



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

Antonia Lister-Kaye Interviewed by

British Library ref. C1134/06/01-11

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## **Oral History**

# **Interview Summary Sheet**

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Collection title:

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

Interviewee's surname:

Lister-Kaye

Title:

Interviewee's

forename:

Anthonia

Sex:

Female

Occupation:

Psychotherapist and writer

Date and place of

1931

birth:

Date(s) of recording:

15<sup>th</sup> March 2005, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2005, 11<sup>th</sup> April 2005, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2005, 10<sup>th</sup> May

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Location of interview:

Name of interviewer: Alex White

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Number of

11

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1411kbps)

cassettes:
Mono or stereo:

stereo

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(HH:MM:SS)

Additional material:

A video interview with Antonia Lister-Kaye for Speaking for Ourselves is

archived at the Wellcome Library in the Moving Image & Sound

collections.

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Interview notes:

The first session was recorded on both cassette tape and mini-disc. The digital file for the first session was created from the mini-disc recording.

Antonia Lister-Kaye Page 1 C1134/06 Minidisc 1 [Digitised as Part 1]

### Minidisc 1 [Track 1]

[From 00:03:02]

Antonia Lister-Kaye. It's the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2005, and this is Tape 1. I thought, if we could start by asking you, when and where were you born?

I was born in Cardiff, in 1931.

And what was the date?

22<sup>nd</sup> November, a gloomy month to be born in, at the height of the depression. [laughs.] 1931. Mm.

And what were your, what were your parents?

Well, my father was in the army, and I was actually born, practically on the barracks square, and I was very early, and my mother, my mother didn't realise it was all so imminent, because, and she'd, she'd been to an army cocktail party, and she said to one of her friends, 'Ooh, I do feel peculiar.' I wasn't due for another two months, [rustling noise] so I'm told, and this other woman rushed my mother back to the C.O.'s house, where my dad was living; my dad was living, and mother were living, and I was born in about, about two minutes after she got to the house. No doctor, no nurse: nothing, and I think it was a bit ballsed up, and that's why I got this slight disability.

And how, how did that, how did that first sort of manifest itself?

Mm?

How did that first manifest itself?

Well, I have to tell you a bit more about the birth now, [rustling noise] because [laughs] it was quite interesting. My mother was a Christian Scientist, and she didn't like doctors, but, I think it was explained to her that at, we must at least have a nurse, and my father got a chicken, got a chicken incubator from his brother, who was a farmer, rushed to the house, and I never went to hospital. I was kept in an incubator, a chicken incubator, in my father's study, and they had, they, they did have this nurse, that was a compromise, but my mother didn't see me for weeks and weeks, because she was quite ill, and I don't think she wanted me anyway. I know she didn't, because she was only, very young, and, you know, didn't know much. She wouldn't have had me if she'd known anything. [laughs] But, yes, so that was, I think that's how I came to be, how I am.

And when, when were your parents first aware that you were...

Not for some time, actually. They were not very observant, I don't think. I think I was about two. I was very slow to walk, and then my head started to wobble a bit. I think sometimes, it does take some time to show up, and they didn't do very much about it. I had massage, twice a week. Somebody came from the hospital and massaged me, and that's about all. I did exercises. My dad was a great believer in gymnastics, and that was great fun, because I adored my father, and, [rustling noise] well, that was, may have been a, quite a considerable help.

{Break in recording}

*Tell me a little bit more about your father.* 

Oh, I loved my father, yes. He was in the army, in the regular army, and he'd been all through the First World War, and got splendidly decorated, and he was an old father, he was nearly 40, and my mother was 20 years younger, and he was a great sportsman. He played for London, he played for London Welsh, and he was a middleweight boxing champion for the army [laughs] and all kinds of marvellous things which ... and I was brought up to, in a very rigorous way, really, because, my

mother was a good horsewoman and, she played polo, in India, and all sorts of things: she was supposed to have the best seat in Yorkshire, incidentally. [laughs.] And it was all very sort of physical, and athletic, and that was one reason why I think she didn't really take, ever take to me, which was hard in a way. But, I think she wanted, if she had to have a baby at all, she wanted a boy; 'cause a boy, an athletic boy, you know, and she got this miserable muling, puking little..., slightly distorted object. [laughs.]

So, so your, can you describe a little bit more about your mother's attitude then?

Yes. I think my mother loved animals, and she was a very sociable woman, you know, she had her parties and dressing up and stuff, but she was very young: very, very young for her age, too, and I think she married my father, because she wanted a father, because her father had been killed in the trenches. I don't remember much about her, because she died when I was eleven: T.B., but that's another story. I can't remember her ever cuddling me, ever. All I can remember was one vivid scene, when I was sitting on my father's lap: I was about four, I s'pose, five, and she said, 'Get off, Tony; I want to sit on Ianto's lap. [laughs] And I remember a sort of competition for father's tigger [ph], but my dad, I, I loved my dad. He was a, he wasn't a necessarily a very good man, but he was a very funny man. He had a marvellous sense of humour, and he could always... he wasn't academic, or anything like that, he was, he always thought he was a bit thick, but he wasn't. He was terribly funny: Welsh, you know, the Welsh humour. [laughs.]

So was he originally from Wales then?

Oh yes: he was Wales: he was the Welsh Regiment, and he was in, in the Welsh Regiment for 35 years: 30 years, and he came from Builth Wells, and we lived in Cardiff, and then we moved to Carmarthen, and then somewhere else, then Rhondda. We all lived in a lot of, a series of Army-rented houses, and when I was five, they buggered off to India, my parents, and my mother refused to take me or my sister. She said, 'They must stay with my mother, my grand...', her mother, who loved

babies, but she didn't really much like very difficult five-year-olds: so we were left in York, with my grandmother, my maternal grandmother, who I hated, and they went off to India, to have a jolly time in Agra, you know, gin-slinging, and pig-stickin' and polo playing. They sent us postcards sometimes, [laughs] but I was left, a very furious, abandoned little girl of five, because my grandmother loved my sister, who'd just been born, she was three months' old when they went off, Veronica, and, and so I was very, not happy, and my ... we had a, we had a nanny, it was that sort of family, you had a nanny, and nanny adored my sister too, because she was a lovely, chubby, little angelic perfect baby, and there I was I, dragging along behind the pram; you know, [loudly] 'Come on, Miss Tony! Come on!' So I suppose, you know, I was not... I was not unhappy, because I just, I went to school. I shared a governess with four other children, and I was the cleverest, and I liked that. [laughs] Although I'd... had great difficulty in writing, I could read everything before I was five, really: well no, six, but it was a hard childhood, as all disabled childhoods are, I think, and especially having no, no working mother, [laughs] and no mother with work, I mean, but I brought myself up, I think.

So, so tell me a bit more about your, your grandmother then: what, what was she like?

[laughs] Well, she was upper middle class, very upper middle class, and she thought she'd come down in the world because she lived in a big..., large terraced house in York, with, with her mother, who was my great grandmother, who I liked rather better, but, she was a tough woman. She was the oldest air, woman Air Raid Warden in Yorkshire, in the war, and she was very puritanical, and, although she had quite a bit of money, I can remember her huddling over a fire with two coals in it, in her gardening coat, saying, and I said, 'Granny, why don't you put some more coal on the fire?' 'Oh' she said, 'well, it's very expensive.' [laughs.] Silly old trout. [laughs.] But, I always got on very well with my peers, my contemporaries, and so I sort of, life, I s'pose on the whole, my family background was rather less important than my friendships, apart from my dad.

Antonia Lister-Kaye Page 5 C1134/06 Minidisc 1 [Digitised as Part 1]

So, do you, what memories do you have of your dad, if, you know, before he went to India.

Sorry, what memories...

What memories do you have your dad, before he went to India?

Oh, I can remember a lot about my dad, before I was five: it's quite extraordinary; I can't remember my mother at all. Well, my father, obviously, I think we had a nanny, again, of course, but my father was the main person in my life. He loved old furniture, and he used to buy things like that, for about two shillings in a Welsh village sale, you know.

That big dresser there.

Yes.

Yeah.

And he used to buy things and do them up: not to sell, but for himself, and I used to help him, you know, he would be scraping the, cupboard out, an old cupboard, and lining an old cupboard out with a penknife and I would be given a penny to do it with, and that was my idea of bliss, helping Daddy. [laughs] And he used to... sing me things like *Old Man River*, although he had a peculiarly tuneless voice, but I suppose he had to sing because he was Welsh! [laughs.] But, no, he was a big man, you know, he was a four-square man, as you might say, and not terribly tall; short legs, long body: a sitting giant, and he had lots of hair, and he was very, so funny. I mean, we didn't always get on later, we... when I was in adolescence, I hated him. [laughs.]

What kind, what kinds of things made you laugh then?

Mm?

Antonia Lister-Kaye Page 6 C1134/06 Minidisc 1 [Digitised as Part 1]

What kinds of things made you laugh, when you were small?

Well, he would, he would just pull funny faces and just... and I would lose my temper, I was very quick-tempered when I was small, and I would lose my temper and say [shouting] 'I'm not gonna do that! Fast and true![???]' you know, and then, I would go up to my room and slam the door, and ten to six I'd come down, I'd say, 'I'm going somewhere: I'm running away!' [laughs] I'd come down ten minutes later, and he'd pull a funny face, and he'd all be jolly again, and I mean, you know, it was very easy, to get in and out of tantrums; but my, my sister used to sulk, and I've never been able to bear people who sulk. I didn't get on with her very well, I'm afraid no, and, naturally, she was the blue-eyed angel, wasn't she?

Mike: Can I just interrupt there?

Mm.

*I just wanted...* [recording stopped.]

*OK.* So do you remember... What's the first house that you remember, then?

The first house that I remember was a house in the Welsh Valleys, called 'Beauville House'. It was near... I forgotten where it was ... I've forgotten where it was ... quite not, not far from Newport ... Merthyr Tydfil, and it was a sort of miner [??] house, rented to the army, I suppose. I can't remember very much about it, but I do remember being on a balcony, scraping cupboards out with my dad, [laughs] 'cause we moved, it was before they went to India, you see. It was, I was about four then, I suppose. Yes. That's what I remember about that.

Mm. Do you remember the, the room that you were in at that, that age?

What?

Do you remember, do you remember your room, your bedroom at that time?

No, no I don't, no.

And so then, you, from there you moved... where?

To York.

To York. So whereabouts in York did you move?

We lived in Clifton. Do you know Clifton?

Yes. It's, just outside the sort of centre, isn't it?

That's right. There's a great, a row of huge, mid-Victorian grey..., grey-brick houses, terraced, but it's an enormous terrace, of houses, just by Clifton church, and by Clifton Green, and we lived there, yes. We lived on the top floor. The nursery, the nurseries, the day nursery and the night nursery, was up on the top floor, and we were kept up there most of the time, but we were allowed downstairs in the evenings, to play games of spillikins, and draughts, with Granny and Great-Granny.

What's spillikins?

Spillikins is a wonderful game. It's very good for teaching, you know, hand movement. It's little ivory sticks. I think it probably came from India, the game I mean, and you had to sort of try to get rid, get them to, out of the pile, without moving the others. I don't s'pose they play spillikins now, [laughs] but it was fun, yeah. I loved games, I was immensely competitive. Mm.

What other games did you like to play?

Oh, Snakes and Ladders, and there's a game called 'Lexicon', which you had to remember things which were... cards, and you had to remember which was where, and I was good at that. You see, my... competitiveness was a natural, it was natural, because I was, there were so many things I was so bad at, and couldn't do, that the things I was, I liked doing, or was good at, I had to do very, very well.

So, what, what sorts of things couldn't you do well, then?

Well, I remember doing my shoelaces up 13 times, and then doing them up on the thirteenth stroke. Well, mainly, yes, walking. Having people laugh at me in the street. My knickers falling down. You know, we had these great big school knickers in those days, and I don't mean knickers, literally falling down, I mean knicker legs coming down [laughs] and, you know, because I had to walk to school, and walk back, and walk to my friend's house, where, where Miss Moss, the governess was. I used to walk all the way up, you know, to Bootham, you know, along that road: and I used to get a lot of... comments, and rude, rude looks, from the girls and boys at the local, the local school: and I didn't like it.

#### What kind of comments?

Oh, 'Here comes Useless Eustace!', and later, I actually learnt to ride a bicycle, and the comments got even worse [laughs] because I was wooo! Nobody actually threw stones at me, but I was always frightened they might, and I remember going to a shop; this was when I was a bit older, in York, and I was sort of a very nervous child, my hands had always been a bit trying, sort of getting the change out, and the woman said, 'Oh poor dear! Was it the air raids?' so I screamed at her, absolutely screamed: I was absolutely furious. You see, nobody at home ever mentioned my disability: it was never mentioned, because they were Christian Scientists, or, you know, or very inhibited, or very ashamed of me, having produced a child who wasn't quite ... a hundred per cent, so, if anybody outside mentioned it, I just couldn't stand it, because it was never even mentioned at home. Can you see that?

Mm.

I expect a lot of people have that experience.

So, so, what other effects did your parents' Christian Science sort of have on you?

Well, my dad wasn't a Christian Scientist. He was a nothing, but it was my grandmother who was a sort of Christian Scientist, and Christian Science actually killed my mother, I think, because my mother had T.B. She came back from India and I think it was probably something she'd caught in India: I don't know. She came back, they came back in India, at the beginning of the War, when I was seven and a half, nearly eight, and then we went to live in Northern Ireland, and my father was training troops in Armagh, and she was, she, she loved riding, you see. We were always riding, and she always had rather a hectic flush, you know, and her voice started to go, and she wouldn't see a doctor. She just wouldn't see a doctor because of her mother's indoctrination of the Christian Science, and my father wasn't tough enough; he should have made her go and see the military doctor. Anyway, gradually she went down and down, and she did see a doctor, and he said ... this was when I was about nine, eight, nine ... he said, to my father, 'I'm afraid it's, it's too late, but we'll send her to a sanatorium and see what they can do,' so she went to a sanatorium, in North Wales ... sorry ... and, well, she didn't die there, she died in a Christian Science nursing home, because my father allowed her to go to a Christian Science nursing home, also in North Wales, because she was dying anyway: but I didn't see her for a whole year, which didn't seem to be much loss at the time, to tell you the truth.

What about when you were ill? What would happen then?

I was never ill. [laughs] No, no, that's not quite true: I had a very good constitution as a child, and I think it did have something to do with mind over matter: not my mind, the people round me, because people, we weren't ... well, I s'pose we were, we had measles, and things like that, but I can't remember seeing a doctor much: no.

[gulls in background] This was when my parents were in India, in India, and my, we were solely in the charge of my grandmother, who was a Christian Scientist, as I've said, and I just think we were tough. We were tough: kids were tougher in those days, somehow or other. [laughs] Perhaps we had to be.

And you, you mentioned that, your grandmother lived with her mother in this house. Can you ...

Yes, I did.

...describe her a bit?

Oh, she was a very ... erect old lady. She was deaf, very deaf, which cut her off a bit, but she had this enormous hearing trumpet, five foot long, and you had to yell, [talking loudly] 'Hello, great-granny, how are you today?' and, you know, she'd be very pleased that you bothered to yell, but, and she used to read fairy stories to us, and she was, actually I preferred her to the grandmother, although there wasn't all that much contact, because she was very much of a, very, very Victorian lady; in fact they were both rather Victorian, but my great grandmother was, and she never really emerged, I don't think. She used to clean the silver, and that was about the whole scope of her domestic work, I think.

So you stay, you stayed in York until you were nine, is that right?

Yes, I was in York from about five to about n... eight, I think: yes, but I used to spend my life in the public library: do you know, by Lendal Bridge: is it still there? Yes. And I used to spend my entire life in the public library, and when I was eight, I decided that I'd read all the books in the junior fiction, in the junior department, I was going to be an adult reader, and so I managed to swap, yeah. Yeah. I read all sort of unsuitable things like *Gone With the Wind*, [laughs] when I was about nine.

What other, what other kinds of books did you like to read as a child?

Oh, I liked to read everything. I was omnivorous reader, yeah. I read, quite a lot, quite a lot of the classics, before I was 11, or 12, and I liked... well, I just liked, I just read everything. I mean, I even liked comics, like *Beano*, Desperate Dan, [laughs] so I wasn't a particularly snobbish reader. I used to read everything, but I had so, difficulty with writing, that it was very frustrating, because I wanted to write, and I had to write, sort of standing up, and with a big, I used to have a thick pen, a very thick pen. I don't know, whether, you know, 'cause they were easier. But people didn't go out of their way to make it easy for me, because, you know, they preferred not to recognise it, really.

So what was it like at school, then?

Oh, I liked it, I loved school, really. I particularly liked mental arithmetic. [laughs.] I was very quick at school, and very slow in almost every other aspect, so I liked learning for its own sake. Mm. Then I went to boarding school... No, after the school in Northern Ireland, which was ordinary school, Armagh Girls' High School, I liked that too. I was always very sociable and gregarious, and I don't think I let my disability get in the way, all that much, when I was a child. But I mean, having parents who never talked about it, had some kind of advantages, in that, you know, I wasn't ever cosseted, I liked to do exactly what I liked, because they couldn't stop me. I mean, my aunt, when, before she died, my aunt, aged about 80 said, [mimicking] 'You know, An, you know Tony, we never knew how to bring you up at all,' so I said, 'You didn't! [laughs] I did.' But, yes, of course, it was sad, having no proper mother: and it was sad, not liking my grandmother, but... I managed, quite well. There were bad times, of course: one doesn't deny that, but then the most, I wouldn't say I had an unhappy childhood, in spite of all these lacks. [laughs] No.

Can you maybe talk about some of those bad times that you refer to?

Well, I mean, when people laughed at me, and I used to turn round, to see if they're turning round, if they were turning round, and they always were, so I used to put my tongue out at them. [laughs] But, and there was frustration in, I went swimming and I

mean, I did everything. I did a lot of things badly, rather than not do them, I think, but I knew I wasn't going to be good at anything physical, really, and I used to knit dishcloths for soldiers [laughs] and, but they weren't discarded, I think they were put in use for dishcloths [laughs] And then I went to boarding school, when my mother became very ill and went to the sanatorium, I went to a boarding school for a year, in Reading, and I hated that. The head teacher had been a friend of my mother, a friend of my mother's, and, you know, it was, she was horrible to me, and I used to do terrible things, like walking round an 18-inch ledge at the top of the Queen Anne building: and I got caught. I used to get, tell everybody to come with me. I used to say, 'If you can, if I can do it, you can do it. Come on!' [laughs] And we used to sneak, the teachers used to live in, most of them, 'cause it was the war time and it was difficult, and there was a room there. I used to go into the teachers' bedrooms and try on their bras, [laughs] and, we did this once too often, and the gardener saw me, and I was expelled. [laughs.] We said, they said, 'Colonel Price, we can no longer be responsible for your daughter.' [laughs] So, that wasn't a great success, but I did do a large, I did enjoy the learning part of it, yes. Yeah, and I think when my mother was ill, and I think they were worried about who was going to tell me about the facts of life, but I knew them probably, already anyway, so I went ... apart from the fact that I was definitely a bit peculiar, I used to love, enjoy tearing strips off, of wallpaper off, you know, and like tearing strips off people, but it was, but it wasn't it was buildings, now, and then so I was sent to these child psychiatrists, child psychologists; she was one of the first, I think; in Reading, towards Henley, I think. A lovely woman, 'cause she recognised that I was clever, you know, and we spoke the same language, and I really enjoyed her, enjoyed going to see her, and whether she did me much good, I don't know, but she taught me the facts of life, which was useful. You know, birds and butterflies, and they were all very tentative in those days, and we used to do lovely sand play, you know, making things up, in, in the sand, and making up headlines for newspapers and things like that: and she did an IQ test, and I came up pretty high, but I think it diminished ever since. [laughs]

So what age were you, wh...?

Eleven.

You were eleven.

No, no, ten, sorry. I get muddled up. Ten.

And what was the school that you were expelled from called?

Oh, gosh, I can never remember. Cane End. C-A-N-E: Cane End. I think it's probably disappeared soon though... I think it was a temporary sort of place, and Miss Clutton, who was the headmistress, didn't like me at all, and she used to say things like, 'Oh we mustn't leave a handbag outside. Tony's is about,' and I never, I mean, I wasn't a thief. No: she just didn't like me. She went on to teach prisoners. [End of side.]

### [Changing tape side]

What made you walk round the outside of the, the school? What do you think made you do that?

It was a challenge, it was there: it was like Everest, wasn't it? [laughs.] You know, it was something that I could get some excitement from. I was just, I was a thrill-seeker.

And were there other things that you used to do, that were in similar vein?

Oh, I remember, that was the only thing I remember, but I remember I was a pain to authority. I was a real, a real little rebel, and, you know, I think it was all about my grandmother, and I hated my grandmother so much, that she sort of spilled over into every type of authority I was ever to encounter for the rest of my life. [laughs]

Were there, were there ways that you used to play her up then?

Oh yes, terrible ways. Yes, I used to lie down in the street and scream, and bite her ankles. [laughs.] That was when I was younger: and, yeah, I used to get dressed up and go and dance around on the village green, in all sorts of bizarre clothes, and, you know, [loudly] 'Come and get me!' I'd say. 'Come and get me! You can't, you can't run fast enough to get me!' and, you know, I used to be terrible, at showing her up: yeah, I thought, 'Well, if I'm going to look particular, I might as well trade on it.' I might as well make her life absolute hell, because she, she doesn't do much to make my life... pleasant.

And how would she, how would she try and discipline you, then?

[laughs] I think they gave up very early. I'd be sent to my room, but I'd climb out of the window, onto the roof. It was all about roofs, wasn't it? [laughs] And I don't think she was very good at disciplining me. You know, I think I was past it already. The only person I listened to was Daddy, and he was in India.

So, during the course of your childhood, when did you actually see your father from...?

Well, next, you know, when they came back from India when I was about... eight, seven or eight, at the beginning of the War, you know, and we went, till he got to Northern Ireland, and we lived as a family for the first time, two or three years, and it wasn't easy, and, but I was just so pleased to have my dad back, that I forgave him for going away: yeah.

Can you remember when he came back?

No. It's funny, those things that one remembers, isn't it? And doesn't remember. No, but I remember him being there, and how nice it was, and how lovely he looked in his uniform, and he used to get chocolates from the NAAFI: a huge amounts of Kit Kats, Mars Bars, Crunchies, and he was always very fair, he always gave us exactly half each, but the great cry was always, [loudly] 'Oh, she's got more than me! She's

got more than me!' and, I think that's always, was part of our life relationship because my sister always thought I had more than her, even when, when she was 60. I'm sure I did, [laughs.] but she didn't have a disability, and I think it's always very difficult, to be the sibling of someone, of a disabled child: not because they get more fuss to them, although sometimes that's the case, but it wasn't the case with me. I just got everything I wanted to, because nobody dared not give it to me, because they knew I'd scream. [laughs] I must have been a nightmare to bring up. I was always so, I was always so charming to outsiders, that they didn't know [laughs] how awful I was at home.

So what was it, what was it like, moving to Northern Ireland?

That was quite nice, really. I loved that. We lived in another rented house, in Banbridge: you know a place called Banbridge? To begin with, and I went to an ordinary school, and I loved that, and I had a pony: I didn't have a pony, I went to a riding school, and, and I never felt my mother and I could tally [?], could do it together, although she, she was a very good rider, and I was a very poor rider, but I stuck on somehow or other, but ... and I had lots of friends, I remember, you know: that was great, and it was a nice little town, yeah. Banbridge Academy I went to: yeah. I mean, I liked the Northern Irish people, you know. They were very friendly to us. My dad was training troops there.

And what was the school like, you went to?

Mm?

What was the school like you went to?

Oh, it was an ordinary sort of secondary... I don't know, I went... I was ten, or nine, nine, eight. It was an ordinary sort of school, you know ... and co-educational. I was educated with boys for the first time, and that was rather fun. My mother loved giving parties, so I used to have sumptuous parties. We used to have beetle drives.

Do you know about beetle drives? [rustling noise.] Well, when you get a, you have to have draw a beetle, and it's like, and you draw bits of a beetle, and you move on from one table to the next table, and draw another bit of a beetle, and it's a matter of getting your beetle finished first. It's a bit like Bingo, and you... one, do you know, people don't play Beetle Drive, very well. [???] My mum, the good thing about my mother was, she was very sociable and she was very good at, at cooking canapés: posh cooking, you know, but she didn't really do cooking really, we had somebody else to do that, but, and, you know, she knew a lot of people, and so I got to know a lot of children, and most of whom I liked: yes.

Can you think of a particular party: a particularly lavish party that you had?

Mm... no I can't, really.

*Or a particular one that sticks in your mind?* 

Well, I think there was this... she used to produce an enormous amount of wonderful food, and, she really came into her own, and she looked beautiful. My mother was a very beautiful woman: and that was another trial, another trial for me, because I wasn't a particularly beautiful-looking little girl, and, no, I can't really think of a particular party, no, but I do know that, when they went out to parties, which they did a lot, she'd come and say goodnight to me, in all her finery and, you know, she'd lean over me, and she'd have all these wonderful clothes on, and my father would be in his best dress suit, and he looked very good. I didn't want to go with them or anything, but I just thought, 'Well, I just thought they looked good: and in a way... I loved that.

And you, your father's work, what, what sort of memories do you have of that?

My father's work? Oh yes. Well he was in the army. He was [clears throat] training the troops, in Ireland, and we used to, he used to use the army car, illegitimately, on Sundays, because we, there was no petrol, you see, so he used to take us to the sea, and we had to bob down, every time a car passed, and it wasn't very often, because

there weren't many cars, and I remember thinking, 'Oh, yes, Dad's just like me, really.' [Laughs.]

[Clears throat.]

But his army business didn't impinge very much, but it always meant that we had a lot of people around, because we lived in the context of the regiment, you know, the Best Welsh, and there was always a lot of people around, and, I mean, later, I became very intellectually snobbish about my father's army friends because they were ... thick, and drank too much [laughs], but there were one or two who I liked very much: yes. I had a passion for a man, you know, one... a Major Wilson, who had only one arm, and I think it was a kind of identification thing. He was a nice man. But that was when I was very young, about ten, or nine, I s'pose.

So what was he like?

He was OK. He used to play Lego, you know. Do you know Lego? Do they still have Lego? No, well, we had mini, things called 'mini bricks', which were rubber bricks, which you had to slot into each other, and build houses, and things, and I liked doing that, and Major Wilson used to play mini bricks with me, and that was nice, and we used to play Monopoly, and, you know, the games people, the games children play: and I was good at that too: I always got Park Lane. [laughs.]

And how, how did lose his arm? Did he tell you?

I think it was in the War. In my ... imagination, it was in the War, anyway, and he was being brave. [laughs.] Yeah. But later on, I became very snobbish about me Dad's army friends. I remember going to a party at the barracks, (this was after we came back from Ireland) and there was a picture, a really awful picture, in the Officers' Mess, and I said to old Bill Gibbins, who was Daddy's Second-in-Command, 'Who painted that? Picasso?' and he said, 'No, I don't think that was his name,' so I said, 'God, you're hopeless, aren't you?' [laughs] I was a horrible little

intellectual snob, and, well, it was natural, wasn't it? They could walk properly, and they could do all of these things that I couldn't do, therefore I'd say, I had to be good at something.

What about ...the other, the sort of the other army children, that you were mixing with?

Oh, they were all right, I suppose. I don't remember much of that. Basically, I used to mix more with my school friends, and, I don't, I think, I think they were fine, yes. I never had much hassle from people, from the children that I actually mixed with, because I was funny, [laughs] and I loved, we used to play Swiss, games like Swiss Family Robinson, when we'd pretend you're on a desert island, and wrecked, and I used to, we used to have concerts, and I used to have people reciting poems and singing songs, and I was always the producer, and they were always very boring really, [laughs] and I was always very fond of drama, and my, now my children say I'm a drama queen. [laughs]

Where did that love of drama start?

When I was born, I suppose. [laughs] My birth was rather dramatic, wasn't it? I think it was when I was born. [laughs.] No, it's sort of a compensationary showing off.

And did you, did you go to the theatre very much, as...?

Oh gosh, yes. When I lived in York, that reminds me, I used to tell my grandmother I was going swimming, and I'd, instead, I went to the matinee at the Theatre Royal, on Wednesdays: and one and six it cost, in the Upper Circle, and when I came back, I used to have to put my head underneath the garden pump, to make it look as if I'd been swimming, and duff the towel a bit [both laugh] and I used to see all sorts of wonderfully unsuitable plays: you know, not really unsuitable, but my grandmother would have considered them unsuitable. I loved the theatre, yes, and the cinema too, yeah.

What sorts of things did you see at the theatre?

Some, I think it was Noel Coward, that sort of stuff, you know: or upper-class rubbish, really. There weren't, the kitchen sink didn't come in for 20 years, did it? No. [laughs.] 1957. *Look Back in Anger*, and so it was quite, sort of ... the plays were quite sort of limited, I think, in scope. Hm. No, I used to do exactly what I liked, and tell lies to everybody, and, you know, and just make life nice for myself. [laughs.]

I mean, can you remember the first time you went to the theatre on your own?

Yeah, I can. I tell who was in it: Leslie Phillips. He was a very beautiful young 20-year-old: he must have been about 20 years old, and Vivien Marchant, who, I think Peter was married to, before he met the other Antonia. [laughs.] Oh yes, it was great: I really loved it. I never went with anybody. I went myself, and it was wonderful. I just loved the theatre, I wanted to go to the theatre: I wanted to be an actress, but of course that was absolutely hopeless, but in school plays, I got quite good parts. I was Lady Brockhurst [Bracknell], you know: [loudly] 'In a handbag!' [both laugh] And Caliban [laughs] and all sorts of ... character parts, you know. It didn't matter if I looked a little bit squiffy, [laughs]. But that's that's, we're going on a bit, when I went to my second boarding school, yah.

But I'm interested when you talk about, going to see Leslie Phillips at the theatre...

Mm?

I'm interested, when you talk about going to see Leslie Phillips at the theatre: what age were you, when you first went into a theatre on your own?

I must have been about eight.

And how did you know that you could do that?

Oh, I could read the paper. I've always read newspapers, I've always been a great newspaper reader, and I can remember, something about... I don't know whether I should tell you this, but... just before, just after my parents came back from India, my mother did take me down to London, on the train, to see a consultant, and that was the first time I ever saw anybody about, about my disability. I don't know what made her do that, but anyway she did that: and two things happened. First of all, she bought me a peach: a sixpenny peach, off a barrow in London, and I was so pleased that she bought me a sixpence peach, and not a threepenny one, [laughs] and the second thing that happened was, when we came back from London, we had *The Times*, and a man opposite, in this carriage... I sat opposite my mother and I was reading, I was reading The Times, and the man said, 'I bet you aren't really reading that paper: you're just pretending to read it,' so I said, 'I'm reading *The Times*, yes. I'll read you, I'll read you, I'll read you this column about...'ah! I've forgotten what it was about... I think about Munich or something like that: about Chamberlain going to Munich. I read it to him, perfectly, and he said, 'Oh, jolly good. Read some more,' and all, and each ... and he tried to feel me up, underneath the newspaper, so anyway and that was that. I said, 'I'm not going to read any more, because you're being rude!' [laughs] I didn't, I didn't tell my mother about it, I just said, 'Mummy, I want to sit next-door to you, please, so I, I, I'm tired.'

Mm.

So I think that was an example of coping. [laughs.]

So what, what happened when... you were talking about when you went to London, and you saw a specialist: what happened? [talking together.]

Yes.

What happened there?

Well, I saw this man, who put me through; I think he was an orth... a neurologist? Orthopaedist, I don't know, or ... I can never say that word, you know. A child specialist of some kind, perhaps. He was very nice. He put me through my tests, and he said, 'It's not very ... it's not a very bad case of ...' they used to call it 'Dr Little's Disease': did you know that? Dr Little's Disease. 'She may become very much better when she becomes adolescent,' which wasn't the case: I became worse. [laughs.] Everything gets worse in adolescence: but I don't think he was very useful, shall we say, because my father had always done exercises with me, which was the most useful thing that anyone could possibly have done, and Daddy did it instinctively really, I think: and then we went to stay with my Uncle Tom who ... fussy old Tom ... and we went to the zoo, and, you know, it was quite a good, good time, we had, actually, but I remember about the peach, because my, there were so few interchanges between me and my mother: and then we came back, and I slept in her bed, because it was cold: and that was the only time I remember any physical contact with my mother. I suppose there were pecks on the cheek, but I don't remember any kind of cuddling, you see. All she said was, 'Don't kick me!' [laughs.]

So this, this was a bed at, in, in London, was it, where you were...

No, this was after we got back to York.

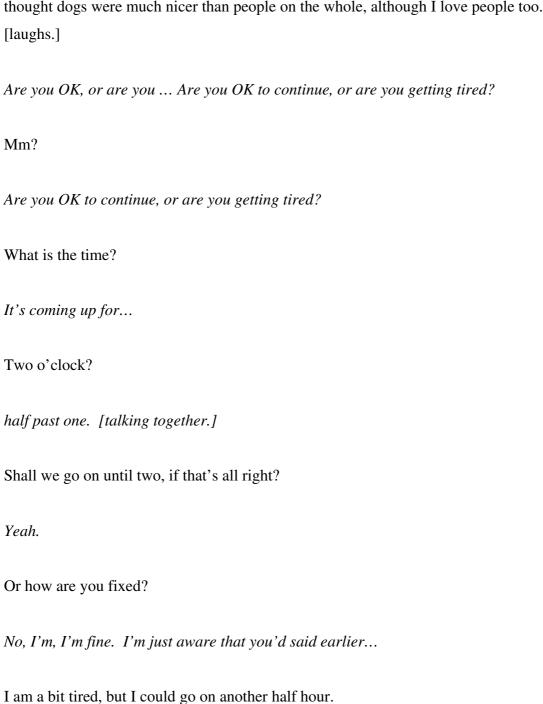
Oh right.

And, because it was so cold, you know, that winter. No. Funny, how these things come back to you.

Are there any other memories of your mother that stick out to you?

Well, not really, no. I remember thinking that she was the nicest-looking mother around, but I would like, prefer to have a mother with bosoms: 'cause she was stickthin, you know, and a clothes horse really, but she was very kind to animals. She was

always very good at giving presents, and things like that: but I didn't really have a basic bond with her, so she remains a black hole in many ways: yes. I was brought up with her puppies. I was put into a play pen, and my mother bred dogs, when we lived in Wales, before I went to York, and I was put in the play pen with two litters of puppies. I've got a picture of it somewhere, and I think I thought I was a puppy, because I've always had dogs, I've always loved dogs, ever since, and I've always thought dogs were much nicer than people on the whole, although I love people too. [laughs.]



OK. Good.

Or what, what, is that all right for you?

Yes, that's, that's great: it's, yeah.

Mm.

I mean, you were talking about... that your mother bred puppies: what kind of puppies were they?

Oh, they were Sloppy Sue puppies: spaniels and Sealyhams, and so I was, and she also had goats, and she would have liked to have had a horse, but my father drew the line, he couldn't afford any more. [laughs.] I think I remember my mother, mostly, in connection with animals: that's right. Mm. Because I think it was the one thing we had in common, was, her love of animals, particularly her love of dogs, and I grew up to love dogs too. Mm.

Did you have any special favourites, or...?

No, we had three dogs, a Kerry Blue: a type of Airedale, and it was sort of blueish, not, not Airedale colours: a Kelly Blue, a spaniel and a Sealyham, and they were always having puppies, because she bred them: I mean, she did it for, I s'pose she did it because she liked doing it. I can't think that they brought in much money, but I think she used to...she flew [??] for, she was much more interested in dogs than children: and... I could show you a picture of my mother if you like.

Yes, that would be nice.

She was incredibly beautiful. [rustling sound]

Antonia Lister-Kaye Page 24 C1134/06 Minidisc 1 [Digitised as Part 1]

I'll just...

Oh sorry... [break in recording.]

Well, I remember the time in Ireland as being, quite happy really. Yes. One of the things I remember most clearly was when my father smacked my sister on the bare bottom, because she stuck her fingers in the dog's eyes, and that brought up all sorts of things for me because, my grandmother had never punished my sister for anything, and of course it was a dire thing to do, to stick your fingers in a dog's eyes, and I remember being terribly pleased [laughs] and Nanny kept on saying, 'It's a terrible thing to do,' and then to see the imprint of his fingers on Veronica's bottom! It must have been a very hard smack. He was a cruel man, you know, I s'pose really. [laughs.] So, in a way, that was justification. I couldn't, I didn't like my sister, because she didn't have a disability: it wasn't fair. [laughs.]

*How...* 

And she didn't like me, because I was not very nice to her sometimes. I used to lock her in the tool shed: only once but, I think mentally she stayed in there, as far as I was concerned, for the rest of her life. [laughs.]

And what

She died about five years ago.

What

On Christmas Day. She would.

What other, what other kinds of things did you do, to your sister, then, that were...

Well, I can't remember anything, except that me and my friends would sort, we were five years' older than my sister, we were, we'd leave her out, we would exclude her from things; I think it was more that. I can't remember being awful to her, but she obviously remembered a great many, a great scenario which I have conveniently forgotten. [laughs] But I do remember locking her in the tool shed, and that was probably the worst thing I did to her: yah.

Do you remember why you did that?

I had a friend who was a particularly, rather an unpleasant girl really, called 'Pam', and I thought, I just thought it'd be fun to lock her in the tool shed. [laughs.] Well, she was only there for half an hour, but that would remain in her mind and that sort of, epitomised our relationship for her, me locking her in the tool shed. I wasn't a very nice little girl, but why should I be? [laughs]

And the incident you mentioned earlier, when Veronica was poking a dog in the eye: do you know why?

Why did she poke her in the eye? I have no idea. I think she was just being... probably she was just exploring what would happen, like you could poke a doll in the eye, and the eye goes in. She wondered if a dog's would as well, [laughs] I think: I don't know really, but she was only three or something, you know: not, two and a half, I don't know: very young, and p'raps it was an over-reaction of my father, but my father loved animals too, and he just thought he must put a stop to this. He never smacked her again, ever, or me. I mean, he was a... kind, basically, a kind man, but rather fierce.

Right, so, going back to the thing we were saying about Northern Ireland, where, how long did you stay in Northern Ireland for?

Oh, only about 18 months, but I went... we moved twice, we lived in Banbridge and then Armagh, and I went to two different schools, and I liked that time, we were all together as a family so... It had been a bit difficult at the beginning but, to get used to it, but basically, it was a happy time. My mother wasn't markedly ill, yet, and my dad

liked his work. He was training troops, which he was... a very good teacher I suppose. He was always very good with people, men. Better with men than woman, I think: yeah.

And so what happened, what happened next? Where did you go...?

When we came back to England, and I think we were, we were a little time in York, and then we were moved to Cardiff. That's the depot, as they used to, the depot of the Welsh Regiment, and Daddy was training troops there, and I, we lived quite near. We didn't live in the barracks, but we had a house very near, and he got the OBE for training. He was training very, very bad, very bad material, very bad cannon fodder, it was: it was the runts from the runtish boyos from the Welsh Valleys, [laughs] and they were difficult, because they were, they were the last, they were sort of the last people to be trained, you know. They were the rejects from former times, or they were, or they were very young, but Dad used to have marvellous parents' days, you know. He used to ask all their parents down, and give them a damn good nosh-up, and he just loved the work I think, yes. He was very good at it too, and I used to spend a lot of time in the barracks, 'cause I liked it there, and, yes, he had a bull terrier at that time, called 'Bully'. He'd been given it by a policeman, who couldn't control it, [laughs] and Bully kept every dog off the barracks square [laughs]: and we lived in this school house, by the barracks, and there my mother became ill, became obviously very ill, and my dad would say, 'You must see a doctor!' 'Oh, I don't want to see a doctor.' 'Your voice is getting so bad,' he'd say, and 'Oh, it's nothing: it's a cold, it'll go away.' And then, I, during this time, I was at the first boarding school: just to get it right in time: Cane End, so I didn't, didn't really... I can't remember very much about the time in Cardiff, except that, towards the end of my year in this boarding school, just before I got expelled, my parents came down, and Dad said, 'We've got sad news for you. Your mother's got to go to a sanatorium for a year, because she's very, she's quite ill,' so anyway, I remember not thinking very much about it, really, [chair creaks] and, you know, but, I just remember him telling me that, and I sort of said, you know, 'Will I be able to see her?' and he said, 'No, no: it's infectious, you see.' T.B. was very infectious: and then we had to have a lot of tests, you know: BCG

tests, to see if we had it, and we didn't, but ... and then I went to my second boarding school, which was a great success: well, I mean, I liked it, and I was there for years and years and years, [laughs] and that was a Christian Science school called 'Claremont', but it was, first of all, I went to it in Wales, because it was evacuated to Llandriddod Wells, and on the whole it was good: a lot of substitute mums there, you know: teachers who should have been married but weren't because their putative husbands had been killed in the First World War, in the trenches: a lot of very nice women, who, you know, would have made wonderful wives and mothers but weren't because of the shortage of men...

[End of Minidisc 1]

### Tape 2 Side A [Track 2]

And it's 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2005, and this is Tape Two. I've just been reading your book, that you've written, called Camilla, Bloody [Little] Imbecile, and what I'd like to do today, if we can, is actually, sort of compare some of the things in the book, which I know, you've said you, you've made up quite a lot of it, but some of it is inspired by actual events, and I would just like, if we can, to maybe explore some of those.

Yes, yes.

The first thing, actually, I thought, when I reviewed the tape we did last time, was, I didn't actually get [someone clears their throat] the names of your parents, so I thought we could just start with what their names were, and where they were born and ...

Yes, well, my dad was Welsh. He was born in Builth Wells, and he died in Monmouthshire. He died at 88, and he was an extraordinary man, an extraordinary man, he was a sort of blend of all sorts of strands. He was an army officer for 35 years, which, of course, marked him superficially, at any rate, but basically, he was very Welsh: very spontaneous; that's why he didn't get, do terribly well in the army, because he reckoned Leiutenant Colonel wasn't terribly well. I suppose it wasn't really. He stayed in the army because he was a good sportsman, but, yes, I loved my dad, very much, although he was a horrible man sometimes. He was a Victorian. He was born, I s'pose, I think in, about 1890, and he would have been brought up in a small, a very small Welsh town. I think his father was a bank manager, I think, or, no, no, he was a, and his mother was a would-be schoolteacher, but her father wouldn't allow her to be a schoolteacher. He said [in a Welsh accent] 'What would the neighbours say, Annie, if I sent you out to be a schoolteacher? They'd say I didn't have enough to keep you home?' and anyway, she wasn't a teacher, but, she had five daughters and they all became schoolteachers. [laughs] They were my dad's sisters, of course. So my dad's background was totally and utterly different from my mother's. Oh, I have to say my father was a very brave man. He got very, was very

bemedaled by the First World War. He was, luckily, he was in the Somme and he was one of the lucky few who survived it, but all his friends were killed, and I think that, that must have marked him, to a degree; and he had a bullet wound in his shoulder, and was told that he wouldn't ever be able to raise his arm higher than his shoulder, and he was a very committed sportsman, in all sorts of different directions, so he said, 'Well, I, we'll see,' and for about two years, he went into the gym every day, after the War, this was ... are we ...

[Talking together. Inaudible.] No, no.

And did exercises, and he came back as a very good second-class sportsman. He played cricket, county cricket, London, rugger for London Welsh: I think actually that was before the War, I'm not quite sure, but anyway, and I've always been very inspired by that story, because he was so determined, and he did it, and I suppose this has marked me in that, I do exercises for half an hour every day. I, even if I'm dying I do them, because I know that way, my muscles will be much more amenable. Anyway, so, my mum. I really don't think of her as 'Mum'. I think of her as 'Mummy' or 'Mother'. She was a very different, had a very different background. She came from the York, Derby/Notts sort of region. Her father was a land agent to a big land owner, as was her grandfather, and she was brought up as, without a father but largely, 'cause her father was killed at Gallipoli. I think that's 1916, I'm not quite sure: and she was born in 1909, much younger than my father. I think she married him as a father figure. Whether the marriage worked or not, I'm not quite sure, because she died, very soon after, well, I'm never quite sure, I was still 11 I think, but they'd been to India for, a lot of that time, and I didn't know her, and she didn't, we didn't ever bond, so, my mother remains largely a black hole, which is why I've had to use a lot of invention in my book, but she did love animals. She was a very good horsewoman, and very upper middle class, I suppose, you'd call her, or middle, middle upper: I don't know, I mean, these classifications still exist, unfortunately; so, but they're useful sometimes.

Did she, did she ever call you 'a bloody little imbecile'?

Yes. Not very frequently, but I was always very slow when we went for walks, and obviously I just couldn't help it, but she never made any concessions. My disability was never mentioned at home, because they were Christian Scientists. I think this came into the last tape, and, although I was put into knee caps, like a racehorses, which I hated. You can imagine, the shame of it, and I also had to wear boys' trousers with fly buttons, corduroy, you know, because they were, sort of, virtually, I could live in them and they didn't have to be washed every day, and I was always falling down, and I was a very dirty eater, and all that sort of stuff, you know, but I was never really told the reason. They just said, 'You will,' or, you know, 'Here's an oil cloth,' and they'd put on the table, and pinafores, and knee caps, and these terrible trousers, and of course, I knew I was different, but my difference was never a subject of, conversation, or even allusion: and I think this made it p'raps more difficult in some ways and less difficult in others. I certainly wasn't cosseted; and, but it made be a very much a loose cannon. [laughs]

Can I ask you: in, in the book, Camilla has a fairly unusual way of getting rid of her trousers and her knee pads: is that what actually happened? I think she threw them away.

Yes, I did throw them away. I threw a lot of things away that I didn't like. Yeah, over the hedge they'd go. [laughs] Yes, I was almost impossible to bring up, so they gave up trying, I think. The only person who could do anything with me was my father, and he wasn't there much of the time, because it was, first of all, there was India, he went to India, and then he, there was the War. But, in a way, I'm quite grateful it was like that.

You said you were 'a loose cannon'...

Mm.

... and there are some examples of how Camilla is a loose cannon in the book...

Oh yes. The loose cannon business is, is quite authentic. [laughs]

So, did you go to the races, and see the St Leger?

Well, I was very keen on the races, and I didn't actually go to the races, but I tell you what I did do: I used to..., say I was going swimming, which was allowed, and pop off to York Repertory Theatre on a Wednesday afternoon matinee, and see the most unsuitable, but marvellous plays. I was dotty on the theatre from about the age of five, [laughs] and I had been taken to the theatre by my godmother, who was also very keen on the theatre, but, for one and six, you could get a very good seat, in, on a Wednesday matinee, so I'd go, to the two o'clock..., half past two matinee, and I'd come back, and I'd rumple my hair, and sort of damp it, in the garden tap, and, you know, I'd have taken with me a towel and bathing costume, and all that stuff, and wet it all, and nobody ever knew. [laughs]

And how did you get the money to pay [talking together] for the ticket?

I had pocket money: and I stole money, [laughs] on a regular basis, from my grandmother's purse. I once stole a sovereign, which, I reckon, was worth quite a bit, and I think I was had. I went to the Shambles where, in York, where there was a jeweller, a sort of pawnbrokers-type jeweller, and I, I think I didn't get as much as I should, but I got a good bit of money, [laughs] with which to pursue my nefarious activities.

Can you, I mean, can you describe the sort of transaction with the jeweller: I mean, how, did, did he ask any questions, or...

I don't remember terribly well, except that I, he wasn't a very nice man, and I reckon that if I'd have been a grown-up, I'd have got twice as much, and he said, 'Where did you get it from?' so I said, 'Oh, it was a birthday present,' and he said, 'Who gave it to you?' 'My grandmother,' and he said, 'Well I hope this is the truth, young lady,'

so I said, 'Yes, of course it is!' [laughs] and he then, he was quite keen to have it, it was, especially at the cut price which he was offering me, so I said, 'Is that all? I thought it was worth more than that,' and anyway he said, 'Oh, yes, yes: they're not doing very well at this, at the moment.' [laughs]

And, did you ever get caught, stealing the money from your grandmother's purse?

No, she was... foolish. No, she had a lot of money, I mean, you know, she, not by today's standards, but by those, she, I s'pose she was well off, quite well off, but she always thought she was very poor: but then, she never used to know what she had, I mean, you know, she never used to reckon up what she had in her purse. But I never got caught, no: very lucky. I mean, I didn't really mind if I did get caught, but she'd just make it harder for me [laughs] to find her purse.

And you mention in the book about, your grandmother's bureau.

Yes, that's where the purse was kept.

Right, and you would talk about finding letters, or Camilla finding letters in the bureau from India: was that, did that ever happen?

Yes, I found letters... I used to read everything, you know I've always been an omnivorous reader, ever since I could read, which was about five, and I used to read everything in Granny's bureau that made any sense to me, including her stocks and shares list, and I reckoned that she was very rich, and yet she told me she was, hadn't a bean. [laughs] She used to sat, sit, huddled with an old gardening coat on, [noise of seagulls calling in background] on a fire with two coals in it, on it, you know, and say how cold she was, and she couldn't afford to put any more coal on the fire: you know, it was just sort of, it's a Protestant ethic: the epitome of the Protestant ethic at that particular time. It was in the thirties, when people, a lot of people were genuinely very, very poor, but my grandmother wasn't one of them. She had two maids: I mean,

a maid, a cook, a full-time nanny, and a char woman, so, there she was, being poor. [laughs]

So she had four members of staff?

Well, there was the cook: my grandmother couldn't boil an egg; and then there was the housemaid, called 'Dorothy'. The cook was very nice, Dorothy was... not very nice, and then there was Nanny, who... I suppose my father probably paid for Nanny, I'm not quite sure. There was great arguments about my money, between my father and my grandmother, they just couldn't bear each other anyway, and then there was a charwoman who came in once a week to do the rough. Yeah. So I don't know what they, it was a big house, huge house.

And did you have a gardener?

Yeah, once a week, but my grandmother did a lot of gardening herself. I mean, she was, it was one of her few interests.

One of her other interests was being, an air raid warden.

She was an air raid warden, yes. She was the oldest air raid, woman air raid warden, it might be either in York or the North, I don't know, but she was one of them anyway, because she was quite old: and she, when she went out to the air raid po..., the warden's post at the bottom of the garden, fighting Hitler: yeah. [laughs]

But were you ever sort of involved, or, or did you ever watch [talking together] what she was doing?

Well, there was an air raid in York. It was one of those Baedeker raids, you know: a raid on a historic city, in return for Dresden, or... it was 1943 I think; and they dropped 70 bombs in York, which was then a very small, quite a small, contained city, and, yes, Granny was out, doing her duty. I was, I was on the cellar steps, clutching

our cook, who was a Off... Austrian refugee, a woman called 'Mrs Baum', who was dear, but she was very hysterical, and, you know, I comforted her, I think, and we actually had a bomb, somewhere near us, and blew all the windows out, the ceilings came down and the Sevres china all fell off the dresser, [laughs] which was a pity. But, yes, I was very proud to be the only member of, in my immediate family who was in the air raid, but the next day, I went up... I think I told you, I lived in Clifton, and I then walked up to Bootham, I walked up to Coney Street I cried, there was so much damage, and so many churches damaged, but the Minster wasn't. It went all the way round the Minster. There was a ring of bombs, but the actual Minister was, almost intact. The Minster was always falling down anyway, and it couldn't have survived any kind of an attack, but it did, and although I'm not religious, I never have been really; I [laughs] was very astonished by that. But I was very upset, because I loved York. I think that, being brought up for a certain amount of years in York, made me want to study History, and I chose Durham: or Durham chose me, which was not unlike a miniature York, to go to University, and... yes, well yes: York meant a lot to me: it meant a lot more to me than most people I was surrounded by.

Do you remember ... particular landmarks within York that were hit that...?

Yes. I remember, there were one or two very ancient churches were demolished, and the station, of course. York Station was quite, it was quite an important, junction in those days. The station was hit: and the field where I used to go riding in... this wasn't an important landmark, but it was in my landmarks, had two enormous craters in it, and the four horses were killed, and that upset me no end. I couldn't, I can't, I think there were, there was quite a lot of historical damage done, but I can't really remember, beyond that.

So, the major impact was, to the field where your, the horses were, from your perspective.

Well, yes, although I wrote an *Ode to York*, [laughs] on the, aged nine, I think, and it was all about the air raids. I can't find it now, though, fortunately. [Both laugh.] So I

think in a way, I've always liked places. I love people no, but I've always been very interested in places, which means I've travelled a lot: and I married a man called 'Hugh', with much (sorry, we're going to, we're doing a huge, gigantic hop, I think) largely because I could live in Africa. He was in the dying embers of the colonial service, and we went out to Nigeria to live, and that was quite interesting, and later went to South Africa, which was absolutely fascinating and, no, I think I've always been interested in places; they've always had a tug: some places, other places I've hated, of course.

Mm.

But place is important.

Mm.

Yes.

I look forward to hearing about Africa, later on. I look forward to hearing about Africa later on.

Oh yes, of course.

The other landmarks that come out in the book are Rowntree Gardens. What are your memories of that?

[laughs] The Rowntree Gardens were where Nanny used to take us for walks. It was just the other side of Clifton Green, near the river, and The Rowntree Gardens were the source of enormous delight. Not only did they have good slides, but they had monkeys. Two cages, full of monkeys. I think they were well, quite well-kept, they seemed quite happy monkeys, and they were quite healthy ones, and they had, those monkeys absolutely fascinated me [laughs] and, you know, I couldn't be got away from watching the monkeys.

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Why, what were they doing? What were they doing?

Picking fleas out of each other's... heads, mostly, and doing other sort of things which [laughs]... sort of vaguely sexual things, although... I was about six, seven at the time and, you know, I didn't really quite understand the significance, but I thought it was awfully jolly. [laughs] I thought the monkeys were jolly, were much more jolly than most of the people that surrounded me, anyway. [laughs]

And what sort of other things did you get up to in the park?

Mm?

What other things did you do in the park?

Oh, well, I don't know really. I used to go with my friends, and we used to play Swiss Family Robinson, and, you know. We used to play an awful lot of make-up games, where we always used to take various parts, and act out things we'd been doing with our governess.

And what are your memories of your nanny?

I didn't like her much, and she didn't like me. She used to say, quite sternly, that she was 'Miss Veronica's Nanny', which made me feel very much of a hang-on. No, I didn't care for her. She had red hair, and I've never really liked people with red hair, and... you haven't got red hair? No, [laughs] and she was not at all loving to me and was very loving to my sister, and I think that, combined with the fact that my grandmother absolutely adored my sister made me feel very sad, and the sadness came out in aggression, and sort of don't-care behaviour.

And you said before that, you were very much left to your own devices...

Mm.

And one of the things you used to also do was go to the library a lot...

Yes.

Can you maybe talk about...

Ye... yes. I loved the library. I think, is it still in the same place? Right by Lendal Bridge, and it was a big, imposing... it seemed to be a huge building to me then, but probably it wasn't, it isn't very big, but I, yes, I used to... that was a great refuge. I had a, I was quite extrovert, I used to play a lot with my friends, but there were times when, you know, I wanted to just get away, and I loved reading, and if I could go, I read very fast, and if I could go to the library, I could just read a book in an afternoon, and I didn't have to take it out, and, you know, it was very nice: and then I found the reference library, which was interesting: looking up people's qualifications, and whatnot, and my grandmother was a fearful snob, and she was in Debrett's Peerage, and she showed me, and my sister and I were in it as 'living issue' [laughs] and so I became, well, I don't know, I think perhaps I went through a snobbish period, because it was, well it was 19, it was the period when there was a lot of snobbery around. I daresay there is now too, but it's based on different things, like money. Then it was based on things like whether you were in Debrett's Peerage or not. [laughs.]

Anyway, yes, that was interesting. Mm.

*Do you remember what it said in Debrett's about your grandmother?* 

Oh, it just said that my grandmother's, the Lister-Kayes (I took the name 'Lister-Kaye' because I liked the sound of it, I've had about four names in my time, I've been married twice) and they were quite well-connected, shall we say, and there were quite a lot of them in Debrett's Peerage, but, and my grandmother's family she married into, they were in Somebody's Landed Ge..., *Burke's Landed Gentry*, I think, it was, yes. But every year, Granny used to get print-outs of herself in this little book, in this,

in this snob's, this snob's, snobbish, snobs' dictionary, really, and I suppose in a, I was quite interested in it, I suppose. But, yes, the library was a place, it was a refuge, and it was also a place of more... enormous resources for me. Mm.

And I mean, the other thing about the library, was where, in the book, Camilla [Antonia laughs, so Alex inaudible.]

Well, that was mostly true: but I don't really want to talk about it.

Fair enough: OK. OK. The ... what was I going to say? When, we talked about your grandmother being in Debrett's, and we've also, you've alluded to the fact that she had shares and things, where did those shares come from?

Well, I think that sh..., hereditary, I think she inherited them, but she was always stupid, she was always putting money into things which went bust: and I'd say, 'Granny, you shouldn't put it in that cheese, just 'cause you think it's got a good taste. I don't think it's...' [laughs] you know. I used to, I was quite interested in money from a very early age, so I said, 'Don't put it in Beaver Mead, put it in something... put it in motor cars, or something,' but she lost it, and she lost a lot, and 'I should have listened to you,' she said, so I said, 'Oh, you never do.' [laughs]

Hm. So this was during the thirties, when she was losing...

Yah.

...was it? And do you have any idea how much, she would have had, in shares, or...?

No, I don't really. She didn't tell me very much, [laughs] not much. No, I think she wasn't a very good harbour, harbinger of funds.

So do you remember what sort of things she had shares in that failed?

Yeah, ICI, she had a few blue chips: ICI and... I think she had some in Fords: you know, one of those old blue chips that go on and on, and on: and some oil shares, but I think she had it managed for her, most of it, but some of it, she used to have little flings, and they were never very satisfactory little flings: and, you know, well.

Do you remember any sort of specific schemes that went badly wrong?

Yes, I remember this cheese, because she liked it: it was awful cheese, actually, and she said, 'Oh I'm going to, there's a good little cheese factory starting up, and it tastes delicious, I'm going to support 'em,' so I said, 'Mm,' I said, 'I shouldn't' and, anyway, she did and she lost, I think, a few thousand, which was a lot, a lot in those days. But I s'pose money... money's always important, isn't it? It was very important in our family, because my father didn't have any. I mean, he, in those days, the most army officers had some sort of private means, and Dad didn't have any at all, and this, I think, made him slightly bitter, and my grandmother was always going on about my father having, you know, no money and no blood, and no, no, you know, [laughs] and being common, and all that stuff, and this made me fiercely defending, defensive, defensive, about Dad: but, yes, it was a very strange upbringing, but I suppose everybody's, a lot of peoples have very strange upbringings.

And in the book, there are also some sort of 'aunt figures' in Burythorpe who...

Oh yes, that was true. Yes, I had a, a couple of, well, she was, they were vaguely cousins. They were a marvellous pair of old ladies: I mean, they weren't so old, but they seemed old to me. They were in, I suppose they were in their sixties. There was Margaret, Rose Margaret, who was my godmother. She had also been my mother's godmother, and she was a spinster of... but a very sexually frustrated spinster, I realised, in one way and another. She was plump and plain, and, but she loved fine clothes, so she used to be a marvellous... she used to go round jumble sales, and she was always thought of as terribly eccentric, and she did have, sort of, not psychotic episodes exactly, but she did have episodes when she couldn't stop washing everything: obsessional episodes. But I liked her very much, because she was mad,

slightly mad, and I always thought that everybody thought that I was slightly mad, so we had a sort of, not a collusion exactly, because... no, I don't suppose it was a collusion, and she... but she was a very generous woman, she was, she just didn't have anything, but if she had anything, you had half. And, and she loved, and funnily enough, when she was seven... this is going on a little bit... when she was 70, her very rich brother, who was a really wicked lawyer. He was known as 'the scourge of Newcastle'; he was a very, very rich man. He died, and he left her his house, his chauffeur, his car and everything to his sister, but, Margaret, so she became very rich at 70: and it was incredible, she enjoyed it so much. She would have enormous theatre parties. She was very keen on the theatre, and she'd take about 20 people down to London, and we'd have the whole of the first row of the Dress Circle, and she'd put them all up in hotels, and give us enormous meals, and she was a wonderful character. She, her sister, there was a sister called 'Agnes'

[End of Tape 2 Side A]

# Tape 2 Side B [Track 3]

She was very masculine. [Rustling noise.] She had a very low, husky voice, and very ruddy face and was very forthright, but she had a very good brain, and I liked her in a different sort of way: I think I respected her enormously, and they lived in this marvellous house, Burythorpe, which is near Malton, and Agnes had been married to Ronald, who I think she must have given an awful life to. He killed himself in the woods. He was deaf. For, as a youngish man, he wanted to go into politics, and I think he was terribly frustrated: but he was a nice man, I think: I didn't know him very well. But we used to go and stay there quite a lot, when Granny had had enough of us, and I loved staying there because of all the, you know, the rural life, and I met, the evac... this was at the beginning of the War, too... this goes on, on a little bit. I met an evacuee called Maureen, who told me all about the facts of life, when I was about nine, yes: and we played in the hayloft and, you know, it was, I met people outside my class, and outside my experience, because of these evacuees, who'd been taken in to this small Yorkshire village, and that was fun: yes. I had a lot of fun in my childhood, in spite... I wouldn't, looking back, I wouldn't say I had an unhappy childhood, in spite of all these grown-ups, who were... difficult to cope with, but... I think I went very much my own way. I always have. I've always hated authority, [laughs] which made it very easy for me to work for myself, but quite difficult to work, for an authority. [laughs]

You, one of the things, again in the book, is about a birthday party...

Oh yes, my mother.

That your own birthday party, or Camilla's own birthday party, which she... [talking together] boycotted

I went to the races instead... no, I had, I think that was made up, but, 'cause my mother, the one thing my mother was very good at was giving parties, and she put such a lot of energy into it, you know. I don't think I was as quite out to sabotage it as

I did in the book. I would have liked to have done, I think, and she always wanted me to ask nice little girls, and I always wanted to ask a lot of rather rough boys, and there was a lot of sort of discussion, because, shall we say, argument, because my idea of a birthday party was quite different from hers: but I don't, if, it didn't go so far as me boycotting it, no. I must be truthful about that.

What about the other incident in the book, quite shocking one, when Lucy hits Camilla with a hazel switch?

I'm afraid that did happen.

Can you s... tell us what, what did happen?

Well, it was when I was being a really bloody, bloody, bloody little imbecile [laughs], and, you know, it was when we went out blackberrying, cause the ... Lucy was, whose real name was 'Helen', was very, very fond of, you know, going blackberrying, going out in the country, she was a very rural girl, rural woman, and I've forgotten now why it happened, but she did. I think I wouldn't come, you know, and she had to get back to go to a cocktail party or something. I just wouldn't come. I was just so intent on cramming blackberries into my mouth, that, you know, I, or... and I got hung up in a lot of brambles, and she didn't seem to understand this, and she lost her temper, and she bashed me with a switch, just round the legs: and it did, p'raps it didn't, it was a bit exaggerated, of course, in the book, in the interests of, you know, making it more dramatic, but it wasn't a very nice thing to have done.

Was anything said afterwards?

Not much. In those days, you know, parents did bash their children far more. That's why [clears throat] it rather shocks me when I read smacking your child is coming an offence. I mean, I think that's ridiculous. [laughs] But, it was a very different culture. But bringing up children was a totally different sort of... scenario, and

anyway, different classes brought their children up very differently, as I realised when I met the evacuees, in Burythorpe. [laughs] Yah.

*In what ways were they different?* 

Well we were brought up... well, I s'pose we were brought up to have very good manners and, which they never succeeded in giving me, anyway, and to dress properly, and to speak properly: that was most important: and to eat nicely, and they were the peripherals, you know: and perhaps even some deeper things like, you know, being kind to those who didn't have as much as you had: droit de seigneur really. [laughs]

*In the book, they talk about her grandmother having sort of 'Lady Bountiful visits'*.

Yes.

Can you describe what they were like?

Well, she worked for the RSPCA: no, not the RSCC, the N, the Soldiers' and Sailors' and Airmen's Families: SAAFA, and I don't know what she did quite, but, I don't suppose it was very important: and she also adopted a woman down the lane. There was a lane in the bottom of our garden called 'Water Lane', which led to a lot of very poor council, a very poor council estate, and she sort of adopted this Mrs Rawcliffe, who had seven children and no husband, and she used to go and take her food, and clothes, and I imagine Mrs Rawcliffe sort of taking it all and having a good laugh, behind her back, because my grandmother had no idea how to communicate with, people, other than her own sort of kind. She was so condescending, and, but at the same time she was, I suppose, quite a kind woman, and the idea of doing good was very ingrained. Mm.

Was that something that was, sort of, passed on to you?

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Yes, it did: yeah.

*In what, so in what ways?* 

Well, I s'pose I've always done a lot of ... social work, and [clears throat] I now have an adopted, little boy I send money to... Have you heard of a thing called 'Plan'? I've adopted a child in Malawi, and that gives me great pleasure, and I give so much a month towards his village, and I think it's a very good idea, and I hope it works as well as it sounds as if it works, [laughs] and I also, I write to someone on Death Row, in California, because they have such... I don't care whether he did it or not, but they have such a terrible, terrible prisons, and they stay there for years, and they don't know whether they're going to be executed or not, and that I think is something worth doing: and I worked for a mediation service, mediation among neighbours. I think I told you, and that was fun. I mean, I like people, I like meeting different people, in different situations: and I used to visit prison, long-term prisoners' wives, when I lived in London. Also when I was a psychotherapist, I used to see people, for very little money, people, I mean I used to see people for a lot of money if they had a lot of money [laughs] but that... and then I used to see students, and, you know, people who couldn't afford more than about two pounds an hour. [laughs] I'm not telling you this because I think I'm a particularly good person, it's just, telling you this is part of my grandmother's inheritance, perhaps.

Did she take you when she went to see Mrs Rawcliffe?

Yes, she took me once.

And what was it like? [talking together]

I found it most uncomfortable, because I was an emergent Communist, [laughs] I think, at nine, and although I'd never heard of Communism, I mean I didn't like this idea of this sort of patronage: I mean, this sort of whole idea. Oh yes, I was, another facet of this was, I wasn't allowed to go into the Co-op, because it was, the food was

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bad, it was common, only common people used the Co-op, so I went into the Co-op as much as I could. I bought all my sweets from the Co-op: I think I bought that marvellous lemon sherbet powder, and, you know, I've always belonged to the Co-op ever since. [Both laugh.] Much better than Tescos, [laughs], which is the ultimate end in disgusting, American capitalism.

And what was Mrs Rawcliffe's house like, when you went into it?

Oh pretty ghastly. I'm interested to see that houses in Brighton, in parts of Brighton, you know, just about, haven't changed. They just have a saggy old sofa, peeling wallpaper and disgusting lavatory down, outside, and a kitchen that was so smelly you couldn't bear to go into, and a garden full of weeds, and, you know, stuff all over the garden. That, as I say, that wasn't my scene: I didn't want to go, and I never went again, because I was ashamed of my grandmother, [laughs] for being so patronising.

And how long did she stay for?

Oh, about half an hour, you know. They didn't have very much to talk about, really, she and Mrs Rawcliffe. I don't want to start, but, you see, in those days there wasn't much of a social work... system. I s'pose they, you know, people relied on women like my grandmother to keep an eye on people like the Rawcliffes. [Sound of seagulls in the background.] Yeah, it's strange: it was a long time ago.

Mm. There's one other incident with your granny that I just wanted to know, whether it's made up or... it's the one, is the one you, where Camilla bites her grandmother.

Well, well, I bit my grandmother. Yeah, yeah, I bit her.

What was the occasion? What was...

I've forgotten. It was in Coney Street. You know Coney Street?

Yeah, the main shopping street in York.

Outside Woolworths, and I think I wanted to buy something and she wouldn't let me, so I got in a paddy. I was quite young, I was about six. Yes, quite young: and I just lost it, and so I lay down in the road and bit her ankles. [laughs] That wasn't a habit of mine, I only did it once, and she was so humiliated. Ooh. [laughs]

And, I mean, was there any punishment, afterwards?

I think she'd never take me shopping again, which lasted about a week: yes, and she was very upset, and she lost her hairnet: and her glasses fell off, [laughs] and, yes, it was pretty, a pretty shame, a pretty shameful experience, and I didn't repeat it. No, I think I grew up out of that. I was only six.

Mm: and, I mean, York is famous for its tea rooms as well.

[laughing] Oh yes.

And can you tell us a little bit about some of the ... [talking together.]

Well, that was quite, it was really made up, but it was based on... she used to love Miss Welch's Tea Room: Miss Welch's Tea Rooms don't exist, I don't suppose now.

It was in a little street which is extended after The Merchant House, and you go to the river, and it was a very, very genteel place, where, ladies with hats had coffee, and tea, and very delicate butterfly buns, and, you know, delicious little meringues and things, and I think my grandmother was always putting off taking me there. I always wanted to go there, because I was a very greedy child, and anyway, she did take me there, and something awful happened: I, she also sold fine china, and the window was full of very, very fine china, you know, I mean, when I say 'fine china' I don't mean... I don't mean antique china, I mean well-made modern china, and I stumbled, and I fell into the window, and broke everything in the window. It wasn't, it was a mistake,

it wasn't on purpose, and I felt it was, it was a very upsetting experience, because my grandmother had to pay for God knows what, and I remember thinking Miss Welch was an absolute stinker, for making my grandmother pay for, pounds for what, what was a disabled child's stumble really, and everybody looked at me, and they all looked with absolute horror. They all looked at me with horror anyway, but I mean, it was the extra-special horror [laughs] and that was a sad incident, transformed into a sort of lunatic [laughs] scenario.

Mm. How did you actually feel about that incident?

Well, I think I felt quite upset about it. Yes, 'cause mostly I would deny feeling upset, you know. Otherwise, I'd be upset all the time, about people staring at me and, remarks being made, and that sort of thing, so, I adopted a largely don't-care attitude, but I did care very much about that, because it was it was so humiliating. There were other humiliating incidents, but, it was so public in a way, that the whole tea, a whole tea room staring at you: and, and oh yes, it was; but I did sort of convert it into something rather more fun. [laughs]

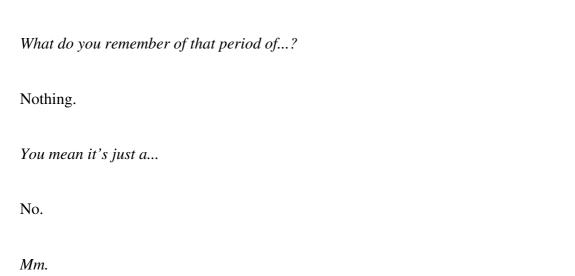
You alluded to some other things that humiliated you: can you...

Mm? [talking together]

...talk. You, you alluded to some other things that humiliated you, you found humiliating: I wondered if you could maybe talk about...

Well, I mean, yes, there were... the, I went, against everybody's, most people's ideas of what was a good idea. Somebody gave me a bicycle when I was 10, and of course, I had to learn, and I did learn how to ride, but I didn't learn, I hadn't got enough manual dexterity to use the breaks, [laughs] so it was a very hazardous experience: but I did once go all the way through York, from one end to the other, from The Mount, to, all the way down by the station: it was a Sunday, I think, to my grandmother's

house and I thought I'd give Granny a surprise, because at that time, my parents were living in a rented house on the Mount, because, after we came back from Northern Ireland, my father was stationed in York, for a short time, and I thought I'd give Granny a fright, by coming for lunch, and, oh, it was awful, 'cause every time I wanted to stop the bike, I had to get off. I had to stop it with my legs, and people... anyway, not on that particular occasion, but on another occasions, people used to yell after me, 'Here comes Useless Eustace!' and it wasn't very nice, because I was doing my best, and then there was another time when I went bike riding with my mother, and I fell off, badly, and got concussion, and I was just put to bed for three days, and, anyway, I don't think, I don't remember seeing a doctor or anything: I was just put to bed, and that was when I was about 10, I think. I still went on riding my bicycle, mind you.



I just... Well, thinking back, I remember thinking, 'Gosh! They should have really got a doctor in, or taken me to hospital or something,' but that wasn't in my mother's... that wasn't in my, that wasn't my mother's way of doing things. I also remember I had a friend called 'Sheila', who I studied with: she was part of a little group, that we had this, we shared this governess, and I remember, I loved Sheila's parents, and I wished her parents were my parents: I mean, this was when my parents were in India, and her father was a psychiatrist. He was the sort of director of an enormous mental hospital out, beyond the aerodrome, you know? Up, the road going out, past Clifton, out of York, and Sheila's mother was Scottish, and a very, very sweet woman, you

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know, and they were a very, very nice couple, and obviously very happily married,

and Sheila was a perfectly-brought up little girl: it used to annoy me, that, sometimes,

but I remember thinking, 'Oh, if only I had those parents! If only I was Sh... had

Sheila's parents, life would be much nicer. I used to do that with a lot of people, you

know. I used to think, 'I wish I had you as my parent.' I suppose I've gone on doing

that, [laughs] and I've always had a lot of mother surrogates, you know. [laughs]

And I think one of the mother surrogates you, you started to talk about last week was,

was at the boarding school that you went to.

Oh, I had masses of mother surrogates there, yes. That was a sort of great surrogacy

centre. [laughs] Yah. Do you want me to go on with that?

Yes, shall we, we talk about that, or do you, is there something...

No, no, I don't know. I wanted to, are we, have we passed on from talking about the

book, now?

I think that's covered pretty much all. There's one other thing that I can bring up, but

it doesn't have to be now, so ... I mean, are there any other things that you wish to say

about the book?

I want to have a few minutes off: I'm tired.

Yeah, sure.

Shall we?

Yeah.

[End of Tape 2 Side B]

# Tape 3 Side A [Track 4]

5<sup>th</sup> April 2005. This is Tape 3. So, just one last thing, I've just remembered about the book. There seems to be quite a lot of... drinking, goes on among various members of the family within the book.

# Drinking?

Yes: and also some early experiences of Camilla, drinking as a child. I just wondered when was the first time you...

Had a drink?

First had alcohol.

Oh well, my parents used to give cocktail parties, and my sister and I used to go round draining all the glasses afterwards [laughs]. I think that was the first time I had a drink: yeah, had a few drinks [laughs]. Yes. I wasn't aware that there was a lot of drinking in the book.

Mm. Well...

Because drink has never been one of my problems, I don't really like the taste. So, just as well, I mean... my headmistress of my boarding school once said to me 'Antonia you must never drink, you're quite bad enough without it.' [laughs] So luckily, I didn't like the taste, and I never smoked either. Because I didn't like the taste of that either, but, when I was young, I used to have a big cigarette holder you know, a long cigarette holder and have a ci..., dummy cigarette in the end, and it made it possible to... I had a lot of involuntary arm movements, and it made it very possible to sort of make 'em into rather dramatic Mediterranean gestures. And one had various wheezes [laughs].

And when was the first time you tried a cigarette then?

Oh the fir... I was very old I think: I was about 18 and me and a friend tried, bought a little packet of Philip Morris and we smoked them in the train. Neither of us really liked it, but we just pretended we did. [laughs] No, cigarettes are not an issue really.

And when you were finishing off cocktails, how old were you when you were trying that?

Eight. But I don't think it made much impact really, except it was something that was rather naughty we shouldn't be doing because, you know, we weren't allowed to... have drinks, of course. But drink wasn't an issue in the family much, because my grandmother was very puritanical and she'd have half a glass of cooking sherry or something occasionally. [laughs] And she'd give sherry parties, but she herself wouldn't drink very much. My father drank, but it wasn't a problem, you know; whisky, you know, and later on he used to drink a lot of barley wine. Sorry have I...

No it's all right: I'm just turning the level up a bit there.

But I have enjoyed the odd spliff, I must say, [laughs] but that was in later life.

OK. All right, well... the sort of the departure point of the novel is when you go

To school

Away to school, and we were talking earlier on the tape about, the surrogate mothers that you met at that boarding school. Maybe you could tell us a little bit about the school?

Well the school was... I was sent there because it was my mother's dying wish that I should go there. It was a Christian Science school. It still exists and it was a school

called 'Claremont', and the building is ... the school is outside, just outside Esher. Now it's a tremendously posh sort of school. When I went, it wasn't so posh, and academically, it wasn't so hot: but it was a nice school, and when I first went there it was in Llandrindod Wells, because it was, we were evacuated, and I went there when I was 10: no 11, I think. I went to this other school first, which I think I spoke about last week

#### The one at Cane End?

The one that I was deported from: I mean expelled from. No, but Claremont was the secondary school. I mean, I was there for seven years, I think. And it was a, there again, it was a beautiful building, another beautiful building for me: original damasks from the eighteenth century. It had been built for Clive of India; designed by Vanbrugh, the grounds, and Clive never lived there, because he committed suicide, for some reason or other, before he got there, but it was subsequently belonged to Louis-Philippe, king of Belgium, and Queen Victoria used to spend a lot of time there, as a child, because he was her uncle. And it was fascinating, because Prince Regent's daughter, Charlotte, actually died in childbirth in the fourth form classroom, [laughs] and we used to be fascinated by this story, and we were very aware of the history of the place because, you know, there was a teacher called Phyllis Cooper who was very keen on history, she was, actually taught French, but she wrote the history of the place up and, we all knew about it. It was a smaller school: about 30 boarders when I was there and about 30 daygirls. All girls. And of course, it wasn't sort... it was sort of... now it's a sort of posh building, you know, and I think they get a lot of money from the National Trust, and they've poshed it up no end, and it's, really is a, staggeringly good example of eighteenth century domestic architecture. But when we were there, it was a bit falling down, and you know, a bit shabby because it was just aft... during the later stages of the War, and after the War, and it was, well it was a fine place to be.

And how did a Christian Science education differ from what you'd had before?

Well, it wasn't very different, because Christian Science, I suppose it always had a certain influence on my upbringing. It was just more intense. We had to read a lesson every day, which was a bit of stuff from the Bible, and a bit of stuff from Mary Baker Eddy, who was the founder of Christian Science and now has gone into decline, I think. But, and nobody, they never called a doctor, unless somebody was very, very, very ill; although they went to dentists. I always thought that was incredibly... inconsistent. I was never really a fully paid-up Christian Scientist. You know, I used to go along with it, and I didn't allow my, I didn't allow my anti-authoritarian streak to, sort of, laugh too hard, loud at Christian Science, because I think I had a sort of, a sort of basic sensitivity some times [laughs].

So, so, sorry, forgive me, I don't know a great deal about it. What sort of, what were the sort of the, the main sort of beliefs?

Well, they believed that... I suppose the one that... I remember most was the fact that all illness was error and the result of wrong thinking, which in a way is, is sound, because so much of illness is psychosomatic in origin, anyway, and people know that these days, but in those days, it was thought to be absolutely batty, to think that if you didn't think the right thoughts you would get ill, or, if you were ill, it was because you hadn't, you'd had erroneous thoughts, and they didn't believe in doctors, but they had people called 'Christian Science practitioners' who'd help you with right thinking. It all sounds rather batty, but it was psychologically quite sound, I think in a way, because nobody was ever ill. I mean, it was very, very rare for anyone to be ill there.

And how did Christian Science view your disability?

Well, I think it was good because, in a way, it was a continuation [laughs] of my home: nobody ever mentioned it. Or if they mentioned it, it was always in a very sort of... soft way. I had to play games. I had to play a lot of games. I had to do gym; I wasn't allowed... not to do anything: but, at one time, I was allowed to have a rest for half an hour in a lunchtime. And I, they got a typewriter, for me to do my exams on and things, you know, because I couldn't write, very much. And I suppose I got a lot

of teasing when I first went to school when, you know, children are like, but I still managed that because, I just thought, 'Well, I'll be able, I'll really make them laugh. I'll laugh with them we'll, I'll be a real buffoon' so I became a real buffoon, and we all laughed together,

Mm.

which was a much better idea [laughs]. I've been a bit of a buffoon ever since, I think. But... no, and then I was an academic child. I liked, I loved learning, but my maths went off badly because I couldn't cope, with writing the figures down. Geometry was difficult; but, yes, I loved English and I even liked French. I wasn't much good at it, but I liked it. Latin, yes, and History was of course, was the main, always my main love. And we had very small classes, only single figures sometimes, and we got a lot of attention, and although the teachers were not always very good, because they had to be Christian Scientists, so there wasn't a big pool to pick from. In my day they had to be Christian Scientists. They were all very nice people and they were, you know, they very sympathetic, without being cosseting.

And what sort of games were you having to play?

Lacrosse, which was good for hitting people on the head with. Hockey, which was good for people, hitting people on the legs with, and netball, and tennis. We had a swimming pool, I learnt to swim which I was pleased about: and, no that's about all. It's enough really.

What about outside of your sort of your lessons. What was the social life of the school like?

Oh it was good. We had, I had elocution lessons because I had a ... it was the one thing that my parents did pay for, which was to do with my disability. I had a rather slip, a rather sliding voice you know, sort of muffled, because of the muscle tone

being really bad. That became all right, but in old age it's become a slightly bad again. I mean what would you say about the voice?

I've turned the volume up slightly on the recording level.

Yes, yes.

Because you sometimes fade away a bit but, but so do I. My, I've got quite a quiet voice too, so...

Yes. Yes. Well, I had a very loud voice when I was young you know: very strident and I loved drama. At school, that was my main interest I suppose, it was one of the main interests and I remember playing parts like Lady Brocklehurst, I won't do the handbag again [laughs]. And, you know, I suppose in a way, I was lively, [laughs] and I was always tired, but I mean I have always been like that. I always lived to the limits of my... fatigue level. You know, fatigue has always been a bit of an issue, but I think it's worthwhile having fatigue if you are going to live. I mean I don't want to not live, and not have fatigue. I'd rather have fatigue and live, and I have never slept very well though: I mean, I don't think spas..., people with cerebral palsy, do sleep very well on the whole because of the movements. I have always taken sleeping tablets. Well, not always, but since I had the children.

OK. So in... What sort... Can you talk a little bit more about some of the other things you did in drama?

It was an all girls school so I was always cast in as either old men or old women, or character parts: and there was nearly always a part for me, I must say, that was really good. I took the parts that nobody else really... wanted, I suppose. or I was good at old people, because I was a sort of ... my movements were sort of sufficiently shambolic, to be old, [laughs], but character parts, you'd say: and I just loved it, I just thought it was such fun, being somebody else [laughs]. And the drama teacher was the elocution teacher, old Miss Clements, and she was about 90, and she'd sort of

worked with one or two film stars and, she was a right character, but she was about six foot tall, and held herself immaculately, even though she was so old. She was of course a Christian Scientist and went on to die at about 99, I think. But she was a very good teacher. Mm.

And what about your sister, Veronica? Was she at the school?

No.

*So where was she?* 

My sister is a very... difficult subject. She was nearly six years younger than me. Do you want me to go right back to the beginning or...

Well if it's something....

No. My sister ... she died five years ago, of cancer, and, for the last two years before she died, she refused to see me. Did I tell you this? And it was, I really loved my sister in a kind of curiously convoluted way; and I couldn't bear not seeing her, so I got a private detective, to tell me where she was living. It cost me fifty quid [laughs]. And I said to her ex-husband, who was sort of fending off various people, who she didn't want to see, including me. She went into remission for two years and I suppose she was determined not to see anybody she didn't really want to see and I was one of them [laughs] and I rang up Ossie and I said, 'Look, I know exactly where Veronica lives and I'm going to turn up unless you, unless you arrange it.' So he quickly put things into position and I was invited up to go and see her, but she was well chaperoned by her ex-husband and her middle son: and I saw her for about 50 minutes and she was quite ill then. She was, she died about two months later, but I was so glad I made the effort, because I had to drive up to Dulwich in the rush hour and, you know, it was very... I do drive, but I don't like driving in London. I wasn't feeling very well and... but it was worth it, even though it was heavily chaperoned; and I could not understand why she was so frightened of me. Can you? [Both laugh]

Not, not really, to that extent. I mean you... So when you went away to school, does that, was that, you were apart from your sister for long periods?

My sister went to another school. My sister, being so much younger was very much in a different sort of age group. She was, she went to school in York and then she went to a boarding school called Monmouth School for Girls. It's a Haberdashers school because my father's farm was about 10 miles away and it was a much cheaper school and by that time dad had retired and there wasn't any money, or very little money. But she did, she was, a strange woman. I think it must have been hard, being my sister, actually. It's always hard to be the sibling of a disabled person, I think. Either the disabled person gets a lot of attention or they, their lives behave so badly and the other one isn't and, you know, and I don't know ... I always think it's difficult. It was certainly difficult in our case: and I was terribly jealous of her as a child, because my grandmother loved her, and nanny was her nanny, not my nanny, and I think the, the family was so riven. You know, my grandmother was on one side, and my sister was with my grandmother; I was always supporting my father, and, after my mother died, it was dreadful. They each ... would tell the other one they had been responsible for the death of my mother. It was really melodramatic and awful: and I suppose we couldn't hope to be friends as sisters. We used to have moments when we would have a good giggle together, you know. But she was a big girl, and she actually bullied me quite a lot, because she was much stronger than me and I was, she was 10 and I was about 15, she was stronger than I was: and, but she remembered it. Well, I once locked her in a tool shed you see, when she was four, and I was... nine or 10. This was at Granny's, and she never forgot that, and so, and I think, in later years that sort of epitomised her feelings about me, that I'd locked her in the tool shed, and it was the most terrifying thing that ever happened to her: and so we didn't get on, but I did try, from about when I was about 50, and she was about 45, I, and I left teaching and became a, trained to be a psychotherapist, I did think it was time I tried, so we used to see each other, about four times a year, and we used, we tried and tried. I think she tried too, but it was difficult. She would never talk about the past, and I always wanted to talk about the past, and, for her, it was too painful. And she was an

introvert, I think, in a way, in very ... a very peculiar person, but then I suppose, suppose that she would say that I was a very peculiar person, [laughs] but it was a... not my best relationship: in fact, probably one of the worst ones I ever had. I never managed to manage my sister. I never managed to know where she was coming from, quite. But it's funny I am very great friends with her daughter-in-law, who she didn't like, [laughs] who was totally black; a really nice person called Pauline, who married her eldest son and she is really one of my very best friends. But, I don't, the friendship was at one time based on a mutual dislike of Veronica, I think, but it's become, it's blossomed and become very much better. I like my eldest nephew very much, Pericles. My sister married an Italian prince called Guardino Palvacini. I liked him. He was a ... he was, I think, an interesting man; he is an interesting man. I must be careful now I was talking about the present.

Mm. Taking back a bit then, what was it like then for you in the holidays, from the boarding school. How did you and your sister get on, when you went back for a holiday?

Not very well. No. By that, by that time, my father had bought the farm and he had married my first stepmother. Sorry. Is it all right?

That's all right.

I kicked it a bit.

Mm.

When, I think I told you last time, when Daddy retired, he bought a farm with my step-mother who had all the money in the farm but she couldn't bear it, and she couldn't bear my father either, and after a year she left and took all her money with her, so my father was left with a mortgage at the age of 56, after he'd left the army and he had this farm which he really couldn't... have I told you this?

Which he really couldn't... finance. It was a smallholding of 20 acres, in Monmouthshire. Beautiful country. But he was particularly keen on pigs, and he had a lot of pigs, but he really was too old, not to manage without help. He had a land girl called 'Bonnie', who wasn't much help, I don't think: and then we had a half-wit boy, a half... I'm sorry, I shouldn't say that, but you know... an educationally-challenged boy [laughs] called 'Douglas': and, but it was no good. I don't think he even broke even on the farm, and he was completely hopeless technically, you know. We had to have a machine we made electricity with, a Lister-Kaye machine, and it used to break down about twice a week, and Dad used to have to go and get a man from the next village to mend it, and then most of the time we used Tilley lamps and paraffin lamps, and we cooked, believe it or not, for a long time on a paraffin stove. We lived a really, a really deprived life, I must say that, because a house without a grown-up mother, a woman in it and with a man who's always been looked after by a batman, or a wife, or both, is hopeless around the house you know, [laughs] especially with a couple of daughters who were so undomesticated it wasn't true. I hated that house. The only room that was ever warm was the kitchen because, we didn't have any heating, of course, and Daddy was very stingy about heating. And the kitchen was a revolting room, and we had mice and rats and god knows what. We used to have quite fun, my sister and I had mouse races. We had a bull terrier called 'Bully' and we used to make him run after the mice through the cupboards in the sideboard. [laughs] It was all rather like Cold Comfort Farm. Have you read Cold Comfort Farm? Yes, it was a bit like that. And of course dad was under financial siege all the time, because he had to pay off the mortgage, out of a military pension which was very small. It was £600 a year or something, and so he was always in a bad temper because he was always anxious. He wasn't always in a bad temper, no, but he was, had underlying anxiety about finance. And I remember him saying at one time, 'If only I didn't have you two girls, I'd be rich.' [laughs]. But no, it was a hard life, on the farm and the pigs kept going, getting out on the green and we had to chase then round the village green, and that was a subject of great village hilarity, watching us chasing the pigs around the green. Or the cow would get in the corn, and it really is true, if a cow gets in some

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green corn, they die, because they eat green corn, and it's poison for cows. So Daisy would get in the corn, and the pigs would get off, out of the gate, into the village green, and oh God, something was always happening ,something boring like that; [laughs] so it wasn't a very happy life. No, we didn't have very good holidays. [sighs] No.

So did you look forward to the holidays together then?

No, I hated them.

Mm.

I used to cry at the end of term. Everybody else used to say, 'Oh we're going home. Isn't that lovely? The holidays.' Sometimes I used to go and stay with other people, but the holidays were horrible. This was when I was about... Dad bought the farm when I was 15, and he married Hilary who I didn't like at all. I hated her. I wrote hymns of hate to Hilary, in my bedroom. [laughs]

So how did he meet Hilary?

What?

How did he meet Hilary?

Oh he'd known Hilary for years and years. You know, these sort of regimental widows who circulated, when one chap died, they'd marry somebody else in the regiment. It was a kind of 'in' society. So he, I don't think he'd been engaged to Hilary before he met my mother, but he'd known her very well. She was a very strikingly beautiful woman, and but very, completely cold and no... she'd been married twice and had no children, so she was, and she was very fussy and I think she liked my sister. She didn't like me and I couldn't stand her: and in the end, she

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couldn't stand my dad either [laughs]. Because he was bad-tempered and messy: untidy, you know. [laughs]

*So how long were they married for?* 

A year. Then she went off and died of breast cancer. He used to say she'd fallen in love with the local doctor, [laughs] but I don't think that was... him, his imagination. I hope so, anyway. But, no, she wasn't a success, poor Hilary.

And did you say your father got married another time as well?

Yes. He got married later when I was in South Africa.

Mm.

Another regimental widow and that wasn't a success either.

Mm.

She stayed, I think she stayed two years. But she had a manor house..., in Colchester so she went back to her manor house.

So your father bought this farm, when you were 15. What was happening to you at school at that time?

Oh, I think I was sort of enjoying school, yes. It was coming up on my school certificate in those days, and I was busy learning to manipulate a typewriter. The typewriter had been not got by the school. My godmother in the book, remember? My godmother, who loved young clerics, got the typewriter out of a young cleric. It was called a Zost. It was a terribly ancient American typewriter with huge keys, but it worked and it was in the wartime it was very hard to get typewriters, and she went to all sorts of trouble to get it. I don't quite know that it was the truth that was in the

book. [laughs] I think that was a bit of camping up, but, so I was busy, learning to manipulate this typewriter thing, and there was a question about whether I should use a typewriter at my public exams, or whether I should dictate. But I opted to use a typewriter, and I did quite well. I didn't take that many subjects, but I got two distinctions and two credits, and two passes. And so everybody was quite pleased, and then I stayed on, one year in the sixth form and... or was it two years? I've forgotten exactly. Anyway, I think I had a sort of breakdown, and I didn't get my GCE A level. It was too much, and so, and then I went home to stay with Dad, on this bloody awful farm and I didn't know what to do. I thought, 'I've mucked it. I can't go to university now. If I don't go to university, I'll not have a life, so I took a correspondence course with somebody called Wolsey Hall in Oxford. Do they still exist? I don't think so.

### [Something inaudible]

Anyway, I was becoming very left-wing by that time, and I was, read the *New Statesman*, which was a marvellous paper in those days: Kingsley Martin, you know. I don't suppose you've ever heard of him really, but still. And it was full of really good writing and there were very good advertisements on the back page, and one of them was to do with this correspondence course in Oxford.

[End of Tape 3 Side A]

# Tape 3 Side B [Track 5]

Yes, this correspondence course; and they were a jolly lot of people. I think they were largely dons' wives, but I enrolled, and did three subjects. I did English, History and Religious Knowledge. This was the first year they did A' level: that's right: and the school said I could go back there, and take the examination from that, as a centre and have individual invigilation, which I needed because of being on a typewriter, so I worked like bloody hell, and my dad made it very difficult, because he didn't believe that it... he wanted me at home, for the dubious company, and I absolutely hated it. God, I hated that place. I hated Dad at that time too, I think, because he didn't make it easy. There was no heating, as I said, anywhere, except the kitchen, and the kitchen was absolutely filthy: and, yes, it was a very difficult time. But anyway I did work very hard, and I applied for lots of universities and they all turned me down. Five universities turned me down, because I couldn't write: I had a disability. I mean, in this, the disability scene has changed dramatically. I mean, all those civic universities that I wanted to go to Leeds or Manchester or Birmingham or, one of those civic universities. I think I applied to four or five and they all sa..., they didn't want to know: because they didn't have any provision for disabled students, at all. None: and I was beginning to get really upset, and I applied to Durham. I had always liked Durham, because it was a bit like York, and, in many ways it was, had more charm, because it was smaller and I'd been, I'd had an aunt who lived at Billingham. Her husband worked at ICI up there, so I knew, I'd been to Durham and I thought this was a lovely place and so I applied to Durham, and there they have a collegiate system, and I applied to two colleges, and I got an interview, and I had a very good interview with a professor, history professor: and he asked, he was very keen on me having read certain books, like *Middlemarch* and *War and Peace*, and of course I'd read them all and I was quite fluent: and then I had to have another interview with the head of the college so I had, it was St Aidan's College, St Aidan's Society I think, Miss Scott, and she and I got on terribly well. I mean, she was this, a real archetypal blue-stocking, and anyway, so I got my place, which was assured if I got my A' levels. And so, so anyway I got my A' levels, I got a state scholarship and was off [laughs]. But university was very interesting: it was very hard in some ways. I'd never met boys

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before. You know, having gone to an all-girls' school, and, you know, my father never encouraged any kind of social life. And it was a very interesting, very, quite difficult scenario, but there again, I loved the library [laughs].

Well, shall we, shall we stop there?

Yes. I think that's a good place to stop actually.

Yes. Ten to and

Is it?

[End of Tape 3 Side B]

### Tape 4 Side A [Track 6]

This is Antonia Lister-Kaye, and it's 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2005, and this is Tape 4. Antonia, last week you were, telling us a bit about how you'd got in to Durham University. Perhaps you could tell us a bit about what it was like, when you arrived?

Yes. Durham was a very, in those days it was a very small university. I believe there were only six thousand students, spread out among ten colleges: four women's colleges and six men's colleges. This in itself was a good thing for me because, you know, and also Durham being such a small town, it's an interesting place because the top of the town is all university and the bottom is like a mining village. It was in those days: I'm sure it's changed now. So it was really two towns, and that thing in itself fascinated me, the contrast between the two towns, the two bits of Durham. And I suppose I really loved Durham as an entity. A place has always been important to me and I have lived in lots, a lot of places and Durham was a marvellous place to study history. [rustling noise.] Anyway, I got in with a state scholarship so I had heaps of money and, having never had any, [laughs], at least it felt like that, I felt very lucky in some ways. And there were only 12 students in our year, in the History School, at year one. And I don't think the history school was terribly good in those days. It was a very ancient Professor Hughes, who had written one book I think, one, North Country Britain, North Country England in the Eighteenth Century, and it wasn't, it was very stagnant, and I don't think the lecturers could care a damn about the students and, well it, I don't think they do now either probably [laughs]. But you know, I don't think that's changed, but you'd think being such a small outfit it would, there would have been more sort of personal [inaudible] but there wasn't. We were just something that had to be got through for the sake of their money, their salaries. And also we had peculiar people, known as 'moral tutors'. You would have thought that they would have had some pastoral insights, but they, mine didn't anyway. I mean, she was just a sort of, she was the wife of a cleric, who was very superficial, I felt, and she never really cared a damn. We used to have to meet them once a term, and she never really asked me any questions about, how I was managing to cope or anything, so, on the whole, that was very much a blank: a blank bit. But, on the other hand, I had a very, very nice head, head of college; college principal, called Miss

Scott, and Miss Scott and I warmed to each other. She was a real old-fashioned bluestocking, you know, with grey hair in a bun, and she didn't actually wear blue stockings but I wouldn't have been surprised if she had a pair of navy blue stockings, and she queened it in this place called Sheencliffe [phon.] Hall, which was some way out of Durham, and... my first year, I lived in, but, and she had a sort of mini High Table and I was very often on High Table despite of my disgusting table manners, because she said I had a beautiful brain: which was very, well she didn't actually say that but that's what she thought, I think. And I was always very good at making conversations with high ecclesiastics, although I wasn't even a Christian. But that was a good thing, really, that was very good for my ego. But there were bad things: boys. Now, I'd never come across boys, or men much, except for my father, who was a Victorian: and I was terrified of boys, and I think they were frightened of me, and although it was university I made some very good women friends. I failed abysmally on the ... male front. I suppose this was all, all the, perhaps the echo of what happened at the Freshers' Ball. At the Freshers' Ball, I did one very good thing: I went down a coal mine. We were allowed to choose what we did, and I thought that I'd never go down a coal mine again, I'll just do this, it will be wonderful: wonderfully, you know, a wonderful sort of sidelight on what people's life, what some people's life is like. It was truly terrible. There were these men in boot, in gumboots, with nothing on, except the little tiny trunks, hacking away, all folded up: hacking away at the ceilings of the coal seams. It looked really eighteenth, nineteenth century. Anyway, way, it made me think and it was really interesting. But the other thing I did was to go to the ball, Freshers' Ball, and I had on a brand new, very, very cheap nylon dress and you know, I thought I looked rather nice [laughs], and nobody asked me to dance: you know what it is, boys at one end, and girls at the other. No one, until, this sort of clerical chap, although I knew, I don't know how I knew he was a clerical, there were an awful lot of clerical students at Durham, he asked me to dance and I sort of said, 'Well, I can't really dance. I've never really danced.' [laughs] And [inaudible] looked all, alls sort of, you know. [???] Anyway, we danced and I fell, I dragged him over on the middle of the floor and we fell in a terrible, embarrassing heap and he, I've never seen a man blush. So very quickly and so very red, become so very, very red and I, neither of us hurt ourselves, but it was

very humiliating, and I suppose in a way that made me feel very bad about, my future with the opposite sex, at Durham anyway, which was stupid really but, you know, I was very ambivalent. I longed to have a boyfriend. I was 19 when I went to uni... I'd never had a boyfriend; never been kissed. I was kissed once at a Young Farmers' Dance, but that doesn't count. But, and, you know, all these beautiful young freshers, who were all [background noise] picking up or being picked up by glorious castle [???] men, and there was I, stuck without a..., even an ugly, plain boyfriend I would have settled for: but nobody, and that was how it was, most of the time at Durham really, and all those lovely balls people went to and, you know, and the chatter, but, but I liked my time at Durham in spite of it. I threw myself into work, and I had some very, as I said, I had some very good friends of my own sex, with which I used to go hitch-hiking in the summer holidays, all over Europe, and considering, I think I really had a good time. And of course I loved the city of Durham, and the cathedral. The second year, I was in digs, outside Durham, and I had a very nice Yorkshire landlady, but the buses were useless. I fell off one, a bus, and broke a rib. You see, I had a very bad cough, and nobody was quite sure if the cough was caused, the rib was caused by the cough, or the falling off. Anyway, that rather did me in for, half a term, but my landlady looked after me, and that was very good, because nobody else would have done [laughs]: not at home. But I think that was the only bad, really bad thing which happened: apart from this awful soulful feeling that I would never have a boyfriend. And I think [rustling noise] it was largely, it was largely, not really my fault, but I didn't help myself. I used to walk along with my head on the ground: my head down, facing the ground, because I was so shy; and I always remember, one time, when most of the History, my History class were one side of the road, and I never looked at them, and I was the other, and I was walking round with my head to the ground, my head down as usual and they all, with one great voice shouted [loudly] 'Snob!' And I don't think they realised altogether that I couldn't help, I could help, if I thought about it: if someone had told me, I could have walked with my head up: I suppose, I was quite physically capable of it, but, I was so shy: and this I suppose was when my disability kicked in a lot, at university, because of men. I mean I was perfectly at home with my own sex. I mean I'd been to a same-sex boarding school, where I spent about seven years. I was perfectly at home with women. I used to, you know, I mean have a, have a greater entertainment, it was very entertaining. But I remember my 21st birthday party. I think there were about 15 women and one man [laughs], and that was about it, and I think the man was a, belonged to somebody else anyway. But, so I made up a boyfriend. I made, I invented a boyfriend, who was down in London, you see, and he worked in the British Library, he worked in the British Museum [laughs]. And I used to invent letters and, you know. This is all very sad, but, it was very funny really: and I had a photograph of him, which I'd sort of culled from somewhere, I've forgotten where, but, he was called 'Robert', and he was very clever [laughs]. And then I think a lot of my rather, one or two rather malicious students rumbled that I, that he didn't really exist, but it was my way of coping: probably not a very good way of coping, but, you know, I felt I needed it for my self-respect. A funny old time really, yes.

When you say that, that 'one or two malicious people sort of rumbled it.' How did, how did they rumble that you'd made up a boyfriend?

I'm not quite sure, but I think it was the non-existent letters. The letter, I said I'd had a letter, and they said they'd looked in my pigeon-hole and I didn't have a letter. Something like that. And then once, when my... godmother came to take me away, to Newcastle for the day, I said I was going out with, Rob, Robert had come up from London and I was going to spend the day in Newcastle with some friends of his: and I think somebody actually saw me with my ancient godmother, [laughs] and anyway, it was all, it was terribly embarrassing, but I'm not quite sure who knew what: and, anyway, I knew why I was there was to get a degree and you know, and okay these things were, were very difficult, and humiliating, and they didn't do my ego any good; although I did have some very, very good, fast friends, who I still know: and it wasn't that I was anti-social, I wasn't even anti-men, but I thought men were anti-me. I never quite knew what impact my disability, was making on people, at this stage. Then there was a nice girl in the History, in our History year and she said, 'People ask me why you always sit at the back?' So I said, 'I always sit at the back because, I don't want people to be disturbed by my involuntary movements.' And she said, 'Well I don't think they know that,' so that I said, 'Well, you know, I'm, that's their hard cheese that they're so insensitive.' But it was, my disability was a great trouble to me I think,

at that stage in life. I was a sort of rather backward adolescent at 19, and while I was, you know, I was very, very keen on the idea of sex, [laughs] I certainly, and I wasn't a lesbian. I often used to think later how easy it would have been if I had been a lesbian but I wasn't, so there: not really, no. And, so that was Durham, and I had a breakdown unfortunately, over doing the degree. They expected me to, they gave me, we had 10 papers to do, and sometimes we had to do two papers in one day, and they gave me three quarters of an hour extra for each paper, so that would have meant nearly eight hours typing a day, and I just couldn't do it so I didn't. I said, [whispered] 'bollocks,' and, well I just refused. Anyway, they gave me an Ag, Aegrotat, which I very well, very much, deserved.

Sorry what is that?

Do you know what an Aegrotat is? [both talking together]

It's Latin for 'he is sick'. Aegrotat. Don't they use it now?

I've not heard it.

Perhaps they don't. [both talking together]. It's a good, it's a good honourable title for someone who doesn't quite make it, because they're not well. And so that was Durham really and, I'd made some wonderful friends and I'd had some lovely adventures, in the holidays. I never wanted to go home to the horrible old farm, so I used to go to Budapest instead: not, not Budapest, exclusively: all round Western Europe with my friends. I had a couple of friends. I had few, quite a few friends I used to go hitch-hiking with, whenever I possibly could because it was ch..., it didn't cost any money really, cheap, it was fun and completely, you know, you couldn't tell what was going to happen next; exciting: and that's how I spent my holidays, and that was perhaps one of the nicest parts of that time of my life was going hitch-hiking. Yes, sleeping in barns, and meeting all kinds of incredible people and... it was hard, quite hard, because we carried quite hay, hard, quite big rucksacks on our backs, and

it astonishes me now, how I could have done it, but I think it tired me very much but, it was such fun that it didn't matter.

So [noises of crockery in background] what were you carrying in your rucksack?

Well, mostly knickers [laughs]. Basics: but quite a few basics we had, I suppose. Underclothes and shirts: whatever you wore in those days. We didn't wear very much, [laughs] I mean we wore... life wasn't geared to any kind of fashion for us. We just wore trousers and tops, and I had a bottle-green, duffle coat which I'd dyed green. It was a duffle coat, which are usually, sort of, either blue or, or sort of khaki-coloured. This I'd made green and it was a wonderful colour. I've always liked colours, even though I, seldom thought I was worth, bothering, to wear them, if you see what I mean, at that stage. Anyway, next I went to Edinburgh University, to read for a postgraduate diploma in Sociology. I really was so interested in people, and Sociology seemed to me to be a very good follow-up to History, because History was about yesterday's people, apart from all the constitutional stuff, and Sociology was about today's people. And, well, I didn't do any work, you know. [laughs] I shared a flat with a very glamorous girl, called Annette, who had the most wonderful clothes. She was rather a rich, Scottish farmer's daughter, and she really helped me tremendously, you know. She used to lend me her dresses, and make me go and have my hair cut properly, and put varnish on my nails, and, although she wasn't a, it wasn't a very, you wouldn't call her an actual carer. [laughs] She was a funny girl, but she wanted some other fun girl to do things with, [laughs] so she made me into a fun girl. And so I went to dances, and all sorts of things, and I joined cosmopolitan clubs, you know, I hadn't got time for any work: so my university career was work, work, work and then no work: all, all fun. It was very split, and I really managed, for the first time in my life, to come to some sort of terms with my wavering limbs, and I realised I wasn't, I wasn't bad-looking. You know, I had a good bone structure and, with a bit of makeup, I looked rather nice. Also I had a, I had quite a good figure considering: I mean, you know, I was very lucky in that I'd always done these exercises, so I hadn't got sort of very twisted up, or gnarled up, and I could walk, yes. I even learned to dance but, and I got a boyfriend. He was ever so boring [laughs]. He was a geologist. Ever

so boring, God, Bill, he was boring, but he was a boy [laughs]. He was a man, I mean. And anyway, I soon dispensed with him, he was too boring, but I learnt a lot of things [laughs]. And then I realised that I really liked black men. I think it wasn't simply that black men were easier to get, because if you, in those days, black men had a hard time of it, because a lot of white women didn't really want to be seen with the black men, because of what people would say. I mean they might like 'em, they might like the idea of going to bed with a black man, but [laughs] not many of them did. So anyway, I began my career with black men [laughs]. After Bill, Bill was so terribly Anglo-Saxon and boring that I feel, I felt I could do with some exotica. So... I met a lawyer from Ghana, called Sam. He wasn't terribly nice, but he was... interesting, in a way, and clever, and first generation at university, and he became Ghana's first Solicitor General after Kwame Nkrumah went to prison. I mean, I don't think it was as instant as all that but, at some time he became the Solicitor General. So he was a bright boy. Anyway, I held on to him for some time, and of course, I failed all my exams. I mean, you know, I passed two exams and failed two of them, so left Edinburgh with nothing except sexual experience [laughs]. Which was about time, I think: I was about 22 then, and I didn't know what I was going to do. You know, here I was, with an Aegrotat degree, and nothing else and, but a huge amount of enthusiasm to do anything which anybody would let me do. Anyway, luckily my old school, which was called Claremont, wanted a history, desperately needed a history teacher because their last history teacher got pregnant: and it wasn't nice for the girls to see a pregnant woman in those days, who wasn't married, so I got called upon, by telegram [laughs]. So that was lovely because it was near London and it was, was really fun, and I loved teaching. Goodness knows how I managed it; I hadn't even had any experience at all, but I love the subject and I liked the girls, and I think I didn't do very, I didn't do badly really. And so that went on for two years, while, and I lived at, in the school to begin with, and then I realised that I couldn't stand that. For one thing, I had a picture of Sam on the mantelpiece and the Deputy Head had said, 'Well that must go; you have sixth-formers coming here for coffee. Well, it isn't very nice for them to see that.' So I said 'Well Sam's staying. I won't ask them again' [laughs]. Anyway I was very cross. It was a very sort of prim school and... yes, well anyway, Sam went anyway. I got rid of him, after some time. I realised he was

rather pompous. And then I used to go to these conferences, these, run by the young Fabians. I was very lefty: very left wing, working in a totally right wing establishment: which was quite fun, getting their knickers in a twist. Oh yes, and then there was Shirley Butler. Shirley Butler was a hopeless teacher. She taught classics. Enormous woman, she was a spinster of about 40. But she and I were quite good buddies. We sat at the bottom of this vast staff room table, we were at the very bottom of it, and we used to giggle, giggle away, and she used to say, 'What did you do last night Tony?' So I used to make up what, you know, I used to, I used to tell her awful things I'd done, leaving out the things I thought she shouldn't be told, [laughs] because she was a spinster, and then, anyway, she got the sack and I learnt that she was later making her money, writing short stories for women's magazines. So I reckon I'd given her plenty of copy, down at the bottom of the staff table. [laughs] But she was a very nice woman. I don't know what happened to her quite. She was a bit of a born loser I think. But, I had heaps of boyfriends actually, during that time. I used to go to a graduates', they had a graduates' ball every Saturday; not a ball, a dance. Some sort of graduate association, and they used to have dances at Chelsea Town Hall, and that was great fun too because, you know, you met all sorts of people. And, there was a very glamorous games teacher at this school, and she said, 'Antonia, I don't know how you manage it, I never have any boyfriends, and I'm much better turned out than you.' So I said 'Ah, but you haven't got sex appeal' [laughs]. And this was about two years after I was despairing of myself. And, anyway, so I took her along to this graduates' do and I think she was very fussy, anyway she didn't meet anybody, and that was it, I think girls in those days were often, very fussy and they were looking for husbands and things, you know. They were looking for permanence. I wasn't; I was just looking for fun [laughs], I think at this particular time. Oh yeah, and then once I went to the Slade's dance, a dance at the Slade with another friend of mine, called Jackie, who I met in Edinburgh, and I actually found myself hopping along with Lucian Freud. And Lucian Freud said to me, 'Oh God, you just can't dance, can you?' So I said 'No. I never pretended to,' and he said, 'Well let's go, let's go on the roof and look at the stars.' So I said, 'I'm not an astronomer either.' [Both laugh] Well I thought 'One of Lucian Freud's women, no thanks.' He's got 13 illegitimate children.

Antonia Lister-Kaye Page 73 C1134/06 Tape 4 Side A [Digitised as Part 6]

Did you know who he was when you met him?

Yes, I think so. I think somebody said 'Oh that's Lucian Freud you were dancing with,' so I said, 'Oh. Oh.' I had heard of him because I was always interested in art and, although I didn't paint or anything, I knew quite a bit about modern art and all that stuff. So that was rather fun.

So you declined the visit to the roof did you?

Um?

You declined the visit to the roof?

Oh no, I wasn't interested. I mean, you know, I, he was too old anyway. He was about 32 and I was about 22, and I sort of wasn't into one-night stands. No. Not really, no. Not unless they were absolutely gorgeous [laughs]. Whew, God!

Your relationship with Sam: you said that the deputy headmistress had been a bit ...

Sorry?

Your relationship with Sam, you said that you'd had a sort of strange reaction from, one of the deputy headmistress.

Yeah, yeah,

*W*...

... well it wasn't strange in those days. It was perfectly normal.

Mm. I was going to say, did you have other reactions to your relationship with Sam?

Well my father who I used to tease about it because my father had the sort of mentality, if I'd turned up there with Sam he'd have probably run him through with his First World War sword: in fact, that's what he said he'd do. So, Sam had never met my father, and my father, what I did in London was, never had, never told about, I never told me dad. I mean, I think, I used to go home occasionally, and he would read my letters; I'm sure about that, and, however, that's another story, but it didn't much matter. And anyway, when I, after Sam, I think I took to going to these conferences, the Young Fabians, and things like that. I used to choose conferences and, sort of, meetings which were about subjects that women weren't normally interested in. Can you hear this?

Yes. Yes it's fine.

And, you know, like statistics, [laughs] And I was very interested in social statistics, which was not a very feminine subject in those days: and world population trends and, you know, sort of, undomesticated, global sort of subjects. I had a genuine interest but, at the same time I did realise that, there wouldn't be many women there, and the competition would be quite limited. Anyway. So, that was how I got my next boyfriends [laughs].

Who was he?

Well, this world population chap was a ... There were two I had to choose from. One was a second secretary at the Pakistan Embassy, who was absolutely dead gorgeous, but I realised that it would probably be very short-term indeed. [laughs] And the other was a man who was younger than me: he was called Walter and he was a farmer, a farmer's son, and he was at agricultural college and I thought, 'God I've got nothing in common with Walter,' but he was a very nice man. I think he was 20, and I was 23 or something, 24, and anyway we had quite a fling, Walter and me, and I've forgotten what went wrong anyway something: I was a fly-by-night really I think at

that time. I'd missed out on so much experience, [laughing] that I was going to have it comp...

[End of Tape 4 Side A]

# Tape 4 Side B [Track 7]

I think he was a Quaker. He was the eldest son of 11 children, and came from Cornwall, and he was really one of the nicest people I've ever met: certainly, one of the nicest men I've ever met. Because I was ... it was odd, I think the fact that he was three years younger than me seemed an awful lot, in those days and in those days, age seemed to matter a lot. And then I met Freddy and Freddy was a, he was, he came from the Sudetenland. His father had been a, his grandfather had been a very famous musician. He was Jewish, and very, he was rather exotic, but he was white; he was rather glamorous, I thought. And, and rather good, and very large and very goodlooking, so... and a German Baron, to boot. Well [inaud] Sudetenland, which makes him sort of Czech doesn't it? And he was very bright. He worked in the intelligence unit of *The Economist*, and he'd got heaven knows how many degrees, from everywhere. And so I chucked poor Walter on Waterloo station. I said 'I'm going out with a Baron,' [laughs] and he burst into tears and disappeared and I felt terrible for about five minutes. I still feel terrible about it intermittently, because it was so cruel and horrible, but then I suppose, life had been cruel and horrible to me in some ways. But it was a very nasty thing to do, and I don't know why I did it now. You know, every one of us has done things we, small things and big things, that we bitterly regretted and this was one of it, one of the things that I was so hard. Anyway, so Freddy and I cavorted around for a year or two and we, he was a bit sort of alternative for me, actually. We belonged to a thing, he belonged to a thing called 'The Progressive League'. Have you heard of The Progressive League? Which was a kind of thirties, poets and artists and sub-Bloomsbury, I would say. People who were, had conferences, and all got into each others' beds, which was quite something in those days, my God! And, but they were quite bright. They all lived in NW5 or N, not Ham, just off Hampstead, you know, not in Hampstead, off Hampstead: and they had a magazine and they used to discuss things like the female orgasm, which was incredible stuff to discuss in 1952 or 3 or whenever it was. I didn't really like them: they weren't really me. I have a deeply conservative streak, and I think I couldn't sort of, although I was quite promiscuous in a way, for that period, I couldn't hack all this

promiscuity, the theories behind the promiscuity [laughs]. I was a practical, but I couldn't, I didn't want to, take on board the theoretical. [laughs]

So were they sort of advocating sort of free love then?

Yes. Free love; that sort of stuff. And they were all so old too. I mean I was 23 and, or 24, I don't know, and they were all sort of pre-war characters, you know; getting on into their forties, and even fifties. And they, and they were, believed in witchcraft and stuff like that; pagans and things like that. All very, stuff which is all very, not acceptable, exactly now, but much more acceptable, much less outré, and, well I gave up on Freddy, because of all this stuff. Although he was nice, and we did a lot of nice things. He was an opera fan and he had a lovely bass voice. He used to sing, and he had a lot going for him, but I think he had, he had sort of emotions made of concrete. I think, because he'd had a ghastly time in the War, in Switzerland with his grandmother, who was a German actress, who he didn't really like and his mother had given up on him very early in life and his father had disappeared, and, you know, it was, he was the sort of war awful, not awful but pretty harrowing wartime childhood. Anyway, funnily enough, he later married a girl, a school-friend of mine, who he didn't meet through me, and that was successful, for 20 years, I think. Anyway, so that's Freddy down: and in between there were other great [?] ones: I can't remember their names really [laughs]. A long time ago. But I was going through a very delayed adolescence. At the same time, I was doing a reasonably good job at school: I was teaching, and but I had a f..., got myself a flat, which was virtually on the railway line, almost on the railway line, at Claygate. Do you know Claygate? And so I used to spend my life going up and down to London. I, my social life was nowhere near my work life. No, because the school was a very religious school: Christian Science, as I believe I told you. But it was a good time. I didn't really do much which was tremendously worthy but, as I said, I'd had all those terrible dreary years, at the farm and, you know, and all those man-less years in Durham and I was just making up for it really, and there were one or two bad times but, on the whole... I still had my clutch of girl friend, women friends, and that was nice and I had a lovely mother surrogate at school, who was called Ruth Pearcey [ph] who just died the other day, aged 102, and

she was a marvellous help, and, you know, you could tell her anything. She had four children, and she was a founding member of the Samaritans, so she was a woman who did good without, sort of, being boring about it. She was a friend of Chad Varah. Anyway, can we have a little break?

Sure.

[break in recording]

So how did your sort of working life, and your social life how, how did they sort of...

Well I must say, I didn't over work, [laughs] but I think I got on well enough with the girls, and I managed to do the marking. I couldn't write on the board, but I got them to write on the board and... because I, it had been my old school, and I knew a lot of the teachers there. [Voice in background.] I think I felt very much at home there really, and think they thought I was a, sort of rather a desperate character, the staff I mean, because they were all rather old and fogeyish. Very good teachers, some of them. And the Head, I liked the Head, yes, she was okay. Miss Macaffie [ph] and there was another teacher there called Miss Cooper, who we called Coops, and she'd been the one who'd always believed in me and I think I may have mentioned her before, and persuaded me that I had a brain, even though I wasn't very good at her subject, which was French. But, yes, I quite enjoyed it. I think I wasn't the best teacher in the world. I wasn't prepared to be committed enough. My committal was to my social life: but I think I more or less earned my keep, and it was a beautiful building, to be teaching in. The surroundings were lovely and most of the staff were all right, yes. Although I wouldn't have counted any of them among my special friends, no. I had a sort of clique of friends, who I used to go round with. One particular friend called Pam worked in John Lewis's and she actually married a very handsome Pakistani. She and I used to go to these dances where we were likely to encounter black men [laughs]. We had the same rather ... which was sort of a bizarre taste, you know: she likes black men [laughs]. Oh dear. But, there you go. I had a lot of friends and they weren't always in this clique they were, I always tended to have

separate friends as well, but I've never, I've never not had a good social life. And my friends seemed to have taken my disability in their stride, especially when we were younger because it, I was strong, you know. I may have had this disability, but because I was so active, I was very strong considering, considering the impediment, I was strong. And I come from a strong stock: and so I got off quite lightly I think, in a way. It was after I had, years later, after I started having the children, had babies, and you know, into my thirties, when I started getting very bad back-aches and, you know, it started troubling me in various ways, I think. I've got scoliosis, sorry this is going on a bit, and I think, you know, it was, but when I was, certainly when I was in my twenties, and fancy free, I was fairly free of any pain to do with my disability, and I just got on with life and, you know, I had a lot of energy and I lived on the margins of my energy. So sometimes I was very tired, yes, but I never let that stop me really, I swam well, which was great fun. I loved swimming. I still swim: on my back, now. I think I had a very full life, and a very adventurous one, as far as the hitch-hiking went. I wish I wrote it all up when I came back from the very big hitch-hike I did, but I lost it of course.

You mean you lost the book?

I lost the piece of paper with it written on.

Oh.

But I still see the girl, the woman, sorry, she is now 69, who I did a lot of hitch-hiking with. She just lives down the road. So it sort of bonds you together, because you have such extraordinary adventures, like when we were outside Marseille, the men were obviously up to no good and they, they weren't taking us where they said they were going to take us, so we just had to jump out quickly at a petrol station and go and hide in the woods. We'd awful tales about white slavery in South America [laughs], but whether they really happened or not, I don't know, but still. I wouldn't ever have hitch-hiked alone, certainly not on the Continent. But when I, we used to hitch-hike on everything; a sausage van, a refrigerated sausage van took us down the

Rhine. My God, it was cold! And, but it was the only thing that picked us up, and then at one time in Bayaria we were, we were just sitting on the side-line and we had a lift on a steam roller, which was very fast, I must say, and very noisy. But in between, we had Rolls Royces, we had, you know, all sorts of, varieties of Volkswagens and lorries, great big lorries, and Morrises, and just about everything you can imagine: and people were very good, they would stop. We never waited long, and, you know, there were always two, sometimes even three of us. But, at one time, we went to visit my, my German relatives, in Bavaria, and we hitch-hiked there, and this was, must have been in 1944; no, in 1954 I mean, 54 or 55: or even 56. But my great grandmother had a sister who married a German officer, at the beginning of the century, and we had this very devoted German, these devoted German cousins. They were cousins of my grandmother actually went down and they were, they lived in a mini castle, a small castle. And we arrived with, with our two rather dubious-looking drivers, and we had to go through all this, these fields, and these peasants were in smocks, blue smocks, and I remember, one of us spoke very good German, I didn't, but Joyce kept on saying 'They keep on asking 'Who is the cousin from England?' And anyway, so we arrived, and my cousin Clara, who was rather a tough old woman, she'd been, both she and her husband, the Baron, had been locked up in prison in the War, because they were listening to the BBC radio and their villagers had informed on them, and they were very tough but they were very ni.... Her husband didn't speak a word of English, but she spoke very good English and she, it was very nice, it was very touching and moving really to, get to meet her, because I'd never seen her before. But she was a great friend of my grandmother's, but that didn't stop her from being a very nice, really. [laughs] And we stayed there a few days, and sort of rested up a bit, and it was very pleasant. And then we went on; I've forgotten where we went after that. But we went to Italy, I know, at one stage. We went round Lake Lugarno with a, in a souped-up Citroen, and he was a racing driver, or a would-be racing driver, and there's tremendous bends, terrible bends all the time and we were going at terrible speeds, it must have been at least 70, and in those days 70 was huge, and we were terrified. But, yes, that was, that was great. Another time, we got a lift from, also in a Citroen, in Italy, with a tenor, he was a singer and he was, wanted to sing to us, and he was singing this aria from somewhere or other, and, you know, a sort of would-be

Pavarotti. And he was singing so hard that he banged into another car: and he blamed us. He said, [loudly] 'Get out! You made, you made me do that. You made me sing. Get out! Get out! Go away!' [laughs] So, so we, we quickly vamoosed. But, you know, so it gave us a tremendous... taste of people, different people, from different countries: and people were extraordinarily tolerant in those days you know. We would find ourselves invited to a gorgeous lunch and, you know it was, it was one of the most exciting and most interesting things I've ever done in my life. It wasn't just one hitch-hike; we used to go every time, every summer. Hitch-hiked for about four summers and it was a way of not going home, you see [laughs]. My father absolutely hated it. He said, 'Lorry-hopping, ergh,' and I used to pretend I went by train, but how I got from Paris to Naples in one day, I don't know. No, it was a strange, it was a hobby really. You didn't need any money really, hardly any money at all. We just, we stayed at Youth Hostels which in those days were very, very cheap: and very basic; and once, we had to stay in a prostitute's home, because the Youth Hostel was full, and all these dreadfully sad women with bad coughs, this was in Bonn, I think. Another time, we had to, we found a barn with lots of hay, in Austria, and all the village lads came up and the farmer said, 'I'm going to lock you in for your own good'. But all the village lads came out and made mooing noises outside [laughs]. But the farmer was very nice: he brought us hot coffee the next morning. Yeah. [laughs] Mmm. I wish I'd, I really wish I'd retained my notes on the whole thing, because, then I could have remembered it better, but there you go.

Sorry, I mean, I'm just thinking maybe that's...

Mm?

Shall we stop there for this time?

Yes let's stop there. Yeah.

And then we can... [talking together]

I'll just get my diary [End of Tape 4 Side B]

# Tape 5 Side A [Track 8]

This is Antonia Lister-Kaye. This is Tape 5, and it's 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2005. I wanted to pick up from where we were last week, where we were talking about your teaching, and I wondered if we could talk about what happened after you finished teaching?

Oh well, yes. I taught at the school, I think I told you, where I was an actual pupil, and so I sort of knew most of the staff, and they treated me [laughs] like a sort of superannuated schoolgirl, really, but I enjoyed it, and I didn't overwork exactly, but, and, you know, I think I, I think the girls quite liked me: and that went on for, I think, nearly three years, and the only thing that stopped me going on was that I got married and went to Nigeria, which was rather a [laughs] you know, it was quite definite [chink of glass or china] and that begins a new phase of my life, really. Yes, I married a man called Hugh. I always thought the name 'Hugh' was very beautiful, and I actually had a lot of Hugh's in my life: Hugh's and Hugh's. [laughs] But Hugh was a very witty, funny, clever, man, who could make, he could make the most wonderful bookshelves, and he knew all about absolutely everything: he was a geologist, actually, or land surveyor, but he had a degree, First Class, of course, in Geology, and a subsidiary degree in Classics, so, he had a most, he was a man of wide, wide learning really, which ... and he was also very funny, and witty, and the first date we had, he, you know, we went to a wonderful cheap restaurant in Charlotte Street called Schmidt's: Schmidt's was an ancient, Austrian dining place, and all the waiters were 102, and they all sort of had bad feet, and grumbled and groused, but the food was really good: in fact, it was Freddy who'd introduced me to Schmidt's because he was, sort of Austrian: and, anyway, anyway, I went with, had, Hugh and I went to Schmidt's and, we started at seven, and got up at eleven. [laughs] I mean, he was, and liked his food too. We just laughed and joked, and I said to him, 'Well, this is a man I might consider marrying.' I suppose in a way, it had been difficult, because I knew very well that a lot of men wouldn't consider marrying a disabled woman, and I daresay it hasn't changed, and also there were some suspect reasons why men might want to marry a disabled woman. One reason and another, which I won't go into now, it's more appropriate later on, I suppose, but Hugh didn't seem to mind, and he

was quite kind, and he wasn't sort of, it wasn't a come-on, and it wasn't a sort of... fetish thing. It, and he didn't want to be terribly kind to me. He wasn't a sort of social worker-y type, but he was fun. [laughs]. He was just a funny man who, we read the same books, and we liked the same music, and he was clever enough. [laughs] Anyway, we got engaged after two weeks. He was on leave from Nigeria, and he said to me, 'Well, I don't suppose you'll wait 18 months, for my next tour of duty, because I won't be back for 18 months,' so I said, 'No, I don't suppose so,' [laughs] and though, oh, I liked him very much, so I think having made my mind up at who I was going to marry, I was going to marry him, and, and so we got married two days after Christmas: December 27<sup>th</sup>, or 8<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, 1957. We got married in London in a church, in a rather second-rate church in Lancaster Gate. It's now been made into a block of flats called 'The Spire', [laughs] but we wanted a London wedding because we, he came from the South East: he came from Guildford. I couldn't marry, imagine being married in Guildford, and neither could he imagine being married in the woo..., in the wilds of woolly Wales, so we settled for a London wedding, which was quite nice. Well, we had a lot of people. My dad asked all his old regimental blokes, and... it was quite fun really. I was very conscious in those days, my head was a bit on, more on one side than it is now, and I was very conscious about how I looked, but I did look quite pretty, in a rather odd kind of way, [laughs] and anyway, he was no beauty. He was quite plain and fat, and, bald, and he was, although he was only 29, the African sun had done for his hair, and he didn't have much hair, but he had the most beautiful brown eyes, which really, you know, I really liked, [laughs] and he had this wonderful brain: and he was quite sexy: yes; quite, and so, but he did have the most terrible mother: the most, the mother-in-law to end all mother-in-laws. She's dead now, so I... Yes, she was really ghastly. She would have me to stay with them, before we got married, you know. I was one side of the house and he was the other, and she would say to me, 'Antonia, don't you think you should tell them about your disability before he goes out there? They'll be very shocked.' I said, [loudly] 'Tell them what?' 'Nonsense' he said. 'Nonsense' I said. 'I think he was quite lucky.' [laughs] He said, 'Well, I wouldn't say that,' she said, 'a Welsh spastic gypsy.' She was awful. A, I was Welsh, B, I was spastic, C, I was, I was not sort of, the ideal, you know, girl-next-door type. I was clever, and disorganised at the same time. [laughs]

In fact, I was a sort of beatnik, almost: you know, I like, pre-hippies and all that, but, you know, as we were going abroad, we didn't have to live next-door to her, thank God, and her, his father was an ancient brigadier, and I think this is one of the reasons why I married Hugh in a way, one of the sub-reasons was, because, I was marrying into a military family, and this pleased my dad, and I really quite wanted to please my dad occasionally, I suppose, and so, but that wasn't really an important reason, but it was definitely somewhere in the scenario, and so, yes: oh, that reminds me, when, when I used to take Hugh down, after we were engaged I had to take Hugh down and, to ask my father's consent, and we went ... we, he hired a car, a little Morris or something, and we went tootling down to Wales, to this old farmhouse, and Hugh had bought a large bottle of whiskey for my dad, and Dad was, he was very [something dropped in the background], on his best form, you know, and he said to Hugh, 'Well, Hugh, to, tonight we'll split this bottle: we'll split this bottle. If you could drink half and not show it, you can have her,' [laughs] which I always thought was a very funny, because actually he managed it: but having been out in the, what were then the Colonies, for a few years, he was used to it, drinking; not that he was a drinker, I wouldn't say, not at all. He did, he liked the odd glass of whiskey, but, you know, he wasn't, that wasn't one of his problems; nor mine. Anyway, where were we? Yes, we got married, and we had the most dismal, terrible honeymoon, in Devon, in January. If you can imagine anything worse than a third-rate hotel in Devon, and the waiter had a plate in his head, [both laugh] and he was really a very strange character, and we had cold meat and pickles every night, [laughs] and anyway, it wasn't a very good start, because it rained every day and, you know. I mean, Devonshire is all right, I suppose. Oh, it's very nice, lovely, in the summer, but what we should have done, and we realised afterwards, was to go out to Nigeria by boat, and stop off at Madeira or the Canary Islands, and had a sun-drenched honeymoon, but we didn't really know very much, I don't think. [laughs] We didn't sort of think, and because Hugh's parents were really very ambivalent about the marriage, you know, we didn't get any good ideas from them, and my father just didn't know anything about, sort of, modern marriage or, anything really. The wedding was managed by his youngest sister, Gwyneth, who was nice, I liked her: but, yes, it was a strange, strange time really, I did so mind, saying 'goodbye' to all my friends. I think I really minded that.

I managed to keep in touch with quite a lot of them, but I didn't really miss anybody else: I didn't miss anybody in the family at all, no... but, and when we got out there, it was quite a, challenge really. We were living in the northern region, and the northern region was the most backward region: Hausa country. We went to live in a place called Maiduguri, which was, actually it was [inaud] country. It was just to the south of Chad; Lake Chad, and the people were terribly backward. In those days, yes, we're talking about the 1950's...

## [break in recording]

Yes, and well, all Mrs So-and-So, all my, all my mother-in-law's fears really didn't materialise: I think they just accepted that I had a small problem, but I was quite a fun, so it didn't matter, [laughs] and, but my problem was with them, they were so stupid, most of them, you know, because colonial wives: gosh, Somerset Maugham knew a thing or two: [both laugh] and they were, and there were one or two I quite liked, but most of them were just content to do absolutely nothing, with their time, and I suppose I was desperate for something to do really, because I felt very ... after a very busy... career-life, I mean job-life, and a very busy social life, I felt really bored: and I did make friends with the wife of the, Margery [inaud], [more background noise] who was the wife of the resident in, oh, Maiduguri but, and then I found a French girl who played chess, and so I spent most of my time, playing chess with this French girl. Anyway, I became very, very pregnant very quickly, and we're not quite sure at which time, [laughs] before marriage, or after marriage, but, so I got the doctor to send me home in May, so I only had about five months out there, and, because the heat was terrible, and I couldn't, they didn't know what the birth would be like, because of the spasticity, so I went home, and guess who I had to live with? My mother-in-law. So forbid, and then I bought a flat. Luckily, I had a bit of dosh, stowed away, because I got, I wasn't supposed to go and live with my father, because he lived 30 miles away from the nearest hospital. However, I, of course, I went to see him, when I was about six months' pregnant, and that was all right, but living with mother-in-law was absolutely awful, because she minded terribly about my disability, and anybody would think I was really a sort of, like Mrs, like that woman in Jane

*Eyre*, you know, completely bonkers: and I was a bit, but not all that, [laughs] and then of course, by this time, I had this sister, who really was a beatnik, and she would come and visit me with bare feet and the hair, long hair, down to her waist, which in 1958, '57, '58, just wasn't, just was considered, well not very, you know, absolutely disgraceful, in Guildford: and... [laughs]

This, this was your sister?

Veronica.

Yeah, right: and she came to visit you and ...

Yes.

Mm.

She went, later went on to marry a prince, that, rather an extraordinary Italian prince, and that marriage wasn't very successful either, but, and so I stayed with my motherin-law. I had to stay with, I was going to have a baby in Guildford, so I had to, when I got very pregnant, when I was about eight months' pregnant, I had to go and stay with her, and I bought this flat, so that I could... We were going to let it, so that we had somewhere to go when we were, came home on leave, and anyway, it was a good investment. I was always good with money, [laughs] and, well, we, my mother-inlaw was a very intelligent woman in some ways, and we, she had this woman called Polly with her, who'd been Hugh's nanny, 28-odd years ago, and she'd never sort of, they'd never separated. They didn't like each other terribly: they used to talk about each other in the most disconcerting terms, but when I came in the house, they had a wonderful time chewing me up: and it was an open-plan house, so I heard everything, and [laughing] I wasn't deaf in those days, and that was a very difficult time. I had a few friends round there, so I used, you know, used to go out quite a lot, but, and then the terrible thing she said, two weeks before the baby came: she said to me... we were having quite a decent conversation about modern art: she was very keen on art, and

suddenly she said, 'Well personally, I think all disabled women should be sterilised,' so I burst into tears and went, said, 'I hate you!' [laughs] and went roaring upstairs, nearly falling down, which would have been interesting, and anyway, so we had a very difficult 10 days, and of course, the baby was late, [laughs] and, well then I had a... Sarah decided to make an appearance, and she was nine stone two... nine... [laughs]

No, I was going to say.

Nine pounds, two: sorry, it felt like nine stone, at the time, and it was a perfectly normal, and very easy birth, actually, which surprised everybody, and I had her at a small nursing home, under the National Health, with a wonderful woman, called 'Sister Mary', and Sister Mary: she wasn't religious but she was just a matron, the sister: she was wonderful, she really was, and I was kept in this nursing home for three, for three weeks, so they could teach me how to handle the baby: how to bath it, so that I didn't drop it: her, sorry, [laughs.] and this sort of thing, and they were very, very, very decent and nice, and encouraging, and then I went home, or to my motherin-law's home, and everything was changed. I was breast-feeding the baby, of course, and she said, 'Well, Polly's going to look after the baby. She's a trained nanny, and you can just feed her,' and I was so feeble [feeling?], you know, after a baby, you don't feel, I mean in those days it, it took me a long time to get over it, having, I mean I was... I felt delicate: I was all right, I didn't have any kind of... illness, I was just very t..., yeah, delicate, and not up to standing up to bloody old mother-in-law. So anyway, s...I wasn't even allowed to have the baby in the room to sleep. She went off to Polly's room. Polly was a devoted and, and had been dying to do a bit of nannying, and of course it was ideal for my mother-in-law, and I wasn't allowed to carry her downstairs, in case I dropped her, and she wrote to Hugh and said, 'Antonia is not very good with the baby. I think she should have a white nanny.' Of course he was in the deepest Af... Nigerian bush, and didn't understand, and he really was terribly upset because he was earning £1,200 a year, which wasn't very much in those days even: and anyway, of course, if you're going to have a nanny, we'd have a black nanny, out there. In the end, we didn't have a nanny at all, [laughs] but I think this is

quite interesting 'cause my, my mother-in-law was an old mother: well, she was about, I suppose she was in her sixties, so she was representative of a Edwardian. She, when she was young, it was sort of, twenties, and it was First World War, or post First World War, and so she represented a generation where when people like me were shut up, and not allowed out: certainly not allowed out to marry their sons, and so that was interesting, because it went back a generation, and then all my own family, being Christian Scientists, had mostly been quite... they hadn't treated me like a lunatic. They treated me like a wild one, but not a lunatic: and they hadn't made an awful fuss about my physical shortcomings, but my mother-in-law anyway would think I was a complete and utter idiot, and a sort of cripple to boot: a crippled idiot. I mean, she would talk to her friends, I heard her, on the telephone, saying terrible things, which weren't true: 'Oh, she's absolutely hopeless with the baby, you know.' She had this very affected, south east, more affected than mine: mine's not affected, but hers was affected, [both laugh.] accent, and it was all so awful, and so stressful but I had, I did have a marvellous friend, a teacher from the school where I taught, called Ruth Piercey, and she lived in Woking, and they used to sneak out to the telephone box, and ring her up secretly in the dinner hour, the dinner time, and she said, 'Well you can't stay there any longer. I've asked Hugh and he doesn't mind.' Hugh was her husband. 'You're coming to us. I'll come and get you tomorrow,' so, I departed, after being with my mother-in-law about two weeks. I couldn't, you know, it was awful, and Mrs, Ruth Piercey, Ruth and Hugh had a lovely big house in Woking: was it Woking? It was the other place: Walton-on-Thames, and they were just so sweet and nice, and Ruth was very encouraging, and Ruth wrote to Hugh, and said, my husband, and said it was a lot of old cods, that I was perfectly confident with the baby but all I needed was a bit of encouragement, and I got the matron, [laughs] which was, I got the matron of the home to write to Hugh, and the doctor to write to Hugh, and the doctor was terribly angry with my mother-in-law, and he got her to call in to h..., in Guildford, this was, he got her to call in to his surgery, on some pretext, and he gave her such a blowing-up about making me so miserable, and being so discouraging, and I don't know what he said to her: anyway, it was pretty vicious: not vicious, but pretty strong, and, we, because his wife had had polio, so he knew all about disabled people and handling babies, so he was really angry. I knew all this,

because she came back in ferment, and told her husband, the Brigadier, and the Brigadier really blew me up. He said, 'You've got no business to go talking to your doctor, to Doctor like this: it'll be all over Guildford!' so I said, 'Yes; yes, it will be.' [laughs] By that time, I was beginning to get my courage back, and anyway, so I, so we went. We went to lovely Mrs Piercey, and this wonderful house in Walton, where we stayed for six weeks, and then I went down to my dad with the baby for a week or two, on the train, and that was all right. If I could take a baby on a train, I could take it anywhere, and that was fine, and my dad wasn't very interested in the baby, but he liked me having, he liked me being there, I think. Well it didn't matter, I... he wasn't a very devoted grandfather at that stage, but babies are not always very appealing to everybody, are they? And, although she was a very beautiful baby actually, Sarah. She was also very good, very good at night: and I was very proud of her: yes. That's Sarah: not the one with the hair; the sophisticated-looking one.

The, the pastel,

Yeah, well.

Behind you.

Can't see. No, no. Anyway, it doesn't matter. We'll do photographs later,

Yeah, okay...

but anyway, it's hardly appropriate to when she's, how old she is, was then. She was a big baby, she was a strong baby, and I was ever so, ever so chuffed, and I took her out on an aeroplane to Nigeria, and, yes, her father took to her, yes. In those days, fathers weren't nearly so involved, you know. They were, particularly for his particularly upper middle class background, but he was good with her: yes. We used to take, he bought a campervan, and we used to take her everywhere, you know, and we used to have a a big cot, so we used to go to all our, all our parties, all the meetings and parties and things. There weren't that many, but, we'd put her in the

van, and just, she'd just, sleep in the van, in a big cot, and we had a little boy about 12 who loved babies. He was the cook's nephew, and he helped me with the baby, and [laughing] my mother-in-law would have had a fit, I think, but we couldn't afford anybody to look after her really. I mean, what would I do? It wouldn't, you know, now, at least I had something to do: and I wasn't very fussy about the baby: if she was around in the dirt, with the other African babies, and I breast-fed her. Most people didn't: most white women didn't breast-feed, you know, out there, then. I don't know why. I did it because I couldn't, I couldn't have coped with all those bottles. So... yes, so that was quite a happy time really, and then we came back, because he had, was due to leave on leave, and we went to my little flat that I'd bought on Ham Common, just near Richmond. A tiny little span flat, but, and that was nice, because I saw all my friends and everything: and by then, I was pregnant again, of course, [laughs] with Frankie, and we hadn't really arranged this, it just happened, but it was a bit disconcerting. I didn't know how I was going to manage two, only 17 months apart, but, and then Hugh ... that's right: he gave up working for... I think he did something. He had a very bad temper, did Hugh and I think he lost his temper in inappropriate circumstances, and he wasn't exactly sacked from the Colonial Office, but they didn't seem to want him back, [laughs] and so he was looking for another job, and he got a job in the Lebanon, laying pipe-line, oil pipe-lines for John Brown, and I was going to follow him, and... I've forgotten what happened: it's such a long time ago. Anyway, I went out there, for a short time, and the climate didn't suit me, so I came back again, to the little flat. Luckily we hadn't let it, so it was empty, and things got worse between me and my mother-in-law, you know, I, because, oh, I just refused to go and see her, at all, after that, and then... that's right, the baby arrived in due course, a bank holiday: Easter bank holiday, the next year, 1960. I'd had a lovely time before she came, because, my friends all came round, and, you know, it was very jolly and nice and, I even entertained an ex-boyfriend [laughs] in a, quite a social way, and... yes, I enjoyed that time. I won... I never think I was in love with my husband really. I think it was a marriage of, not of convenience, but I did so want to go to Africa: and a strange marriage. It went on for 16 years, and I think I was very fond ...

[End of Tape 5 Side A.]

# Tape 5 Side B [Track 9]

Right.

Yes, Hugh was a bad-tempered old man. I think that was his, the thing that spoilt a lot of things, and he was very, he could be terribly rude to people: not even, you know, when he was in a bad temper, because he was, he was just a rude, a clever, rude man, you know. He made a witticism, but often it was at other people's expense, and I had to do a lot of soothing-down of ruffled feelings: but on the whole, those early years weren't bad: and so... that's right... so our next port of call was South Africa, and so he went out to South Africa. That's the only place that'd give him a job, I think, [laughs] because they were so desperate, then: because of Apartheid, nobody wanted to go and work in South Africa, if they had any kind of intelligence at all, but Hugh reckoned he didn't have much choice, and I was really angry about it, because I'd always sort of stuck up for Trevor Huddlestone, and you know, and was really, really, anti-apartheid, so I said, I'd 'try for six months, Hugh, and if I can't bear it, I'm coming home,' and that was quite, for those days, that was quite sort of, well, quite unusual, for a wife to make quite such a rabid, rabid statement. Anyway, he went out there, and got us a flat, and I think he was very, very fond of me, actually. I think, perhaps he was fonder of me than I was of him, I don't know, but the emotional part of the marriage was very un... was a bit unpredictable, I think. Sexually, we got on fairly, we got on well enough, yeah, very well, and intellectually, yes, yes, but it was the middle part, like in so many marriages, the sort of middle-class marriages, it was a bit dodgy. I don't think I ever came to terms with this huge temper, and he had his mother's tongue: that was it: y... yes. He could be very, very nasty, but at the same time, he had a def..., definitely a very, basically a very affectionate person. If you could put the two together, it, people are so complex, aren't they? Especially when you're married to them: yeah. I wouldn't say it was an unhappy marriage though, at that stage, but we were both uncompromising people, as you can p'raps imagine, [laughs] and that was, South Africa was absolutely, so different from anything I'd anticipated, or anything I'd ever experienced: I mean, it was a wicked society. It really was, and when you saw, you know, park benches, labelled 'Sleigs' [ph] 'For

whites only', and you saw, sort of white boys lounging on these benches, and little old black women, huddling in the gutter, and all, you know, all kinds of terrible things: ridiculous, it was. I don't know how anybody could possibly have rationalised, sort of irrational, in any way, the way a rational, rational policy, Apartheid. That was the case of religion that, politicised, politicised religion, because they thought, Afrikaners, particularly, thought they were the Chosen People, and that blacks were... descended from Ham, who was definitely the black sheep, and that they were little better than animals: that was the classic Afrikaner argument, and they treated them worse than animals should be treated: much worse: and I suppose I was so desperate to get a job, OK, I had a couple of kids, but I had a wonderful black nanny called Violet, who was so intelligent. In any other culture, she'd have been a top, top secretary, or, you know, something like that, but she was, she was such fun. We had great fun, I mean, you know, and she was very, very good with the chi... kids, so I felt I could get a job. In those days, women often didn't get jobs when they had children, when they were small, but I felt there was so much to do in South Africa, so much that had to be done, so much that had to be fought against, that... could, could we stop for a minute or two?

Sure.

I'm tire... [break in recording.]

So could you just say a little bit about Hugh's work in South Africa?

Oh...

What was he doing?

Hugh did a great swap. He went out there with a firm called 'Aerial Surveys', as an aerial surveyor, 'cause he was basically trained as a land surveyor, even though he was a geologist as well, but there were more, less and less, there were less and less jobs coming up, in land survey, because it had all been done, and, anyway, so, I said

to Hugh, 'You must finally look round. You've got, you're jolly clever, why don't you go into something else?' He said, 'Oh, I don't know,' because his dad was a land surveyor with the Royal Engineers, do you know: an army surveyor: and so, anyway, I got him a lot of books about the Mayo Institute, and all that stuff, and because, I had my eye on work, something like work study, which was becoming a big thing in those days, and so anyway, I made him read... I didn't make him read, I encouraged him to read these books on work study, and I looked for advertisements in the paper, for him to answer, and he answered quite a lot, and there was this great big firm, called 'African Explosives', which is a terrible name, isn't it? [Alex laughs] Half of it was owned by ICI, and half by... Oppenheimer's, but it was a huge chemical firm, really, and, anyway, I... He went for an interview, and he got a job, to train in work study. I mean, he had a First Class degree, he had, and all that, even if it wasn't in... Any degree was appropriate for work study, I suppose, and then he went into something, Operational Research, which was the next big thing, and then he went into computers. He was a natural computer buff, and he was... you know, in on the first generation: analogue computers. I got quite interested too, but, so he made this big career switch, and then he took a degree in Maths, and ended up with a Doctorate in Maths, when he was... in his forties: [dog barking in background] this is going ahead a bit, but he was fortunate, because he was a difficult man to manage, and he got a very good Scot, old Scotsman, who he really respected, and so he got himself into a really good position, and financially it was much better than sur..., aerial survey, and so we bought a little house, a bungalow... well, a lot of the suburban houses are bungalows, in Johannesburg, I mean all over South Africa, and it was a charming little house really: just two bedrooms, and... so we were settling down a bit, and I got a job, teaching in an Indian school, the last Indian school to remain open, which I didn't care for very much, because it meant a terrible journey, and I didn't like the other teacher, in another... there were only two of us in that, and anyway, then I got this job, selling coffins, [laughs.] which is almost unbelievable. Actually, I was selling coffins before I was teaching in the Indian school. Sorry, I got that wrong. I was determined to get a job, and I thought, 'If I can't get a job, I'm not stay... I can't stay here. I must do something. I must get into the locations,' 'cause I don't know how much you know about this, but the locations are where the African workers lived, where the labour

was, and they were in a ring round Johannesburg, about 20 miles out, you know, well, well away from the white folks, and all the worst bits of land were given to Africans. Most of them lived, the town Africans lived in these locations, and pretty bad circumstances. They didn't have electric light, mostly, most of them had, didn't have much water, and... all of the facilities were pretty poor, but it was either the, living in, in the locations in very squalid, over-crowded circumstances, or living out on a, on the reserves. Have you heard of the Bantu stands? These, they were known, collectively as 'the Bantu', because the Bantu were these tribes who came down from Central Africa, and there was all this fighting about, the Afrikaners had arrived in 1657 at the Cape of Good Hope, and the Bantu had come down from Central Africa, and then they clashed, and whose land was it, and who was there first anyway, and, you know, it was historical, it was a historical, great historical dialogue, was who was there first, so the Africans, in South Africa, were known collectively as 'the Bantu', and the places where they lived were... if they didn't live in town and have a job, they lived on the reserves, which were known as 'the Bantu Stands' and every tribe had its separate Bantu Stand, and, the, so you got the position... sorry, I'm going to be a bit boring now, where four per cent of the population lived in thirteen per cent of the land, and the poorest, most parched dry land it was, and the whites had all the good land, and it was going on all the time, resettlement: they'd get chucked out, and put into tents and we'd take the land, because we needed it for the whites farmers, and, well, I could give you a whole tape on it, life in South Africa, but, I have to remember that this tape is supposed to be about my life, not a history of South Africa. [laughs] But history is my subject, and I was absolutely fascinated by South African history, but anyway, so, I really wanted an interesting job, one that would get me into the locations, so I saw this advertisement in *The Star*. The Star was a marvellous daily newspaper in Johannesburg, and it said... what did it say? The ad said, 'Wanted: salesperson, or salesman, to sell goods in African market. Experience unnecessary. Driver... provided.' I couldn't drive, you see, so, I thought, 'Well, this is marvellous.' I hadn't ever sold anything: I mean, you know, I... wasn't, I was the last person to be a salesman, really, but, anyway, I went to the interview and it was, down in S... what is now Soweto, where all the, on the edges of where, of the location, where, the industrial part of Johannesburg, a foul part, it was, and there was this great

big warehouse, and this office, attached to the warehouse, and it was a man called Mike, also. Very, very second-generation Irish, I think. I think his parents had, I think his parents had migrated, and he was a rough diamond, if there ever was one, and he went on and on, talking about the job, and he didn't tell me what he wanted me to sell, so I said, 'Well, what is it you want me to sell, actually?' 'Cos I think I was the only candidate for [laughing] the job, and he said, 'Well, um, um, um, yah, well, I'd better show you,' so I thought he wanted me to sell condoms or something. Anyway, so he pushed me through the doorway, into the main part of the doorway, and there were all these coffins, laid out on the floor, made of aluminium, all differing colours, all different sizes, and he said, 'Well, I am an entrepreneur, I suppose,' he said. 'I made all this money in a ? mine, and I wanted to do something different, so I made these coffins.' He was a welder, and he said, 'We know that Africans are... the, the nightives, [ph]': They called them 'the nightives', that's what they called them then. The nightives are all encouraged to go to church, and they have 40 churches to each location: and of course, that way, they wouldn't get interested in politics, they reckoned. They had all these extraordinary churches, like The Church of the Seven Kings, and, you know, this, all sort of exotic names, and they were very pagan churches, a lot of them, I mean... but also, it was interesting, so I said, 'Well, how does it work?' He said, 'Well, I want you, if you want the job, and [laughing] there doesn't seem to be anybody else who wants the job, I want you to set up little shops in the locations, called 'Christian Undertakers'. We're not allowed, they're not allowed, the Europeans are not allowed to sell, retail, but they're allowed to sell wholesale, so we couldn't sell the coffins to the Africans, they had to sell them to themselves, so I want you to set up these shops, and to start with this funny old location, called 'Vierenesburg' [ph] and I said, 'Well, I'll have to think about it,' I said, and 'I never thought it would be coffins,' and, and he said, 'Well, what you have to do, Antonia, is to interview all the, as many of the vicars and the church, heads of church as you can, and weld them together, get them together into sort of committees, and get them to, take a little shop in the location. There's lots of little shops available,' he said, 'I know, I've been round them, and call themselves 'Christian Undertakers' and then we supply them with coffins, and we have a different colour for every church, and then all different sizes, so if it's a child, they get a small coffin, if it's a big man, they get a

big coffin, etc, etc,' and I must say, they were beautiful: they were beautiful. They were sort of lozenge-shaped, and had a cross on them, you know, and lovely colours: so I said, 'I'll think about it.' I did actually say, 'I have to talk about it with my husband,' but I knew I wasn't going to do any such thing, because my husband was away at the time, in the Congo, doing some work. This was when he was in aerial surveys, still, and so I went home, and I knew I was going to do it, but I didn't want him to think he could... you know, I wanted some money for it, [laughs] so I was going to hold out for a decent wage, and, anyway, [telephone rings.] Sorry. Look, I'm going, I'm not going to bother. If it rings seven times, they'll [break in recording] Anyway, is this all right?

This is fine: yes, great.

I suppose I got myself into a job, among Africans, because, I'd always, as I said, I'd always liked black people, in one way or another, [laughs] but, this time, it was, my interest was definitely, social, and, because I was something of a, sort of do-gooder, and anyway, so I... rang him up a few days later, and I said, 'Yes, I'm interested. How much are you going to pay me?' It wasn't very much, but anyway, so I said, 'I'm not working on commission.' [laughs] So he gave me a small amount of money, and, plus commission. Anyway, so, he said, 'Come in, come on Monday,' so I went on Monday, and I met Joseph, who was a great big Zulu, who was the chauffeur and this great big Buick, and they matched each other very well, the Buick was huge and old and scruffy: I mean, Joseph wasn't all that scruffy, and he wasn't all that old, but he was, you know, he had these great big ear lobes, where he'd had great earrings put in as a child, and he was very uncompromisingly non-European, shall we say, but he was a nice man, and he spoke good English, and he said, 'Joseph will take care of you: if there's a riot, Joseph will get you out of it,' and it's funny, I wasn't a bit frightened, I mean, I wasn't, I was just terribly interested, and terribly excited that I was going to do a job, in the locations, which never, nobody else I knew had ever done. I mean, you know, I, by the time, I knew quite a few Europeans, and they all said, '[Sharp intake of breath] you're not going to work in the locations. It'll be, you won't be... do you remember that nun that was eaten in Port Elizabeth last year? I

hope you're not eaten!' [laughs loudly] And I said, 'Oh no, I won't be eaten. I'm too tough.' [laughs] Anyway, I suppose, in a way, my disability comes into this somewhere. The fact is, that I used to feel, having a disability, meant that nothing else that ever happened to me, could matter, so very much. I mean, I, although I did cope quite well, I suppose: p'raps too well, sometimes, with my spasticity, it was awful. I mean, I didn't like it: I never came to terms with it. I have now, but I didn't then, and it was a continually a way of finding short cuts, and making my personality triumph over my... disability, and I suppose, I was looking for scenes where, my disability wouldn't matter so much as being white mattered, do you know what I mean? And I had a genuine wish to, you know ... to, it wasn't just curiosity: I wished to contribute something, somewhere, somehow, good, but I wasn't [laughs] a missionary, by any means, but my disability had always seemed, so unfair, and so very unfair, and it seemed to me, that, you know, even if I was, had, did have a difficult time, or was put into prison, it wasn't half as bad as having a disability. Being killed would be, but... that wasn't on the agenda: and, do you see what I mean?

Yeah, I think so, yes. That somehow it did, your disability matter as much as the fact that you were white, in a situation where everyone else was...

That's right, but do you see what I mean about, being disabled, vis a vis, walking into quite dangerous situations?

Yes.

That I might just as well, take a few risks. It made me a risk-taker; I think and people said I was brave, that's, that was rubbish, I was just wilful. [laughs] Anyway, I turned up and we went, off we went to Vereiniging [ph], and our first port-of-call was a Mr Fellani. Mr Fellani was an Anglican clergyman, and he lived, very simply, in a very nice, simple little house; vicarage, and he had a really subservient wife, and he spoke very good English, he was a well-educated man: I mean, relatively well-educated, and so I explained what it was. It was a good thing to have him first, because, you know, he wasn't so very foreign. He didn't, he wasn't one of these

ministers of some outlandish, sort of semi-pagan church: so anyway, he said he thought it was a wonderful idea, especially the profit. You know, they'd make quite a big profit, the churches, that, which would really go to, nominally to the church, but of course, we used to see the old vicar's putting it in his back pocket, so anyway I was very, and they gave me orange juice, and, and some peculiar kind of... cake, and so that was the first interview, and he said he knew a little shop, and he knew, he had a word with his fellow Methodist minister, so that was the first one, and I went back to Mike, and I said, you know, [tearing sound] 'I think we've got something. I think we've got ??? on the way,' and he was very pleased, and he said, 'Well, I think it would be a good idea if you wrote a letter to the churches: if you wrote a letter, if we got a letter out,' [sound of crockery] so I don't know whether you know, there's a very famous, Paul's Letter to the Churches, The Corinthians, and all that, so I thought, very funny, me, latter-day St Paul, writing a letter to the churches, [Alex laughs] and so I wrote this letter. I wish I'd kept a copy of it, it was really funny, as to why they should use our coffins, why they should promote our coffins, and why they were... because of course, Mike's idea was their belief, he believed that a lot of them believed in ancestor worship, which was a hang-on of their pagan days, and he said that the bodies wouldn't decay in a, metal; aluminium they were, as they, as they would in wood, so I put this in the letter too, and anyway, we had a lot of response from the letters, and... the awful thing is, I didn't know that, Mike didn't really have the money. He was doing the whole thing on, on less, on dead, dead money: you know, loans, and suddenly, after about six weeks of, rushing round, meeting the most interesting people, he suddenly said to me, 'You know, Antonia, I have to tell you: the banks have called in the money, and we can't go on,' so I was quite glad actually, because I'd, you know, I'd seen a lot, I'd met a lot of people, I'd been very interesting... I don't suppose you want any more, much more detail about that, it's going to make it too long, but... so I thought, 'Oh gosh, I'm out of a job.' He paid me, and the whole thing shut down, and we remained friends with Mike. Mike got on quite well with my husband, once my husband had got over the awful business of his wife being an undertaker, a sort of, wholesale undertaker, but, that was the end of that little enterprise.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Well it might have been a bit longer.

Mm, hm.

You know, it does... time distorts: and then...

And so did you actually sell any coffins in that time?

Yes, we opened one shop, and then, of course, he just sold them coffins that he had, but he couldn't afford to make any more coffins

Oh, I see.

So we sold them off to Mr Fellani and his mates, in their Christian Undertakers, and I went, I went on seeing Mr Fellani, and his wife, although it was terribly difficult to get in, once you got your work permit taken away, so I didn't really keep up with him much. I just went to see him twice, and then my work permit, you had to have a permit to get into the locations, and it had expired, and the Superintendent of the location was a dreadful man: he was a huge, great blond Afrikaner, he said, 'Oh lidy, [phon.] I can't understand why you, a nice lidy like you wants to do a job like this,' so I said, 'Well, I'm just interested.' He said, 'Huh! You lidies from London, you ain't no lidies.' I think he thought I had an African boyfriend or something: so he said, 'No, you can't go in again. Just as well: you might end up in the Fort.' The Fort was a prison. He said, 'We can't have you London lidies running around like this: it won't do,' and he was horrible: but there you are. That was the end of that: and... my memory... Yes, and then I looked for another job in the jolly old *Star*, and I got this

job, teaching in an Indian school for a bit, and that was a long journey, into [sneezes] into the Indian locations, which weren't as far out as the African ones. They were allowed to live nearer into town, because they weren't so black: [laughs] gosh, and they actually did some trading, with whites, because they were very cheap, and they sold cheap carpets and things. Later, they had to move out, when it all became more intense and dreadful, but when I wa..., they lived, they worked in a place called 'Forsberg', which was, a sort of, the equivalent of the East End, I suppose, in Johannesburg, really, but they had a very ambivalent and difficult time. There were the Indians, the Africans, who were known as 'the Bantu', and then there was the mixed race, 'coloureds', who were perhaps the unhappiest lot of all, because they had no idea who they were, and you'd get coloured families split in two, because the wife was white-ish, and the father was black-ish, and you'd, they'd have to live in different... they'd be split, or one child was white, and the other child was brown, and they'd have to live in different parts, in different locations, different parts, and if you could, if you were coloured, and you could pass for white, then you passed for white, because it meant a good job, a good education, or the possibility, much more possibilities: so if you were eight or nine, and you were col..., you were designated in any... these commissioners would come round, and they'd say, 'Well, she's white,' and 'She's black,' and they had the same parents. It happened, throw-backs; you know, so the white child would go and live with a white-ish aunty, perhaps, who lived in a white area, and have much better, a much better life to the black child, who was staying with his parents: and it was so dreadful. [Metallic background noises] You can't imagine, and people just can't imagine now, how dreadful it was. So anyway, I felt very awkward [??] I didn't like teaching, in this Indian school, because I taught with a very rigid Afrikaner lady, who was so condescending, and dreadful, but I did get to know some of the parents, who were very fiery: you know, Ghandi; Ghandi sort of descendents, 'cause, 'cause Ghandi, you know, started off his stuff in South Africa, in the 1890s, and so, you know, then I stopped; I just did one term, I think: yes; and

[End of Tape 5 Side B]

# Tape 6 Side A [Track 10]

...because they didn't really want, they wanted the Indians to... move out further, and they wanted to close, they were in the process of moving the Indians out, 20 miles out, to a place called Lenasia and one of the first things they did was to close the school down, but then they were closing down things all the time, you know, that they thought were giving people advantages that they shouldn't have. Sorry, I'm liable to deviate too much, on the subject of South Africa. I still feel really churned up about it. Well, I thought, it's retrospective of course. It's still a difficult place to live, I think, but... and then my big break came. I got a job at the university, in the History Department, which is, I suppose what I'd wanted really, but by this time, I was expecting Matthew, [laughs] and, I don't know, we weren't very good at birth control: that was it, and so Matthew was born in Johannesburg, in a... and he was a big boy too: he was over nine pounds, and, well...that's right, I well, stayed at home with Matthew for about three months. This was, oh we had this marvellous person called Violet, and she said, 'No more babies: I can't look after any more babies: Madam: no more babies,' [laughs] so I said 'OK' and anyway, so there you are. Matthew was the last. I did have another one but it was... an abortion, I'm afraid, but that's going on in time a little bit. Anyway, Matthew was an awfully jolly baby. He was a big, bouncing... wilful baby, and I'd always wanted a boy, I'm afraid. You know, having been brought up by a man, I s'pose in a way I was always rather keen on the idea of boys, boy babies. I'd really wanted three babies; three boys. I was very jealous of my friend, who had four boys, but, you know: you've got a boy, haven't you? Yeah.

ſm.	
o what how old were your other two	?
Vhat?	

Mm hm.

How old were your other two when Matthew was born?

I was just, nearly 30. I was 26 when Sarah was born, 28 when Frankie was born, and 30 when Matthew was born, and that was the last one; yeah. Yeah; and that was one thing I had on my side, was that I was the right age, I suppose, to have children: and then this job came up, at the University, of Witwatersrand. They wanted an assistant lecturer in the History Department, so I went, and grabbed it. I think I was the only candidate [laughs] at that time, too, with an ancient Professor, who was a dear man. He was about 90, and he was called Professor Marair. He was an Afrikaner, but he was one of the nicest academics I've ever met, and, to get into academic circles was really nice too, because, you know, we got invited to... dinner parties, the odd dinner party and I once had lunch with three professors, [laughs] and I was an academic snob, I suppose, really, but never mind. One was allowed to be a, something of a snob in some direction, if you've got something to compensate for: and I loved that job, I really did. It was only part-time, badly paid, but the kind of job that I'd always, I'd always wanted, so I was fairly happy, and I did that for the rest, for three years... three years? Yes, and that was the happiest time, one of the happiest times I had, we had in our marriage, anyway, certainly, because, you know, we had our domestics looked after by Violet. We paid her very well, and, or I mean, considering how under-paid the rest of them were, and, you know, she was a really intelligent, nice woman: very competent, and I certainly wasn't domestically competent at all, [laughs] but and the three new, three children were, they were very nice: they were all right, they were quite strong, healthy children, in spite of my mother-in-law writing anxiously to say, 'Are they all right?' and then there was something happened with my, something happened between my husband and his mother and they stopped talking to each other for ages, and of course, it was all my fault, but, I think he didn't write to either of his parents for about two years, and that was because of my disability, mostly: and personality as well, I suppose. [laughs]

	Mm.	In	wł	hat	way	"
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Mm?

In what way was it to do with your disability?

Well, they never got over it, and, you know, they were always making remarks, in letters to Hugh, and, and to our mutual friends, and they were just, they just hated me, and Hugh, who was a very loyal person, you know, he thought he couldn't go on, having them send picture postcards of donkey, they sent him a birthday card of a donkey on. I mean, he was a donkey to have married me, and, you know, so childish, idiotic; so it was a feud over his choice of partner, and we were going to call Matthew after his grandfather, but... He was going to be called 'Edward', so we thought, 'We'll call him 'Matthew' instead,' and he's actually 'Edward Matthew', among other things, but, anyway, 'Matthew' was a nicer name anyway, and then the children were lovely, they really were, and they didn't seem to be any trouble. They were very healthy, and that part of it was very good, and I had a job I liked, where nobody cared if I had a disability, and that's the wonderful thing about academia: you can be, you know, you can be really, now anyway, anyway, particularly now, you can be a completely, sort of, completely crippled up and, as long as you do your stuff: I mean, look at Stephen Hawking. [laughs] As long as you're clever, it's OK, and you present your stuff well, so I was happy as Larry, but then, of course, things were getting really bad, Apartheid-wise. Stupider and stupider, and more and more... well, more and more radically right-wing. It really was a fascist state, and I think we both decided that we didn't want our children brought up as little fascists, because the schools, the white schools for whites were mostly, they had to toe the party line, and mostly children would talk about 'nightive', [ph] 'nightives' and they would, you know, they would naturally have this very non-liberal attitude, and this very, exc... 'We are the weeks, [ph] we are the exclusives, we are white. We may be a minority, but we rule this country,' you know, sort of, as the, as the blacks got more and more 'uppity', to use the old-fashioned American term, the whites became more and more repressive; so we decided to go home. I'd been there about three and a half years, I think, and that was very, very difficult. In England, you know, we couldn't afford the domestic help, we'd had in Africa, and those first three months, we had to live with my father on his farm, because we didn't really have anything... I've forgotten what

happened to my flat. I think I sold the flat. No, no, we had, that's right, people in there. We had... tenants, so for the first three months, we lived with Dad, in South Wales, and then, of course, Hugh went and got a job in South Wales, with Richard Thomas, a steel company in Cardiff, Newport, so we sold the flat. That's right, in order to have some money to buy a house with, and of course, Hugh was so impossible, to work for. I mean, he was very clever, but he was very, very intolerant, and after six months, he walked out, and we had to get another house, we had to move house again, so we moved to... the suburbs: somewhere called Hampton Hill, which is near Twickenham. I was sent up on a day trip, and I got a house, and [laughs] came back again: that was how it was. But I had a very bad time, after leaving South Africa. I think it was, the change was too great, and I had two babies in nappies, and I just couldn't cope, and so I had a breakdown: a sort of peculiar physical breakdown, it was. I couldn't, I couldn't walk, and it was all neurological. I was taken to a place called The Burton Institute in Bristol, a neurological place, and they said that, you know, I was, they told my husband I must never move, because it was bad for people like me to move. That's why I was asking you at the beginning. [????] And he said, the neurologist said, 'Don't move your wife for 15 years at least,' and of course, we moved in the next six months, and then we moved again.

Oh, so, sorry, so you mean by 'move', 'move house'.

Mm.

Yes, sorry. [laughs] I was imagining you being...

No, no.

...immobile for...

No, no. Moving house, sorry.

Right, yes.

Yeah, I didn't make that very clear; sorry.

Mm.

But, anyway, then we settled down in this place near Twickenham, and it wasn't a bad... well, we were there for six years, and I got to know a lot of people. I did WEA classes, you know: we had these classes in literature, in the daytime, when the children were looked after by, in the crèche, and then the parents were able, the mums were able to sort of, have a good, good old class about, Russian literature, or whatever your, whatever your taste was, and I was really happy there, yes, and we, we were in a sort of small dinner party circuit, and... that's right: and then I decided I must go and do a course in, for teaching in Higher Education, Higher and Further Education, so I did that, and I think that was when it started, our marriage really started to fall apart. All this time, Hugh's temper never got any better, and I, my temper became worse. I was, instead of taking no notice, I was answering him back [laughs] and then he took to physical violence. I don't mean, systematic beating, I mean just occasionally, you know, squeezing and bruising, and pulling my hair, and... Well, it wasn't terrible, but it was bad, so I went to the doctor with these bruises, all round my neck, and he said, I can't do anything. What you need is a good divorce lawyer' [laughs] and anyway, so things began to go downhill, and then Hugh got, Hugh was always leaving jobs, and getting new ones, because he was so clever, and at that time of full employment, you could do that. He ended up with IBM, having been poached from Rolls Royce, and he was earning quite well, but, it was all sad, because it was falling apart, and I had one of those invalid trikes, you know? Those three-wheelers, which was better than nothing, but I got a job, in... my first job was in Bermondsey, and the journey was horrific, and while I could manage the work, the journey was terrible. I didn't go in the trike. I used to take the trike to the train station, and then take the train, and then a bus, but it was too much, and, so either I gave up the job, which I didn't want to do, I enjoyed it, or we moved house, so we moved house, to Wimbledon, which was very, on a very good train circuit to Wimb..., to Waterloo, as you probably know. It's very quick: so we moved to Wimbledon, and then Hugh didn't like the house, he didn't

like Wimbledon, he became more and more, not mad exactly, but, well, his temper became worse, and then he got this job at Rolls Royce, which meant, in Derby, which he commuted, and he came back at the weekend, every weekend we'd have the most terrible row. It just didn't work at all: we thought it would work if we didn't see so much of each other, but it didn't work, it was horrible: and... do you mind if I stop there?

No, OK.

[End of Tape 6 Side A]

[Side B blank]

## Tape 7 Side A [Track 11]

This is Antonia Lister-Kaye, Tape 7, 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2005. You were just saying to me earlier, about your involvement with a school in South Africa, for children with cerebral palsy.

Yes, yes: well this was a sort of a bit of voluntary work I did. I did quite a lot of voluntary work, when I think of it. I became the youngest marriage guidance counsellor, in Johannesburg, at 27, and it was very interesting, because I was told that I could deal with black people, and that was well, really a good sort of initiative, so I did do quite a lot of work for the Marriage Guidance Council, and I was swimming [??] with a lot of quite interesting liberal whites, most of whom were Jewish ladies, and, [clears throat] yes, and a lot of the African cases I saw were typical, in that they were women who were married to African men, in towns, who had another wife on the reserves, in what we called 'the Bantu Stands', and it was very confusing, and very... because one was dealing with a cross-culture, with a kind of cross-culture situation: but what I did, which was probably of more interest to this particular archive, I worked: well 'work' is hardly the word: I was involved with the, what they called 'The Spastic School': sorry, but they used that term in, in those days, and in that I was asked to see various family groups, and children, the older children really. It was a matter of telling them that it wasn't all out there, that, you know, they had to make use of what they had, and they had to optimise their advantages, and just sort of, cope the best they could with the things they couldn't do very well. The usual sort of, you know, story of, using what you had, which is, I s'pose what I've always done, and I s'pose what people, disabled people who make a go of life always have done: and my highlight was when I was asked to address all the parents at a parent-governors' meeting and I've forgotten, I forgot what I've said, but I made them laugh a lot, I know that, [laughs] and that was qui..., that was really quite fun, and I felt I was really doing a bit of something for somebody. Yes: and then I got this job, did I tell you about the job at the University? I think I did, which was fun, which was good, because it meant I used my brain a bit. I mean, you know, the academic part of my brain, and I did that for three years, and when I got back to England, they wrote and

asked me if there was any chance of us coming back to South Africa, because they said that they wanted me back in their team, which was very nice, but there wasn't much chance of us coming back really, but, yes, I enjoyed that. I had to use a lot of new stuff: I had to study a lot of new stuff, which I'd never done before, and that was good, and I got, I liked the students. It was a very sort of... chaotic department, and, in that, because Witwatersrand didn't get much money from the government, because there were certain members of staff who were anti-Apartheid and it was, it wasn't in favour with the government, the University had to take every single white student they could possibly lay hands on, for one year, in order to get the fees, and then, the idea was that you threw out fifty per cent of students, first year students, which was wicked really, but I mean, you know, because it meant that you had a lot of people who were, thought they were failures because, and they probably they were, academically, but they should never have been there in the first place, and then when I was mark, I had to mark the University first year papers, the professor, who was a dear old man, called 'Professor Morair' [ph] who was about 90, Afrikaner, said to me, 'Well, Mrs P, you take from A to M, and I'll take from N to Z, and we'll do half and half,' so I said, 'But I've no idea what standard you mark for, to.' 'Oh it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter really,' [laughs] and I said, 'I've never done the Fourteenth Century.' 'Oh,' he said, 'you can do it now. It's only three weeks,' [laughs] and anyway, it was very chaotic, because I never learnt how, if our marking was consistent or not, or, you know, whether [laughing] I really knew very much about the Fourteenth Century, but I guess you just go on a general feeling, or, when, you know... anyway, South Africa was full of sort of oddities like that, in those days. In some ways, it was very, very strict and authoritarian, and frightfully sort of, obsessionally, quite obsessional legalistic, but in other ways, it was very sloppy: you know, and you could get away with a lot, and you could, if you were white, you could do almost anything and get away with it, as far as I could see. If you were black, if you so much as looked at a white woman, and it might be interpreted as a certain way, you could be clapped into prison. It was a rape appeal court or something like that, and it was a very, very peculiar society, and it's terrible, how soon you got used to aspects of it. I don't think I ever did get used to it really; otherwise we might have

stayed there, because it was an easy society, materialistically, if you were white. Yes, well, it...

Going back to what you were saying about the school that you visited: well, can you describe what it was like?

It's such a long time ago. It was quite a caring sort of place, but they didn't expect their pupils to do very much, I think, and that's what got me down, a lot, and I did actually manage to help get two students out of that school into an ordinary school, because they were bright, and they went to University. One I kept in touch with for quite a few years after I came back, but I think the assumptions were, in South Africa at that time, that if you had an impaired life, if you were, if you did have some degree of cerebral palsy, you didn't even have to have much of it, you know, you were, it was a sort of sub-Apartheid situation. You were apart, you were educated apart: well, you were in England at that time, but it, I don't think it was ever as... exact as it was in South Africa. I think they were very well looked after, the pup... the children, and there was certainly, you know, it was certainly not nineteenth century. It... but it was, they were not ... the children were not given opportunities to extend themselves, and I think that was very typical of many, of that type of school, you know. You could do, if you had hand control, you could do basket work, or oh, it was a bit like blind schools used to be, you know, and I think this made me, this made me angry, and that's why I wanted to get involved, to tell them that there was a, you know, 'You could do this, you could do that,' and because I'd had such a difficulty getting into University, but that had been a generation before: I was now about, I s'pose about 28 or 30, and 10 years before, I'd had a terrible time, getting into University in England, but, things had changed in England, I think, there were disabled students around, in the 1960's, which there hadn't been in the 1950's: well, not very many, so I was keen to see, I've always been very keen, to see, people make the best of themselves, and I think this has another side to it. I'm quite intolerant of people who go to excess, and ruin their constitutions, like people with drink, drink too much, although, of course, I understand the reasons why they're doing this, because, having been trained in psychotherapy, one has to, but at a sort of lower level of my being [laughs], I get very

upset when people, who've begun with good constitutions, and being perfectly normal, and go and ruin themselves, by drugs and drink, and, you know, overdoing things generally, because it, I'm not religious particularly, but I do feel, if they've been given a good body, they should jolly well keep it in ... not exactly in good shape, I don't mind about weight, but they should make the best of it: that's the thing, make the best of everything you've got, whether you've got cerebral palsy, or had polio, or whether you're just normal. [talking together]

And...

End of story. [laughs.]

I'm intrigued by what you were just saying about the two pupils that you managed to get into other schools. Can you describe how you went about doing that?

Well I think I sort of, saw their parents a lot. I did see the parents, rather than... in the first place, and the parents... I can't remember an awful lot about it now, but I do remember the parents were very, very support... [laughs] I mean, I was very supportive of the parents, and they were supportive of me, and then we approached the headmistress who was a bit, was a set in her ways, and then I had to approach the headmistress of a school who would take them, because they were 16 I think, both of them, and they had to do those two years at school, they had to get, it was called 'Matric', which was, it was a sort of O/A level, it was a bit, bit more harder than A, O level, and not quite so hard as A level, in those days, and, yes, so there was quite a lot of negotiations involved, but I think, when people saw what I was getting at, and in those days I was very pushy, and quite [laughing] ferocious at times, and I was quite determined, I think that everybody pulled the same way, and you know, and they both got to University. I kept in touch with, one was a boy, and the other was a girl, I kept in touch with the girl, I've forgotten her name, I think she was an Afrikaner name, but, yes, I was very pleased about that.

And what... you said you kept in touch: what happened to her?

She became a lawyer, and, you know, eventually one does lose touch when you leave a country, but she wrote, I wrote, we wrote for years, I mean, two or three, four years, perhaps: and, well, yes, I think that was quite a, not an achievement, but it was very... it made me happy.

And the school that, these children were at, what, were they just white children, at the school?

Oh yes, everything was... everything was just white. I mean, I don't think, the blacks were very lucky if they went to school at all, never mind a special school. You know, everything that they had was very, very basic, whereas there was in those days, a lot of money in South Africa, I know there isn't now, because you had tremendous investment from outside, in diamonds, and gold and... and, well, all kinds of minerals, particularly: and wine, and the whites had a tremendous standard of living. You know... two swimming pools in some cases. 'When are you going to build your second swimming pool?' that was the famous question, [laughs] and one felt, if one stopped to feel at all, one felt tremendously guilty, and you wondered why they didn't feel guilty, I mean the white people who'd been there, and I think some of them did, [seagulls in background] and there were quite a lot of liberals, liberal-thinking people, and I had a cousin who belonged to something called 'The Black Sash', which were women who were, did a lot of good: I mean they were, they were do-gooders really, but they were, they actually achieved quite a lot: I mean they were achievers, and, you know, they'd sort of get into the locations and, they weren't rebellious, they weren't particularly rebellious, they were careful, careful to keep on this side of the law, but they extended, they sort of pushed it out a bit, and they'd help financially with some food, and clothes for the children, and medical costs, and they were one of the few flickering lights of good, in the white community, towards the black.

Talking about the liberals that you came across, how did they... sort of, were they ... put it another way, were they able to express their opposition in any way?

Well, there was a newspaper, called <u>The Rand Daily Mail</u>, which was run by a very good bloke, called John Woods. He later had to escape, illegally, because he was imprisoned, but he was a great lefty, and we all read The, well we, I mean, me and my friends, people like us, we all read The Rand Daily Mail vociferously, because, because it was a very, very, very extraordinary really. In Johannesburg, you got extremes, I s'pose, because Johannesburg was in, as you know, was in an original Boer state, the Transvaal, whereas I think in Cape Town, things were very much more liberal, and there was less authoritarian Apartheid-ness, although Apartheid did, was practised, I think everywhere really, but Johannesburg was a hard, metallic city, you know, built on minerals, [laughs] and sometimes, when you walked down a street, you could feel the hate rising from the pavements. There was a lot of hatred in Johannesburg, and white women never went out after dark, and the post offices, and the stations, you know, they all had separate entrances for black and whites, the only places that didn't were the shops, because black money was as good as white money, even though, if there wasn't a lot of it: and when we first went out there, as I said, it was shocking, but you soon got used to it, to a degree. You had to fight yourself in order to, not to, sort of, relax into this lovely white affluent living, which was really built on black labour: black, you know, semi-slave labour, because they were very poorly paid. I mean, you'd get a plumber in, to mend a lavatory or something, and he would just sit there and his black mate, who carr... was supposed to just carry the tools, did all the work, but you paid the plumber, and the plumber paid the mate about one eighth of what he got: because there was this thing called 'The Job Reservation' where, where most jobs were reserved for whites. There was very limited jobs the blacks could do, and one of the funniest things was that the whites, some of the whites, were pretty awful. They were known as 'poor whites' and one of the reserved occupations was being a postman, so, and it was very poorly paid, but, but it was something that the poor whites did, and they used to do terrible things, like then dumping large sacks of letters in the middle sort of Veldt, you know, because they couldn't be bothered to deliver them: and another example... sorry, I'm going a bit off the, off at a tangent. When we first went there, we stayed in a very... down-market flat, and next-door there was a couple called Mr and Mrs Pretorius and they were, he was in charge of some sort of sewage dump or something, and they were very, very

poor white, and they didn't have a washing machine so, as soon as I, they saw me go out, and they knew my, they knew Violet was there, and they'd, Mrs Pretorius would come in, and she'd say, 'I'm going to use the washing machine, Violet,' and because Violet was black, she had no authority, so she said, 'Right, Mrs Pretorius,' and this happened once or twice, and Violet told me, and I said, 'Well, we'll play a trick on Mrs Pretorius. She will see me go out, and you will, she will probably come in and, and ask to use the washing machine, and you will say, 'Yes,' and I'll come back in 10 minutes,' so that's exactly what happened. I, she thought I was going to work, and in actual fact I went round the block, and came back, and there she was, all her dirty old clothes, all over my kitchen floor, and Violet looking very, sort of pale, [laughs] you know, and, and I said, 'What do you think you're doing, Mrs Pretorius?' I said, 'That's my washing machine. What are you doing in my kitchen anyway?' So she mumbled and mumbled and got all her rags together and she never did it again.

Hm.

But they'd do things like pinching milk from behind, from outside one's doors that had been delivered. You know, they were blacker than a, black as black, as far as morals went, as far as, you know, living ethics went, but they were given these jobs which the blacks would have loved because they were, you know, they were better paid than most black jobs, but on, on a white scale, they were poor.

In terms of, the Apartheid society, were there ways in which you bent the rules?

Oh yeah. I used to... there was buses, state buses. It was an incredibly stupid rule. On the whole, the Africans went on their own buses: they had to, they had black buses and white buses, but if you had a black, what they called a 'nanny', which, Violet was our nanny, I s'pose, and Nanny had a white child on her back, they had to go upstairs, [feedback noise] which was quite crazy really, and so Violet and I used to go, I had two children at, at that time: Violet used to take Frankie on her back and go upstairs, and I used to, I couldn't manage the stairs, so I used to go inside with Sarah, and there was a café in one of the down-town areas where, Italians, and they didn't mind if

black or whites ate there, and had cups of tea together, so we used to go there quite a lot, and have coffee or tea, and it was so extraordinary, because it was about the only place in the whole of Johannesburg, where you could sit down, and enjoy a cup of tea with your black friend/servant, and then, Violet's brother was a militant member of ANC. You know the ANC? And he used to be always involved in a lot of meetings, and he said, 'Why don't you come along, Antonia?' so I said, 'I might, I'll think about it.' Anyway I had talked to my husband, who was much more sensible than I was [laughs] and he said, 'Well, I shouldn't go if I were you, really, Tony. You know, you don't want to go to prison, and you know what these buggers are,' so I didn't go, but I had a husband, and children, and what-not, and I didn't go, and I'm always sorry I didn't. [laughs] However, it's all the things you don't do which you regret, much more than the things you do do, I find, and that was an example of it. But certainly, in the school, you know, I taught Africans in this school, in that school: I told you about that, didn't I?

No, I don't think...

Yes I did. I taught Thabo Mbeki, among others.

[feedback] I don't think you mentioned that on the tape.

I couldn't escape that.

I think you did. That's why I was, that was why I was pushing you towards that.

[Talking together] You must be confusing...

You told me, you told me off the tape.

Well, I will have to make notes another time, yes.

Right: but I'm... almost certain that you haven't mentioned the stuff about the night school, which was what I was trying to lead you towards.

Well, that was one of the highlights. [both laugh.] Yeah, well when I was teaching at University, there was a woman called Helen Joseph, who was very magical and she was a, she wasn't a university teacher, but she had lots of contacts, and she was a union, very heavily into the Garment Workers' Union, and she used to do, she was marvellous, she was getting on, she was quite old, but she used to go round all the banished people: if they didn't like something you were doing, and they couldn't imprison you, they used to banish you, to, Africans, I mean, they used to banish them to furthest, further reaches of the Kalahari Desert, and dear Helen Joseph, who had a little Volkswagen car, and she used to go around visiting these poor banned people, well, mostly men, I s'pose. Letters from their family, and cigarettes and food, and you know, because they were just dumped in the middle of nowhere with a small, a very small amount of money, and it was just to get them out the way, to stop them being trouble-makers. Anyway, she and a woman called Ann Welch who lately died, she was a quite, quite well-known, I think she was, she was a university lecturer, I think in Economics or something, I've forgotten now exactly what, but... yes, and they were looking for people, to act as tutors, in a one-to-one, on a one-to-one basis, this tutorial college, which belonged to a man called Oscar Pitseus. I'm sure I told you this. Oscar Pitseus was Russian, he was a Russian Jew, and he was very, very anti-Apartheid, and he had this tutorial college, right in the middle, right in the middle, a plum part of Johannesburg, and he said we could have his... tutorial room, the use of his tutorial rooms, you know, which were like little cells, you know, one-toone, for teaching, for certain, to certain evenings, or on a Saturday morning, or something like that, and so we both [???] It was called 'SACED', South African Council for Higher Education, or something pompous like that, but it was, there was an Archbishop, called Archbishop Reeves who wasn't, he was very much anti-Apartheid, and he was very much hated by the Afrikaners, by the government, and... it was half-funded by the World University Service, which I'm sure you've heard of.

Hm mm.

Well, I don't, I suppose it still exists, but it was to do with, they doshed out money to educational establishments who were having a hard time of it, or were educating people in the face of opposition. It's one of the things [rustling noise] they do, or did, more black than non, because I had an interview with them when I came back from England, and that wasn't at all satisfactory... so remind me. Anyway, this institution got started and we used to advertise, they used to advertise for st..., you know, clever students, who were, mostly had been chucked out of their own colleges, because there were black colleges, which specialised in things like forestry and horticulture, and, you know, soft, sort of non-political subjects, and they got, they were mostly run by the Minister of Education, the Minister of Education's numerous second cousins, or [laughing] something like that, but... yes: and... so we got started, and I did one, one or two hours a week with one or two students, and most of the students were white: sorry, most of the students were males, there were very few female students, but one of my students, for a short time, was Thabo Mbeki, who as you know is President, and he was a very clever, a very clever man, and he was a very beautiful man, too. He was about 19, I suppose, when I taught him. Later he came to Sussex University: but we were given, we followed syllabuses from London External Examinations. You could do exams which were called 'London External Degrees', in those days, and we based our teaching on those, but they, I taught History, and they were all mad keen to do the French Revolution, [laughs] and the feudal system, that was their two favourite topics, and I actually got them autobiographies, which were written by students, just before I left, so I've got, you know, I've got the evidence written down, which was one of the most sensible things I did, but I didn't get Thabo Mbeki's one. I think I only taught him for a short time, but about, there were equally interesting students, but he was the cleverest. Yeah: and they were very nice, and, you know, I mean, some of them were quite, quite ferocious, in a way: not toward me, because I came from London, and I wasn't, I was English, I wasn't South African, so I had a certain immunity there, but there was one chap called Ben Rakou, who, he was bright, and he was very pushy, and he said, 'We are going to push you whites into the sea. Just you, just you watch, Antonia. Just you watch.' I think I was called 'Mrs Peake', actually, not 'Antonia', but, you know, it was a most exciting thing to do, because, you know,

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it was, you really did get it involved with the future. Mm. I told you about the coffins, didn't I?

You told us, me about the coffins, yes, but I wanted to know a bit more about the night school that you were say ...

The night school was very much more interesting.

Yeah. So, was what you were doing allowed or not?

Well, it was dodgy. There was a law saying, 'No white person could teach a class of Africans,' but they never got round to thinking that one white person would ever want to teach one African, so ...

[End of Tape 7 Side A]

## Tape 7 Side B [Track 12]

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Yes, but I think that was after I left... but it was certainly a very, very interesting... thing to be doing.

What were your first impressions of Thabo Mbeki, when you met him?

[laughing] What a beautiful man he was. Yes, he was beautiful. He wore a sort of flat cap and, you know, and he was very tall in those days. He seems to have shrunk a bit, and got much fatter. He was a lean [laughing] mean-looking man, you know. He could have made it in Hollywood: he was so beautiful: and bright, and very quick, but he came from a kind of middle-class, African family. There were a few, who'd been educated... a couple of generations, you know, when things, before Apartheid really got going, they had been able to go to University, and his father had written a book in the thirties. Gavin Mbeki had written a book. I think I've forgotten what it was called, but it came out in Penguin: so he had certain advantages, did our Mbeki.

[pause] And what sort of things did you teach him? Was it...

Well, it was meant to be foreign life [???] so a history syllabus. We did the Nineteenth Century, we did the slave system, the death of slavery, as it were, and we, they didn't, we didn't do much South African history. They'd done enough of that from a certain viewpoint: nine Bantu wars - that was their idea of African history, in which the whites won every one of them. [laughs] I can't remember really, but we used to, they used to write essays. They worked hard, and to write essays, they had to get up at four o'clock in the morning very often, because they had to get into Johannesburg to start work at seven, which meant catching a train at six, and to write... they were too tired when they got back in the evening, so they'd write their essays by, you know, a smoky old paraffin light, in the small hours: and some of them were good. A lot of them weren't, but there was a tremendous, tremendous, the

endeavour, and the enthusiasm, and the eagerness, to get education, was something wonderful: and to come back to England, and teach in an English school was [laughing] absolutely shattering, after this amaze, people struggling, really struggling to learn how to read the proper books, how to expand their minds, how to use their intellects, which hadn't ever had a chance to expand, or, or be used. It was a wonderful, a wonderful opportunity.

What kinds of jobs were the, your students doing?

Well, most of them were doing shitty [??] jobs, like being porters, or messengers for the public library, you know. Oh yes, if you were white, if you belonged to the public library, which were only whites were allowed, and you sent a book back, by a black servant, it had to be wrapped in brown paper. [laughs] That was the sort of thing one was up against, the ridiculous, absolutely... how people can possibly have accepted their sort of regulations. It reminds me of Nazi Germany, only, it wasn't quite so, it wasn't so bad, of course not, but, it was petty restrictions: humiliating restrictions. Anyway... I digress. We were talking about jobs they were doing. Yes, they were doing rather menial jobs, because there weren't any other jobs for them to do, really.

And, if blacks weren't allowed to borrow books from the library, how, where did you get the books, to study?

They had their own libraries in their own... in the better locations, they did have libraries: and I think they passed them around a lot, you know, and sometimes they even bought books, but books were very precious, and I lent them books and, you know, we man... I'm not quite sure whether we had a library at the college, I don't think we did, but we might have done later: but, you know, the preciousness of education was amazing, and they realised how precious education was.

You mentioned			

Mm.

Can you tell me anything about what sort of stories they were telling?

Well, I can look them up the next time. Yes, they'd tell us stories about how they... I can't really remember, but I've got s... three of them anyway. I'll look them up for next time.

OK.

Yeah, sorry about that.

That's all right.

My memory does fail me sometimes. [laughs]

So we've talked about the night school. Are there other things, are there anything else that you can remember about the night school, that you want to...?

[pause] Well not really, no, except that... how fond I got of my, some of my students. They were really nice. I was expecting my third baby, at some time when I was teaching there, and, you know, they'd give me little presents for the baby, and they had no, they had no money at all, hardly, and yet, you know, they'd produce these tiny little black dolls, or, something, and they were very nice. They weren't all very nice, there was this one, one who wanted to shove us all into the sea [laughs], but they were interesting, and the way they coped with life was so good, you know, and OK, they weren't allowed to have liquor, but they had beer halls, you know, and they weren't allowed spirits, that's right, but they used to make the most ghastly stuff, called 'scok', it was like scokeen [phon.] I think it was called 'scokeen': like poteen, only scokeen, and they used to put dead rats in it, and all sorts of things: and, but you never saw them remotely, the worse for wear. Never, I mean I think, there was a lot of drinking done on occasions, because life was so miserable, on the whole, and a lot of them took refuge in drink, and darka [phon.]: dacha, you know,: cannabis, but my

students were too motivated to go overboard or rely on them, I think, but they, most of them didn't stay in South Africa. They escaped. There was a thing called 'The Caprivi Strip', which was the escape to Botswana, and there was a kind of air-strip somewhere, called 'The Caprivi Strip', and they would go and take their qualifications, and their ambitions to other parts of Africa, I mean, notably West Africa; Ghana was a favourite place to go: or Kenya. You know, in those days there were places in, to the north of South Africa, which were relatively stable, so I think, in a way... I'm sure they came back, you know, when the wall went down, as you might say, when the ... when Apartheid went bust, if they were alive, they all came back, and they must have been alive, because most of them, well most of them must have been alive, I suppose, but in the meantime, their talents weren't lost to Africa.

[Pause] What about the... so from night school, did you then get the job at the university, or was it that you were already at the university, when you...

No, I got the university job first, and then, as I was at the University, people knew how I thought. I mean, you know, we always thought in the History Department was very liberal: and I got the job I think, because, through being at the University, yeah. [Pause.] It's interesting. I met, I, a man who was my, who was a fellow-lecturer of mine, he was a senior lecturer, I think, called Noel Garson, he's still Professor, there, at Witwatersrand. He was a very nice man, and he was married to an Afrikaner lady, who, and... you know, there was a lot of socialising, so we went out to dinner with most of the people I worked with from time to time, and there was another girl, a woman, called Deborah Lavin, who went on... she had had enough of the troubles in South Africa, and she was very bright, she was a Rhodes Scholar, in Oxford, and she landed a job in Queens, the University of Belfast, and just at that time the troubles started, so she really did go out of the frying pan into the fire. I visited her once in..., at Queens, and she, and I think in the end she ended up in, at Durham, as a Principal at one of the colleges: a very bright woman. She was a good, good friend of mine: yes. Yes, I must say if you were white, you know, you had the, and you were quite, reasonably well off, you had a very good life out there: very sociable, lots of dinner parties, lots of parties, you know, and people were enormously friendly, much more

friendly than they are, are here. I find the English very unfriendly, you know. Mm. Yeah, but, but there you go.

But nevertheless, after three years in the job, at the University, you decided to come back to England. Why was that?

Yes. I think we didn't want our children to be brought up... you know, children [phone rings] oh sorry. Shall, I think I'll leave that. [another ring.] It was a hard decision to make, because my husband, who was a very difficult man: gifted, but very difficult, had a boss who could actually manage him, and he was doing very well, working at this exp... this huge place called 'African Explosives', which was, you know, an unfortunate name really [laughs] but nobody ever thought it was a funny name at this time, and he was doing very well, and he'd sort of made the switch from being a sort of land surveyor into being an operational researcher in industry, and he'd gotting in, getting into computers, and he ended up working for IBM, but that was a long time ahead: and he didn't really want to leave, and I had this interesting job: it was two interesting jobs actually, I mean, though they were both part-time, and the children, you know, well there was sunshine and the outside activities, but it was about the time of the eldest was, was due to start sch... proper school. They went to kindergarten. Sarah was five, and I think we had very great reservations about the kind of teaching they would, the kind of stuff they were taught in the schools, because the schools were very much under the government, and the kind of slant, history and South African [??], and the kind of way that children took for granted that the blacks were their sort of semi-slaves, and actually I think it might have been OK, because, as things turned out, there were more and, there was more and more, questioning about everything, although this was 1963, and the actual thing didn't really fall, absolutely apart till 1985, so probably we did do the right thing, but I was very loath... to leave it after... on the other hand, I used to feel guilty that my exciting life was built on the backs of blacks, and, you know, I used to get very ... very ... chewed up and angry, about the things which happened in South Africa. It was very stimulating, but one used to wonder sometimes whether you weren't being stimulated for the sake of stimulated. I mean, I did care very much about what happened there, but, at the same

time, I was leading a very easy life, and it was because of, in a way it was built upon what, the way the majority were expected to... were... governed, really. You know, they were governed as a sub-species. Four-fifths of the major... four-fifths of the population owned thirteen per cent of the land, and had about, well something, a minute proportion of the resources, of the money, and it was always, it was a terribly unfair society, and people were leaving all the time: white South Africans, who couldn't stand it. We couldn't, that's why we couldn't find anybody at the University, because the universities were boycotted, and the whole country was boycotted at one point, wasn't it? Trade-wise, too, and it became a republic, in 1960, and I remember ... and that was under Verwoerd, and Verwoerd said to all the white South Africans, 'Have a baby for the Republic,' you know, so they were all urged to, all the white South Africans were urged to have a baby for the white Republic, because they were, their birth rate was very low, and the African birth rate was very high. You know, it was like that, it was, you know: [laughs] and, in a way... it was an invidious society to be part of: and I suppose it was an unreal society, built on all the wrong, all terrible, terrible mixed values. It sounds very pompous, but I think it did, did have a great deal of... that's why we did leave, because if we, as we were leaving, there were a lot of white people, particularly from the north of England, coming in, you know, because they thought it was a good life, and they didn't care about, blacks, particularly, so in a way, the liberals, whites, were leaving in their swathes, you know, the chattering classes, [laughs] and, but white people were still coming in, because of course the government was keen to get more and more white immigrants, but I don't think they got that many but, you know, a few, because it was a good life, and if you were after a materialistic, good life, and, you know, a good outdoor life, because they were very sporty, and, you know, there were terrific sort of sports facilities, for the whites, it was quite tempting, I suppose. Anyway, we left, and everybody said, 'Oh, I mean, oh you'll hate the weather. It'll be raining all the time,' and we said, rather pompously, 'Well we won't let that st... keep us, we won't let that keep us. That's a very small consideration,' and it wasn't. [laughs.] And we, we [clears throat] ... that's right, we left in 1964: I think, and we had to go and live with my father, who had a run-down farm, in the middle of Monmouthshire. A small-holding it was, and he'd been in the army and... I think I told you, and he bought this... well, he was a widow, he was a

widow, and then a divorcee, a divorced man, and he just let things run badly, really. He didn't run things at all, you know. Everything was falling down, and the house was damp and filthy, and, it was like a nightmare, [laughs] and it rained all the time, and I became quite ill, and you know, and by that time we had three children, and two of them were in nappies, and it was really a nightmare: no Violet to do all the work for the children, and a filthy old farmhouse, and Dad said, 'Oh I've bought a bag, I've bought a sack of swedes: I thought you could live on swedes. It'd be nice and cheap.' You know, swedes are what you give cattle.

### Mm.

Well I mean, they are, they're quite nice, but I've never been able to look a swede in the face since, and it was difficult. I mean, Dad and, and Hugh: Hugh was my husband, didn't get on very well. Well, and Hugh got a job at Richard Thomas & Magdelan [??] which is in South Wales, is in, was in South Wales, in Newport, and he only stayed there for six months, but before, but between that and him leaving, we'd bought a house in Cardiff, because I was born in Cardiff and I liked, quite like Cardiff, but he went and... in those days, if you had qualifications, and you were bright, professionally, you know, you could get jobs every six months, a new job every six months, you know, and everybody wanted you; and Hugh was particularly bright, and he was into computers at a time when everybody wanted people who knew about computers, 'cause there weren't very many of them. He wanted to, us to buy a computer and put it in the spare bedroom [laughs] and they were huge things, you knew. Anyway, I digress. So we stayed with my father for about two months, and then, thank God, we bought a house in Cardiff: which was quite fun really, living, I liked living in Cardiff. I always wanted to go back there really, because I am Welsh, and... oh yes, that was when I had a very strange time with The Spastics Society. [laughs] I'll have to tell you about that. I got in touch with a marvellous lady called Audrey Davies, and Audrey Davies represented The Spastics Society in Wales, or at least in Cardiff anyway, and she was a wonderful sort of, one of the best type of social worker, you know: really, very funny, had a marvellous sense of humour, and she involved me in working with this, with people with cerebral palsy to a certain extent.

There was this man, who was about 30, and there was no reason why he shouldn't get out of his bed and walk, and he just wouldn't, and his mother was a little tiny old lady, and, she loved having her son in bed and looking after him, and all that: it gave her something to do. I don't suppose it happens these days, but in those days it happened quite often, that somebody who couldn't, could have managed to walk, just didn't walk: they just stayed in bed, and nobody persuaded them to walk, and we're talking about the 1960's, and I used to say, well, he was about my age, I suppose, about 30, and I said, 'Look, John, you've got to get out of bed and walk, you know: you know. I'll get you a crutch: I'll get you two crutches, and you can have a go.' I was quite strong in those days, you know, I was [???] spastic, but I wasn't at all, I was quite tough, and anyway, he wouldn't, and I was furious with him. [laughs] Anyway, there was another boy, a little boy who came with his parents to see me, and... and, one or two, it wasn't, it wasn't as inclusive as the South African, business, but and then I went to a... I went to this awful Spastics Society meeting and it was full of people with, well in those days I think they'd just about not been called 'spastics', you know: very bad cerebral palsy, some of them, and I don't know why, when I was, when I was younger, I absolutely loathed being... seen with people who were very disabled. I suppose it's like being, marginally black or marginally Jewish, or you know... I'm not really disabled. I mean I feel quite disabled now, but that's got to do with the aging process, plus, you know, fighting your muscles, and muscles w..., getting weaker, than other people's of course, but when I was 30, I was definitely something funny to look at, but not that funny, and I could manage most things, after my fashion. And I went to this Spastics Society Meeting, and there were these awful... you know, I'm telling it my perspective really... there were these awful do-gooding women. They were women who'd probably never married, and they were the sort of the last of the do-gooding spinsters, and they were... one of them, sort of latched on to me, and I was feeling most awkward-acting, and I wanted to leave, and I hadn't, I was ashamed of feeling like this, but I did [laughs]: and this woman, [voices in background] this sort of Girl Guide-y, this sort of aged Girl Guide woman came up to me, and she said, 'How long have you been in Cardiff?' so I said, 'Oh about six months.' 'Oh,' she said, 'you must have been so lonely. It's taken you six months before you discovered our Society,' so I said, 'I have plenty of people who are not spastics, thank you very

much, and what's more, I have a husband and three children': and that was that, I never saw, I never saw her again. You know, she was obviously sort of, unmarried, a do-gooder, and I was, I never went to that place again. No, no. [laughs] I suppose the ... I mean I, in a way, I wanted to help people who were, not as fortunate as me, but in a way, I, it was awful. I didn't really want to... be seen as one of them. You see, I was a disablist if you like: I mean a... yes, a disablist. [laughs] I mean I'm not now. I haven't been for many years, but when I was young, I was so keen to be seen as 'passing for white', I used to call it: that was normal, as passing for white, that I used to run a mile if I saw someone who was very disabled, and you can put that in the record, because, although I'm a bit ashamed of it, I think it's very pertinent. Do many people feel like that?

I think, I think, I think some people.

Yeah.

Yeah. Mm.

Anyway, I've got over it. I think it was a mixture of false pride and mostly it was to do with pride. [Rustling noise.] Thanks. And then I went up to London. Audrey Davies, who was this brilliant social worker for what was called The Spastics Society then, she wanted me to go up to London and meet this bloke, who we talked about: Bill?

Bill Hargreaves

Bill Hargreaves: and he and I didn't get on [laughing] one bit. We had lunch together, and, you know, I could see he was... my upper middle class accent made his hackles rise, and you know, he was quite a ... he's a Northerner, isn't he? And, oh, we just didn't like each other, [laughs] but I could see that he was a marvellous man, and all that, but he was quite disabled: more disabled than me. [laughs] I don't whether that was something to do with it, which was rather naughty, but I think he, I don't think

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we had the same sense of humour: no, I think it was probably that, but he was one of the only spastics, sorry, people with cerebral palsy, I've ever met. I haven't met very many.

And why were you meeting him? What was the idea?

I can't remember. I think I was up in London anyway, and Audrey said, 'Well come along to meet... whatever it was, The Spastics Society, and I'll introduce you to Bill. Bill's marvellous,' she said, 'he works,' she said, 'he does such a lot of work for us,' so I said, 'Right, I'd love to meet him,' so we went out to lunch and hated each other. [laughs] Well, that's an exaggeration: I mean, we didn't get on, and... well, so...

What were your impressions of Bill Hargreaves?

Well, I thought he was admirable, but I didn't like him, because I felt he didn't like me. I felt that my accent, which was probably... very upper middle class to his eyes, to his ears, although I can't hear it. [laughs] I mean; do you think I've got an upper middle class accent?

It's diff... I s'pose to [talking together] some ears ...

I think it's just ordinary.

Mm. Mm.

You know: 'cause when I went hitch-hiking, I did a lot of hitch-hiking. Did I tell you about that?

Yes.

All over the continent. It was wonderful, but whenever [??] I got hitch-hiking in England, I used to try and water down my upper middle class vowel sounds.

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[Coughing] It used to come out as very, as very Welsh. [In a Welsh accent] I could talk very Welsh if I want to, you know, [Alex laughs] because before I was five, I had a really smashing Welsh accent, [laughs] [back to normal accent] but then my grandmother, my maternal grandmother saw to [???] ruined it, so I had posh then, I spoke posh after that: [Alex laughs] but [clears throat]... well...

So that was, was that the end of you... sort of, encounter with The Spastics Society then, or did you do anything else?

No, I don't think I did... aft... I was... oh God, because I then started working. When I got to London, I did... a diploma in Education, and then I started working full-time, in further education, in Bermondsey, and Kennington. No, I didn't have time, you know, I really didn't, and I suppose in a way I wasn't really interested: [laughs]

So...

to be quite honest.

Mm.

But I've always been interested in [clears throat] helping people who are not physically-disabled.

Actually, just go back to the... this chap that was in bed. Can you say any more about that, that...

John?

Yes.

No, I had no [clears throat] success, and therefore I don't think about him very much. [laughs] You know, he was the, he was just, it was too late. He'd been in bed for 30 years, and his wife: his, sorry, his mother [clears throat] encouraged him to be in bed, I think. He was hopeless.

And Audrey had asked you to go and talk to...

If I could do anything,

Right.

and I couldn't. [laughs]

So tell me about your work, in Bermondsey then.

Well I did this... well, we moved to London, [clears throat] in about 1965, and we lived in a place called Hampton Hill, which is a sort of suburb of Twickenham. We had this enormous house, which was falling down. I seem to have spent my life in falling-down enormous houses. You know, this is the first time I haven't lived in a falling-down enormous house...

[End of Tape 7 Side B]

## Tape 8 Side A [Track 13]

...so I want to say something about living in this house. This house was huge, and but we didn't really have the money to keep it up, so, it never got to the state of my father's house, because we weren't there long enough, but, and my husband was, anyway, much, quite a different person from my father. He was very neat and tidy and, keen on keeping things together, and he was quite a good DIY man too, so, but we had a sort of flat that we let off, and I was terribly keen that we should let it off to Africans, because they, at that time in the 1960's, it was still very, very difficult, for blacks to get anywhere decent to live: particularly black students, with families, and so I contacted the British Council, and I said, 'Look, we've got this nice little flat. We'd like to have a family with children,' so they sent us this delightful, lovely family from Fiji. He was, I don't know what he was studying: something at Kingston University, and she was one of the nicest people. They were lovely: a lovely mother, 'Kiara', she was called, and they had two little girls about the same age as our little girls: so it was a very, very good arrangement, and then the building society heard about it. We had an enormous mortgage. I don't know how they heard about it, I've forgotten: perhaps we'd put in for more money or something, for, to put in central heating, but, and they said, 'We hear you have lodgers. We must pay more money; pay a bigger mortgage, so I said, 'I'm damned if we're gonna do that,' so I went up to the... it was the Abbey, Abbey National? I went up to Abbey House [laughs] and, you know, I, having asked for an interview with the manager, and so I went up to Abbey House, and I sat in his chair, and I said, 'I'm not going to pay, we're not going to pay any more, you know.' [laughs] So I said, 'I'm sitting here. I'm not going until you agree with me.' [laughs] Oh, and I sat there for four hours, and he's, and he was obviously dying to, go and have lunch or something, and he said, 'All right Mrs Peake, you win.' [laughs]

# [Laughing] Really?

Yeah, so that was one of my little per..., my little successes. [laughing] I'm good about telling you about my successes, I don't go to tell you about my failures, [laughs]

but yeah, we were terribly pleased about that, and so, and that was a really happy time. I mean, the marriage was going well, and having these nice people around, and, I got involved with... adult, not adult literacy. I did classes in Russian literature, you know, and we had, it was a sort of very nice, compact place we lived in, where everybody knew, even though it was a London suburb: not everybody knew everybody else, but we knew a lot of people in a very short time, because we had, we were doing these daytime classes, and they would have a crèche where everybody's could go, and the women's children all in one room, and we would, were taught by this very nice WEA lecturer from, who came down from London, to teach us Russian literature, and things like that, and yes, it was very happy. We were there for six years, till about 1970, and, but be, between... by 1968... oh, I'm talking, I went up to London, to teach in a place called The Monkey Club. Have you heard of The Monkey Club? Well, it was a very posh, finishing school, for the chil..., girls of the really rich, in Pont Street; and it was run by two very, very, ghastly women. One was very old, and smelt of urine and she, she was a right... Mrs, Mrs Johnson-Hicks. She, her husband had been rather a well-known fascist M.P. [laughs] Well, semi-fascist, and she had this Swiss woman who was quite sinister, and they ran this finishing school, and gosh, it was awful, and they paid us 30 shillings: no, they paid us 10 shillings an hour, so I said, 'I won't accept 10 shillings an hour. I'm going to have a pound an hour or I'm not coming.' [laughs] So, they gave me a pound an hour, and then I got all the tutors to say they wanted a pound an hour. [laughs] But one of students was Arabella Churchill, [feedback] you know, which I think, Winston Churchill's daughter. No, she was the grand-daughter of the Winston Churchill. She was a little monkey, a real madam, and all they wanted to know, I had, I was going to teach them History, anyone's history, and they all wanted to know about Kings and Queens, and aristocrats, and you know, not any of them wanted to know about the people: so that didn't last very long. But it was an insight into the other side of life.

It was quite a contrast then, to your night school in South Africa, then.

Absolutely. I'm glad I did it, [clears throat] and all the tutors were aged, ever so aged, and very frightened of Mrs Zaig, I think she was called, [clears throat] but then the

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children were all spoiled to death, you know, horribly spoilt little girls, and not very

bright.

So how were you offered that work? How did that come about?

I think I got it through Gabbitas-Thring, or something; you know, one of those;

educational agencies. I just wanted a job to do about twice a week, you see, because

the children were still very small, and it was quite interesting, but anyway, it'll do for

a short while and, it was in a nice area, with very nice shops, and then I decided to go

to London University, to do a Diploma, a post-graduate Diploma in Education,

because, I'd never, although I'd taught, I hadn't got a teaching diploma, so I did that,

locally, actually: a place near Roehampton, though it wasn't a, you know...

Roehampton was just a collection of teachers' training colleges in those days, it

wasn't a university: and, oh, that was quite fun.

So what was the experience of being a student like, then?

Oh, it was great fun really. I was a terrible flirt. [laughs] I mean the academic input

was easy-peasy, it was nothing really, you know, [laughs] because it wasn't just an

ordinary teachers' training college, it was for, people who wanted to teach in further

education, so you got a lot of engineers and cooks: you know, hairdressers, and, you

know, people who teach technical subjects, as well as academic, so it was a real mish-

mash, and I had a really nice tutor, who was quite mad. He's still alive: a dear old

man called 'Bumpton'. Anyhow, I really enjoyed it, yah. I had one, oh yes, by this

time, I'd got a cripple-car, one of those three-wheely jobs, which I used to drive at a

hell of a pace, [laughs] and it was so noisy and smelly. Have you ever been in one?

You know what I mean.

Yes. [talking together] What was it...

A pale blue one ...

Yes.

... made of fibre-glass.

What was it like to drive?

Hideous. It had a tiller. It was like a motor bike, well it didn't go as quite as fast, and you weren't supposed to take anything, anybody in it, and I used to cram the three children in the back. We used to throw a shopping ledge at the back, and it used to tilt terribly to one side, [laughs] and I never had anybody, bad accidents in it, because, but it was a fun, it had a nice, I had a job in central London for a bit, and I used to drive it all round, central London, and I remember we were driving round, five times round Admiralty Arch, and I was too frightened to get off the [laughing] roundabout, and I thought, I'd never do this for the rest of my life.

[Talking together] Well what...

And suddenly I'd cut across four swathes of huge, hugely monstrous traffic, in this tiny, delicate car, and but it was fun: but then, later I got a car, [??] and I had about 400 lessons to drive that, but that's another story; that comes later.

Can you tell me what it was like, to learn to drive the three-wheeler?

Well, I had this very nice young man, who had this sort of, there was a sort of three-wheeler depot garage place, in Hounslow. He was called John, and he was really nice and patient, and he sort of, sat in the shopping boot, and, you know, 'You don't do this, you don't do that,' and it was... it did take me quite a long time, and I had 12 lessons, I think, and, you know, I had to do the Highway Code and all that, but it did give me a measure of independence, which was very nice.

Can you remember what it was like, the first time you went on the road?

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Terrifying, but I was dying to go on the motorway, but I wasn't allowed, and I did once, and I got returned by the police. You know, they said, 'You're not allowed here,' so I said, 'No well, why not?' [laughs] 'Cause it says so.' [Both laugh.] You know, they didn't take action or anything, they just said, you know 'Get off! Get off the, get off this road, young lady, you're not supposed to be down here. Go down that st..., road there.'

And what was the attitude of other drivers to you?

Terrified. [laughs] Oh, I used to cut them up like anything, you know, because, it was jolly good, you know, in certain situations, you could cut through them and you were, you were given a wide berth, because you were considered a loose cannon. [laughs] No, I had great fun, driving that, but the smell was awful, and you couldn't really do more than about 15 miles: but it was good to go to the station in.

Mm?

You couldn't go further than 15 miles' distance. Is that what you're saying?

Well, I only ever went 15 miles, further than about 15 miles

Mm.

at a time, because the smell was awful, [talking together] and it was not...

What was the smell?

It was still on diesel.

Ah ha.

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[clears throat] And they were fragile things: and somehow they, I just got very tired, because it was quite a heavy tiller, much worse than the steady wheel I've got now, and, but the noise was incredible. I mean I think that was the most tiring thing about it, the incredible noise.

Mm.

And I remember the sports driver... oh, what was his name? Graham Hill? Had a go and he said, 'My God, I'd never be in one of those.' He said, 'They're dangerous.' [laughs]

Did you feel that?

Mm?

Did you feel that they were dangerous?

Yes; but they were better than nothing, weren't they? I mean, you know, and then, I did try and drive a car. My husband, who was very bossy and arrogant, and difficult, and bad-tempered, tried to teach me how to drive. We'd got a Polo or something, a little car, and he shouted at me all the time, and we ended up...between the lamp post and the wall: and after that, I gave up with that idea until he went, [laughs] and when we got divorced, I had another go, to, and did it. Husbands should never teach wives to drive, anyway. But, you know, the year at teachers' training college was great fun. I enjoyed it: yah. I didn't have to do much work, and it was interesting. We had to do awful sort of dreadful stupid subjects like The Philosophy of Education and The Sociology of Education, and then we had to just, practical, practical work, which was more fun, really. Yes, I enjoyed that: a good year.

Was there anything in your training about... teaching disabled children?

Yes, I [clears throat] later on, I thought I'd have a go at teaching deaf children, and, [clears throat] in Brixton, and I was accepted to do that, and then I've forgotten why... I got promotion, that's right, at work, so I decided to take, to stay on, because I'd got promotion. I became a student counsellor, and as the, it meant less teaching and more coun..., more interaction with students on another thing, in another capacity, I didn't go, for the deaf, but it would have been interesting. Yes, do you see, I was gradually breaking down my resistance to disabled, to people who were more disabled, perhaps more disabled than me, and I, way [??] got rather involved with a blind man: a teacher, sorry, doing the teaching staff. Doing, sorry, the teachers' course, I got involved with a blind man: and, to a certain extent, and we liked each other anyway, and that was a great breakthrough for me, because he was dead blind, and he was so marvellous, because he was teaching, and he couldn't see anything hardly at all, and he was at Birkin [??] and he, he had, he'd gone suddenly blind at 18, and I think, there's a genetic thing, sometimes, that people go blind at 18, and he was very much a sort of working-class bloke, who wouldn't have been, dreamt have been a teacher, had he not been blind.

Your microphone's [rustling noise] come off again.

Sorry.

That's all right. We're obviously not putting it on [??]

Well, when shall I go back, to?

No, you're all right. It's literally just come off, so...

Oh good.

... carry on.

I'll have to watch it. And this was really quite a break-through to, for my attitude to disabled [???] Yeah, because I could see how he struggled, and how successful he was. He had everything Brailled, and... he was tough; like me. [laughs]

So what was it like, being a counsellor, then?

[Talking together] Oh, very interesting, yes.

A student counsellor.

You mean... when, no, well I think it was more interesting before that. I had a terrible time, getting a full-time job, because, although I'd been, done a course on the assumption that I was going to teach full-time, when it came to it, the ILEA wanted me to, to do a part-time job, and as I, my marriage was very shaky, and I knew I was going to need the money, apart from the fact that I wanted to do a full-time job, really, I wanted to be a proper person, and do a full-time job; although I had three children: I mean, you know, [laughs] and looking back at it, I would have been much better off doing a part-time job, because it, I was exhausted a lot of the time, and got quite ill, but... I taught first of all in a very strange little college in Kennington. Do you know Kennington? It was in St George's Square, very near the British, the Imperial War Museum, and they all, the teachers, the staff were all very eccentric, but the students were nice: and I enjoyed it: I taught everything: History, Sociology, English to foreigners, English to O Level, Religious Knowledge: you name, you name it, I taught it, [laughs] over the years. I could never say 'no' to a new course, which meant I was perpetually exhausted, but I did enjoy it, and I loved the students: I love, the students were lovely East Enders, and, you know, I had a wonderful time with the students. [laughing] I think the staff hated me, but I loved the students: I was sort of retarded, you know: and I led a revolution from behind, in one, one ... I think that was Kennington, yes. They closed the library, because of alterations or something. This was in the middle of term, just before examinations, and they closed the library: so I said, 'Oh, this is absolutely ridiculous,' because I was always telling my students to go to the library, and 'look up this, and look up that: read that,' and so, anyway, we

got a massive protest document out, and I got nearly every student in the college to sign it, but of course, I wasn't doing anything at all, I was working [laughing] through a marvellous chap called... what was his name? 'Jack', I think, and Jack was a sort of, hippy type, you know, with black greasy hair, all, you know, and he, he was Irish, and he sort of did all the stuff, but I, he and I managed it, really, and I got a... I got: no, I won't say, 'I': I don't think it was me, but, oh, we all got, decided that the students should descend [??] the petition to the rather ghastly principal at home, at the week end, [laughs] so [??] a road near, quite near her, we did that. Anyway, she got to hear... she was a very unfortunate woman, Miss Fletcher, just waiting it out to retirement, and she somehow got to hear that I was behind it, me and the Sociology teachers. I taught Sociology, mostly, at that first, at that time, and sociologists were always suspect. [laughing] I think they always will be, and she said, she called me, and she said, 'Yes, I think we'll give you that transfer, that you wanted,' [laughs] because I had put in a sort of a, a kind of transfer to a college nearer home, because it was very difficult to get to. It meant going on to a, going on, going in my car, then going into trains and buses, and going round Waterloo, and, by the time I got to college, I was very tired, and by the time I came back, I was exhausted; although it's amazing, how you can keep going, isn't it? Even if you, I mean, if you enjoy what you're doing, and like the people, you know. Anyway, I got quite ill; I got pneumonia at one point, and I was... taken to hospital: Isleworth, somewhere, you know: West Middlesex, and all my st..., one of my, all my class came to see me, in hospital, and it was quite nice: and another time, I went to another hospital, where there were nuns. I had glandular fever, actually, but no-one, the doctor wouldn't say it was glandular fever, so I was taken to hospital. I went into this hospital, where a lot of nuns were, and I was being my usual atheistical self, and my, this, by this time we moved to Bermondsey, that's right. Bermondsey; yes, that's right. I thought it was Kennington, and then the same college moved to, from Kennington to premises in Bermondsey, which was an even worse, worse, travel, and these nuns were all hovering over me, you know... they were pretty kind, but very nauseating, and, yes, they said, 'Oh, you must be a good woman after all, because the students have come down for a Religious Studies class.' [laughs] I mean, it wasn't, about five or six, there were, and... it was funny, it was funny, that.

Antonia Lister-Kaye Page 139 C1134/06 Tape 8 Side A [Digitised as Part 13]

[Talking together] So

I suppose, in a way, I got on better with students than staff.

And how did you manage a full-time job, and looking after three children?

We had au pair girls, and... mostly they were Austrian. We had one Austrian au pair girl for four years, and we managed, yes. We managed, because the children weren't that young by that time. I think Matthew must have been about seven: seven, eight and nine, or seven, eight and ten, or something like that. Yeah, but it was hard, wasn't it: yes it was very hard, and the children now think I didn't, [laughing] I didn't give them enough attention. However, you can never do right.

And how did they react to moving to England?

Sorry?

How did they react to moving to England, from South Africa?

Oh, they hated it, other than the little boy, who was only... Matthew, who was only 18 months, went all... he went round the place, saying, 'Mummy, why is it always rining [phon.] in England?' It wasn't rining; it was just dark. I mean, the South African sunlight is fantastic. 'Mummy, why is it always rining in England?' And they didn't like it at all, because they had to be inside a lot, and they particularly hated it in my father's farmhouse, because it was November when we arrived. I don't know if you can imagine how cold it was: but they got used to it: yeah, but it was a big upheaval, for all of us. [pause] I had a kind of breakdown, when I got back: when I was at my father's house, farm, after South Africa. I think I was so bored, [laughs] you know. [Clears throat] The most exciting thing there was, was <u>Dr Kildare</u> on the television, and it just seemed such a boring, pointless sort of life, after all the excitement of teaching, students, and, you know... going against the government and

all that, it was, it had been exciting. To come back and live in a Welsh, on a Welsh hillside: God, it was terrible. Anyway, I had a kind of a blackout, and it took, my husband took me to a neurological institute, in Bristol, called The Frenchay, this place and, it was funny, he said that it was absolutely all right, it was just a result, it was the shock of the trauma, moving trauma. He said, 'You shouldn't move; your wife shouldn't move anywhere within 15 years, at least,' and of course [laughing] we moved all the time: and there I am, moving again at 74: 73: so... yah. So it's, so it's been a bit all over the place.

Mm. So anyway, let's move... so you got your transfer, from Bermondsey. Where did you go?

I went to Putney.

Putney.

And that was quite near where we lived. We lived in Wimbledon, you know. We moved after about six years, from this big old house, to another big old house in Wimbledon: which was where we were for 12 years, and during that time, my husband departed: and that was very traumatic really, because we were... I think we were very fond of each other in a way, but he was so bad-tempered, and we weren't suited in a way. He was always neat and tidy, and I was all over the place, [laughs] and, but he was always very good about my disability: always very good about that, and he never threw it in my face, or anything, although he used to throw practically everything else in my face; [laughs] but he was very, very bad-tempered and hard to live with, and I suppose I wasn't easy, and I went off and, and had an aff... I had an affair with someone who... he was a Deputy Secretary to the Education Department: [laughs] very smart and posh, and... but, but a much older man: yah. But, and that was that. [laughs] Well, I, I don't want to say too much about that, 'cause I don't want to cut anything out: but anyway, Hugh was a bit violent, and that really put the kibosh on it. [voices in the background.]

So when did you divorce?

1974.

And how, how old were your children then?

Well, 14... 16, 14 and 12, so it wasn't that bad, but we went through a pretty chaotic period after that, I will say. The oldest girl went to a private school, some, school that I'd been at, actually, and the middle girl, I think, took the brunt of it, and my son, Matthew, after about year or two, I realised that he wasn't doing any work at school at all, and I went to the school, and I said, 'How many O levels is he going to take?' and they said 'Three,' so I said, 'Three? That's impossible,' and he said, 'Mummy, can I go to boarding school? I don't like all these women, all over the place,' so luckily my godmother died about then, and she left me some money, so I sent him to boarding school. I put down a lump sum, you know, the way you can, for two and a half years, or three years, and he loved it, so he was insulated really. But Frankie became very disruptive, and very sort of, naughty. She was practically expelled from school. It was a hard time, in '73, because three adolescents: I had four adolescents, counting me, and, you know, it wasn't... it was quite fun in a way, but I realised that, I, well, I, how much I depended on Hugh, and how much, how little I wanted to acknowledge it: [coughs] because he was a very efficient man, you know, very... although he wasn't a very... he was a loving and affectionate man in a way, but he wasn't... very childorientated, but he would always see they went to the dentist on time. [laughs] And [clears throat] he, you know, he was, he ran the, he didn't exactly run the house, though, but he saw that things got done, and when he wasn't there, they didn't get done: and I had lots of, in order to stay in the house, which was we all liked, I had lots of lodgers, you know, and that, sort of, so were huge household, full of rather... immature people: [laughs] but it's a story itself, [feedback] is that. I don't really want to give stories on that.

OK. What about your... children's attitude to your disability?

Well, it's strange, [clears throat] because they all say now, they never noticed it. Children accept such a lot, don't they? And I can't say they were particularly helpful, because they didn't see why they should be, I mean, you know: but they never said, 'Mummy, why are you doing this in such a funny way?' or anything. They just took it for granted, I think: which in a way, I was glad of, mostly, but I would have been glad of some help at times: [clears throat] and it wasn't

[End of Tape 8 Side A]
[Side B is blank]

## Tape 9 Side A [Track 14]

OK now?

Yes, it was having a temperamental moment.

They are temperamental, aren't they?

Yes. So it's Antonia Lister-Kaye: Tape 9, and it's the 28<sup>th</sup> June, 2005. So in the last session, we were talking about, we'd got up to about 1974; and you were talking about what happened after your husband left.

Yes. Well, my husband didn't leave me, I threw him out. I actually found him a flat, and it was a very difficult and dreary... but, at the same time, dreary, in between exciting, period of my life. It's one, not one I look back at with much... appreciation, because I behaved very badly, [laughs] and I had a lot of physical difficulties with my spasticity, because, as is well-known is that when one goes through stress and trauma, one's spasticity becomes rather more marked; and I fell downstairs, and I think that was shortly after my husband left, I went from top to bottom, and I broke two or three ribs, and although it doesn't sound very much, I became terribly spastic, and I went to an absolutely stupid, stupid physio, who was out to make a lot of money. At that time I drove a three-wheel trike. I don't know whether I've spoken to you about my threewheel trike, and she said, because the actual action of driving it, was terribly bad for these ribs, because it's like a motor bike, you know, and she said, 'Oh, come every day, and I'll use all my latest machinery on you,' and of course that was really very bad, and she made it worse, and I was in considerable pain, and the doctor wasn't any help. He said, 'Oh, we don't do anything now for ribs. We don't strap them up, because that impedes the breathing,' so I said, 'Well, can I go to Italy next week?' He said, 'Oh, no trouble, no; no, no trouble,' and of course I couldn't, because I was, very much more handicapped for, with two broken ribs than most people would be, I think, because it, it wasn't so much the, it was the pain of the ribs which was considerable, but the spasticity made the pain worse, and the spasticity... on its own was bad

enough; so it was a bad period really. It seemed to go on for ages, and I taught all the time: [rustling noise] and I didn't have a day off work, which was something to do with my egotism: and then I found this marvellous woman, who I'd been to before. She was a German, from before the War, and she lived in Notting Hill Gate, and her name was Charlotte Gaffer, and Charlotte Gaffer was brilliant. She said, 'You silly girl, you should go to bed for a week. Get some good books, and put a pillow under your legs, and just keep as quiet as you can. Don't take any medicaments; just, just try to relax, and it will heal, but if you go rushing round the place like this, of course it won't heal. It'll take a long, long time,' and Charlotte became one of my mainstays, through these difficult years, although I had known her before. She was about 70, and she drank rather a lot of white wine, and she was a lesbian, and lived with another partner, lived with a partner, and the partner died when, while I knew her, and it was all very s..., tragic, but Charlotte was a sort of white witch in a way, for me. She used to, I used to go up there twice a week for exercise classes, and she used to give me sort of magic massage, because I had a lot of pain, up, even, without the ribs. I haven't talked about pain much, because, when I was younger, I sort of rode over it, with the excitement of life, and, you know, the interest of things, but I was becoming quite tired out with teaching, because I was taught, teaching in further education, which wasn't so bad, discipline-wise, but I used to have to do a lot of evening work, and I've always all my life had a rest after lunch, and it seemed very difficult to fit it in, but I had asked for it. This is going back a little bit now, if you don't mind. I fought for a full-time job. I went to a teachers' training college where they specialised in turning out teachers for further education, and they, I got a, First Class Certificate, or whatever it was, and then the Inner London Education Authority marked me down, and said, 'You can only do half-time, because you've got withered hands,' and I said, 'I haven't got withered hands,' and anyway, so I made a terribly fuss, and luckily, I knew somebody who knew somebody who was on the board of the ILEA, so I got it made up to full-time: but I don't know whether that was a good thing, or a bad thing. It meant I was perpetually tired, although I did manage to have a very good social life, [laughs] when I wasn't teaching. I thought, 'If I'm going to be tired, I might as well be tired. I might as well be tired for a reason,' so I rode over the tiredness: I s'pose I've always done that, in a way, and I did computer dating, [laughs] which was in the

early days of computer dating, and that was great fun, and I don't know how I didn't come to more trouble than I did, because, you know, I was very, I took a lot of risks, and I met a lot of interesting men, and a terrible lot of very dull ones. God, yes, [laughs] but, yes, one of the nice ones I met was a, he'd just retired from MI6. He was..., a very bright classicist, and I really fell for Charlie, but it didn't last. Charlie was terribly neurotic, and I wasn't in, I was very neurotic at that time, and I suppose it just didn't last, but he was a gorgeous man, [laughs] and that was when I was about 44, I suppose. I liked his brain really. He was good-looking too, but I liked his brain. He was really a first-class brain, and [seagulls crying in background] one doesn't come across many of them, and there were other people. Oh, but I mean not... and then I went to Ireland for a holiday in 1976? I'm keen on the poetry of Yeats, so I went to a Yeats Memorial Course, in Sligo, and it was that very hot summer of '76. Were you alive then?

#### Mm.

Yah, and I had a very great romance with this American professor, and he had a good brain, and that was really nice. I was at a party, where there were not very many people from England, they were mostly Irish and many, many Americans, and they put us to sleep in a boarding, boy's boarding school. You know, it was dormitory, and it was quite fun really, but this chap... actually he really almost, picked me up, when I was at this party that the Irish Tourist Board gave us. I was just sitting there looking a bit glum, I suppose. I'm not a party girl really, and he, I just felt somebody put an icecold beer into my hand [laughs] and that was it. I thought, 'What a nice gesture,' and he turned out to be a really bright fellow, and anyway, so we sort of, we forgot about the boarding school, and we found a flat; this was after knowing each other for about 24 hours, [laughs] and there were many more women than men on this course, and they were all very jealous, because he was good-looking, and intelligent, and I thought, 'Well I may be spastic, but I've got my man.' [laughs] [Something under her breath. Inaudible.] And so that went on for about three weeks. We stayed, I stayed an extra week, in Dublin, with him, and that was very exciting, because we went to the theatre all the time. He was very keen on the theatre, so we sort of lived

in the Abbey Theatre, in The Plough, and we met a lot of Irish writers, and it was a holiday I shall never, never forget. Of course, he was married, but, there you are: and we wrote to each other, every fortnight, for about two years after that, and I've still got the letters. He wrote like Swift, Jonathan Swift, and he had a sort of great, this great loopy, Irish, un, Irish-American handwriting [laughs] and, oh it was wonderful really, because he was quality. [laughs] A lot of the men I met with computer dating were definitely not quality, but meagre men, meagre people really. Sorry, am I? Is this all right?

Mm: fine.

Yeah, and I s'pose as I grew older, my disability, in a sense, became less important to me, socially, because I learnt how to turn myself out quite well, you know. I've always had quite decent hair, and I was specialised in having, spending a lot of money on my hair, and hairdressing, and I had good eyes, and I, you know, I sort of learnt how to make the best of my assets, and I used to talk about my disability, which I never did before. I used to say, 'I'm a bit wonky, but [??] the parts that really matter up there are working hard, very hard. I don't miss much.' [laughs] I didn't really say that, but it, that was my attitude, and, really, from being a very difficult time, between about '74 to '76, it then became quite a fun time, although I was still working, still getting desperately tired. My back was very bad, top and bottom, and then I went to a very old acupuncturist, called Mr Yen and Mr Yen was about 140 [laughs] and he lived in a sort of extraordinary house, which we'd get up to look like a Chinese minipalace, in Ealing, and he actually made acupuncture work for me, a hundred per cent. I had a lot of trouble with the bottom of my back, I mean it's the trouble a lot of people sort of get, it wasn't particularly spastic trouble, and I had one acupuncture go with him, and it went and it never came back, so that... I want to, sorry, I want to bring in the good people in my life, and there were quite a few: one was the Gaffer, Charlotte Gaffer. Sadly she died, about mid-seventies. I knew her for about five years; I s'pose, and then this Mr Yan: Mr Yen, sorry, the Chinese bloke, so although I had a body which nobody would envy, although it did go in and out at the right places [laughs] and I had to use my personality like hell, you know? It was a question of

seduction through... well it was, it was very, seduction through manipulation, with [???] but it worked.

In terms of... I'm interested about the computer dating: was any reference at all made to your disability or...

No, none at all

*by...* 

absolutely. You know, they never saw you or anything, and it didn't seem to matter. Most of the people I met didn't mind about it. It was really funny: I mean some of them were a bit horrid, and I mean, if they did mind, they just didn't see you again, and, well, I didn't know what it, I don't, I didn't particularly like people who, who just take the... image, the physical image, and that's really... I used to meet men who said, 'Ooh I do like people who wear... nice strappy sandals, because it means they're wearing nice strappy things underneath,' so I said, 'Oh God!' [laughs] Out the door he went. [laughs] Yes, I haven't really thought about that, but I could tell you some amusing tales, but perhaps it wouldn't be quite suitable for the box, but, no, in a way, no my children were, were doing all right, I suppose, my three, and since my husband had left me the house, and no money, I took in lots of lodgers. It was a big house, a big shabby house, in the middle of Wimbledon, and the children ran a bit wild, but fortunately, my godmother died, so I sent my son to boarding school for three years, which he loved. He thought the petticoat government was a bit too much: I mean the petticoat mis-government, [laughs] and Frankie, the middle one, used to have uproarious parties. I seemed to spend my life, making peanut butter sandwiches, in our kitchen, for just about... it was the drop-in place for semi-delinquent middle-class adolescents. [laughs] Anyway, in a way, it was fun, and in a way it was... chaotic, but... there you go. [Talking together] But...

How did your children react to your going computer dating?

Oh, I don't think they thought much of it, but they were very much into living their own lives, and on the whole I didn't bring people home, because that would be a bit too much. I mean, computer dating sounds wild, and very... promiscuous, but it wasn't really, it was just a question of meeting people, and sometimes one would meet people who one really liked, but not very often. I'm fussy, and then I met a South African farmer, who was nice, and liked me, and he became a sort of house dog. [laughs] Not a house dog, I had, I already had one, but he was a very, very, a willing, I, I, that I used him a bit, to, to help me with my sort of labours, household labours; but he didn't actually move in, but he was around, at weekends and things like that: James. He wanted to marry me actually. In those days, one got married sometimes, but, no he would have bored me really, I think: but he was a kind man, and a nice man. Rather... a spiritual man in some ways, and I wasn't. I was definitely on flat earth: [laughs] but yes, that was a relationship worthy of remembrance: James. Actually, I rang him up the other day. He lives in Arundel. He's 82 now, and not very well, so I'm glad I didn't marry him: [laughs] but, yes, there were various other people who I quite liked. I used to get myself taken out a lot, to the theatre and the opera, and dinner. In those days, one didn't, there wasn't a, it wasn't quite such a promiscuous society: it was getting on that way, but, I suppose, I was very much aware that, having a disability might make me appear easy meat, and I was quite sure that wasn't, I didn't want that to be the case. I think that I avoided that danger. I think it was a good thing, actually, that I had this sort of thing about intellectual quality. It kept me on the rails a bit. [Pause.]

So you were keeping the household going, you were doing your work and...

I was tremendously busy, yes. I had lots of friends, and I used to have parties, mad parties sometimes. I used to go out at weekends a lot: [???] the children so that was all right and yes, I had a very busy life really: and I enjoyed teaching tremendously. I, I used to take my students out to the theatre and out to the cinema sometimes, where we saw things in London which were appropriate to the history course, and I used to take my own kids as well, and that was, I think, why my son went into further education, because he thought it was fun: [laughs] and I had a lot of time for my

students, especially the weaker ones, or the ones with some difficulty. I had a Chinese film star, a child film star, who hated being a film star, from Hong Kong, but her parents made a lot of money out of it, so she came over to England, to stay with an aunt, and she just wanted to get away from her parents, so when her parents came over to England, to see her, she either had, or simulated, a nervous breakdown, and she went into St Mary Abbotts Hospital, which is in Kensington, and she did look very ill, and I went to visit her there, twice, I think, and she told me all about this exploitation business: so anyway, she stayed there while her parents were in England, and then she miraculously got better: and I had her to supper, and we had a, we had quite a lot, we used to have, end-of-term parties in my garden, and ... I've got some pictures somewhere... and anyway, she took me to the Chinese ballet as a way of saying 'thank you' for her, visiting her in hospital, and sort of being on her side, and, because she was a bright, and she wanted to be educated, she didn't want to be a bloody old film star: and, many, many interesting and, you know, incidents like that, and my sch... teaching career wasn't just teaching, it was a great deal of involvement with young people, really. I don't, I was sometimes a good teacher, but sometimes I was pretty bad at it, [laughs] and the st..., I didn't have many friends among the staff. I used to spend the time in a classroom... and I once ran a revolution, [laughs] in this college in East London that I taught. They closed the library: the principal was absolutely nutty, and she closed the library, just before the exams, because of repair work, so I mean, you know, the students were absolutely furious, so we got a petition up, to take to the governors, and I was... teaching Sociology at that time, and, you know, a suspect subject if there ever was one, and, although I wasn't sort, I was sort of managing it a bit from behind, and they got the library opened, even in the face of the stupid principal, who was really a idiot [laughs]: but, yes, I think I must, I enjoyed my teaching very much, up till I became about 48, 49, and then I was getting very, very tired, because it was a bad journey, to Bermondsey, and then I got a transfer, to nearer home, and that wasn't so much fun at that college: it was Putney, but very suburban: so I gave up teaching at 50, and I just got tired out: and I wasn't sorry: I mean I'd done quite a few years, I'd done about 14 years' teaching, not all full-time but, you know, and the ILEA was very generous, gave me quite a good pension, and I'd bought in a few years, so, that was OK, but one of the nicest people I met in

teaching was the doctor that I, at County Hall, where I had to go every six months, for a medical, to see I was still coping, [feedback] and he was so, such fun, and we used to have, he used to lay aside a whole hour [laughs] to see me, and we used to have the most wonderful conversations. I think he was an out of, in-the-closet gay, you know. He was a strange man, very attached to his mother, and we used to have terrific conversations, and he used to say, 'Oh my dear, you should be in a Jane Cooper in The Daily Telegraph. Jane Cooper used to write raucous articles every Sunday. I think it was *The Observer*? And I said, 'I wouldn't write anything in *The Daily* Telegraph.' Anyway, he, that was fun: I mean, it was just a little bit of aside, but, I've met some, in my life I've met some extremely nice people, in extraordinary circumstances, and you wouldn't think you'd have a really good relationship with a doctor, who... with a municipal doctor, you know, who you had to go and see, you had to go and see that you weren't, sort of, going to fall down dead any moment. Yes, and I mean the lawyer I'm going to see, going to Cardiff, he's going to take me to the opera, you wouldn't think one's lawyer doesn't usually take one to the opera [laughs] and it's this irony... this sort of sense of irony, irony, I like, I love, I love funny, I love the unexpected, you know, the conjunctions of the unexpected. I think that's the biggest thing in life really, [laughs] and I think that's why I think I shall never find life very dull. [laughing] Just a bit dull sometimes.

*So...* [talking together]

Is that all right?

Yes. So what you did, did all teachers have to go every six months for this medical?

No: no, it was because I'd been taken on as a sort of, risk. I mean, they think I was sort of taken on because Lady Walton knew s..., Lady Leighton and this sort of thing, you know, it was... even though they jolly well got their money's worth, as far as I can see: and more.

So you taught for 14 years, and... [talking together]

Yeah. Altogether.

And every six months you had to go and have a medical.

No, no. I only taught, I only taught for, at the ILEA for about 10 years. Before that, I'd done years before I was married, and I'd done [talking together] part-time.

You'd done your old school, hadn't you? Yes.

But I'd done, did 10 years straight, which was enough, really. It was a ... it was like a sort of short, shortish marriage, I suppose, and then I looked round for something else to do, but I wrote a book: I wrote a book, which you read, I think. Eighteen months it took me, and I sat down every day at nine o'clock, and got up every day at quarter to twelve, [laughs] and of course, it wasn't very well-written. I could type, but I, it, I'd hurt my back, so I used to, I didn't do drafts, I didn't do any, you know, I just sort of, it was more or less as it came out, and it does read bad, roughly in parts, but, anyway... so, and at the same time, I was doing things like, visiting long-term prisoners' wives, in Battersea, which, Battersea in those days was a very down-market place, and on Alton Estate, Roehampton, which was quite horrendous, in some ways, and Peckham: and it was nice, it took me round a bit, and I met some interesting characters that way, too: and then I got involved, I sort of, got involved with an alcoholic clinic, a clinic for alcoholics, which was five minutes away from where I lived, and that was interesting. It was founded by a sort of batty American, who had been an alcoholic, and had a lot of money, and he sort of paid for it, and there was about 15 clients, and about, a lot of volunteers, and one or two paid staff. When I think about it, it was pretty horrendous in some ways. A lot of them could come off the alcohol, but then we used to get them to get prescriptions for Valium, and the Swedish thing called 'Antebus'. Anyway, so, it makes you sick when you take a drink. I don't suppose they still use it, but they did in those days, so through a means, through chemical means, and a lot of, sort of, half-trained therapists, or not trained at all, the thing worked, sort of, for some people. We used to do a lot of group work,

which was interesting, and a lot of one-to-one work: and it wasn't paid, but I had, there was a paid supervisor, called Moiry, a very, an older woman, who had been, who had been a psychologist all her life, and had done a lot of psychotherapy, and she said, 'You know, I think you've got a flair for this, you should do a proper training,' so I did, I went to the Westminster Pastoral Foundation. Have you heard of it?

Yes I have.

WPF. I did an introductory course, and then I got onto the mainline course, and I did that between 50 and 54, I suppose. No, 51 and 54,55. You'd see a lot of times there, anyway, so, and then I set up the practice in Richmond, which went for 10 years, and that was one of the most astonishing experiences of my life: I mean, to find a completely new career at 54 was very interesting; 55; it was good, and I had a house near the station, with good parking, which was essential; and I really enjoyed that. I mean, you're not allowed to, we weren't allowed to advertise or anything like that but, you know, word gets around, and I didn't, I was never short of clients, after the first year or two, which is always difficult: but that was very, very interesting. I can't divulge any client material, so I'll just say 'it's interesting'.

Well, how did you go about setting yourself up, though, as an...

Oh, I just used the sitting-room. I had a sitting-room which was my office as well, and ... well, I don't know quite how I did it really. [laughs] I pinched four clients out of WPF, when my supervisor wasn't looking. Four I'd been working with. You weren't supposed to take them out but you were, but that was the basis: and then I'd go, I'd have, [laugh] I was always having to have work done on my back, you know, osteopaths, and people like that, because it was hurting, it hurt a lot, and I'm not quite sure how much good they did, but, and it was terribly funny, because I had one woman osteopath: I shan't say where or anything, but, and, you know, she was, I talked about what I did, and she said, 'Oh, do you think I could come as a client?' I said, 'Well I don't really know. It's not, not terribly professional, because I do know you in another capacity.' 'Oh please!' So anyway, she came: and then, I, she

stopped, I stopped going to her, going to her for osteopathy, because it was, it wasn't a good idea, and then the second, and then I found a second osteopath, who was a man.

[End of Tape 9 Side A]

# Tape 9 Side B [Track 15]

... at least he [????] for a time. I hope not. Not the right kind, and anyway, about two weeks afterwards he, he rang up, and I said, 'I'd like to send you my wife for treatment.' I said, 'Well, I never take people who are sent. Your wife will have to ring me herself, if she wants to come,' and she did. She was a really nice woman, and the, you know, it was quite obvious that there were difficulties between them, but I did some, we did some good work together, and she, so, anyway, that was the second osteopath. The third osteopath [laughs] she lived quite near me, and she was a Nordic character, she was Nordic, and I thought, 'Well, anyway, you, you've got, you're all commonsense and, and, you know, cold blasts of commonsense. I won't have any trouble with you,' so I went to her for about six months, about once a week, and she rang me up one day, and she said, 'Antonia, I must come to talk to you about my marriage,' [laughs] so anyway, she came and then I couldn't see her as an osteopath, any more. [laughs] Anyway, that, that's just a very strange sort of run,

Mm. mm.

but I did have other clients who weren't [laughing] osteopaths, and I liked running my own business really, because I had a sliding scale. I used to see City men, on their way to big jobs in the City, at about seven o'clock in the morning, and, and charged them a lot of money; and then I used to see students and single mothers for hardly anything, as well: it was a very sliding scale, and I suppose the power of the sliding scale made it good for me too, because I felt I could never turn anyone away, who really needed help, who I thought I could help.

So, on a typical day, how many people would you see?

Well, it very much varied. I tried not to see more than five a day, because that was really enough: four a day was really better, so I had an average of about 13 or 14 a week. I know there are people who see far more than that, but that was what I

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wanted. I just wanted to have a good occupation which I, where I, which was

worthwhile. I think I did more help than damage. [laughs]

What typically would happen, in a session? How would you, if somebody came to you

for the first time, how would it work?

Well, you'd get them to, you'd have to fill in a name and address, and doctor, and any

medication: you know, on for mental trouble, and then you'd, well then you'd sort of,

remain fairly silent, and see what happened. The idea was that you never took much

initiative, unless it was a crucial point, and, never gave advice or anything like that: it

was a matter of getting them to use their own resources, and find out that they had

them: but, it was interesting, I must say, but I got tired, I got pretty burnt out after 10

years of that: so I did 10 years of straight teaching, and then wrote my book, did my

bit of social work, and then 10 years, being a... I suppose I was a psychotherapeutic

councillor: whatever, [laughs] and then I thought I'd had enough, so I came to

Brighton, and that was about 66.

When you were 66.

Yes.

Mm.

And, in many ways, I miss London very much. I spent so much time in London, and

there are so many facilities. I miss the theatre, even though I can't hear it very well:

but Brighton, I've got some really nice friends I've made, in later life, here: very

supportive people, and I'm happy enough...

[Talking together] What...

especially this house.

Mm hm. Why did you choose Brighton?

My daughter lived here, Frankie, my middle daughter, with her two grand, with her, with my two grandchildren, and, because we had a difficult time, when we tried to live in the same house, it was absolute murder, nearly murder, but we've recovered from that now, just about; and I've got a son called Matthew who's going to come and live in Brighton, which is nice, and I've got a nephew and niece who live in Brighton. It's relaxed, it's laid-back, and if you live out here, it's not, not noisy. This might be any old suburb actually, but I've got the sea at the bottom of the road, which is quite nice. A good park where I can walk the dog. I can walk the dog every day, except when I'm not very well, and I've got a man who comes to work, walks the dog in the afternoon; so it's good, and Kenny has him when I go away, you see. But I do get a lot of pain in the top part of my back, and it is boring: but I don't talk about it much, because people who talk about their aches and pains are, are ineffably boring, [laughs] so I'm not going to talk about it now.

No, no, well I was going to say, I mean, at the risk of being boring, I think it might be quite good to, describe it, if you... how you manage it.

[Laughs] Well, I have something called 'reflexology' which seems to help a bit. Do you know what that is?

Mm hm.

And, it's because the top of my back is, has a scoliosis, and the muscles hurt, go into spasm at the slightest thing. This is why I have to have this chair. I can't sit in any other chair [laughs] hardly, but it did, I think it's good thing to do exercise, I do a lot of exercises, after breakfast, you know: lie on the floor and kick my legs in the air and, and... I lost the use of my legs pretty well, a few years ago: but this is number three good person in my physical health category, and it was because I had one dog who died, and for six months I didn't have a dog, and I didn't go for walks, and the legs just packed up: not completely, but almost, and I went to a lot of people, and

spent masses of money and [seagulls crying in background] nobody could do anything, and then, I heard, on the internet, I discovered this neurological physio, up in Dorking, who specialises in mobility. So I got, it was terribly expensive; £80 an hour, but I went to see her. I got Jimbo, who's a great friend of mine, to drive me up, and, after about four sessions, and lots and lots of exercises, I got the walking back. Now I can walk half a mile, round the park, and so I do that, whenever I possibly can, because it's terribly important. For anybody at my age, it's important to walk, but, especially someone with funny muscles; so I move a lot, and I go dancing sometimes too, with another friend of mine called 'David', but he's got a bit rheumatic-y now, because he doesn't do his exercises. [laughs] Still, I still have a good life really.

And, apart from osteopathy and... reflexology...

Oh, I've tried all the opathies, yah. Physiotherapy: not much good, except for these people in Dorking, who were brilliant: osteopathy, very... varied. I've had about a thousand in my life. [laughs] Osteopathy, I've always had the greatest sense of, if there's anything really wrong, if your muscles seize up very badly, osteopathy's good, but it's not good for chronic conditions, it's just hopeless really: and I hate a straightforward massage, 'cause it's so slow. I have a very quick dynamic, inside of this carcass, and I have a very, very quick-heartbeat, you know, like a hamster, and I, I read very, very quickly. That's *The Raj Quartet*: it's got about 1,500 pages, and I'm really revelling in it, because I know I'm not going to get to the end for quite some time. [laughing] I never buy a book unless it's got 400 pages. I don't think it's worth it, it has to be very good, to buy a slight book.

Mm. What about, apart from therapies, what about, did you have pain-killers, or anything?

I don't like pain-killers. They mug up my stomach, most pain-killers. I have a very, very bad reaction to aspirin: anything with aspirin is dire. Ibuprofen doesn't work, and it also has a bad effect on my stomach. I can eat absolutely anything, I've got a very good stomach, but it just doesn't like aspirin, or any of the derivatives.

Paracetomol isn't strong enough, it doesn't do anything: what does do good is hospital-strength Codeine, which is 30 what-nots of Codeine, and a bit of Paracetomol, but on the other hand, [laughing] you know, it makes you constipated for three or four days, one, one help, one helping: I mean two tablets,

Mm.

so I don't take that, unless I'm doing something really special, and I need desperately to be free, relatively free from pain: but I'm not, I'm not in to pain-killers, I've got a very good stomach so far, so I don't see why I should muck it up, so I just have to live with it, live over the pain.

What about cannabis?

Oh, I love cannabis, yes. Oh, did I tell you about the cannabis?

No, I think, that was what I was hoping we'd maybe talk about.

Yes, cannabis did help. It relea..., it relea... Have you had this before?

No.

It releases the spasm: and when, when I was, when we were living in Wimbledon, in this rather decadent period, post, post... oh, I did get married a second time, I'd forgotten that, [laughs] but we're talking about cannabis now; [talking together] we can't

Yes.

talk about cannabis and Richard at the same time. My daughter used to, my naughty daughter, Frankie, used to get hold of cannabis; this was in the seventies, and bring it home and smoke it, so I said, 'Oh hey, give us a, give us a go,' and because I knew

people who smoked cannabis in the fifties, in Hampstead, you know: well, they do everything in Hampstead, before they do it anywhere else, and so she gave me a joint, and I smoked it. I did, I'm not a smoker, so I didn't inhale properly, but I said, 'God, Frankie, the pain's dropping out of me fingertips,' and so she said, 'Oh Mum, isn't that interesting? Have another one.' [laughs] 'I'll roll you another one.' Anyway, and then I got involved, shortly after that, a long time after that actually, I went on smoking cannabis, not, not, not really recreationally. I always have done, because I did, had this friend who used to say, 'Come on'. I used to get the stuff from... oh, I used to grow it, that's right. I grew it, it grows like anything, and I had a lodger who didn't smoke it, but he was a gardener, a sort of, you know, he wasn't a real gardener, but he liked gardening, so I used to get this stuff from some fishing shops, and I went to a fishing shop, and I said, 'Do you have any ...' what was it? It was hemp, and they said, they said, 'Yeah, you want it for fishing?' and I said, 'Yes, of course,' and they said, 'Well, it's been de-activated, it won't work as a drug.' and, 'Oh yeah,' and we grew it in the potting shed, and then we grew it outside, and it grew, it grew, it grew, and Darwin knew exactly how to separate the male from the female and make it sort of, strong, and we sort of, hung it up in the boiler cupboard, and it was good stuff: yeah, it really helped, and after that, I read an article, in *The Independent*, written by somebody with MS, called Liz, who lived in Leeds, and she wrote about the marvellous effect of cannabis on her MS, so I thought, 'God, I must find out more about this lady,' so I wrote a letter, care of *The Independent*, and she phoned me up and she said, 'Come up and stay,' so I went up to stay the next weekend, no hanging around, [laughs] and she was a delightful person. She's still around, but quite ill now, but her... yes, she's very nice, she's a classicist, she's one of these first-class brain people: Oxford classicist, really brilliant, but she got MS when she was 24. She'd just got her degree, and she was starting to work for Yorkshire Television, and she married her boss, fortunately, [laughs] and then she was told she had MS, so she couldn't work for Yorkshire Television, but she'd married the head of Yorkshire Television in the meantime, so I think... at least she had Duncan, and Duncan is a very, very nice man, and then she was told not to have children, so she had two quickly, who are nice boys, and I go up and stay there, well, not frequently, but three or four times, and she's been to Brighton once, and she is a really

lovely woman: copes very well, and she's very keen on cannabis as a medicine, and so we went to Parliament together, and a man called Paul Flynn, who was MP for Newport. Have you heard of him? A nice man. I think he's, he has very bad rheumatism or something. I'm not quite sure, I don't think he takes cannabis, and I'm not prepared to say so if he does, [feedback] but he's very keen on the idea of, he was very keen on the idea of cannabis as a medicine, so we sort of, he put this Private Members' Bill, some kind of a Bill through, and of course, there were only seven people in the house: they were just, they just weren't interested, and it didn't even get through, so we sat, we were so furious, that we sat on a terrace in the House of Commons, smoking cannabis.

What year was this?

Mm?

What year was this?

Ages ago. About 1980s? 1990s, it must have been. That's right. 1992, or something like that. Anyway, it was all a bit of a miserable thing, because they didn't take any notice of it, but she used me as her, she was a principal of a pressure group for the medical use of cannabis, and I had to... did I tell you this before? I had to, when the BBC rang in, I used to, about a particularly vicious case, where somebody had been arrested with MS, or something like that, for using or growing cannabis, they would ring me up and ask me for my comments, because Liz was in the north, you see, so she did the north and I did the south, and, you know, they'd ring me up at seven o'clock in the morning, and they'd say, you know, or, or they'd tell me they were going to ring me up at seven, and so, and I'd have to s..., pretty answer their questions straight-off into the microphone, and it was great fun: and I did that half a dozen times, I think: half a dozen different cases: and then I was on television. That's right, that's where I met Liz first. No, it wasn't where I met Liz. Sorry, it was... where was it now? I can't remember now. I can't remember the sequence of events. No.

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Didn't you just say that, you'd read an article by her, and then you went to stay with her?

I read an article and then I went to stay with her.

Mm hm.

That's right: and then, some time after that we were on television: that's right; and one of my greatest friends in Brighton is the producer of that [laughing] television programme. Yes; and the television programme was showing three people... They had a thing called *Pub Night*. *Pub Night*. I've got it somewhere down there, I've got the video, and it shows three people, and I was one of them who had obviously benefited from the use of cannabis, and it was great fun: quite short: but now, of course, I do realise that cannabis has its risks. I think if you smoke it very young, and you smoke it a lot, or if you have a tendency to any kind of psychosis, it can make that worse: so I feel slightly... differently about it now, [seagulls in background] although I would still advocate it as a medical, as a medicament for pain: if it works; it doesn't work for everybody. [Pause.] Yeah. That was quite interesting. Shall we have five minutes off?

O.K.

[End of Tape 9 Side B]

## Tape 10 Side A [Track 16]

Tape 10, and we were talking about your campaign, to legalise cannabis, for, sort of, medicinal purposes. So what happened you'd been [talking together]

Well, after that, it all went rather quiet, but I did, I was in touch with Liz, and Liz actually, Liz's husband, he wasn't head of Yorkshire Television, he was scientific advisor, or something, and he got, he and she got talking to a, a sort of businessman, who was also a scientist, and they actually helped to find a company, called 'GW something or other'. I think it was just called 'GW', and they managed to get permission to grow lots of cannabis as a experiment, and the company has actually got itself on the stock exchange, so I bought a few, supporting the home team, and I'm not quite sure how they do it, I think they've been bought up by a Canadian company or... 'cause, in Canada, they can use... the thing is, it's, I think quite recently, the... one of those committees for, you know, medicine committees, said it wasn't fit to be used in Britain. They didn't want, think it was going to be used but, because they wanted permission to make sprays, which were, of cannaboids, which were supposedly freed from their recreational aspects, you know: it didn't have the aspects to make you feel very high, and made into sprays, which they would made into sprays which would be licensed to people with MS, and, and p'raps other, various other, diseases; but anyway, the bloody English said 'No', but in Canada, they use them. So I think GW either exports to Canada, or I thought it had been bought up by a German firm, I'm not quite sure. Anyway, there's some kind of complication, but it's still going, and I mean the whole idea is not dead, it's just... pending, in Britain: probably pending for about 20 years, knowing how slow we are at these things, and how much opposition there is, because the medical people are so dreadfully conformist and orthodox, and frightened really: and heaven knows, they make enough mistakes, anyway. [laughs]

And do you still take it yourself, for pain relief?

Very rarely. I had, it's easiest to get in Brighton than anywhere. You don't have to go to the bother of growing it, but I have a friend who takes it, and I do take it sometimes, yes, but somehow it doesn't seem to have the good effect it used to have. Perhaps it was all more daring and more fun, and that made it more fun: I mean, that made it work, but no I don't, I mean, it was cynical. No, somehow it doesn't seem to work very well now; but I don't think that's any reason for saying it doesn't work, for anybody or, 'cause I know Liz, who's a woman of great integrity, Liz said it made all the difference to her life, so I think p'raps it has a special effect for MS, and also something that's called glaucoma, which is completely different, and it is used in some places for cancer pain: so it definitely has an opoid effect: well, 'opoid' is probably the wrong word, but a pain reliever, relieving effect.

Were there any other sort of consequences for you, of being involved with the campaign?

No, I hoped, after about, I thought, after I made that film, which was very much me in my sitting-room, me going for a walk with the dog, and me saying, 'Well, the Queen Victoria took it for her period pain, so... what?' [laughs] And I told them how I grew it and everything, but, you know, no Surrey Constabulary came marching up to my door. I was quite disappointed really, I wanted to be a heroine. [Both laugh.] I always wanted to be a heroine: [laughing] I never quite made it.

So, but you were also saying that now you have some second thoughts about...?

Yes, well, because of a lot more research has been done, and, and I have seen a friend of mine who had some kind of mild psychosis, was prone to mild psychotic episodes, very mild, she took a cigarette, which was quite strong, it was not mine, it was somebody else's skunk: she went, and was quite out of it, for once: an hour, so I think it is to be taken with discretion really, and of course, you can't expect kids to do anything with discretion, so, but I still think it's relatively harmless, for most people, unless they get really, really hooked, but anything can be addictive: boot polish; anything, so I think it, [phone rings] I don't think it's specially addictive. No, I'll

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leave that: it's all right. [Keeps ringing] It's going about seven times. [Still ringing, then stops.]

And, so, OK: I've lost our thread a bit there: so we talked about, your sort of, 'Legalise Cannabis' campaign: were there other things that we p'raps ought to touch upon that we haven't...

Mm?

Are there other things that you ...

Yes, I got married, again

Oh yes.

When I was... 50, and I was married to Richard, who was a poet; much younger than me, and it didn't really work, but it was quite interesting. [laughs] It's funny, I forgot all about it.

How did you meet?

Well, probably it was a mistake, but then most marriages are mistakes, really. I mean, a lot of marriages... you know, it sounded too cynical, but I think it's very, many marriages are mistakes, and this was certainly a mistake, but, and, but it lasted six years. Yes. He was too young, he was much too young; he was 34 and I was... 50. His mother was a year older than me, [laughs] but he was a nice chap: yes. A nice chap; but it doesn't last. I don't want to talk much, about that. [Pause.]

OK. What about your sort of current life then: what...

Mm?

What about your current life? Your...

Oh.

what you do now.

Well, do you want to wrap it all today?

No, I think, well, we, I think we should have another session...

Yah.

because I'm sure there will be things we haven't talked about.

No, because I don't really think about it in between. Perhaps I should do, more, but, but like leaving Richard out. [laughs] Yah, I've got a good life; at the moment. It's been a strange, this life, this, I've been in Brighton for eight years, and on the whole, I think I'm glad I made the move, because London is become very... very hot really: very sort of crowded and... rather metallic, I think. Do you know what I mean?

What: no, what, what...

Harsh, and a kind of take-it-or-leave it, whereas Brighton is much more relaxed. I think that London is full of tension; stress, although I love going back there, for the day: and parking and all that: well, it's bad enough here, but you know. I quite like Brighton: yes, it's relaxed, and you meet some very strange people here. Strange people seem to be drawn to Brighton like a magnet, and, I mean, the Brighton of Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* hasn't changed at all. There's a sort of criminal subtow [laughs] which I rather like, but I haven't suffered from it as yet, though somebody did pinch my bag in a restaurant, yes, but that might happen anywhere: but if you go in, through the middle of Brighton, you do see some strange people. You know, if you see a man with knickers on their head, you know, it's quite usual.

[laughs] But it has been injected with a large amount of money from London, over the last three, four years, because people have thought it was much cheaper to buy in Brighton, and to, much better to commute, much pleasanter, and the money hasn't percolated down very much, you know. Brighton is still supremely shabby. Look at the second, look at the old pier, they've just let that go, and it's rather typical of some attitudes in Brighton: and you get the most beautiful little Edwardian beach seats, with a shelter, you know, and nobody's done anything about them, they're just falling to pieces: but it is better than it was, I think. It is less shabby, but I don't mind a bit of shab meself, but on the whole... you see, there are so many Brightons, I think: there's rich Brighton, or rich clubs, and there's artistic Brighton, and there's dotty Brighton, and there's very poverty-stricken Brighton, and there's very suburban Brighton, and I'm a bit of suburban Brighton, I suppose, but my friends come from all sorts of Brightons. [laughs]

What about for disabled people? How is Brighton for disabled people?

I don't know any. [laughs] I know one other one, yes: one other disabled person; and I don't like her very much. I have always had difficulty with people who are... more disabled than me. I don't mean blind people, or deaf people, but just people who are cripples, in inverted commas. I don't know why, I think it's something I've fought to get over, and I have got over it to a certain extent, but when I was a child or an adolescent, I used to run a mile from anybody who was crippled, and I wouldn't, I didn't want to associate with them at all. I don't know, terrible, I mean it really, I really feel ashamed of it, but I always used to at one time attractive friends, attractivelooking girl friends, apart from men friends, [coughs] but now everybody's getting older anyway, it's changing a bit, because people who you knew used to roar up Everest are now sort of on a stick, with rheumatism, so it is changing, because one's peers are becoming, not exactly more like oneself, but more challenged. [coughs] [Pause] I worked, I've done quite a lot of social work when I've been here. I've worked through a mediation service: mediation among neighbours, which was great fun. You know, you had to go in, two of you in ... we did a six-months' training course, and then went in, if we were asked to, and tried to sort out difficulties between neighbours, and sometimes we were successful, but more often than not ... My best case was when they came, when they agreed to share a taxi back to the estate, after we... be, coming round to our round table, and talking with, talking to each other, and with us; and that was... I've only just stopped doing that, because, I was getting a bit deaf, and there was often quite a lot of noise. So, oh what else have I done? I don't think I've done much else.

What sort of disputes did people have?

Mm?

What sort of disputes did people have?

Oh, over everything. It seems slightly snobbish to say so. Most of the disputes were on the rather poorer council estates. I think a typical one was really, you'd get this woman who would be lying around on the sofa all day, drinking, and thinking up disputes to have with her neighbours, I think. I mean, you know, well she didn't have to think very hard, because there was a lot of noise, and a lot of people coming in at one o'clock on the morning on their motorbikes, and making a hell of a noise, and waking everybody up, and just small things really, but mostly to do with, mostly with noise, or rubbish, or shared driveways, or parking: that was a main problem. The car was terribly, very much a sort of source of friction: or children making noises, and, you know, being rude, and sitting on walls, and yelling names, and nothing very, nothing terrible, but just annoying in itself. It was started off by somebody who, either was retired or was a retired single mother, and you simply thought, 'Well, you should,' I thought, I didn't, one would never say anything like it: 'Get off your ass and go out and do some work, and then you might feel better,' because they were down on the sofa, there were several of them, we'd had a spate of them, about four of them, lying on the sofas, either drinking wine, or, you know, not drinking wine, but obviously, leading a very dull, boring existence, with the telly on, and a boyfriend who came round occasionally and battered her up, or did, or didn't necessarily, but, not very fulfilled lives, shall we say? And, oh it was quite exciting to have a bit of a

bash-up with a neighbour, you know. I'm being very brutal: it wasn't always like that, sometimes they were really, they were quite serious, and they were quite seriousminded people, and, you know, one managed, when somebody really wanted to get something right, on the whole, it was successful, but so often the quarrel or the row was so much a part of that person's life, that they didn't really want to let go of it: do you know what I mean? So it was quite interesting, but then that was, I used to do it with a man called John, who was very good, and then he retired, and I wasn't very interested in doing it with anybody else, and, well, I enjoyed it, and it was fun. And I've done a writing course with the Open University, and I'm writing my, I'm writing snippets of a memoir. Did I say about selling coffins? I probably did, I did, don't know what I said now, but, you know, I seem to manage, do quite a lot, go to the cinema a lot. I don't like the television very much: there's not much on. What do I do? I now see my daughter quite a lot, and my grandchildren, and my friends. There's never a day when I don't see two or three people, so I'm not bored or lonely really. Sometimes I suppose I might get a bit lonely, but I have this chap called David, who is also a History graduate, who I met in the university. I did a university course, when I first came down here: a degree in... what was it now? It was Cultural Studies: something rather anaemic like that but it was very interesting: postmodernism, and who's that man, that awful Irishman, who keeps writing so many books? He's a critic, critic, a literary critic...

Tom Paulin.		
Mm?		
Tom Paulin.		
Oh no, no, no.		
No?		

No, I like Tom Paulin. No, this chap, he's sort of very left-wing, and he's got a sort of industry of books, which he spurs, spurs out. It doesn't matter.

Mm.

Anyway, I thought it was rather interesting, and I became quite friendly with one of the people there. That one I did for the first two or three years I was here, so I was quite busy, writing essays. I wrote about, perhaps you'd like, like to see it, it's an essay about the disabled. It's called *Narcissus Denied*. Would you like to read it?

Mm.

It's, I think it's quite well-researched, and quite good. Not very good, but quite good.

[Talking together] Yes, I would ...

I got an 'A' for it. [laughs] I'll look it out sometime: yah. It was a way, it was really about the way the disability is portrayed in the media. That was why it was called *Narcissus Denied*: and it was rather miserable really, because so often, you know, they get straight people to play challenged people's parts, like, I suppose the, the most notorious one was getting Daniel what-not to play that Irish spastic.

Daniel Day-Lewis, [talking together] to play Christy Brown. [Talking together.] Mm.

Yes, that's right.

Mm, mm.

Yeah: and the way that they, you know, the sort of compartmentalisation, and they make it so hard for a disabled actor to get even a disabled part. Did you ever hear about Graeae? He founded a company for disabled actors, and he was a, he came from the Lebanon, and he was a fantastic man. I was on television with him once. I've

been on telly several times: yes. Did I tell you about going on telly with that awful woman, Miriam Stoppard?

No, I don't think so: no.

That was quite early on. It was quite, I think it was in the eighties, and I saw this ad in *The Guardian*, and I rang up for it, and they said, 'Come up to Leeds: we're doing a, Yorkshire Television is doing a... a programme about disabled people: people who were born disabled, we want,' so I said, I'll go up on the train, went up to Leeds, and it was this woman, Miriam Stoppard. Do you know Miriam Stoppard?

Mm hm.

Not a very nice character, I don't think. You know, they wined and dined us, and we came to the conclusion that we were divided into two distinct parts. There were people who were disabled, and because there were a whole lot of them, disabled, I didn't mind: I mean, you know, I didn't have to sort of [laughing] relate to them too closely, and then there were mothers who'd had disabled children, and wished they hadn't, and there were, I suppose it was two to one, and there were about, 30 of us altogether: quite a lot, and there were 10 mothers who'd had disabled babies, and wished they could put them back, and there were about 18 people who were quite disabled; a lot of wheelchair cases, quite a lot of cerebral palsied people; much worse than me, on the whole, and Marion Stoppard went round, interviewing us. The programme, her pro, her thing took three hours for a half hour's programme, so it was quite a lot out, but she interviewed us about why we were, how we thought about our disability, and if we thought our lives were worthwhile, and if we were glad we were alive, and all that, and of course, we were: we were all brilliant, we were all marvellous. There was a lawyer called Adam who was fantastic. He had, his spine was sort of turned inside-out almost, he was so spastic, it was so convex or concave, and he was a lawyer, and he was doing very well, and you know, he was obviously a very, very, a very courageous man, and there were lots of girls in a, very pretty girls, in wheelchairs, and they were, they got on al right, and, you know, it was a lot of [??]

around [laughs]: and me, and then there were these 10 mothers, who were very embarrassed to say that they didn't want their ch..., they hadn't wanted their children. They'd just had an abortion, or they could have done, and this was before they gave, they gave you choice, or whatever they do, and it was a really, it ended up as being a really nasty programme, because there was so much of, you know, conflict, and this woman was sort of manipulating everybody to a very high degree, and, but it was interesting. I mean, I think she upset people. Anyway, the programme came out about, a few months later, and it was interesting. They didn't cut me out, which I was glad about. [laughs] Yes; yes; but I realise now how it works. Reality TV.

What do you think Miriam Stoppard was trying to do?

Oh, she was trying to create an interesting programme, with a lot of conflict, and produce it to some kind of a rather, even debate, I think. You know, people who were glad that they'd been born, they'd been kept alive, they hadn't been killed in the womb, or whatever: they hadn't been aborted, and then there were those poor mothers who were struggling hard, you know, I think: very hard, some of them, which didn't have husbands, or, you know, divorced: with very, very difficult children. My heart went out to them, actually, and she was creating a kind of... I think it was part of a series. I've forgotten what it was called now, her show produced by Yorkshire Television. It was about people who were ill, or people who were outsiders, and, in some way or another, but it was a very interesting experience, and I'm glad I did it.

Do you remember any of the things that you said?

Yes. [laughs] One or, yes one or two. Well, I had this awful mother-in-law. I think I told you about it, so, one of the things I said 'Well, my mother-in-law certainly believed I shouldn't have been born.' Three weeks before the baby, my first, I was expecting my first baby, she said, 'All disabled women should be sterilized,' and I hope to God she was listening that night. [laughs] Anyway, and then the, she, Stoppard asked me a very horrible question, she said, 'Well, what you do, what would you have done, if one of your children had been very disabled.' I've forgotten, I must

have muffed it, because I've forgotten what I said, which isn't like me. If I'd said something really good, [laughing] I'd have remembered it. Anyway, so I said, I think, I think I said I'd have drowned it, [laughs] you know. However, there you go.

Do you... what do you feel now, about that same question?

I don't know. It depends on the degree, I think. Because being disabled, I could only just about cope with normal children. I don't think I could have coped with a really disabled child. Well, I probably would have, sort of, got a, really special nanny in, and worked very hard to support the nanny. [laughs] I don't know: I honestly don't know, because, you see, people weren't particularly nice to me when I was young, and I wasn't particularly nice to them. I mean, in the family, apart from my dad, and so I had, I didn't have that experience of growing up in a smothered, loving way. I mean I do think some disabled people have it much too easy, and they are smothered with too much love, and are not, they're not allowed to do anything, you know. Perhaps not now, but certainly in my generation, and in the generation after mine, I used to meet a lot of people who, I mean, not a lot, but through the spastic school I was involved with in South Africa: and in Wales, I met people who'd been smothered by their mothers, because their mothers were terrified of the children to take a step, and I think that's, I think it's almost worse, that, than malevolent neglect. I suffered from neglect, I don't, sometimes it was malevolent; [laughs] sometimes it was just, you know, can't be bothered. 'We're going hunting today.' [laughs] But, no, it's a question I haven't really resolved: and, because I don't really meet, I don't put myself out to meet disabled people, I don't belong to any help group, any remedial help group, it's not something, it's not something that... challenges me much, in everyday life. I do notice that most of my friends are much younger than me, and that just happens. I don't know anybody in Brighton, the same age as me. I don't know why that happens really. I think it's because somewhere Oh I just never seem to meet people my age, and I've got one or two friends who I've known before. I mean, I've got several friends of my age who live elsewhere. One or two have come to Brighton, to live, but most of my friends are in their fifties, or their early sixties. That suits me fine, because they've got more energy than I have, and they can put up with me,

[laughs] you know. I've got this very helpful man: two men actually, I've got two men admirers, [laughs] One is David, who is the historian, who's very, very boring, but he's got a good brain, but he's got a very slow brain, you know what I mean, like a tortoise, and he's the same age as me, but he's terribly kind, and he sends these loving postcards, twice a week, and I see, I never ring him up or anything, but I see him every Saturday; and that's quite nice. He's a sort of, you know: and he does some shopping for me, and we go to, go out for walks together, or we go to the cinema, or whatever, and it's very nice. That's a sort of six point [??] and then I have another chap who came originally to help me with my computer [end of Side.]

# Tape 10 Side B [Track 17]

... you finish off what you were saying.

No, no, well he's a very nice man, and he's a very, not at all... you know, he's never opened a book in his life, I don't think. He's a very practical man, and he helps me with my computer, and, you know, we see a lot of each other now, I'm very fond, we're very fond of each other: yeah, and I know, I always know he's there for me: and David lives the other side of Brighton, you see, and Jimbo lives about five minutes down the road, so if anything difficult happens, I ring Jimbo, [laughs] and I see him, about a couple of times a week. He comes and we have a, we chew the rag: yah, and I think we find each other fascinating, because he comes from working-class Kings' Cross. He has the most, oh, extraordinary deep Cockney accent, which he's never, he never bothered to do anything about. He was in the Merchant Navy, and, you know, he's very interesting, 'cause he's very bright. He is actually much brighter than the academic, David, I think, but they're different. David never stops reading: Jimbo never lifted a book, and yet he's got a much quicker... well you know, he reminds me of my father in a way, because he, Dad never read, but he was great fun and makes you laugh, you know, cheers you up, and takes a great interest. When I had cancer, he was absolutely marvellous, Jimbo was. You know, he took over everything, he rang everybody up, to say how I was doing, and that was a time when I'd fallen out with my daughter, because, so he really, took over a relative's job, and he came to see me every day, and when he didn't come and see me, he rang me up, and he was really terrific, and they live just up the road, he and his wife. He's got a lot of step, he's got a couple of stepchildren, step grandchildren. He's actually a big, big family man: you know, they have enormous amounts of barbecues, and things like that, but I'm a side issue, [laughs] but then I'm very fond of him: yes, and then I have about four girlfriends, sorry, women friends, [laughs] who are very good to me, and I'm good to them, and, you know, we have a, I have a good social life on the whole: yah, it's OK. Mm.

So when was it, you had cancer then?

Oh, it was two years ago. Was it two years ago? No, it was a year and a half ago. Don't know. 19, '04. It was our last year. It seems years ago now. '04, it was January '04, they discovered a lump. [Rustling noise] Quite a big lump, and I had to wait 10 weeks for the wretched, for any treatment, but it was awful, and then I had a horrible... I said I wanted the whole thing off. I wanted them both off in fact, because I didn't want one: I'd be unbalanced; so anyway, they did a double mastectomy, and I never miss 'em. [laughs] You know, I used to struggle with those old bra things, and, it wasn't easy because of, my bad back you see, it used to hurt my back, to wear a bra, and I had to wear a bra though because, otherwise I'd look terrible, and so having them off was a good thing really, [laughs] but it was traumatic too. I'm not disguising the fact it was fr..., I was frightened, and it was traumatic, and, and I, so they said I'd w..., if I had a mastectomy, I wouldn't have to have radiotherapy, and I, that's what I dreaded, having to keep still in that machine; all that fatigue, and s... I didn't have radiotherapy, I didn't have chemotherapy. I want, I was allergic to the medicines that they gave me, like Tamaxiphan. Have you heard of Tamaxiphan? It's something, it gives you a 20% better chance of not getting cancer again, but I thought I'd take the radical route, but of course it could appear anywhere, any time, but it's something that... I've lived with disability all my life; I can live with a bit extra. [laughs] I simply don't think about it very much: and, when one is 73, one has a more philosophical attitude to these things: you've got to die of something, and I've had a really good life. I don't mean 'good' in that it's not had extreme sadnesses in it, and a lot of pain, but it's been a fulfilled life. I shall die thinking, not that I've particularly made much difference to the world, but that I've made a lot of good friends, I've been in a lot of good situations, I've used me brain a lot, I've used what I've got, and I've done some really extraordinary things, and, you know, I feel fulfilled. If I died tomorrow, I wouldn't be very pleased about it, [laughs] but I think I got a few more, a few more years in me left, p'raps, but I'd just think, 'OK, I've had en..., I haven't had a bad time. I might have had a much worse time, and I've had a much better time than most people.' I've probably had a better time, than if I hadn't had a disability, because I've put more into it. Do you know what I mean? Do you get this attitude often, with people?

Yeah, I think sometimes: yeah, I think that's right.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And, but I do hate people who say, 'Aren't you marvellous? I think you're wonderful.' I think it's absolutely septic, that sort of stuff, because, on the whole, there's a little bit of me which takes it on board, but most of me thinks, 'Yuk!' because, you know, I've just been me, I couldn't be any other way. It's not marvellous, it's just how I am: and I've got a disciplined mind, and, well, it does take a bit of honing, I must say, [???] it wasn't more than a disciplined mind, but it helps. It helps to know... that one's life is not chaos: it's pattern, it's got a pattern to it, and yes: not a rigid pattern. I often do things on a ... on, on, I'm very spontaneous in a way. I used to be terribly spontaneous, but now I'm not quite so much, because I have to, sort of, I have to pace myself. No, it's been OK. Mm, and I'm glad I've been alive: yes.

OK. Shall we... That's probably quite a good place to stop. [laughs]

Well, the most important thing in my life has been my friendships. I think much the most important. I didn't have a very good family life. I'm very fond of my children, and my grandchildren, and they mattered a lot of course, but, certainly my friendships have been very, very important. I've had some wonderful friendships, and I've been very aware that it's give and take, and it's dead easy, if you've got a disability, to take rather more than you give, but I've been very, careful to try and even it up, and having been a counsellor helps, because you're a good listener. It sounds terribly smug, doesn't it? Sorry. [laughs] A bit smug, but I don't really feel smug though. I feel I could have done a lot of things better, and I've done a few things I wish I hadn't done, and I've said a lot of things I wish I hadn't said, but on the whole, I mean, looking at the totality of it, it's been OK.

I think, we'll, we will leave it there
We'll leave it there.
And I'll come, we'll come back on 19 <sup>th</sup> .
What shall we do then? We're finished.
[End of Tape 10 Side B]

## Tape 11 Side A [Track 18]

Antonia Lister-Kaye, Tape 11, and it's 19 <sup>th</sup> July, 2005, and we're looking through
some photograph albums. [Sound of turning pages, which continues throughout.]
[Pause]
Ah, was it that one?
Not that one.
Sorry, yah. I should have done my homework better.
That's all right, don't worry.
Oh yes, that's, that's me, aged 25, with a boyfriend's sports car, in Edinburgh.
Hm.
As you can see, it's very 19, it's very 1950-ish,
Hm.
But, and that's me, as a little girl. I think I was three and a half there.
Mm, yes: and this is your dog that you
That's my nanny, and
Yes [talking together]
and one of the many dogs in my life: probably it's about the first: that's Sloppy Sue.

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So this, this photograph here [talking together] would have been taken in Yes, I think it's about the only one I've got, of me as a ... very young [talking together] child.

So interesting, that your nanny is dressed in sort of, very sort of formal, sort of, white, sort of,

Yes, well that must have been about 1934.

Mm.

And that was before I went to, that was in Wales. I loved my nanny, and then she had to go, 'cause we went to York, and that was a great, the first great tragedy in my life, really, I think, apart from being born a spastic. That was, I think I told you, in, but my parents went to India, and they dumped us on Granny, in a York, in a great, in a horrible, frozen attic, with a horrible frozen nanny, and, not to speak about my grandmother, who I didn't like very much, and she didn't like me, and so that was a very early photograph, because I must have been about three or four there.

Mm.

And, and

So this isn't the nanny that you've talked about, that, that only liked your sister. This is [talking together.] the previous one.

No, no, that's the previous nanny. That's Nanny Cole,

Mm.

and I remember she came to York with us, and I remember we walked round Marks and Spencer's, and she said, 'You can have whatever you like. I'm going to give you

a present, Tony,' and I chose the biggest, pinkest teddy bear I could find, and I had that teddy bear for years and years, and he was simply known as 'Pink Teddy', [laughs] and I suppose, in a way, those were very, [clears throat] very happy years, in the sense that I had a nanny who loved me, and I had a dad who was there a lot of the time, which he wasn't later, because he was in the Army, and I had a mummy who, probably didn't love me very much, but that didn't really matter to, I don't remember her much. This is a terrific skip, to when I had my first child.

Oh right.

I was 25? And this is Sarah, who was, as you can see, a very beautiful baby, and I was an enormously proud mother. You know, I somehow, thought I would ne..., well, you know, I didn't really mind very much whether I had children or not. I wasn't one of those very maternal type of people, but, you know, when they just came along, it just happened, [laughs] I was quite pleased, and I was absolutely so proud of Sarah, because she really was beautiful, and she weighed nine pounds and two ounces; and, but it did lead me to think about some other, rather awful things. I had to live with my mother-in-law, when I had her, and my mother-in-law didn't think I was the flavour of any month. I was a wild spastic, Welsh gypsy, [laughs] so she told my son [?] and, I don't know whether I've told you this, but I don't want to repeat it, repeat myself, but just three weeks before I had this angel child, she said to me, 'Well personally, I don't think any woman with a disability should be, have children. They should be sterilized,' which was the most awful thing to say: and I was really terribly upset, especially as I was living with this old hag.

And in this picture, you're actually holding Sarah,

Yes.

and that's one of the things that you were told that you wouldn't ...

Well, no, I couldn't take her up and down the stairs, but I could hold her, if somebody handed her to me, when I was sitting down, which was all quite ridiculous, 'cause later on, you know, I had whole charge of her: and this is this, this is Sarah, a little older: and this is Sarah, and this is Sarah.

Mm.

A bonny baby. Then we went to Nigeria [sound of seagulls crying in background] and Sarah got malaria, and she nearly died. We were living in the mid, back end of nowhere, in the bush, and we had to go 30 miles to a mission doctor, and she had a jab for malaria, and she was allergic to the jab, and she went absolutely blue, and I think the doctor, and my husband and me all thought she was going to die. Anyway, that's her, she's looking a bit scraggy. [laughs] Anyway, she didn't, and she was fine, and we came back to England eventually: and this is number two child. That's Frankie, who was a jolly little extrovert, she was. She was known as 'Apfelsnut', the German for 'apple snout', 'cause she was, always had this very red nose, and she had this, she was a, she's a natural, Scandinavian blonde, and was terribly jealous of Sarah. Sarah took her behind the sofa, when she was, about, 18 months, and Sarah was about three, and cut off all her hair, [both laugh] and they never really got over it. [Pages turning.] That's Frankie again. That's me, and the thir..., number three: that's Matthew.

Mm.

Matthew was born in South Africa; and he was a big baby too. He was about nine pounds, four. A big bruiser of a baby, [laughs] and I was very proud of him, because he had, he was a boy, and I mean, I wanted a boy. In fact, if I had to have children at all, I wanted three boys; but as it happened, I had two girls and a boy, and I loved them all very much, just the same. This is our house in South Africa, and that's our nanny, Violet,

Oh yes.

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who enabled me to be a bad girl all round Johannesburg, as far as the government

went, anyway, and, you know, gave me time.

And where's this, sorry, where's this building, here, [talking together] this rather

Well, we came back, and lived in Cardiff for six months, and that's there. Coming

back to England with children was absolutely terrible, as I expect I've told you,

because... you know, no Violet, no nobody, and two children in nappies. Imagine: it

was frightful: and the weather was cold. This is the three children, back in Cardiff.

That's Sarah, Matthew, Frankie. Matthew had riotous curls, and of course, my

husband said they must be cut off, when he was two, [laughs]

Mm.

because it wasn't done. That's Frankie, a bit later, looking like an absolute imp of

mischief, which she's always been really, I think. This is the first of my lovely dogs.

He was called Dogget: a cross, a Collie-cross, and he was an amazing dog. He used

to get out through the cat door, about the five o'clock in the morning; we lived in

Wimbledon then, and he used to go and, round the pond, and on the Common: do you

know Wimbledon? And have a constitutional swim, having crossed two zebra

crossings, on the way. He used to wait for someone to cross, and pretending he was

taking them across, do you see [Both laugh.] And then he'd come back, about 11

o'clock, after the rush hour. He knew a thing or two, and he was a real devil of a dog,

[talking together] but he was sweet.

And is this your husband here: this picture?

I don't know: yes, it might be. That's me and Sarah.

Mm.

This is when we came back from South Africa. I have a friend, who I still see, and stayed with in Wiltshire, who has a farm, and we went down to the farm, and of course the ani..., the children were mad on the sheep. You can see them here, the sheep.

Your own father had pigs, didn't he?

He had pigs, yes, and I unfortunately haven't got much. Oh, this, that's a photograph of Sarah, and my dad, and he was a quite old grand-dad, he was. Matthew; me: that's a bad one of me. That's Frankie, looking a bit wistful: and that's us on the beach, as the family, with some friends. That's my husband. Yes, well the others are just all, more or less the same. That's me, in Scotland; we were on holiday then, and that's, as you can see, there's the three children having a bath. [turning pages] Matthew. [Pause.] That's one of me, looking rather fat, and slightly spastic, but as I've said, I've destroyed all the ones that make me look really wonky, because, I suppose, in a way, there was much more pressure, in those days, to 'pass for white', as we used to say [laughs] in South Africa, and I just felt I didn't want these horrible photographs of me, looking wonky, so I just kept the ones that were, not so wonky, so it doesn't really tell you, it doesn't really give a balanced, view, as you might say.

*So do you have any, wedding photographs, then?* 

You mean looking wonky?

Or just any wedding photographs that you have? You, you

I've destroyed them: ages ago, I mean, before I realised that it was a stupid thing to do: before I matured into realising that, you know, it didn't matter that I was a bit wonky. That's my dad, standing in front of his farmhouse. That's Dad, of whom I was terribly fond. He was a funny old military man, but, we had lots and lots of terrible arguments, because I was a communist. Well, I wasn't always a communist, but I was very left-wing, and he was Colonel Blimp in, personified: so there you are.

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There's the children getting older: almost adolescent: Frankie with her long hair. That was an au pair girl, and that was Matthew, beginning to look very... much his own man. Yah, well, these are just the same, really. That's me, looking a bit wonky; [laughs] with Sarah, aged about 10, at a party I think. [laughs] There we are.

And so, you really don't have any pictures of your wedding at all?

Yes, somewhere.

Oh you do. Oh right.

Do you want me to go and get it?

Yeah, that would be nice.

All right. I'd better undo me.

Yeah.

When I was at school, I was always made to sit, when we had school photographs, it seemed to me, I was always made to sit, in such a position that I didn't appear in a photograph, because it was a private school, and they wanted their photographs to look full of nice, healthy, agreeable, good-looking girls, and, well, well, I suppose it happened before that, I always had trouble with my image, and photographs have always been an issue. I can remember, early on in life: not so very early, when I left school, I can remember, I used to go to a photographer, a very cheap photographer in Cardiff, and have my photograph taken, to see if I was getting any less spastic, and I used to go about every six months, and they used to say, 'Oh dear, oh dear, it's you again. You look exactly the same,' and, you know, I was so disappointed, because I thought I was, would, grow out, out-grow, and my ne..., I had a scoliosis. Do you know what that is? It's a kind of, it's gone, it, anyway, it's slight now, but my head was on one side a lot. It's a sort of, when the muscles at one side of the neck go into

spasm, which of course they do, with this condition, and I just hoped that I'd get better, and it was to do with coming to terms with growing up, and, and I suppose in a way, that's stayed with me, so I've always destroyed, very meticulously, any photograph which made me look peculiar: very peculiar, and this means that the photographs that remain, are not entirely, as I said just now, they're not balanced, not, they're not entirely representative of what I looked like, or who I was, so you can understand why photographs are my Achilles' heel. I'll talk about anything [laughs] but photographs are a different issue.

Mm.

So, well I thought we could look through any of these and see if there's which interest, which are of interest.

OK.

Do you understand?

Yes, no, I do, I do understand what you're saying, yes.

Have you come upon this before?

Well, one or two people don't have many photographs, and I think

Well, there you go. It's us, I think it's the sort of marginal ones, the ones that don't have to look very peculiar, but sometimes they do: I mean, look, that's a bit peculiar. These were taken, this was an album taken by a friend of mine, so I couldn't rip it out. [laughs] That one...

Right.

looks a bit odd, doesn't it? Look at these neck muscles. Well, this is in Thailand. [laughs] I just look fat there. [laughs] I suppose I always longed to look beautiful, like my mother. I showed you that picture of my mother, didn't I?

Yes, you did, yes.

And, you know, no matter how... I wasn't unattractive, I suppose, when I was young: in fact, I was quite, reasonably attractive. I could be, if I made an effort. No, this is about the dog. Oh, and there's me too. There's me and my beloved Cindy. She was my, the dog of my life, she really was: a wonderful dog, in Norfolk. That's me. The face and muscles a bit odd there, and this again were taken by somebody else. This album was given me by my friend, so I couldn't take 'em out. [laughs] And that's me and my cousin Michael, looking very butch, and rather hideous, really. And that's a beautiful one of my dog. That's not bad. There you are! Done! [Alex laughs] And these are the sort of loose cannons, loose ones, which, [sound of something dropping] will not be representative, I don't think; these are more recent p'raps: and that one was a few years ago. That was of me and my friends in Wiltshire. That's the present. No, it's horrid: not [???] That's one of my friends in Motspur Park. I don't suppose you want to see all these, but still. I'm looking for the marital one, marital ones, but I don't think it's here. That's me, feeling as if I'm a romantic heroine.

Mm: and that's

That's me at the House of Commons, being furious, because they hadn't taken any notice of our Bill.

This is, this is the, 'Legalise Cannabis' thing.

[talking together. Inaudible.] Yes, that's right. That's my great friend, who got muscular sclerosis, but she looks fine there. Yes, and she lives in Leeds. She was a journalist: and that's the MP, who I developed a great crush on. [laughs] That's me, looking rather wild, and

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Chessil Beach

That's right: yes. That's my beautiful elder daughter, you see: sandwiched between a rather beautiful daughter, and a rather lo..., beautiful mother, is a very ugly person, I used to think. [laughs]

Is this, is this the

That's Sarah. German.

one. Did she marry the

She married a German.

Oh, a German.

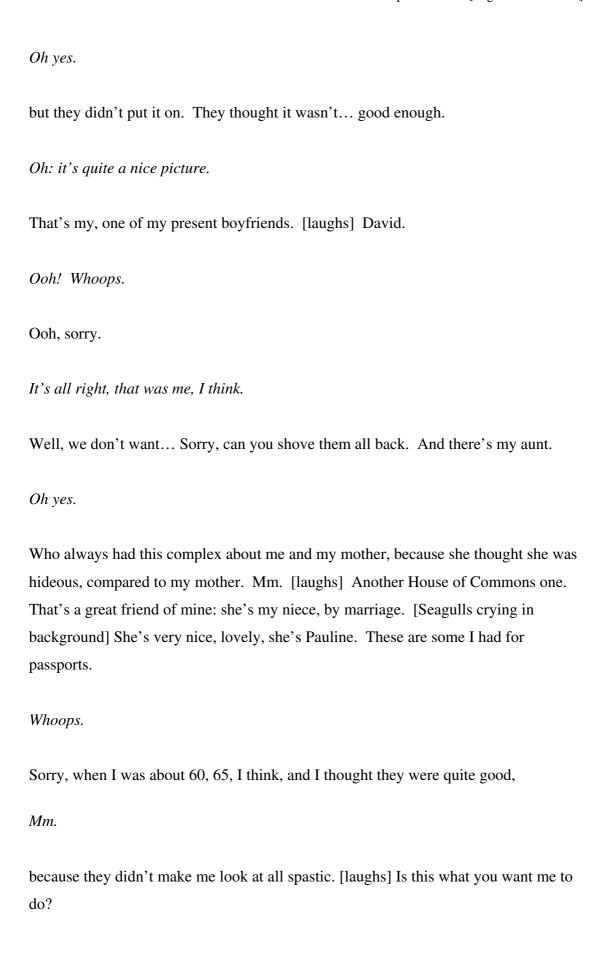
Yeah. That's me at the wedding, at the funeral, no, at the wedding of a son of a friend, which, I rather like, because it doesn't make me look spastic. That's me, looking rather wistful, on the beach. [sound of siren.] And that's me with my first grandchild.

 $Hm \ mm$ .

That's me with one of my beloved dogs. Sorry, these are very, very sort of ill-assorted: not sorted at all, really. It's one of those things I always meant to do. That's me, in Amsterdam, sitting outside a café, smoking cannabis. [both laugh]

Coffee Shop Johnny.

That's right: yeah. [laughs] That's rather fun, isn't it? [Alex laughs] That's me and my big son, Matthew. Oh that's me, the photograph they took, to put on the back of *Camilla*,



Mm.

It looks, seems a bit sort of, oh yes, this other coffee shop one. I've got one of my second marriage, if you want that. [laughs] [Pause.] Oh, I think that's about all really. I can't find my first marriage.

Don't worry.

But it was a posh one, you know, the all, white, white wedding, and all that stuff: a London wedding.

Well,

Here we are: there is something, something coming up. Yes, there you are. I haven't quite

Mm.

You see about my neck.

Well, it's funny, because I mean obviously, you might be aware of that, but I would think anyone looking at that picture wouldn't necessarily...

Well, I think it's good of my dad, anyway. [laughs]

Yes. So, I mean, in terms of, one might be able to borrow for the project.

Oh yes, yes, you can borrow anything you like. I don't want [inaud] [laughs]

Well,

Well I do really, but

Yes.

Take any that you think, any that are any... good. Oh, yes, this is a rather nice one. That was in Texas. I went out to stay with my son, Matthew.

Mm.

He was living in a campervan. [both laugh] But you don't, suppose you want that one.

Well, I think, I think what ... I'd quite like, I there were two quite the same, is it OK if I took one of those to [talking together] borrow.

Oh yes, do: you can have it.

Oh, we'll return them, and then... Which one of these

What, oh yeah, well, sorry.

[End of Tape 11 Side A]

## Track 19

No transcript available