yes.

And, in your mind's eye, can you see children there that you remember?

I can remember some names: I can't remember the children, as such, no. I can remember cos there's only a couple that I've seen since I've left.

And when you had the reunion at Park Crescent, you must have then come across adults that you last saw as children.

Yeah, well we'd all grown up a little bit, but it was only three or four years, so I suppose we were still quite young.

Oh right, so this was when you were about sort of 20?

Twenty-one, 22, yeah.

Yeah. And have you heard of, if not met, children that were there at the time, since?

No, not really.

Yeah, yeah.

No particular reason. In fact, I would like to, but one tends not [to] do that, unless there is a reason to do it, and, of course, as you will know, when you've got to consider carting wheelchairs about and sleeping anywhere overnight, when you start dealing with people with disabilities, it creates a lot of problems, and unless there is a real reason to do it, when you've got to sort of take into account that most of us would need a PA [personal assistant] for all or part of the day, or we'd need to take a friend, or somebody, to do something with us, or for us, you are then coming into needing quite a large premises or something, aren't you?

And you mentioned, Tony, that you missed a couple of years in the latter part of your time at Wilfred Pickles, because of operations; then the decision to go to Dene Park. Tell me a little bit about Dene Park: what kind of set-up was there?

Oh, they called it a 'further education centre', but I think that was rather grand.

[Coughing.] Excuse me, I'm going to cough.

It was more... [coughing]... Sorry, would you like some water?

[Coughing.] Oh dear, sorry. I'll ask the question again, as you... Thank you, Tony. What kind of set-up was Dene Park?

Well, Dene Park had previously been used as the Delarue School. The Delarue School had been given some larger premises down the road, and it was being used then as a further education centre for The Spastics Society, as it was then, but it was more a chance of giving people the chance to catch up on some of the things they may have been unlucky to miss out on in school. I mean, I will never forget one of the teachers said, 'Well, it is important: if you can't teach people to read because they just can't grasp it, you must at least teach them the difference between 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen', so that they don't walk in and out the wrong toilet when they're out.' [Laughs.] Which, she said it in a sort of a semi-patronising way, but it is, in fact, very true: you've gotta teach people if they can't actually read which buses to get on or off, if they're going to have any hope of getting into town to get themselves a little bit of shopping, and, quite seriously, which toilet to go in and out of, so they don't make any embarrassing mistakes. I mean, it's slightly easier now because one tends to have little diagrams on them as well as the words, but it certainly wasn't so in those days. And, when we were at Dene Park, they would let us free on the Saturdays, and we could go into town and perhaps watch the cricket, or go and have a Chinese meal in Tonbridge which I seem to remember doing quite a few times, occasionally go to the cinema.

What sort of numbers of school students, were at Dene Park?

I think, again, it was sort of around about 50, 60, something like that. Maybe not as many, I don't remember. Certainly, we had... I'll try and remember... oh! Mr Mayhew. There was an MP called Mayhew at the time – it was his brother. He had spent some time in New Zealand.

He was a teacher?

He was the headmaster.

Right.

Or actually, they called him 'Principal', because it was a further education centre. For some time he'd worked at Lord Mayor Treloar College, that's where he'd come from. He was very good, a very impressive man: I liked him very much.

And so, in deciding to go there: do you remember being involved in the decision to go there?

Yeah, very much involved in the decision, and I enjoyed that year. That year went very fast, and I enjoyed that very much.

And what kinds of things did you study there?

Well, again, it was just a chance to catch up on some of things you hadn't done in your other schools, and to give you a chance to grow up rather quickly, you know. I mean, there was, certainly at the Wilfred Pickles School, if you forgot a handkerchief, it was possible to ask a house parent to go and get it for you, but of course there wasn't that number of staff at Dene Park, so if you forgot something, you had to try and remember to get it yourself. And one tended not to want to go up and down in the lift too many times, cos it took a lot of time up, sort of running – well I say, 'running' up and down in the lift, that's a bit of a misnomer when you're in a wheelchair. In fact, I seem to remember that the lift wasn't big enough for wheelchairs, so we had to sort of stand up on our walking frame and get up and down that way, and then somebody would bring your chair up afterwards, I seem to remember.

And again, it was a co-educational organisation?

Yeah, co-educational school, yes, and...

And so what kinds of things, then, in your own free time... you talked about going to the [clears throat] cinema and out and about, and so on, but you were in dormitories, I suppose, were you?

Yeah, but some of us were lucky enough to only be two or three in one room, which was quite a luxury.

And so you would listen, again, would you, to the radio?

To the radio, yeah. And I think there was two TV rooms, so you could have either BBC or ITV, and, of course, that was pre-colour television.

[Coughs.] Oh dear! And do you remember any particular television programmes from that time, at all?

No, no.

And the radio – I suppose there were gradually a few more stations?

No, because new stations didn't come out until late 1967, sort of August, so that would have been after I'd left Dene Park. I came to Chigwell House in April 1967, and as I remember, and I could be wrong, the pirate radio stations didn't sort of come out until about September time.

[Coughs.] Oh dear, excuse me.

I'll go see if I can go and get you some...

No, don't worry. Tell you what, I'll... [Break in recording.] Did you, Tony, at Dene Park have social events at the college itself?

Yeah, we did a few, and [laughs] one of the things I enjoyed was the Map Club. I don't know why, cos there were girls there, but it seemed to be mainly lads, and we used to go and visit places somewhere. Why it was called the Map Club I don't really know, cos we didn't do much with maps, but we had some discussions and occasionally we had visitors come and speak to us. I remember Colin Cowdrey came

one time – it was only a year’s course – but I remember thinking I was very impressed with him, he was a very nice chap, and I was Chairman of the Map Club, and it was my privilege to thank him for coming, and it was a very interesting evening.

And he talked about cricket mainly?

Yeah, mainly about cricket. And I remember one of the chaps asked him, ‘Who, apart from yourself, was the best Yorkshire cricketer?’ And the poor chap, you could see ‘him – Colin Cowdrey this was – he was trying not to be rude to the guy, and he said sort of something like, ‘Ooh, I don’t know how impressive I am’, he said, and he mentioned a few names and the chap was quite impressed, the lad he was talking to. And everybody clapped, and a few people laughed, and it was a very enjoyable evening. [Coughing.] Obviously, the chap who run the Map Club, he was something to do with Marley Tiles, I can’t remember his name, but he obviously knew Colin, cos Colin Cowdrey played for Kent for a while, and, indeed, his son did too.

And how would you describe the overall atmosphere at Dene Park?

Oh it was slightly less formal than what it was at the Wilfred Pickles School, but it was very good. Again, I enjoyed it very much, you know, cos...

And -

... you went out a lot, and you visited places you...

So you went out during the day, as well as

Yeah, yeah,

... part of your studies?

They would take you to places where some people might work, and, you know, take you to shops and things like that, and [inaudible] I always enjoy going out, even more now, I think, cos you appreciate it more, but I don't tend to stay in very much. I mean, there was somebody came to visit. He tried to visit me to fill in some survey or other, and he knocked on the main door at the reception, and he told the manager, who runs the place who happened to be in that day, he said 'I'm looking for Mr Stamford with regards to...' 'Ooh,' he said, 'you'll never find 'him in! He's never here!' [Laughs. Coughing.] I think after the third attempt, and me ringing the chap up, the chap ringing me up, we agreed to manage to find each other. But it's true; I don't spend a lot of time in here, certainly not since my wife is no longer here: and my parents live local, so I'm over there, or they're here, and we go out a lot together in the summer cos I'm very lucky, I have a vehicle in which I can take two other people, plus a driver. And as my parents don't drive quite so much distance now, if I'm going anywhere and they'd like to come, we tend to take them with us.

And so, when you were at Dene Park, what are your memories of any discussions about what you should do next?

Well, I thought I was going to the office training place in Chester, but I didn't do that. I don't know quite what reason was given for the fact that I shouldn't do it, but I didn't do it. Anyway, and then from there, just along by us there was a home, 'institution' I suppose you'd call it now, for younger physically-handicapped people opening up, and my father and various people, social workers, and myself, to a lesser or greater degree, bearing in mind it was 1967, we argued with them, saying I that should be allowed to go there every day, and they said, 'No, you know, he can go there three times a week', and my dad said, 'Well, that's all right', he said, 'but, what does he do the other two days?' He said, 'We can't leave him in bed all day. I don't feel that we can leave him in the house on his own because he wouldn't be safe to make himself a drink, or get out of the house, if there were a fire.' He said, 'My wife and I cannot afford to give up our work, nor are we going to, because we're quite young. We still want our holidays,' he said, 'and we also want Tony to have a life after his own.' So anyway, after a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, something which lasted

about six months, I remember that Essex County Council, in their wisdom, agreed that I should go to Chigwell House. In fact I was at Chigwell House from April 1967 until I moved here in October 1983, and that was, what, 17-odd years, maybe a little longer, and I enjoyed most of that.

And and that was a residential set-up,

Yeah.

... so what was the typical week like?

Typical week, typical day: well, when I first went there, you were expected to get up for breakfast, but of course that soon died out, thank goodness. Some of us would stay in bed most of the day if we so wished, and perhaps we'd get up and go down the pub at lunchtime, or down the pub in the evening. People like the Round Table would come in, occasionally, and show films for us and people would take us out, and some of us still had our parents and we would go home for the weekend: I mean, you could come and go as you pleased, it wasn't a prison, it was just an institution for younger physically-handicapped people. And it was envisaged then that by that time Essex County Council would have built somewhere else so that the people between 40 and 60, which was then the time at which you would have gone into an old folks' home, would have somewhere else to go: but that building never ever got built. But now, I believe, Chigwell House has had a complete refurb. and I haven't been back for many, many years, cos the people I used to go and see have moved out or have moved, are no longer there, or they've moved on to other places, but I don't know. My parents have moved away from there. In fact, as I said earlier, they're now living down here in Pitsea, quite near to me, so we don't have occasion to go up that way any more, so I couldn't quite tell you what's happened at Chigwell House.

And was there any thought given, or did you have wishes yourself to explore work options, or anything like that at all?

No. I wanted to. There was never any thought about that because, I think, it was mainly the difficulty of getting to work, cos I never drove and certainly, in those days, there was never the things like the PAs, or things like that. There was a workshop, well we used to call it a 'workshop', but it wasn't in fact a workshop: it was more a occupational therapy place attached to Chigwell House, where you could go and you could make a few baskets, or, you know, stools and that sort of thing, which never appealed to me. But then, towards the end of my time there, I used to do a bit of cooking, which I quite enjoyed. [Inaudible.] I used to make cakes, and biscuits, and made one or two dinners for various people, which was quite good fun, cos of course you had to go out and buy the food, and stuff like that – that was always good fun – and it gave you a chance to eat something other than what you were supposed to be eating. I always, as I say, popped off to the pub occasionally, which I enjoyed cos I could push myself down the road to the King's Head in Chigwell, which was a rather nice pub.

[Clears throat.] And apart from, you know, shopping trips and trips out, and so on, was the pub then, the sort of main contact you had with the local community?

Yes, [laughs] it was my main contact with the local community, definitely.

Yeah.

Yes.

And, as I say, one year follows another, I suppose. How do you look back on that time, really?

Oh, I enjoyed that time. I'm very grateful to that time, cos that's where I met my wife, Tracy, who unfortunately died in 1990. We came here, and we had five, very nearly six years, and most of that time was good. Tracy was ill for three months, and then she died. She was taken from Basildon Hospital to Bart's in an ambulance, with a doctor and a nurse, and she laid in Basildon Hospital for 11 weeks, and then

subsequently died. But fortunately I was with her, so that was rather nice, and she passed away quite peacefully in her sleep: and I was able to get her buried where she wanted to be buried, and it was a lovely service, and that's the most important thing to me, and those memories cannot be taken away, you know. I've now lived on my own for quite some time, and I don't know that I would want to get married again because [laughs] I have the luxury of being able to do more or less what I want to do, when I want to do it, and I don't know that a wife would put up with that. [Laughs.]

And when you were at [clears throat] Chigwell House, you had then for income, what?

A very small amount of money, because they took away most of your money. When I first went there in 1967, you got 16 shillings to live on and two and threepence comforts allowance. Now the comforts allowance goes back to the time in the, well, not workhouse, the old folks' home, when they used to give the ladies sweeties, and the gentlemen tobacco. Well, they discontinued with that, and gave you an extra two and threepence a week. So you had 18 and threepence to live on, bearing in mind that 18 and threepence was to pay for all your clothes, all your houses, all your holidays, anything and everything. That was all the money you got a week: 18 and threepence. But, take away from that, you didn't have to pay for any food, you got three meals a day, you got all your heating, lighting, you know, and everything, all your laundry done, everything. So it could be argued, although I don't agree with it, but it could be argued, that you don't actually need very much money.

And you know, on a typical day or a typical week, how did you fill your time, really?

Well, I always listened to the radio a lot – loved to listen to the radio, and indeed still do. We 'ad a public phone. I would use that a lot, ringing me mum for this, that or the next thing. Again, I used to write these sort of very odd letters to friends. We would occasionally go to the Festival Hall up in London, cos Chigwell House had its own bus, you know, with the tail lift and things like that, and we'd go to the Festival Hall in London, and all the local theatres. I enjoyed that. I always do like the theatre. My

mum says I go to the theatre to watch paint dry, and I think she's almost right: but I just love being with people. I spend a little bit of my time, nearly every day, in one of the local hostelrys, and in fact I've written a book that a few of the local pubs around. I got lucky enough to get a Millennium Grant to do that, but that was finished over two years ago, so it's probably now slightly out of date.

And [clears throat], what did the book focus on?

Well it focussed on lots of things. It focussed on how one was treated by the staff in the pub, what the general access was like, and what the feeling of the pub was like.

[Coughs.] So what -

So each...

So what was it intended to be of use for?

Well, it was actually just an access guide, but I found, for myself, it was more [coughs], excuse me, it was more a chance of me, having to organise myself...

[Coughs] Oh dear, sorry.

... to make sure I gave up the time, and we worked out a little form that I would fill in when I came back, you know. Was I impressed with the food? We didn't always have food. Were there any steps? Were there any bad attitudes? Was there much parking? Was there much space? Was there any non-smoking areas? What was the disabled loo like? Was there, indeed, a disabled loo? Cos in quite a few of them, there wasn't. The one thing we did find was that it was most of the new-build pubs that were good, but by design they were actually restaurants that served beer, rather than proper [laughs] little old-fashioned country pubs, if you know the... [interviewer coughs]. They were the bigger chains like the Wetherspoons, and I don't know who else runs pubs

nowadays other than Wetherspoons, but, you know, the chains, rather than the individual pubs.

And, just taking, you know, pubs as an example: what kind of changes have you noticed over the years, in terms of things like ease of access?

Well, I think it's getting better, but whether it's getting better quickly enough, is a matter for debate.

[Clears throat.] And, in terms of the amount of contact you have with other people in pubs, going into a pub that you don't know, or a pub that you do know, have you encountered different reactions from different...?

Yeah, I think you do, and I think a lot of it is to do with how you approach people. You've got to get out there and kick it, I think, and to prove that you're normal, I suppose. I don't know why you should have to prove anything, but to prove that you're not going to actually start taking your clothes off, and start slinging them about and you're not actually going to get a pint of beer and spit it in somebody's eye, either by accident or on purpose, you know, and you have to, if you can, sort of mould in to the company.

[End of Tape 5 Side B]

Tape 6 Side A [Track 9]

How would you say, Tony, attitudes have changed over the years?

Well I don't know that they have really. Although, then again, I'm going to contradict myself here. I think that they have, in as much as that most people with disabilities have slightly more money than they did have, so we at least have a chance to get out now and to mix on level ground with 'normal' people, and to, sort of, you know... We can afford to buy someone a drink, without them thinking that, 'Ooh, if I take a drink off this person, have I in fact taken the money that he may have to use for tomorrow's dinner?', you know, and because people see more of us 'disabled people' about, I think we're less of a threat to them. I don't know what sort of a threat anybody like me could be cos somebody would only have to go, 'Boo!' behind me, and I'd chuck the drink over me shoulder anyway, and have to come home and change me shirt. I'm very lucky: I've got quite a nice flat here, I've got good parents, I've got enough money to be able to go and do what I want to do, I can buy, within reason, whatever I want, I can go and visit the theatre when I want. I don't have holidays, cos they're too complicated, but if I want to go away for a weekend, I can do that. I'm a very lucky person.

And can I ask, Tony, [clears throat], where you're able, then, to draw your sources of income from?

Yes. I get money from Essex County Council, a small amount of money from them, to pay for... cos I have a live-in personal assistant. I get a certain amount of money from Essex County Council, I get a certain amount of money from the Independent Living Fund: now that money has to be paid into a separate account. That money is administered by 'Essex Pass' [Essex Coalition of Disabled People], and they are a collection of people who pay all the bills, they see to all the National Insurance and everything else, and then every three months, they send me a bill, telling me what they've done. They pay the agency, and the agency provide me with carers (24-hour care) and the carers have to be able to drive. I'm very lucky, I have my own vehicle in

which I'm driven in my wheelchair, and I'm involved in lots of different things. I'm involved in the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, and various other offshoots of that, and various bits and pieces, which keeps me off the streets.

And what does it mean to you, Tony, to be able to live independently?

Oh, it's very important. I almost have nightmares every day thinking, 'God forbid, I should ever have to go back into residential accommodation, and be one of a crowd, and have to wait...' I mean, I know even now, when you've got somebody living on the premises, you still have to wait and you have to work together as a team, because you can't be sitting there and going [clicks fingers] flicking your fingers every five minutes, and expecting things to happen immediately, cos they don't. [Laughs.] I mean, if they did it would make you a very arrogant person anyway, but I mean, I think if you plan your week you can sort of go around and do things. I mean, as I said the other week, we were up in York for the day looking at the National Railway Museum. Well, I mean, there's not going to be many people that are going to drive to York and back in one day, and still have time to go to the pub, and enough money indeed to do it, cos that week we spent £65 on petrol, and [laughs] I mean, my car doesn't take a lot of petrol: it's only a little Renault Kanga, I think it's 1.4 litres. That's not a particularly powerful engine, is it? I don't know much about engines really. I mean we left at sort of half past five and we were, as I say, back in Basildon at nine o'clock in the evening, and still had time to have a hour and a half or so in the pub [laughs] before it shut, which was good cos it meant my PA [personal assistant] was able to go off and do a bit of his boxing training, so he got a bit of a relax that day after what must have been for him, quite a lot of driving. But we did enjoy it, cos while we were up in York, we went to look at the newly-restored Minster, as we thought, but in fact it was 20 years ago since it had been burnt down, and either 14 or 16 years ago since it was re-opened.

[Clears throat.] And what are your observations, Tony, on changes in recent years – changes which have seen more people with disabilities, more disabled people, getting together with others to press for change?

Well, I was involved in that very slightly in the seventies. I remember my friends and I, two or three of my friends, went up to London, wanting to use the tube in the rush hour. Now, we fully expected this would cause ructions, and we would be on the local South East News, saying, 'All these naughty disabled people are trying to stop...' but what happened, of course, was the jolly station master, or whatever he was, stopped the wretched escalator thing, and we were bumped down the escalators and of course sent off the station. So, when we rung the press and told them that, [laughs] there was nothing controversial, so they didn't want to know! I mean, so that was... although it achieved the end, it didn't. That was a bit unimpressive really, cos we couldn't do anything with it, but we still... I was lucky enough to go over to France four or five weeks back, and I was told that I'd be able to get on the bus in France, but in fact I couldn't, so we had to spend the whole day just in Calais, just walking up and down. Anyway, that was a good day, some of it, but it wasn't as good as we thought it might have been, but you've got to sort of take the best of everything all the time, I think, and every day that you get up, and you have a good day, and you don't fall out of your wheelchair, is a good day, in my opinion.

And have you been aware of many changes in the built environment, around and about?

Well, there's not too many impasses really cos it's a comparatively new town. There are of course small changes, but Basildon was built as a London overspill town in 1949, the main Basildon New Town. In fact, it's not called a 'new town' any more: I think it dropped it's 'new town' status about four years ago, and I heard this week that we're actually thinking of going for 'city' status, which means that we're gonna have quite a bit more population than we have got. And we've got to find a cathedral from somewhere: I'm not quite so sure where one actually finds a cathedral: I believe they've got an extra one in Liverpool that they don't want, but I don't know whether we can borrow that or whether we just upgrade one of our present churches to a cathedral: I'm not very into what that involves.

And if you had a magic wand or whatever, and you were able to change something, or things, what would be the things that you'd want to change?

Well, I think, without sounding a bit sort of blasé, I think everybody needs to be a little more tolerant. I think to wish for more money is a bit sort of empty-headed really, cos if we wish for more money, it means that it's got to come from somewhere, so if we have more money, it means somebody else is going to lose out.

And [clears throat], in getting your package of care provision, how did you go about that process?

Well, I was very lucky. I had a friend who'd already done it, so I was able to go to him, and he introduced me to a chap who was able to advise me, and I'll never forget, the best bit of advice I got was, he said that, 'What you've gotta do, is to take your worst day as every day', because he said, 'If you can set up a package, which will cope with your worst day, then your best days are a bonus.' I think what he really meant was, you have to be very honest with yourself, because when you're setting up these packages, unless you actually tell people exactly what you need, you're not going to be able to go back to them very easily, very quickly, to get the care package, or the hours in the care package altered. Cos I mean, it's not so much what you want, because, obviously the agency that you use, or the people that you use, you have to interview each other quite extensively before they will take anything like that on, but in order to get the amount of care hours that you need, you have to be scrupulously honest.

And [clears throat], looking back Tony, perhaps, over the years do you believe that you have been subject yourself to discrimination?

I suppose so, definitely. But, it's discrimination from the very places where you don't expect it. I mean, when my wife and I first moved in here, and other people came to visit us, and they said, 'Ooh, more disabled people coming to live here. We don't mind you. We're used to you, you know, but we don't want any more.' And it wasn't

until I came home, I was sitting down perhaps half an hour later, perhaps having a cup of tea, cos I used to drink tea in those days, and then I thought, 'Well, don't [he] really realise how rude that is, how ...' and, in all fairness, I don't think the person realised what they had just said.

And what do you believe is the way to change attitudes?

I don't think you can. Well, yeah, the way to change attitudes is to do what we're doing now, and to get out. You've got to get out there. You can't fight from the inside: you must get out there, and you must do whatever you can, whatever you want to do in order to further... You've got to be very selfish in some ways, and you've got to be very sure of what you want, and you've got to be almost 95 percent sure that you're going to be able to get it: because if you're not, you're going to bang your head up against a brick wall. I mean, you're not stupid, you know, you've worked in all sorts of things, you know how difficult it is to get a job, how difficult it is to keep a job, you know how difficult it is to get out of bed in the morning, and you know, as a person with a disability, how much more difficult it is for you. And it is for everybody, and you don't ask for pity, no more do I. All right, some days you're a bit stiff or you're a bit tired, you know, you may need a bit more help. If you work with a good bunch of people, maybe you get the help, I don't know – I don't wanna know, it's not relevant – we're not discussing our own lives in quite that way, but if you're lucky you get the help and we survive, and every day we survive is a good day. If we've had a day when we haven't fallen over, or where we haven't been involved in an argument with a car, then it's a good day, and that's all we need ask for. We don't want to win the lottery, although it'd be rather nice if we did, but I mean to want to do that, you're going to have a very sad life, if that's the only the thing you can want, because money won't do everything. Money will help you, but I think what you really need is your own self-belief, because unless you believe in yourself, unless you've got a positive image, if you like, you cannot hope to put that onto other people.

And what, Tony, are some of your happiest memories?

Oh, the happiest memories I believe are when I was with my wife, and when I was slightly fitter than I am now. But you can't look back all the time because if you do, you become melancholy. Again, I think every day that we can wake up, and it's not raining, not snowing, is a good day, and every day we can do a good turn for someone. I mean, I'm not big-headed or anything, but I'm lucky enough to go in the pub yesterday evening and I saw a good friend of mine, who I hadn't known very long, and I said, 'Oh, hello Phil', and funnily enough, got a good name there, and, 'Oh hello, how are you?' I said, 'Coming in the pub for a drink?', and he said, 'No, I haven't got any money', so I said, 'I didn't say, "Have you got any money?"' I said, "Are you coming in the pub for a drink?"" He said, 'Oh yeah, if you can afford to buy me one.' I said, 'I'd be pleased', and Phil and I stood there for an hour, chatting, and he quite enjoyed that, and he said, 'Well, I shall buy you one on Friday.' I said, 'Well look', I said, 'I know you're a bit strapped at the moment: you don't have to'. He said, 'No, I want to.' I said 'Fair enough, you buy me one on Friday then, if you want to, and I look forward to drinking it', and he went away quite happy, and I was quite happy cos there weren't many other people in the pub who I would have spoken to, so I did my good deed for the day, and I think if we're given enough grace to do at least one good deed a day, then whatever you do in life, you're always get it back.

And what are some of the times that you'd rather not recall?

Well, I think when you get depressed and when you're sort of sitting in the middle of something, and you sort of think, 'Oh blimey, is it really worth it? Do I really want to climb out of this bed? Are people really going to notice if I don't turn up, and have I really got the strength to fight through another day?' And then you think, 'Well, it's not your choice, you know, we're all here...', and I haven't got a religious faith in any way, but I believe that it's not up to us to decide when we're no longer here. I believe that, if you like, life is [a] journey, and some of us [laughs] have a very long journey, some of us have a very difficult journey, some of us have a hard journey. But I believe we have to have some sort of, I won't say 'black, bad times', but you have to have some times that are not as good as others, so that you realise how good the good ones are...

Sure.

... Otherwise it makes you sort of selfish.

And what things would you still like to do that you haven't yet had a chance to do?

Oh, I don't really know, I think I'd like to be able to do more of what we're doing, although I think I would like to be on your side, so that I could learn more. I think, again, if we're lucky enough every day to learn something and to be able to pass on our knowledge to others. I think that is so important: and to be able to leave a gathering of people, and they say, 'Oh that's nice. He's gone. We've all had a good evening, and let's look forward to tomorrow, or next Wednesday, or whatever, or next year, or ...' I know this time of year now, half past two in the afternoon, or whatever time it is, on a sort of semi-cold Wednesday, let's say quarter to three time, whatever it is, or beginning to get dark: by the time you get home tonight, it'll be so dark, you'll have to use your car lights, and you'll get in, and probably, if you've got young children, they'll already be in bed, and then by the time you get up in the morning, it's already dark, and all it starts again, doesn't it? Then we get a fortnight off for Christmas, and it starts again, and it's January, and we've got another two months where it might snow, and then we're looking forward to our holidays, and then before you look round, it's August, and people are starting talking about 'Well, oh, come on, we'd better start looking in the sales for things for Christmas presents!' Well in fact, at the weekend, I was with some very good friends of mine and Dorothy said to me, 'I send over 300 Christmas cards a year, and in fact, I start writing my Christmas cards in January,' she said, 'because [laughs] I haven't got time to leave them all till November, cos I'd never get them all done', and I thought, 'Well!' She said, 'Not only that', she said, 'I can buy the two-for-ones.' She said, [laughs] 'They're a lot cheaper in January than what they are in December, or October.' And I'd never thought of that, but it's very true.

And if you could pass a message to yourself, when young, what would that message be?

Listen to them [laughs] what are bit older than yourself, and try and remember some of it. And if you're lucky enough, never be afraid to pass on your own views: and, you know, stick to your own view, and don't change your stance, and don't be sucked in by the wrong people, and be lucky enough to have the knowledge to know who the wrong people are.

Yeah.

That's really all I can think of today. I don't know about yourself.

OK, Tony. Let's...

[End of recording]